

PLAY, PLAYFULNESS AND INTERACTION IN THE STREET

A case study on the experiment leefstraat Duifstraat

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Abstract

In this research the space of the street has been explored from the perspective of play theory. This has been done through the case study of leefstraat Duifstraat. Leefstraat Duifstraat is an experiment in the street which took place in the summer of 2016 in Utrecht. During a period of several weeks the street was closed down for cars and the residents were allowed to put objects and street furniture in the street, creating a space to safely play and a space for residents to meet. By focusing on three elements within the leefstraat; the rules, the physical boundaries and the artificial grass carpet, this research argues that these three elements facilitate a space for play, playful appropriation and stimulate interaction. The research question which is asked is: 'how does the leefstraat Duifstraat by play and playful appropriation reflects on interaction in the street?' The play theory from Huizinga is central in this research and helps understand leefstraat Duifstraat through play theory and how by playing it stimulates interaction. When residents regulate and construct the space themselves, they have the freedom and possibility for playful appropriation of the space, this stimulates community forming. The physical boundaries create a separate space from the city and allow for residents to linger at the boundaries which stimulates interaction. The grass carpet creates a playground and a context for play in the street and it allows the organization of activities which stimulates community forming. Through the use of play theory, it thus becomes clear how communities can be formed. The initiators of the experiment used play as a tool to reach their goal of connection between resident. This research has shown that utilizing play as an instrument to stimulate community forming, can make the process easier. If city councils want to stimulate community forming in their city, it can be recommended to implement playful experiments and use a frame to create space for play in their city.

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Introduction

Cities have a lot of public space which is mostly used in a practical way such as transportation. I am interested in the already existing public spaces of the city, the way they are constructed and how they invite playfulness and playful interaction. The experiment 'leefstraten' caught my attention because it shows the construction of a playful space and offers, by being temporarily disruptive a reflection on daily life and the street and its interactions. This research contributes to the broader context of phenomena in the playful city.

Leefstraten is an experiment and initiative started by Lab van Troje, a platform that strives towards a sustainably city in Ghent, Belgium. This experiment aimed to investigate how Ghent could become a more sustainable and comfortable city to live in. Furthermore, the creators wanted to connect citizens to the city.¹ A leefstraat converts the street for a short period of time during the summer into a space for play. The street is closed down for traffic and residents are asked to seek parking for their car elsewhere for several weeks. Together, residents discuss and co-create their street together. They are allowed to put objects and furniture on the street to create a homely atmosphere.² They can also organize activities such as yoga classes, dinners, music performances and wine tasting sessions.³ The case study for this thesis will be the leefstraat Duifstraat in Utrecht, that took place in the summer of 2016. I will choose this street because of the elaborate accessible information online about the general process and outcome of the experiment. The research question is as follows: how does leefstraat Duifstraat by play and playful appropriation relate to interaction in the street? To answer this research question, I will answer the following supporting questions:

- How do the rules of the leefstraat and appropriation of the street facilitate play in leefstraat Duifstraat?
- How do the physical boundaries create a space for play and playfulness in leefstraat Duifstraat?
- How does the grass carpet transform the space of the street?

¹ "Leefstraten," Leefstraten Gent, accessed September 25, 2018, www.Leefstraten.be.

² Leen Verveake, "Auto's eruit kunstgras erin," *de Volkskrant*, June 17, 2015, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/auto-s-eruit-kunstgras-erin~b8da8ae6/>.

³ "Duifstraat leefstraat," Facebook, accessed November 17, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/duifstraatleefstraat/?__tn__=kC-R&eid=ARAQ-rsDpHkuJm_VclA1aFv-8nkNBVmp4tKbugwIWsjApktSIf2RZL6i7P4n4YT21VG3UYN6eUH_3i4&hc_ref=ARS_cO04O_XeDCEpL8NWVSSWNf9LTxHrS7MvyfFbcHSmGeABhu49xoNPEqYR0-tUrp8.

In order to answer the supporting questions, I will first explain which theories I am going to use. Chapter I till III will analyze the elements of the case study. In the first chapter I will analyze the rules for the leefstraat drafted by the city council of Utrecht. I will also analyze how the space is playfully appropriated. In the second chapter I will analyze the physical boundaries, I will show how they are being appropriated by the residents and how they stimulate interaction. In the third chapter I will analyze the grass carpet and I will show how it creates possibilities for playful appropriation and interaction in the street. It will then be possible to provide an answer to the research question. I will focus on certain aspects in the leefstraat Duifstraat, the rules of leefstraat Duifstraat, the physical boundaries which visualize the border of the leefstraat and the artificial grass carpet. I have chosen to analyze these elements because they show how it is possible to construct play and interaction. When analyzing these aspects, I will focus on how the citizens of the street playfully appropriate these aspects and thus playfully appropriate the space of the street and how by playing community forming is stimulated.

