

# Everyday performances of the Wageningen Marketplace during COVID-19

Exploring the locally enacted realities of the public space of the Wageningen marketplace as impacted by the COVID-19 measures.



Marieke de Haas



Department of Environmental Sciences

Human Geography and Land Use Planning chair groups

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Marieke Bella Johanna de Haas

1010413

Supervised by Martijn Duineveld

Second reader Marlies Meijer

## A prologue and some acknowledgements

As a student of spatial planning and design I have a personal fascination for the public space and her public life within. People do things, and that is endlessly fascinating. To me, the public space sometimes feels like a theatre. One can go there to sit or stand and simply watch. Or partake and play your role by standing in line for the bus, or for buying a bag of apples.

Because of the COVID-19 measures, many forms of public life were shut. A curfew was emplaced, and the university and the streets were mostly empty. Amid this, I was about to start a thesis. A lot of the things people do and how they use their space turned to the private sphere. They became invisible and the theatre of life was turned upside down. Like that, it shuffled the rules of living and the roles of this theatre. The décor of the home was not only the décor for the housemate, mother, or son anymore. It was converted into the décor for the student, home-teacher, gym attendant and professional, as remote work became a new norm after a work-out in the living room.

In that latter respect, as a parttime home care cleaner with the elderly, the lockdown did not change much about my work. Bathrooms had to be cleaned, and so the work continued. However, upon entering a client's house, who or what I would encounter, gradually did change. Many of my clients would receive minimal, or even no more visitors. As the absence of visiting friends and family grew, experiences of loneliness got ever so present. As I was washing their windows, I would witness people get more socially isolated by the week.

Unlike the universities, streets and living rooms of my clients, there was one place where the theatre of life did not seem to have shut. That feeling of being surrounded by others, greeting and maybe even chatting with strangers as you stand and wait. Standing one-and-a-half meters apart: 'How are you dealing with the lockdown?' 'Yeah, it is pretty though...' And so, the normal feeling of being surrounded by life still existed on Wednesdays and Saturdays, making the lockdown at least a bit less though. It led to my decision where to direct my fascination for people in this master thesis.

As a student of spatial planning and design, I try to be aware of my own role and my own performances. When engaging in washing people's windows, one should not ask too many questions. But when engaging in academia, one should be able to think reflexively about the effect of (constructed) assumptions of reality that follow from any methodological approach. In this vein, this thesis should be read as an exercise as to how public space can be seen from a relational micro-perspective. It recognizes that the roles that we play make up the multiplicity of realities that we live. Realizing one's role is fundamental for understanding change. Thereby it serves mostly as pre-cursor to an exhibition that things could always be otherwise.

In carrying out this exploration, my special thanks goes to all the participants, without whom the marketplace could not exist.

Some pictures were taken by myself, but the great majority of pictures were taken by Lienke Roos. Thank you for your beautiful eyes and talented ability of directing them at the right moment in the right place. I would like to thank Marieke van den Broek, who has helped me a great deal with some stylistic choices. Finally I would like to thank my supervisor, Martijn Duineveld, who was ever supportive and patient of the creative process revolving this thesis.

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**I** Step right up: introducing the stage!  
Introducing the thesis  
Exploring how measures against COVID-19 impact the public space, specifically at the Wageningen Marketplace

## 1. Introducing the thesis

End of summer, 2021. The COVID-19 lockdown that has been in place over the last year and a half has been partially lifted. No one knows how or if new restrictions will follow soon, but for the time being, the new normal<sup>1</sup> in its current state bears little reminiscence with a global pandemic. It has been otherwise: over the last year and a half, official measures against COVID-19 have decreed drastic changes in public interactions. Following the first COVID-19 outbreak in the Netherlands, Prime minister Mark Rutte has advised to 'Only leave your house [...] if you have to suffice your necessities of life. Go to the shops, but do so alone. And not with your complete family or a group. And do so at a time when the shop is scarcely visited' (Rutte, 2020).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, citizens have been urged to maintain an interpersonal distance of one-and-a-half meters with anyone that is not part of the respective household. These guidelines remained largely unchanged over the course of this study. Consequently, activities within the private and digital sphere intensified and the activities in the public decreased (de Haas et al., 2020).

Living with diversity and thus interacting with other people in the public space is beneficial for building cohesive communities (Simões Aelbrecht, 2016). The COVID-19 measures have directly targeted these social interactions as human-to-human interactions are pointed to as main cause in conveying the COVID virus. In 'battling' that, new rules of conduct aim to target these interactions in such a way that this conveyance is minimized. The according lockdown and social distancing measures being of unprecedented scale, little is still known about its impact in the context of the public space. It thereby raises questions as to how proclaimed changes revolving social interaction have an impact on public spaces. Additionally and more profoundly, it opens up a discussion about the function and meaning of existing spaces in a new way (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020).

Similarly, the Wageningen market had always been a place for strolling, meeting, hanging, demonstrating, playing and more. However, during the lockdown, these activities supposedly were not to be practiced in its space. Thereby it could be hypothesized that measures against COVID-19 have resulted in the alteration, or refrainment from 'normal' everyday social interactions. At the same time, providing its inhabitants with life necessities, the Wageningen marketplace has been continuously hosting the market days on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Upon attending, one would find a bi-weekly scenery full of life, chitchat and social and economic exchange; the marketplace remained one of the few places in the city where groups of people would consistently meet. Taking this seeming antithesis as starting point, this thesis set out to explore how the public space of the Wageningen marketplace, specifically during the Saturday market, has been impacted as a consequence of the official COVID-19 measures. From there, a more general discussion on the role of public space in the context of social interaction and relatedly general quality of life during these exceptional times is initiated. Specifically, this thesis studies how elderly visitors of the Wageningen marketplace respond and relate to the COVID-19 measures. This group has been commonly framed as the most vulnerable group to contamination during the pandemic. Consequently, their attitudes are rather telling in exploring its impact on interactions in the public space.

In endorsing the relevance of studying the marketplace during COVID-19, Van Eck et al. have conceptualised Dutch marketplaces as prototypical public spaces that 'are constructed, deconstructed

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<sup>1</sup> Het nieuwe normaal (*the new normal*) is a new phrase that has first emerged during the course of the COVID-19 outbreak. It refers to active adoption to new norms of interaction.

<sup>2</sup> Litteral tekst from a related press conference: 'Ga alleen de deur uit voor je werk als je niet thuis kunt werken. Of wanneer je een vitaal beroep hebt. En als je in je levensbehoefte moet voorzien. Ga boodschappen doen, maar doe dat alleen. En niet met het hele gezin of een groep. En doe het op een tijdstip waarop de winkel rustig en overzichtelijk is' (Rijksoverheid, 2020a)

and reconstructed on a daily or weekly basis, they function as important spaces for recurring socio-spatial interactions' (Ibid p. 376). They are thereby recognized as essential, not only for providing access to fresh products, but equally important social infrastructures for cities and towns. At the same time, Van Eck et al. point to institutionalised processes of commercialisation and privatization in marking the decline of public space (2020). These processes are coupled with an appraisal of marketplaces as part of a corporate and commercial infrastructure. The socio-political importance of the public space for communities is thereby overlooked. This way, Van Eck et al.. encourage future ethnographic research to provide more in-depth insights into how both dimensions of space have affected each other' (Ibid., p. 383). As such, this thesis bases its exploration and ultimate discussion in an ethnographic approach through recognizing the marketplace as an important social infrastructure. The marketplace is thereby fundamentally seen as a publicly accessible site of gatherings and 'site for vibrant social encounters, social inclusion, the care of others and for 'rubbing along' and for mediating differences' (Watson 2009, p. 1557).

#### Approaching the reciprocal enactment of public space

In studying the impact of the COVID-19 measures on public place, it is viewed how physical environments on the one hand, and human presence on the other reciprocally shape each other's reality. As such it is scrutinized how multiple forms of realities of one space are enacted y in the context of the COVID-19 rules. According to this approach, this this study finds itself in the paradigm of social constructivism. This choice is substantiated by its potential to appreciate the complexity of interactions characteristic for public space while allowing for a micro-perspective on what is going on at the marketplace. As such it opens up original forms of approaching a topic by discussing elements that might have otherwise been remained taken for granted.

Following the ontology of this paradigm, public space becomes conceptualised as ephemeral and relational, opposed to ontologically secure. To clarify, just like the market stands are constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed each week, the enactment of its reality can be similarly viewed as such. Toward this end, both Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the Actor Network Theory are applied. Guided by these frameworks, participants' overlapping and interfering articulations of agency are reported on to at last present a reflexive discussion on the marketplace as public space. This exploration is operationalized by the following research question:

**In what ways do measures against COVID-19 continuously impact the public space of the Wageningen marketplace?**

#### Coming up

The remainder of this thesis first reviews multiple views on public space as socially constructed in chapter 2. In this way, this chapter serves to position the study in a social constructivist approach by providing context for later discussion and reflection on the research question. Next, the employed theoretical frameworks are outlined and discussed in chapter 3. Consequently, considering its theoretical fundaments, an ethnographic research approach is chosen with related methods that rely on a case-study design, as further elaborated on in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 moves into the empirical realm of this study in a twofold manner firstly by focussing on the historical and spatial set-up of the location. Secondly a concise timeline of COVID-19 measures is presented providing further contextualisation for the interpretations of data following the interviews. Accordingly in chapter 6, the marketplace was approached as a stage that enacts potentially different and conflicting realities through performed sets of practices. The themes that followed from the discussed theoretical frameworks are applied in analysing observations and interviews. As such, the first part of this chapter deconstructs a multiplicity of relationalities inspired by the Actor Network

approach by explicating several forms of agency between human actors and non-human actors. Consequently, in applying Goffman's interaction order, it is contended that such interaction order concerning interpersonal distance, or, what counts as morally acceptable behaviour in public interactions, were not yet fully been re-established over the course of this study.

