



**Universiteit Utrecht**

# **How does (Partially) Privatized Public Space affect Local Residents?**

**Westerpark Case-Study**

Master's Thesis  
Marit Redeker (5732751)  
Human Geography  
Utrecht University  
Supervisor: Irina van Aalst  
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## Abstract

*For years now, scholars have been critical about the increasing influence of private organizations in public space. This study examines how the privatization processes affect residents in the Westerpark area and how the residents react to these processes. Using qualitative methods such as interviews and visual methods, the perceptions of the local residents have been outlined. Residents find the Westerpark a pleasant park and they indicated that the park has become busier throughout the years. Additionally, the range of activities in the park has changed: there are more events and the programming of the Cultuurpark area in the Westerpark has shifted from culture to more bars and restaurants. Partial privatization in the Westerpark does not cause dissatisfaction among local residents. Nevertheless, there is some tension between citizens, the municipality, and Westergas about how the activities are carried out and how the Cultuurpark is organized. Residents desire more publicly accessible events, increased variety in park programming and park extension regarding the construction of the new Haven-Stad.*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Intro

More than half of the world population lives in urban areas. Hampton et al. (2014) stress that an increasing amount of people in urban areas tend to spend their time together in public spaces: centrally located parks and squares are hotspots for the urbanite. This means that for Amsterdam, a relatively small global city, the pressure on space increases (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019). More intensive use of the (limited) public spaces in the city can be noticed. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic that is holding the world in its grip, the importance of public space is emphasized even more. Therefore, the design and quality of public space must meet the needs of the residents of the city. Traditionally, municipalities and other state-organizations are in control of managing and providing public space (Langstraat & van Melik, 2013). However, as Kohn (2004) puts it, *'the private and public realms are becoming increasingly intertwined'*. Currently, an increasing number of public spaces is (partially) managed by privatized parties. The involvement of private actors in public space has taken place in the Netherlands for some time now. Leclercq (2018) argues that there is a lively debate going on about the management of urban public areas and the related privatization: the processes concerning the management could create tensions in the maintenance and daily use of certain public spaces in (Dutch) cities.

The debate around privatization in scientific literature mainly focuses on the increased demand for commercial facilities in public space and the different forms in which this happens. The growth of urban population and their urge to find outstanding experiences (Bauman, 1995), facilitate the increasing commodification of public space (Carmona, 2010). From an economic standpoint, private companies may benefit from the management and preservation of public space in commercially accessible areas. This benefit can be used to boost public space and enhance the experience of urban residents. On the other hand, there is a taboo on privatization of public space in the Netherlands (Melik, 2013). Many scholars (e.g. Kohn, 2004; Carmona, 2010; Collins & Stadler, 2020) mention that inclusive accessibility of public space is important because these areas are the breeding grounds of political and social change: protesting and demonstrating are actions that cannot take place anywhere else than in public space. Kohn (2004) states that privatization can lead to a reduced publicness of the area and therefore reinforces exclusion of particular groups or individuals. The author stresses that by privatizing the public space, people's actions and understandings of the area will be more structured and therefore influenced. Carmona (2010) argues that the role of 'consumption' in public space has become more and more important in the regeneration of public space. Therefore, people who are unable to consume, will be excluded from the space. However, from an user's point of view, the situation is more nuanced. Leclercq (2018) stresses that public spaces that

are dominated by private organizations, still can feel highly public and public management can feel oppressive and exclusionary.

This thesis attempts to show how processes of privatization in public space affect local residents and how local residents react to these processes. In order to do this, the thesis will focus on a specific public space: the Westerpark in Amsterdam. The Westerpark is a public space in which a private organization has influence. According to the organization that owns the buildings on the terrain, Westergas, a collaboration between the municipality of Amsterdam and the latter private organization takes place. An expression of this collaboration is, for example, the many events that are organized in the Westerpark (temporary privatization). Privatization processes in public spaces do not necessarily have negative consequences for the visitors of the park or residents close to the park. However, in the Westerpark case, a group of local residents organized themselves to guarantee the preservation of the Westerpark. It is therefore interesting to research how privatization processes in the park affect the residents of the Westerpark area. The following research question has been formulated:

*“How does (partial) privatization of the Westerpark affect the local residents and how do the local residents react to this process?”*

In order to answer this research question, the following four sub questions will be examined:

1. *“How has the Westerpark, in terms of privatization, changed over time?”*
2. *“Which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark?”*
3. *“How do local residents experience using the Westerpark and in what way are they affected by privatization processes in the park?”*
4. *“How do the local residents react to the influence of privatization in the Westerpark?”*

By means of empirical research and by analyzing municipal documents, an attempt is made to find answers to the above questions. The empirical research that was conducted, consists of in-depth interviews with residents of the Westerpark area. Furthermore, photographs have been taken of places in the park that are considered as important by the local residents to create a better understanding of the park. More detailed information about the methodology and the sub questions will be provided in chapter 3 (Methodology).

## **1.2 Relevance**

The relevance of this thesis must be determined in order to be useful research to society and science. In this section, the social and scientific relevance of this study will be explained.

### **1.2.1 Social relevance**

Partly due to extensive urbanization, mass-tourism and now COVID-19, pressure on public space is increasing. This development in combination with the increased focus of municipalities on the inclusivity and sustainability of the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019), makes management of public space a relevant research topic. Users of the park determine the atmosphere and liveliness of the park. With the increasing influence of private parties in the development and use of public space (Carmona, 2010), it is useful to study how (partially) privatized public space affects its users and local residents. The perspective of the daily user or local resident on the privatization processes in public spaces is not extensively present in the literature. This research ensures a deeper understanding of the current processes in the public space and the perspectives of local residents on that topic.

In this thesis, the Westerpark is a relevant case-study because processes of privatization (temporal and partial privatization) are noticeable in this area and local residents are (publicly) reacting to that. The park hosts the most events of all parks in Amsterdam: as for 2018, 123 event days are allowed in the Westerpark each year. Local residents have formed an organization in order to reduce the number of event days and guarantee the preservation of the park. Besides this, a new neighborhood, the Haven-Stad, is being built on the north side of the park (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020; Vrienden Westerpark, 2021). The new residents of the Haven-Stad (will) use the Westerpark for their activities because this is the closest park to their neighborhood (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020). This development puts further strain on the park.

### **1.2.2 Scientific relevance**

It is important to indicate why the existing knowledge should be expanded through this research. Although much has been written about the over- and undermanagement of public space (De Magalhães & Freire Trigo, 2017; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Kohn, 2004; Carmona, 2010), the user's (or local resident's) perspective remains underexposed. To the author's knowledge, little studies about the perceptions of local residents on privatization processes in public space has been performed. Leclercq (2018) showed in her study on privatization of public spaces in Liverpool that the public spaces that are dominated by private organizations, can still feel very public to its users. Further research on user perspectives on public spaces focuses on the aesthetic of the public space (Lofland, 1999; Carmona, 2020), on the interaction that takes place in the park (Lofland, 1999; Leclercq, 2018; Van Aalst & Brands, 2020) or on the control of the public space (Brands et al., 2013; Jameson, 2017). Moreover, literature on user and local resident perspectives on temporary privatization can be found. Public spaces turn into commodities when certain events are held in these areas (Schmidt & Nemeth, 2010). Users who are not interested in these events, but still want to use the area, are excluded from the public space. Furthermore, local residents could be affected by the noise and waste of events (Smith, 2016; Smith, 2017; Smith, 2018).

Because of the lack of literature on user perspectives on privatization processes in public spaces, it is important to obtain more information on this subject. This research aims to address the feelings of local residents towards the processes of privatization occurring in the Westerpark. The scientific relevance of this research lies in the fact that the research tries to fill a gap in the literature. Eventually, with the results of this thesis, recommendations for a balanced public space can be made.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 encloses a literature review of the existing literature on this subject. After that, in chapter 3, the methodology of the research is explained and the research questions are discussed in more detail. Chapter 4 contains a context description: in this chapter is displayed how the Westerpark has changed over time and which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark. In chapter 5 the results of the empirical research are presented, followed by the conclusion and reflection (chapter 6 and 7).

## Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

A foundation of theory linked to management of public space and more concrete, privatization of public space, must be established to understand the underlying processes concerning the use of public space. In this section, an introduction on the regeneration of public space, followed by a description of a more specific public space, the urban park, will be provided. Thereafter, privatization and the different forms in which privatization occurs and the theoretical debate around this process, will be explained. Lastly, user perspectives on public space will be explained.

### **2.1. Introduction Public Space**

Archetypal public spaces are squares, urban parks and streets and nowadays there is a new interest in these spaces. In order to maintain a healthy and social city, a good public space is important. Public space is essential for '*sustaining the public realm*' (Mehta, 2014). The public realm changes continuously and it is therefore important that in order to be a good space, the public space also changes. The needs of modern society ask for the emergence of new public spaces. Mehta (2014) states that former public spaces, such as squares and plazas, are being adapted to the modern city needs. Collins & Stadler (2020) stress that public spaces ensure a livable and vivid city and this contributes to the well-being of the inhabitants.

Sendi & Marusic (2012) claim that public spaces are *multipurpose* spaces in which the process between people (public) and place (space) occurs. Many scholars agree that public space plays an important role in maintaining a democratic and social city (Kohn, 2004; Mehta, 2014; Collins & Stadler, 2020). However, one central definition of public space does not exist: public space is an abstract concept and the definition of it changes over time and differs per scholar. Carr et al. (1992)



creates a basic, straight definition of the public space: “*public spaces are publicly accessible places where people go for group or individual activities*”. Also, Madanipour (1996) mentions a somewhat unambiguous definition of the concept: a public space is a “... *space that is not controlled by private individuals or organizations and hence is open to the general public*”. Gregory et al. (2009) argue that a public space must be juxtaposed with private space in order to define the public space. More recent definitions cover different scales and levels of understanding of the public space. Mehta (2014) argues that a good public space is always ‘*responsive, democratic and meaningful*’. When the public space is meaningful, the area facilitates social encounters and offers an alternative for private life at home. Mehta (2014) uses Arendt’s (1958) explanation in order to emphasize the importance of a democratic public space: public space enables social encounters and this way, people can exchange ideas. People emerge from their bubble and contradictory (political) sounds can be heard in a democratic public space. “*The public space mediates between society and state*” (Gregory, 2009). Collins & Stadler (2020) also emphasize the importance of debate and conversation in the public space. They state that political discussion is fundamental for the public realm. This goes hand in hand with the fact that according to Mehta (2014), a good public space is responsive: in a vibrant environment, encounters are facilitated and new ideas arise. Furthermore, public spaces often are defined with the concepts *control, use* and *access*. Nemeth (2012) argues that a public space is a ‘*public forum*’ and that the space is accessible, provides the opportunity for consultation without the introduction of institutions and enables participation for every citizen. Sendi & Marusic (2012) define a public space also with the terms *access* and *use*. The authors argue that people need to have unrestricted access to public space. In addition, Sendi & Marusic (2012) stress that public space should be an area for individuals and groups. The activities occurring in the public space can be functional or symbolic and when people have access to the public space, they can have access to these activities (Sendi & Marusic, 2012).

Scholars agree that a public space needs to be an inclusive space for the inhabitants of the city. Nevertheless, a space can never be totally accessible for everyone. Particular groups tend to exclude other groups from using the space the way they want to or in order to avoid conflict, segregation takes place in a more ‘natural’ way. Mehta (2014) states that “*Although public space is referred to as a space of participation and amicable social behaviours, it is also a contested territory between various groups, between private and public, and between regulating authorities and the citizenry*”. On top of that, the accessibility of public space to certain people or groups can be limited by the way the space is maintained. Complete, universal access to a public space never occurs (Collins & Stadler, 2020; Mehta, 2014). There will be an elaboration on the publicness of public space later on in this theoretical framework.

In conclusion, public space is not an unambiguous concept and scholars use different definitions to explain it. In this thesis, the definition of Mehta (2014), as shown above, is used in order to describe

the concept. More detailed information about this definition will be provided in chapter 3.4 (Operationalization).

### **2.1.1 Urban Parks**

One of the most common public spaces is the urban park. Konijnendijk et al. (2013) define urban parks as “*delineated open space areas, mostly dominated by vegetation and water, and generally reserved for public use*”. The park is preferably open to every urban resident and can be public or privately managed. The park may include sport clubs, museums, restaurants and so on: it is not just necessarily a green area. According to Sendi & Marusic (2012) urban parks “... *contribute to the aesthetic quality and to greater satisfaction of the inhabitants with their residential environment, which is important also as a restorative environment, addressing health issues and well-being*”.

Many scholars highlight the health benefits of urban parks (Schnell et al., 2019; Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2017; Sendi & Marusic, 2012). To promote healthy choices among urban residents, institutions not only need to focus on individual traits, but also need to take the urban environment into account (Van den Berg et al., 2015). Green spaces reduce the risk of various heart diseases and improve mental health. Van den Berg et al. (2015) systematically reviewed the literature researching the connection between green spaces in the city and health. The authors took physical health and mental health into account. They found adequate evidence for a positive relation between green spaces and these health indicators, resulting in a higher life expectancy. According to Nieuwenhuijzen et al. (2017) the improvement of health happens through mediating factors, for example reduced air pollution, increased physical activity and social interaction because of the existence of green spaces. Schnell et al. (2019) emphasize the impact of green space on the well-being of urban citizens because of the social consequences it engages.