Although media in the city is a relative new field, there already has been done research on media and technology in the city for example, Michiel de Lange wrote about mobile media and playing games in relation to the city.⁴ Martijn de Waal and Michiel de Lange wrote about the role of citizens in relation to urban media.⁵ Marcus Forth also wrote about the digital city in relation to citizenship.⁶ Thus, a lot has been written on play(ing) in the city in relation to digital media, in which there is a focus on the role of citizens. Adriana de Souza e Silva wrote about hybrid spaces where virtual communities and physical space collide and how this leads to a redefinition of the urban space.⁷ Not only media studies explore urban spaces but also within performance studies urban spaces are redefined by considering the street for example as stage.

I am however interested in how play theory can bring new perspectives on an already existing space, the street. I will analyze a case study that does not have any new media technologies embedded. I want to show that through play theory there can be a different perspective gained and I will thus only explore one perspective on public space. Play theory will shed a different perspective on the forming of interaction and community in the public space. Nowadays in our society a lot of interactions take place online, online platforms such as

⁴ Michiel de Lange, "Moving Circles: mobile media and playful identities," (PhD diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2010), 240-324.

⁵ Michiel de Lange, Martijn de Waal, "Owning the city: New media and citizen engagement in urban design," *First Monday*, volume 18, no. 11 (November 2013). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v18i11.4954>.

⁶ Marcus Forth, Martin Brynskov, Timo Ojala ed., *Citizen's Right to the Digital City*, (Singapore: Springer, 2015).

⁷ Adriana de Souza e Silva, "From cyber to hybrid: Mobile technologies as interfaces of hybrid space," *Space and Culture*, 9, no. 3 (August 2006): 261-278, DOI: 10.1177/1206331206289022.

Facebook try to stimulate interaction and community forming. Leefstraten is in contrast to Facebook communities, since it stimulates interaction and community forming in the physical world instead of the online word. This research will thus contribute to redefinition of urban spaces. After the conducted analysis, this research will then be able to make a statement about how leefstraat Duifstraat as a playful interruption in the street stimulates interactions and community forming and thus contribute to a more connected city.

Theoretical framework

In this research the play theory from Johan Huizinga, will be central. In *Homo Ludens* Huizinga defines play as consisting of five characteristics. First, he states that play is free, it is not obligatory and if it would be, it would not be play anymore. Second, play is not part of the everyday life, it is a temporarily step out of the real life. The third characteristic is that play takes place within the boundaries of time, this means that play is always predetermined to have a beginning and an end. Fourth, play creates order through rules. And last, play is not only limited by time but also limited by space. Play takes place within its own play space, which is marked beforehand. Play takes place within marked off temporary worlds within the ordinary world.⁸

Building on the work of Huizinga, Miguel Sicart proposes a different understanding of play. He bases his theory on Huizinga's fundamentals of play, however Sicart argues that play is part of daily life and does not take place separately, as Huizinga argues.⁹ Sicart makes a distinction in his theory between play and playfulness. For Sicart, playfulness is not tied to any objects or spaces but arises from people and is a way of approaching and engaging with the world. Play is an activity and can be mediated by objects or context. "Context is the network of things, people, and places needed for play to take place."¹⁰ This statement signifies that people need other people in order to play and be playful, play needs interaction. It is in the context of the street that community forming takes place. In leefstraat Duifstraat people are connected because they live in the same street. The process of residents co-creating their street and playing in the street together, leads to community forming.

Play is autotelic, it is an activity with its own goals and purposes, duration and conditions. Playfulness is an attitude people have towards objects or contexts but does not have a goal itself. This means that by being playful the original purpose of the object or context is respected.¹¹ The distinction between play and playfulness in space is that play happens in a space that is created for play and respects the autotelic nature of play. Therefore, the space allows for play to happen. Playfulness takes place in spaces and context that are not created for play.¹² I will use these theories in this research to understand how play and playfulness take

⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Groningen: H.D. Tjeenk Willink bv, 1974), 11-13.

⁹ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 209.

¹⁰ Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014), 7.

¹¹ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 16.

¹² Sicart, *Play Matters*, 6.

place in leefstraat Duifstraat. In order to understand how residents play, there needs to be an understanding of what it means to appropriate a space.

