Flash Mobs: Social Construction of Public Spaces as Places for Sociability & Public Discourse

"What is the Citie, but the People? True, the People are the Citie"
– (Shakespeare, Coriolanus, act 3, scene 1)

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Abstract

According to Young's normative definition, public spaces should be cosmopolitan places where people from different backgrounds can meet and learn from each other, resulting in new insights and new tolerant social relationships (Young, 1990), however, many scholars have pointed out to the apparent decline in importance of public space for sociability and public discourse (Sennett, 1977, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995). Nonetheless, the flash mob phenomenon, as an ephemeral and partially extemporaneous social event occurring in public space, might provide counter argumentation to the apparent decline of public spaces. Recognizing its increasing popularity and practice over time, scholars in the field of anthropology, sociology and media studies have examined the sociological and ICT aspects of flash mobs (Rheingold, 2003; Nicholson, 2005; Gore, 2010; Molnàr, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010), yet, no urban geographical research has attempted to understand this phenomenon and its relation to the public spaces where it occurs. Thus, utilizing a humanistic approach to the geography of flash mobs, this study aims to understand the affect of the flash mob phenomenon on the social construction of public spaces. Through Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad of space construction and Tuan's (1977) perspective of experience, the research will examine how people socially construct public spaces through their ephemeral flash mob experiences. Moreover, considering previous research claiming a cultural and societal difference in the effects and types of flash mobs for the developed and developing societies, this research focuses on two case studies of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Skopje, R. Macedonia, attempting to elucidate whether and how the flash mob affects vary in different societal contexts. Could something frivolous as a flash mob socially construct public spaces as places for sociability and public discourse?

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

According to Young's normative and ideal definition, public spaces should be places where people with different social perspectives, experiences and affiliations encounter each other (Young, 1990; Mitchell, 1995). Therefore, to many theorists, the public space is the material location where social and political interactions of the public sphere occur (Habermans, 1989; Mitchell, 1995; Fraser, 1990). Accordingly, most authors have stressed the social meeting function of public spaces (Lofland, 1973; Sennett, 1977; Zukin, 1995), describing the symbolic interaction and playful and fleeting social encounters that occur (Goffman, 1971; Hollands et al., 2007; Stevens, 2007), stating that public spaces should be multicultural and diverse places where people from different backgrounds can meet and learn from each other, resulting in new, open and tolerant social relations (Mitchell, 1995; Melik, 2008; Hou, 2010).

However, there has been an ample of argumentation to support the apparent decline in importance of public space for social interaction and public discourse (Sennett, 1977, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995). This end of public space has been related to a set of societal developments, among which two seem to be of great importance. One is the overturn of public politics and social discourse by capitalist commercial and homogenized semi or pseudo public spaces (Sennett, 1977; Davis, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Stevens, 2007), and the other is the development of electronic cyberspace of media and computer networks which opened a new frontier for the public sphere, suppressing the material public spaces are by the realm of TV, radio shows, and internet media (Roberts, 1994; Mitchell, 1995; Wellman et al., 2003; Hymphreys, 2005; Hampton, Gupta, 2008).

In light of inquiring counter argumentation to the apparent decline in importance of physical public spaces for social interaction and public discourse, the phenomenon of flash mob is interesting to examine from a geographical perspective, as a potential act of social construction of public space. Flash mob is a recently addressed phenomenon that has been increasingly gaining global recognition and popularity in the last years. The flash mob is defined as an ephemeral and partially extemporaneous social event occurring in public space, or specifically, "a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). Considering the macro context of today's globalized world, flash mobs can be considered as a global socio-cultural phenomenon, which due to the Internet, as one of the major technological developments underlying globalization, has been spread in practice in different localities around the globe (Castells, 1996; 1999). However, as most scholars have recognized, the globalization processes have penetrated localities in different extent and manner, creating inequalities, thus, pointing out to the interrelatedness of the global and local forces ('glocalization') in different localities of the global network (Munck, 2002; Roudometof, 2005).

Having already developed a typology of flash mobs according to their form and purpose, and recognizing their development and diversification over time, several researchers have attempted to go beyond the point of viewing the phenomenon solely as a pointless act or prank and investigate the sociological and electronic communication aspects of the phenomenon, in the field of anthropology, sociology and media studies. While some scholars have investigated the role of the new communication technologies in the mobilization process

and its potential for viral marketing, others have examined its potential for developing a new form of sociability in public spaces, as well as representing differing public opinions and discourses (Rheingold, 2003; Nicholson, 2005; Gore, 2010; Molnàr, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010). Even though public spaces are essential for the flash mob phenomenon, no specific attention has yet been paid to this phenomenon from a geographical approach, examining its relation with the public spaces where it occurs. It follows the aim of this research is to understand the affect of the flash mob phenomenon on the social construction of public spaces of varying societal contexts.

With the intention of understanding an ephemeral social phenomenon occurring in public spaces, existing research on flash mobs and diverse literature on public spaces was utilized to design the research. Additionally, to support the geographical focus of the research a humanistic theoretical framework is considered, including Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad interwoven by three aspects of social production of public space, where the third aspect of the triad, or the representational spaces, directly lived by their users, is supported by Tuan's (1977) humanistic experiential approach, centering on the human experience of space and place.

Accordingly, data was acquired through participant observation, desk research and interviews, in order to understand the experience of flash mob in public space from the perspective of the flash mob organizers and participants, while taking into consideration the wider societal context. In order to examine the possible variation depending on societal/cultural local context, the research entails a comparative case study analysis of two cities which bare notable cultural and societal differences: Skopje, Macedonia and Amsterdam, The Netherlands. In a nutshell, this research will try to answer how these flash mobs, as public, ephemeral and playful events, might be moments of social construction of public spaces as places for sociability and public discourse.

2. The Research Questions

Following **the aim** of the research to understand the affect of the flash mob phenomenon on the social construction of public spaces of varying societal contexts, there are few general conclusions elaborated in the following chapters, which guide and inform the focus of the main research questions. First, the debate around the apparent demise of public space has had both its opponents and proponents; however, this research will take the more optimistic side, considering that flash mobs can be potential evidence of social construction of public spaces, as necessary places for the phenomenon to occur. Second, existing research on flash mobs has already dealt with the relation between the phenomenon and online cyber space, examining the complementarity of modern communication technologies in the organization and promotion. Additionally, it has considered the potential of this phenomenon for creating sociability and public discourse in the public sphere, but not specifically in relation to the geographical public spaces. Thus, beside other possible affects of the flash mobs in public spaces, the aspects of sociability and public discourse in public spaces are specifically examined. Third, variations in flash mobs in differing socio-cultural contexts have been noted, pointing out to the diversity of form this inherently globalized phenomenon can take, but no explanation for the differences in societal contexts has been provided. Accordingly, the study will focus on two case study urban public spaces, in an Eastern European and Western European context, namely comparing the flash mob phenomenon in Skopje, R. Macedonia and Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Consequently, the following three research questions will be the central focus of the research study:

I. *How can the social construction of public space by way of flash mobs be understood, through the experiences of organizers, participants, and the wider public?*
II. *To what extent can flash mobs affect sociability and public discourses in public spaces?*
III. *To what extent do flash mobs relate to the immediate socio-cultural and political context?*

Before outlining the design and methodology utilized for answering these questions, the next three chapters first provide the relevant literature on public spaces, thereafter the existing research on flash mobs, to finally integrate both concepts in a humanistic geography framework.

3. Public Spaces: Definitions & Debates

Throughout history, urban public spaces, such as streets, squares and parks have been defined in various ways and used for various purposes, ranging from places for relaxation, platform for public discourse and protest, places for unexpected or planned social encounters, and platforms for exchange of goods, knowledge and culture (Melik, 2008, Hou, 2010). Dating back to the Greek concept of 'agora', the function of public spaces has been important for democratic societies, being an open place for conducting public affairs through unmediated interaction by strangers and citizens, which included a plethora of political, commercial and spectacle activities (Mitchell, 1995). Consequently, numerous authors have stressed the importance of public space for social interaction and public discourse, pertaining to the idea that urban public spaces should allow for different people to meet on neutral ground and to interact with others within the context, both in planned and unplanned ways (Fraser, 1990; Lofland, 1973; Sennett, 1977; Zukin, 1995; Hollands et al., 2007; Stevens, 2007;). However, many of the authors have been rather pessimistic in locating this importance of public spaces in contemporary societies. Namely, the apparent decline in public spaces for socialization has been mainly related to the consumerist commodification of public spaces (Sennett, 1977; Davis, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Hou, 2010) and the development of a networked cyberspace for social interaction and public discourse (Roberts, 1994; Mitchell, 1995; Wellman et al., 2003; Hympherys, 2005; Hampton, Gupta, 2008). These changes are characteristic globalization effects on contemporary daily life brought about with capitalism and the development of an Internet, networked, global society (Castells, 1996, 1999; Munck, 2002).

On one hand, the corporate and state planners have created pseudo and semi- public spaces based on private consumption desires and safety of a homogenized group of commoditized consumers, rather than non-instrumental social interaction and public discourse. As noted by Hou (2010), the growing privatization of public spaces spreading worldwide, has transformed downtown and suburban spaces into themed malls and festival marketplaces which serve as segregated safe havens for businesses and consumption. In other words, "…the 'public' space of the new mega structures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity."(Davis, 1992, pp. 155). And so, physical public spaces have been said to be stripped of their use for social interaction and discourse, rather being places for safe consumption and leisure. As described by Sennett (1977), in The Fall of Public Man, people from the 19th Century onwards have retrieved into their personal, individual, private sphere of life, being afraid of contact with the strangers and exposing their feelings in public, the people have been stripped off their ability to play and interact in public. Therefore, modern public life has transformed into formal obligation (Sennett, 1997).

On the other hand, the electronic space of media and computer networks has been considered as the new contemporary public space where social interaction and public discourse occurs (Castells, 1996, 1999; Mitchell, 1995). With the increasing use of the mobile communication technology, a large body of research has examined the way for example, how mobile phones are used to modify and maintain social networks and interaction both in public and other realms of life, such as work and home. In public space, mobile phones are considered to be a distraction and constraint to potential social encounters, since mobile phone users tend to give precedence to phone interactions over those with collocated others, especially if those people present in the surrounding are less familiar (Humphreys, 2005; Hampton et al., 2010). Thus, mobile phones "…can be used habitually to insulate

the individual from the social diversity of urban public spaces and completely remove the public realm from everyday experience that provide access to messages and people that are absent from the intimate networks of the private realm." (Hampton et al., 2010, pp.705). Since the mobile phone makes the already highly familiar people readily available for social interaction, it undermines the need for social interaction with anyone else in the immediate surroundings (Boarse et al., 2006; Hampton, Gupta, 2008). Moreover, the simultaneous physical presence and situational absence of mobile phone users in public reduces the density of people available for social interaction and creates a contextual effect, so that those with the intention of engaging in social interaction in public will have less opportunity to do so, because the potential candidates for interaction have decreased (Hampton, Gupta, 2008). This contextual effect of declining social interaction with present others due to mobile phone use does not only change the character of the urban public space for the mobile phone users, but for the other participants in that space as well (Humphreys, 2005).

Besides the use of mobile phones, fewer studies have addressed the use of internet in public, since new wireless communication infrastructures, such as free Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile internet-supporting devices, such as laptops, have become an integral part of modern urban daily life. Initial research in this field has also found that internet use contributes to decrease in size of people's social circles and public participation, and an increase in home-centeredness, which amplifies the existing trend towards privatism (Hampton, Gupta, 2008). Wireless internet use in public is likely to promote behavior similar to internet use at home or at work, linked to the more intimate and personal social interaction (Boarse et al., 2006; Hampton et al., 2010).

On the contrary, several authors, such as Stevens (2007) and Hou (2010) have taken a more optimistic view on public space, demonstrating that people in post-modern cities still do play in a creative and non-instrumental way and test and contest the boundaries and identities intermingled in the diverse public spaces of cities. Stevens (2007), in The Ludic City, explores the playful uses of urban spaces, which even though are risky, unexpected and non-instrumental, they provide new experiences and create new social relations. More recently, Jeffrey Hou (2010), in Insurgent Public Space: Guerilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities, has compiled a cross-disciplinary work on how public adaptation of spaces can affect the social and spatial relationships within our urban environments. According to Hou, the examples of self-made urban spaces, reclaimed and appropriated sites, temporary events and flash mobs, are not isolated meaningless instances, but are acts of insurgency that reflect the social settings and issues of predominantly marginalized communities, and "challenge the conventional, codified notion of public and the making of space" (Hou, 2010, pp.2). By spontaneous events, unintended and informal uses and practices that diverge from existing rules, regulations and habits, people create new forms and use of public spaces, transforming them into places of difference, possibility and social encounters (Stevens, 2007; Hou, 2010; Orum, Neal, 2010).

Additionally, instead of only looking at the cyber-internet and physical worlds as dichotomous, scholars have tried to consider them as co-existing. Thus, the relationship between the public space and electronic space has proven to be not one of mutual exclusion, but complementarity, since scholars have widely recorded the support of electronic communication in public mass gatherings and flash mobs (Molnàr, 2010; Hou, 2010). Some authors have explored the utilization of ICT's for supporting, instead of declining social interaction in public spaces. Namely, recent research has explored how new mobiles services, such as the Dodgeball, which allows

people to report their physical location to virtual social networks, might facilitate and enhance social interaction in public spaces (Humphreys, 2010).

Thus, the debate around the apparent demise or importance of public space as a place for some form of sociability can be addressed by examining how the flash mob phenomenon affects the social construction of public space, and whether it can be considered as a form of public social interaction. In line with the focus on social construction of public spaces, the social conception of public space is important to explain and has been well summarized by Orum and Neal (2010). Namely, they provide three perspectives on how the social public space works: public space as facilitator of civil order, public space as site for power and resistance and public space as stage for art, theatre and performance. To elaborate, in the first one is a public space where we interact with friends and maintain our social networks, but also where we meet strangers and learn about social expectations and norms of behavior; the second one is a public space which has never been fully open and egalitarian, thus creating a field for conflict between those who claim and use the space and those who feel to be unrightfully excluded; the last one is the public space where we go to see, be seen and express our identity and ideas in a passive/active, formal/informal role. These three perspectives of public space might as well refer to the same public space at the same time and thus reveal the richness and importance of public space for our social lives (Orum, Neal, 2010). Additionally, if the 'glocalization' effects are considered, contemporary public spaces, even though subjected to the same globalization forces, could represent different perspectives according to the local societal conditions (Munck, 2002; Roudometof, 2005).

4. Flash Mobs: Existing Research

Flash mob is a recently addressed phenomenon that has been increasingly gaining global recognition and popularity in the last years. The flash mob is defined as an ephemeral and partially extemporaneous social event occurring in public space, or specifically, "a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). It's most common forms include freezing in place, pillow fights, dancing performances, silent raves, zombie walks, etc. The first flash mob happened in June 2003, at a Macy's department store in Manhattan, where over a hundred people gathered around a rug and claimed to be members of a commune living in a warehouse, trying to bargain with the salesman about that 10,000 dollar "love rug" they wanted to purchase or get for free "to play on". After few minutes they unexpectedly dispersed as if nothing had happened. The salesmen and other shoppers were puzzled, not realizing they have just witnessed the beginnings of a new urban phenomenon (Gore, 2010; Molnàr, 2010). Even though due to its fleeting and frisky character the flash mob was said to be dead by some scholars, an internet YouTube search would easily yield over ten million video hits of flash mobs, which demonstrate their existence and evolution from the original forms and intentions.

One of the first and most well-known groups that has been reported to execute similar pranks in public spaces is 'Improv Everywhere', a New York City based collective, created by Charlie Todd in August 2001, executing over 100 public missions until now. However, this group was formed two years before the reporting of the first flash mob, and they have never labeled their public stunts as flash mobs, but rather missions, because they do not

always perform in large groups and the missions usually last much longer than just a short flash. To add, their missions are solely oriented to having fun, without ever being associated with promoting a specific cause, brand or person (Improv Everywhere Productions, Inc., 2013, http://improveverywhere.com/faq/). Nonetheless, many of the other flash mobs organized later on global scale have been similar to the missions and stunts performed by Improv Everywhere.

Due to their diversified, ephemeral and playful nature, besides being positively perceived by its proponents and participants, the flash mobs have received a lot of criticism. Namely, the criticism towards flash mobs has been highly attached to its pointlessness and frivolousness, as phenomenon that can be seen solely as a reflection of the narcissism of the younger generations. It is seen as disturbance of public order for no reasonable purpose. Some critics even explain that the fact flash mob participants seem ready to follow any instructions given by the organizers demonstrates their troubling sign of conformity and herd mentality, rather than creativity, sociability and critical thinking (Molnàr, 2010).

However, scholars have gone further in examining this phenomenon as more than a simple, pointless prank in public. Molnàr (2010) has established a typology of flash mobs according to their function or form of sociality which sometimes overlap: atomized, interactive, performance, political and advertising flash mobs. The atomized is the original archetype of a flash mob where the people strictly do not interact with each other and the purpose does not prioritize the observers as the main goal of the flash mob, but merely the purpose of doing something funny. The interactive flash mobs attempts to cause the unsuspecting audience to partake in the flash mob and have people rethink the normal everyday ideas of "public". The performance flash mobs are aimed towards raising awareness of a specific artist and are executed by professional artists. The political flash mob is focused on raising awareness of certain agendas to observers. Lastly, the advertising flash mob is used that corporations use to alert observers to products and is pursued as an advertising techniques. However, it is pointed out by the author that the types are not clear cut, hence, a flash mob can both have an advertising purpose and include performance by professional artists, or a flash mob with political message can be organized in an interactive manner.

In addition, by using Simmel's concept of sociability, Molnàr theorizes that flash mobs are digitally mediated forms of socialization, evoking free-playing interaction among individuals in public space. As defined by Simmel, "Sociability is the art or play form of association, related to the content and purposes of association in the same way as art is related to reality." (Simmel, Hughes, 1949, pp.255) The sociability in this case has no ulterior end and depends on free interacting independence of individuals. Additionally, this form of sociability is also democratic since social status has little or no effect, thus enabling individuals from different social backgrounds to interact as equals. Drawing on Simmel's concept of sociability, Molnàr argues that flash mob and its playfulness, creativity and togetherness suggests that sociability is a central and controlling principle in this form of gathering. Being fleeting and loosely organized events through new social media, flash mobs are also expressions of the sociability of the networking culture of participants. (Molnàr, 2010). Similarly, Benschop (2003) explains that from a sociological viewpoint, flash mobbing is a manner in which people come into contact, more importantly; they share a collective perception of the flash mob action that connects them and gives them a group-feeling. The importance of sociability for public life has also been noted by Sennett, who has been rather pessimistic about the level of sociability in modern and post-modern societies. Namely, for Sennett,

a city is a place where people learn to live with strangers, where they experience and take interest of the unfamiliar others. Therefore, sociability in public with the unfamiliar others is a prerequisite for a functioning diverse and democratic society (Sennett, 2000). Therefore, the sociability potentially evoked by flash mobs can have a positive affect on embracing the diversity of cosmopolitan societies.

Recognized by many scholars, the public spaces dating back to the Greek "agora" have been important places for public discourse, or the discussion of issues that concern societies as a whole. Sennett also strongly holds that public life, social interaction and discourse evolving in urban public spaces are of outmost importance for the development of the individuals as civilized people and the society (Sennett, 1977). Accordingly, Rodriguez (2010) in his sociological approach to flash mobs has used Habermans' idea of the public sphere and lifeworld, and Debord's idea of the spectacle and culture jamming, to discern the effects flash mobs have on society. First the flash mobs are often perceived as extensions of culture jamming or a form of activism (most frequently meme hacking) employed in order to achieve a certain goal. Currently culture jamming is mostly related to anti-consumerist movements, whose "…enforcement mechanism of culture jamming depends on reaching out to everyday and unsuspecting individuals."(Rodriguez, 2010, pp. 6). As recognized by most scholars, the flash mob predecessor is the Situationist movement (which in turn arose from the Letterist movement in the 1950's and the 1960's in France), that was largely based on the idea of détournement. The idea of détournement entailed that by taking a usual and ordinary idea or object, and then changing something about it, would cause people to think critically about the messages being sent. This means that the Situationists in refusal to capitalist commodification of society, used tactics such as active participation, counter-strategies, valorization of spontaneity and play, in order to spread their message (Rodriguez, 2010).

As a flash mob potentially transcends a societal message or idea, it might be providing a way of steering public discourse in societies. Therefore, in his research on flash mobs, Rodriguez extends the importance of flash mobs for public discourse, moving from culture jamming to its effect as a spectacle on the public sphere and the lifeworld. As explained by the work of Habermans, the public sphere can be any place that enables people to engage in discussions about troubling societal concerns. The lifeworld is a concept denoting a common sense of understanding the social world via codes and general knowledge, where two distinct modes of communication exist: the communicative and instrumental rationality, which create meanings for people in the lifeworld. While the communicative rationality and action are considered to be the desirable mode of communication for a good, progressing, creative lifeworld, the world is threatened by "the colonization of the lifeworld" governed by instrumental rationality and action, which is more coercive way of institutions and actors assigning meanings and values to the lifeworld, influencing individuals to go about their consumerist lifestyle without critically thinking about it (Rodriguez, 2010).

Thus, in a modernist view of the flash mob as a spectacle, if it's a way of promoting something the audience can purchase, then it helps perpetuate consumerist ideology and is thus condemned, on the basis of using instrumental rationality. On the other hand, in a post-modernist view, if the flash mob does not contain a pro-consumerist ideology and its purpose is to distract people from their passive consumerist behavior or raise awareness of a problem, than it can be considered to be based on communicative rationality and be an attempt to re-establish a more active public sphere and provide resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld. Thus, the findings of this research indicate that flash mobs, especially those that attempt to raise awareness of a social

problem have a positive effect on developing critical thinking and constructive public discourse in urban public spaces. It has also been found that the audience and social media had a major role in the organization and implementation of the flash mobs, nonetheless, the motivations of the participants, the actions undertaken by organizers and the choice of location, were also signified as determining factors in the successfulness of a flash mob (Rodriguez, 2010).

Furthermore, from an anthropological perspective, Gore (2010) examines the dance flash mob as a one-off collective dance events organized in public spaces through mobile phone and internet communication, which can reconfigure urban spaces by creating a new form of sociability in public, regardless of its purpose or supporting cause. This sociality is potentially achieved by creating temporary performance sites in public, where the usual flow of people and traffic is disrupted. As a means of promoting causes or interests, dance mobbing can be effective, in that the very reconfiguration of the layout of a public space for a moment will inescapably draw the attention from the public audience. As she explains, "The very reconfiguration, through the dancing, of the layout of public space forces attention on the performance, thus constituting a heterogeneous public into a community with a shared focus – the audience – even if only for the space of a song or two." (Gore, 2010, pp. 128).

Being an event orchestrated both offline and online, the flash mob is also seen as an example of interplay of the cyberspace and physical space as interrelated spaces rather than opposing dichotomous realms (Rheingold, 2003; Nicholson, 2005; Molnàr, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010; Gore, 2010). While new technologies and media have shadowed the importance of physical public space, they have enabled new types of public actions, such as globalization activist movements and more importantly, flash mobs. Additionally, by posting videos of the event in cyberspace and discussing it on open forums, the individual experiences of the event can have an impact longer than the moment of occurrence (Nicholson, 2005; Hou, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010).

Finally, Molnàr (2010) has identified a cultural and geographical variation in flash mobs with regard to its purpose: the flash mobs in US and UK are usually about playful sociability, while the flash mobs in Eastern Europe and Asia often have a political aim or message. The possibility that the affect of flash mob on public space might entail cultural differences in varying contexts is also supported by Hou (2010) who states that the functions and meanings of public space have varied across different cultures, having western democracies where public space and public discourse have been important components of the democratic process and, on the other hand, in eastern countries influenced by Confucianism, public space is either non-existent or closely controlled by the state.

5. Geography of Flash Mobs: Humanistic Approach

In order to examine the affects of an ephemeral event such as flash mob on the public space it occurs in, a humanistic geographical approach will be adopted, considering the human and social aspect of public space production. Here, Lefebvre's spatial triad of social production of space and Tuan's experiential perspective, putting the experiences and emotions of people central to the theorizing of space and place, are foundation for researching flash mobs from an urban geographical perspective and designing the methodology of this research.

Humanistic geography is a relatively new sub discipline that deals with the subjective action space and describes the phenomena of immediate experience as understood by those experiencing it, by recognizing the complexity and variety of the phenomena. Thus, by focusing on meaning and experience, "humanistic geography addresses the subjective interpretations of man within a cultural setting, and describes spatial behavior and activity from within such a context."(Winchell, 2000, pp. 344). Phenomenology and Existentialism provide foundations for this approach. Namely, phenomenology offers the perspective that the human condition should be examined through fundamental incentive acts including perception, memory and consciousness of image and time. Therefore, humanistic geography entails examination of the relationship between space, time and body, represented in themes such as meaning and feelings emoted by places and social spaces.