From section 2.1, it has become clear that public spaces are places where social interaction occurs. Urban parks facilitate all different kinds of leisure activities. Leisure activities in urban parks ensure an enhancement of social cohesion: people are doing activities together and the activities are giving them the opportunity to connect. Konijnendijk et al. (2013) state that there is more opportunity to improve social cohesion in urban parks than in other areas in the city. People are meeting other people and have the option to connect. Furthermore, scholars suggest the relation between green urban space and the improvement of social relationships between urban residents and integration in society (Schnell et al., 2019; van den Berg, 2015; Cetin, 2015). Because of the social interaction in parks, urban residents form an identity and people feel safe and relaxed in those areas. Inclusion into particular communities or even into wider society occurs (Schnell et al., 2019; Nieuwenhuijzen et al., 2017). Van Aalst and Brands (2021) explored in their study ‘*Young people: being apart, together in an urban park*’ the role of the Wilhelminapark in Utrecht in the interaction of teenagers and young adults. The authors stress that teenagers and young adults are frequently found in urban parks because they do not have their own private spaces. The study suggests that the presence of other people in the

park is one of the most compelling reasons to visit the public space: the park is a comfortable place and you can see and be seen by others (Van Aalst & Brands, 2021). However, people still like to connect or relax within their own group, there is not much interaction with people from other groups or other individuals in the park.

Besides the positive effects on urban residents, parks also contribute to the biodiversity of the city. Carrus et al. (2015) and Konijnendijk et al. (2013) stress that parks are the place of significant activity for species in cities. They argue that urban parks and therefore the biodiversity of the city need to be protected to be a positive feature for both nature and people.

The urban park is one of the most common public spaces and provides all kinds of benefits for the urban resident. In this thesis, a park in Amsterdam was chosen as a case-study in order to research how privatization processes affect local residents. In the following paragraphs, privatization and the theoretical debate around this process, will be described.

## **2.2. Privatization**

In the 1990's, a new economic and political paradigm emerged: neoliberalism. This paradigm emphasizes individual freedom and therefore, governments stimulate competition and try to not interfere in market processes. The regeneration of urban areas from the 1990's to this day is driven by this neoliberalism paradigm (Leclercq, 2018). Leclercq (2018) states that this paradigm shift has led to changes in the processes of urban development. A public space is meant as a space for every inhabitant of the city and formerly, the (city) government ensured that the space is maintained and that inclusivity is actually guaranteed. Nowadays, processes of privatization can be seen more and more. Privatization in the most general sense, is the process where property and services transition from the government to private companies. Public property, like a public space or a state-owned company, is brought into private hands. Private organizations increase their influence in public space (Gregory et al., 2009). Margareth Kohn (2004) states in her book *Brave New Neighborhoods* that privatization most of the time occurs in an indirect way: it is part of the bigger economic system or reflects the change in the kind of demand that comes from people. Public spaces that are privately owned, are open to the public but are allowed to reject certain people at certain moments. Local or public involvement will not necessarily be taken into account in these processes and the owners of private space are not accountable for the degree of publicness of the area (Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011).

There are several reasons why men can choose to privatize a state-owned area. Due to decentralisation of the Dutch government and therefore the increasing cutbacks, municipalities are less able to take care of the construction and management of the public space. Leclercq (2018) stresses that public budgets declined and that tasks that previously belonged to governmental institutions, now have been assigned to private organizations. This way, it is easier to provide a better functioning public space and to compete with other cities all over the world (Leclercq, 2018). Van

Melik (2013) states that another reason for increasing privatization is that private organizations are not only interested in their property, but also in the space around it. They think they can increase the value of their property by redesigning the close environment. The municipality on the other hand, is interested in private organizations to stimulate the redevelopment of space (van Melik, 2013).

Private organizations can facilitate the reorganizing and redesigning of public areas (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Besides the motive of profit, there is an urge to control public space. People can feel exposed and unsafe when they are out in the public (Boddy, 1992). Especially in large cities, a fear of crime arises. This trend points to an increasing pattern of regulation of unsuitable behaviour in public spaces (Gomes, 2020). Bodnar (2015) is even claiming that the end of public space is near. In literature, a distinction is made between two forms of control: soft and hard control. Soft control implies the more symbolic measures taken by the government or organization in order to keep people's behavior in check. One can ensure that people's possibilities are being limited or one can direct people to exhibit certain behaviour. Hard controls are more active measures such as CCTV systems and forms of private security (Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998). Extensive control of public space can be especially seen in The United States and The United Kingdom and therefore these are the countries with the most research on the impact on control on public space. However, in the Netherlands, the control on public space also occurs. Brands, Schwanen & Van Aalst (2013) studied the role of video surveillance as an instrument to watch over the safety of city residents. Mainly in nightlife areas, CCTV can be found. Brands et al. (2013) researched how people in two nightlife districts in Utrecht and Rotterdam perceive CCTV and if they understand how CCTV works. They found that people who are more aware of the CCTV presence, perceive more safety during the night-time economy (Brands et al., 2013). Also, Jameson et al. (2017) researched in their paper *'People's strategies for perceived surveillance in Amsterdam Smart City'* how people perceive surveillance in the city of Amsterdam. They stress that people are skeptical about how surveillance is being produced and integrated. Partly, this is because it is not clear what happens to the data and what exactly the benefits are of the surveillance in a smart city such as Amsterdam.

In short, processes of privatization in public spaces are seen more and more. The responsibilities that previously belonged to governmental institutions, are now assigned to private businesses. Private organizations can (help) facilitate the redesigning of public space. Profit and control are motivations for private organizations to interfere in the management of public space. In the next paragraph, the various ways in which privatization can occur, will be described.

### **2.2.1 Continuum Privatization**

Privatization of public space can take various forms. It is not something that can be viewed in a binary way: a space is not necessarily public or private. Most of the time, the privatization processes occur gradually: commercial organizations slowly take over more and more public space (Kohn, 2004). For

example, private parties call public roads a *private road* (*eigen weg*) or security guards are hired to control (parts of) the public space. Places can be totally private (POPS), totally public, semi-private or semi-public (PPS). In this section, an explanation of different forms of privatization of public space is explained.

To comprehend the growing number of redeveloped public spaces, it is important to examine societal changes. Carmona (2012) talks about the ‘traditional’ public space. Traditional public space is a space where economic phenomena are not (yet) part of a public space. Public space in a traditional way, is a space for leisure and recreation and not for consumption. The traditional public space is managed by governmental institutions. On the other hand, in a non-traditional space, the focus is put on making money and enforcing safety (Carmona, 2012). Langstraat & Van Melik (2013) stress that in the Netherlands, governmental institutions always maintained the public space in urban areas. However, because of the declining capital of the state and decentralisation, properly maintaining the public space the way the state wants to, is not possible. On top of that, public spaces are changing into attractions, and the state needs to anticipate that. Giving the maintenance and control out of hands to private parties contributes to the urban residents' demand for attractive public spaces (Langstraat & Van Melik, 2013).

In the United States, in 1961, a term emerged to define a public space which is completely managed by the private sector. ‘Privately owned public space’, also known as POPS, is a space which is accessible to the public (for use and leisure) and which is completely managed by a private organization. In the United States, the private organization who is assigned to manage the public space, gets exemptions or extra areas in return. This is part of incentive zoning policies, which were imposed in the last century in order to upgrade public spaces in urban areas. The website of the city of New York states that only in that city, over 590 POPS have been created (NYC, 2020). In the Netherlands, we do not see these public spaces (yet) (Van Meelik, Van Aalst & Van Weesep, 2009). Since the Dutch national government has long retained a solid, top-down position in urban growth, it is not likely that POPS will be integrated in the Dutch urban redevelopment the same way as the United States.

Different terms are used to define and explain the form a public space can take. A semi-public space lies between public and private space in terms of definition. Different attributions from the public and private realm, are coming together in a semi-public space. A semi-private space is an area owned by an individual or organization and allows the public to access the space. These spaces are also known as public-private partnerships (PPPs), a collaborative project involving both private and public parties (Gregory et al., 2009). In semi-public and semi-private space, certain ‘rules’ may be of application such as a ban on skateboarding or a specific dress code. These rules can encourage people to feel more responsible for the space they are in. Donnelly (2010) argues that *‘Residents will come to see these areas as their own spaces, be more concerned for them, and exert more control over the activities occurring in them’*. This way, people with different intentions than the dominating ones, are

discouraged to be in this particular space. So, semi private and semi public spaces are accessible to the public, albeit more limited than totally public spaces (such as universities or airports) (Gregory et al., 2009). The difference between semi-public and semi-private places can be compared to the glass half full - half empty situation. Both spaces enable the public to visit the spaces, but certain groups are (on purpose or not) excluded from the area: a semi-private space is not totally private and a semi-public space is not totally public. Gregory et al. (2009) argue that sometimes, there is a 'third party'. To this party belong local (voluntary) organizations, NGO's and the social economy. This third party must be taken into account when looking at the involvement and management in privatization processes. Van Melik (2013) also stresses that other parties such as citizens, organizations and companies are involved in the production of space. *Coproduction* can take place: the responsibility of the management of public space will be shared between different parties. Control will not completely be transferred to the market. This means that governmental institutions found other sources of income or other managers who are appointed to guarantee the preservation and quality of the space. In this case, the area is not necessary in the hands of the private organization. Coproduction can also take different forms: private parties can be at the head of redesign, they can bring in ideas about the development of space or they finance public space through land development while public institutions officially manage the space (van Melik, 2013).

### **2.2.2 Temporary Use of Public Space: Events**

Citizens value urban parks as valuable green areas, and their role as public goods has protected them from some of the neoliberal policies that have impacted other government services. However, this is changing (Smith, 2018). According to Smith (2017), urban parks are incorporated in the urban economy that is now focused on offering unique experiences. Governments no longer have public space solely for the purpose of social interaction and recreation; it is now about the policies and techniques used by those who control it. Cities and other involved parties are now maintaining public spaces on ever-shorter time scales in order to manage the varying demands of the urban residents (Crowther, 2016). This contains the temporary use of public space: cities are hosting more events than ever and a well-known development within this trend is that more and more of these activities are being held in public spaces. There have always been events in parks and squares, however, events are staged in popular urban spaces rather than conventional venues and now welcome different types of activities, including events where people need to pay for. Event organizers are seeking for the perfect location to give the visitors the one unique experience (Smith, 2016). This way, events are welcoming a crowd to the public space that might not normally visit the space (Smith, 2017).

Although parks are essentially public, private companies are increasingly producing them as commodities. Urban parks make money from the events that are organized in it: parks often get a certain percentage of the profit made by the event organizers. This has consequences for the accessibility of the parks (Smith, 2018). While a temporary approach to public space may expand the

possibilities of its usage, it is uncommon to include this in the design or planning of public space. The effects of the temporary use of space are therefore not calculated (Smith, 2016). More scholars address downsides of temporary use of public space. Smith (2017) argues that big events produce waste and noise disturbance. On top of that, Schmidt & Nemeth (2010) state that these public spaces temporarily turn into places where only consumers, the people with money, are welcome. Public spaces become places for '*exclusion and appropriation*' (Smith, 2018): general use of the park is interrupted and the accessibility of the park is challenged. The idea of a public park is undermined by restricting entry to ticket holders.

Within the academic literature on privatization of public space, different forms of privatization and critiques on privatization are discussed. Chapter 2.2 showed that processes of privatization are not straightforward: there are many ways in which privatization takes place. The latter paragraph identified another form of privatization that applies to the Westerpark case that is described later in this thesis. To examine the privatization debate in more detail, it is helpful to describe the concept of publicness. This will be done in the next paragraph.

### **2.3. Publicness**

Latham & Layton (2019) stress that publicness is not necessarily the opposite of 'private'. However, many scholars relate increasing privatization to the diminishing of the publicness of public space (De Magalhães & Freire Trigo, 2017; Carmona, 2012; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Qian, 2018). Scholars from different disciplines, such as sociologists and geographers but also architects and urban planners emphasize the decline of publicness in public space (Sorkin, 1992; Carmona, 2012; De Magalhães & Freire Trigo, 2017; Leclercq, 2018). According to the aforementioned authors, the increasing commodification and commercialisation, accompanied by privatization, reinforces the exclusion of different individuals or groups.

Carmona (2012) mentions that management of public space has been "*criticized for allowing the overmanagement of some types of space in ways that undermine their essential 'publicness'*" (p.144). The author stresses that overmanagement includes privatization: private parties get involved in the management of public space and this has an effect on political discussion and social exclusion in the space. People tend to feel less free, or are less free to express political opinions when a public space is privatized (Carmona, 2012). Private organizations can determine how the space they manage should be used and they can make certain rules apply. Furthermore, the increasing commodification of place that often accompanies privatization, can cause one to be excluded because of financial reasons. Financial exclusion occurs in low socioeconomic groups. When people need to pay to enter a space that is usually public, less prosperous people do not have the opportunity to use the (public) space. Besides this, the focus on security and safety in public space also contributes to the decline of publicness in the space (Carmona, 2012; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012). These ramifications of

privatization all have to do with increasing control over space (Leclercq, 2018). Carmona (2012) calls this 'scary space': the focus on safety and security impacts the liberty with which the space is used. When a space is controlled by hard security measures such as CCTV or security guards, people can be excluded because they do not fit into the picture of the behavior intended by private organizations for the specific public space.