The findings from the analysis from chapter 6 finally feed into a discussion and conclusion on the marketplace by re-addressing the research question in the chapter 7. Through scrutinizing, illustrating and stressing the importance of everyday performances, the public space of the Wageningen Marketplace is celebrated. The latter features a final case recognizing how the marketplace has continuously hosted an important part for social infrastructure in the 'new normal'.

It has been argued that COVID-19 has and continuously will force planners and designers to think about and reflect upon the function and meaning of existing spaces in a new way (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020). Along these lines, the ultimate aim of this thesis does not amount to a traditional format of recommendations for future planning and design or management of the public space. The ontological foundation of this thesis appreciates the multiplicity of realities and thus possibilities of outcomes before thinking about the more practical sides of spatial planning. In this way, final conclusions merely open up an array of simple, arguably mundane and familiar, principles derived from the deconstructed enactment of one marketplace. In this sense this thesis hopes to ultimately present a theoretically original perspective on this spatial topic in the relevant context of COVID-19.



# 2

## Context and perspectives on the public space

Public space as social construction: A literature review

Various approaches to the study of public space and her social interactions are reviewed. This chapter describes a development of analyses of public space and specifically marketplaces from a social constructivist approach.

## 2. Public space as social construction: A literature review

Throughout this chapter, various social constructivist approaches to the definition of public space are reviewed. That is, looking at public space not so much as a singular object of study, but rather as constantly defined through its use and management. First of all, in theorizing about public space, existing literature on the concept of scarcity is featured. Secondly a review of constructivist approaches from an urban planner's point of view is included. It swiftly describes the development of analyses of public space that solely regarded her physical form to an approach that takes into account her environment and relationality. Finally, specifically the marketplace as social construction is discussed. In this way, existing views on public space are presented, serving as a context for analysis and discussion.

### Public space as constructed through scarcity

By viewing public space as a space with physical and definite boundaries, it can be understood as constructed through scarcity (Gerber, Hartmann & Hengstermann, 2018). Land is definite and therefore scarce. From there, this view challenges planners to better understand instruments of land policy by thinking about it in terms of scarcity. This line of argumentation continues that as land use is mediated through public institutions, with a variety of policy instruments at her disposal, it is exactly these institutions that are decisive for how public space is used (Ibid.).

Scarcity, it is argued, is the result of a political process and not good or bad in itself. When theorizing about managing the public spaces, new conflicts arise, for example as a result of new expansions of zones or new physical boundaries. Case specifically illustrated, these forms of management surface when looking at the expansion of the marketplace or the measures that promote restriction of movement in limiting contamination. In this way, its approach focusses on how agency is asserted by the employment of COVID-19 measures at the marketplace through the particular material and spatial repercussions they carry. For example, the facemasks, directive arrows and the pillars imply accepted distance between market visitors. Competition over different forms of land use arise, for example between market stands and expanded terraces. Hence new forms of scarcity are constructed.

### Public space as relational

Much research has been done on the role of public space in the context of social interaction and relatedly general quality of life. For example, in their critique on modernist abstract planning, Jacobs (1961) and Jan Gehl have encouraged urban planners and designers to focus on interactions of city life and space through observations (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). Contrary to the rationalist approach of planning, that based itself in separation of functions when designing for the city, this so-called environmental design approach aims to understand the public space through the ephemerality of public life. Putting it differently, this approach to planning focusses on the interaction of people and the build form. (Gehl, 1987). Its view stresses the importance of understanding city life and space through your own senses, common sense and simple registration techniques (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). In other words, its approach encourages urban planners and designers to focus on human-scaled activities and interactions of city life and space through observations and empirical data of people and their activities (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). Its approach entails the study of existing cities and public spaces to gain basic knowledge about how we use and get around in cities (Ibid.).

The city as meeting place is imperative in thinking about its use. The potential for social interactions is a preconditional quality that makes a city safe, sustainable and healthy. In this way, 'public space has a significant social importance as a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions' (Gehl, p. 28, 2013). Its space thereby conveys an important democratic dimension in a society and economy where privatized life is increasingly favoured, for example through private car use, private household

machines and private offices (Ibid.). Similarly, other disciplines, ranging from sociology, geography to political science, have conceived of public space as the site for the formation of democratic culture, political practice and conflict (e.g. Lofland 1989; Carr et al. 1993).

In thinking about a theory for the design of public space, the work of Rapoport has focussed on the role of cultural variables such as historical precedents (1990). Accordingly, he proposes an approach that uses empirical data with the goal in mind of generalizing more validly about human and humane environments (Rapoport, 1990). 'Thereby the environment is best conceptualized as the organization of space, time, meaning, and communication, or, alternatively, as the relations between people and people, people and things, and things and things' (Ibid., 1990, p.11). In this vein, considering Gehl's and Rapoport's logics alike, this thesis views public space as the result of a co-production between the bodies and their activities taking place between the buildings. As such, following these literatures, public space is conceived of through the variety of (social) activities that do take place within.

### The marketplace as relational

From the 1980's, marketplaces emerged as an object of study. Through the development of new perspectives on social structures from anthropological, historical, sociological, economic and cultural lenses, they have become conceptualised as nodes of complex processes (Ünlü-Yücesoy, 2013). Ground level studies of marketplaces have recognized their importance as publicly accessible sites of gatherings with 'distinctive systems of social relationships' (van Eck et al., 2020).

By approaching the marketplace as a relational construct, Ünlü-Yücesoy denotes 'the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict and control' (2013). In this way, the marketplaces is viewed as a site of gatherings with distinctive social structures, with a potentiality for vibrant social encounters (Van Eck et al., 2020; Ünlü-Yücesoy et al., 2013; Watson, 2009). It thereby suggests that 'individuals as agents construct places based on meanings, definitions, and activities, while they are interacting with others in the social setting of daily life' (Ibid., 2013, p. 197).

This chapter has presented several existing views on public space as socially constructed. In approaching a space like the marketplace as such, a theoretical foundation has been presented for framing observations, analysis and discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 measures on the public space of the Wageningen marketplace. In other words, it embraces the conception of the space as constantly evolving through its use and management. In what follows, this theoretical underpinning is made more explicit following two analytical approaches: Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the Actor Network Theory.

# 3

## **Constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed:** Employed theoretical frameworks getting the marketplace into focus

Analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 measures on the public space of the Wageningen Marketplace following two theoretical outlooks. Both Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Actor Network are presented.



The next section presents two theoretical outlooks for framing observations, analysis and discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 measures on the public space of the Wageningen marketplace. Building along the literature review as presented above, the public space is conceptualised not as ontologically secure, but rather through its ephemeral- and relationality. To clarify, public space is thereby recognized as continuously crafted through the performances of its users. So, first by viewing the reality of the marketplace as constructed, the deconstruction of its reality is enabled in chapter 6, to finally derive a discussion on the impact of the measures against COVID-19 in the final chapter of this thesis in chapter 7. Toward this end, respectively Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the Actor Network theory are presented and applied

The arguably unconventional combination of these theories is justified by the combination of its parts and outputs. Through Goffmanian analysis, its traditional and sociologically significant dramaturgical approach is given a renewed relevance by looking at public space and the relatively novel norms of interpersonal distancing. It thereby allows for a detailed understanding of the nature of social interactions among urban dwellers and the available methods for studying them. Consequentially, building upon and complementing this dramaturgical output from an Actor Network approach allows for an original outlook for discussion on the public space in the context of the COVID-19 measures.

#### Everyday life and the interaction order

Erving Goffman analysed and theorized about the dynamics of any kind of public social interactions, ranging from standing in a queue, to attending celebrative social occasions like birthdays or funerals. Equally, he theorized about how urban dwellers meet and interact. Doing so, he has contributed to the school of the symbolic interactionists. This school of thought provides a micro-sociological perspective to understand how individuals interact with each other and thereby construct the social world in which they live (Goffman & Best, 2017).

Goffman formulated a dramaturgical approach to deconstruct everyday interactions in the public space, that in theory, reciprocally influences how the individual acts. Thereupon, Goffman looked at the choreographies of these interactions using the metaphor of the theatre. He conceptualised people in public as actors in a play. From there, he illustrated how performances in the public space, or when sticking to the metaphorical term of the stage, limit but also enable the everyday interactions of its players (Romania, 2020).