Play appropriates the context and the objects that it uses.¹³ When being playful, people appropriate a context that is not created or intended for play, there is a shift from a goal-oriented interpretation to pleasure. Designed playgrounds in the city are constructed for play and thus not playfully appropriated. Public spaces in the city not constructed for play but where play does take place are playfully appropriated. When applying play theory to the city, it can help us understand how play and playfulness can occur outside designated play areas such as playgrounds. It also helps us understand how citizens take matters into their own hands and appropriate the space. Another concept which therefore will be useful is the *Ludic city* from Quentin Stevens. He applies play theory to the city and categorizes settings in the city where play takes place regularly. He states that boundaries beside limiting the space and possibilities, also raise different possibilities for play. The boundaries structure social relations because they create spaces where people can perform different roles and they create a separated space from the everyday life of the city.¹⁴ The movement and play across boundaries rise the possibility of interaction and connection between people. These interactions contribute to a sense of community.

Community forming is not stimulated in every place, because people that play in urban spaces interact with each other but may not be so likely to form a community. The people on the street are only connected with each other through play in the urban space. They engage in play and can then easily move on to their desired destination.¹⁵ In Leefstraat Duifstraat however, residents are likely to know each other, since play takes place in the same space for a longer time. Since the play space is in front of the residents' houses, they come into contact with the play space frequently and are more likely to engage in play. The interactions that then takes place stimulates community forming.

Appropriated space

Quentin Stevens and Karen Franck use the term 'loose space' to describe a space in which citizens recognize the different elements that they can appropriate and actively appropriate these elements. These elements are objects in the urban space, for example the sidewalk, but also activities citizens can do. These are activities that are not productive, take place outside the daily routine and can be planned or unplanned. Some urban spaces have

¹³ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 12.

¹⁴ Quentin Stevens, *The Ludic City* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 3, 114.

¹⁵ Stevens, *The Ludic City*, 114-116.

regulations which according to Quentin and Franck can obstruct the appropriation of the space. However, in this research leefstraat Duifstraat will show that regulations can also stimulate play. Loose space relates to Sicart's notion of play being bound by space and that play manifests itself through appropriation of that space. However, Stevens and Franck recognize that some spaces are loose whereas Sicart states that all space can be playfully appropriated.¹⁶ In this research I will conform to Sicart's theory.

The idea of loose space is very similar to Gehl's theory in *Life between buildings*. From his architectural perspective he states how buildings and design can alter behavior and space. He states that the quality of streets is determined by hard edges and soft edges. Soft edges are created through the possibility for activity on the street and the easiness for access from people's houses. It also includes the adaptability of the street and possibility for changing it.¹⁷ Thus, Gehl is describing a transformation of the space into an appropriated space. The discussed theories all have in common that they categorize spaces and their effects. However, leefstraat Duifstraat will show that not every space can be as easily categorized according to their effects. Additionally, these theories offer an insight in the facilitation of play and how elements in the Duifstraat are being appropriated by residents.

¹⁶ Quentin Stevens, Karen A. Franck, *Loose Space*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 2, 8, 40, 51.

¹⁷ Jan Gehl, "Soft edges," in *Life Between Buildings* (Washington: Island Press, 2011), 183-197.

Method

Now that the theoretical field and context has been defined, the analysis will be conducted. In order to answer the research question, I will conduct a textual analysis of the case study Duifstraat Leefstraat. The first chapter will start with an analysis of the rules of leefstraat Duifstraat. I ask the question how do the rules of the street and appropriation of the street facilitate play in leefstraat Duifstraat? I will argue that these rules facilitate a space for play. I will analyze the rules for the leefstraat as stated by the city council of Utrecht and how this creates limitations and possibilities. Then, I will use the discussed theories to understand how residents can appropriate the space of their street and I will analyze how it stimulates residents to interact. The use of the space and how the rules limit or create possibilities will shed light on the facilitation of play.

In the second chapter I will define the boundaries that are present in the leefstraat by looking at the available photos. I ask the question how do the physical boundaries create a space for play and playfulness in leefstraat Duifstraat? Through use of the theory from Stevens, I will be able to understand how the boundaries allow for interaction and actions to happen. The bordering of the space and the interaction on the boundaries will support the argument that community forming is stimulated.

In the third chapter I will analyze the grass carpet. I ask the question how do the grass carpet transform the space of the street? Through the use of the theory from Sicart about playgrounds I will be able to understand how the grass carpet transforms the space of the street and allows for a different kind of use. The Facebook page of leefstraat Duifstraat will provide me with information on activities that took place on the carpet. Therefore, I will be able to understand how interactions took place on the carpet and how they contribute to community forming.