Exclusion of certain individuals or groups contributes to the decline of publicness of a public space according to the above literature. However, not all scholars propose that the involvement of private organizations disadvantages the publicness of a space. Leclercq et al. (2020) studied the degree of publicness of spaces in three cases in the United Kingdom that are co produced and discovered that urban spaces that involve both public and private organizations are experienced as more public than fully public or fully private spaces.

Designing how public or how private a space is, is more complicated than just testing if the space meets the concepts with which scholars describe the publicness of the space. Therefore, publicness should be approached as a multifaceted term with various and often conflicting meanings (Kohn, 2004, Van Melik, 2008; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Qian, 2018). The term *publicness* needs to be conceptualized to debate the processes of privatization in a public space. This will be done in the operationalization in chapter 3 (Methodology). Based on the literature on privatization of public space, this thesis looks at the degree of publicness in order to research the privatization processes in the park. Using this concept, the accessibility of public space can be described. The operationalization of publicness is used to carry out the empirical research.

#### **2.4. User Perspectives on Public Space**

The perspective from the user or local residents on public spaces and their privatization processes is not extensively present in the literature. However, literature is written on the general experiences of users in public space and on the perspectives of local residents on temporal privatization. In this section, an overview of the literature is displayed.

Tani (2015) mentions 'loose' and 'tight' spaces in her study on *geographies of hanging out* in Helsinki. When a space is used for purposes which the space was not intended for and these uses are tolerated, the space can be considered a loose space. When the activities people do in a public space are regulated, or it is implied how to behave in the area, the space is considered a tight space. Loose and tight spaces are not absolute concepts: "*tightness and looseness are understood as attributes of a continuum between strictly regulated and free spaces*" (p.128). Franck & Stevens (2007) stress that users of a public space can make a space more loose or tight. For example, when people hang out in a café without buying a cup of coffee or when people sit on a square but do not use the designed seating areas, they loosen the space. When people use urban public spaces, it's likely that they do so because they enjoy being there: people associate public spaces with joyful feelings (Lofland, 1999). Lofland



(1999) states that people experience two sorts of pleasures in public space: aesthetic pleasure and interactional pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure refers to the appeal of the space. The design of a public space has a certain effect on visitors of the place. Interactional pleasure refers to the contact users of the public space can have with others in their direct environment (Lofland, 1999). More scholars emphasize the importance of the presence of other urban residents in public spaces. People are drawn to public spaces because other people are enjoying themselves there (Jacobs, 1961; Whyte 1980). Whyte (1980) concludes that individuals and groups favor vivacious and social public spaces. The availability of food and drinks, in the form of bars, restaurants and stalls in public spaces, ensures more interaction and use of the area. This diversity of activities contributes to more social contact with others (Leclercq, 2018). Hajer & Reijndorp (2001) add that everyday meetings and 'small talk' between strangers are important aspects of public life. Other beliefs and ways of living compete with one's own perception of reality as a result of the experience with others (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001).

The degree of publicness depends on the quality and accessibility of the space and on the freedom of users to use and replicate the space within contemporary norms (Leclercq, 2018). Carmona (2019) adds to this that public spaces that are well managed (e.g. a clean space) are experienced as safer than an unclean space. The author published a study on the principles of public design and the experiences of the users and found that users of public spaces enjoy open, active spaces over deserted ones. In terms of user perspectives on temporary use of public space, Smith (2017) stresses that the diversity of the users varies more when events are held in public space. The author states that people prefer a mix of people in public spaces: regardless of whether people are actually mixing with others.

Leclercq (2018) specifically focused on the user perspectives on privatization of public spaces. She stresses that public spaces that are dominated by private organizations, still can feel highly public and public management can feel oppressive and exclusionary. The author of *Privatization of the Production of Public Space* (2018) studied three cases in Liverpool: Liverpool One, an inner city development project; Ropewalks, a private-public collaboration for a mixed-use neighborhood and Granby4streets, a neighborhood renewal with private-local influence. The respondents were asked how they perceive different aspects of private space in the public area. This way, the scholar got several perceptions on the publicness of the public space in Liverpool. She concluded that, from an user perspective, privatized processes do not necessarily ensure the feeling of exclusion among the users of the public space. Liverpool One was not completely public (in a social and political manner), however, the users still felt that the space was accessible and recognized the social value of the space. Leclercq (2018) does add a critical note: *'...although a privatised space can be aesthetically beautiful and socially pleasant, a degree of publicness is compromised in privatised space because users are restricted in the ways they can appropriate space.'*

Concluding, both passive perception, active interaction and the influence of users on the

public space are considered as essential elements of the spatial experience. Users appropriate and renegotiate space by engaging in activities within it, and thereby replicate and alter the space.

Based on this theoretical framework, I expect privatization processes to affect local residents in this study. The publicness of the public space may be at issue in the Westerpark case. Many scholars relate the increasing privatization of public space to the reduction of the publicness of the space (De Magalhães & Freire Trigo, 2017; Carmona, 2012; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Qian, 2018). Users of the public space do not have to be aware of this, or be bothered by it. The study of Leclercq (2018) indicates that users are not necessarily excluded from a (partially) privatized space, however, users can be restricted in the ways they appropriate space.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Problem Statement

From the published literature it can be said that privatized public space can have multiple consequences. Concluded from the theoretical framework, the involvement of the private sector is not necessarily a bad thing: for example, the redevelopment of a space can get a boost because of the economic profit the involvement of the private sector entails (van Melik, 2013). Nevertheless, private organizations do not necessarily own a space for the public good. There are several examples that the inclusivity is affected after the public space has been made private (Banerjee, 2001; Kohn, 2004; Sorkin, 1992; Carmona, 2019; Smith, 2018). When the management of a public space is regulated, the social aspects of the space are often not as important as when the space is managed by public institutions (Kohn, 2004; Mehta, 2014). The publicness of public space may come under pressure and this makes the city in its entirety less democratic. For decades, there has been a lively debate going on about the influence of private organizations on the public space and therefore, the inhabitants of the city. This study tries to shine a light on this debate and more in particular on how (partial) privatization affects local residents close to one of the biggest public spaces of Amsterdam: the Westerpark.

There are many studies focussing on the user perspectives on public spaces. These studies concentrate mostly on the opinion of the design of the public space, safety of certain users in the public space or general experiences (Carmona, 2019; Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Whyte, 1980; Lofland, 1999; Smith, 2017; Smith, 2016). However, at present, not much is known about the perspectives of the users of public space on the privatization processes occurring in parks. The study performed by Leclercq (2018) is the only study that investigates the perceptions and reactions from users on privatization of public space. Furthermore, much literature on the involvement of the private

sector in urban redevelopment is from the United States or the United Kingdom. The examples of private involvement from the latter countries can be compared to a certain extent with the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the Netherlands has a different history and culture with regard to the involvement of government institutions. This study contributes to the debate about private processes in public spaces in the Netherlands and moreover, the perceptions of its users and local residents.

Do local residents recognize several aspects of privatization occurring in the Westerpark? And what are their views on it? The purpose of this research is to find out in what way processes of privatization affect users of the Westerpark and what their perspectives are on the (partial) privatization occurring in the public space. The following main question has been formulated regarding this goal:

*“How does (partial) privatization of the Westerpark affect the local residents and how do the local residents react to this process?”*

In order to answer this main question, four sub questions are formulated to get a well-founded answer.

1. *“How has the Westerpark, in terms of privatization, changed over time?”*
2. *“Which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark?”*
3. *“How do local residents experience using the Westerpark and in what way are they affected by privatization processes in the park?”*
4. *“How do the local residents react to the influence of privatization in the Westerpark?”*

The first research question investigates with what intention the park was set up and whether this has changed since the opening. Was the intention of the municipality of Amsterdam that the park should be completely public or have there always been influences of private parties? Furthermore, this sub question describes how the supply of culture and entertainment has changed over the years. Also, a general introduction on the creation of the park will be provided in order to fully understand the context. The second question examines what parties are involved in the management of the park. It investigates who owns which part of the park and how the interaction between the different parties takes place. The third question deals with the experience of local residents while using the park. ‘Experience’ means in this case what the respondents do in the park, with whom, which spots the respondents use and what parts of the park they find (un)pleasant. Furthermore, the awareness of privatization and the influence of privatization in the park on the daily use of local residents is being investigated through this question. Lastly, the fourth sub question examines how local residents view

the privatization processes in the park and determines if local residents take actions regarding consequences of the privatization in the park.

### 3.2. Methods & Design

In this study, several research methods are used to provide an answer to the research question. A methodology based around interviews and visual methods is chosen to get a picture of the perceptions of local residents in the Westerpark area. Additionally, municipal documents were studied to determine which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark and to describe the changes of the Westerpark over time. In order to collect data to answer the research question, 10 local residents, two members of the program council of the Westerpark and the account manager of the *Cultuurpark* in the Westerpark were interviewed. The research design that fits this thesis is a *case-study*. According to Bryman (2012), a case is a location, community or organization. In this research, the privatization processes will be studied in one particular location: the Westerpark in Amsterdam. People living in the Westerpark area were invited to be part of this study. The following section describes how the results are collected per sub question.

To answer the first two sub questions as extensively as possible, "*How has the Westerpark, in terms of privatization, changed over time*" and "*Which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark?*" the following municipal documents were studied: Amsterdamse Thermometer van de Openbare Ruimte (2019); Visie Openbare Ruimte 2025 (2017); Bestemmingsplan Westergasfabriek (2016); & Locatieprofiel Amsterdam 2021. An analysis scheme of the documents can be found in the appendix (4). In addition to this, the account manager of the *Cultuurpark* in the Westerpark, Paul Nieuwenhuizen, and two members of the program council Westerpark were interviewed. The interview with Paul Nieuwenhuizen was a classic in-depth, semi-structured interview and was held via Microsoft Teams. The interview contained information about the history, management and programming of the park. The interviews with the members of the program council were part of 'walk-alongs' in the park because the members are also local residents of the Westerpark area. More information about these 'walk-alongs' is provided below. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and encoded. The program Nvivo was used to code the interviews. The answers to these two sub questions can be found in chapter 4 (Context Westerpark Case).

To answer the questions "*How do local residents experience using the Westerpark and in what way are they affected by privatization processes in the park?*" and "*How do the local residents react to the influence of privatization in the Westerpark?*" (sub questions 3 and 4), 'walk-alongs' or 'go-alongs' were conducted. Walk-alongs are a qualitative research method where the researcher interviews the respondent during a walk in a specific place which is important for the research. A

walk-along can ensure deeper, richer data because people can connect their thoughts and hunches to their immediate environment. When people are 'in situ', a particular sentiment can be evoked. Furthermore, according to Evans & Jones (2010), respondents '*... are less likely to try and give the 'right' answer*'. The researcher investigates the respondent's experiences, interpretations, and behaviors in the direct environment by interviewing them and observing the way they speak and react to the questions (Carpiano, 2008). When respondents walked through the Westerpark, certain memories and experiences about specific places came up. For this study, this provides a deeper understanding of the actual experiences in the park and opinions regarding the park: the method ensures a better understanding of people's perceptions on their immediate residential environment. A walk-along in the park is therefore a suitable method to find out the respondents' perceptions about this specific park. In this research, 10 respondents were taken for a walk-along where they talked about their general opinion of the park, the activities they do in the park, the spots they (do not) use and their opinion about accessibility of the park. Then, the interview builds on to a conversation about the effects of (partial) privatization in the Westerpark and the possible consequences of this for the local residents. A camera was brought along to capture specific places the respondents attach memories to. Following the completion of the interviews, a visual map was made utilizing the pictures taken by the researcher during the walk-along. This way, the experiences of the respondents are more visible: by means of visualization, the reader of this study gets a more vivid impression of the specific experiences the respondents have and what spots are mainly used. The interviews with the local residents were recorded and transcribed. The results of these last two sub questions can be found in chapter 5 (Results). In the appendix (5), the topic list for the interviews is attached. Based on this topic list, the interviews were coded using Nvivo's qualitative analysis software. The code tree is listed in the appendix (6).

The respondents involved in this research all live in the Westerpark area and the interviews were mainly done in Dutch. Therefore, the transcripts of these interviews are also in Dutch. Quotes used in chapter 5 (Results), are translated by the author. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents, pseudonyms have been used in the results section. The age of the respondent is displayed behind the pseudonym, because it became known during the interviews that age influences how the respondents view the privatization in the park. It was decided not to mention the length of residence of the respondents behind the pseudonyms because the text became unclear and the length of residence is related to the age of the respondents. All the older respondents respectively have lived longer in the Westerpark area than the younger participants.