From his observations, Goffman formulated an interaction order that denotes how social normative structures are embedded in all forms of social interactions. By studying and classifying different kind of interactions, ranging from getting on the same bus with a stranger to more ritualized celebrative occasions like weddings, he concluded that one class of interactions is similar every time. In each scenario Goffman depicts the individual as an active and knowledgeable agent devising its own conduct following the script of the play (Marshall, 2013). Accordingly, the rules of the theatre determine if the actual interaction, or the storyline of the play is morally acceptable and realistic.

Consequently, 'respectful interactions enable citizens to have rewarding social interactions and to develop social networks that are sustained by trust' (Goffman, in Peters et al., p. 99). From these interactions, it is further theorized how a mutual interpersonal trust supports a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive social sphere (*Ibid.*). Followingly, individuals in public follow a set script of conduct to make a good appearance to others and not be considered societal outcast (Marshall, 2013). In this theory, Goffman made a distinction between public and private behaviour; the front- and backstage. The backstage entails the hidden reality of the self, or, performance of an individual when not being observed by others at all. The frontstage entails presentations of the self, or the performance of an individual in the presence of someone else (*Ibid.*).

### Agency and the environment

Goffman theorizes how dwelling in the public space expresses a material and practical dimension as well as an important symbolic dimension 'because the socio-spatial relation is a dialectical dynamism of great importance' (Jensen, 2006, p. 153). To illustrate, when looking at the techniques that pedestrians employ in order to not bump into one another, a number of different devices are constantly employed. Thereby the dialectical dynamism, that is how people move relative to each other, casts a consistent pattern of street behaviour without which street traffic would be a chaos, and thus morally unacceptable (Jensen, 2006). Consequent to this line of thought, the individual agent on the marketplace is given little rational agency as her interactions are the result of existing scripts and material boundaries of its décor. Goffman's dramaturgy thus views public choreographies of social distancing as the result of a process of regulation and organization of what counts as morally accepted social interactions (Romania, 2020).

Thus, individuals are viewed as active and knowledgeable agents informative for their own conducts. Arguably paradoxically, at the same time they seem to be subjected to the existing public choreographies of interpersonal distancing. A constructivist line of thought can be recognized in this seeming discrepancy, as interactions shape and are shaped by both the physical and social environment. In other words, the interaction order *co-produces* the performances and interactions in the context of her material, or spatial setting. Also in Wageningen this means that the market visitors are configured to perform a script of readily rehearsed lines in their use of this space.

Exactly so, it has been argued that interpersonal distancing for Goffman is the main element in the 'grammar and syntax' of social interaction (Romania, 2020). Now, as COVID-19 has imposed new rules concerning interpersonal distance, Goffman's theory seems appropriate for exploring and evaluating its effect on the stage of the marketplace. It raises questions as to if new interactions orders are adopted. Equally so should the theoretical contributions of Goffman to this thesis be understood; it provides an inspirational direction of looking at contemporary everyday interaction at the marketplace, serving as a foundation for discussion on current use of the public space with unprecedented norms of social distancing.

### Actor Network Theory

It should be clear how Goffman offers a way of deconstructing the Wageningen marketplace from a micro-sociological perspective. As discussed, viewing everyday interactions as the foundation for any normative social structure, its view features a dialectical dynamism through recognizing both material as well as symbolic interactions. In this way, by initiating an understanding of the complex relationship between actors (stage player) and between actor and object (the décor of the market), it has been argued that Goffman has predicated the now widespread 'actor network theory' through its dismissal that the agent is isolated from its material environment (Jensen, 2010).

The Actor Network Theory (ANT) facilitates an approach to socio-technical analysis that treats entities and materialities as enacted by exploring the configuration and reconfiguration of those relations (Law, 2000, p.157). Major ontological categories, for example technology, knowledge, or more specifically the physics of the human body are treated as effects and outcomes, instead of as explanatory resources (*Ibid.*). In other words, its approach allows for explication of the configuration of scientific truth-claims by emphasising how a network of actors, both human and non-human, enact such respective truth-claims. In turn, these actors too are viewed as configured in other existing networks, resulting in an ontological approach that acknowledges multiple realities that are based in sets of practices, or, articulations of agency.

Socio-spatial relations make up a space, and as such, they are always in the making through practice (Law, 2004). 'Like (human) subjects, (natural) objects are framed as parts of events that occur and plays that are staged. If an object is real this is because it is part of a practice. It is a reality enacted'. (Mol in Law, p 56). Finally, the simultaneous enactment of objects results in a claim that there is a multiplicity of realities, inconsistent with a singular world view. 'This arises because practices are endlessly variable and differ from one another' (Law, 2004, p.162). Following this logic, it is added that 'practices overlap in many and unpredictable ways, so there are always interferences between different realities'.

Specifically, its approach implies that COVID-19 is conceptualized as constructed through the truth-claims that are made about it, for example following scientific studies and press releases. Due to its limited scope, this thesis leaves the analysis of how such truth-claims about the COVID-19 virus have been constructed undiscussed. In a similar way, however, it does consider the official measures against COVID-19 to follow from the same process of construction. All the same, ontological assumptions about the public space of the Wageningen marketplace in the context of the COVID-19 measures follow from how they are enacted. This way, public space as object of study is viewed as the result of sets of practices or articulations of agency played down between both its human and non-humans actors.

So like Goffman's dramaturgical theory, when making truth claims that follow ANT's logic, the role of performance is pivotal to its reconstruction. Viewing reality as performed means abiding to the claim that enactments produce realities (Law, 2004, p.162). However, argues Mol, ANT does not entail an updated version of Goffman's dramaturgical sociology (Mol in Law, 2004). As discussed, Goffman makes a distinction between 'presentations of the self on the one hand, and self as a hidden reality lying behind and producing those presentations, on the other' (Law, p. 56). ANT on the other hand, places the emphasis on the productive consequences of performances in crafting reality. In other words, reality is fluid and enacted throughout, as there is a continuous' two-way traffic between enactments on the one hand, and realities on the other' (Law, p. 56). Following that same logic, this thesis embraces a conception of the impact of the measures against COVID-19 as a continuous two way traffic between enactments and materialities opposed to Goffman's dualistic distinction of presentations of the self on the one hand, and self as a hidden reality lying behind.

As such, in studying how human- and non-human actors co-produce the reality of the marketplace, these performance and sets of practices form the focal points for analysing gathered data. The following chapter elaborates on how this premise is methodologically substantiated.



# 4

## Studying the co-production of human- and non-human actors at the marketplace

Employed methodological framework for analysis

Actor's performance and sets of practices are ethnographically recorded using direct observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews. The target group of the study consists mainly of elderly, roughly from the retirement age onward.

In studying how human- and non-human actors co-produce the reality of the marketplace, performance and sets of practices form the focal points. In other words, the COVID-19 measures and their impact on the public space of the Wageningen marketplace are understood through the study of the related sets of practices and performances of its users. Doing so, the remainder of this chapter explains and justifies how following an ethnographic approach. What follows is an elaboration on how data is collected. Next, it is featured how the mixed methods of observation and interviewing respectively were carried out following a protocol. Consequentially it is discussed how its results were analysed. Finally its related ethical implications, limitations and positionality are discussed.

## Methods

Simões Aelbrecht argues that upon reviewing existing empirical methods it shows that to study similar complex types of social interactions in the public space, a cross-disciplinary combination of different types of method is necessary (2016). On the one hand, direct observation was used to initiate a reconstruction by mapping the agency of the non-human environment of the marketplace. On the other hand, as the study of socially shared means and constructed social worlds depend largely on subjective elements, an ethnographic approach using qualitative interviewing and observation was deemed appropriate (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Qualitative interviewing allowed for a variety of perspectives in reconstructing the performances and sets of practices that enact the reality on the Wageningen marketplace. 'Ethnographic research needs to pay close and serious attention to the material goods and circumstances that are integral to the organization of everyday social life. [...] Not only do people do things with words, but also they do things with things' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 137). The latter endorses how both human and material actors co-produce a reality, thereby abiding to this thesis' working paradigm of social constructivism.

### Data collection

Initially direct observations were made to identify the patterns of use and behaviour in relation to the physical environment. Next, 23 semi-structured interviews were held on 6 different Saturdays starting on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 8<sup>th</sup> and ending on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. Semi-structured interviewing was used gathering information in planning for public spaces as it gives insight into relationship, assessment and understanding people in their surrounding environment, whether natural or urban (Santo-Tomás Muro et al., 2020). The semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were based on a given script that is organized using open-ended questions, where the interviewee is allowed to elaborate on his or her answers. SSIs' adaptability, combined with its particular structure, has been successfully applicable in diverse research projects concerning (urban) landscape perception (Ibid.)

The chosen location for this research pertains the Wageningen Marketplace. This marketplace was chosen for its easy access and remarkably lively spirit in spite of the lasting COVID-19 pandemic, established through direct observation. The target group of the study consisted mainly of elderly, roughly from the retirement age onward. As it is likely that interviewees have spent much time in this public space, many of the interviewed maintained a telling and long-lasting relationship to it.