One of the key phenomenological features is that the world can be understood through human intentions and attitudes towards it (Winchell, 2000). Accordingly, one of the main phenomenology thinkers, M. Merleau-Ponty explains the central idea that human bodily experience is embedded in space: "By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and moreover, time), because movement is not limited to submitting passively, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp. 102). Existentialism additionally determines the context research for humanistic geography by putting focus on the inter-subjective spaces within which people function, in other words, analyzing the subjective space and the occasion within which a given activity occurs is crucial for grasping spatial activity. Here, it is also relevant to distinguish between the objective social space, as the spatial framework within which groups in social structures and civic organization operate, and the subjective social space as perceived by specific people and groups (Winchell, 2000).

5.1 Lefebvre: Social Production of Space

In line with the humanistic geography approach, Henri Lefebvre (1991: 162), in The Production of Space, analyzed the interplay between social and spatial relations and noted that "it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced". He was one of the first scholars to identify both the concrete, but also the abstract aspects of the production of social space. While the concrete space is the material and social space that is experienced in everyday routine activities, the abstract space relates to the conceived and lived aspects of the space, how it is formally and informally regulated and experienced by its users. He argued that the Western societies are largely governed by abstraction that even the practical aspects of life are represented in terms of quantities, commodities and categories, while these representations are put forward by the professional

planners as the one and only official representation of social space, or 'true space'. As he explains, this Euclidean container, a geometric representation of space, has long been treated as absolute space of reference. Treating space as an abstract mental construction is problematic according to Lefebvre because it ignores the socially constructed aspects of space and limits the possibility of spatial actions that can be undertaken in daily life.

Thus, according to Lefebvre, places are imbued with conflict between the use of it for social purposes and the dominating commercial productivity and private ownership (Merrifield, 1993). In contrast, Lefebvre argues that a more inclusive concept, such as the 'truth of space' should be utilized, since the mental (conceptual) and sensory (embodied) aspects of people are occurring everywhere, participating in the dynamic and competitive process of space production. As opposed to the homogenized 'true space', the 'truth of space' entails diverse and even divergent socio-spatial processes, which are not authorized by the dominant culture, nor recognized or conceived by the official planning professionals. Thus, he developed the triad as a model that would assist the understanding of the process of producing space, which includes both 'the abstract conceptions' and 'lived experiences' of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Watkins, 2005; Carp, 2008).

Understandably, the widely acknowledged conceptual framework for analyzing the construction of public spaces, put forward by Henri Lefebvre (1991) is a spatial triad entailing 3 aspects of public space production and their dialectical interplay:
1. The spatial practices, is the aspect referring to the 'production and reproduction' of spatial relations between objects and products, which, in relation to the other aspects of the triad, ensures continuity and cohesion of daily life (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.33). "These spatial practices include everyday routines and evolved social conventions of tolerable behavior" (Watkins, 2005, pp. 213);
2. The representations of space, or according to Lefebvre, the dominant space in societies, is the aspect referring to how the space is conceptualized or conceived of, including formal and informal regulations, symbols and codes of behavior and abstract representations. This is the space discursively created by professionals such as urban planners, developers, managers and authorities that regulate the physical make-out and use of space (Merrifield, 1993).
3. The representational space or the spaces of representation, is the aspect referring to the lived experience of users directly through its associated images and symbols, overlaying the physical space with the human experience of socio-spatial everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993; Watkins, 2005). As Watkins explains, "It is the spaces of representation that forms, informs and facilitates the deviations, diversity and individuality that are a fundamental aspect of any social encounter. This distinctiveness is achieved in conjunction with, while not being completely constrained by, the structures of the representations of space and the spatial practices that have developed to provide the necessary cohesion and competence for successful social interaction" (Watkins, 2005, pp. 213).

Thus, within the process of on the social construction of space, Lefebvre focuses on social space, arguing that it is not an inert and pre-given, but rather fluid, produced in an ongoing manner, through spatial relations and practices (Lefebvre, 1991). As he states, "...social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.73). In other

words, it is through actions and occupation of space that this space is constantly in a state of re-emergence and contestation (Hou, 2010).

However, Lefebvre believed that "(t)he social space of lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what he calls an abstract conceived space which dances to the tune of the homogenizing forces of money, commodities, capital and the phallus. It denies the celebration of lived difference, of tradition, of jouissance, of sensual differential space."(Merrifield, 1993, pp.524). Even though he recognizes that the production of abstract public space in capitalist times has been characterized by homogenization, hierarchization, social fragmentation and elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, Lefebvre believes a new differentiated space can be produced as resistance to the homogenization, through a dialectical conflict between the three aspects of space reproduction, where he also sees a prospect of emerging new differential spaces over the abstract spaces, due to the contesting nature of the relationship between the conceived, planned and experienced spaces (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1993). Having in mind the apparent decline in importance of public spaces, the flash mob phenomenon can be examined through Lefebvre's spatial triad of social space production, as a social event or representation occurring in public space might hold the potential for affecting sociability and public discourse in physical public spaces.

5.2 Tuan: The Perspective of Experience

Within Lefebvre's triadic construction of public spaces, the crucial aspect for this research is the lived space of representation. Thus, additional theoretical foundation is needed to examine how people experience spaces. In order to explain in depth the interrelated concepts of experience and public spaces, or how human perceptions, experiences and creativity influence people's attitudes of their physical and social environments, the work of the humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan also needs to be elaborated, specifically his elaboration of the concept of experience place and space. To begin with, "Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows his world…"(Tuan, 1975, pp.151). Taking into consideration touch, smell, taste, hearing, seeing, the human senses are, according to Tuan, utilized for actively exploring and getting to know the world around us. But experience is also "…compounded of feeling and thought." (Tuan, 1977, pp.10). In other words, beside the senses, humans actively utilize their thoughts and emotions in experiencing and reacting to their surroundings, while engaging in "…active visual perception and indirect mode of symbolization" (Tuan, 1977, pp.8).

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience" (Tuan, 1975, pp.152). Getting to know a place or experiencing it can range from one extreme of high abstract level as point in a spatial system to another extreme of experiencing it as a strong intuitive feeling. For most people, the extremes are either too abstract to be real or too emotionally committed to be common, and thus fall in the middle range of experience (Tuan, 1975). Places are constructed by experience at different levels/scales, as both a bed, the home, city and nation are places which differ greatly in size and physical character, but the one common thing these places all share is that "they are all centers of meaning to individuals and to groups" (Tuan, 1975, pp. 153). Moreover, most places are unnamed, since naming is providing conscious recognition, whereas much of the human experience is subconscious and passive. These experiences are deep and important but difficult to articulate since such common daily experiences such as the hard ground, the feel of air or smell, which are therefore feelings that are given shape and made visible through art, education and politics. In such a way, a sculptural art or architecture transforms an empty space into meaningful place, or a political discourse and symbolical representation might imbue meaning to a space in becoming a specific place (Tuan, 1975).

In one of his later books, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (1977), Tuan continues in the same experiential perspective to elaborate on the concepts of space and place as basic components of the world within which we experience life. The relation between the human and the world, or more simply, the body and the space is that the former not only occupies the later, but also creates and orders it. With cultural examples, Tuan (1977) demonstrates how humans are oriented in place, space and time and how they experience it. Here, space is un-differentiated and defined as openness, freedom, mobility, whereas place is considered to be a definite object that provides a feeling of security and stability, with attached value. "Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning." (Tuan, 1977, pp.136). Again, feelings are crucial in defining places and providing meaning. Architecture, art and events can build strong sentiments for places. Similarly, a temporal event such as a flash mob might also imbue a public space with meaning for those who experience it at the given moment and when re-visiting the same public space.

6. Research Design & Methodology

The research design is primarily guided by the aim and research questions, but specifically translates from the literature selection and the theoretical framework posited above. Therefore, the research entails a qualitative, ethnographic, comparative case study design, where data is essentially collected through desk research (online, media and literature review), in-situ participant and non-participant observation, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Due to the qualitative, explorative and ethnographic nature of the research, the data collection including all three methods was a rather non-linear, iterative process. The following five sub-chapters elaborate the justification for such a design and operationalization of key concepts, the case study selection, the data collection through three different methods, and the data analysis process and a concluding chapter reflecting on the methodology.

6.1 Design & Operationalization

When considering the aim and research questions, it is suggested that there is an exploration of flash mob as an urban phenomenon, which is ephemeral but can potentially have longer-lasting affect for the social construction of public space; deriving knowledge of the phenomenon from involved actors; consequently dealing with the key concepts of experience, public discourse and sociability; lastly, taking a range of different societal context in order to make comparison and possible connection to the phenomenon with its societal conditions. These questions require a theoretical and methodological framework that can deal with subjective, qualitative concepts, such as social construction of public spaces, experiences and emotions related to public space, sociability and public discourse, and their rootedness in differing societal contexts. Hence, the humanistic geography theoretical foundations, the qualitative data orientation and the comparative case study design, respectively.

Evidently, the research is qualitative since the nature of the research topic requires collection of rather subjective, qualitative type of data, concerning meanings of human experiences, emotions and attitudes. Therefore, based on symbolic interactionism, the research focuses on the phenomenological aspects of daily life interaction, expressed in the form of words, impressions, images and gestures. Besides, this research is qualitative because of several other key features of qualitative research: the type of questions asked which entail exploration of social phenomenon; examining the construction of meaning; understanding the details of people's actions in context; taking research participants' views into consideration and meanwhile pertaining to naturalism and reflexivity (Gibson, Brown, 2009; Bryman, 2008). Translating these features into the research, it is an exploration of the flash mob as a social phenomenon, attempting to understand the meanings and details people attach to their socio-spatial practice of flash mobbing in public space. It pertains to naturalism as it considers the socially constructed nature of the flash mob phenomenon and the contextual explanation and understanding of it. And lastly, it is largely reflexive because my personal experience is influencing all aspects of this research, starting from my personal experience with flash mobs as the very motivation for dealing with this research topic, to actively exploring and considering my positionality in the research in all stages of data collection and analysis.

Moreover, ethnography is broadly defined as a research design concerned with making sense of the actions and intentions of people as knowledgeable agents. In geography, it is considered to be an advantageous method for discovering processes and meanings that underline socio-spatial life. People create their socio-spatial worlds by processes that are symbolically encoded and thus meaningful. Because ethnography provides understanding into these processes and meanings, it can reveal the relationships between structure, agency and geographic context (Herbert, 2000). Therefore, this research is an ethnographic study because the flash mob phenomenon has to be explored from within the social group of flash mobbers who initiate it, in order to gain insight into the phenomenon, or the processes and meanings that motivate these people. Hence, beside participation at the flash mob events I also tried to be active in the organization beforehand and promotion afterwards. Henceforth, the methodology employs ethnographic, in-situ, participant and non-participant observations accompanied by video recordings, in order for me as the researcher to be directly involved in the immediate experience of the phenomenon and the social processes occurring during, before and after a flash mob.

Additionally, considering the theoretical framework embedded in humanistic geography, as the most convenient approach for examining the possible affects of the flash mob on public spaces, the research focuses on the human and social aspect of public space construction. Thus, the methodological design of this research focuses on the experiences of flash mobbers, at the event of a flash mob, through which they interact with the public space, as a social and physical environment. In other words, the focus is on how people through their attitudes and experiences can construct the social public space. From Tuan's perspective of experience, it is evident that the data collection will focus on the experiences of the people involved in the flash mob phenomenon, both as active (organizers and participants) and passive (media, audience and wider public) participants at the event. Thus, the concept of experience in this research design is operationalized according to Tuan's elaboration of it, entailing all various modes of sensory perception and existing attitudes through which people know their world and by which places are constructed as centers of meaning. In a similar vein as Tuan explains that a sculptural art can transform an empty space into a meaningful place, I focus on how the flash mob can transform the public space into a place imbued with meaning and attached value for those experiencing it. It is assumed that a temporal event such as a flash mob might also imbue a public space with meaning for those who experience it at the given moment and when re-visiting the same public space. Therefore, I used in-depth interviews that focused on asking how people felt during and after the flash mob, and how they perceived the public spaces.

Furthermore, I operationalized the process of social construction of public spaces through Lefebvre's spatial triad. The three aspects of social space production were translated into the research design by taking into consideration the make out of the concrete, material and social public spaces where the flash mobs have occurred, their formal regulation and general conceptualization, the spatial practices commonly associated with these public spaces, and lastly, but most importantly, how the public spaces have been experienced or lived by the flash mobbers and their immediate audience. The subjective space is the focus of this research, or as Lefebvre puts it, the lived/experienced space. Consequently, the methods for data collection ensured that through the desk research and direct observations, as well as through interviewing media representatives, the first and second aspect of the triad were covered, while the third, most relevant aspect of public space production was researched through the in-situ observations and in-depth interviews with flash mobbers. Through the experiences and emotions attached to their flash mob activities, the flash mobbers socially reconstruct the public space. As posed by Lefebvre, public space is not an inert thing but it is a continuously

produced and reproduced through socio-spatial relations and practices. The flash mob, as a socio-spatial practice and form of public symbolic expression then also holds the potential to reproduce public space as a representational space.

Having in mind the argument for the apparent decline in importance of public spaces for sociability and public discourse, mainly explained through the work of Sennett, I focus on these two social phenomena in relation to flash mobs with the second research question. As explained in the literature review section public spaces have been considered as places where people can meet, socialize and discuss topics that concern the society as a whole. Thus, sociability is considered to be any form of social interaction in public space, with existing friends and acquaintances or strangers, including verbal and non-verbal, planned or unplanned forms of human interaction, ranging from creating or maintaining strong social bonds to observing or taking interest of unfamiliar others. On the other hand, in accordance with Rodriguez's (2010) research I operationalized the concept of public discourse as any form of action, verbal or non-verbal, that relates to a societally relevant issue and aims to raise awareness of a problem or promote critical thinking in the society. However, according to previous research it is also evident that the flash mob is a social phenomenon operating both in physical public space and in online cyber space. Even though the socio-physical public space is the focus of this study, I took into consideration the online public space in relation to the flash mob phenomenon and sociability and public discourse, as well as, a rich source of information for the desk research.

Recognizing that flash mobs in public spaces are social phenomena embedded in their respective local societal context, the design takes into consideration the social, political, economic and cultural environment where the flash mobs occur. Moreover, the research is a comparative case study, including two differing data collection locations, since the third research question focuses on possible societal and contextual differences in how flash mob is practiced. Here, the methodological technique of desk research is crucial in establishing the societal context. Besides gathering formal information on the social economic political and cultural status of the societies under research, I also considered information on the audience and media responses to the events as data related to the relationship between the flash mobs and their wider context. Nevertheless, the interviews and active participant observation also provide rich insight into the relationship between this phenomenon and its local societal context, especially in trying to tease out which societal circumstances affect flash mobs in public spaces and how.

Last but not least, I researched flash mobs as social phenomena that can affect social construction of public spaces through the experiences of people involved, including three different types. First the people who organize the flash mobs, then people who only participate in flash mobs and third, people representing the wider public including the immediate audience at the events, audience on social media websites who saw video recordings of flash mobs and commented, and official media coverage and media representatives.

Finally, the data collection process was an iterative one, rather than linear, since I moved back and forth from the theory and literature and the data collection, especially at the initial stages of the research. The iteration was necessary in order to gain insight into possible sub themes and sub topics of the affects of flash mob on public spaces from desk research, which I haven't previously considered from my personal experience. Nonetheless, at the beginning of July, 2012, after the initial desk research I finalized the research questions and decided on the two case study locations. For the selection of case study locations, flash mobs to observe and

flash mobbers to interview I utilized a convenient, purposive framework as a sampling technique, because "some types of research design necessitate researchers taking a decision about the locations and individual participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth" (SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods, 2012).

After choosing the case study locations I immediately started the desk research focused on finding past, but more importantly, near future flash mobs that were planned during my data collection period. Thereafter, I started making contact and attempts to permeate the flash mob groups active in both locations, in order to schedule for observations and interviews. Meanwhile I continued analyzing the data from the desk research, which together with the theoretical framework, guided the creation of the observation protocol and the interview questions, which focused on specific aspects and themes of the research. The period for organization and scheduling of the observations and interviews lasted very long due to the unplanned nature of flash mobs, in terms of when they will occur, but also in terms of spending time getting to know the flash mobbers in both cities, in order to gain access to their activities and more personal relation for the interviews. Accordingly, in October and November, 2012 I conducted the observations and interviews in Skopje, and from January to April, 2013 I conducted the observations and interviews in Amsterdam. The observations I conducted were limited due to time constraints and the frequency of their occurrence, while the interviews were conducted until I reached saturation in terms of information and data richness. Overall, the case study selection and data collection methods correspond to the above explained theoretical operationalization and are elaborated below.

6.2 Case Study Selection

Alongside the qualitative nature of the research and the consideration of ethnography, the case study research design was also cogently derived from the theoretical framework and research focus. I decided to use a case study design because I initially set out to examine how the flash mob phenomenon is embedded within the public spaces and their wider societal context (See Research Question 3). The case study research method is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used."(Yin, 1984, pp.23). In other words, case study research allows for holistic, in-depth exploration and understanding of complex social phenomena, embedded in their socio-spatial context (Zaidah, 2007). Therefore, instead of targeting more flash mobs in different locations in order to improve the generalization of findings, I decided to use two specific cities as case study locations and conduct a more in depth, micro exploration of the relationship between the flash mobs and their societal context. In those case study locations I tracked all flash mobs that occurred within the timespan of the research.

The reason of choosing two case studies instead of one is mainly due to the third research question focusing on the extent to which flash mobs are related to the immediate socio-cultural and political context. Molnàr (2010) has indicated that flash mobs typically occur in public and semi-public spaces in larger and more diversified metropolitan areas. Furthermore, he detected a cultural and geographical variation in the purpose and effects of flash mobs in different societal contexts. Whereas flash mobs in US and UK tend to be focused on sociability, in Asia and Eastern Europe flash mobs usually have a political aim (Molnàr, 2010). However, the reasons behind

this societal variation have not been elucidated. The research questions and theoretical framework too, suggest that the flash mob phenomenon as a socio-spatial practice is embedded and thus influenced by its societal context. Therefore, in order to explore the potential societal differences in how flash mobs are practiced I decided to have a comparative case study design in order to compare the differences and similarities within different societies, thus discovering more about the relationship between the flash mob phenomenon and its wider context. I choose Skopje, R. Macedonia and Amsterdam, The Netherlands as case study locations both according to the findings from previous research, as well as, due to practical reasons.

On one hand, Skopje is the capital city and the key urban metropolitan location of R. Macedonia, an Eastern European country in transition. On the other hand, Amsterdam is the capital city and most densely populated urban area of The Netherlands, a developed, Western European country. On a European level, these two capital cities represent the distinction made by Molnàr (2010) as a Dutch Western, developed, liberal, politically stable, democratic society compared to the Macedonian, developing, rather traditional, politically unsteady and transitioning from post-socialist to democratic society, aspiring to join the EU. In addition, due to differences in historical trajectories, these two societies also differ in the socioeconomic level, The Netherlands being economically more developed country (GDP per capita $42.300) where the consumer society has existed longer and social development has reached stabilizing levels, and Macedonia being less economically developed country (GDP per capita $10.700), where rapid social change is currently steering the development of a new consumer society (2012 estimates, CIA World Factbook, 2013).

Moreover, the main practical reason for choosing these two case study locations was my previous familiarity with those societies from personal living experience. Due to time constraints for conducting the research and the envisaged in-depth analysis of not only the flash mobs in relation to their public spaces, but also to their wider contexts, it was necessary for me to have some previous knowledge of the societies I choose as research cases. I have been born and raised in Skopje, Macedonia, and I obtained my higher education in the Netherlands, living in Utrecht for 5 years. Moreover, my first personal experience in organizing and participating in a flash mob occurred in Skopje, while I was temporarily working for a local Youth NGO – "Youth Educational Forum". Namely, in May, 2011 I organized a dance flash mob for celebrating the European Union. The participants were about 100 young people from all Balkan countries, gathered in Skopje for a finalization of a youth EU project. The flash mob happened unannounced, in front of the EU building on a Sunday afternoon. Beside the familiarity with the societal conditions in both case study locations it was convenient to know the spoken language since the ethnographic participation, observations and in-depth interviews largely depended on the ease of communication between me and the flash mobbers. Thus, in Skopje I was conducting the research using the Macedonian language, while in Amsterdam, since I do not speak Dutch very well; I conducted the research using the English language.

However, it is important to note that I had far more extensive previous experience of the Macedonian case study than the Dutch one, both in terms of knowledge of the society, the language and the flash mob activities. Moreover, the fact that flash mobs are a rather novel phenomenon being practiced in Macedonia I was able to construct a complete overview of all flash mob activity that has occurred in Skopje from the beginnings to date. In contrast, Amsterdam, as a case study location was less familiar to me, especially being a city where flash mobs are not a new phenomenon. Thus, I focused on researching the most recent flash mobs instead of providing a

complete quantitative, historical overview of flash mobs in Amsterdam. Since this comparative case study is ethnographic, aiming at understating the flash mob as a social phenomenon in relation to public spaces, I focused on in-depth research of the social behavior and interactions of the flash mob groups when organizing flash mobs in public. Consequently, rather than aiming at making an exhaustive historical account on the flash mob phenomenon in relation to the wider societal context in each of the cities, I aimed more at finding at least one local flash mob community in both cities and closely follow their activities within the current wider societal context. This strategy allowed me to collect the data and observe the phenomenon in the natural environment of occurrence (in-situ participation) and understand better the underlying motives and perceptions individuals share within the flash mob groups.

Nonetheless, the embeddedness of the flash mob phenomenon within the wider societal context is a vital component of the research, since the flash mob and its potentials for social construction of public spaces cannot be researched in isolation, without regard to the social atmosphere of its occurrence. Adding this argument to the findings from previous research for the societal differences in flash mobs resulted in my decision to research the phenomenon in two differing societies. The societal context of both cities taken as case study locations is presented in a form of descriptive narrative in the data reporting, which were derived from my personal experience of living in those societies and the desk research.

6.3 Data Collection

The data collection included three methods, namely, desk and online research; in-situ, participant and non-participant observation; and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. As mentioned before, the data collection process was an iterative one, thus the utilization of the three methods was not occurring in separate consequent stages, but rather as a mixed process of conducting desk research, observations and interviews in a given period, per case study location. Nonetheless, the process of data collection for both case study locations was initiated by desk research which provided background information, thereafter scheduling of flash mob observations and interviews. Additionally, even though the observations and interviews were time-wise entwined, I aimed at conducting the interviews proximately after the flash mobs occurred in order to grasp the most recent flash mobbing experience from the interviewees.

Even though collecting the data through three different methods is frequently utilized in qualitative research in order to achieve triangulation of findings, that will provide trustworthiness of the different sources of data (Gibson, Brown, 2009), it was not per se my intention since credibility and reliability of the data in this case were not a relevant issue. More importantly here, the three data collection methods reflect the three aspects of social space production provided by Lefebvre, as means to gather data both from the personal lived, conceived and actual spatial production of public space during a flash mob. However, the different sources do provide some scrutiny of the research trustworthiness. In other words, how research participants discuss the flash mob phenomenon and how they behave while organizing and participating in it, will be tested through their statements from the interviews paralleled to the conclusions drawn from the participant observations, as well as reports and statements taken from social and official media.

6.3.1 Desk Research

The desk research had two general purposes, namely, acquiring contextual information and tracking online flash mob activity. First, the purpose of utilizing the desk research as a data collection technique is the qualitative and contextual description it yields. Qualitative description has the goal of providing a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms when straight descriptions of phenomena are needed (Sandelowski, 2000). The fact that this research focuses on flash mobs as a phenomenon occurring in public spaces of given societal contexts, the desk research is generally used to provide a contextual overview of the socio-political atmosphere in the selected locations, as well as an overview of local flash mob activities. Thus, the desk research entailed researching the existing literature on flash mobs, media releases on flash mobs in both case study locations and, search on YouTube and Facebook as most frequently utilized social media, internet networks for tracking flash mob activities through video posts from the events. In addition, I acquired information about the concrete make-out of the public spaces used for flash mobs, including how these spaces are formally regulated. This information was relevant in order to include all relevant aspects of the spatial triad for public space construction, elaborated through the work of Lefebvre in the theoretical framework, specifically the conceived abstract space of spatial practice and the representations of space.

However, another purpose of the desk research was to identify and access the active flash mobbing groups/communities in both case study locations and track their online activities and communication. As a digitally mediated phenomenon, the flash mob is organized, discussed and promoted on the internet (Molnàr, 2010). Therefore, I used the social media websites, mostly Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo in order to establish contact with the flash mobbing communities and gain access to the discourses arising in the comments sections of the relevant YoutTube videos or Facebook event pages. Considering the ethnographic nature of the research, I did not only passively follow the online flash mob communication, but actively participated, especially focusing on establishing communication with flash mob groups and individuals. Additionally, I conducted desk research of online media releases concerning flash mobs that have happened or have been planned for near future. This desk research not only provided information from the active flash mobbers, but also informed my research with the comments, opinions and discourses put forward by the flash mob audiences (those who either witnessed a flash mob or saw a video of it). Since the flash mob events are ephemeral at the moment of occurrence in public spaces, and the audiences are fortuitous, it was impossible to track and ask people from the audience about their opinions and feelings related to the event at the moment of the observed occurrence. Nor was it manageable to arrange in-depth interviews with them. Therefore, the comments audiences posted online, most frequently under the videos or news of the flash mobs they have witnessed, provided me greater insight into the outsider's perspective of the audience.