### 3.3. Respondent Recruitment & Ethical Accountability

This study looks at how privatization processes affect local residents and how local residents react to these processes. It is therefore important that the respondents in this research are living in the Westerpark area and (occasionally) visit the park. Respondents have been recruited using different methods. A local newspaper (*bewonerskrant*) from residents from the Westerpark area had been sent with information about this research and whether local residents wanted to cooperate. Additionally, the snowball method was used. The first respondents were asked if they knew any other local residents who wanted to participate in this study. In this research, 10 residents from the Westerpark area participated. People of different ages were interviewed in order to obtain a picture as representative as possible of the experiences of those living in the vicinity of the park. A map in the appendix (1) shows which area exactly belongs to the Westerpark area according to the municipality of Amsterdam.

During the empirical fieldwork for this study, ethical principles were kept in mind. Bryman (2012) describes five ethical principles that need to be taken into account as much as possible during social research. The first principle implies that respondents must not be disadvantaged in any way. Participation in the research is based on complete consent. Besides this, the research must be clearly explained to the respondents and the researcher needs to address what will be done with the obtained data. Furthermore, respondents must be given the option to remain anonymous: when conversations are recorded, they must remain in the possession of the researcher(s) and will only be used during the procession of the data. Finally, respondents should not be deceived during and after the research. In this study, Bryman's (2012) ethical principles are respected as much as possible.

### 3.4. Operationalization

The most important concepts used in this research are public space, privatization and publicness. In order to fully understand this study, a clear definition of these concepts has to be determined.

To define the concept *public space*, the explanation of Mehta (2014) is used: public space is '*... a space of participation and amicable social behaviours, it is also contested territory between various groups, between private and public and between regulating authorities and the citizenry*' (p.54). The interaction and behaviour in the space can be passive or active. Furthermore, every public space has its own measures that direct the ways people use the space. Mehta (2014) states that the concepts *access* and *use* are applicable to explain and describe public space. One definition can never totally fit the concept of public space. However, on the basis of the literature on the subject, this definition captures a great part of the concept. Furthermore, in order to determine *privatization*, the concept is described as follows: privatization of public space is the process where property (in the public realm) transitions from governmental (public) institutions to private companies. Public property is brought into private hands. Nevertheless, privatization cannot be seen as a black and white concept. Places can

be semi-public or semi-private. In order to question respondents on this subject, the concept of privatization was made measurable: various core concepts related to publicness have been used to describe this term and to discuss the processes around privatization with local residents in the Westerpark area.

One of the earliest theoretization of publicness is made by Benn & Gaus (1983). They used the concepts *access*, *agency* and *interest* to describe the term. Access refers to the possibility to access the space and to the activities that take place in the space. Agency is about the party or parties that control the public space and interest is defined as the decisions made in the space and the consequences influencing the space. Later on, more scholars use the concepts agency and access to theorize the concept of publicness. Kohn (2004) uses accessibility, ownership and intersubjectivity to describe the term, where accessibility is more or less the same as access and ownership as agency. Intersubjectivity refers to the kind of social actions occurring in the public space. Yet, there are scholars who describe the term in a more diverse way. For example, a good public space should be authentic, has to have a certain variety and should not be totally planned (Schmidt, 2005; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011). Variety is about the diversity of functions that the park has to offer, but also about the diversity of visitors (Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011; Akkar, 2005). Qian (2018) also uses the terms *agency* and *practices* but places them in an even broader spectrum. He theorizes publicness “... *as the outcome of the labours and agencies widely distributed across people, objects, material environments, meanings and affects.*” (p. 91)

Several models have been made to make the production of public space and therefore the publicness, more visible. Nemeth & Schmidt (2011) divided management of public space in *ownership*, *use* and *operations*. In the diagram in the appendix (2a), the combinations between these concepts of public space can be seen. The model shows how public or how private the particular public space is. Furthermore, the ‘star mode’ is a relevant model in order to show the publicness of a public space. The model, attached in appendix (2b), shows five dimensions of public space. The bigger the limb, the more accessible the public space is (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). Langstraat & van Melik (2013) present the OMAI model and can be seen in *figure 1* at the bottom of this paragraph. The model shows the ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness of the public space. Additionally, the OMAI model shows the consequences of the degree of publicness. *Ownership* refers to the legal authority of the space. *Management* is defined in this model as how the place is maintained, also considering techniques of control (e.g. CCTV and security guards). *Accessibility* is about the design of the place (a place can be designed to make the place look less accessible) as well as the physical connection people have to the place. *Inclusiveness* refers to how the location satisfies the needs of individuals and groups in terms of welcomeness and interaction. Van Langstraat & van Melik (2013) explain “... *each of the four dimensions forms an equal part of the circle. A bigger ‘slice’ represents a more ‘public’ space; a small slice stands for a more private space in that*

particular dimension. The concentric rings allow each of the four dimensions to be measured on an ordinal, four-point scale ranging from 1 (fully private) to 4 (fully public).”

All models have limitations in terms of scale and comparison to other models, but the OMAI model is the most complete model and therefore, this model is used for the operationalization of publicness in this thesis. The OMAI model is shown beneath this paragraph (figure 1). A conceptual model based on aforementioned definitions scholars use in the literature is made and is added in the appendix (3). A topic list for the interviews is made with the help of this conceptual model. A short version of this topic list is shown in figure 2, the extended version is shown in the appendix (5). It should be noted that publicness (as part of the processes of privatization) is not an unambiguous concept and the context must always be considered.

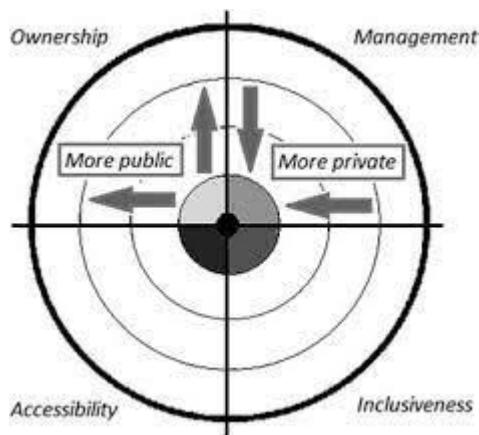


Figure 1: OMAI model (Van Langstraat & Van Melik, 2013)

Topics	Literature
<b>General</b>	
Changes in the park	
Spots used/ activities	Carmona, 2019
Company in the park	Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980; Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001
<b>Publicness</b>	
Welcomeness	Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011;



Authenticity & Variety	Schmidt, 2005; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011; Akkar, 2005
Interaction other visitors	Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Qian, 2018
<b>Privatization</b>	
Use of privatized businesses	Leclercq, 2018
Accessibility	Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Ben & Gaus, 1983; Kohn, 2004; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011
Positive/ negative consequences privatization	Leclercq, 2018

Figure 2: Short version of topic-list interviews

## Chapter 4: Context Westerpark Case

In this chapter, the context of the Westerpark case will be described. With the help of a document analysis of municipal documents (Amsterdamse Thermometer van de Openbare Ruimte (2019); Visie Openbare Ruimte 2025 (2017); Bestemmingsplan Westerpark (2016); & Locatieprofiel Amsterdam 2021), interviews with the account manager of the *Cultuurpark* from the municipality of Amsterdam and two members of the Westerpark program council, the first two sub questions of this research are answered in this section.

### **4.1. Public Space in Amsterdam**

Public spaces in city centers of the Netherlands are used more intensively than ever. According to the municipality of Amsterdam, the public space in Amsterdam plays a key role in the social and economic success of the Dutch capital city. The growth of the city can be seen in parks, squares and commercial streets (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic of the past 1.5 years, the importance of public space in the city has only increased: Amsterdam residents' do not necessarily have a garden and social life takes place in public space.

The public spaces in Amsterdam mostly exist for decades and are not designed for the intensive use occurring nowadays. The growth of the city will continue: the population of Amsterdam is growing with approximately 11000 people a year and therefore, the municipality has a focus on the development of public space in its policies (Amsterdamse Thermometer van de Openbare Ruimte, 2019; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019). The municipality of Amsterdam wants to create a public space

which can cope with the intensive use of the residents, climate change and which enables an inclusive environment (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019).

#### **4.1.1. The Creation of the Westerpark**

The Westerpark is one of the newest and most used parks in Amsterdam and in this paragraph, the creation of the park will be described.

In 1981, the city council determined that the Overbrakelpolder in Amsterdam West will be transformed into a park instead of using the ground to extend the railways next to it. Years right after this decision, nothing happens: the contaminated soil obstructs the municipality to start construction of the park. Local residents took initiative and hired an environmental research firm in order to map the status of the land. Early 90's, the Westerpark district as we know it nowadays, was established. Now the decisions about the future of the soil are made by the district and are not centrally determined anymore. The district appealed for its residents and asked for ideas for the creation of the park. Because the area contained several buildings, the municipality decided to make the place a cultural destination. From the 334 submissions, 4 ideas were selected: a museum for civil engineering, the Amsterdam Centre of Arts, a centre for modern music and the Rhizone scenario. Two of these options were the most popular and feasible. The local residents chose the Rhizone scenario and the Westerpark district chose the centre for modern music which they called Ijsbreker. The Westerpark district decided that the Ijsbreker should be located in the park but the municipality decided to give the centre for modern music the location next to the IJ in 1995. Meanwhile, from 1993, the buildings that were already located in the area were assigned to several artists, theatre groups and musicians for a period of six months. These six months eventually became seven years and this 'temporary' use gave the involved parties a certain vision for the purpose of the land and its buildings: the ground should be used as a cultural area where the buildings and the outdoor space strengthen each other (Bestemmingsplan, 2016).

City counselor Edgar Peer, stressed that there is a need for housing in the park and he demands that the buildings on the property must be privately managed. However, a final decision about the destination of the park was still not made. In 1995, soil remediation took place and in 1996 a working group with three residents and twelve architects was founded. Five designs for the park were made and the design of Kathryn Gustafson, an American landscape architect, was eventually chosen. The final design was delivered in 1999 and after this, construction began. The public space has an industrial character, but Gustafson ensured that green was built into the industrial site. Because of serious soil contamination most of the buildings on the property had to close and the restoration was therefore delayed. Eventually, the park was finished in 2003 (Bestemmingsplan, 2016).

## 4.2. Changes over Time

In its short existence, the Westerpark has gone through several transformations. The Westerpark consists of four official sub-areas: the Westerpark, the ‘Cultuurpark Westergasfabriek’ (*Culture Park Westergasfabriek*), the ‘Waternatuurtuinen’ (*Water - Nature Gardens*) and a children’s animal farm with school gardens (*kinderboerderij en schooltuinen*) (see figure 3 below). The areas are self-contained but are really part of the bigger picture of the park. These sub-areas exist since the opening of the park in 2003.

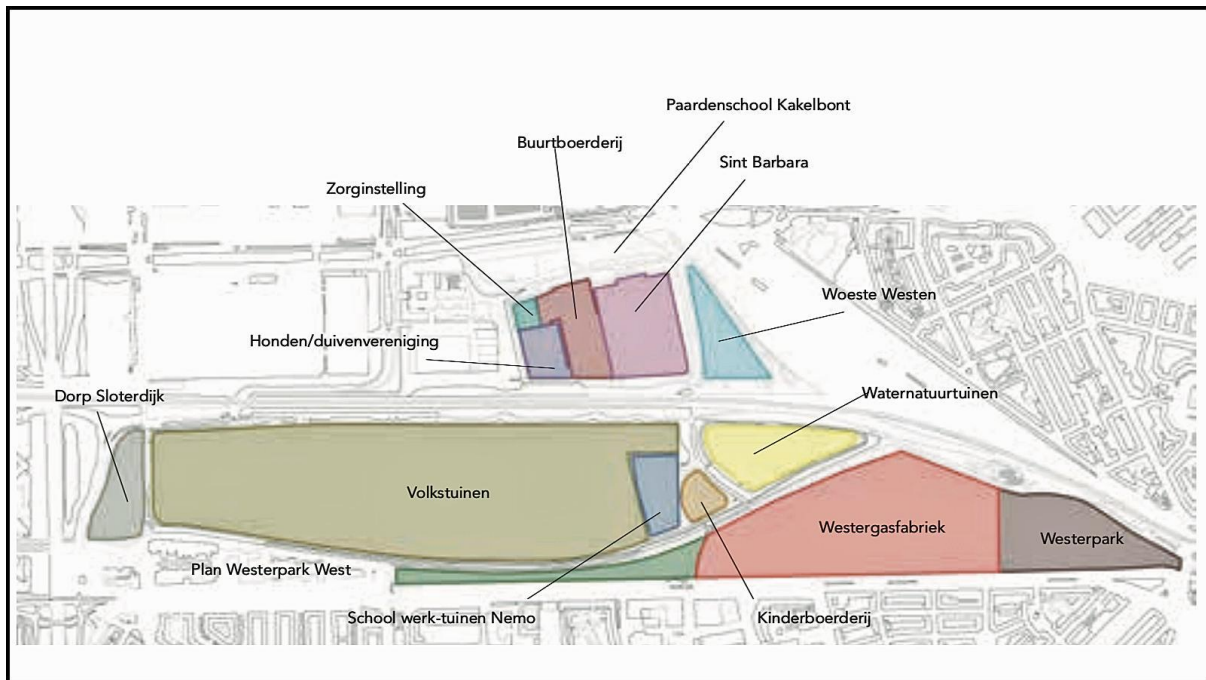


Figure 3: Gemeente Amsterdam. (2019). Requested from <https://www.amsterdam.nl/toerisme-vrije-tijd/parken/westerpark/>

When the Westerpark was finished in 2003, the city of Amsterdam looked different than it does now. Back in 2003, the Westerpark area was not a centrally located area in Amsterdam: it was really a separate area, away from the city center. When people bought a garden house in the Westerpark, they bought a garden house outside the city. The neighborhood was coming back from its squatters period and tourists were not seen in that area (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark). Just before the arrival of the Westerpark, new-build homes were completed, such as the buildings on the GWL site (*het GWL-terrein*) (GWL-terrein, 2021). However, the area was not as much of a hotspot as it is now.