### Observational protocol

Observation offers a direct way of gathering data. Understanding city life and space through your own senses, common sense and simple registration techniques is pivotal (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). So, in understanding public space, the interaction, behaviour and movement of its users is key, shifting the focus from the public *space* to a focus to public *life*. Using direct observation, the following questions were leading in this study (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

- What do people do when attending the Wageningen Marketplace?
- How do these activities relate to each other spatially?
- How do spatial relationships affect participants?

Direct observation means that in collecting data, the senses are used to document experience and behaviour that are taking place on the marketplace (Duineveld, 2021). Next to note-taking and initials sketching, photography were employed.

#### Interview Protocol

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way containing grand tour questions postulated based on the initial observations. Significant results from observations that were executed in the weeks before the interviews formed the basis of later interview questions. Probing questions were asked as the interview proceeded. Upon initiating an interview, first the nature and purpose of the interview was stated. Then, respondents were given the immediate option to withdraw at any time and to remain anonymous. Followingly, an introduction question was asked in a casual small-talk sort of way to break the ice. Then the respondent was asked for permission to be audibly recorded. The interview would usually start with questioning one's business at the marketplace. If the interview would not flow automatically to the topic of the COVID-19 measures, it would be asked directly how it had effected people's experience of their business. After the interview was done the relevance of the research was explained, and the respondents were thanked for their time. Finally they were asked if results are allowed to be shared. At the end it was added when the interview took place.

#### Data analysis

The interviews were gathered in the format of audio recordings on the marketplace, after which they were transcribed and coded. Similarly, early insights were translated into open codes, accompanying the data. These open codes were translated into focussed codes by comparing and categorizing them. Related themes and descriptions related to the topics were then further be analysed. Thence, these codes were translated in conceptual connections related to elements of the theoretical framework, following an iterative process. This means that interpretations of codes were regularly revisited to make them fit their distinctive categories better as the process continued.

Identified themes were then used to deconstruct and discuss the impact of the COVID-19 measures on the public space of the Wageningen marketplace. As the study was explorative, the identification of new relationships to the marketplace was open-ended.

'Practices overlap in many and unpredictable ways, so there are always interferences between different realities' (Mol in Law, 2004). Overlapping and conflicting practices thereby formed the backbone around which the analysis and later discussion became organized. Doing so, it was aimed to show a diversity of answers and potentially conflicting enactments.

#### Ethical considerations

To not impose any danger upon participants, the COVID-19 measures as postulated by the government were maintained. More specifically this means that one-and-a-half meter was maintained with all (potential) participants at all times.

Secondly, as intimate details about people's life might be revealed during the interviews, the participants are given the option to remain anonymous. Unlike their age, in nearly all cases, their names have been replaced by imaginary names. They have also been given the option to disengage from the study at any moment in time before commencing the interview in order to avoid inflicting discomfort upon the participants .

Despite the interviews being intentionally resembling a casual market conversation, being a researcher always implies a power relation toward those interviewed. Especially when considering the nature of qualitative studies, participants are personally involved in study (Sanjari et al., 2014). It is therefore at all time considered that this study might be dealing with a person's account of experience that features for example anxiety or fear. Both during the interviews and her interpretation, results thus are treated with reflexivity and sensibility.

#### Limitations

During the course of the research several limitations became apparent. First, the very central object of this study, namely the interaction taking place at the marketplace during a pandemic might cause people to refrain from interaction with this place from the start. In other words, like some people reported, COVID-19 has forced them to socialize less on the market, and act more goal-oriented inhibiting them to be willing to be interviewed, or even not come to the marketplace in the first place. Obviously, those who are not present could not be asked about their experiences. It is thereby acknowledged that no grand causal relationships can be drawn from the interviews. At the same time, this limitation puts under discussion the importance of presence and absence of human actors in constructing and making truth statements about a space. Following an ANT logic, the reality of the marketplace comes into being through enactment and sets of practices. This results in quite an interesting theoretical position that would view that whatever is not there, does not contribute to its ontology.

Finally issues revolving translation might form a limitation. All interviews were conducted in Dutch whereas its results are being presented in English. Due to translation, subtle discrepancies in what is said, interpreted and written down could be consequential. This proposition, although beyond the scope of this paper, would be ground for an interesting discussion alike. After all, to what extent is language representative in de- and reconstruction of enacted realities?



# 5

## Gather round for the Wageningen Marketplace

### Methodological framework

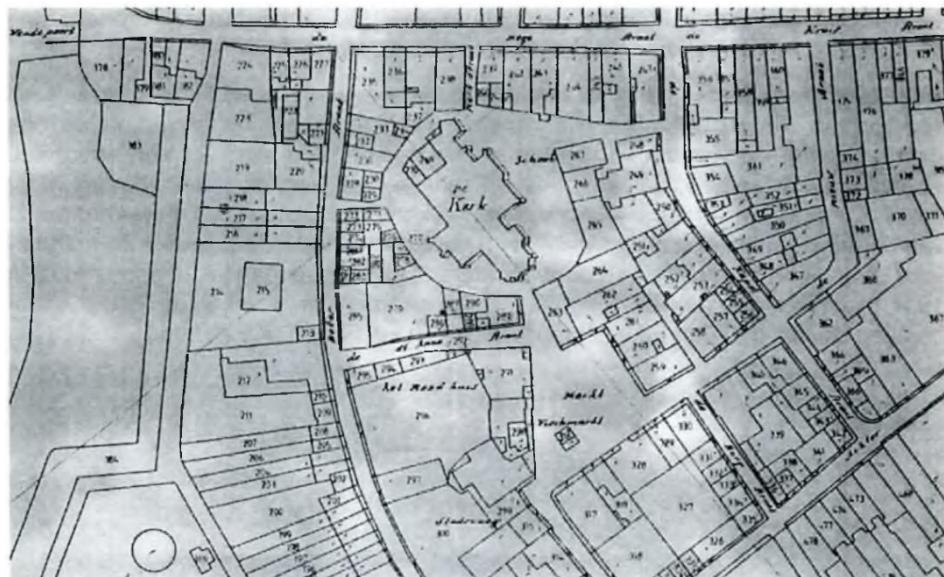
Moving into the empirical realm of the study, this chapter provides historical background of the spatial set-up of- and a concise timeline of the COVID-19 measures related to the Wageningen Marketplace.

## 5. An intermezzo: presenting the socio-spatial context

The remainder of this thesis moves into the empirical realm of its study. More specifically, this chapter provides the context for understanding the historical and spatial set-up of- and a concise timeline of the COVID-19 measures related to the Wageningen marketplace. In this fashion, first the history and rationale of the spatial set-up of both the Wageningen Marketplace and the Salverda square are discussed. Namely, in thinking about how its public space is impacted, some historical precedents of how food shapes the city are featured. This done to generalize more validly about its human and humane environment (Rapoport, 1990). Consequently, a timeline featuring Covid-19 measures is presented in providing contextualisation for the interpretations of data following the interviews.

### Gather round for the Wageningen Marketplace

Traditionally, the marketplace is centred around *de Grote Kerk* (the Big Church). The first church on this square was build first in Roman style when Wageningen received its city rights in 1263 (*Grote Kerk Wageningen*, n.d.). In the 15th century, the church got expanded with an aisle facing North in gothic style (*Ibid.*). Later in the 16th century, the rest of the church was renovated in the same style. The following map from 1832 show the pre-war spatial set-up.



Cadastral map from 1832. (Gast, 1991)

Like any old city, also Wageningen has always had a marketplace for trading and exchanging products from the hinterlands. Historically, the marketplace was hosted in the close vicinity to the church, whose area was not always densely built as it is today. When looking the map above, it is typical how all main roads do lead there. Nearly all historical cities of today are structured around food and the transportation from the hinterland to its inhabitants (Steel, 2013). In illustrating spatial set-ups of multiple cities, Steel has focussed on food as shaping factor rather than infrastructure (2013). 'This focus on everyday life considers the "mundane" things such as lifestyles and eating habits as the essential factors of how a city is built' (Escobedo, 2014). Equally it argued that the spatial set-up of the urban structure of Wageningen has been shaped by the eating habits of its past inhabitants



Map of Wageningen from before 1850 (Missel, 1997)

In addition however, as a result of World War II bombings in 1940, the urban structure surrounding the church has changed (Missel, 1997). Due to these devastations, the buildings were damaged beyond repair. The marketplace got rebuild according the design of ir. Kraayenhagen who was a disciple of the *Delftse School*. The Delftse School was a movement in architecture and urban design striving for the reinstalment of particular and historical character of a city (De Vree, n.d.). In redesigning its streets and squares, Kraayenhagen based himself mainly in the city plans of Wageningen from 1650 as he found these representative of Wageningen medieval city lay-out. As he found that medieval gothic churches usually stood spatially disconnected from the buildings surrounding it, he designed a spatial square surrounding the church. Following the bend of the street and the placement of small poles a suggestion of an oval shaped terrain was created, reminiscent of the cemetery that was once located there (Missel, 1997).

The new square was intended to remain the trade centre of Wageningen. Its surrounding houses, similarly rebuild in the style of the Delftse school, were designated to be shops. In this way, market days would give enough space for the stalls. On other days, shops exploited by the local middleclass, would predominate (Ibid.). Additionally, for what is known today as the *Salverdaplein*, plans existed to build a federal court building. Short after the war, these plans were cancelled and soon the plot was converted into a square that would regularly host markets and festivities, Wageningen being known for the city of liberation.