I have utilized the desk research throughout the whole research process, before the beginning of the data collection process, during the organization, and after the flash mobs have occurred. In the first phase I conducted desktop desk research of existing literature and media releases on flash mobs in order to gain more knowledge of the current issues discussed concerning the flash mob phenomenon in the given case study locations. Specifically, I made online search of all media releases within the case study locations, using the search word "flash mob". For Macedonia I used www.org.mk, the online search engine that archives all news releases from all Macedonian newspapers and TV stations, dating back from 1999 to date. For The Netherlands,

I used the LexisNexis Academic Search Engine http://academic.lexisnexis.nl which contains all Dutch news and media releases from 1980 to present. Considered by Molnàr (2010) to be the most resourceful website for flash mob activity, I conducted a search on YouTube with key words "flash mob", "Macedonia", "Skopje", "The Netherlands" and "Amsterdam". I utilized the information from this desk research to discover the specific discourses arising from these events and derive specific topics to inform the design of the open-ended questions for the interviews and the protocol for the participant observations. These newspaper and video research, coupled with search on Facebook also helped me to find the groups and individuals that organize flash mobs and establish primary contact with them in order to find my gatekeepers for the observations and interviewing.

Later on, the desk research was a process parallel to the participant observations and the interviewing, when I mainly used the same Macedonian and Dutch online search engines and Facebook. The key purpose then, was to follow the flash mobbers activities in cyber space and to gain insight into the attitudes and opinions of the wider public audience who witnessed or saw a video of the flash mobs, thereafter, commenting and discussing it online. Thus, I closely followed the online activities on the Facebook group pages and event pages of the flash mobs, as well as, the comments sections on the videos and media releases of the flash mobs.

6.3.2   In-situ Participant & Non-Participant Observations

Observation is a data collection method commonly utilized for gaining a general understanding and an insider's point of view that helps comprehend the meanings of the activities people enact (Gibson, Brown, 2009). Thus, the main purpose of the in-situ observation in this case was to gain personal insight and experience of the flash mob phenomenon and better understand the meaning this event has for the participants and the immediate audience. The observations in this case were in-situ, hence, in position or in its original place, as they were conducted at the time and locations of flash mob events. As suggested by the theoretical framework above, I focused the observations on the phenomenological aspects of flash mob interaction, expressed in the form of words, impressions, images and gestures.

Alongside the observations conducted at the events of flash mobs, I also engaged in ethnographic observation by gaining access into the groups and engage in the organization and promotion of the flash mobs. I selected the flash mob groups for my ethnographic fieldwork on opportunistic basis, using my previous experience in flash mobs and the information from the desk research. In Skopje, R. Macedonia, due to my previous experience in organizing a flash mob with a group of members of a youth NGO – Youth Educational Forum, I engaged in the organization of their upcoming flash mob. In Amsterdam, The Netherlands, I found an upcoming flash mob on Facebook and I established contact with the organizer, Andries Tunru, who did not hesitate to allow me access into the preparations and execution of the upcoming flash mob. Therefore, in addition to observing all flash mobs that occurred in the selected case study cities, within the timeframe of my data collection period, I also observed the dynamics of every-day life settings of the flash mobbers, especially during the organization of the flash mobs and the promotion afterwards. Hence, beside in-situ observations of the flash mob events, I also conducted ethnographic observation of the flash mobbers before and after the event, collecting information from informal conversational interviews in a casual, naturalistic manner. I collected the informal, conversational data in a form of a personal diary.

For the observations of the flash mob events, I conducted both participant observation, when I was active in organization and execution of flash mobs, and non-participant observations, when I was only observing the event as an outsider audience. In participant observation the researcher attempts to be included in the practices observed as much as possible in order to gain understanding of the insider's perspective, while the non-participant observation assists in understanding the outsider's perspective of the event (Gibson, Brown, 2009). Consequently, I conducted both type of observations in both case study locations in order to secure insights both from the viewpoint of the flash mob participants, and the outsider's viewpoint of the audience. At the participant observations I aimed at being active in organizing and participating in the flash mobs, while at the non-participant observations I only witnesses the events as audience. For the participant observation, where I could not focus on the audiences I organized one person to assist me in taking video shots at the event, for the purpose of having richer observation material and have data from an outsider's point of view at moments where I am focused on the insider's understanding.

Due to frequency of flash mobs occurring within the timeframe of my data collection process, I observed seven flash mobs in total. In Skopje, I conducted two participant observations of one flash mob that occurred for two consecutive days, The Silent Disco Flash Mob, where I fully participated in the organization and realization as part of the "YEF" Group, and one non-participant observation of a dance flash mob in a city mall. In Amsterdam, first I conducted two participant observations, whereas only in the Standing Ovation Flash mob I had the opportunity to participate in the organization. Thereafter, I conducted two non-participant observations of a dance flash mob and a pillow fight. Table 1 below provides the specific information on all flash mobs I observed. Accordingly, I conducted most of the ethnographic fieldwork with YEF and Shoqs in Skopje and Amsterdam respectively.

Table 1: Observations of Flash Mob Events					
	Flash mob	Location	Organizer	Date	Observation
Skopje	Silent Disco Flash Mob for International Tolerance Day	Central city square	Youth Educational Forum NGO "YEF"	16.11.2012	Participant (+organizing)
	Silent Disco Flash Mob for International Tolerance Day	Central city square	Youth Educational Forum NGO "YEF"	17.11.2012	Participant (+organizing)
	Dance Flash Mob	Skopje City Mall	NOVA School, Ritam+ Dance School	12.11.2012	Non-participant
Amsterdam	No Pants Metro ride Flash mob	Central Station	Shoqs flashmob group	13.01.2013	Participant
	Standing Ovation Flashmob	Museumplein square	Arnout Visser & Shoqs	09.02.2013	Participant (+organizing)
	V-day Dance Flash mob	Dam square	Onebillionrising.org	14.02.2013	Non-participant
	Pillow Fight Flash mob	Dam square	PillowFight Amsterdam	06.04.2013	Non-participant

Furthermore, the observations of the flash mobs were semi-structured, since I used an observation protocol providing guidance into the specific aspects, practices, elements and behaviors of the flash mob I was focusing on. This protocol provided me direction in specific observations that are of interest to me and structure that was helpful for later comparison in the data analysis process (Gibson, Brown, 2009). However, I did not fill out the observation protocol at the moment, but immediately before and after the flash mob has occurred. In this way I was not fully constrained by the specifics of the observation protocol while observing, allowing me to be open for unforeseen or unexpected observations and fully engage in the moment. To add, the short and dynamic nature of the flash mob events, especially in cases where I was participating made it difficult to be attentive to all aspects of the event. Thus, for the participant observations I arranged for assistance, where friends would take additional videos and photos of specific aspects I believed I could not fully grasp myself, such as reactions from the audience or interactions and gestures of the flash mobbers.

The observation protocol (Appendix 1) was generally guided by the research questions and based on my previous experience in flash mobs and the desk research. The aim of the observations was to experience the subjective socio-physical public space in the event of a flash mob and discern the interaction that occurs in the immediate environment. In other words, I would observe and experience in situ how the social space of a certain area transforms during the event, so afterwards I could interview the participants about the meaning of this transformation. As previously explained, I incorporated all three aspects of public space production by Lefebvre, thus including description of the physical environment, description of its typical use and regulation, and lastly the description of the social environment at the flash mob event (Items 1 and 2 of the protocol). I usually filled out these items in the protocol before the flash mob events, when I visited the public spaces beforehand in order to observe and compare the usual atmosphere of those spaces compared to the one in the moment of a flash mob (Item 3). To add, I observed both the flash mob participants and the people in the immediate environment (Items 4 and 6 of the protocol). Since it was practically impossible to attempt and schedule in-depth interviews with the audiences of the flash mobs, the online desk research and the observations were the only source of data that would provide information on the outsider's viewpoint. Therefore, I focused a large part of the observations to the people who witnessed the flash mobs and their reactions. When conducting the non-participant observations I had the opportunity to ask short questions to audience people about their impressions, but in participant observations that was more difficult to do. Nevertheless, the video and photo material I arranged provided me with data on how the audience reacted to the flash mobs. More specifically, according to Tuan's elaborations of human experiences, emotions and attitudes of space, I focused the observation on what type of verbal and non-verbal gestures people demonstrated during the event. Besides observing non-verbal gestures and physical behavior, I also attempted to observe the verbal social interaction, including flash mobbers, audience and sometimes local authorities and media reporters (Item 5 of the protocol). Lastly, in order to account for my positionality in the research I filled out my personal reflections and emotions from the event (Item 7 of the protocol).

The observation as a method has proven useful in understanding the social phenomenon of flash mob and experience in situ its influence on the social construction of public space. To add, comparing the observed behavior and communication between the participants at the event with their interview statements has provided a better understanding and contextualization of the data. Through the observations I generated rich data in form of observation protocols, personal diary notes from the ethnographic fieldwork before and after

the flash mob events and videos and photos. Besides the observation data that yielded from this method, it was also useful for establishing social contact and sampling of interviewees for the in-depth interviews.

6.3.3   Semi-structured In-depth Interviews

Lastly, the purpose of the semi-structured in-depth, interviews was to gain substantial knowledge and understanding on the attitudes, experiences and feelings of people involved in flash mobs. The semi-structured interviews were conducted after the initial contact and observations of flash mob organizers, participants and media representatives from both cities. Thus, as a methodological tool the interviews indeed were utilized as a final method of data collection, where the most in-depth knowledge about the flash mob phenomenon in public space would be collected. The interviews lasted on average for 44 minutes and were voice recorded. I conducted in total eleven in-depth interviews in Skopje and six in Amsterdam.

I selected the interviewees utilizing a snowballing technique, which is the process of one person recommending that I talk with another person (Gibson, Brown, 2009). Therefore, I approached the interviewee selection, first by selecting interviewees on the spot at the observations and later by propositions from the interviewed people. However, the first people I contacted were usually the organizers of the flash mobs, and in terms of relevance and depth of the data I was collecting, the organizers proved to be far more involved, interested and devoted to the flash mob phenomenon than the participants, thus providing richer data in analyzing the phenomenon at the interviews. Nonetheless, I interviewed people who only had a role of participant due to their uninformed and thus more raw and sincere experience of the event. Hence, the sampling was purposive, since it targeted those who would potentially have most experience in the phenomenon, rather than selecting interviewees by chance. Those same interviewees were my gatekeepers and key informants, providing me access and contact to other interviewees, as well as, providing me with relevant information. For Skopje, my key informant and gate keeper was Petar Antevski, a member of a youth NGO, YEF – Youth Educational Forum, with whom I have organized flash mobs in the past. For Amsterdam, that role was played by Andries Tunru, a student at school for drama and theater, whose is the founder of the SHOQS flash mob group and has a part-time job in organizing flash mobs both for profit and non-profit purposes (See Appendix 2: List of Interviewees). [1]

Besides interviewing flash mob organizers and participants, I also interviewed one media representative for each case study location, in order to account for the representations and attitudes of the wider public through the official media. In Skopje, I interviewed Saska Cvetkovska, a reporter who has more than 4 years of working experience as a local journalist both in TV and newspaper media. I selected her as a media representative for the Macedonian case study due to her grounded and versatile experience in the Macedonian media sector, as well as, her interest in following media reports on the flash mob phenomenon both locally and internationally. Her knowledge of international trends both in the media sector and flash mobs was insightful, as she was able to make a comparison of the Macedonian case with other cases. On the other hand, I interviewed David Dekel for the Dutch case. He is a CEO and Founder of Endeavour Enterprises N.V. (a corporate relocation and interim management firm located in Amsterdam). Even though he is not specifically a journalist, he has experience in co-

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[1] The interviewees allowed their names and quotes from the interviews to be used in this research.

founding and managing Amsterdam Spoke Magazine and Amsterdam hotels city guide project. I selected him for the interview also because of his extensive knowledge of the media sector in The Netherlands, but more importantly, due to his specific interest and experience in flash mobs. Namely, being also a photographer I met David both at the No Pants Metro ride Flash mob and the Pillow Fight Flash mob, present to experience and photograph the events. After the selection of the interviewees I scheduled and conducted the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews include specifying the key themes for the interview formulated as questions, but with certain degree of flexibility in terms of determining the order and importance of themes and questions, and allowing for the interviewee to bring out novel themes concerning the research (Gibson, Brown, 2009). Thus, I constructed an interview questionnaire (Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) in order to make sure I cover all the aspects relevant for the research and be able to compare the data from different interviews during the analysis. However, due to the fact that the aim of the interviews was to tap into the emotions and experiences of flash mobbers, I decided the interviews should be informal in order to create a comfortable atmosphere for the interviewees to express personal views and feelings. Therefore, I did not strictly follow the questionnaire during the interviews, as it both allowed for the interviewees to add issues I did not cover in my questions, and allowed for the interview to flow naturally, as an informal conversation. The issues that were not raised by the interviewees, and are relevant to this research, were covered by the questions I designed. Additionally, I conducted the interviews in quieter café's, considering it would be a more appropriate, informal and relaxed environment for a conversation than an office or other working spaces. Since it was a semi-structured interview, aiming to resemble more of an informal relaxed conversation, I did not only pose the designed questions in the exact given order and wait for an answer, but often I would pose additional questions either to dwell more into the specific issue in the conversation or to ask for more elaboration and details, as well as provide some of my experiences in order to motivate the interviewee to discuss theirs. Nonetheless, I was continuously aware of my influence and positionality in the research, and thus aimed at being neutral and supportive with each interviewee, regardless of my viewpoints and emotions.

The interview questions were designed in accordance with the three main research questions and theoretical framework of the research. Thus, the purpose of the interview questions was to discuss and understand the experiences of flash mobbers in terms of how they socially construct public space during the flash mob events, whether they consider a certain extent of sociability and public discourse as crucial elements in the process and whether they relate their activity to the socio-cultural and political context of their environment. Moreover, the questions were informed from my previous personal experience in flash mobs, as well as, the conducted desk research and observations. I conducted one pilot interview before finalizing the interview questionnaire in order to test whether the questions are relevant, clear and unambiguous, whether the order of the questions is appropriate and whether the questionnaire contains all relevant analytic matters for the research (Gibson, Brown, 2009). While scheduling the interviews or before recording them, I explained to the interviewees that my research is about the exploration of the flash mob phenomenon in relation to public space and that the purpose of the interview is to gain insight into their personal attitudes, opinions and emotions related to their experience in flash mobs. I did not provide more information into the specific theory and aim of my research in discovering the social construction of public spaces through flash mobs in order to prevent influencing the answers of the interviewees from the very beginning of the interview.

As evident from Appendix 3, there are nine open ended questions for the flash mobbers. At the beginning of each interview, I asked for basic personal information such as name, age, occupation and noted the date, time and place of the interviews for data categorization and arrangement. Thereafter, follow the open ended questions regarding their experiences and opinions about the flash mobs they have participated in, and the phenomenon in general.

Questions 1 and 2 explore the most relevant experiences the interviewees attach to the flash mobs they organized or participated in. For most the first flash mob experience was the one they remember most vividly, although I also discussed the latest flash mobs we both have participated in, so I am better informed from the observations. In line with Tuan's theory, I aimed to understand the way interviewees experienced the events, including all sensory perception and existing attitudes. Question 3 focuses on the responses they got from the immediate and wider audience. According to Lefebvre's 'truth of space' and 'true space', considering the flash mobs a divergent socio-spatial practice, I asked interviewees to compare their experience with the one of the non-participants or dominant culture. Some had experience as observers or filming crew, entailing valuable spectator experience. Question 4 required from interviewees to analyze a media excerpt about a local flash mob. I presented news about the Dance Flash Mob in City Mall and the No Pants Metro Ride for the Macedonian and Dutch interviewees, respectively (Appendix 5 and 6). I found the media excerpt useful because it motivated the interviewees to think and discuss more extensively about the outsider perception, the public discourses and the relation with the societal context they operate in. I posed Question 5 about the possible threatening effects of flash mobs to public order and safety because there was almost always police presence on flash mobs in Skopje, whereas flash mobs in Amsterdam, such as the Pillow Fight, grow in popularity and size every year, sparking discussions on social and official media about its disruptive and troublesome effects. Question 6 filters out the key ingredients of a successful flash mob and check whether public space will be mentioned as one. The interviewees described examples and moved to a more abstract level, discussing the objectives, motivations and effects of a flash mob event.

Being a phenomenon that is orchestrated both in online and offline public space, Question 7 and 8 explore how the flash mobbers relate to both platforms. Evidently, the cyber space has been utilized for organization and promotion of the flash mobs (Molnàr, 2009). However, I wanted to examine whether it is additionally considered as a place for sociability and public discourse, such as communicating with others before and after the events and/or discussing topics of societal relevance, if initiated by the flash mobs. On the other hand, Question 8 explores how flash mobbers experience and feel about the public spaces in general, at the moment of a flash mob and afterwards. Whether experiencing a flash mob in a certain public space changes the way people feel about the space is crucial in examining how flash mobs can socially construct and reconstruct public spaces. Specifically, the question of how they feel when revisiting the same public space where they have participated in a flash mob, relates directly to Tuan's explanation of how a sculptural art can create certain meaning, value and attachment for a place, in turn, researching whether a temporal event such as the flash mob can hold the same potential. At last, although all previous questions were open ended, implicitly inquiring information about the social construction of public spaces, Question 9 provides specific statements about the potential of flash mobs in creating sociability and discourse in public space, explicitly asking the interviewees to provide an opinion about these issues in case they have not done so earlier in the interview.

Beside the questionnaire there were many other interesting questions that came up during interviews. For example, as Macedonian flash mobs are typically organized by youth activists, who are usually more active on social media, using it as online public space for youth activism and addressing or promoting certain societal discourses, I asked an additional question in order to get a deeper understanding into the value of the offline public space for public discourse: If you could promote a societal message or idea solely with cyber activities in the online public space, by Facebook teaser campaigns, video and text (blogging) communication, etc., why do you go out in offline public space to promote/address the same message through a flash mob?

The interview questionnaire I used for interviewing the media representatives slightly differs from the one I used for interviewing flash mob organizers and participants (Appendix 4). Nonetheless, the list of questions is very similar, but logically focused more on the viewpoint of the media representatives and the wider media in general, rather than their personal experiences in flash mobs. The aim of these interviews was to understand the relationship between the flash mobs and the local public sphere.

In conclusion, the in-depth interviews had provided rich qualitative data on understanding the meanings and experiences people attach to flash mobs and the public spaces they temporarily occupy with these activities. How the interviewees discuss the flash mob phenomenon and how they behave while organizing and participating in it, was explored through their statements from the in-depth interviews paralleled to the conclusions and experiences I have drawn from the participant observations, as well as, reports and statements taken from social and official media. The interviews yielded a lot of data, and add to the recorded and transcribed interviews I took into account other informal conversations and e-mail correspondences with the interviewees, as I sometimes had follow-up questions. After conducting all the interviews, I transcribed and began analyzing the data. Nonetheless, as the research was an iterative process, the data analysis began during data collection and continued afterwards.

6.4 Data Analysis

The collected data from the desk research, the participant observations and interviews were transcribed, translated and imported to the NVivo software for qualitative data analysis.[2] Generally, qualitative data analysis is a systematic search for statements about relationships, underlying themes and essential features that are of interest for the research (Gibson, Brown, 2009). As stated before, the data collection and subsequently the data analysis in this research had relied on conclusions drawn from previous research and are embedded in the respective social contexts where the flash mob phenomenon has been addressed. Firstly, I analyzed the two case studies of Skopje and Amsterdam separately, by conducting in-depth analysis of the interviews and comparing them to the participant observations and the information derived from the media. Thereafter, I made a comparison of cases, elaborating on similarities and differences.

The general flow of the data analysis was guided by Description, Analysis and Interpretation. "The description involves producing an account that stays close to the original data." (Gibson, Brown, 2009, pp.5) Therefore, the

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[2] The transcribed interviews and observation notes are available in electronic format upon request.

section outlining the results first includes a description of the contexts of the addressed case study locations whose aim is to create a narrative that presents the original data in a motivated way. Second, the Analysis entails going beyond the descriptions and using the data to systematically discover key concepts and relationships among them, and third the Interpretation involves an attempt to make sense of the data by creatively producing insights about it (Gibson, Brown, 2009). Therefore, followed by the contextual descriptions, the Analysis entailed creating categories of key concepts from the data collected, whereas the Interpretation included the observation and my analytical viewpoint as the researcher, through which the main conclusions from the research are drawn.

Specifically, the analysis focused on how the research participants felt, experienced and understood the flash mob in relation to the public space where it occurred. Beside novel concepts and themes derived from the data, I primarily dealt with analyzing the existing key themes/concepts of interest derived from previous research, the theoretical framework and the interview questions. Accordingly, the main themes of analysis were: the flash mob experience, the social construction of public space, the societal context and the potential of affecting sociability and public discourse. Other ancillary themes were the media attitude and representation, flash mob in online public space, the relation with the immediate audience and with the public space authorities.

Using NVivo, after I uploaded all the data from the interviews, observations and desk research in 2 separate projects for each case study, I began detecting and coding the data according to the key words and concepts, (namely, flash mob, experience, feelings, public space, online space, sociability, public discourse, society, media, audience, authorities). Thereafter, I began clustering and connecting different themes and categories I have created in tree nodes and sets and finally queries. Alongside, I used memos and annotations next to the coded data to reflect on my personal opinion and conclusions. Lastly, in order to account for possible variations in flash mobs for differing socio-cultural contexts, a comparison of the data and key themes from the two case studies of Skopje and Amsterdam was conducted, by focusing on outlining the similarities and differences and attempting to relate them to the differences in their respective societal conditions.

6.5 Concluding Reflection on Methodology

In conclusion, I have designed the methodology primarily guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework, taking into account the theoretical and practical guidelines of doing qualitative studies. The research questions had necessitated a collection of qualitative data, within a comparative ethnographic case study design, including desk research, observations and interviews as the three main data collection techniques I had employed. In order to account for the validity and reliability of this research[3], I employed verification strategies during the process of the research, rather than afterwards, in order to be able to correct myself while

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[3] Many qualitative researchers avoid the terms 'validity' and reliability' because they are primarily associated with quantitative research. However, I personally believe that even though given different names (e.g. credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability), the same underlying principles of establishing rigor of research are used in both quantitative and qualitative research. In order to be acknowledged by mainstream science, I opt for using unified terminology, recognizing that the manner of establishing validity and reliability differs according to the qualitative or quantitative paradigm (Bryman, 2008; Lawrence, Newman, 2003; Morse et al., 2002;).

conducting the work and thus, strengthen the rigor/trustworthiness of the research. Considering the fact the research process was an iterative one, I employed these strategies continuously as I moved back and forth between the research questions, data collection and data analysis, thus modifying, correcting and guiding the research accordingly.

As suggested by Morse et al. (2002), I paid attention to the aspects of investigator's responsiveness, methodological coherence and active analytic stance, sampling adequacy, and theoretical thinking and development, using verification strategies to ensure the validity and reliability of my research. Essential to the validity of the research was my responsiveness as a researcher or being able to "…remain open, use sensitivity, creativity and insight, and be willing to relinquish any ideas that are poorly supported regardless of the excitement and the potential that they first appear to provide." (Morse et al., 2002, pp.18). In this sense, I found that the greatest potential threat to my responsiveness would be to work deductively through the data solely guided by assumptions from the theoretical framework, previous literature and my personal experience, rather than inductively focusing on the knowledge I extract from the collected data. With the theoretical framework employed, and aiming with this research to provide a counter argument to the apparent demise of public space for sociability and public discourse, I was running the threat of ignoring contradicting data. Therefore, my strategy was to be actively aware of this threat during the research process, especially during interviews where I tried to avoid influencing the answers of my interviewees with my previous knowledge and opinion of the topic, as well as during the coding and analysis of the data.

Moreover, the methodology of this research closely followed the research questions and the humanistic geography approach as the theoretical framework of the research. The aim of this procedure during the research was to ensure methodological coherence, or "…congruence between the research questions and the components of the method." (Morse et al., 2002, pp.18). Therefore, with specific reference to Tuan's elaboration of the perspective of experience of spaces, I focused on understanding the feelings, motivations and attitudes of people who have organized and participated in flash mobs through the participant observations and in-depth interviews. Additionally, with reference to Lefebvre's conceptual framework for analyzing the construction of public spaces I incorporated the three aspects of the triad by taking into consideration first, the context and specifics of the public spaces used for flash mobs, second, the regulation and daily use of the spaces, and third, the perceptions of the flash mob participants, the spectator audience, and the wider public. Considering the fact the research was not a linear process, I was prepared and open for possible modifications of the research questions, the literature and theoretical framework, the data and the analytic procedure in order to account for coherence in the research. By recognizing the importance of "collecting and analyzing data concurrently" (Morse et al., 2002, pp.18), I was pacing myself through the iterative process of the research.