In 2004, the municipality of Amsterdam made a policy for the events that can be held in the Westerpark. General principles for events have been formulated in the policy for the *Cultuurpark* (Locatieprofiel Amsterdam, 2021). The most important starting point is that the cultural character of the activities is paramount. The *Cultuurpark* must provide space for events for a broad and intercultural audience. The park is meant to host expositions and events as well as recreational and

leisure activities for the local residents. In the Gashouder, dance parties, operas and concerts take place (Bestemmingsplan Westerpark, 2016). However, in 2014, the new Westerpark district council revised the zoning plan. More buildings in the park were getting a hospitality destination instead of a cultural destination. These changes were seen in the occupation of the buildings in the park. There has always been *horeca* (abbreviation for the Dutch 'hotels, restaurants and cafes'), but after the revised zoning plan, more horeca emerged in the park. For instance, in the center of the park, the Conscious Hotel was placed in the building where the old district office used to be. There was already a plan to have a hotel built nearby, but the district office was chosen by the real estate developer (the Meijer family) who owned the buildings in the park, because when a hotel would open in the building, it would increase in value. Furthermore, restaurant Cantine de Caron, provides since 2021 a few square meters extra of horeca in the park (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark). Some places have always been in the park. The Bakkerswinkel at the entrance of the park was there already in 2003; Pacific Parc, a nightlife place, has been in the park before it became an official park and the Ketelhuis, a movie theatre, was also there already before it became an official park (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark).

The amount of events and the days where the set-up and dismantling of the events take place, were increasing since the first years of the park (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark; Menno, Program Council Member; Rafael, Program Council Member; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020). In 2013, local residents started to annoy themselves: they argued that there are too many events in the Westerpark and that the diversity of these events is not guaranteed. After discussions with the municipality, the number of events and the number of construction and demolition days were reduced. However, the park continues to get busier and some local residents keep protesting against these circumstances (Vrienden van Westerpark, 2021; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019). The increase in the number of events is accompanied by an increase in visitors of the park. Many Amsterdam residents, other Dutch citizens and tourists recreate or pass through the area: in 2011 the park had over 5 million visitors. The Westerpark district decided in that year that the park did not need expansion. In 2017, the park had already over 9 million visitors (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019).

The Westerpark has gone through several changes since the opening in 2003. The changes mentioned above are mainly focused on the *Cultuurpark* area in the Westerpark or apply to the park in general. Because of COVID-19, the events of 2020 and the start of 2021 were mostly canceled. However, mayor Halsema already promised that there will be a focus again on events in the Westerpark to help the event industry when the pandemic is under control (Rafael, Program Council Member).

#### **4.3. Actors involved in the Management and Ownership of the Westerpark**

As mentioned before, city counselor Edgar Peer from the VVD, demanded that the buildings on the property must be privately managed. That is why, in late 1999, the Westerpark district and Meijer

Aannemers Bedrijf, a contractor, signed a cooperation agreement: the leasehold contract and the zoning contract. The zoning contract states that the Westerpark district takes care of the construction and the maintenance of the Westerpark. The leasehold contract involves the agreement that Meijer Aannemers Bedrijf becomes the owner of the buildings for one Dutch *gulden*, if the company renovates the buildings on the property. The contractor focused on the restoration, the development and the exploitation of the buildings. A subsidiary of the company, Westerpark BV, was set up to fully focus on the Westerpark (Herbestemming, 2021). In order to properly renovate the buildings in the park, Meijer Aannemers Bedrijf received approximately 10 million subsidy and paid approximately 10 million to leasehold and the design of the park (Vrienden van Westerpark, 2021). In 2018, Duncan Stutterheim and associates took over the buildings in the park under the name of Westergas.

The policy from the municipality of Amsterdam implies that they offer space (The *Cultuurpark* area) in the Westerpark to people who want to organize activities or use the grounds. Outdoor and indoor spaces are rented out in consultation with the municipality and temporary rental contracts and permits are then granted to the event organizers. The events have to be cultural. Some of these cultural activities are subsidized because otherwise they cannot exist; others can exist on their own (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark) The account manager of the park mentioned that ‘cultural’ is meant in the broadest sense of the word: a fair, a liberation festival, a circus, a dance festival, a photography event and much more are organized in the park. Moreover, there is a fixed rent of the buildings with horeca and offices and temporary rent where something different can take place every time. Public and private events can take place in these buildings with temporary rent. This is all regulated by the municipality, however, the buildings are owned by the private organization (since 2018 is this the organization of Duncan Stutterheim and others under the name of Westergas) and as a result there is constant consultation. There are generic agreements, however, the agreements may differ per location, event and time (Paul Nieuwenhuizen, Account Manager Cultuurpark)

The *Cultuurpark* is not the only area with a certain ownership in the Westerpark. On the left side of the park, garden houses are situated. This garden park is called ‘Nut & Genoegen’ (*Utility & Pleasure, translation by the author*) and has existed since 1909. The garden park has 375 houses and they are all in use. Nut & Genoegen is an association and in order to be part of this association, membership must be paid and monthly maintenance of the gardens and houses is mandatory.

Local residents from the Westerpark district were involved in the decision around the use of the land throughout the whole process. In 1995, just before a concrete design and plan was formulated for the area, several action groups and individual local residents united and formed the Vrienden van Westerpark. This organization wants to restore the balance in the park and preserve and guard the unique character of the Westerpark. To this day, the group is still committed to the park. Furthermore, in May 2018, a program council (*programmaraad*) was set by Melanie van der Horst (board member

of the Amsterdam Westerpark district) to advise on the programming of outdoor events and on the nuisance of indoor events in the Westerpark. The program council consists of fourteen local residents, entrepreneurs and cultural organizations from the surrounding neighborhoods of the Westerpark. Under the chairmanship of Daniël Nagel, thoughts were exchanged with the West district and Westergas. The aim of the advice of the program council is to contribute to the restoration of the balance in the Westerpark. According to them, the balance is lost due to the many outdoor and indoor events in the park and the nuisance associated with it. The program council stresses that the park will get even busier because of the construction of the Haven-Stad, a new neighborhood in the North-West of Amsterdam (Programmaraad, 2018; Rafael, Program Council Member). In this area, 40.000 to 70.000 houses will be built (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021).



Haven-Stad area. (2021). Gemeente Amsterdam. Requested from <https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/haven-stad/integraal-raamwerk/> on 11 June 2021

Based on the interviews with the account manager of the *Cultuurpark* in the Westerpark, two program council members and the document analysis, it was possible to describe how the Westerpark has changed over the years and which actors are important in the management of the park. From this chapter, it can be concluded that the Westerpark area has become busier: the area has become a desirable place to live and even a whole new neighborhood is being built. This increases the number of visitors to the Westerpark. Also, changes can be seen in the programming of the *Cultuurpark* in the

Westerpark. There are more buildings now with a hospitality destination, instead of the original culture destination. Additionally, the number of event days has increased since the opening of the Westerpark. The number of event days will be reduced, however, it will be easier to organize small events without a permit.

Furthermore, it has become clear in this chapter which actors are involved in the management of the park. The outdoor spaces in the park belong to the municipality, while the buildings in the *Cultuurpark* belong to a private organization. First, Westerpark BV exploited the buildings in the park. However, in 2018, Duncan Stutterheim and associates took over the ownership of the buildings under the name of Westergas. Renting spaces is done in consultation with the municipality and the granting of permits is carried out by the municipality. In short, the municipality offers its public space to people who want to use its grounds, as long as it fits the programming of the municipality.

## Chapter 5: Results

This chapter presents the results of this research. Based on interviews with local residents, an attempt was made to obtain information about their experiences in the park and their opinion about the privatization processes in the park. The first section describes the experience of different local residents using the Westerpark: which spots they use and what kind of activities they do in the park. Thereafter, it will be described how *public* the respondents find the Westerpark. The last section is devoted to the reactions of local residents on the privatization processes and possible actions that they take to make the park a better place. The quotes presented in this chapter are all translated by the author from Dutch.

### **5.1. General Views on the Park**

To open the conversation about the park, general questions were asked. All respondents replied positively when asked how they viewed the park in the general. Many local residents mention that the diverse areas in the park are an added value to the park (Lana, 24; Kurt, 24; Menno, 51; Rafael, 66; Emma, 30). There are spots to relax, to do activities, there is horeca, sports associations and many more facilities.

Lana (24) stated: *“I think it is nice that the park is so big and that there are many different parts, so you can make a choice: today I fancy the big lawn or today I want to sit in a place with more shelter, so yes, I think it is a very nice place.”*

Three respondents immediately added a critical note when asked what they think about the park. Menno (51) mentioned that the park is a bit too styled and that this does not benefit the park. Finn



(22) and Rafael (66) stressed that the Westerpark is too crowded. However, their first, general opinion remained positive.

### **5.1.2. Changes in the Park**

All respondents mentioned changes that the park has undergone over the years. They saw changes in visitor numbers, changes in the design and changes in the type of places in the *Cultuurpark*. A few respondents have lived in the area before the park was opened in 2003. They have seen how the area was excavated and how the current design came about (Rafael, 66; Robin, 46; Menno, 51).

Rafael (66), Finn (22) and Robin (46) mention that they have seen the park become more and more crowded over the years. Finn (22) adds to this that he thinks that the park has become much *hipper* than it was: as an example he gives the Sunday Market, a market in the Westerpark that hip Amsterdam visits every first Sunday of the month. According to him, it used to be more of a park for the neighborhood and he sees that changes nowadays. Menno (51), Robin (46), Emma (30) and Felix (23) see different bars and restaurants come and go in the park. It is striking that four respondents mention the acquisition of the bar Pacific Park. Emma (30), Menno (51), Felix (23) and Kurt (24) stress that the takeover does not benefit the diversity in the park. Felix (23) stated that the bar lost its edge. Four respondents also mention the change *de Rollende Keukens* (a multi-day food truck event in the park) has undergone: it changed from an alternative happening to a hip event that is too big for the park (Emma, 30; Finn, 22; Felix, 23; Menno, 51; Rafael, 66). Rafael (66) argues:

*“The innovation has slowly faded. Masiveniss has increased.”*

Almost all the changes mentioned by the respondents are negative in nature. However, Rafael (66) and Menno (51) mention that the park has become 'mature' in terms of design. Rafael (66) stresses that the idea of the design of the park is now really coming into its own.

## **5.2. Use of the Park**

### *Activities & Spots Used*

To create an understanding of how local residents experience the park, it is interesting to map out how they use the park. The Westerpark consists of different areas where people can relax or be involved in activities. The interviewed local residents use many different areas in the park and perform different activities. This paragraph shows what activities local residents do in the park and which areas they use. To make the information more visible in this paragraph and in the



paragraphs to come, a map containing the different places local residents mentioned in the interviews, is added below (figure 4). The places on the map are numbered and photos of these places are included below the map.