Over the course of the 1980s, this original destination of the marketplace as 'place of shopping' changed as shops made way for cafés and restaurants. Equally, averting carparking at the square considerably changed the streetscape (Ibid.). Until today and with no significant exception, the Wageningen marketplace has been continuously hosting the market days on Wednesdays and Saturdays for stallholders.

## Timeline of Covid-19 measures

The following features a concise timeline of COVID-19 measures and its implications for the Wageningen marketplace to provide contextualisation for interpreting the interviews. Some points are given some extra context. Facemasks have never been legally mandatory in the public outside. However, as they become available, it was strongly advised to wear them in busy outside areas. Over the course of the study, more people received a vaccination. The amount of people wearing a facemask gradually dropped toward June 2021.

18 march 2020      april 2020      1 june 2020      16 juli 2020      3 september 2020



The weekly market in Wageningen continues as usual after the pandemic outbreak.

Separation of marketstands regarding food and non-food.

Terraces are opened again after being closed since beginning of the lockdown.

Marketman at Costerweg complain about relocation of marketstands.

Market gets reunited and is expanded by including Vijzelstraat, Raadhuisplein and Salverdaplein.

januari 2021

28 april 2021

may 2021

juni 2021



Vaccination program starts and curfew is emplaced.

Curfew is lifted.

75% of 70+ is vaccinated.  
(Rijksoverheid, 2021)

“Society is re-opened”.  
(Rijksoverheid, 2021)

### 18<sup>th</sup> of March

'Corona or not, the markets continue' (Omroep Gelderland, 2020a). After the very first COVID related pressrelease of march 12<sup>th</sup>, the markets would continue following some 'playing rules', signfyng no fingerfood may be offered to visitors, but mainly vendors are responsible for creating a 'corona-proof'environment.



*Special investigating officer inspecting a vendor's conduct in the first wake of the Covid measures*

### April 2020

From mid april, the market has been seperated into food and non-food stands. All food stands could stay at the marketplace, all non-food had to move to a parkinglot hundrernd meters away. 'In this way, the vendors able to maintain one-and-a-half meter distance.' (Omroep Gelderland, 2020b)



*Non-food related marktstands at Costerweg (Gelderlander, 2020b)*



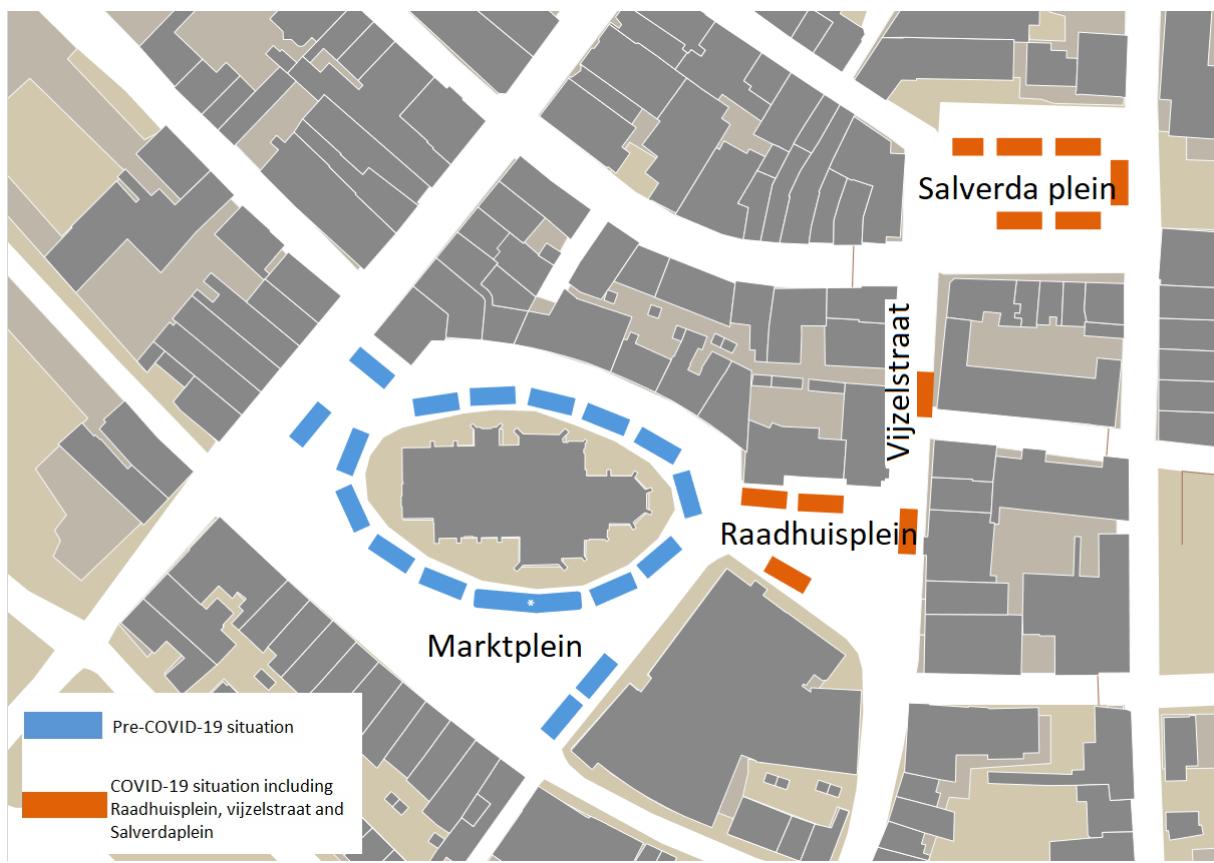
*Empty Costerweg market (Gelderlander, 2020b)*

### 16st of Juli

'We won't be able to keep up with this'.

Wageningen Marketmen voice their complaints about the low number of visitors . Their bussinesses are not cost-efficient anymore. They want to move back to the marketplace.

3<sup>rd</sup> of September



*'The market returns'.* Because the marketmen were struggling, a solution had to be found. All stands were reunited. However, as terraces also needed extra space, the market got expanded to Vijzelstraat and Salverdaplein (Huibers, 2020).



# 6

## Stories of the Marketplace

Analysis of empirical material

This chapter features a deconstruction of multiplicity of relationalities following from human actors and non-human actors. Following overlapping and conflicting accounts multiple enacted realities of the marketplace surfaced, finally feeding into the reconstruction of the reality of the marketplace in the context of the COVID-19 measures .

Following the proposed theoretical frameworks in chapter 3, the marketplace was approached as a stage that enacts potentially different and conflicting realities. As such, the first part of this chapter deconstructs a multiplicity of relationalities inspired by the Actor Network approach by explicating several forms of agency between human actors and non-human actors. Secondly, in applying Goffman's interaction order, it is contended that such interaction order concerning interpersonal distance and its according dramaturgical scripts has not yet been re-established during the study.

### [The Actor network at the Wageningen Marketplace](#)

Based on the interviews, several accounts of how interactions have changed, or not, as a result of the COVID-19 measures are presented below. First, being at the marketplace presupposes a physical presence and material interaction in its space. To state the obvious, there is a need to move around and interact with both other humans and the material environment. It is less obvious, however, how the COVID-19 measures enact its new reality. Consequent to this premise, sets of practices at the marketplace are deconstructed following three basic features of one's marketplace presence: First and foremost, being at the marketplace implies having to perform in its physical environment. In the undertaking of deconstructing these performances, the set-up of the marketplace forms the first focus point, which in this thesis is defined by its spatial materiality and corresponding directive props like pons and arrows. Secondly, the moveable and non-spatially oriented objects that came up in the data like facemasks and disinfection alcohol are discussed. Thirdly, being at the market inevitably implies interacting with others. Thereby this third section deconstructs enactments of relationalities and performances revolving human-to-human interaction.

### [The role of spatial materiality in performance](#)

This section deconstructs how relationalities and performances take place at the Wageningen marketplace in the context of its spatial materiality. Specifically, the definition of 'environment' is defined in terms of its structural-spatial and relatively stable conditions of the urban infrastructure and the (novel) arrangement of the market stands. The weather remains generally undiscussed, to not exaggerate the scope of this study.

### [Multiple enactments of a new spatial set-up](#)

The new spatial set-up of the marketplace was a theme that came up early rather consistently during most interviews. For example, Mies (68 years old lady with rollator, interviewed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May) expressed how the new spatial set-up that now includes the Salverda square is bothersome to her because '[she] must walk a larger distance, which is not all that easy'. 'Still, I go, because I want a bouquet of flowers every week'. Consequently, she reported, the market does feel different to her. Similarly, the change is noticed by Theo.

(80 years old man, interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> of May) He does not necessarily mind the change that much. Yet, he reports he does calculate more time for his weekly visits beforehand, simply because he needs it for moving around. Dina (92-year-old woman with bicycle, interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> of May) expressed she is happy that the measures were enforced but also that she will be relieved the moment when the other market stands will be reintegrated onto the market square because it suits her state of mobility better. Several other accounts signified how the lived accessibility of the marketplace has changed along with the COVID-19 measures.