Likewise, I employed verification strategies during the process of sampling flash mobs and interviewees. Most importantly, I aimed at quality and diversity in the sample, thus, attempting to interview the people who are most involved in the flash mobs as most knowledgeable and resourceful subjects, and observe different types of flash mobs for each case study location. Besides seeking 'replication' in the data I collect in order to reach 'saturation', I also attempted to find 'negative cases' or flash mobs and interviewees that will potentially provide contrasting or different data, thus ensuring 'completeness' alongside the 'comprehension' (Morse et al., 2002). In detail, this included: Interviewing few first time flash mob participants since the majority of interviewees in

the sample were experienced in organizing and participating in flash mobs; interviewing people about other flash mobs I have not included in the observations; including the dance flash mob in Skopje that does not have a social or political aim, since most flash mobs from that case study were socially or politically motivated; and including the V-day flash mob in Amsterdam as one promoting public discourse on a societal issue, since most flash mobs from this case seemed to be motivated by sociability and fun.

Lastly, the theoretical thinking and theory development was a crucial aspect in all stages of the research process. I specifically included the micro-macro understanding of the phenomenon in the third research question, relating the flash mob in public spaces with their respective societal contexts and comparing the two different case studies. To add, Lefebvre's conceptual triad made me recognize the multifaceted nature of public spaces and the potential of attaining contrasting data that might require additional theoretical or methodological support to be appropriately understood and included in the research. Alongside, Tuan's theoretical approach to experiencing spaces was very useful in guiding me through the observations and interviews, ensuring I would approach these relatively ephemeral situations with a clear theoretical and research focus (Morse et al., 2002).

Moreover, the triangulation in using three different data collection methods stemmed from including Lefebre's three aspects of public space construction within the theoretical framework, but also proved to be useful in confirming the conclusions I drew from the data analysis, since the different discourses I encountered required different sources and type of data in order to be presented in a reliable manner. For example, the relationship between the local police and the flash mob organizers in Skopje seemed to be complicated and thus, advising legal documents on regulation of public spaces during the desk research and having a short unofficial talk with a police officer during the observation helped me clarify and confirm the data I analyzed from the interviews. Here, it would have been ideal to conduct in-depth interviews with relevant city officials and/or local police representatives, so that I can properly cover the second aspect of Lefebvre's spatial triad, or the representations of space (pp.12), but I was denied access in Skopje due to political reasons.

Even though I opt for addressing validity and reliability during the research instead of performing post hoc evaluation of the rigor of the research, I have adhered to a certain structure during the data collection process, and I have carefully documented and transcribed all data, which allows for evaluation by others. Additionally, documenting the research in detail increases the potential to replicate the research, as a concept associated with reliability. However, the extent of replication of this study is limited due to its ethnographic nature and ephemeral phenomenon being studies.

Considering the fact I had limited time and human resources, taking up on a qualitative and comparative case study design was quite an ambitious task. Despite my attempts to design the study in a way that the scope would match the resources available, there were several issues affected by lack of resources, which can limit the rigor of the research. Namely, as mentioned before, I did not manage to interview relevant city officials or police representatives, due to problems with access and lack of time. Also, in the final stages of the research I thought that including several focus groups where I would discuss the flash mobbing phenomenon would add value to the findings, especially with the public discourse related issues, however I did not utilize this method due to time constraints.

Finally, I had significantly more knowledge and access to data for the Macedonian case than for the Dutch one. This was due to the fact I knew the Macedonian language and societal context better. Also, flash mobs are a rather new phenomenon in Macedonia, compared to the Dutch case. Thus, I was able to track flash mobs in Skopje from the very beginnings and include all flash mobs that have occurred in my analysis (to different extent), whereas for Amsterdam I was not able to track all flash mobbing activity since its commencement. However, I believe that the data collection I conducted has proven to be exhaustive for providing sufficient information for analysis and understanding of the flash mob phenomenon in relation to social construction of public space for both case study locations.

The following three chapters elucidate the results from the research. Chapter 7 deals with the Macedonian case study and compared to that, Chapter 8 elaborates the Dutch case study. Each case study chapter is divided in several sub-chapters. Throughout these sub-chapters different issues related to the first research question of how the flash mobbers and their spectators socially construct public spaces through their experiences are analyzed. The last sub-chapters specifically deal with the issues of sociability and public discourse, pertaining to the second research question. The findings are presented through the perspectives of the flash mob organizers, the participants and the audience. Finally the conclusions in Chapter 9 interpret the results through summarizing and comparing both cases embedded within their differing societal contexts, thus, shedding additional light on the last research question as to what extent flash mobs relate to the immediate socio-cultural and political context.

7. Macedonian Flash Mobs: Activism in Public Spaces

Chapter 7 presents the results of the Macedonian case study, divided in eight sub-chapters, each dealing with a different issue pertaining to the flash mob phenomenon in public spaces. The first one provides background information and description of aspects of the Macedonian societal context which are relevant to the flash mob phenomenon, including the form and function of Macedonian public spaces. The second one elaborates on the specific characteristics of the Macedonian flash mobs, specifically being a new phenomenon locally initiated by young NGO activists. The third sub-chapter provides the experiences related to flash mobbing in Skopje, whereas the fourth one specifically focuses on those experiences related to the public spaces where flash mobs occur and the way organizers and participants socially construct them. The fifth sub-chapter elaborates on the affects of online cyber space both in relation to the flash mobs and in comparison to the offline public spaces. The next two sub-chapters deal with the issues of sociability and public discourse, as to what extent can flash mobs bring about social interaction in public spaces and whether as a form of public expression can affect public discourses on current topics that concern the Macedonian society. Lastly, a conclusion of the Macedonian case study is provided. The following quote from a flash mob participant and organizer reflects the Macedonian flash mob phenomenon elaborated below:

"It's about social activism… it's about freedom of public expression in a society of oppressed people … it is so liberating to do it in open public space … I can be seen and heard by someone outside my Facebook friend list…"
(Petar, NGO activist, 2012)

7.1 The Transitional Society & Skopje's Public Spaces

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a rather small, landlocked country in Southeast Europe, covering a total area of 25.333 square kilometres, with 2,087,171 (July 2013 est.) citizens, including the majority of ethnic Macedonians and several ethnic minorities (Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, Roma, and others). The country gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, and since then has been transitioning from a socialist towards a capitalist, democratic society, as a candidate country aspiring to join the European Union since 2004. However, there are continued concerns about many socio-economic and democratic processes in the country, such as upholding the momentum of democratic reforms and stimulating economic development, including 31.3% (2012 est.) rate of unemployment, 30.4% of the population living below the poverty line (2011 est.) and GDP per capita (PPP) of $ 10.700 (2012 est.) (CIA FactBook, 2013; State Statistical Office of the R. Macedonia, 2013). Additionally, the EU Commission has continuously reported problems concerning inter-ethnic tensions, freedom of expression, media freedom, and institutional transparency and corruption, as highlighted in their 2011 Accession Progress Report. In the field of media freedom, the Commission reports on continued concerns about self-censorship and the public's access to objective reporting, which is highly politicized (EU Commission, 2011). Further concerns have been noticed as limited progress has been made in promotion and enforcement of human rights. Namely, violation of women's rights and gender inequality are widespread, as well as limited progress in children's rights. To add, the capacity of the Commission for Protection against discrimination is still insufficient and as the Anti-Discrimination Law neglects discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, the

LGBT community especially, faces continuous discrimination. Consequently, general public awareness for the need of addressing the problems associated with discrimination is very limited.

Skopje is the capital city of Macedonia, home of approximately one quarter of the total population (480.000 citizens, 2009 est. (CIA FactBook, 2013; State Statistical Office of the R. Macedonia, 2013)). It is the main administrative, economic, political, cultural, academic and urbanized city in the country. In other words, as Skopje is the city where most of the urban population lives and works, it is the place where things happen. Due to the concentration of the Macedonian economic and academic sector in Skopje, it is also the city with the highest concentration of young population (age 18-35).

Picture 1: Central Square Macedonia, 1993 [4]   Picture 2: Central Square Macedonia, Skopje, 2013 [5]

In accordance with the historical, socio-economic, political and cultural conditions, Skopje is a post-socialist city undergoing transformation towards a capitalist city. After a devastating earthquake in 1963, the capital was re-built into a socialist city, where public spaces were of great importance for developing the socialist identity and most space was considered public, having the purpose for social interaction, cultural activities and manifestations. After the country's independence in 1991, Skopje began undergoing a transformation towards a capitalist democratic capital city, generally modifying the open public spaces into privatized and commercialized semi-public places for leisure and consumption (Hamilton, 1979; Enyedi,1998; Stanilov, 2007).

Beside the newly built shopping centres and other commercial services (See Pictures 3 and 4), the central square and other spaces that remained largely open, still hold the function for reformulating and transforming the national identity and societal fabric of the city. Beside governmental interventions in these transformations (See Pictures 1 and 2), the public square is also a place for demonstrating social discontent in times of political and economic instability. In Skopje, there have been also noted public incidents and numerous protests in the last period (European Commission, 2012). This right for freedom of thought and public expression is guaranteed by the Constitution of R. Macedonia and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, occurring at any time and place without any previous announcements or required permits. However, The Law for Public Gatherings of R. Macedonia regulates the manner in which citizens can realize their right for public gatherings, especially in

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[4] http://retromk.tumblr.com/post/76942221483/1993, 2013
[5] http://www.macedonia-timeless.com/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabindex=0&tabid=1326, 2013

terms of safety considerations, providing organizers of such events to be able to inform the local district unit of The Ministry of Internal Affairs for the public gathering not later than 48 hours before the event and have police presence at the time of occurrence (Official Gazette of R.M, 1995, 2006, 2007).

Picture 3: Vero Centre, Skopje, 2013 [6]   Picture 4: Skopje City Mall, Skopje, 2013 [7]

Therefore, the central part of the city is the busiest area, where the main square, shopping and business areas, as well governmental buildings are located. To add, there is the highest frequency of people transiting or engaging in leisure and consumption activities. Cogently, it is also the area where public spaces are most commonly used for public events, such as celebrations, concerts, protests, festivals, etc. Thus, the main square, the central city park and the streets within this area and the governmental buildings are the public spaces most frequently occupied for protests and other public gatherings and festivities, including recently, the flash mobs.

7.2 The Rise of Macedonian Flash Mobs

Being quite a new phenomenon, flash mobs penetrated the Macedonian society not long ago, with the first flash mobs reported in September, 2010. Since then and up until December, 2012, 19 different flash mobs were reported to have occurred in 16 different cities around the country. This might not be an exhaustive list of all flash mobs that have occurred due to removed reporting/publishing or lack thereof. To add, the number count is excluding the fact that 4 of those flash mobs occurred several times in different cities, locations and/or dates, amounting up to 44 flash mob events (See Appendix 7 for list of Macedonian flash mobs). In accordance with Molnàr's (2010) findings stating that flash mobs occur in the largest, and most densely and heterogeneously populated urban centres, or university cities, Skopje is the city where half of those flash mobs occurred. I expected that a relatively new phenomenon such as flash mob, in a developing society such as the Macedonian one would occur only in Skopje as the only urban centre which is disproportionately larger, more developed and

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[6] http://www.panoramio.com/photo/45801530,2013
[7] http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/state-of-the-art-skopje-city-mall-officially-opened,2013

urbanized from the other cities in the country.[8] However, the first flash mobs in the country happened in Kumanovo, a smaller city located nearby the capital. In addition, flash mobs have occurred in 8 other cities and towns. This finding suggests that, at least for the Macedonian case, the flash mobs are not solely concentrated in the main urban centres, but they are inherently an urban phenomenon.

The definition of flash mobs being public gatherings of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, which perform a pointless act and then disperse again, does not really describe the phenomenon in the Macedonian context, except for the fact it is a gathering in public space and is organized via the Internet. First, flash mobs in Macedonia are usually not gatherings of complete strangers, but rather organized groups from non-governmental youth organizations, who most frequently know each other before jointly participating in the event, because they go to the same school or are active in the same projects of the NGO that is organizing the flash mob. Moreover, participants get acquainted by previous communication online and in rehearsals. Thus, the profile of the flash mob organizers and participants includes NGO members, high school and university students, young volunteers and activists. All flash mob organizers and participants were in the age range of 15-30. The number of participants per flash mob event ranged between approximately 15 and 100 people. Only on three occasions it was reported that professional dancers or professional dance studios participated in the organization and preparation of the flash mobs. Beside the active organizers and participants, all flash mobs included few people who video recorded and took pictures of the flash mob. Typically, the flash mobs were organized online; using Facebook or e-mail, and most of them had offline rehearsals beforehand.

Furthermore, the flash mobs in Macedonia do not seem to strictly follow the rule of sudden, unannounced gathering, very short act and immediate dispersal. On the contrary, many of the flash mobs have lasted longer than 5-10 minutes, such as the Freeze flash mob that occurred following a route through the central part of the city which takes more than 15 minutes to pass. Additionally, many of the flash mobs were repeated at different locations and different times. Even though the flash mobbers disappear from the space they occupied and seem to go in different directions, they all have the tendency to gather afterwards again at another arranged space to share the impressions of the event as a group.

In addition, many of the flash mobs were somewhat announced. Almost all flash mobs had calls for participation on social media, most frequently through a Group or Event page on Facebook, although some were organized in close groups through mailing lists, such as the first silent disco flash mob. Moreover, few flash mobs were announced to the wider public in the official media (The UNICEF dance flash mob and the Dance flash mob in City Mall), which was generally judged by others as completely inappropriate, because it strips out the element of surprise. Many flash mobs organizers had invited media reporters to some of the flash mobs that would later publish a story about the event. Lastly, almost all flash mobs were announced to the Police and sometimes to the local city or municipal authorities. Thus, even though most flash mobs were announced to potential

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[8] R. Macedonia is a country where approximately half of the population lives in urban areas and half in rural areas. The level of urbanization is 0.3% per year (2010-15 est.). Despite the fact there are officially 34 cities in R. Macedonia, twelve of them have population under 10.000 and seventeen have population under 50.000, considering them to realistically be mid-sized cities and towns. Beside Skopje the other 4 largest cities have population between 50.000 and 74,550 (State Statistical Office of the R. Macedonia, 2013).

participants, media reporters and local authorities, the element of surprise or abruptness, especially for the immediate audience is still crucial according to most Macedonian flash mobbers.

Almost all flash mobs were in the form of dance flash mobs, excluding three Freeze flash mobs, one Performance flash mob, one Book-reading flash mob, one Eco flash mob (Pictures 5 and 6) . Being organized by NGO's, all flash mobs had some sort of societal message behind them, which according to Molnàr (2010) might fall under the type of political flash mobs, although these flash mobs also overlap with characteristics of interactive, advertising and performance flash mobs. Nonetheless, the act Macedonian flash mobbers are performing is never pointless. On the contrary, most of the people who have organized or participated in flash mobs believe that a flash mob always has to be societally motivated and have a purpose or point. In other words, it is integral to the definition of a flash mob to have a message you are sending in the society or to the general public.

Picture 5: CreaCtive Freeze Flash mob, central square, Skopje, 2012 [9]

Picture 6: CreaCtive Michael Jackson Flash mob, central square, Skopje, 2012 [10]

[9] http://vimeo.com/user9493732 ,2012

[10] http://www.kreaktiv.mk/?p=1593 ,2012

For example, dance flash mob to Michael Jackson – Beat It, organized by the NGO CreaCtive, had the purpose to promote volunteerism in the society and happened on International Day of Volunteerism. By gathering 130 volunteers who danced to the choreography they wanted to demonstrate the effect of the power of the group, or in order words, more people means greater impact and better effect. Even though the Michael Jackson flash mob turned into a global phenomenon after the death of the singer, when in many cities around the world people danced in flash mobs to his music as a tribute to his work, the volunteers in Skopje utilized it to symbolically promote the idea of volunteerism to the public.

Likewise, the other freeze flash mob organized by "Youth Can" happened on 21st of May, The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and development, under the slogan "Stop the moment and change something", where the flash mobbers would freeze for moments at time while walking through public space, holding message boards with short questions or quotes that were written in all languages of the majority and all minority ethnic groups living in Skopje, so the idea that cultural diversity should be openly discussed, embraced and nurtured is demonstrated to the public in the moment. Thus, the original freeze flash mob mission by 'Improv Everywhere', which was intended to shock, amuse and have fun, with the first video of the freezing in 2008, at Grand Central in New York, was used few years later by youth activists in Skopje to promote volunteerism and cultural diversity in the society.

To add, the Silent Disco flash mob was performed for International Day of Tolerance. The purpose of gathering in public space silently dancing with headphones and holding message boards with messages such as "I do not want to be judged for being different" was to symbolically and literally support and promote the idea for greater tolerance in the society.

Therefore, the general description of the flash mob phenomenon in Skopje is a surprising event in public space organized by youth activists that has the purpose to promote or celebrate a societal message, idea or value in society. As one flash mob organizer states:

"…The flash mob usually does have this connotation of being fun and surprising…But since we are a youth activist collective, usually all flash mobs we have organized aim to indirectly send a message…because this attention you are getting allows you to effectively diffuse the message to as many people as possible…and it's not like inviting them in a hall to give a presentation about something, but you catch them on the streets ….you do something to attract their attention and at the same time, you indirectly give them the message you wanted them to receive…A good flash mob is the one that based on interactive and spontaneous fun manages to unexpectedly attract the attention of people and make them understand your message" – (Stevica, CreaCtive NGO, 2012)

However, a dance flash mob in a shopping mall I observed (Picture 7) was an exception to this rule of societally motivated, activist flash mobs. It was collaboration between the marketing team of the shopping mall providing the space and sound equipment, the dance school Ritam Plus who prepared the choreography and the private school NOVA whose students danced at the event. This flash mob was announced in the media by the shopping mall as something exciting that will happen at a specific time. When observing the event, it was evident that most of the spectators were parents and friends of the flash mobbers who came to witness and video record the performance. I could see amusement and happiness in the crowd, but nobody looked confused, surprised or

wondering what is happening. People seemed as if they were watching a dance performance. There was an element of a flash mob in the way the music started and the children came dancing from different sides to gradually join in one group dancing in the middle of the mall and disperse immediately after the end. However, many people condemned it afterwards on social media, precisely because it was announced, lacked a societally relevant idea or message behind it, and was used for promoting the shopping mall.

"I think there should be a goal behind it, to send a message, a positive message…This is just a performance… Dance act serving as commercial for the shopping mall and the school…" (Tina, YEF NGO, flash mob organizer and participant, 2012)

Some online comments addressed the quality of dancing either judging it as looking good or not professional enough. Nonetheless, there were many positive comments, both online and during the interviews, on the fact it was a flash mob which is new, original and fun as an event in public space, congratulating the organizers and participants for the effort. The activists who have organized flash mobs do recognize that there are different types of flash mobs, mainly the activists/societal and the commercial/advertising, although they would never participate in a commercial flash mob or any other flash mob that does not support their certain activists values and opinions. However, they support the effort too, because they believe that any type of flash mob would increase familiarity and acceptance of the phenomenon from the wider public audience.

Picture 7: Dance flash mob in City Mall, Skopje, November, 2012 [11]

Unlike the other flash mobs happening in open public spaces such as the squares, pedestrian streets and sidewalks this flash mob occurred in a privately owned public space, but it was not necessarily the reason why this flash mob was seen as a "cash mob" [12] (Irina, NGO activist, 2012) or "promo dance performance" (Tina, NGO

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[11] http://tocka.com.mk/1/79930/nesekojdneven-performans-vo-skopje-siti-mol ,2012

[12] Group of people gathering at local businesses to buy products. More on cash mobs: http://www.cashmob.com/ ;

activist, 2012) instead of a flash mob. The NGO CreaCtive also organized the Michael Jackson and freeze flash mob in shopping malls, but they conveyed that the idea behind both flash mobs was to promote volunteerism, both at and after the flash mobs, when approached by the spectators or media.

Lastly and most importantly, there are several key characteristics to the place and time of occurrence. The most commonly used public space for flash mobs is the central city square of Skopje with its surrounding streets (Picture 2). As well, the flash mobs in other cities occurred mostly at the central city squares. Next to the city squares, the shopping malls are second most frequently used public spaces for flash mobs (Picture 3 and 4). As for the time of occurrence all flash mobs occurred during daytime, mostly in the afternoon, especially during peak and rush hours, attempting to perform the flash mobs at the chosen public spaces when there is highest frequency and presence of people or potential immediate audience. Since most flash mobs were organized with the aim to promote a societal message or discourse in the society, they occurred at days which are officially connected to the issue at hand. For example, a Freeze flash mob was organized on 21st of May – The World Day for Cultural Diversity, Dialogue and Development, a Silent Disco flash mob was organized on 16th November – The International Day for Tolerance, a EU Dance Flash Mob was organized day before 9th of May – The Europe Day, etc. Consequently, as flash mob organizers explain, the timing of the flash mob is more important than the place because they aim at targeting or addressing the audience, not the architectural place where they perform.

"…I mean, organizing a flash mob at the square at 2 a.m. in the morning makes no sense, right?! You'll be performing for the statues and pigeons…" (Sanja, YEF NGO, flash mob participant and audience, 2012).

Having in mind the general characteristics of the Macedonian flash mobs embedded in their societal context, the following sub-section describes the flash mob experiences of organizers, participants, audience and my reflection from personal experience, taking all three different viewpoints during the observations. As previously explained, the focus is on the feelings, motivations, experiences and opinions of the different actors in relation to the event happening in public space. In Lefebvre and Tuan's words, the experiences involve both the mental or conceptual understandings people have, as well as, the sensory, embodied involvement.

7.3 The Risky Activist Flash Mob Experience

My first direct experience with flash mobs happened few years before I embarked on this research, when I was involved as a volunteering activist at a Macedonian youth NGO – Youth Educational Forum (YEF). At the time, the organization was a host to a final, closing week of events with 60 participants, from a regional EU-supported project for analysing reasons why ex-Yugoslavian countries should join The European Union. The idea for a dance flash mob to the "Ode to Joy" (official hymn of The EU) came to me by trying to brainstorm what activity could be free of charge, involve approximately 60 young people, have celebratory and entertaining character, should serve the purpose of rounding up and an EU Youth project and presenting it to the public.

Michael K. McIntyre's Tipoff ,'Cash mobs' replace 'flash mobs' using fistfuls of dollars:, November 13, 2011 at 5:55 PM, http://www.cleveland.com/tipoff/index.ssf/2011/11/cash_mobs_replace_flash_mobs_u.html .

Picture 8: EU Day Dance Flash Mob, Skopje, May, 2011 [13]

Dancing in public on a sidewalk, with a random audience passing by to who we were not announced, was quite a novel and exciting experience for me, even though I had previous practice with theatre and performing. During the very few minutes before the music began I felt stage fright like never before, even though there were not so many people passing by. It somehow felt scary that we are going to do a very uncommon activity on a public space that is open to any random people that happen to pass by. In Lefebvrian words, I had a previous understanding that the street walk as a representation of public space does not usually embrace dancing as a common spatial practice and thus felt uncomfortable. The moment the music started and we gathered from different corners in front of the building I was overwhelmed by a feeling of euphoria and joy, having the group around me dancing made me feel secure, the space became smaller and comfortable.

As the music finished and we dispersed, each going in different directions, I realized I didn't even notice if there were people passing by and looking at us, because my experience was focused on the activity I was performing with the group. We all met back in front of the offices to share our impressions of the flash mob. In general, we all felt excited and satisfied, commenting on how euphoric, unique and fun the experience was. Right afterwards we sent a short text to the local media newspapers and TV stations, and we published a video of the event online (YouTube and YEF website). The event was very well accepted by official and social media, as well as, The EU representatives in the country who asked if they could borrow the instructions to organize the same flash mob again in other locations.

In short time, the experience of flash mob in public space, at least for the organizers from "YEF" and other local NGO's became a new tool for activism. The YEF as a youth NGO was usually organizing events indoors, such as debates, lectures, etc. The only activities in public space we were usually involved in were larger protests. Even though the purpose of the first EU dance flash mob was to have a non-costly and fun closing event for the

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[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgruQ_js_0s , 2012

project participants and promote the project outcomes and conclusions in the public, the experience of going out in public space to send a message in society is what caught the attention of NGO project leaders.

"*Once we saw how striking and memorable the event was for the participants and how it caught the attention of the public both in the moment and afterwards on social media, we began thinking about strategically incorporating flash mobs in our project activities.*" (Petar, YEF NGO, 1012)

The general reasoning was that compared to protests flash mobs also occur in public space and thus should have the same public outreach effect from social and official media attention. Unlike protests, which are long, disruptive and accompanied by police, flash mobs are shorter, less disruptive and have a celebratory, performing character, so it might be perceived as less aggressive and more appealing for the public audience we aim to target.