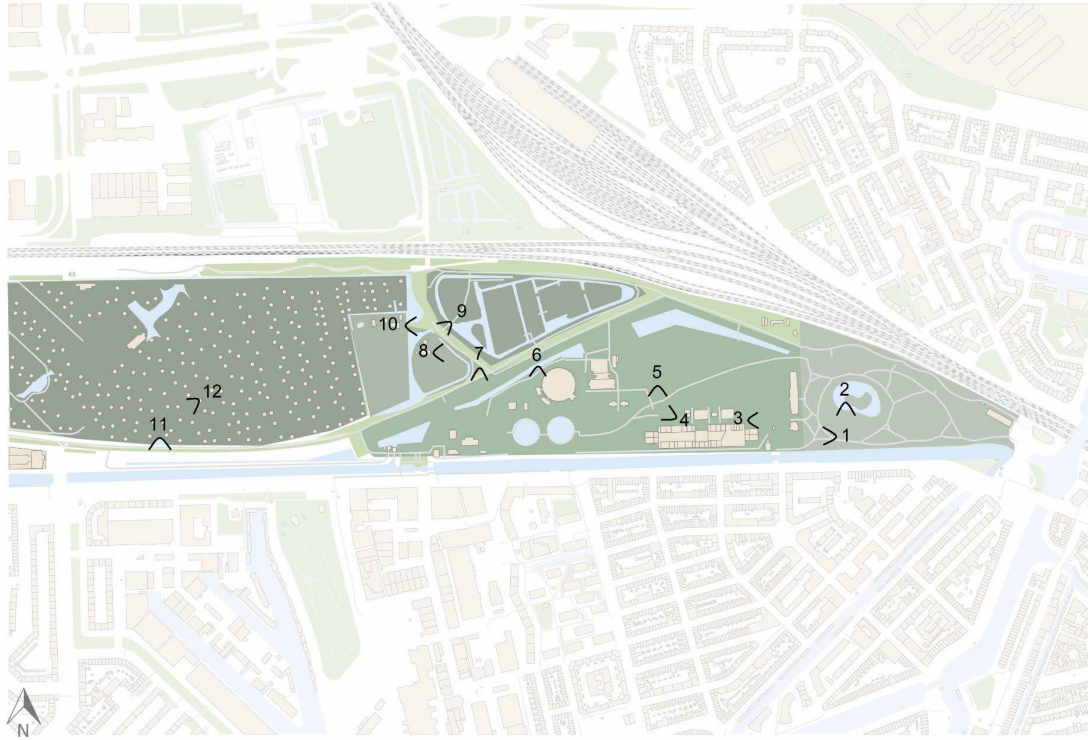
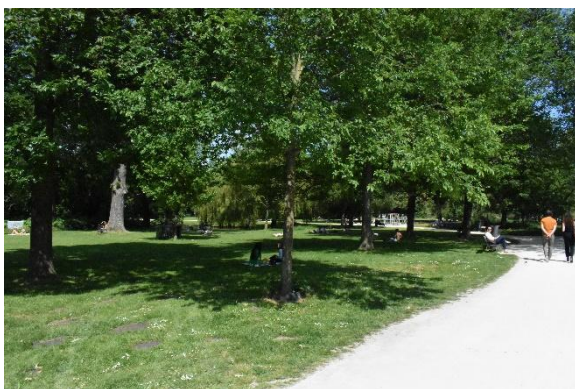
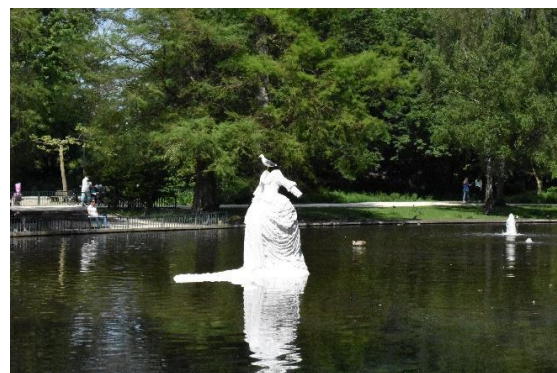


Figure 4: Map Westerpark : Different Areas Used by Local Residents, (2021) made by the author via Illustrator



**1. Old Park**

Local residents use the old park for leisure activities such as meeting friends, running and relaxation. All respondents mentioned they spent time in the old park



**2. Statue, Old Park**

Favourite spot of Arwan (50). He calls this statue the 'Headless Bride'





### 3. Entrance Culture Park

This is the area where many horeca businesses are located, the movie theater is situated and events are held



### 4. Culture Park

The heart of the *Cultuurpark*. Ijscuypje (left), an ice cream shop, mentioned by several respondents as a hotspot



### 5. Big Lawn

Local residents sit with their family and friends on the grass. Moreover, events are held on this lawn



### 6. Little Waterfalls

Some local residents mentioned the waterfalls as favourite spot in the park (Rafael, 66; Robin, 46; Menno, 51; Finn, 22)



### 7. Sports Equipment

The park provides sports equipment, which is used by some respondents (Arwan, 50; Menno, 51)



### 8. Entrance Children's Farm

The children's farm is one of the sub-areas in the park. Respondents hardly mention this place





### 9. Waternatuurtuin (Water – Nature Garden)

This area is popular with the local residents: it is very green and respondents do not feel like they are in the middle of the city (Rafael, 66; Menno, 51; Felix, 23; Finn, 22; Sophie, 30)



### 10. School Garden

Children from several primary schools in the area have vegetable and fruit gardens here. Two respondents had gardens like this when they were younger (Finn, 22; Felix, 23)



### 11. Entrance Garden Houses 'Nut & Genoegen'

The garden house area is a large area in the park. One respondent visits a friend here who owns a house (Arwan, 51). One respondent feels like the garden houses take up too much space (Felix, 23).



### 12. Garden House

The respondents all use the park on a weekly basis and some of them say they use the park everyday (Menno, 51; Rafael 66; Robin, 46; Louisa, 27). The park also lends itself as a passage from the center to more western neighborhoods in Amsterdam. A couple of respondents use the park among other things as a passage to work on a daily basis. The interviewed local residents mentioned that they all use the park with other people; only when they use the park for sports, the park is mostly used alone. Sports is an activity every respondent performs in the park: either they go for a run or they work out at the public sports equipment, a club or sport class. The soccer and korfbal fields are also mentioned as places where some respondents do sports (Arwan, 50; Felix, 23; Robin, 46). Furthermore, almost all the respondents stated that they use the park to sit in the

grass and hang out with friends or family: this takes place either in the old park or on the big lawn opposite the *Cultuurpark* (Arwan, 50; Felix, 23; Robin, 46; Lana, 24; Louisa, 27; Emma, 30; Rafael, 66). The horeca is also frequently used by the interviewed local residents. The respondents sit on terraces, go out for dinner, get ice cream at *Ijscuypje*, go to the movies in *het Ketelhuis* or go out to bars. Felix (24) states that it is easier to meet people in the park when there are opportunities to get a beverage or some food.

Three respondents mention a daily walk in the park (Rafael, 66; Menno, 51; Louisa, 27). One respondent cleans up the park every day when he walks his dog. He even has a website and wants to invite people to keep the neighborhood, and therefore the park, clean (Menno, 51). Respondents with children or little siblings or cousins use the playgrounds in the park to play with their little family members (Robin, 46; Finn, 22; Emma, 30; Menno, 51). Furthermore, one respondent (Robin, 46) uses the park as her workplace and gives movement classes (*beweegetrainingen*) and mindfulness classes in the park.

### **5.3. Publicness**

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on different aspects of the publicness of Westerpark. The concepts welcomeness, authenticity, variety and the interaction the respondents have or not have, have been questioned.

#### **5.3.1. Feeling of Welcomeness**

The feeling of welcomeness contributes to the publicness of the Westerpark. The respondents were asked if they feel welcome in the park and what causes the (un)welcomeness. Furthermore, questions were asked whether the respondents think other people in the neighborhood would feel welcome in the park and why (not).

All respondents mentioned that they feel welcome in the park. Some of these local residents say that because of the many different spots in the park, everyone can find their own spot and that this is something that contributes to the welcomeness of the park (Robin, 46; Kurt, 24; Rafael, 66; Menno, 51). One respondent mentions that because he has been coming to the Westerpark all his life, the park feels a bit like his 'home' (Felix, 23).

Two respondents feel welcome in the park, however, not all the time. They mention that when there are certain events going on in the park, they do not feel that welcome. One respondent (Felix, 23) argues that this is because certain events are not appealing to him; the other respondent (Rafael, 66) states that the length of the set-up and dismantling of some events makes the park less accessible and therefore makes him feel unwelcome.

Two respondents (Menno, 51; Emma, 30) stress that it is hard for every *Amsterdammer* to feel welcome in the park. This is because they think that the bars and restaurants have high prices and that one kind of crowd is attracted to the park.

*“Well, a lot of restaurants have a Young Urban Professional audience ... the restaurants are often too expensive.”* (Menno, 51)

Menno (51) adds to this that he thinks that everyone *is* welcome in the park and that the park is very inclusive, but not everyone uses it. One respondent has an opposing remark: she says that families, singles, poor and rich people all can be found in the Westerpark. The respondent works with disabled people and elderly and says that these groups also feel welcome in the park (Robin, 46).

People can visit almost every area of the park. Even when the businesses on the *Cultuurpark* are closed, you can still walk between the buildings. One respondent (Lana, 24) stresses that this makes her feel welcome in the park. Even when major events are held in the park, she does not feel unwelcome. Arwan (50) also underlines that the park is very accessible:

*“... there is no owner or boss keeping me from coming in here. Yeah, it is very accessible. Nobody will ask you for an ID or who you are.”*

### **5.3.2. Authenticity & Variety**

#### *Authenticity*

The respondents were asked whether they consider Westerpark an authentic park and why. Three respondents argued that they find the park not authentic (anymore). Robin (46) and Louisa (27) stress that they feel that authenticity refers to places that are old and have great history and that the Westerpark is not such a place. Rafael (66) mentions that the park was authentic when it just opened. However, the respondent feels that the place has become too slick: he compares it to the Nutella stores in the city center of Amsterdam. He argues that the programming in the park is focused on the amount of visitors it attracts. The more visitors, the better the event. He does add that the park has potential to become authentic again because of the historic buildings and the old park: all that is required is a change in programming. Felix (23) states that he thinks there are authentic buildings in the park, but the park is too planned to make it a pure authentic place. He says that an authentic park for him, is a place with more *flow*.

The other respondents all mention that they think the park is an original place. Two respondents (Lana, 24; Kurt, 24) state that the diverse range of activities and places contribute to the authenticity of the park.

*“... other parks I know have one kind of feeling that they evoke. And here you have those multiple parts that really offer a different experience. ... I have the feeling that this is a special park because of the variety.”* (Lana, 24)

Emma (30) mentions, just as Felix (23), the buildings in the park as an example of authenticity. Kurt (24) feels that the park is authentic because it sometimes feels like a festival. He argues that certain kinds of people come to the park that tie in with the festival atmosphere. For him, this is something that makes the Westerpark an authentic park.

#### *Variety*

The respondents were asked how they perceive variety in the park. Is there variety in the park and how do they see it? All respondents really emphasize the different functions the park has to offer. One respondent mentions:

*“All functions complement each other, one person likes this, the other likes that. The park is insanely diverse.”* (Rafael, 66)

A few respondents (Rafael, 66; Kurt, 24; Menno, 51) state that different areas of the park attract different kinds of people. For example, respondents said that the young people sit on the big lawn, the parents with children are at the splashing pond and the people in their thirties are sitting at horeca places (Rafael, 66; Menno, 51). Kurt (24) elaborates:

*“I mean, when you have a garden on the other side of the park, then you use the park in a very different way than when you are drinking a beer on the grass or when you go tightrope walking between the trees. So in that respect it just adds to the different kinds of activities you can do here. It does offer an extra diversity of people who can use the park.”*

Yet it is emphasized by three respondents that the park is not very multicultural (Rafael, 66; Emma, 30; Menno, 51). One respondent stresses that especially the horeca in the park is only visited by young, white adults (Rafael, 66). The respondent mentions that there lies a focus on pleasing people in their twenties, people in their thirties and tourists by the event organizers and

horeca owners in the park. Also Arwan (50), an undocumented refugee from Ethiopia, stresses that he does not visit the horeca simply because it is too expensive for him; he buys his own drinks and hangs out in the *Cultuurpark*. However, Rafael (66) emphasizes that the owners of the buildings tried to diversify their places but then COVID-19 started spreading and this was no longer the top priority.

### **5.3.3. Interaction**

The respondents were asked if the Westerpark is a place where you can easily meet other people or interact with strangers and why that is (not) the case.

Two respondents indicated that they have almost never had social contact with other people in the park. The respondents said that they are not really looking for that kind of contact in the park (Robin, 46; Finn, 22). However, the respondents both said that they think the park is a place that can facilitate interaction: Robin (46) stresses that people who walk with dogs have a lot of interaction in the park. Also Lana (24) experienced this while walking the dog of her neighbor.

*“Because I know people who at some point took a dog and they have gained such an enormously wide group of friends, circle of acquaintances. Which I don't have.”* (Robin, 46)

Finn (22) mentions that because of the events that are held in the park, people are forced to interact. On the other hand, one respondent mentions that he thinks the Westerpark has so many different areas that it is harder to meet with random people than it is in for example the Vondelpark. He argues that in the Westerpark, everyone has their own corner and the mixing of people happens less quickly (Menno, 51).

Rafael (66) and Felix (23) both know many people that visit the Westerpark often. They mention that they often accidentally run into acquaintances. In that sense, the park really has a neighborhood function according to them. There are many people from their own neighborhood and people stop to have a chat with each other. The respondents do not necessarily have a lot of interaction with random people in the park. However Felix (23) stresses:

*“... when people are sitting nicely on the gras and you do the same or you pass by, I always have the feeling that they are open to, say, just talking to each other.”*

Kurt (24) argues that meeting with strangers occurs more often in the park than at other places in the city.

*“Because of course, you go to the park to relax. And if other people do the same, it's a little easier to make contact.”*

Also Arwan (50) mentions that everytime he is in the park, he meets with strangers. He recognises other asylum seekers and they are going to hang out together in the park.

#### **5.4. Temporary and Partial Privatization**

In this paragraph the opinion of the local residents on the partial privatization in the Westerpark will be described. In order not to give too much information about what kind of privatization is happening in the Westerpark, they were first asked what they consider as ‘privatization’. Subsequently, the respondents were asked whether they see (partial) privatization in the Westerpark and what this means for them.