Chapter I

How do the rules of the street and appropriation of the street facilitate play in leefstraat Duifstraat?²

In this chapter I will first explain more about leefstraten itself, then I will focus on the rules for leefstraat Duifstraat by the city council of Utrecht. Lastly, I will analyze how residents appropriated the street. Leefstraten originated with the intention to transform the city of Ghent to a more environmentally friendly, connected city.¹⁸ The aldermen of Ghent are convinced that meetings others in real life colours our lives and that by making the street a place for meeting and connecting, it will increase the change of connecting with others.¹⁹ The alderman of Utrecht, Lot van Hooijdonk, who is responsible for leefstraten in Utrecht, shares this ideal of leefstraten and adds that it also creates a space for play, living and connecting.²⁰ The ambitions of the initiators of leefstraten to make the street a place for connecting and community, has the underlying assumption that the ordinary street is a place where this is not possible or does not happen. The initiators tried to extend the potential of the street and introduce a new notion to the street as a space for connecting and meeting neighbors, thus a space for stimulating the formation of a community. Play and evoking playfulness is used as a tool by the initiators to reach the goal of leefstraten to create the desired connection between residents. On the next pages three photos are provided to give a clear idea of how leefstraat Duifstaat was designed.

¹⁸ "Over de organisatie," Leefstraten Gent, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.leefstraat.be/over-de-organisatie/>.

¹⁹ Dries Gysels et al. "De fiets van Troje: transitie naar een duurzame mobiliteitscultuur voor Gent en omgeving," *Lab van Troje*, November 13, 2012. https://issuu.com/defietsvantroje/docs/fiets_van_troje_web.

²⁰ "Raadsbrief Evaluatie Leefstraten," Gemeente Utrecht, last modified March 22, 2017, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2l0ZA8GqrNQJ:https://api1.ibabs.eu/publicdownload.aspx%3Fsite%3Dutrecht%26id%3D48699+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=nl>.

*Image I: leefstraat Duifstraat, Facebook photo.*²¹



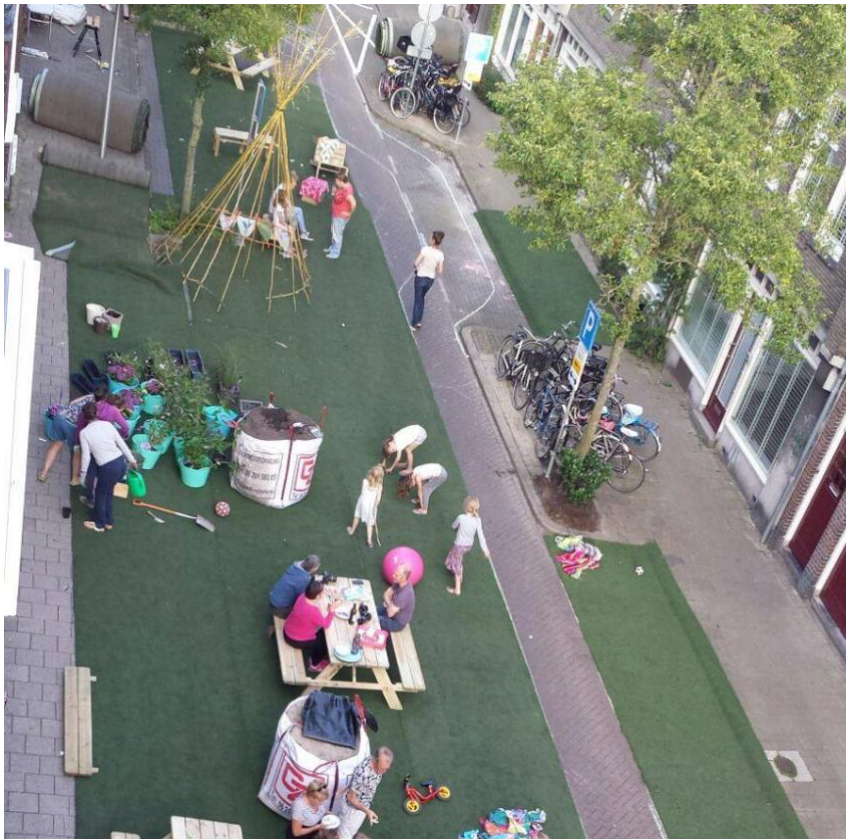
*Image II: construction of leefstraat Duifstraat in progress, Facebook photo.*²²



²¹ “Leefstraat Duifstraat,” MyWheels Facebook, last modified August 8, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/duifstraatleefstraat/photos/a.1738575019730383/1738575146397037/?type=3&theater>.