However, going out in public space with an activist agenda in mind is also a risky experience for the organizers mainly because of potential incidents. For example, The YEF, decided to actively support the marking of the International Day of Tolerance, through a 'March for Tolerance", an event organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of R. Macedonia and Coalition for Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities" – Skopje. The activists from YEF decided they would participate in the event by organizing a silent disco flash mob on the square, where people would dance to different music together, symbolically representing tolerance towards different people. Thus, we organized one smaller silent disco flash mob a day before the March, and another one at the March after the people reach the end point of the route at the square. The first flash mob was quite successful and yielded positive impressions both from the participants and the audience although it did not reach the media and wider public because its purpose was to announce, as a teaser, the bigger silent disco flash mob happening the day after. However, the second event was interrupted by an incident when two of the activists were threatened and physically assaulted by a masked person as they were placing the stands with info material on the square. As the March of Tolerance was focused on supporting LGBT rights, the person was apparently attempting to aggressively disrupt the whole event by forcefully excluding the people from the space. Even though the event was announced to the Police and there was already police presence at the event, they did not manage to prevent the incident, but managed to arrest the perpetrator. Due to the incident the atmosphere was not appropriate for dancing. So, the second event was quite unsuccessful. When discussing these two flash mob events with another participant afterwards he explained:

"*You see, the first flash mob was unannounced, smaller and too short, so we avoided the incident… But the second one was announced and lasted longer, gave them time to try and cause fear and chaos. That's why flash mobbing is safer than protesting or marching…But then again, it is better this way, people should face the reality of the situation, we have a serious problem with homophobia*" (Petar, YEF NGO, 2012)

Picture 9: First Silent Disco Flash Mob, Skopje central square, November, 2012 [14]

Picture 10: After the Incident for International Day of Tolerance, central square, Skopje, November, 2012 [15]

[15] Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of R.M, http://www.mhc.org.mk/announcements/35?locale=en#.UxUgU_ldWnw , 2012

[14] By filming crew participant (Ljupco Kalkov), 2012

In addition to being a risky business, the flash mob participants also feel a fear of being judged by the immediate spectators, who they perceive to be on average quite passive, traditional and backward. They also recognize it is quite a politicized society, thus, they expect that the general public and the media would easily attach political etiquettes to any social movement or public expression concerning a societal issue. Moreover, they believe the public is not familiar with the flash mob phenomenon on a global level and therefore, does not usually react or interact when confronted.

Nevertheless, there are many positive feelings flash mobbers attach to these events. Excitement, stage fright, fun, and euphoria are the main reactions summing up the flash mob experience. More importantly, the feeling of togetherness and being a part of a big group in public space, performing something out of the ordinary and jointly supporting a cause, seems to be the most exciting element for them. Regardless whether it's a first time experience or not it is an exciting and memorable one. As one girl who participated in a flash mob for the first time at the silent disco flash mob at the central city square explains:

"*When I experienced it through participation for the first time…We are talking about a mixture of feelings here…Before it happens, I felt this weird energy… maybe uncomfortable and a bit scared of going out in public space to support a cause through silent disco dancing…I mean, it's weird…What are people going to think? How will they react? But, I'm excited at the same time. And the moment we start dancing this feeling of togetherness and fun…the fact you are part of this group of young people creatively expressing themselves in public …A beautiful feeling that overtakes you completely and clears out all other emotions… As it ended and we all let our balloons fly away up in the air and fled the scene, I felt happy and satisfied and…It's hard to explain the feeling, you need to participate to understand… But, quite a catharsis though!* "* (Tina, YEF NGO, flash mob organizer and participant, 2012)

7.4 Social Construction of Macedonian Public Spaces

The act of going out in public space through these youth activist flash mobs is one of the crucial elements of the event. Obvious from the experiences, being in public space is integral to the flash mob phenomenon in Skopje. Translating the events from Lefebvre's spatial triad, the first aspect of the triad, or the spatial practices inherent for Macedonian public spaces involve transiting, leisure, celebrating and protesting. Second, the representations of these spaces as open and spacious, such as the central square of the city, have been designed and conceptualized as symbolic places representing and used by the public. Third, the representational space, referring to how it is lived and experienced by the flash mobbers and the random audience that happens to be in the same public space for a different reason is elaborated below:

The first things organizers think about when choosing the public spaces for a flash mob are the practical matters. For example, having enough room to fit the flash mobbers and their envisaged activity, which would be visible to the people present, but would not seriously disrupt their spatial practices, since the idea is to attract audience, not annoy it. Also, high density and frequency of people in the public space is decisive, since organizers want to be seen by as many people as possible. This aspect includes the importance of timing, since even though most frequently visited; the public spaces are obviously not equally busy all throughout the day.

More importantly, flash mobbers take into consideration the symbolic conceptualization of the public spaces as places where you can be seen by or address the general public in the society. This is why almost instinctively the organizers choose the most famous and visited public spaces in the city, especially the central city square of Skopje, which seems to have the strongest connection with this symbolic meaning. As one organizer explains:

"Public space has its own symbolic…You are not at home, or in your youth NGO offices, or any other space of your own. When you do something or say something in public space, you are talking to somebody…you are talking to the one you have trusted to take care of your public space in a very wide sense of the word…All that represents you…Not in the sense of who is responsible for maintaining and regulating the specific public space, but the general public and the ones that take care of your well-being as citizens…By going out in public space you show that this is your place too, and you are sending a message to the others from the public from this place."
(Petar, YEF NGO, 2012)

Beside the relation between the purpose flash mob to address the public and the symbolic conceptualization of public spaces as places for public expression, organizers also consciously think about socially transforming the public space into something different for a short moment:

"It's good when flash mobs happen in well-known public spaces because those are the places where you often eat, drink, meet with friends, shop, and with the flash mob, all of a sudden you put the place in a different context…It's like literally coloring it over it…You add different colors to it…This is why I hope these places will always be public and diverse…" (Aleksandra, flash mob participant, 2012)

In line with the reasons for flash mob being a risky experience in Macedonian public spaces, the aspect of the public spaces which constraints the flash mob organizers is the practice of their formal legal regulation. Even though only suggests that a gathering of more people can be announced to public authorities, the flash mob organizers consider it as somewhat mandatory. Since public gatherings are most frequently associated with protests, organizers feel obliged to announce the flash mobs to local authorities, which in turn results with police presence at the events. Most organizers feel that police presence might influence the public perception of the flash mob as being something potentially disrupting for the public safety, thus creating an opposite atmosphere and affect than what was intended. As one interviewee explains:

 "It doesn't seem spontaneous or appealing to the people when we are doing something surrounded by police officers…" (Katerina, flash mob participant, 2012).

Nevertheless, some organizers find the announcement to the local authorities useful because sometimes police presence and protection might be necessary, as it was for the case of the Silent Disco flash mob for International Day of Tolerance, when the incident occurred. Moreover, few organizers explained that announcing the flash mob to city officials is useful because you can find out if other events will be happening at the same place and time, which can potentially divert attention from the flash mob, or merge/brand the flash mob as part of that other event.

In the case of organizing the flash mobs in privately owned public spaces, flash mob organizers also need a permission from the management of that space for performing the flash mob otherwise they run the risk of being removed by security at the event or prosecuted afterwards as formal NGO's. Here the most problematic issues are the fact it is quite complicated to convince the management of the shopping mall to allow access since they do not see a benefit in it for the shopping mall, and second, they always run the risk of being associated with promoting the profit-making shopping mall where they perform the flash mob, instead of promoting the non-profitable, societal idea or value they support.

On the other hand, the spectator public audience witnessing the flash mobs also adopts the symbolic representation of public space as place for public expression, protests, political campaigning events and artistic performances. As I walked away from the square after we finished dancing on the first silent disco flash mob I approached a man who witnessed the flash mob from further away to ask him what was happening. He replied:

"As far as I can see its some kids dancing without music, but they have balloons and message boards…probably they have some message ….Oh well, it's the square so, anybody can come here and do what they want…"

However, the audience does not seem to be familiar with the flash mob phenomenon and there was never a situation that occurred or was described that included spectators interacting with the flash mobbers or joining their activity. Thus, the audience perceives the flash mob events in public space as performances and finds them amusing but only as passive spectators. On few occasions, people would approach some of the flash mob participants after the event to ask about the motivation behind it. This is one of the reasons why flash mobbers in Skopje usually do not immediately leave the public space after the flash mob but stay a bit longer to potentially interact with interested audience and explain their aim/message behind the flash mob. As flash mob participants explain, the audience wonders, smiles and stops to watch and video record the flash mob, however, they rarely attempt to interact but rather passively observe from distance.

Nonetheless, as organizers associated the flash mob as a form of protesting in public space, the audience also at times avoided the flash mob, presuming it is some form of protest. Yet, the fact it differs from the protests by content, activity, duration and intensity of disruption of the daily spatial practices of others in the public space, the audiences find flash mobs in public spaces far more appealing and interesting. Therefore, the difference in activity, even if attempting to address the same issue or send the same message to the public, makes the flash mob more appealing for spectators since they do not immediately associate it with politics and label the event as pro- or anti-government. Additionally, the element of surprise, fun and symbolic coordinated performance makes the flash mobbers and spectators feel and look amused, entertained and attracted, rather than angry, revolted, scared and annoyed, which are feelings most frequently associated with protests in public spaces.

Most important, participating in a flash mob in a certain public space makes people feel more attached to and comfortable in that public space. After the event, the same feelings are still attached to these specific places, as participants recall the event if they find themselves in the same public space even if engaging in a completely different activity, such as passing through or shopping. As people were explaining their flash mob experiences it was evident that at the beginning when discussing their feelings about the public space before the flash mob participation, they would refer to it as a 'space'. Later on, when discussing how they felt at the event and

afterwards, they refer to it as 'place' or specifically, the square or the mall. In other words, by experiencing the flash mob in the public space, participants shift the meaning of this conceptualized abstract public space into a specific place imbued with personal meaning and attachment. In other words, by performing a flash mob in a certain public space, at least for the people participating in it, it transforms it from an open public space to a smaller symbolic place with personal value. As one interviewee attempts to answer whether there's a difference to how he feels about the public space before and after the flash mobs:

"Yes, the flash mob changes things, but it's difficult to explain…Now when I pass through the square after the flash mobs I feel the space is smaller than it used to be… You have this idea about the public space being a big square where everybody passes by…And then you go there and perform something out of the ordinary…I would dance in my room or at a party,…maybe even on a stage, but I never imagined I would do it in a middle of a square…Afterwards, I feel like I know the place better and I feel more comfortable there…" (Monika, flash mob participant, 2012)

7.5 Cyber Space for Promotion & Discussion

An important element to be considered in this analysis is the parallel public, online (cyber) space where most of the preparation, organization and promotion of the flash mobs occurs.

"It is where the flash mob continues to exist" (Stevica, flash mob organizer, 2012).

The most important function of the cyber space for the Macedonian flash mobbers is the promotion of the video after the event both on social media, online news and media portals. Even though they recognize the practical and effective use of social media for organization of the flash mobs, they do not believe it is crucial. For example, the Silent Disco flash mob and the Dance flash mob in City Mall were organized and performed by pre-existing closed groups, thus social media was not utilized to attract, mobilize and organize the participants.

Indeed, the flash mob audience on cyber space is obviously larger in number in online space (evident from views and comments on the posted videos), than in physical public space (evident from observations and video recordings). However, unlike most organizers who believed they target more audience by sharing the flash mob video online, both in terms of quality and quantity, several participants explained that target more audience both in terms of quality and quantity when they address the public from physical public space as opposed to the cyber space. As one interviewee explains:

"When we performed the flash mob we were seen by children, elderly people, families, street vendors, people from different ethnicities and social status…When I posted the video on my Facebook page I only got Likes and comments by young people like me from my friends list, …most of whom were actually participating in the flash mob or witnessed it." (Martin, flash mob participant, 2012)

Most important, the offline physical public space is much more significant to flash mobbers than the cyber space for the aim to address the public about a certain societal issue. Namely, the young activists feel quite different

when supporting a cause by engaging in online activities and discussions on social media or creating online teaser campaigns and supporting a cause or idea physically in open public spaces. The spectators too, apparent from the contents of their comments online, recognize it is different and better to experience the event at the moment and place of occurrence rather than online. As one interviewee summarizes the issue:

"When you support something online you are still anonymous, you act through your Facebook profile …or one of your Facebook profiles, if you know what I mean…It is not as nearly as strong and convincing as going out in physical public space to support the cause with your complete presence, with body and mind." (Aleksandra, flash mob participant, 2012)

Translated into Lefebvre's spatial triad, even though it might seem easier and more effective to utilize the possibilities of online cyber space for societal youth activism (considering its favourable conceptualization as free open public space for personal expression and the associated social practices of commenting, discussing, connecting and sharing), yet the aspect of the representational space, or how it is lived and experienced by its users is much weaker in cyber space than in physical public space. The experience in cyber space is virtual and the experience in physical space is real.

7.6 In-group Sociability

The issue of sociability or the interaction among people creating acquaintanceship or friendly bonds through flash mobs in public spaces is definitely fundamental next to the aim or sending a message or supporting a cause. According to the interviewees, in-group sociability occurs both before, during and after the flash mob events. The following quote from an interview illustrates how crucial sociability is for the flash mob, being practically a building block of the phenomenon.

"If I think what is sociability on the most basic sociological level… It is interaction in group of people with a common aim. So in a flash mob we are a group and we have a common goal…But the flash mob is not defined as organized socializing of a group of people, but organized gathering of a group of people…However, I don't need a dictionary to tell me that we are socializing when participating in a flash mob…No need to put a label on flash mobs as social groups or movements, they still are" (Aleksandra, flash mob participant, 2012)

More specifically, the sociability in the Macedonian case is more about sociability in terms of strengthening existing acquaintanceship or friendship bonds rather than meeting new people. This is mainly due to the fact that most flash mobs were organized by NGO's entailing participants who are members of the organization or a project within the organization and already know each other. Even if the participants haven't been acquainted yet, they do so before the flash mob event through online communication or rehearsals beforehand. Thus, considering the given description of sociability related to the Macedonian flash mobs, it is not quite the same as the sociability Molnàr (2010) described, because it is not a loosely created event where people from different social statuses engage in free-playing interaction without an ulterior end, but rather a carefully planned event of creative public expression by a social group of like-minded people that aim to support a specific cause. Yet, the event has a positive and strengthening effect on the existing social ties within the group and its overall social cohesion.

Picture 11: Gathering before the Silent Disco Flash Mob, 2012 [16]

All Macedonian flash mobbers mention sociability as an important aspect in terms of the flash mob being a bonding moment between the participants, which does not only come from the fact that they support the same cause or idea, but also because they perform something collectively and embrace the positive feeling of togetherness, which strengthens their social bond both between individuals and as a social group. In order to strengthen the social bonding between participants the organizers deliberately disregard the rule of sudden gathering and immediate dispersal, but organize group meetings and rehearsals before the event and/or after the flash mobs. Indeed, besides communicating a societal cause or message, the aspect of performing in a group translated into socially bonding with other people, is the most important element of the event for most participants.

Even though this bonding moment happens in pre-existing social groups, where people usually know each other, several interviewees mentioned meeting new people to be an important aspect of flash mob sociability. As one participant explains:

"*It's about being with other people similar to you and bonding over your similarities,… or the fact you both had the courage to do something funny in public space…You can bond with people over that even if you never met before…*" (Martin, flash mob participant, 2012).

Another interesting finding among the interviewees is that they were all willing to participate in flash mobs organized by others. Since the different organizations are members of the same non-governmental sector in the society, I expected that there would be rivalry between them in organizing flash mobs and criticizing their successfulness, as they would do for other project activities they perform. Instead I discovered cooperation and support among members of different NGO's. Specifically, many of them mentioned the quote "Once a flash mobber, always a flash mobber" (Interview 1, Interview 8, Interview, 10). Apparently, when it came to flash mobs, they did not only support each other through participation, but also cooperated in terms of organization and conceptualization of the events. Thus, the flash mobs did not only bring about sociability for the short

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[16] By filming crew participant (Ljupco Kalkov), 2012

moment of duration, but it positively influenced strengthening of social bonds among participants and cooperation and support among the youth activists.

However, little interaction and sociability is reported between the flash mob participants and the spectators. This is recognized as a setback by the flash mob organizers in Skopje and the reason behind this is two-folded. On one hand, the spectator audience is rather unfamiliar with the flash mob phenomenon which is probably they are reluctant to engage in interaction with the flash mob participants. On the other hand, the type of flash mobs organized in the city usually do not focus primarily on interacting with the public, but rather simply addressing them with a specific message symbolically, through dancing or freezing. This leaves very little room for the audience to engage in the envisaged activity of the event since they are not being invited to something, but they are being presented with something.

7.7 Public Discourse Flash Mobs

Lastly, the issue of public discourse proved to be a key element of the Macedonian flash mobs. Obviously, considering their aim and nature, Macedonian flash mobs also have the idea of influencing public opinion by supporting a societally relevant cause or idea. In this way, they attempt to influence certain discourses in the society. The EU dance flash mob had the purpose of supporting the EU enlargement process and the accession of R. Macedonia and other Balkan countries in the Union; The Michael Jackson and one freeze flash mob had the purpose of promoting volunteerism in the society; another freeze flash mob aimed at accepting cultural diversity; The Silent Disco flash mobs had the goal of promoting greater tolerance in the society, specifically towards the LGBT community; The UNICEF flash mobs aimed at promoting schools free of violence, etc.

Thus, these flash mob events all had an aim to symbolically address certain issues in society, such as cultural diversity or tolerance which are topics of public concern and discursive nature. As Rodriguez (2010) explained in his social research on flash mobs, if the public spaces are the places where flash mobbers address the public sphere, the Macedonian activists base the flash mob on communicative rationality by attempting to address a societally relevant issue or raise awareness, which should in turn promote critical thinking and constructive public discourse in urban public spaces.

Clearly, the aim of organizing flash mobs in Skopje is to make a point, take a stand, support a cause and in this way, steer a specific public discourse in the society. However, the effect or the potential strength they hold in actually modifying or influencing public opinion is doubtful. Some believe that repeating the same flash mob in different spaces and at different times would increase the effects of the flash mob on a certain public discourse, whereas others believe that repeating a flash mob weakens its effect due to lack of originality, uniqueness and the element of surprise. For some interviewees the idea of repetition seemed crucial if flash mobs were to influence public discourses in the societies. They mentioned other movements similar to flash mobs which happen periodically. Namely, the Critical Mass of bicycle users who gather to cycle around the city in a group on monthly basis with the aim to support bicycle use and improvement of bicycle infrastructure and traffic regulation was mentioned as a movement in public space that has the potential to affect public discourse on traffic culture. Likewise, some flash mob participants mentioned a group of activists "Raspeani Skopjani" who

gather in public space and sing in response, criticism or protest towards a specific occurrence in the society. These two examples of social movements were mentioned as similar to flash mobs in terms of being a creative way to address public discourses in the society, but were qualified as more powerful due to their frequency and repetition.

Nevertheless, most of them believe that the actual discussions on the issues touched upon by the flash mobs happen after the events, when people talk about it in person or in the comment sections of the flash mob video recordings posted in online public space. Yet, I did not find extensive discussions on the topic or issue brought up by a flash mob online, on social media and news websites. Most importantly, when the activists try to address the public about a societal issue, they usually believe that they represent voices of the minorities rather than the majority, dominant forces or commonly accepted discourses in society. In doing so, they avoid any affiliation with political parties regardless whether in position or as opposition, since as NGO activists, they want to be perceived as politically unbiased, non-profitable, and non-governmental.

Moreover, some organizers mentioned that the official media plays a great role in spreading the message they addressed with the flash mob, hence, potentially having a greater impact on public discourses and opinion in the society. Therefore, they all send the video recordings with informative text to the newspapers, TV stations and online news portals. This is simply because they can reach more people with the message behind the flash mob. However, when inviting the media at the event, few flash mob organizers were not very satisfied with the relationship they had with the official media, which they assign to lack of professionalism in their work or lack of interest to cover or report on this type of events. As one interviewee elaborates:

"Well they will either ignore us because the story is not hot enough to cover, or they will show up, disrespect your rules and then twist the information you gave them to make the story hotter…" (Petar, YEF NGO, flash mob organizer, 2012)

Finally, from the viewpoint of the audience the flash mob events that aim to address a societal problem are similar, but far more appealing than protests. As summarized by a Macedonian news reporter:

" If you consider the fact we live in such a politicized, rather autocratic than democratic society, with serious problems with freedom of speech, in principle, this form of activism, voicing your opinion…I think exactly because it looks appealing and likeable, it can be more acceptable for the public, far more acceptable than a protest. Because through a protest or strike, it is difficult to attract support and interest from the public, they will usually put a political etiquette on the event and avoid it, even if in reality they do agree with the message you are sending…With the flash mob it happens fast and doesn't interrupt daily movement and traffic, so it's more appealing." (Saska, local TV and newspaper journalist, 2012).

7.8 Conclusion

The flash mob is quite a new phenomenon occurring in Macedonian public spaces and since it has been taken up by NGO activists, it can be considered to be a type of 'political flash mob' (Molnàr, 2010) or a flash mob that concerns a certain societal idea or addresses a certain public discourse. In the words of Rodriguez (2010), the Macedonian activists utilize the flash mob to address the public sphere about an issue or raise awareness, thus promoting critical thinking and constructive public discourse in public spaces. The organizers find the cyber space and media attention to be important elements in promotion of the events and thus strengthening the influence of the event on the specific public discourse it was addressing. To add, participants believe repeated and periodical occurrence would strengthen the effect of the event in public space, as some other similar social movements in public spaces. Besides being about public discourse, Macedonian flash mobs are also related to sociability, mainly in terms of creating a feeling of togetherness for the participants and strengthening existing social bonds in the group. There was one exception to the general rule of flash mobs being an NGO activist business, which might point out to possible future diversification of the forms and purposes of flash mobs in Macedonian public spaces.

In sum, the lived experience of flash mobs in public space is generally perceived in a positive manner both by the organizers, participants and the immediate audience. Obviously, the societal context, the past experiences and conceptualizations of the public spaces all actors involved hold, influences the way they experience the flash mob. The symbolic conceptualization of these spaces as places for public expression and protesting makes them both favorable and potentially risky at the same time. On one hand, the public spaces are both conceptualized and socially constructed as places for public expression which provides the perfect opportunity for the flash mob phenomenon and its intended purpose to address the public about an issue. On the other hand, random gatherings in Macedonian public spaces are often associated with protests and potential public disorder, which in some cases, has the potential to demotivate flash mobbers to perform and the audience to appeal. This issue also includes announcing the flash mob events to authorities and subsequent police presence at flash mob events, which is generally considered as a negative aspect in the successfulness of the flash mobs. Nonetheless, the surprising, fun and theatrical nature of the flash mob activity is what distinguishes the phenomenon from protests and makes it a more appealing form of expression in public spaces, both for the flash mobbers and their audience.

8. Dutch Flash Mobs: Sociability & Spectacle in Public Spaces

Chapter 8 elaborates the findings of the Dutch case study, divided in eight sub-chapters. Considering the Macedonian results, the similarities and differences between both case studies are already elaborated in this chapter. The first sub-chapter describes aspects of the Dutch societal context which are relevant to the flash mob phenomenon, including the form and function of Dutch public spaces. The second one provides an overview of the flash mobs in Amsterdam, especially focusing on the details of the flash mobs I have observed. The third sub-chapter elucidates the experiences related to the flash mobs from the perspective of the organizers and participants including myself, while the fourth one explains the social construction of public spaces through these events. The fifth sub-chapter provides information on the necessity and relevance of online public space for organizing flash mobs in Amsterdam. Next, the importance of sociability as purpose and motivation behind the Dutch flash mobbing is explicated. The seventh sub-chapter deals with the issue of commercial versus non-commercial flash mobs in Amsterdam and how they are perceived and practiced, as opposed to the Macedonian case. Finally, there is a sub-chapter summarizing the Dutch results or the affects of flash mobs on public spaces. A short introduction to the content of Chapter 8 is provided the following quote:

"Flash mobs are about having fun in public space…Do something extraordinary, turn the boring square into a theater stage for a moment and catch the audience by surprise…"
(Andries, flash mob organizer, 2013)

8.1 The Tolerant Society & Amsterdam's Public Spaces

The Netherlands is a country in Western Europe, bordering the North Sea, Belgium and Germany, covering a total area of 41,543 square kilometres, with approximately 16,800,000 (July 2013 est.) citizens, including the majority of Dutch and several ethnic minorities (Indonesian, Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish, Caribbean and others). This constitutional monarchy, initially established as Kingdom of The Netherlands in 1815, is today a developed, industrialized society, one of the six largest economies in The EU (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013; CIA FactBook, 2013). As most of the developed world, the Dutch nation is a modern liberal, democratic society, specifically being associated with pluralism, tolerance and multiculturalism. Moreover, being one of the early industrialized countries on the continent and one of the leading economies in the EU, the Dutch society is also a developed capitalist and subsequently a consumerist society. As Fukuyama (2007) mentions, the Dutch are known for their pluralism, being generally a friendly and tolerant society.