Four local residents stated that because of privatization in a public space, the space can become a better area. Menno (51) argues that entrepreneurs can respond to trends that happen in society much faster than the municipality can. He states that certain areas in the park can be left to private organizations, which is happening now in the Westerpark. Kurt (24) also states that partial privatization is an added value to the park. He mentions the movie theater as an example of authenticity and he believes that privatization contributes to the variety of functions in this park. Finn (22) is also positive about the privatization occurring in the park, as long as the private organization offers a varied range of events and horeca businesses. Lana (24) emphasizes that because of the various events offered in the park, people who would normally not come to the park, now go there.

Some respondents think more negatively about privatization. The businesses in the park can benefit from their place in the park, while only a small part of the local residents can (or want to) use what they have to offer (Robin, 46; Felix, 23; Emma, 30). Not all local residents can afford the places in the *Cultuurpark* in het Westerpark: prices have gone up the last few years.

*“This way, for example, an upper-class business is set up that does not benefit 80% of the park, but a small 20% does, and yet the business is running well.”* (Felix, 23)



A couple of respondents mention that because of temporary privatization, such as organised events, parts of the park can be closed off and people might feel less welcome (Robin, 46; Rafael, 66). Robin (46) adds that the private organization in charge may be less involved in the neighborhood than a municipal organization.

#### **5.4.1. Consequences**

Program manager of the Westerpark Paul Nieuwenhuizen states that more horeca businesses have been opened since the beginning of the *Cultuurpark* part in the Westerpark. He argues that the horeca can be called a ‘success’: the park has been visited more and more over the years. However, Nieuwenhuizen stresses that the municipality and Westergas need to be careful that it does not fall under its success. He says there is friction between the event organizers and some local residents. This has mainly to do with traffic: the set-up and dismantling of the events. This can take a few days and the park is less accessible for the neighborhood during this period of time.

Some interviewed respondents see this indeed as a problem in the park. Rafael (66), not only a local resident but also a representative of Vrienden van Westerpark (the organization that wants to restore balance in the park), emphasizes the difference between paid and unpaid events. When an event has to be paid for, a fence will be placed around the area and the park will be temporarily inaccessible to people who have not paid for the event. Furthermore, Rafael (66) states that the set-up and dismantling of events can be up to ten days even though an event only takes two or three days. He thinks this is out of proportion and prefers to see the park as accessible as possible. He adds that, during the set-up and dismantling of Milkshake two years ago, road plates were laid down for the trucks and because of warm weather that year, the grass underneath the road plates died. Rafaël (66) stresses:

*“For a little party of two days, the park is not accessible for six weeks. Yes, we find that unacceptable.”*

Even when the Davis Cup was organized in the Westerpark in 2012, it took a few weeks before the grass was fully recovered (Rafael, 66; Menno, 51). Coupled with the organization of these events is the nuisance for the surrounding neighbourhoods. Rafael (66) and Menno (51) both say they suffer from rubbish in the street and people peeing on their porch. Menno (51) also emphasizes the consequences of events in the park for the local entrepreneurs: de Albert Heijn sells more beer before such an event starts, but the terraces near the event are filled with bicycles of the visitors of the event.

The organization Westergas does good things in order to make the park a vivid space according to Menno (51). The new owners of the buildings in the park wanted to organize more events for the neighborhood and also involve the neighbourhood in organizing the events. For example, 1.5 years ago an ice rink was set up where children were allowed to skate for free. On the other side, the rents Westergas ask from the businesses in the buildings are so high, that businesses are leaving. This does not contribute to the diverse range of activities in the park (Menno, 51).

Finn (22), Emma (30) and Felix (23) also highlight the decline of diverse places and activities in the park. Finn (22) says the park is being taken over by hip *Amsterdammers* while it used to be more a park of the neighborhood. Emma (30) states that the places and activities in the park used to be more alternative and that it has become a bit commercial these days. Felix (23) adds:

*"... it becomes a bit what everything already is. A standard. It works well! The formula works! Only... it already exists."*

Arwan (50) and Felix (23) are the only respondents talking about the garden houses area. Arwan (50) says that the houses have become more expensive over the years and that there is a waiting list for people who want to own a garden house. Furthermore, people need to take diligent care of the garden houses, the gardens and the paths surrounding them, in order to maintain the property. If owners don't clean their path, they get fined with 50 euro. It is also not allowed to enter the gardens in the area if you do not own the garden. Felix (23) adds that he feels that the garden houses take up too much space in the park.

### *Accessibility*

The partial privatization in the park influences the accessibility of the park in different ways. According to a couple local residents, the price of the events and the horeca in the park ensures that these places are not accessible for certain groups (Emma, 30; Robin, 46). Also, Robin (46) indicates that during some events, such as the Rollende Keukens or Amsterdam Fashion, there are long waiting lines, few places to seat and too much traffic so that she feels like she no longer has a meeting place. One respondent stated that there are always groups in the park for whom the park is less accessible than for others. He gives as an example that when a tree is planted somewhere, people can say that they would rather cycle there and others could say that they want more trees (Menno, 51). Felix (23) feels that the part with the garden houses in the park takes up too much space and that therefore the park is less accessible.

Almost all residents can imagine several consequences for the accessibility of the park. The

interviewed local residents do not experience many negative consequences from this themselves, but talk about other groups of people, who may be hindered by accessing the park.

#### **5.4.2. (Re)action to Temporary and Partial Privatization**

The interviewed local residents react differently to the privatization processes occurring in the park. The majority of the local residents interviewed, have seen the park go through changes related to privatization over the years. These changes include, for example, the increase in the number of events (temporary privatization) and horeca businesses (structural privatization) in the park, the increase in prices and a different type of activities and horeca in the park. Some respondents think that there are too many events (Robin, 46; Rafael, 66) and there is a group that feels that the events and horeca have become too commercial (Rafael, 66; Emma, 30; Felix, 23; Finn, 22). However, some residents feel that the events and horeca, in this form, are an addition to the park (Kurt, 24; Lana, 24).

Most interviewed local residents state that the balance in the Westerpark must be preserved. The amount of events; the diversity of the events that take place in the park and the variety of the horeca must be well monitored. However, the younger interviewed local residents state that right now, the balance in the park is good and they enjoy the activities, evenements and horeca in the park (Finn, 22; Felix, 23; Kurt, 24; Lana, 24; Emma, 30). One respondent says:

*“I can imagine that it can go too far... that the park could be a bit exploited and that that is at the expense of the freedom you have in the park. But I don't really think that happens here. No, not at the moment, but I think it is very important that attention is paid to this, to how this goes. Because it could go wrong.”* (Kurt, 24)

All local residents still enjoy the park every week and most of them are not bothered that much by the events or the crowds in the park. However, some local residents are actively involved in what is happening in the park and are in contact with the municipality about certain issues they see. Rafael (66), the representative of Vrienden van Westerpark, stresses that on behalf of this organization he has indicated to the municipality that the park must be expanded because the residents of the new Haven-Stad will now also use the park. According to the organization, the section near the railway must be added to the park if it is to remain an accessible park in the future. Rafael (66) mentions that 40,000 new homes are being built and the residents of these homes simply do not fit in the park. Furthermore, Vrienden van Westerpark argues that the programming in the park needs to be done differently. When a festival becomes too big, the municipality needs to look for another location for that certain event. Additionally, the organization wants more diverse, exciting programming in the

park. They propose to give start-ups the opportunity to do something in the park that is not happening yet and that they can do that for a maximum of three years. Then it is up to the municipality to find a new location for these companies. Lastly, the organization would prefer that the events held in the park are publicly accessible and that the fences around these events disappear.

Furthermore, a program council was set up in 2018 in which local residents can participate and discuss with the municipality about the future of the Westerpark. Two respondents, Rafael (66) and Menno (51) are members of this program council; also the program manager of the Westerpark, Paul Nieuwenhuizen attends these meetings. Menno (51) emphasizes that this council is an advisory body and that their advice does not necessarily have to be followed by the municipality. As a result of the meetings of the program council, compromises have been made about the events organized in the park: the number of event days has been reduced from 123 to 100. According to Rafael (66), this is not enough. It is not about the number of event days, but about how the events are programmed and what nuisance is caused by it. He likes to continue the conversations with the municipality and hopes that the balance in the park will be restored.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

This research identifies in what way partial privatization of the Westerpark affects the local residents and how local residents react to this. The aim of this study was to determine how local residents experience using the park and how they view the processes occurring in the Westerpark. The Westerpark is one of the biggest parks of Amsterdam and located in the west of the city. The park consists of different parts and there is a collaboration between the municipality and a private organization, Westergas, in one of these areas (the *Cultuurpark*). The various features of the park provide added value to the Westerpark and the park is therefore very popular with its local residents. In this chapter, the conclusions per sub question are explained. The first two sub questions are discussed briefly as they have already been covered in chapter 4. The last two are discussed in more detail. Lastly, a general conclusion from the main question is drawn.

The first sub question of this thesis was “*How has the Westerpark, in terms of privatization, changed over time?*”. It can be concluded from the first sub question that the Westerpark area and the Westerpark itself, have become busier over the years. In terms of (partial) privatization, the amount of event days had gone up and this contributed to an increase of visitors to the park. The programming in the park has also changed and went from businesses and events with a culture destination to more hospitality oriented destinations. Many businesses are situated for a long time in the park, however, some buildings keep housing new companies or initiatives.

The second sub question examines which actors are involved in the management of the Westerpark. Different actors work together in order to manage the public space of the Westerpark. The municipality has full ownership and control over the outdoor spaces in the park; the buildings in the *Cultuurpark* area however, belong to Westergas, a private company. This private company decides what kind of businesses can be situated in their buildings. Additionally, the municipality consults with commercial parties about renting out different areas of the park. Westergas is often involved in this as well. When the municipality agrees with a party on organising an event in the park, a permit is granted.

This paragraph answers the third sub question, "*How do local residents experience using the Westerpark and in what way are they affected by privatization processes in the park?*". It can be concluded from the interviews that local residents of the Westerpark area enjoy using this park. The many different areas of the park are well-used and plenty of activities are performed in the park. The Westerpark has its own micro-geographies: in different parts of the park, several activities are performed with certain types of groups or individuals. Different groups both share and appropriate areas in the public space. Local residents visit the park alone or with friends or family. Van Aalst & Brands (2021) mention that the presence of other individuals or groups in the park is one of the reasons people are visiting the park, however, people still prefer hanging out within their own group. This is in line with how the local residents of the Westerpark area view their way of using the park. They mention that the Westerpark is a place where interaction with others can occur, however, they like to relax within their own group. Furthermore, the park is a place where people can do their own thing or choose to use one of the commercial options in the park. In the *Cultuurpark*, the more commercial area of the park, activities are regulated and it is implied how to behave in the area. This corresponds with a 'tight' space, Tani (2015) describes. Users can make a space more tight or loose with their behaviour. Local residents find their own way to *loosen* the Westerpark: own beverages are brought to the commercial area or people create their own spots to relax.

Partial privatization itself does not cause dissatisfaction among local residents. However, the way the events are executed and how the *Cultuurpark* is programmed does cause some tension between the residents, the municipality and Westergas. Residents want more publicly accessible events: they feel that when a paid event takes place, people are excluded from the public park. This is in line with the literature of Schmidt & Nemeth (2010), which indicates that public spaces are then only accessible for people with money, the consumers. Smith (2018) mentions that the public space becomes a place for '*exclusion and appropriation*'. Furthermore, residents want to see more diversity in the programming of the park and expansion of the park

regarding the construction of the new Haven-Stad. This all in favor of the inclusivity of the park. Additionally, some events organized in the park cause nuisance and pollute the area according to some local residents. This is consistent with the literature written by Smith (2017; 2018), which states that events in public spaces produce noise disturbance and waste and do not necessarily benefit the neighborhood.

The last sub question examines how local residents react to the influence of privatization in the Westerpark. Local residents of the Westerpark area have always been involved in the preservation of the park. Several local residents have therefore united, either at Vrienden van Westerpark or in the program council in order to restore the balance in the Westerpark. Noticeable is that the degree of involvement in restoring balance in the park appears to be related to age and length of residence. Younger local residents are not troubled by the diversity of the activities in the park or the effect of events on the greenery in the park or the neighborhood around the park; people who live in the area since the opening of the Westerpark, are more concerned. The amount of organized events in the park, the diversity of the horeca businesses and leisure activities are well-balanced according to the younger respondents. However, the amount of events or horeca businesses should not be out of proportion.

As described in the relevance of this study, little research has been done on residents' perceptions of privatization in public space. Keeping in mind the contextual explanation of the concept of *privatization* and the use of the term *publicness*, an attempt has been made to find an answer to the main question. It should be highlighted that *publicness* (as part of privatization processes) is a nebulous term, and the context must constantly be taken into account. To answer the main question: “*How does (partial) privatization of the Westerpark affect the local residents and how do the local residents react to this process?*”, interviews with local residents were held. It can be concluded from those interviews, that the involvement of Westergas in activities in the park does not affect the local residents in a negative manner. Nevertheless, the execution of some activities and the declining diversity of the horeca and events is seen as something that needs to change in order to make the park more inclusive and diverse. Some Westerpark area residents have been organized and are in consultation with the municipality about the future of the park.