²² ²² “Optreden Closing Time,” Leefstraat Duifstraat Facebook, last modified July 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/duifstraatleefstraat/photos/a.1738575019730383/1738575149730370/?type=3&theater>.

Image III: clear boundary and a musical performance in leefstraat Duifstraat, Facebook photo.



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Rules & policy in Utrecht

This part will discuss the rules in Leefstraat Duifstraat in the city of Utrecht and explain how play is facilitated. In Utrecht the policy “Utrecht maken we samen” is implemented, which translates to “We make Utrecht together.” The policy’s goal is to get citizens, as early as possible, involved in the policies and plans of Utrecht. Besides participating, citizens also have the possibility to voice their opinion about the policies and plans.²⁴ Leefstraten is part of the policy “Utrecht maken we samen”, because the intention is to create a space for interaction and connection. The residents come together to brainstorm about ideas and objects they want to put in their street and to co-create a space different from the ordinary street. Hence, already starting off with an open mindset towards co-creating and working together.²⁵ The intentions of the creators of Leefstraten are thus aligned with the policy of the city council of Utrecht.

²³ Groenproject Leefstraten,” Leefstraat Duifstraat Facebook, last modified August 4, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/duifstraatleefstraat/photos/a.1743007289287156/1743009502620268/?type=3&theater>.

²⁴ “Werkwijzen Utrecht maken we samen,” Utrecht monitor, accessed December 30, 2018, https://www.utrechtmonitor.nl/sites/www.utrechtmonitor.nl/files/bestanden2018/documenten/werkwijzen_utrecht_maken_we_samen.pdf, 4.

²⁵ Jan Vilain, “De Situatie Creëert de Omstandigheden,” *Publieke ruimte* no. 10 (2014): 40-41, https://issuu.com/defietsvantroje/docs/tpr2014-02_leefstraten.

In accordance with the policy, there are several rules for leefstraten on the website of the city council: the street cannot be an important street, the street must still be accessible for cyclists and emergency services, parking should be available elsewhere, a leefstraat should take place in a vacation period, the majority of residents should vote for the leefstraat and the initiator of the street must be clear in their communication. Furthermore, it states that the initiator and the city both have certain responsibilities. The initiator of the street is responsible for the execution of their idea, for creating support in the street, developing and submitting a plan and change it based on objections. The city council is responsible for monitoring if the described rules are being met and assists with for example parking possibilities in the surrounding neighborhoods.²⁶ These rules can be considered as rules for play in which the city council and the initiator function as the players who participate in play. Play is contextual and is thus bound to the space which is constructed by rules. Rules determine when we play and how we play, rules facilitate and create the borders of play but are not static, they can also be transformed through play.²⁷

The rules as stated by the city council of Utrecht however, do not state anything about what could or is supposed to happen during and in the leefstraat. This gives space for residents to be creative and appropriate the space. Within the new space that is created the residents have the possibility to express themselves, be playful and to be playful towards the rules, the boundaries and the grass carpet, discussed in this research. Because rules create a space for play and play needs interaction between people, interaction is stimulated. The leefstraat is a space in which different rules are present from ordinary life. The rules on the website state that the leefstraat only takes place temporarily, for a couple of weeks. Temporality, according to Huizinga, is a characteristic for play, it has a beginning and end and is bounded by time.²⁸ Play is thus stimulated because of the temporality of the leefstraat and interacting becomes non-committal which makes it more appealing to engage. In the next part I will analyze and discuss how residents use and appropriate the space in order to understand how the rules create a space for play.

²⁶ "Initiatief en invloed leefstraten," Gemeente Utrecht, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/initiatief-en-invloed/participatie/leefstraten/>.

²⁷ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 6-9.

²⁸ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9-10.

Appropriation

In his theory about play Sicart states that play is autotelic, it is an activity with its own goals and purposes.²⁹ The original goal of a street is to transport citizens and vehicles and connect them to other parts of the city. In leefstraat Duifstraat only pedestrians and cyclists are able to pass through causing the original goal of the street to be rejected. The original physical boundaries of the street and the city are not forgotten when the residents playfully appropriate the space. However, there is a separated space created for play, in which the rules differ from ordinary life. Citizens play and playfully appropriate the space because the leefstraat Duifstraat respects the original goal of the street and is thus autotelic.