Amsterdam is the capital city of The Netherlands, where within a metropolitan area of 859 sq. km. and city area of 165 sq. km., approximately 2.5 million and 1 million inhabitants reside, respectively (2011 estimates). Besides being very densely urbanized capital, it is ethnically very diverse city including residents from 178 different nationalities. Moreover, Amsterdam is the tourist hub of The Netherlands hosting around 16.000.000 tourists annually and one of the 10 most visited cities in Europe (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Thus, the international atmosphere and global trends are important aspects of Amsterdam's daily urban living.

Picture 12: The Dam Square, Amsterdam, 2012[17]

Picture 13: Museumplein, Amsterdam, 2012[18]

[17] By Mehrad Watson, 29.10.2011, http://www.fotocommunity.com/pc/pc/display/26181144 , last accessed January, 2013

[18] http://www.2oceansvibe.com/2012/12/04/amsterdam-to-create-villages-for-scumbags/, 2013

Following a long historical line of urban development starting from medieval times, the public spaces of Amsterdam, as one of the most urbanized areas in the country, have undergone numerous modifications both in form and function. Specifically, the city squares, due to their numerous functions have taken up many forms, such as recreational parks for leisure activities, transiting spaces as streets, or shopping places with commercial function. Nonetheless, public spaces, especially squares, which can entail different functions at the same time, have been the focal places for urban redevelopment in Amsterdam and reflecting the main characteristics of the Dutch society in different periods. The medieval public spaces and squares served as market places with commercial and trading functions. In the Baroque and Neo-classical period, public spaces grew into places for symbolic representation of power, or functioning as a promenading and meeting place. After the industrial revolution many Dutch squares were modified into train station squares and traffic junctions. Later on, transport was partly removed from public squares, especially the use of private vehicles, and since the 1990's public spaces have been redeveloping into places for leisure, mobility and mass consumption of goods and services. Even though public spaces have remained largely under governmental control and planning, the involvement of the private sector and the privatization processes have resulted in many shopping centres and department stores as semi-public spaces surrounding the public ones. For example, the Dam transformed from a mercantile square into a central national public square used for celebrations and demonstrations, and most of the time, as a meeting point for locals and tourists (Melik, 2008).

Consequently, Dutch academic research on public spaces has focused on the processes and effects of privatization and regulation of public spaces. Namely, Spierings (2006) has addressed the privatization of urban public life by elaborating on the transformation from the 19th Century traditional flâneur who wonders aimlessly in search of the unexpected and the unknown, to the contemporary flâneur who is seduced by consumption, shifting attention from people to goods and recreational shopping. Similarly, Dutch researchers have addressed the upgrading of Dutch public spaces to secured and themed spaces, by decreasing feelings of fear and providing entertainment, respectively. Researching the concepts of fear and fantasy in the transformation of contemporary Dutch public spaces, authors have concluded that the differentiation of urban lifestyles and fragmentation of the urban society have brought about potential for conflict in public spaces, where the interplay between fear and fantasy is necessary to allow for pursuit of entertainment and pleasure secured by control and regulation (Melik, Aalst, Weesep, 2007; Melik, 2008). Considering the high mobility of people and diverse functions of public spaces in Amsterdam, such as the Dam Square (Picture 12), The Museumplein (Picture 13), The Rembrandtplein and the Leidseplein, and surrounding semi-public shopping centres are the spaces most frequently occupied for flash mobs too.

Picture 14: De Bijenkorf Department Store, Amsterdam, 2012 [19]

Picture 15: Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' Re-enactment Flash mob, 2013 [20]

[19]

http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Netherlands/Provincie_Noord_Holland/Amsterdam-463377/Shopping-Amsterdam-De_Bijenkorf-BR-1.html, 2013

[20] http://www.jwt.com/blog/the_work/jwt-amsterdam-brings-rembrandts-night-watch-to-life-in-epic-flashmob/, 2013

8.2 Dutch Flash Mobs in All Shapes & Sizes

In contrast to being a new phenomenon in Macedonian public spaces, flash mobs have penetrated the Dutch society as early as the phenomenon was reported. The first flash mob labelled Paparazzi flash mob was organized in August 2003, where people could register for participation though the AmsterdamMobs website. The potential participants were given instructions and informed that the flash mob does not have a political or religious connotation. So, spread around in different locations around Dam Square, as people were shopping and walking out of stores, the flash mobbers would start taking pictures and act as if these random people were famous. The idea of the flash mob was to turn around the social practice of cheering famous people into cheering for random, ordinary people who are doing their shopping. After a while the spectators joined the game by acting as glamorous stars. The event was striking and caught the attention of TV and radio stations, reporting it as the first official flash mob in Amsterdam (Benschop, 2003).

Since then many flash mobs have occurred in Amsterdam, as well as in all the other cities in the country, thus, providing a total number is impossible. The YouTube search demonstrates that flash mobs occur most frequently in Amsterdam, with approximately 95.000 hits for 'flash mob', followed by approximately 20.000 hits for Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, as the other 3 largest cities in the country. However, flash mobs (with approximately 5.000-10.000 YouTube hits) have also been reported in other smaller cities such as Groningen, Eindhoven, Maastricht, Leiden, Amersfoort, Breda and Delft. [21] Thus, similar to the Macedonian case, flash mobs seem to be an urban matter, but not solely concentrated in the largest cities or metropolitan areas. In the last six years, in Amsterdam only, there have been more than 50 different flash mobs that have been posted on YouTube, excluding flash mobs in other Dutch cities and more than 20 flash mobs organized by Andries Tunru and his flash mob group Shoqs, and the Standing Ovation which occurs in different cities on monthly basis. During the three month period of my data collection in Amsterdam, four different flash mobs occurred.

This seemingly high frequency of flash mobs also translates into their diversity too. Appendix 8 presenting a YouTube list of the most relevant flash mobs that have occurred in Amsterdam, demonstrates their variety in form including: atomic flash mobs, such as putting down a non-existent fire with water in the middle of Vondelpark, a freeze flash mob or a pantless metro ride; interactive flash mobs such as the first paparazzi flash mob, inviting people to tango or jointly meditate and do yoga on the square, giving free hugs or standing ovations, welcoming people at train stations with flowers or singing; political flash mobs organized by NGO's, such as the Dance flash mob of OCCUPY movement, the OneBillionRising flash mob for V-day, fighting violence against women, the Greenpeace anti-consumerist naked dance flash mob against Nike and ADIDAS or their Orangutan flash mob at NieuwMarkt , the UNIGLOBE travelling dance flash mob, etc.; advertising flash mobs such as the Rembrandt's "Night Watch" Reenacment flash mob marking the re-opening of Rijksmuseum, The Hunkemöller flash mob, Opera flash mob in the Bijenkorf department store; and artistic flash mobs such as musicals, theatrical stunts performed by Shoqs or the'Kunstpaardenproject' by Atelier Loeviera. Alongside the

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[21] The 4 largest cities in the country (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht) constitute the Randstad metropolitan area, with the highest population density between 800.000 and 300.000. Following, the other mid-size cities such as Groningen, Eindhoven and Breda with approximately 200.000 inhabitants and the smaller ones such as Maastricht, Leiden, Amersfoort and Delft with approximately 100.000 inhabitants (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

local flash mobs, almost all known global flash mobs which occur annually, synchronized or in a wave in different cities around the world, have happened in Amsterdam too. These include the Michael Jackson Tribute flash mobs, the Gangham style flash mob, the Pantless Metro Ride, The Free Hugs flash mob and the Pillow Fight. Thus, even though synchronized dancing is the most commonly used form of flash mobs, there have been many other diverse activities labelled as flash mob, overlapping the different categories provided by Molnàr (2010).

Picture 16: Yoga flash mob, Dam Square, September, 2012 [22]

Picture 17: Michael Jackson Flash mob, Museumplein, July, 2009 [23]

[22] http://www.nufoto.nl/fotos/308747/yoga-flashmob-op-de-dam-in-amsterdam.html, 2013

[23] http://www.rtvnh.nl/nieuws/43289/Jackson+Flashmob+in+Amsterdam , 2013

Nevertheless, all the Amsterdam flash mobs tend to follow the definition of a flash mob in terms of being a gathering of strangers via the internet, happening in public space unannounced and sometimes seemingly performing a pointless act with unexpected dispersal afterwards. However, there is much more to the nature of flash mobs in Amsterdam, which makes some of the organizers doubt whether they should label their diverse performances, stunts and social experiments in public space a flash mob.

Firstly, in contrast to the Macedonian case where the organizers are usually an NGO, all Dutch flash mobs also have an initiator or organizer behind them, but it is not a joint idea from an organization, rather starts from an initiative of one person. Nevertheless, the organizers I have interviewed all report that the organization is a rather spontaneous process, leaving many organizational aspects in the hands of the participants as an ad lib formed group and blurring the boundary between organizers and participants. In contrast, the division between organizers and participants in the Macedonian flash mobs seemed to be more evident, although organizers in both cases always participate in the flash mobs besides organizing them. True to the definition, all flash mobs in Amsterdam were organized via the Internet on social media websites, except for some artistic and advertising flash mobs which were organized by a group of professional actors. In those exceptional cases, people still used the internet for communication and video promotion, but did not use it to recruit participants. Moreover, the Dutch participants and organizers are complete strangers in more massive flash mobs such as the Pillow Fight, but most of the time the group of flash mobbers either know each other well or met recently online, on social media. Although most flash mobs were organized without previous gatherings for rehearsal, in very few cases the participants would get acquainted at rehearsals before the flash mob event. Unlike the Macedonians who opt for rehearsals and socialization of the group before the event, the Dutch organizers rather send out text and video instructions that all participants are expected to prepare for and adhere to at the event.

Similar to the Macedonian case, the profile of the flash mob organizers and participants includes young people in the age range of 16-30, although in more massive flash mobs such as the V-day flash mob and the Pillow fight younger and older people participate. Consequently the organizers and participants are usually students, young theatre or performance artists, and sometimes volunteers and activists. In case of advertising or artistically professional flash mobs, the participants are professional actors, singers or dancers. The number of participants also varies greatly for different flash mobs, but on average the flash mobbers gather in groups of 20 to 200 people. All flash mobs included a filming crew that would coordinate with the organizers of the event.

Even though some flash mobs have occurred as one-time events, many of them have occurred in different public spaces at the same time or during the same day, such as the Michael Jackson or the Gangham style flash mobs. Also, almost all flash mobs I observed occur on annual basis, such as the Pantless Metro Ride, The V-day flash mob and the Pillow fight. The Standing Ovation flash mob occurs on monthly basis in different cities around The Netherlands. This re-occurrence was not characteristic for the Macedonian flash mobs, mainly due to their early phase of development and their modifications in accordance with the local societal context, rather than synchronizing with the global flash mobs.

Picture 18: PillowFight Flash mob at Dam Square, April, 2013[24]

Picture 19: Standing Ovation at Museumplein, February, 2013[25]

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[24] Taken by Uria Levy, research interviewee, Amsterdam Dam Square, 06.04.2013

[25] http://www.staandeovatie.nu/fotos.html , 2013

Furthermore, the flash mobs in Amsterdam seem to follow the rule of sudden, unannounced gathering and unannounced dispersal. However, there are significant differences with the Macedonian case, when it comes to announcing the events to local authorities and media. Even if most Dutch flash mobs are announced only on social media websites as calls for participation, and deliberately not announced to the media or local authorities, the media and seem to pick up on the information themselves. Thus, many flash mobs had media presence, which in some cases was a problem to the organizers:

"It is not a spontaneous and surprising flash mob when you have cameras and reporters surrounding you, asking why you're doing what you're doing" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013).

On the other hand, the police showed up at all events, but did not interrupt or criticized the events for not being announced to them. As one organizer explains:

"I never announce the standing ovations to authorities, but when I was organizing it in Utrecht, I was distributing little flyers about the event, and as I passed by the municipal building I went inside to give them one. I ran into a lady that works in the department for public order or…security…And when I explained to her what the event would entail she seemed very interested, but first asked me: Are you aware you should officially announce this event to us, did you?, I said: No, I didn't, do you think I should? Would you be interested in coming to see it? She laughed and said: Yes, I actually would…and no need to officially announce anything" (Arnout, Standing Ovation initiator, 2013)

In addition, the Dutch flash mobs rarely involve a very short 'flash-like' act; instead they last from 10 to 30 minutes, or at least for duration of a song they dance to. For example, the Pantless Metro Ride involved travelling without pants from Amsterdam Amstel Station to Amsterdam Central Station and changing different metros in doing so, which took about 45 minutes to complete. Also, the standing ovation flash mob, where we would sit around in public and wait for someone to stand on the little IKEA chair, so we immediately gather around and give them applause, lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

More importantly, considering the motivation behind the specific act of the flash mobs, both Dutch organizers and participants feel that the element of having fun and surprising or shocking the public audience are the most important aspects. However, in some cases, even if the specific act seems pointless, like walking around and making a mess like monkeys in public space, taking your pants off in a metro on a cold winter day, or freezing still in a middle of a train station area, there is a point to the activity, even if that's having fun or breaking people's daily routines. Nonetheless, the important thing is to surprise, shock or make people wonder what the purpose is, or make them join the activity by finding a personal motivation or purpose behind it:

"The power of flash mobs lies in its mystery and undefined purpose. The idea is for the people to go home afterwards, sit by their TV and still wonder why this weird thing happened at the square earlier"(Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

Still, the flash mobbers in general, never intend to cause public disorder, disrupt people in their activities or create negative feelings for the audience, but rather perform to them and leave room both for active

participation and passive spectatorship. Unlike the Macedonian flash mobbers, whose aim to make their purpose very clear and direct for the public, the Dutch flash mobbers tend to leave the purpose interpretation in the hands of the public audience. Though in both cases, the idea is to draw public attention and appeal even if the specific reasons vary.

Lastly, the Dutch flash mobs also happen mostly in open public spaces, such as squares and parks. In Amsterdam, the most frequently utilized public spaces for flash mobs are Dam Square (Picture 12, 16 and 18) and Museumplein (Picture 13, 17 and 19). Some flash mobs, especially advertising and artistic ones occur in semi-public public spaces such as department stores (Picture 14 and 15), where the architectural design is more suitable for practical matters in the organization of the flash mob such as, sound system or different levels/floors allowing more visibility and surprising start. Additionally, dance and singing flash mobs, as well as the Pantless Metro Ride occurred in transiting public areas of train and metro stations. Likewise, some flash mobs have occurred in the middle of pedestrian or shopping streets. In all cases, the importance of having a rather big open space to fit the flash mobbers and the number of spectators which could possibly engage in the activity is the main aspect of deciding on the public spaces as locations where the flash mobs are organized. However, very high density of potential audience is sometimes a potential cause for avoiding a certain public space for flash mobs because flash mobs might lose visibility in very busy rush hours, or significantly disrupt the social practices and activities of spectators, making the flash mob activity annoying rather than appealing. Thus, the aspect of timing in relation to public audience is also important, as flash mob organizers prefer to organize flash mobs in public spaces which are not too busy, but not almost completely empty as well. Both Dutch and Macedonian flash mobbers want to perform in public spaces with audience, but they all recognize that having too much audience might cause serious crowdedness and overshadow the intended affects of the flash mob.

Overall, the Dutch flash mobs, especially those I have observed can be more specifically defined as unannounced group stunts in public space, involving an activity that is out of the ordinary behaviour in that space, most often with the purpose of amusing, shocking or inspiring the spectators among the random audience. Having in mind the general characteristics of the Dutch flash mobs embedded in their societal context, the following sub-section describes the flash mob experiences of organizers, participants, audience and my reflection from personal experience, taking all three different viewpoints during the observations. As previously explained, the focus is on the feelings, motivations and experiences and opinions of the different actors in relation to the event happening in public space.

8.3 The Fun 'Pointless' Flash Mob Experience

My first experience with flash mobs in Amsterdam was the Pantless Metro Ride, organized by Andries Tunru, founder of the Shoqs flash mob group, which were the only active collective organizing flash mobs in Amsterdam at that period. Even though it was not my first flash mob participation, it was quite a novel experience for me, mainly because of the fact I was performing in a group with complete strangers. Alongside, taking my pants off in a metro on a winter day felt new and exciting. Compared to dancing in public for a random audience, taking my pants off felt weirder and somewhat frightening. Before the flash mob I was quite reserved in my decision to actively participate because I felt the envisaged flash mob activity is shocking and pointless. Albeit the purpose of the flash mob was explained in the instructions I received as a potential participant, entailing breaking the daily routine of people taking the metro and making the metro ride for once a very different and unique experience. However, I could not conceptualize the reason why taking my pants off in a metro with few other participants, would cause appealing and pleasant experience for the non-participants in our surrounding. To add, not having a purpose or societally relevant idea behind our specific performance was problematic for me in deciding to do it. It simply felt embarrassing and pointless. Obviously, these feelings I had were influenced by my previous experience of participating and organizing flash mobs in Skopje, Macedonia, where I would usually have a clear goal and societal message in mind when going out to perform something in public space.

Picture 20: Picture of me during the Pantless Metro Ride flash mob, 2013[26]

Therefore, up until the moment I went inside the first metro and took my pants off I was not sure whether I will do it. But, the atmosphere of the group feeling and the excitement behind doing something extraordinary is what made me take my pants off and walk around the public areas of the stations and the metro wagons. While

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[26] Taken by David Dekel, research interviewee, Amsterdam Central Station, 13.01.2013

it lasted I felt like performing in theatre, except for the fact there was no physical separation between us as actors and the random spectators. Unexpectedly, it was a very interesting experience for me personally. After the flash mob ended we all put our pants back on and went to Starbucks for coffee. I was struck by the fact I was making a friendly bond with complete strangers only because we took our pants off together in public. Sitting and having coffee with the group I felt that everybody was happy and open for socialization and developing friendships with the others. To date, I still communicate and socialize with some of the people I met during this flash mob.

In general, all flash mob organizers I met had a very personal reason behind initiating these events. Andries Tunru, the leader of the Shoqs group, who initiated his first flash mob event, the freeze flash mob at Utrecht Central Station in 2008 was motivated by his personal appeal for theatre performance, as he is a drama and performing arts student. He was inspired by the missions and public stunts of Improv Everywhere. The reason for choosing flash mobs was his infatuation with unannounced theatrical spectacle, where the performance happens in a surprising manner and the audience is not prepared or expecting the event:

 "With flash mobs I can blur the boundary between what is theatre and what is real…It's such a fun experience…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

After their first freeze flash mob at Utrecht Central Station, The Shoqs flash mob group was officially founded on the 2nd of February, 2008, with the purpose of interrupting the daily standard lifestyles of Dutch people in public and placing them in strange, funny situations. The group consists of more than 2.500 Shoqers (About Shoqs, http://www.shoqs.nl/, 2013). Their flash mob activities and public stunts are very diverse, as the founder explains:

"I don't even know if what we're doing can even be called flash mobs because often it's more ingenious than people just appearing randomly in public space doing something pointless very quickly and dispersing. We staged entire musicals and non-existent sport events, and our seemingly pointless flash mobs like the pantless metro ride do have this concealed point to break normal behavior, do something funny and unusual and have fun…so maybe it's something between street theatre and flash mobs…The flash mobs are so fluid in form it's hard to define and draw borders" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

Even though the flash mob group Shoqs has been performing typically atomic, interactive and artistic flash mobs, Andries, as the organizer was soon approached by private companies requesting him to organize flash mobs for advertising purposes. Unlike the Macedonian NGO flash mob organizers who refrained from cooperating with profit-making actors, Andries did not find that problematic, on the contrary:

 "All of a sudden people started asking me if I can do flash mobs for them and that's how it became my part-time job…Why not…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

Likewise, Arnout Visser, who initiated the standing ovation flash mob, was motivated by personal experiences. Namely, his idea for the standing ovations in public space came from working with cancer patients in support groups, where they would use applause as a simple and powerful tool for support. Gradually, he and his friends

transferred the idea in public space by first organizing standing ovation events during Queen's Day celebrations on the streets of Amsterdam and other cities, when they would collect donations for charity from people who wanted to receive applause for something. Two years later, the standing ovation grew into a periodical flash mob event, occurring monthly in different cities around the country. As Arnout explains, his personal experience from receiving and giving applause inspired him to transfer the experience to public spaces in order to share and spread the same positive feelings he embodies with other people:

"For me the standing ovation is personal and very meaningful…And I think it has great personal value and effect for the participants and spectators…There is some unexplained power in the vibration you experience from applause…the symbolic meaning of support, appraisal and recognition is huge… That's why I don't want to relate the standing ovation with other flash mobs that happen without an ulterior motive, but I still use flash mob as a buzzword label, because people are in general familiar with it and find it appealing" (Interview 2).

However, the purpose of doing the standing ovations in public spaces is related to spreading positive energy among the participants and spectators. Therefore, Arnout would not want his initiative of standing ovations to be associated with pointless flash mobs, which do not have a positive purpose or effect. Thus, he would rather explain the motive and purpose behind the event to people if it is not clear enough, rather than leave them wondering why it happened:

"I don't want to be related to the pranksters. It's not positive energy…Just making people feeling uncomfortable and weird… I also don't think having a protest or rebel note under it is a good thing either… For example, the pantless metro ride, even though it just seems like a pointless prank, it has some rebel note under it, telling people to break their daily routine and do something different…But that's just being judgmental about people's patterns and there is nothing wrong with patterns… They protest to something they are doing every day as well. So it's stupid and absurd. I don't want standing ovation to be related to that." (Arnout, standing ovation initiator, 2013)

Unlike the organizers who have a clear personal motivation behind the flash mob initiation, the participants in Dutch flash mobs join the event for many different reasons, having an extraordinary fun experience in a group and surprising the audience, being the main ones. In general, all flash mob participants had positive feelings of fun, euphoria and excitement from their flash mob experiences. Yet, participants also seem to critically analyse the purpose of the event and based on their analysis, make a decision whether to participate or not. In contrast to the Macedonian flash mob participants who were united on the societal purpose of the particular flash mobs, the Dutch flash mobbers seem to have more diverse motivations in deciding to participate. Few quotes illustrate the variety of personal motivations behind participating in specific flash mobs; hence, not all flash mobbers participate in all types of flash mobs:

"I like the idea of the pillow fight because it had no other purpose but having unregulated, silly, fun… I love having an excuse to hit people with pillows in their faces, especially when it's somebody I don't even know…I know the idea of the pillow fight is to officially criticize regulated entertainment in public spaces, but my personal motivation is more about shocking the public than being together with people, doing something in public space

as a group. For the tourists we provide something other than hookers and coffee shops, they can see that people actually live in Amsterdam and know how to have fun. That's why I do it…" (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

"I like the idea behind the standing ovation, but I don't see a point in hitting random people with pillows or criticising their daily travelling routine by taking my pants off, because I don't see anything wrong in having such a daily routine and behaving normally in public transport" (Arnout, Standing Ovation initiator, 2013)

"I like the idea of flash mobbing for the purpose of shocking and entertaining the public… But I wouldn't go out on a protest that has the aim to protest against some societal problem…These societal things don't interest me much…" (Lorenzo, flash mob participant, 2013)

8.4 Social Construction of Dutch Public Spaces

The relation with the public space and Dutch flash mobbers is evidently integral to the experience of this social phenomenon. According to Lefebvre's spatial triad of social construction of public spaces, the Dutch public spaces are multi-functional and involve a variety of uses, from transiting, to engaging in leisure activities most frequently associated with consumption of good and services, such as shopping or sitting in a café. The Dam square is also conceptualized as a place for celebrations and city entertainers that usually serve the purpose of tourists' entertainment. The representation of these spaces as open and accessible to the public is one of the reasons why the flash mobs take place there, however, the general atmosphere of a public space is always carefully considered when organizing Dutch flash mobs. Nonetheless, all involved actors have a conceptualization of Dutch public spaces as places where they can have unregulated entertainment and interaction with the public audience. Most importantly, the ways flash mob actors and spectators experience the public spaces at the flash mob events and afterwards are elaborated below:

Equally to the Macedonian case, Dutch flash mobbers also approach the public spaces where they decide to perform a flash mob both practically and symbolically. On one hand, organizers always think about size, form, function and atmosphere of the public spaces in terms of visibility, crowdedness, size and spaciousness, usual socio-spatial practices, weather and timing, etc. For example, it is crucial to have spectators, but not too many because crowdedness might shadow the flash mob or jointly cause unpleasant public disruptions and disorder in traffic. Also, the activity performed with the flash mob should differ from the common practices within the certain public space. As one organizer explains:

"I was asked once by festival organizers to have a flash mob at the festival… But the atmosphere there is already too busy and so many weird things and spectacles are already happening…It's impossible to draw attention in a crowd like that with a flash mob… They are already overwhelmed with fun and amusement…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013).