Interestingly, for others, the rules, and their generally envisioned effect of containment, rather than the directly felt implications were the focal point when talking about the extended spatial set-up. Like Dina, other people made more general claims about enforcing spatial rules on the marketplace. Judith (65-year-old lady, interviewed 3<sup>rd</sup> of July) said that 'the possibility of having more space to wait or sit [on the terraces] is very good in this time'. Johanna and Tina (78-year-old and 55 year old mother and

daughter-law, interviewed 15<sup>th</sup> of May) indirectly commented on inclusivity through the spatial extension and use of pons in the queues to ensure space for everyone. Equally, Mariet (73 years old lady, interviewed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May) expressed the importance of 'simply spreading everything out' which, without question, seemed to her the most logical thing to do. For the duration of the interview, she seemed to be inpatient about being asked about these 'obvious' matters.

A conflicting account was recorded when Toos en Bert (78- & 76-year-old married couple from Wageningen that had been going to market for the entirety of their lives, interviewed 15<sup>th</sup> of May) voiced a complaint of illogical expansion. Namely, the stands would be positioned 'just here and there. The people are standing one-and-a-half meter from each other, and therefore, no one can pass. That is not logical'. Bert added that to him it is understandable that the terraces received more space, but that the queues directed as they are result in an unpractical situation as it blocks the way for passers-by's.

This conflicting account might seem of trivial nature at first, but upon further reflection compared to the other accounts it might direct toward something more profound. Namely, it exposes how the rules are not unambiguous; they might be found inconsistent depending on the way they are performed. For example, people like Toos and Bert, who reportedly mainly engage themselves with the Saturday market to get the basic food supplies and not the social part, experience newly emerged discrepancies in another way than Mies. For Toos and Bert, the expansion and the placement of market stands 'just here and there', it has become more difficult to maintain interpersonal distance, leaving them with a feeling of inconsistency. To Mies, the market has become less accessible by demanding more physical effort. However, it offers her more accessibility through giving her a sense of safety from contagion. In this light, Mies and others voice a relief that at least all food and non-food are reunited in the same area. Through giving her the option to maintain a social distance in the queues, she feels safer.

These conflicting accounts hint at the relational nature of both the space itself and the material repercussions of the COVID-19 measures; due to spatial expansion, the accessibility of the space changes for the less-mobile, but it enables the same group to uphold a ritual of going to the market and thereby have a meaningful interaction with the marketmen or other visitors. A multiplicity of realities of one space thereby becomes partially exposed.

### [The role of other objects](#)

Beside the just introduced spatial materiality that facilitates interpersonal distance, interviewees reported on the impact of portable and non-spatial objects, like facemasks and disinfection alcohol. The following section deconstructs how these non-human actors, also conceptualised as stage props, enable sets of practices and performances that build up to the enactment of the Wageningen marketplace.

### [Clockwork visits and the normalization of new stage props](#)

It is remarkable out of all 25 interviews, only 3 people reported on not continuously going to the marketplace. The vast majority of interviewee's reported on an unbroken sequence of market visits, despite the implementation of various COVID-19 measures and her stated cause. Most of them even were already so used to it that they looked surprised at it being questioned; why would they not continue their visits? Dirk (82-year-old, and member of the jenever club, interviewed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May), is one of them. For years and years, he has been going to the market every Saturday to eat fish. His logic is quite telling. Namely, asking him if he ever considered to refrain from his fish, he replied very straightforwardly 'No, no, I always carry disinfect with me. 90% alcohol, so all good. And keeping distance.' It is remarkable how by mentioning these two non-human factors he explains the absence

of his hesitation for continuing his visits. Then, also his friends, he adds, 'have not ceased to come. With abidance to the rules of course'.

Like Dirk, for whom bringing disinfect alcohol formed an important aspect for feeling justified to keep attending the market, Paul (89-year-old, interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May) displayed similar reasoning concerning facemasks and the one-and-a-half meter rule. When asking if he ever doubted his choice to attend due to risk of contamination he said: 'Well no. We always wore a facemask and abided to the interpersonal distance. But food needs to be realised somehow. If I go to the supermarket [...] I am also amongst people.' A similar argument is thus made in relation to the facemasks and interpersonal distance. Its logic endorses a threshold of safety for attending the marketplace. Besides this logic, by being both pivotal for food provision and outside it was often implied how the market offers enough reason to not abandon its visits that are 'like clockwork' to Paul.

Loes (85-year-old lady, sitting on her walker, interviewed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May) who equally has been going to the market 'as usual', argues that 'one should not change their good habitude.' Upon immediately asking her what entailed the biggest change for her market visits following the COVID-measures, she stated unwaveringly that for her it meant wearing a facemask. More specifically it meant having to get used to something new in a late stage of her life. However, 'it is no big deal' she said, ' [...] and now I have been vaccinated, I often forget to put it on'. Clearly Loes does not feel the strong need any more to always wear the facemask anymore. It makes sense as, equally reported by Dina, wearing the facemask did result in the impractical problem of fogged glasses and decreased visibility.

Very often the old habit of visiting, 'like clockwork', was reported on in combination with newly introduced stage props. To illustrate, Emma (90 years old, interviewed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July) positively reported about the pons, but that for her it did not matter all that much. She would have continued here visits anyway. To this she added that she had been a visitor since 1951. Maurits (73 years old, interviewed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June) reported, similarly, no mentionable difference in the use of the space 'because the markets are outside. As long as you keep one-and-a-half-meter distance, it should be fine. So far I have not gotten contaminated.' Ever since the announcement of the measures, he had not ceased to come to the Saturday market, as he had for many years. It was clear as day to him what his business was going to be here today and what it would be next week. In this way, the way he talked about his visits came across as rehearsed. With no effort whatsoever he summed up his list of intended purchases; '[O]lives, vegetables, bread and cheese. [...] As always. Johanna and Tina, reported on how despite the adjustment of queues, the market felt just as normal as ever. 'The queues felt good, and the market being outside.' They, equally, unlike their temporally discontinued supermarket visits, never ceased to go to the Saturday market. They reported their friends to have shown a similar conduct.

These accounts have in common that its argumentation depart from a ritual-like visitation to the marketplace. More illustrations can be found when consulting the accounts of Frank, Ronald, Paul, Jens, Dirk, Jan, Loes who all were able to at once summarize what their market business entailed, adding that it had remained unchanged since the first announcement of the COVID-19 measures.

However, two conflicting accounts were recorded when asking people about absent behaviour of themselves or their friends. Loes (85-year-old lady, sitting on her walker) for example stated that most of her friends did stop attending the market days. 'Some are so very scared, even if they have been doubly vaccinated. Even my own brother still recoils when I see him'. Also, Toos and Bert (78 & 76 year old married couple), showed more caution than most. 'In the beginning we let our children do the groceries, because we were part of the target group [read: vulnerable group]'. Upon asking as to when

they deemed it acceptable to go again, Toos replied 'September 2020. After noticing the peak [of contaminations] dropping, we could do it ourselves again [grocery shopping].'

These recordings tell a story of how performances of physical presence are negotiated following different interpretations of the COVID-19 measures and individualized risk assessments of the physical environments where food is purchased. For the rest however, nearly all interviews feature a story of a 'clockwork mentality' when it comes to visiting the market. Most interviewees referred to their market visits as 'vaste prik' (*a set procedure*). Most never had experienced much consideration whether to refrain from their visits over the last year and a half. In perpetuating the weekly visits, a continuous clockwork mentality is exposed. Being compelled through the measures to bring the objects/ stage props as discussed above, eased up the decision to uphold this clockwork mentality. Thereby, a newly normal state of visiting the market is continuously enacted all the while featuring how the announced measures revoked a rationality of visiting the marketplace partially informed by non-human actors. Subsequently, through these objects, people's relationality to the Saturday market changed, and as such the enactment of the marketplace itself arguably has changed.

### [The performance of others](#)

As the rhetoric of the measures against COVID-19 chooses human-to-human interactions as the biggest danger in conveying the COVID virus, most of the discussed measures are eventually directed toward altering these interactions in such a way that this danger is minimalized. After having deconstructed how some material repercussions enact relationalities and alter performance revolving the Saturday market, the following section deconstructs enactments of relationalities and performances toward others because of these measures. Doing so, the analysis of the reciprocal impact of people and people, people and things, and things and things is concluded. Following, several accounts of how interactions have changed, or not, because of the COVID-19 measures are presented.

### [I mind your own business](#)

'What is your business here today?' consistently was the first question that every respondent would be asked at the start of the interview. Its answers have been voiced in many ways inciting a variety of views on other people's presence and forms of social exchange. In illustrating this, a rough distinction is made that splits its accounts into two: The first category would display a response that entails a goal-oriented rationale of visiting, often with a focus on a swift gathering of essential food supplies. This category displays little intentional regard for the significance of social interactions during the still inevitable exchanges taking place during these visits. The second category of accounts is drawn more to the marketplace as a social gathering spot, despite Rutte's plea for only sufficing one's necessities when leaving the house. As such, the following will feature overlapping and conflicting stories of agency of how the presence of others is reported on.