The residents of the street are responsible for making the leefstraat happen. Their cooperation and participation are needed in order to make the leefstraat take place. Because the residents have the freedom to design the street and are partly responsible for creating the space, they can alter the space in the process of being playful. The city council only facilitates the possibility of closing down the street and offers the grass carpet for usage.³⁰ In the process of making choices about the design the residents playfully appropriate the space of the street. Because they use the elements present in the street and the space itself to transform the street, it becomes a loose space which is being appropriated by residents.³¹ Appropriation over the street requires cooperation and interaction between residents. Because residents control the design of the leefstraat, they are stimulated to think and appropriate the street differently and approach playfully. The goal of leefstraten is to connect citizens, therefore citizens already participate in the leefstraat with the intention to connect with residents and to co-create a space together. Playful appropriation thus stimulates through co-creation community forming in the street.

This chapter has stated that in leefstraat Duifstraat, the rules, the boundaries and the grass carpet, create a context and separated space for play in the street and accommodate play. Through prescribed rules play is facilitated and interaction takes place. Residents come up with ideas to design their street and together they implement and maintain them in their street, thus playfully appropriating the street and at the same time interacting with each other.

²⁹ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 16.

³⁰ "Voorbereiding debat leefstraten," Gemeente Utrecht, last modified July 5, 2017, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ll093C-2NGEJ:https://api1.libabs.eu/publicdownload.aspx%3Fsite%3Dutrecht%26id%3D48893+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=nl>.

³¹ Stevens and Franck, *Loose Space*, 2-3.

Chapter II

BOUNDARIES

*How do the physical boundaries create a space for play and playfulness in leefstraat Duifstraat?*²

In this chapter first, the physical boundaries will be explained and then there will be discussed how through interaction, community forming takes place at the boundaries. Boundaries in the leefstraat are important because they make the physical space for play visible. Boundaries, beside limiting the space and possibilities, also raise different possibilities for play and connecting. The photos in chapter one show what the physical boundaries of the street were. The photos show that the haybales are placed next to, or on the edge of the grass carpet to form a boundary around the grass carpet. At both sides at the end of the grass carpet there is also an obstruction to prevent citizens from being able to drive into the street. The haybale, grass carpet and obstruction together form the physical boundaries and create a separated space. In chapter III, I will analyze specifically the grass carpet as part of the boundary.

The context for play is shaped by the physical form of the space, in the leefstraat the boundaries create a separated space.³² The boundaries are physically present, they visibly separate the space of the street from the normal street. Together with the rules the separation of the space from the rest of the streets is enhanced. The boundaries take over the context in which play takes place and breaks the state of affairs, the boundaries can be considered to be disruptive.³³ The disruption creates an opening for a different appropriation of the space.³⁴

Interaction

In this part I will discuss the interactions at the boundaries and how this stimulates community forming. The haybales at the edge of the grass carpet are not only boundaries to separate citizens on the street from cyclists, as can be seen on the picture, but they also function as benches. Citizens like to spend time on edges of public spaces, according to Stevens, it makes them feel safe and gives them the opportunity to watch others.³⁵ It is here at the threshold that residents tend to spend time, because it is the last or first place before entering the private space of their house where they can be expressive and free.³⁶ The haybales in leefstraat Duifstraat

³² Sicart, *Play Matters*, 6.

³³ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10-11.

³⁴ Miguel Sicart, "Play and the City," *Navigationen* 16, (2016): 29.

³⁵ Stevens, *Ludic City*, 115.

³⁶ Stevens and Franck, *Loose Space*, 81.

create the opportunity for residents to safely linger on the edges of the street and it is thus more likely for them to spend their time there. Gehl states that good quality areas for staying in front of the houses influences the amount of time spent outside.³⁷ The boundaries in the leefstraat create a possibility for residents to spend more time on the edge of the street to play.

Encounters and engagement with strangers or neighbours become more likely because of the boundaries. Stevens stated that physical boundaries structure social relations and invite for interaction with citizens. They give the possibility for interaction by offering the opportunity to spend time at the boundary.³⁸ The ability to sit, linger, meet or move the haybales in the street is a playful approach to the boundary. Through play and playful appropriation of the boundaries interactions are made because, as stated before, in order to play people need to interact, thus community forming is stimulated.

The resident's playful appropriation of the street was limited because the physical boundaries of the street were respected. The pictures of the leefstraat show that the shape of the street is still visible and that the physical boundaries of the street were respected and not altered or removed. Thus, the street does not invite residents to feel entirely disconnected from reality and the city, even in the separated play space of the leefstraat. This is in contrast with Huizinga's play theory which states that play takes place in a separated space from daily life. Thus, a space can be playful despite not entirely being separated.