Thus on a symbolical level, organizers choose public spaces which are open and public enough so that they can be transformed into a theatre stage or a place to address the public about something for a short moment,

without disrupting or annoying the spectators. The aim is always to shock, entertain, amuse or involve the public. Consequently, the flash mob activity should be something different from the usual socio-spatial atmosphere of the public space:

"…For the flash mob to be successful it has to be extraordinary… So it has to happen in a normal, ordinary public space, where not much happens except for the usual daily life activities… Public space is what defines the norm of public behaviour…and then you transform the space by doing something outside the norm…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

This conscious consideration of the public space where Dutch flash mobs are organized affects the organizers' personal attachment and conceptualization of those public spaces in the similar manner to the Macedonian flash mobs:

"….After that, whenever I pass through Utrecht Central I think of the freeze flash mob and I feel good. It feels like that space is mine, it doesn't belong to NS…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013).
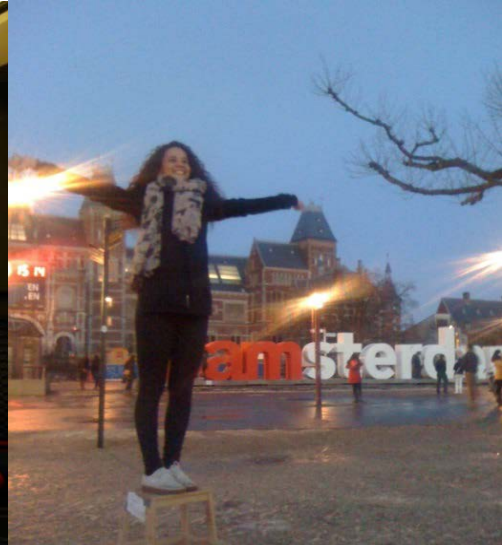
Nevertheless, some interviewees did not consciously think about the public space itself, but focused more on the spectators and their reactions during the event. In other words, for these flash mobbers it was more important who will see them in public and who they will be with, rather than the relation with the specific public space where they perform. Consequently, many do not attach a specific meaning or emotion to the public space when visiting it afterwards, but that depends on their impressions of the flash mob event. For example, one participant explains:

"…Well, I don't really think of the pillow fight when I pass through Dam square, but sometimes when I'm bored and waiting at the train station I recall seeing you guys without pants that day and it makes me laugh…" (Sandra, flash mob participant, 2013).

Lastly, there are significant differences between the Macedonian and the Dutch case, in the way the public audience reacts to the flash mobs. Dutch people who witness the flash mobs or suddenly find themselves in a public space where it occurs generally take it as a positive experience, being interested and amused, even though they don't see a clear purpose behind it. Thus, evident from the observations, many spectators seem to be familiar with the phenomenon and react positively, and often try to join the flash mob activity or interact with the flash mobbers. However, some spectators ignored the event and avoided interaction with the flash mobbers, which probably have the same opinion as some people that condemn these events on Dutch social media for their pointlessness and weird disruption of daily normal practices.

Picture 21: Spectators at Pantless Metro Ride, 2013[27]   Picture 22: Passing spectator participating at the
Standing Ovation flash mob, 2013 [28]

The flash mob phenomenon in Dutch public spaces seems to be tolerated and positively accepted both by spectators, public authorities and media representatives. Compared to the Macedonian case, the media seems to be more pro-active in following these events on social media and attempting to cover them, instead of the Macedonian journalists who would not cover or report on the event even if invited or informed by the flash mobbers. Likewise, the local authorities seem to be more accepting and lenient in practicing formal legal regulation when it comes to flash mobs in public spaces. Instead of interrupting the events and/or requiring formal announcement as in the Macedonian case, the Dutch local authorities rather supported and appealed to the flash mob events. From their viewpoint, flash mobs provide yet a new, unexpected and exciting experience in public space. As the media representative explains:

"Imagine as we are sitting here in this Starbucks having our normal coffee, all of a sudden people around us start climbing on tables, singing and dancing… Wouldn't that be great?! I'm sure it's gonna make you smile…Or if we leave now and go out on the street, and some weirdly dressed people start dancing on the pavements of Leidseplein, wouldn't you feel like joining, get a bit of dancing… It doesn't all have to be about eating, drinking and shopping…" (David, media representative, 2013)

In sum, unlike the Macedonian audience, as well as media and local authority representatives, who were characterized as not familiarized with the global flash mob phenomenon, thus, less accepting and interactive with the flash mobbers, the Dutch public seems to be more familiar and open to the phenomenon.

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[27] Taken by Uria Levy, research interviewee, Amsterdam Central Station, 13.01.2013
[28] http://www.staandeovatie.nu/fotos.html, 2013

8.5 Cyber Space for Mobilization & Organization

The Internet is an important online public space, complementary to the offline public spaces where flash mobs occur. In contrast to the Macedonian case where the cyber space was most important for promotion of the flash mobs, the online space in the Dutch case is most relevant for mobilization and organization of the flash mobs.

The flash mob initiators use online social media websites, most frequently Facebook, to mobilize and organize the participants. For most Dutch organizers, the most important aspect of the online public space is the fact they can reach many people in a matter of seconds.

"…It is so easy and practical…You can mobilize hundreds, even thousands of people online, friends, then friends of friends, and ultimately strangers." (Arnout, Standing Ovation initiator, 2013)

Nonetheless, they believe it is possible to organize flash mobs without the use of social media, by simply calling people you know, but that depends on the number of participants they envisage, because more massive flash mobs definitely require Internet. Even though they post videos of the flash mobs online, the Dutch flash mob organizers usually do not consider promotion or reaching more audience with the video of the event as a very important aspect of the event.

While the importance of online public space is recognized for organization of flash mobs, it is not always a necessary pre-condition for the phenomenon to occur. Nonetheless, it is the place where the flash mobbers usually get acquainted with the idea of flash mobbing, where they find all the information about the events and mobilize.

More importantly, similar to the Macedonian case, the online public space has far less importance than the offline public space, both in terms of reach and affect on the public audience. In other words, Dutch interviewees state that experiencing the flash mob in offline public space, both for the actors and spectators is very different, stronger and much more effective, as compared to watching a video of the event online. Few quotes explain the underlying reasons:

"When you watch a video of the flash mob, you will see people in the audience laughing, so you will laugh too, but your experience is, in a sense, secondary and influenced by the way the video was recorded. On the other hand, when you experience it in real public space you get the feelings first hand and they are much stronger…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

" It's such an interesting moment to experience, and watching it online doesn't even come near to the real experience, no matter how well it was recorded" (Sandra, flash mob participant, 2013)

The internet dehumanizes things… It's different when you see something in front of you or see it through a monitor. Plus if you don't like what you see, online you can make it go away with a click of a button, but in real life, there's nowhere to run, you'll have to face things and experience it fully. I guess that's even more important

for activist and political flash mobs, which can be much stronger than online activism because they happen in real public space, not the virtual one…" (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

Finally, Dutch flash mobbers find the online public space to be both crucial for initiating and organizing these events, but also for increasing their frequency in the future:

"I think we'll see more of them in time… Because social media connects with real life activities more and more, so it will be easier for people to join. So technology is maybe not what made flash mob start happening but it's definitely what made them turn global and increase in number exponentially." (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

8.6 Connecting Through Ephemeral Sociability

Starting from my own first Dutch flash mob experience with the Pantless metro ride, and considering the experiences of interviewees, the Dutch flash mobs seem to be inherently a socializing matter in public spaces. Even though the flash mob participants usually do not know each other before the flash mob events, the socialization evoked during these short events is experienced by all interviewees as a forming of a social bond that can develop further in the future. Thus, according to Simmel's elaboration of flash mob sociability, the one evoked by Dutch flash mobs fits the description of loosely created social events where people engage in free-playing interaction, but their social status seems to be similar rather than diverse, and their motive or ulterior end is rarely purposeless. Even though sociability is not the primary purpose or motivation behind the flash mobs I observed, they were all evidently made possible through the ephemeral socializing by the participants and their spectators. Thus, the Dutch flash mob sociability differs from the Macedonian one in terms of being more loosely and openly organized, including potential strangers, rather than previous acquaintances and NGO colleagues. However, the affects of the ephemeral interaction during the flash mob on the future socialization between the flash mobbers seem to be similar for both case studies.

Picture 23: Pillow fight flash mob, 2013 [29]   Picture 24: Group Picture after the Pantless Metro Ride, 2013 [30]

[29] Taken by Uria Levy, research interviewee, Dam Square, Amsterdam, 06.04.2013
[30] Taken by David Dekel, research interviewee, Amsterdam Amstel Station, 13.01.2013

First, when Dutch flash mobbers consider flash mob sociability they think of the group feeling and bonding moment among the participants evoked by the flash mob activity. They all find the flash mobs to be an inherently positive and sociable event created by group of people. Generally, flash mobbers feel positive about meeting new people and establishing future friendships at flash mob events, even though the actual social interaction during the flash mob is very short. The importance and effect of the joint group activity is what makes a good, successful flash mob according to the organizers:

"…It gives you the similar feeling to a symphony… People working together in unison doing something nice and beautiful, and creating a group vibe… it touches me. "(Arnout, Standing ovation initiator, 2013)

"Sociability! Yes, indeed flash mob evokes it. Look at us! Even if it's only for 5 minutes it's impossible not to socialize. Just by joining there and coordinating before it starts, you, at least subconsciously try to find some connection with the other participants." (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

Specifically, the more unusual the flash mob activity is, the more of a socially bonding experience it evokes for the participants:

"Well, taking my pants off together with you was quite a bonding moment, even though I didn't know your name yet… Doing something weird together with people makes you connect more openly and breaks any barriers you might feel for not knowing a person… If we can take our pants off together in public, than we definitely have a lot in common as personalities" (Lorenzo, flash mob participant, 2013)

Second, the Dutch flash mob organizers also recognize the value of flash mob sociability in establishing new friendships and cooperation. For example, Andries who usually initiates flash mobs individually and organizes them with his open Shoqs flash mob group joined the standing ovation flash mob initiated by Arnout, and even though did not know each other before, organizing flash mobs in public spaces is what motivated their mutual support and cooperation.

Third and most interesting, unlike the Macedonian flash mob organizers, the Dutch ones believe they evoke sociability among the audience and they find the interaction that occurs between them and the spectators to be a particularly important element of flash mobs:

"Flash mobs provide a different type of fun for spectators than their usual shopping, consuming or passing through public spaces… They can engage with the flash mob and have fun, and instead of looking in their phones or at the shopping windows, the flash mob makes them break off their daily routine and have some unexpected interaction with us…" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

Indeed, the Dutch spectators find social interaction to be one of the most important elements of flash mobs too. In other words, the more interactive and engaging a flash mob is, allowing for spectators to join the activity, the better. As the media representative explains:

"Once I saw this dancing flash mob, people were doing the Zorba Dance for promoting the Greek restaurants, and it was so nice because half of the square started dancing Zorba and more and more people were jumping in, joining, you don't know any more who is who, and then the tourists joined in as well…That was beautiful…" (David, media representative, 2013)

8.7 Commercialization of Flash Mobs

One of the discursive issues that came up during the observations and interviews both in Skopje and Amsterdam was the commercialization of flash mobs, or their use and organization for commercial promotion and advertising. The outlier case of a commercial flash mob in Skopje demonstrated that being a phenomenon practiced mostly by young NGO activists, the Macedonian flash mobbers generally do not want to be associated or cooperate with profit-making actors. Even though they recognize that globally the phenomenon has been widely commercialized, Macedonian flash mobbers would like the events to be practiced and perceived as non-commercial. On the other hand, considering the variety of forms and types of flash mobs in Dutch public spaces, the opinions about commercial versus non-commercial flash mobs differ among interviewees.

Albeit he moved from non-commercial to commercialized flash mobs, Andries, as the most experienced flash mob organizer, believes that it is not so important what the reason or motivation behind the flash mob is, but the key is whether it is performed in a creative, artistic way. Thus, for him, it does not matter whether the flash mob will have a commercial purpose revealed at the end of the event, or a non-commercial one, as long as it has an artistic value in the performance:

"People getting angry about the commercialization of flash mobs… I think it's understandable because once you commercialize something the artistic value gets in the background. That's one thing I'm always aware of. I never do concessions on my artistic value. When I do a flash mob for a company I'm not going to wear t-shirts with their logo or give out flyers. Because I want to make awesome flash mobs, make theatre on the streets, and when a company wants to undermine that I don't allow it. They can use it later on to make a commercial from the event or say at the end "it was brought to you by", but I would never allow them to change the flash mob activity or event itself. So I always try to convince them that its best for both sides if the commercial part is in the background, because the audience will also get annoyed if they see us wearing pink T-Mobile t-shirts" (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

As for the differences between the activist flash mobs that deal with public societal topics and the commercial flash mobs that lack an activist agenda, Andries believes that conflict or undermining should not exist, instead both types of flash mobs can coexist in the same public spaces, as he finds value and meaning in both types:

"If there is a market for it, and there is market for it, as far as I'm concerned it's a good thing to have commercial flash mobs too. I know activists tend to condemn these types of flash mobs, but I don't see a problem with it. Activist flash mobs can use the flash mob as a tool for influencing public discourse because this form of gathering can capitalize the potential of people organizing themselves to act around a certain idea and doing it in public

space surely adds value both for the participants and those witnessing it. The flash mob should make them stop and think about the message they're sending… And I think that's great, but I don't see why that has to conflict with the flash mobs I am organizing… " (Andries, Shoqs flash mob group, 2013)

Conversely, some of the participants I have interviewed feel that flash mobs should be anti-consumerist in nature and promote something non-profit making. In other words, they perceive the flash mobs as some sort of insurgence contradicting the regulated, normal, consumer-oriented daily life in public spaces, thus criticizing commercial flash mobs:

"Flash mobs are inherently grass root movements, not necessarily anti-consumerist, but it's something that comes from the public, with the public, to the public. So when flash mobs are used for advertising purposes, like guerilla marketing tool, than it loses its true purpose." (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

However, being anti-consumerist and non-commercial in the Dutch case does not necessarily entail that flash mobs are political and have the purpose of affecting public discourses. Even though such flash mobs occurred, as the V-day dance flash mob I observed, which had the activist agenda of fighting against violence towards women, the interviewees do not believe that the flash mob itself has the power to influence public discourse:

"It's nice that we danced in the middle of Dam square to round off the activities for the social campaign, but let's be real, the dancing is not gonna cause less violence towards women worldwide… I think the other activities we had before the flash mob were more valuable in affecting the public discourse in this society on the topic… The flash mob was just a tool to get more public attention" (Sandra, flash mob participant, 2013).

"Useful, maybe. Powerful, not so much. I think it's stronger than activism online, because it happens in real public space, but flash mobs usually have this 'kumbaya' atmosphere around them, which strips down the seriousness of the idea, or message behind it….So, the potential is there but I haven't experienced a very powerful political flash mob thus far… Maybe if a flash mob develops into a continuous social movement it can become more powerful." (Uria, flash mob participant, 2013)

Lastly, the Dutch spectators also seem to make a distinction between the commercial and non-commercial flash mobs, and find no problem in the coexistence of both. From a spectator point of view, David explains the reason behind this tolerance of commercial involvement in an inherently non-commercial phenomenon:

"No, I like the non-commercial flash mobs, but I don't mind the commercialization and allowing private investors to participate to make the events better. You know why? Because that's sponsoring the thing. And sometimes you need sponsoring; you need some guys to give you money to prepare it… If you think that a business company so far gave money to brochures, commercials, TV, media, newspapers, whatever, and then you let them invest in art, it's like them taking that money and contributing to young artists, and putting paintings and photography on their walls. Everybody benefits. So I don't mind that they do that, as long as they do it nice." (David, media representative, 2013)

8.8 Conclusion

To summarize, flash mobs are not a novel phenomenon for Dutch public spaces, and have taken up diverse types and forms, some even occurring annually and monthly. Considering Molnàr's (2010) typology, all types of flash mobs have been performed in Amsterdam, although most flash mobs, especially those I have observed, overlap between types. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the pantless metro ride is atomic, interactive, artistic or political. To add, the Standing Ovations have both social and interactive, but also a psycho-emotional value for individuals, which is not incorporated in Molnàr's flash mob typology. Nonetheless, the people organizing and participating in flash mobs seem to be of a similar social profile (young people, students, artists and activists). Even though Dutch flash mobs fit the definition provided by previous research, their purpose and motivation is only seemingly pointless. In contrast, the flash mobs in Amsterdam I observed all had a purpose behind them. The Pantless metro ride had the purpose to break the daily routine of traveling in public transport, the Standing ovations had the purpose of providing support and a good feeling, the Pillow fight had an anti-consumerist character, providing free unusual fun, as opposed to the costly consumerist entertainment in public spaces, the V-day flash mob's activist agenda was to fight violence towards women. In all cases, the idea was to create a moment with positive and unusual atmosphere in public spaces and evoke fun and amusement both for the participants and the audience. More importantly, all flash mobs I observed seemed to evolve around the idea of creating unregulated, ephemeral social interaction in the public spaces, both among the flash mobbers and with the spectators. In other words, instead of using it as a more appealing form of protest in public spaces in the Macedonian case, the Dutch utilize the flash mobs in public spaces for evoking playful, non-instrumental, non-consumptive sociability and interaction.

In general, the lived experience of flash mobs in Dutch public spaces is positive both for the flash mobbers and the spectators. On a more conscious level for the organizers and the audiences and on a rather sub-conscious level for the participants, the public spaces are intentionally reconstructed for moment through the flash mob. Thus, flash mobs involve an activity that is different from the usual everyday practices of people in public spaces and intends to socially construct the normal public space into something extraordinary. In some cases, these public insurgencies are in a form of unregulated fun (e.g. pillow-fighting), considered as criticism towards the privatizing, consumption-oriented transformation of Dutch public spaces. The general societal conceptualization and representation of these public spaces as open and accessible to all makes them favorable places for flash mob events. Even though the process of flash mob commercialization is evident in the Dutch case, both organizers, participants and audience believe that this issue does not undermine the sociable, artistic and fun value of non-commercial flash mobs. Therefore, the aspect of sociability and fun seem to be the most important matters for Dutch flash mobs. After elaborating and summarizing the findings from both case studies, in the following conclusion chapter I will turn back to the three main research questions and interpret the results in attempt to provide answers.

9. Final Conclusions

Provided with the definition of flash mobs used in existing research, as a sudden public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a quick, pointless act and then disperse, both the Dutch and Macedonian case studies demonstrate this definition does not fully and correctly describe the events. First of all, Dutch flash mobs do include gathering of strangers, but my interviewees have all participated in more than one different flash mob, suggesting that the similar type of people attend these events. For the Macedonian flash mobs this is seldom the case because the participants are closed groups of activists from NGO organization, comprised of people who already know each other quite well. In the Macedonian case the organizers are usually few people who work together in an NGO organization, whereas in the Dutch case the flash mobs are usually initiatives put forward by individuals who mobilize an open group of volunteering participants online. Additionally, both cases prove that flash mobs are not always one-off events, but the same flash mobs re-occur periodically, and almost never take a 'flash' duration to perform, but rather last 10 to 30 minutes. Furthermore, the flash mob forms have been rather diverse in form and content, but the typology provided by Molnàr (2010) has proven quite redundant in this research, because both the Macedonian and Dutch flash mobs have demonstrated the elements of all types of flash mobs can be present in one flash mob event, including political or discursive aspects, interactive and artistic characteristics and commercial features. Also, some Dutch flash mobs have demonstrated other purposes and values or flash mobbing not contained in the 5 types, such as the individual emotional value of the Standing Ovations. In other words, the flash mob has taken quite a diverse and fluid form, which is difficult and perhaps limiting to be typified. If a differentiation is necessary at all, this research has demonstrated that a commercial versus non-commercial characterization would be more useful.

Moreover, true to the definition both Dutch and Macedonian flash mobs are organized in online public space, but the use of it differs between case studies. On one hand, the Macedonian organizers and participants find the online public space more important for promotion of the event after it occurs and reaching more public audience in that way. On the other hand, the Dutch flash mobbers find cyber space more important for mobilization of participants and organization before the event. Relating back to the development of the networked cyber space as a cause for the decline of importance of physical public space for social interaction and public discourse, these flash mob findings, in line with Humphreys' (2010) research, support the argument that online and offline public space are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Moreover, interviewees in both cases feel that the part of the flash mob phenomenon that occurs in offline public space is far more important and meaningful than the online aspects of the event, such as the online communication on social media for organization and posting a video of the flash mobs for promotion. Hence, the existence of cyber space, according to this study, facilitates the social interaction and public discourse motives the flash mobs intend to convey in physical public spaces.

Most importantly, both case studies breach the defined rule of being pointless. The Macedonian flash mobs, being typically an activist business, always have a purpose of sending a societal message to the public, or addressing a public discourse in the society. Conversely, the Dutch flash mobs are typically a-political; even though NGO organized flash mobs occur as well. The Dutch flash mobs I observed have been quite diverse, both

in form and purpose, but, even if they seem to be at first sight, these flash mobs are also never pointless. Specifically, the purpose of having fun, performing an extraordinary spectacle in an ordinary, boring public space, rebelling against consumerism in public spaces by providing free pillow fighting sociable amusement, or providing group support with standing ovations for random individuals from the public, are just few of the many purposes Dutch flash mobs entail.

Then, *how can the social construction of public space by way of flash mobs be understood, through the experiences of organizers, participants, and the wider public?* Lefebvre's spatial triad and Tuan's perspective of experience have proven applicable and quite insightful when attempting to research flash mobs as a socio-spatial phenomenon and its affects on the public spaces where it occurs. Specifically, recognizing the existence of three aspects of Lefebvre's triad for social construction of public spaces guided the research towards a comprehensive analysis of flash mob phenomenon, considering the interplay between how these spaces are societally conceptualized and what common socio-spatial practices characterize them on one hand, and how these spaces are lived and experienced by the flash mobbers and their spectators at the moment of flash mob occurrence, on the other hand. In addition, Tuan's elaboration of the relationship between human experience and space informed the in-depth analysis of the third aspect from Lefebvre's triad, hence, how people experience the flash mobbed public spaces and what meaning they attach to it. As explained by Tuan, the public spaces are places constructed by the experiences of people, and flash mobs are experiences that imbue public spaces with meaning for the flash mobbers, which continues to be relevant even after the ephemeral event has occurred. Thus, researching the experiences of flash mobbers provided the necessary data to understand how they socially construct the meaning and value of public spaces. In general, flash mobbing in public spaces makes these young people feel more personally attached to and comfortable in those public spaces.

Specifically, the findings demonstrate that flash mobbers in both cases construct the public spaces in a similar manner, by doing something unregulated and different from the usual socio-spatial practices characteristic for those public spaces. Usually taking up open squares, public transport areas or promenading central streets, the flash mob organizers and participants both develop specific, personal value and attachment to the public spaces where they have performed. In both cases this is stronger for the organizers than the participants, because they think more thoroughly about the space they will perform at. However, doing something different than the usual entails public expression through a flash mob rather than a protest for the flash mobbers in Skopje, and evoking fun and sociability instead of the boring everyday practices for the flash mobbers in Amsterdam. Thus, the flash mob in Skopje is regarded as a fun, exciting, but also risky, while the experience of flash mobbing in Amsterdam is generally described as fun, creative, extraordinary and positive. Considering the literature on public spaces elaborated above, my findings are in line with Stevens (2007) and Hou's (2010) reasoning that flash mobs are not just isolated meaningless instances, but spontaneous, non-instrumental use of public spaces, constructing them as places of new experiences and social encounters.

Furthermore, the aspects of sociability and public discourse, which were mentioned in the literature on public spaces as aspects of public life that have been stripped away from physical public spaces, seem to be of great importance for flash mobs in both case studies. *To what extent can flash mobs affect sociability and public discourses in public spaces?*

First, the aspect of sociability is crucial for both case studies, but slightly differs in the way it is practiced. Namely, the Macedonian flash mobbers consider sociability among the participants who have already been acquainted, so the Macedonian flash mob sociability is about strengthening social bonds within existing social groups and creating a feeling of togetherness. On the contrary, the sociability in the Dutch case seems to be more about social interaction among flash mob participants and spectators, rather than establishing a bond within the flash mob group. However, all participants recognized the value of flash mobbing together for establishing new friendships and developing existing ones. In short, the in-group sociability and feeling of togetherness in the Macedonian case is what inspires individual activists to participate in flash mobs that have a specific purpose to send a message in society or address a problem. The sociability in the Dutch case is focused more on blurring the boundary between actors and spectators, thus inspiring the public to socialize. Hence, flash mobbing sociability, especially in the Dutch case is in line with Simmel's concept of sociability utilized in Molnàr's (2010) research, a democratic, free-playing interaction among individuals in public space, with no ulterior motive. To add, in line with Gore's (2010) research, both flash mobs in Skopje and Amsterdam are successful in drawing attention and appeal from the spectators, who get involved in the flash mobbing as a new, ephemeral form of sociability.