As discussed in earlier accounts, many interviewees replied in a very straightforward manner when being asked about their business. They have it very clear what they are at the marketplace for. For example, for Judith it means '[to get] the regular things, olives and mangos from West-Africa' to then go straight home. 'I do not always need olives, so then I do not come [...] I am not here for conviviality, maunder or shopping. If there are a lot of people, I am gone.' Similarly, Wytze (85-year-old gentlemen, interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May) instantly reported 'I come here to buy cheese, vegetables and fruit.' If he would ever have chat? 'Only if I know the people, other than that, no [...] I am absolutely not looking for it'. Upon asking him if this had changed compared to the time before COVID-19 measures, he reported with a straight face 'Idem dito.'. In other words, in the moment of interviewing, he could not think of anything that had made him experience his intention for social exchange in a different way because of the measures. Judith expressed a similar view in the sense that she has been very goal-oriented in her exchanges, especially with the vendors. Only the fact that the marketplace did allow

for more interpersonal distance made her continue her visits. She was never looking for much social interaction anyways.

In a similar vein, Tina reports that she generally '[does] not come to the market for the social happening of it all.' Yet, I found her in conversation with someone that once was her mother-in-law when asking them to partake in this study. What followed was quite a long dialogue related to their experiences. As the interview proceeded, Tina reported that sometimes she would merely greet the people she would know. Other times though, she would start a chat with someone, especially if they had not seen each other in a long time. When the COVID-19 measures were still new, she felt that 'people did not want to talk to each other. Everyone was like, [we have to go] straight home'. Consequently, she reported that over time, the market had start to feel like normal again. '[the time that] people fearfully circumvented each other or look angry when others get too close is over. Last year [in 2020] this was the case, and that has passed.'

Likewise, Ronald (68 years old, interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May) reports that every once a while he engages in a chat with the people he meets on his bi-weekly visits. At the same time, he reports that he likes this kind of interaction to stay limited, as 'in the past I often have had friends that, uh, used me and were not to be trusted, and I backtracked from it. That's it.' Moreover, Ronald reports that this aspect of social exchange and what it meant to him has remained the same since the beginning of the measures. Like clockwork, he comes to the Wageningen marketplace on Wednesdays and Saturdays to get himself groceries. However, he did report that he felt the COVID-19 measures made people more fearful and crankier. 'For example, if you come to close, [they say] 'will you keep your distance?! Maybe that is necessary though...'

In comparison to the above, a contradictory account was recorded when talking to Erna (84-year-old lady, interviewed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July). Upon asking her what she was doing at the marketplace today she hollered with open arms 'It is an amazing place! Amazing place'. As to what made it so amazing, she exclaimed: 'it is simply the people'. Other interviews testified similar responses. For example, upon asking her what the market means to her Joke (a fierce lady accompanied by her big dog, interviewed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July) replied 'Gezelligheid! (conviviality) [...] You meet everyone here. You can get what you want. I live close. Wonderful!' 'I enjoy coming here. I know everyone by now, so eh, and they know me, and they know Misha [the dog]'. Joke did not seem very interested to waste more breathe on answering any further questions. However, her short yet expressive account plainly conveyed how the market for her is a joyful recurring experience that combines the practicality of having to get food with the pleasure of social interaction. Similarly, Theo testifies:

'I always go on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Social interaction, I always call it. I need a piece of goat cheese. Yes, I could also get it in the supermarket, but I find the market is more convivial. [...] In the supermarkets, people tend to just walk over each other.' (Theo, 80-year-old man).

Jan (80-year-old, a bouquet of flowers in his hand, interviewed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May) reports in a similar fashion that it is easy to make a chat 'with those that feel a need for it'. Initially, Jan did not at all seem too eager to be interviewed. He primarily came to the market to get himself a bouquet of flowers. He sometimes also would come to just make a stroll, and reportedly chat with people but only if they would initiate a chat with him. However, as the conversation proceeded and the recorder shut off, he started to show more interest and ask me questions about the study that was being conducted. Soon enough an animated conversation unfolded about his past and other marketplaces he had lived close to. In that way, the course that the interview took was arguably more telling than the answers to the questions Jan initially gave. It illustrated how a simple set of questions and a listening ear added a meaningful layer of social exchange to a market visit to buy flowers. In this vein, both Erna's, Joke's,

Theo's and Jan's accounts reflect the enactment of a reality in which the marketplace is more than a place to get supplies. Its enactment hosts meaningful social interaction, despite the COVID-19 measures. This proposition is illustrated by Loes in a powerful manner in her account:

'[Partially because of the COVID-19 measures] we are of course alone for the entire day. It is thus good to talk to people every now and then, because if you meet too few people, then you talk too little and then you will lose your voice and you will have to look for words.'

Then, upon explaining to her the nature of my study she ended the interview with saying that she did not know a lot of people any more that would come to the marketplace, because they are too scared or too old. 'But] I do like a chat. Therefore I found it nice to partake in the study. Good luck.'

From the above accounts, it should be clear how multiple realities of the Wageningen marketplace are enacted in one and the same place. Despite the necessity of having to socially interact with others at the marketplace, the variety of accounts exemplifies how its respective performances follow from multiple meanings surrounding this interaction. Different people relate differently to the minimization of social exchange and yet they all peacefully coexist in the same place.

Despite what might be suggested through the initially made distinction between a rationale characterised by goal-oriented visits versus socially oriented visits, it is almost never unambiguous what someone's exact rationalities are to attend the marketplace. For example, Ronald's account, and the accounts before him, exemplify a sentiment of a goal-oriented market visits. The message it carries is one of 'my business here is to get my products.' However, generally as the interviews proceeded, people started showing more interest in its interaction and willingness to share personal details and talk about nothing in particular. For example, the conversation with Ronald took a very personal turn as intimate details about his life were shared. Thus, on the one hand he reports a distrust toward connecting with others, but on the other hand he was very eager to share details about himself and his family to the total stranger that I must be to him. This contradiction of proclaimed logical conduct versus what is observed, namely emotionally driven and rationally inconsistent behaviour blurs the initial distinction of relationalities to the market visits. Instead, they are thought to be partially inseparable.

### Dramaturgical scripts at the Wageningen Market

From the section above, it should be clear how multiple realities of the Wageningen marketplace are enacted in one and the same place. In other words, people relate differently as to how the COVID-19 measures enact disparate new realities of movement and interpersonal distance at the same marketplace. However, they also relate differently as to how distance should be kept; thus, how interaction *should* take place. In what follows, the multiplicity of performances is further discussed following Goffman's interaction order. That is, as emerging from a diversity of continuously re-adjusting forms of what is comprising morally acceptable and realistic social interaction.

In the wake of early observations in April 2021, it was recognized how visitors acted insecurely revolving new norms of interpersonal distance. This would often result in awkwardness, discomfort, less eye-contact, unconfident movements, and gestures when greeting or otherwise.

'The marketplace felt like an exceptional space during the lockdown. Especially after everything had been closed for a while, it started to feel like an outing where the new [COVID] rules did not have the same meaning. For example, the fruit vendor would still offer pieces of mango to taste, which I would hesitantly accept. Was this okay? Was this not okay?'(Noa, 22 year old student landscape architecture)

First of all, sentiments like these initiated the question on what kind of effect the measures against COVID-19 would have on social interactions in the public space. More specifically, it hinted toward the insecurity revolving what entails as morally acceptable social interaction. The old interaction order from before COVID at once had been shaken and existing dramaturgical scripts that had been dominant for so many years, suddenly were announced unacceptable due to danger for mutual contamination. As a result of the lockdowns, the old forms of everyday interaction were faced with new moral rules on how interpersonal distance should be maintained. In other words, insecurity was cast onto what comprised morally acceptable everyday interaction. Everyday interactions thereby arguably became less everyday than ever.

Erna testifies: 'People were especially very careful in the beginning [...] they were very strict in keeping distance. [...] For myself, I do not feel the need. I think, yes, if I get it [infected with COVID-19] we will see. [...] I would not act recklessly, but I just go to the marketplace, because it is so convivial!'. Contrarily, Mariet testified in more egalitarian and rational terms: 'I find it a shame that not everyone sticks to the rules. That way it will be dealt with the quickest.' When talking to Ronald, he reported how upon visiting the market stands, he was sometimes being reminded to keep a distance. He would receive comments from other people: 'Will you keep more distance from me?'

All four accounts above illustrate how there is no strict consensus on what counts as a morally acceptable interaction. In this light, it is contended that a new interaction order concerning interpersonal distance and its according dramaturgical scripts had not yet been re-established during the study. The interviews reflect that they are still continuously being crafted, thereby shaping the contours of one reflection on the impact of the COVID-19 measures on the public space; Namely, the measures continuously cause insecurity and discordance about what entails a morally acceptable interaction.

Concludingly, this chapter featured a variety of overlapping and conflicting relationalities and scripts toward the Wageningen marketplace. Upon the display of several participant accounts it surfaced how they not only relate differently as to how the COVID-19 measures enact disparate realities of movement and interpersonal distance, they also relate differently as to how interaction *should* take place. In what follows from this analysis, a discussion and conclusion on their impacts on the public space of the Wageningen marketplace are presented while referring to earlier presented literatures and the strengths and limitations of the used theories.