This research was conducted in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, so for a large part of the year the bars and restaurants were closed and no (large-scale) events took place. The COVID-19 pandemic has ensured that people re-evaluate public space and possibly attach more importance to this space. For this research, it can be concluded that the local residents have not forgotten how the situation in the park was before COVID-19 with regard to temporary and

partial privatization and the local residents expect that after the pandemic everything would be back to the way it was. The mayor of Amsterdam wants the events to resume as soon as possible and time will tell what the situation in the park will be after the pandemic.

## Chapter 7. Reflection

Reflecting on my experiences while writing this thesis, the process was very intriguing and educational. In addition to a lot of factual knowledge about the park and the policies and implementation methods of the municipality of Amsterdam, it was interesting to take a closer look into the perspectives of local residents of the Westerpark. As a local resident of the Westerpark area myself, the stories of the respondents really fascinated me. I entered the investigation objectively and as the investigation progressed I really formed a picture of the consequences of the privatization in the park. Because I live in the area myself, it was relatively easy to recruit respondents. This certainly contributed to a smooth process of the collection of results for this thesis.

With regard to the methodology, the interviews were conducted during walk-alongs with local residents in the park. Some of the walk-alongs took a long time and sometimes there were conversations in between that were not relevant for this research: this could be because the walk felt informal for both researcher and respondent. Therefore, the data-collecting method was not the most efficient method. Furthermore, it was often windy and sometimes the park was crowded and this resulted in high levels of background noise. This made transcribing the interviews sometimes difficult. Lastly, it was hard to combine the photography of certain areas in the park and the recording of the respondents' audio. During rainy days, when I had to hold an umbrella, the respondent needed to take photos instead of the researcher in order to keep the interview going. However, this does not have to be detrimental to the research. Although there were some remarks on this method, it ensured vivid explanations of the respondents on the use of the park, the different parts of the park and their views on privatization in the park. With the help of the photos, memories of the relevant places arose and this caused respondents to talk about the park in a more deep, open manner. Additionally, the readers of this thesis can form a good picture of the situation in the park because of the photos of special places of the respondents. The pictures really show the most interesting places in the park. In the future, I would have the respondents take pictures beforehand of the places that intrigue them in the park, so that the interview itself can run more smoothly and people have already thought about the subject of the study.

Based on this study, a recommendation to the parties involved in the management of the park can be made. Some local residents are already involved in the decision-making processes about the

Westerpark, which ensures a good representation of the views of the neighborhood. Although some local residents are not yet satisfied with the balance in the park, a number of adjustments have been made to the event policy of the Westerpark for the benefits of its local residents. It is important that local residents continue to be involved in these processes and the municipality should keep consulting them in order to preserve the balance in the park.

Perceptions of local residents are important for mapping out the consequences of different types of management of public space, such as an urban park. Future research should focus on different public spaces with different privatization processes (semi-public space, semi-private space, fully public space etc.) and the influence of this on the local residents to paint a broader picture of the perception of local residents on the processes in the public space.

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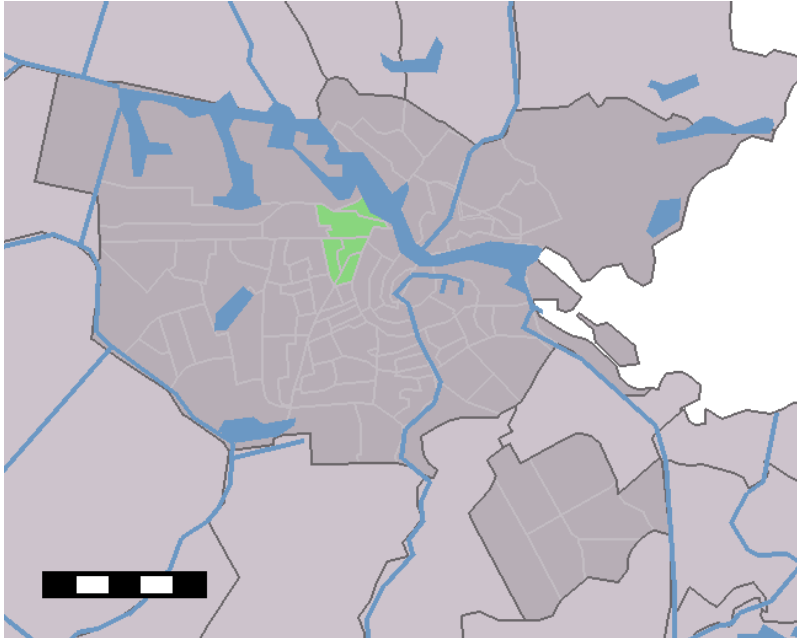
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# Appendix

## Attachment 1

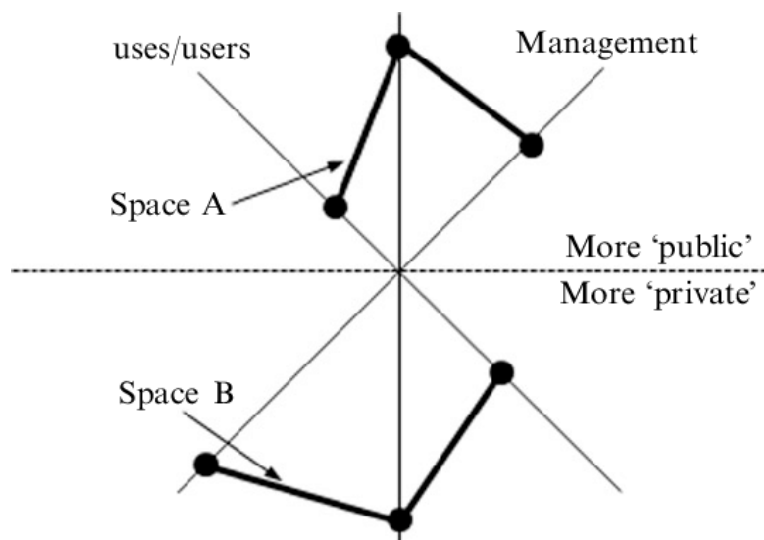
Map Westerpark Area Amsterdam



Gebiedsanalyse 2016 Westerpark. (2016). Gemeente Amsterdam. Geraadpleegd op 30 mei 2021.

## Attachment 2

A: Model of Operation, Use and Ownership combinations



Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011

B: Star Mode Model



**Attachment 3**

Conceptual Model 'Publicness'

Publicness			
Ownership	Access	Uses	Other

<p>Ownership, dominance in the space (Van Langstraat &amp; Van Melik, 2013; Kohn, 2004)</p> <p>Management (Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2012)</p> <p>Agency (Ben &amp; Gaus, 1983)</p>	<p>Access (Ben &amp; Gaus, 1983),</p> <p>Inclusivity (Kohn, 2004; Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2011),</p> <p>Accessibility (Van Langstraat &amp; Van Melik, 2013; Kohn, 2004)</p>	<p>Degree of interaction (Kohn, 2004; Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2007)</p> <p>Interest (Ben &amp; Gaus, 1983)</p> <p>Intersubjectivity (Kohn, 2004)</p> <p>Uses &amp; users (Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2012)</p> <p>Inclusiveness (Van Langstraat &amp; Van Melik, 2013)</p>	<p>Variety (Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2011)</p> <p>Authenticity (Nemeth &amp; Schmidt, 2011)</p>

## Attachment 4

### Analysis Scheme Documents

<b>Bestemmingsplan Westerpark (2016)</b>	<b>Locatieprofielen (2021)</b>	<b>Amsterdamse Thermometer van de Openbare Ruimte (2019)</b>	<b>Visies Openbare Ruimte 2025 (2017)</b>
<u>Beheer</u> Cultuurpark (p.8)	<u>Beheer/Onderhoud</u> Westergas invloed (p. 231) Taken Gemeente Amsterdam (p.233, p. 235) Overleg omwonenden/programmaad (p. 231, p. 236)	<u>Beheer/onderhoud</u> Standaard formule (p. 28) Veranderingen in beheer (p. 4)	<u>Beheer/onderhoud</u> Duurzaam beheer (p. 8, p. 26, p. 37 - 39) Financieel (p. 9)
	<u>Privaat vs. publiek</u> Verhuur gebouwen Cultuurpark (p. 231)	<u>Privaat vs. publiek</u> Verdeling ruimte (p.18)	<u>Privaat vs. publiek</u> Gebruik openbare ruimte (p.19) Randvoorwaarden (p. 43) Co-beheer (p. 48) Financieel (p.48)
	<u>Druk</u> Druk op Westerpark (p. 232)	<u>Druk</u> Druk op Amsterdamse openbare ruimte (p.4, p. 11, p. 15, p. 18, p. 23, p. 33 - 42, p. 46, p. 47)	<u>Druk</u> Door toenemende druk > verbeteringen (p. 7, p. 15, p. 23, p. 33, p. 41)
	<u>Toekomst/visie</u> Gebruik Westerpark (p. 232)		<u>Toekomst/visie</u> Openbare ruimte toekomstige generaties (p. 6) Toekomstig gebruik (p. 29, p. 47)
<u>Geschiedenis</u> Geschiedenis voor Westerpark (p. 3 - 7) Herontwikkeling (p. 7)			
	<u>Evenementen</u> Reglementen (p. 233) Organisatie (p. 234, p. 235)		



## Attachment 5

### Topic List Walk-Along Interviews

Topic	Literature	Elaboration
<b>General</b>		
Familiarity with the park		For how long do you live close to the Westerpark?
Opinion about the park (general)	Carmona, 2019	What do you think about the park in general? And why?  What do you think of the design/looks of the park? And why?
Changes in the park		Have you seen that the park has changed in the past ... years?  In what way?
Spots used	Carmona, 2019	Which spots do you use in the park and which spots do you avoid?  Do you have any favourite spots?
Activities	Carmona, 2019	What kind of activities do you do in the park?

<b>Use of the park</b>		
Frequency		How often do you use the park?
Which spots do you use		Which spots do you use in the park? Why?
What do you do		What kind of activities do you do in the park?
With whom	Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980; Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001	Do you use the park with other people?  Do you use the park alone?
<b>Publicness</b>		
Feeling of welcomeness and as for others	Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011	Do you feel welcome in the park? Why?  Do you always feel welcome in the park?  Do you think Amsterdam residents feel welcome in the park? Why?
Opinion about authenticity & variety of the park	Schmidt, 2005; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011	Do you think the park is authentic? Why?  What do you think about the variety of the park? Are there different recreation/leisure options?
Interaction other visitors	Kohn, 2004; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2012; Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Qian, 2018	Is it possible to interact with other visitors of the park?  Do you do this and how?

<b>Privatization</b>		
Interpretation concept privatization		What do you think of the word 'privatization' related to the Westerpark?
Use of the 'horeca' in the park	Leclercq, 2018	Do you use the 'horeca' in the park? What do you use?
Visiting events in the park	Leclercq, 2018	Have you ever visited festivals in the park?  What is your opinion about the festivals being held in the park?
Opinion about accessibility	Van Langstraat & Melik, 2013; Ben & Gaus, 1983; Kohn, 2004; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2011	Do you think the park is accessible for everyone?  How is that for you?
Perceived positive/negative consequences of privatization	Leclercq, 2018	Do you think privatization in the park is a good thing? Why?  Do you feel there are negative consequences of privatization of this park? And why?  Did you see the Westerpark, in terms of privatization, change over time?
Possible types of action against privatization (specifically for Vrienden van Westerpark)		Do you take action against certain processes in the park?  How do you take action? Concrete examples?

## Attachment 6

Nodes, imported from NVivo

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>General</b>	<b>Introductory opinions about the park</b>
<b>Changes in the park</b>	<b>Seen changes in the park over time in terms of design, programming and visitors</b>
<b>Favourite spot</b>	<b>Most favourite spot in the park</b>
<b>General opinion</b>	<b>General opinion about the park</b>
<b>Least favourite spot</b>	<b>Less favourite spot in the park</b>
<b>Time living in the area</b>	<b>For how long do the respondents live in the Westerpark area</b>
<b>Privatization</b>	
<b>(Re)action to privatization</b>	<b>Views on privatization &amp; concrete actions local residents take regarding consequences of privatization</b>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>Thoughts about accessibility of the park (considering the temporary/partial privatization)</b>
<b>Consequences privatization</b>	<b>The perceived negative/positive consequences privatization</b>

<b>Events</b>	<b>Visiting of events, thoughts about events in the park</b>
<b>General opinion privatization</b>	<b>Thoughts about the concept privatization, applicable to the park</b>
<b>Horeca</b>	<b>Use of horeca, thoughts about horeca</b>
<b>Publicness</b>	<b>About the publicness of the park</b>
<b>Authenticity</b>	<b>Opinions about authenticity of the park</b>
<b>Interaction</b>	<b>Possibility to interact (with strangers) in the park</b>
<b>Variety</b>	<b>Opinions about variety of the park; diversity of features and different areas in the park</b>
<b>Welcomeness</b>	<b>Feelings of welcomeness in the park and questioning the feeling of welcomeness of other people in the park</b>
<b>Use of the park</b>	<b>Different uses of the park: e.g. activities and interaction</b>
<b>Activities</b>	<b>The activities respondents do in the park</b>
<b>Company in the park</b>	<b>The company the respondent visits the park with: alone, with friends/ family</b>
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>How often the park is used by respondent</b>

**Spots used**

**Particular spots respondents spend time**