Second, public discourse is also an important aspect of flash mobbing, but much more in the Macedonian than in the Dutch case. Even though flash mobs concerned with public discourses were not so common in Amsterdam, the Dutch flash mobbers recognize the potential of the form to be used in political purposes, but doubt it can have a serious effect because of its fun, surprising, celebratory and playful nature of the phenomenon. Conversely, the Macedonian flash mobbers find the flash mob to be a new, less aggressive, more creative and thus more appealing form of protest for the Macedonian public audience. According to Rodriguez (2010), who uses Habermans' idea of the public sphere and lifeworld, and Debord's idea of the spectacle and culture jamming, these types of flash mobs should have the potential to evoke critical thinking in the Macedonian society and positively affect public discourses. Indeed, the point of Macedonian flash mobs is to use flash mobbing in public spaces as a form of protest or public expression of the young activists on varying societal discourses, such as the issue of volunteerism, tolerance for ethnical diversity, acceptance of homosexuality and LGBT rights, the problem of violence in schools or towards women, etc. However, Macedonian flash mobbers too feel that one-time flash mobs do not have significant power to affect public discourses in society unless they grow into more frequent and massive social movements. Nonetheless, both Dutch and Macedonian flash mobbers agree that flash mobbing activism in physical public space has more potential to affect and reach to the public than activism in online cyber space, due to the stronger meaning and value of the real versus the virtual.

Finally, obvious from the findings of both cases, there are several similarities between the flash mobs in Skopje and Amsterdam, which demonstrate the global aspects of the phenomenon. Being a global social phenomenon organized and spread virally online on social media, the form and organization of the flash mob activities is similar in both cases. Dancing and freezing in public space are the most commonly used flash mob activities. However, the Dutch flash mobs are quite more diverse and frequent, which might logically stem from the fact that it has been practiced for a longer time. Moreover, the flash mob organizers and participants in both cases are of a similar profile, hence, young people, usually students, in the age range of 16-30. Also, how the

phenomenon socially constructs the public spaces where it occurs by providing something different, are similar for both cases.

However, the differences between Dutch and Macedonian flash mobs prove the importance of the 'glocalization' concept (Roudometof, 2005), or the fact that both the global aspects of flash mobs and the local societal context or their occurrence are interrelated in providing the reality of the phenomenon. Specifically, the Macedonian flash mobs are usually youth activist business, and the aim or motivation behind them is to support a cause or address an issue in the society. So even though they use the same form or activity as other globally famous flash mobs, they modify the event in accordance with their societal aim. Obvious from the observations and flash mob example when a violent incident occurred, there are certain power issues and problematic societal discourses in the Macedonian society that make the flash mob both a valuable tool for dealing with those problems as well as a risky and complicated event to organize considering the societal circumstances. As Rodriguez (2010) states, the successfulness of a flash mob also depends on the audience and the media, as elements of the societal context. The flash mobbers consider the general public to be on average quite passive, traditional and backward. Additionally, they recognize it is quite a politicized society, thus, people and media easily attach political etiquettes to any social movement or public expression concerning a societal issue. Moreover, they believe the public is not familiar with the flash mob phenomenon on global level and therefore, does not usually react or interact when confronted, due to the fear of the unknown. As for the media, as previously mentioned, even though there is sometimes lack of interest in covering these events, the media generally responds well in reporting the information send to them by the organizers of the flash mobs. Nevertheless, there is reasoning behind the fact that flash mobbers and the public still feel that the flash mobs have a potential to be more successful, both in value and societal impact because they are a new, more appealing and thus more effective form of societal activism. As the Macedonian reporter I interviewed explains:

" If you consider the fact we live in such a politicized, rather autocratic than democratic society, with serious problems with freedom of speech, in principle, this form of activism, voicing your opinion…I think exactly because it looks appealing and likeable, it can be more acceptable for the public, far more acceptable than a protest. Because through a protest or strike, it is difficult to attract support and interest from the public, they will usually put a political etiquette on the event and avoid it, even if in reality they do agree with the message you are sending…With the flash mob it happens fast and doesn't interrupt daily movement and traffic, so it's more appealing." (Interview 3).

Therefore, the fact flash mobs have taken a form of youth activism in public spaces is both influenced by and has the potential to influence the social public sphere in the given local context. In other words, flash mobs have been utilized as a new way of protesting in public spaces, using them as the place where you address the public about a societal issue in hope of getting support or influence public discourse.

In contrast, the flash mobbers in Amsterdam are more in line with the global trends of flash mobbing, evident from their synchronization with the same flash mobs in other cities around the world. However, the ways and purposes of flash mobs in Amsterdam do relate to the local Dutch societal context, specifically in their motivations for organizing the events. Dutch flash mobbers find the boredom, individuality, lack of sociability, the commodification of leisure and domination of consumption activities in public spaces, as the main

motivations to transform those spaces for a moment into places for social playful interaction. In line with Spierings (2006), Melik, Aalst, Weesep, (2007) and Melik's (2008) research, flash mobs can be seen as a reflection or reaction towards the transformation of contemporary Dutch public spaces into regulated, consumption-oriented places.

Evident from their laid-back relations with media representatives and local authorities, flash mobbers in Amsterdam, unlike the ones in Skopje, find no obstacles in the way the public spaces are regulated and never experienced their flash mobs as inappropriate or potentially risky. In addition, they expect the audience to be familiar with the phenomenon, appeal to it and join to participate. Unlike the Macedonian flash mobbers who consider their audience as traditional and old-fashioned, the Dutch flash mobbers expect a more cosmopolitan and tolerant audience, familiar and accepting of global trends, such as the flash mobs.

Moreover, the issue of commercialization of flash mobs also reflects the societal differences of both flash mobbing cases. The Dutch flash mob phenomenon, being practiced for a longer period and being embedded in a modern, consumerist society, has already been commercialized, engaging private, profit-oriented sponsors and organizers. In line with the consumerist culture, the Dutch flash mobbers and their public audiences generally do not perceive the flash mob commercialization as problematic. This finding might suggest that the flash mob phenomenon can both have a commercial and social value at the same time. In contrast, even though the flash mobs seem to be strictly an activist thing in the Macedonian transforming society, especially for the participants, some organizers recognize that the phenomenon is globally utilized for advertising and performance purposes too. On one hand, the Macedonian flash mob organizers feel positive about it because it involves promotion of the flash mob as a form of expression and socialization in public spaces, but on the other hand, they feel negative about the risk of the audience perceiving the different types of flash mobs as one and the same, advertising guerrilla marketing, hence, undermining the social value with the commercial one.

In sum, the Macedonian flash mobs are in general political, social and non-commercial, while the Dutch flash mobs are usually a-political, social, interactive and often commercial. The local societal contexts and how people understand public spaces are an important explaining factor in this difference, thus shedding more light on the relationship of the flash mob phenomenon with its context. Considering what they want to achieve by flash mobbing, whether it is public expression or playful sociability, the young flash mobbers seem to indirectly demonstrate what they lack in the public sphere. Thus, flash mobbing might not only relate to the local societal context, but also reflect it. In other words, the flash mobbers respond to the politicized and transformative processes in the Macedonian society, whereas they react to the commodified, consumptive and regulated nature of public life in the Dutch society.

Lastly, along with the additional insights it provides to the existing literature on public spaces and flash mobs, the research findings have some policy relevance in terms of future planning and regulation of public spaces. If flash mobs are indeed relevant insurgencies of sociability and constructive in their approach to public discourses, than their requirements for loose regulation, openness and spaciousness of public spaces, allowing for these events to occur, should still be considered by city officials in future planning of public spaces, both in terms of design and regulation. The further development and increase in frequency of flash mobs, which was

predicted by the interviewees, and the relevance of this phenomenon for sociability and public discourse in public spaces elaborated through this study should motivate further research of flash mobs. Considering the significant elaborated affects of such an ephemeral and supposedly pointless phenomenon in the context of geographical research on public spaces, supports the importance and value of the humanistic approach with a focus on the relationship between space, time and body, represented by the experiences, emotions and meanings people attach to places. Thus, the ethnographic research design that attempted to understand more in-depth the experiences and feelings people attach to places in socially constructing them, was proven insightful in conducting geographical research on public spaces. Moreover, utilizing a comparative case study between Skopje and Amsterdam, considering the affects of the wider context allowed for clarification and deeper understanding of the reasons behind the different types of flash mobs present in different public spaces of local societies.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Observation Protocol

- <u>Site/Place of observation:</u>   .
- <u>Date and Time:</u>   .
- <u>Event/Activity:</u>   .
- <u>Length of observation:</u>   .
- <u>Observer/ Role of observer:</u>   .

Guideline	Observational Notes
1. Description of Physical environment - Type of public place (open, close, semi-public, typical uses) - Surrounding architectural elements - Weather conditions **2. Description of Social environment** - Approximate frequency of people - Physical features of people - Activities undertaken by people **3. Description of Activity** - Details of the flash mob activities - The atmosphere **4. Description of Participants** - Approximate number of participants - Roles of participants (organizers, participants, filming crew) - Their behavior (non-verbal) - Their reactions (verbal) **5. Description of Social Interactions at event** - Communication among participants - Communication between participants and media reporters and/or police/security - Verbal and non-verbal interaction among participants and audience. **6. Description of Audience** - Approximate number of people witnessing the flash mob - Behavior (Body language and appearance) - Reactions (spoken) and responses when asked for opinion (positive, negative, confused) **7. Personal Reflections** (thoughts, emotions)	

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

N	Name	M/F	Age	Occupation	Organization/Employee	Experience
				Skopje		
1	Aleksandra Stojanovska	F	25	Actor, part time	The Macedonian Cultural Center, Skopje	Participant
2	Tina Mitrovska	F	24	Master of Law, Coordinator of "Learning Law" at YEF	YEF - Youth Educational Forum, NGO	Organizer Participant
3	Saska Cvetkovska	F	28	TV/Newspaper journalist and reporter	TVmagazine Eurozoom/ Fokus and Novatv Web	Media representative
4	Martin Stojanovski	M	27	Economy graduate Free-lance photographer, NGO volunteer	/	Participant Audience
5	Ivan Angelkovski	M	27	Dance choreographer and instructor	NOVA International School	Organizer
6	Stevica Levajkovski	M	27	Law graduate, NGO Coordinator	CreaCtive NGO	Organizer Participant
7	Irina Janevska	F	28	University Student, Member at YouthCan, Executive Committee member at CIRA	Youth Can NGO, CIRA - Center for Institutional Development	Organizer
8	Petar Antevski	M	21	University Student, YEF Program Activity Coordinator	YEF NGO	Organizer Participant
9	Monika Milkova	F	19	Highschool student, YEF Volunteer	YEF NGO	Participant
10	Sanja Stefanovic	F	25	University Student YEF Program Coordinator	YEF NGO	Participant Audience
11	Katerina Dimovska	F	20	Highschool student YEF Volunteer	YEF NGO	Participant
				Amsterdam		
1	Andries Tunru	M	22	Student at Koningstheateracademie, 's Hertogenbosch	Private company Andries was Hier and Shoqs flash mob group	Organizer
2	Arnout Visser	M	30	Physical therapist, Health and Leadership trainer	Initiator of WishYes Foundation and StaandeOvatie.nu	Organizer
3	David Dekel	M	/	CEO & Founder of Endeavour Enterprises N.V.	Amsterdam Spoke Magazine	Media representative Audience
4	Uria Levy	M	26	International Relations Student	/	Participant
5	Sandra Dilberovska	F	28	Sustainability master student, part time employed	/	Participant
6	Lorenzo Marchiori	M	28	Android Developer at IceMobile	/	Participant

Appendix 3: Interview Questionnaire for Flash mob Organizers and Participants

Interviewee (name, age, occupation, affiliated organization)
Contact Information:
Date and Time of interview:
Place:
Duration of interview:

List of Open Ended Questions:

1. What can you tell me about your experience with flash mobs until now?
   The flash mobs you have organized/participated in.
   How, what, when, where, why?

2. How did your first experience of flash mob participation feel like?
   Your feelings/experiences at the event.
   The relationship with other participants and the audience.

3. How was the flash mob conceived of afterwards by the official and social media?
   Responses by participants, social media, national and local media.

4. Can you read at the following newspaper excerpts? What do you think about the representation of the flash mob by these reporters?

5. Do you consider flash mobs to pose a potential threat to the public order and safety? How?

6. What was in your opinion the most successful flash mob you have participated/organized/experienced until now and why?

7. What was the role of internet/cyber space in the organization, promotion and discussion of the flash mobs you have organized/participated in?

8. What was the role of the public space you used for the flash mob? How do you experience the places where the flash mobs occurred when you revisit them?

9. What do you think about the following statements:
   "Flash mobs can create sociability (acquaintanceship and friendly bond) among the participants"
   "Flash mobs with a societal message are a powerful tool for steering public discourse in public spaces"

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 4: Interview Questionnaire for Media Representatives

Interviewee (name, age, occupation, affiliated organization)
Contact Information:
Date and Time of interview:
Place:
Duration of interview:

List of Open Ended Questions:

1. What can you tell me about your experience with flash mobs until now?
   The flash mobs you have read about, experienced or reported on.

2. What is your opinion of the flash mob phenomenon?

3. How are flash mobs conceived of by the official and social media?
   Responses by participants, social media, national and local media.

4. Can you read at the following newspaper excerpt? What do you think about the representation of the flash mob by this reporter?

5. Do you consider flash mobs to pose a potential threat to the public order and safety? How?

6. What do you think is the role of internet/cyber space in the organization, promotion and discussion of flash mobs?

7. What do you think is the role of the public space flash mobbers occupy during the event? How do you experience the places where the flash mobs occurred when you revisit them?

8. What do you think about the following statements:
   "Flash mobs can create sociability (acquaintanceship and friendly bond) among the participants"
   "Flash mobs with a societal message are a powerful tool for steering public discourse in public spaces"

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 5: Media excerpt for Macedonian Interviews

http://tocka.com.mk/1/79930/nesekojdneven-performans-vo-skopje-siti-mol ,last accessed 13.12.2012

Берово
4°

Македонија ┊ Љубов ┊ Рокенрол ┊ Рејака

1 ┊ ВЕСТИ ┊ СПОРТ ┊ ЖИВОТ ┊ ШОУ БИЗНИС ┊ ПЛАНЕТА ┊ АВТОМОБИЛИ ┊ ЗАБАВА ┊ ЕРОТИКА ┊ ФОТО ┊ ВИДЕО ┊ ИНТЕРВЈУ

НАСЛОВНА СИТЕ ВЕСТИ МАКЕДОНИЈА РЕГИОН СВЕТ АНАЛИЗИ

Несекојдневен перформанс во Скопје Сити Мол

12.11.2012 | 11:48

Извор: Точка

Прочитано: 10121 пати

☑ Испрати на пријател

𝑓A Зголеми го фонтот

𝑓A Намали го фонтот

Ми се допаѓа Споделн < 20

Меѓународното училиште Нова во соработка со танцовиот клуб Ритам Плус изведе Flash mob во Скопје Сити Мол.

Повеќе од 120 ученици од Меѓународното училиште Нова во соработка со танцовиот клуб Ритам Плус изведоа несекојдневен музички и танцов перформанс во Скопје Сити Мол познат како Флеш Моб.

Посетителите во трговскиот центар беа изненадени кога неочекувано од различни места во трговскиот, децата почнаа да се појавуваат играјќи во ритмот на песната Dance again на Џенифер Лопез.

Ентузијазмот и возбудата на децата беа очигледни, но и вчудовидувањето на лицата на посетителите кои се најдоа таму во тој момент.

Флеш мобот беше организиран по иницијатива и целосна организација на професорите по танц во училиштето Нова во соработка со танцовиот клуб Ритам Плус.

"Настапот го подготвувавме повеќе од два месеци и целта ни беше да понудиме уште една интересна активност за своите ученици. Благодарни сме на Скопје Сити Мол за гостопримството и желбата да ги понуди најновите светски социјални трендови и во својот трговски центар." изјави Иван Новаковски, менаџер на Меѓународното училиште НОВА.

Флеш мобот е необично интересно доживување за оние кои го изведуваат, но и за оние кои го гледаат. Учесниците настапуваат ненајавено на јавни места и во поголеми групи. Тие се чувствуваат како да се дел од сцена на некој филм или музички спот кој почнува ненадејно и завршува како ништо да не се случило. Момент кој секој би посакал да го доживее. Единствената цел на флеш мобот е да изненади и забавува. Иако до сега кај нас се изведени неколку вакви перформанси, Скопје Сити Мол, следејќи ја својата определба секогаш да понуди нешто ново и поинакво, повторно ни ја донесе магијата и единственото доживување наречено флеш моб.

Настапот е снимен и за неколку дена ќе биде промовиран преку социјалните мрежи (Youtube, Faceboook) за тие што не беа во можност да присуствуваат.

Appendix 6: Media excerpt for Dutch Interviews

http://www.amsterdam-spoke.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=422&Itemid=133, last accessed 12.12.2012

Appendix 7: List of Macedonian Flash Mobs

No	Flash mob	Organizer	City	Location	Date
	Reported Flash mobs in Macedonia (in the period 09.2010 - 12.2012)				
1	Eco Flash mob	Multikulti NGO	Kumanovo	Main square & streets	11.09.2010
2	Book Flash mob	Multikulti NGO	Kumanovo	In a small park before library	19.09.2010
3	Theater&FlashMob Performance	CreACTive NGO	Skopje	Vero Centar (mall)	27.11.2010
4	EU 'Ode to Joy' Dance Flash mob	Youth Educational Forum NGO	Skopje	In front of EU building	08.05.2011
5	Freeze Flash mob	Youth Can NGO, Stop the moment & change smth	Skopje	Route from central square to old bazaar	21.05.2011
6	UNICEF flash mob (dance and freeze)	UNICEF 'School with no violence' campaign with CID and Creactive NGO	Skopje Gevgelija Struga Kocani Veles Bitola Shtip Strumica Gostivar Radovish Kavadarci Prilep Tetovo Ohrid Kumanovo Kicevo	Central squares	02.10.2011 20.10.2011 24.10.2011 27.10.2011 29.10.2011 31.10.2011 01.11.2011 02.11.2011 05.11.2011 05.11.2011 07.11.2011 09.11.2011 10.11.2011 12.11.2011 13.11.2011 15.11.2011
7	Dance flash mob for Diversity	MDG Fund Project	Kumanovo	Central square	10.10.2011
8	Michael Jackson 'Beat It' Flash mob	CreACTive NGO	Skopje Skopje	Vero Centar (mall) & central square The hall of University for Philology	10.12.2011 13.12.2011
9	Freeze flash mob	Youth Educational Forum NGO	Tetovo	Vero Super Market	24.12.2011
10	Dance flash mob	LetsDoItMacedonia eco campaign, CreACTive NGO & Korcagin high school	Skopje	Central square	21.04.2012
11	Dance Flash Mob	Local High School 'Georgi Dimitrov'	Skopje	Vero Center Mall	19.05.2012
12	Dance flash mob	The Red Cross	Bitola	Central square	14.06.2012
13	Dance flash mob in Gostivar	Unknown	Gostivar	Central square	25.07.2012
14	Silent Disco flash mob	Youth Educational Forum NGO	Skopje	Central square	16.11.2012 17.11.2012

15	City Mall Dance flash mob	NOVA International School & 'Ritam Plus' dance studio	Skopje	In a central area of the mall	19.11.2012
16	Dance flash mob	Local High School „Josif Josifovski"	Gevgelija	Central square	30.11.2012
17	Gangham flash mob	For Worlds AIDS Day, Youth organized by local Youth Council	Strumica	In front of Global Mall	01.12.2012
18	Flash mob for Youth recreation	Youth Educational Forum NGO (USAID project)	Kicevo	Central Square	15.12.2012
19	Frozen flash mob DON'T BE FROZEN, ACT!	CreACTive NGO, PTPI	Skopje	Central square & Skopje City Mall	30.12.2012
*	The sources used for making the list include the online desk research on YouTube, Facebook, and Macedonian search engines for news and entertainment, as well as the interviews. The list might not be exhaustive and representative of all flash mobs that have occurred in Macedonia in the given time period.				

Appendix 8: YouTube List of Flash Mobs in Amsterdam

(* from approx. 95.000 Youtube hits for 'flash mob, Amsterdam')

No	FLASH MOB	ORGANIZER	LOCATION	DATE
1	Paparazzi Flash mob (first flash mob)	Stijn Hoster	3 locations around Dam Square	08.08.2003
2	Fire Flash mob (second flash mob)	People putting out imaginary fire	Vondelpark	18.10.2006
3	Pillow fight Flash mob	/	Dam Square	04.04.2009 03.04.2010 02.04.2011 07.04.2012 06.04.2013
4	Michael Jackson Flash mob	1000 Michael Jackson fans	Museumplein Leidseplein Keizergracht Dam square	19.07.2009
5	Catwalk Underwear Flash mob	Hunkermöller	Dam Square	28.11.2009
6	Kerst Schiphol Flash mob	FESTIVENTS and Schiphol Group	Schiphol Airport	20.12.2009
7	Dance Flash Mob	Dans & Balletstudio Jolein	Nieuwmarkt	03.01.2010
8	Valentine Musical Flash mob	STREETPROV	De Bijenkorf department store	06.02.2010
9	Augmented Reality Flash mob	Sander Veenhof	Dam Square	25.04.2010
10	Orangutan flashmob	Greenpeace Nederland	Nieuwmarkt	30.04.2010
11	Fiat 500c Bikini Flash mob	Leo Burnett, promotion of new Fiat 500c	Koningsplein	29.09.2010
12	Running4Society Flash mobs (fitness and dance)	Stichting@Society and Fit&Fruitig	different public spaces in the central area	28.11.2010 26.06.2011
13	Dance Flash Mob	/	Magna Plaza shopping center	15.01.2011
14	Worldwide Hug Flash mob	Worldhugger Rob Schrama	Leidseplein Dam Square	20.03.2011 21.03.2012
15	Shim Sham Dance Flash mob	/	Amsterdam Central Station	09.04.2011
16	Solibad Tennis Worldwide Flash mob (in 30 cities)	Solibad organization	Museumplein	05.05.2011
17	The Helden Race Flash mob (promotion of Heroes Race)	charities raising money	Museumplein	13.05.2011
18	Naked Flash mob against Nike and Adidas	Greenpeace activists	Kalverstraat	23.07.2011
19	Hema Lowlands Flash mob	/	Kalvertoren shopping center	02.09.2011
20	Trigger Point Amsterdam Flash Mob (fitness)	Trigger Point CEO Cassidy Phillips	Dam square	21.09.2011
21	Opera Flash mob celebrating 25th birthday of Muziektheater 'de Stopera'	De Nederlandse Opera (DNO)	De Bijenkorf department store	25.09.2011
22	ONEforONE Zorgverzekering: Flash mob	OneforOneNL	Dam Square	23.11.2011
23	Swagger Jagger Dance Flash mob	/	Dam Square	27.11.2011
24	USKO Choir Flash mob	Utrecht University Choir&Orchestra	Amsterdam Central Station	30.03.2012

25	Red Light District Flash Mob	Stop The Traffik Awareness Campaign	Red Light District	04.04.2012
26	Jedward - Waterline dance Flash mob	Jedward fans	Schiphol Airport	22.04.2012
27	Occupy #12M Amsterdam Dance Flash Mob	Occupy movement	Dam Square	12.05.2012
28	UNIGLOBE travel dance Flash mob	UNIGLOBE travel management	Dam Square	13.05.2012
29	Flash mob Openbare Bibliotheek	singers	Central Library Oosterdokskade	12.06.2012
30	Meditatie Flash mob Stadsverlichting	Kris & Tijn Touber	Museumplein	08.07.2012
31	Ultimate Contiki Flash mob (dance)	Contiki Holidays, travel agency	Amsterdam Central Station	05.08.2012
32	DBSV Dance Flash mob	DBSV	Dam Square	30.08.2012
33	International Zouk Flash mob	volunteers	Dam Square	16.09.2012
34	Justin Bieber Flash Mob	Justin Bieber fans	Dam Square	17.09.2012
35	Yoga Flash mob	Yoga Magazine	Dam Square	22.09.2012
36	Dance4life Flash mob	Mediacollege Amsterdam	Dam Square	01.10.2012
37	Bodyback Flash mob (body bags left at transit hallways)	Petition by Liubou Kavalyova, Belarus to save her son from death penalty	Amsterdam Central Station	04.10.2012
38	Gangam Style Flash mob		Magna Plaza shopping center Dam Square Kalverstraat Amsterdam Central Station	07.10.2012
39	Flash mob for Conor Maynard	@ConorDutchCrew	In front of radio station	18.11.2012
40	Flash mob 'Kunstpaardenproject'	by Atelier Loeviera, Jumping Amsterdam art exhibit	P.C. Hooftstraat shopping street	15.01.2013
41	One Billion Rising V-Day Flash mob	BlijfGroep	Dam Square	14.02.2013
42	Sevillanas dance Flash mob 2013	Feria De Amsterdam (4day fair event)	Westerpark	29.03.2013
43	Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' Reenacment Flash mob (announcing re-opening of the museum)	Rijksmuseum, ING bank - sponsor	De Bijenkorf department store (repeated in Breda shopping mall)	29.03.2013
44	Dance Flash mob, Yanou - 25 Light years Away	group of young girls	Dam Square Nieuwmarkt	06.04.2013

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