Furthermore, another indication for the connection with daily life is continuation of a community. Leefstraat Duifstraat shows after it took place, residents still maintain the connections they made during the time the street was a leefstraat, thus it is possible for these connections to also exist after the leefstraat.³⁹ This signifies the playful appropriation of the boundaries. The residents do not let themselves be stopped by the physical boundaries of leefstraat Duifstraat in which play takes place, or the boundaries of the temporality of the leefstraat, but continue to play and connect with their neighbours. This confirms Huizinga's theory which states that play communities still remain after play.⁴⁰

The conclusion of this chapter is that boundaries create a visible separated space from the city and the street and create a context for play. Residents are invited to playfully appropriate the boundaries by the possibility of lingering at the physical boundaries. Because of

³⁷ Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*, 183-187.

³⁸ Stevens, *The Ludic City*, 114.

³⁹ "Kees Bos en Ineke Brunt over de Kersstraat als leefstraat," Gemeente Utrecht, accessed October 14, 2018, <https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/initiatief-en-invloed/participatie/initiatievenfonds/verhalen-van-initiatiefnemers/kees-bos-en-ineke-brunt-over-de-kersstraat-als-leefstraat/>.

⁴⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 12.

lingering at the boundaries, residents connect with each other and by doing so, they interact and start forming a community. Residents are part of the process of creating their own playful environment.

CHAPTER III PLAYGROUND

*How does the grass carpet transform the space of the street?*²

In the following chapter I will argue that the grass carpet transforms the space of the street and provides a playground that stimulates community forming. A grass carpet is a returning aspect in every leefstraten and is provided by the city council. During the design process as well as during leefstraat Duifstraat, the grass carpet of the street provided a space for residents to spend time, connect and play. The photos show that the grass carpet filled up the entire length of the street. A small path was cut out for cyclists to be able to cycle through. The residents placed furniture and objects on the grass carpet or right at the edge of the carpet. In the next part I will argue that the grass carpet can be considered to be a playground and stimulates community forming.

Playground

The leefstraat is similar to the of Sicart's understanding of a playground. Sicart uses the term playground to describe: "A play space is a location specifically created to accommodate play but does not impose any particular type of play, set of activities, purpose, or goal or rewards structure."¹¹ Before the leefstraat Duifstraat took place, play elements in the street were absent and there was no space for play. The leefstraat and specifically the placement of the grass carpet gives the opportunity for residents to place objects and implement rules in the street. According to Sicart: "playgrounds are interesting because they are spaces designed for appropriation."¹² Because during the leefstraat the rules, the boundaries and the grass carpet in the street can be appropriated through play, the space of the street is transformed into a playground.

On the playground not only the physical boundaries and rules of the street are playfully appropriated, as I have concluded in previous chapters, but the entire space of the street allows a playful attitude. When people playfully appropriate a space it happens in the already existing space and with objects that are already there. In leefstraat Duifstraat this is different because residents have the option to place their own objects on the street and transform the space. The transformation of the space into a playground occurs because of the presence of the grass

¹¹ Sicart, *Play Matters*, 51.

¹² Sicart, *Play Matters*, 55.

carpet. The grass carpet forms, together with the boundaries, a playground and thus a separated space for play.

Activities

In this next part I will analyze the activities that took place on the carpet and how these lead to community forming. The construction of a playground with a grass carpet and furniture increases the quality and possibility for activity on the street and creates the soft edges as described by Gehl.⁴³ The grass carpet establishes a safe space where children are able to sit, crawl or roll over the ground just like being on real grass. For example, the children are invited and able to play games on the street such as Twister.⁴⁴ The grass carpet allows the residents to use the street more extensively and therefore they playfully appropriate the space.⁴⁵ Residents did not fully playfully appropriate the street or the playground, since the rules of the street and city were respected; no parties were hosted, no campfires were made or unusual objects, such as a swimming pools were placed.⁴⁶ Thus, this respect for the rules shows that although play takes place in a separated space it is still connected to the daily city life contrary to Huizinga his theory.

In a loose space, an appropriated space, Stevens states that people come together and are likely to act and interact.⁴⁷ The grass carpet creates this space for connecting and playing as can be derived from the activities that took place. The activities are a form of play that were organized on the grass carpet. These were, for example, musical performances, reading to children, board games, outdoor dinners and movie nights, that all took place on the grass carpet.⁴⁸ According to Sicart, when citizens play in the city, they express themselves by creating new things.⁴⁹ The leefstraat residents appropriate the space and feel free enough to express themselves, which manifest itself in the activities in the leefstraat. Play in the form of activities creates and stimulates community forming in the street, because through the forming of a community it becomes possible to organize activities, the existence of these activities confirms the presence of a community. Residents take play a step further by also allowing it to take place outside of the playground. Occasionally, an activity such as wine tasting was organized in one of

⁴³ Jan Gehl, "Soft edges," in *Life Between Buildings*, (Washington: Island Press, 2011), 183-197.

⁴⁴ "Duijstraat leefstraat," Facebook, last modified August 18, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/duijstraatleefstraat/posts/1748751568712728:0>.

⁴⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 162.

⁴⁶ Stevens, *The Ludic City*, 47.

⁴⁷ Stevens and Franck, *Loose Space*, 12-15.

⁴⁸ "Duijstraat leefstraat," Facebook, last modified August 2, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/duijstraatleefstraat/posts/1742045186050033:0>.

⁴⁹ Sicart, "Play and the City," 28.

the resident's houses.⁵⁰ Although there is an established playground on which residents can play, the wine tasting activity shows that residents playfully appropriate the space by refusing to let the boundaries of the playground limit them and they continue to connect even outside the playground.

The playground provides opportunity for citizens to spend more time outside. The more time citizens spend outside and linger, the more likely they are to talk to acquaintances or strangers and thus the more likely they are to connect with others.⁵¹ The use of the carpet as playground invites for activities and creates interaction that lead to community forming. The activities on the grass carpet took place in residents their daily used space, the leefstraat thus connects the playground and daily life. Play in leefstraat Duifstraat is thus not separated from daily life as argued by Huizinga but overlaps with daily life and therefore confirms Sicart his theory of play.

⁵⁰“Duifstraat leefstraat,” Facebook, last modified August 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1746148318973053&type=3>.

⁵¹ Sicart, “Play and the City,” 168.

CONCLUSION

After the conducted analysis it is now possible to formulate an answer to the research question: how does leefstraat Duifstraat by play and playful appropriation reflects on interaction in the street? I have analyzed the rules, the physical boundaries and the artificial grass carpet. The first chapter has shown that the prescribed rules in leefstraat Duifstraat facilitate and create a space for play. Through designing and implementing their ideas in the street together, the residents playfully appropriate the street and interact with each other. The second chapter has shown that boundaries create a physical separate space from the city and a context for play. Residents playfully appropriate the boundaries by lingering at the physical boundaries which leads to interaction among residents and thus stimulates community forming. The third chapter has shown that the grass carpet establishes and creates possibilities for the placement of street furniture and the organization of activities and in this way creates a separated space for play in which the ordinary rules of the street are respected. The grass carpet thus creates a playground on the street. Through play it becomes easier for residents to connect with each other. The playground allows for activities which confirms as well as forms a community, even outside the playground. The rules, boundaries and grass carpet thus facilitate a space for play, playful appropriation. This research has shown that through the use of play, interactions and communities can be stimulated to form in the street. Through the use of play theory, it becomes clear how community forming can be stimulated. This research also has shown that utilizing play as a tool can make the process of connecting and community forming easier.

Huizinga stated that play takes place outside of everyday life. However, this research has shown that although leefstraat Duifstraat is separated by boundaries and rules from the everyday life, residents play and playfully appropriation of the street shows how they still were connected to everyday life. Although leefstraat Duifstraat is a physical separated space, this research has shown that it is not disconnected from the everyday life. Therefore, Huizinga his theory is not confirmable in this case study but instead leefstraat Duifstraat confirms Sicart his theory, in which he states that play is part of everyday life and people are able to playfully appropriate any space.

Leefstraat Duifstraat suggests that it is better if the initiative and control results from the residents and that control from the city council could interrupt the process of community

forming. The leefstraat creates a place to stimulate daily interactions on the street and make the street more part of our lives. By making the street a place for interaction it stimulates the growth of connection between the residents of the street. Thus, if the city councils want to stimulate community forming in their city, it can be recommended to implement playful experiments or spaces for play in their city. A long-term design which is already implemented in Dutch cities to stimulate play and interaction are woonerven. Further research can be done on how other designs compare to leefstraten and how they show a redefinition of space in the street in relation to new media technologies and (online) communities in nowadays society.

In this research there is not enough space to elaborate on other leefstraten, thus only a statement about leefstraat Duifstraat can be made. During the time of the leefstraat I did not make any observations or conducted any interviews on how residents play in the street because the focus of this research is not sociological. Other elements that were playfully appropriated have not been considered but could be present. Although Huizinga has stated play communities form and still exist after play, it cannot be known yet if these communities will still be in contact in five years. Another aspect which has been left out due to the scope of this research is the interaction and community forming on the Facebook page of leefstraat Duifstraat. Further research could shed more light on interaction and community forming in relation to play and online spaces versus public offline spaces. More research can also be done on other leefstraten in order to make a statement about leefstraten in general.

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