# 7

## The Final Performance

Discussion and conclusion

In what ways do measures against COVID-19 continuously impact the public space of the Wageningen marketplace?

Departing from a very specific and local place, this thesis presents an explorative study revolving the continuous impacts of the measures against COVID-19 on the public space. The previous chapter featured a variety of overlapping and conflicting relationalities and scripts toward the Wageningen marketplace. Subsequently, the following features a conclusionary discussion referring back to earlier discussed literature (chapter 2) and critiques to the used theoretical frameworks.

First of all this includes a final section on the continuous impact of the COVID-19 measures on the Wageningen marketplace following a threefold argumentation. First it is argued how the measures create a multiplicity of realities resulting from the diversity of how human actors relate to their material urban environment. Secondly, the importance of everyday performances is highlighted all the while highlighting a twofold of critiques to Goffman's approach,. It is thereby recognized how the marketplace has continuously played an important role for social infrastructure in the 'new normal'. The 'mundane and familiar' face-to-face interaction in this way surpasses the definition of its own category. In other words, it is argued that especially when considering the intensification of activities in the private and digital sphere, face-to-face interactions in the public space seem to have gained more special significance, exactly by staying 'mundane and familiar', or, by remaining everyday. From there, finally a third and fundamentally reflexive argument is made. It expounds that by being a host for this case study, the Wageningen Marketplace serves to perpetually celebrate the publicness of the marketplace in more general terms. As such, it ultimately helps to celebrate its everyday functioning in a time where I have witnessed loneliness and social isolation taken unprecedented proportions.

### [The Multiple Market: A space beyond scarcity](#)

The starting point of the literature review, as presented by Gerber et al., discussed land use as constructed through scarcity. Gerber et al. argue that the material and spatial repercussions resulting from any spatial measure cause newly constructed competitions over its land use. Following this perspective, the Wageningen Marketplace would be conceptualised as host to new conflicts arising from both placement of new physical boundaries and expansion measures. In specific terms by employing COVID-19 measures at the marketplace, freedom of movement, for example, becomes scarcer in the waiting queues, while the options to maintain more interpersonal distance becomes less scarce. This way, the facemasks or pons that imply accepted distance between market visitors are informative for truth-claims about the marketplace as new conflicts of use arise over its definite resource.

Similarly, new forms of scarcity of space that result from newly set limitations to movement and interpersonal distance indeed were identified. For example, following the accounts of Toos and Bert, there is more space for waiting in front of the market stands, but reportedly less space for interpersonal distance during walks around the stands. As such, the research question would be reflected upon by stressing how the measures against COVID-19 continuously impact the public space of the Wageningen marketplace through the construction of new forms of scarcity over land use.

Secondly and opposingly, following Mies' account from chapter 6, the marketplace as accessible space for the less abled has become scarcer, as there are larger distances to cover. However, to her the marketplace as a safe space from contamination has improved, because of its margin for interpersonal distance. These conflicting forms of scarcity related to customary interpersonal distance expose how the COVID-19 measures are not unambiguous.

Some limitations are thus raised to its viewpoint. Namely, when looking at land use through the lens of scarcity, a strong emphasis is put on how institutionalised decision-making surrounding the material is shaping realities. Scarcity is a term that originates from economic theory (Samuelson, 2015). It comprises thinking about space in terms of definite resources, framing it as being apt to be modelled

in order eventually envisage a more optimal outcome. Its ontological foundation thus facilitates truth claims revolving public life at the marketplace using scarcity of resources as explanatory resource. However, its ontology does not allow for reflection upon how its users enact the public life from within.

Clearly, Toos and Bert compared to Mies experience disparate forms of conflict resulting from the same COVID-19 measures, hinting at the multiplicity of realities. When putting it more bluntly, in another scenario where no one would relate or abide to the market expansion, the directive arrows or facemasks, these measures would merely exist on paper. They would not have any connection to how the reality of land use is enacted.

In this way, it is argued that scarcity too is a relational effect. Specifically, the official measures against COVID-19 (envision to) enact a particular constricting effect on the use of this physical space. Consequently, this implies that measures are expressed and acted upon following multiple conducts. Instead, it stresses that the measures create a multiplicity of realities because of the diversity of how human actors relate to their reciprocal material consequences. Recognizing this aspect of the scarcity theory allows for another layer of discussion on how COVID measures are received and impactful.

In its place, the COVID-19 measures framed in ANT fashion initiated a discussion how the public space was impacted all the while appreciating the multiplicity of realities enacted by its actors. This way, scarcity of space, or newly set limitations to movement and interpersonal distance, are viewed as effect and outcome, rather than explanatory resource.

### [The city's pounding heart in times of COVID19](#)

At the time of him publishing, one line of criticism endowed Goffman with an utter lack of consistency in the gathering of data leading up to his conclusions (Gouldner, 1971). He would approach his subjects in a non-systematic way that would suit him to organize his observations as he saw fit (Psathas, 1996). Consequently, his refusal to be consistent has given him a reputation of uncredited sociological theorist according to the standards of science. Secondly, often critiques have been made arguing Goffman was depicting the very mundane and familiar to the extent making it a trivial enterprise (Romania, 2020).

### [Mundane and familiar or unexceptionally everyday?](#)

Comparably, the interviews every so often bared some insecurity from the participants as to what exactly was being alluded. Once the recorder was shut off, it occasionally was brought up by the interviewee: 'Did I give you the answers that you wanted?' or, 'how will these results be of any help?'. In the light of the critiques, could it be understood why many of those questioned seemed surprised by the nature of the questions themselves? For example, Paul shruggingly reported he would always carry a facemask and simply maintain interpersonal distance, all whilst admitting that he never considered not going to the market. For him, the COVID-19 measures had already become an everyday matter.

The section on *clockwork visits and the normalization of stage props* has further illustrated this argument on how new normal states of being at the markets are already being continuously enacted. Or how, in other words, the 'new normal' has already become part of the everyday. Following recorded accounts of insecurity revolving what entails as morally acceptable social interaction, it was argued in chapter 6 that *everyday interactions have become less everyday than ever*. However, this earlier proposition becomes potentially less compelling when considering the shrugging accounts like Paul's, signifying how the everyday might already have re-adjusted into a new everyday, *the new normal*.

### The power of face-to-face interaction

By way of response to the first critique of lacking consistency, Goffman has never accredited himself the role of social theorist, and even explicitly stated the contrary (Psathas, 1996). Instead, he defended the conclusions of his theoretical undertakings by the merits of the novel effort to approach and understand complex social phenomena in the public sphere that had not been given the attention they deserved. By focusing on the symbolic dimension of face-to-face interaction, Goffman has given rise to sociologically profound implications for the understanding of private and public spaces in the city.

Therefore, it is argued, especially when considering the current time where many parts of public life have become non-existent or shifted to a digital space, that the meaning of 'mundane and familiar' meetings has arguably found a new significance. Namely, in multiple ways, the marketplace has testified to have remained a place of social interaction and exchange, in spite of- and for the entirety of the COVID-19 outbreak. By remaining everyday, it has demonstrated its significance for multiple groups in the locality as a continuous site for both vibrant social encounters and inclusion. In other words, following observations and interviews, the Wageningen marketplace this way remains recognized as important part for social infrastructure as initially highlighted before in the works of Ünlü-Yücesoy , Watson and Van Eck et al (2013; 2009; 2020).

All in all, equally criticising this study for being a mundane and familiar enterprise, in this way would directly points toward the essence of the final claim. Namely, mundane or not, the marketplace seems to underly a remarkably resilient performance. To clarify the latter, considering many people's *clockwork mentality*, the marketplace has remained successful by staying everyday for a myriad of these people. If it is 'the trivial yet respectful interactions [that] enable citizens to have rewarding social interactions and to develop social networks that are sustained by trust' (Goffman, in Peters et al., p. 99), then the marketplace has been continuously hosting such interactions, in spite of the measures. Interpreting Paul and the others that voiced some insecurity as to what exactly was being alluded at in the interviews, the performances of the everyday seem to have simply continued. Hence to wonder why it is interesting to be studying people's 'mundane and familiar' choice of action in this space points directly to the essence of the exercise.

Especially since the announcement the COVID-19 measures, activities within the private and digital sphere have intensified and the activities in the public sphere have minimized. People stay at home to stay free of contamination. They have been insisted to rely on privately owned facilities in the domestic sphere. In this way, it is argued, privatization of life as earlier described by Gehl has further intensified. Then, while some of the interviewees reported they would not come to the market to necessarily socialize, or even deemed the pure intention for socialization immoral, others reported it was their only way to be able to talk about the sudden flush of loneliness that had come their way. Especially for a generation that was not brought up with digital communication systems like the internet, there were little other places to talk about how the rapid deterioration of the public had manifested itself in their lives.

Still, a harmonious weekly assembly was found for the complete duration of the fieldwork for this study, despite the current multiplicity of relationalities toward the COVID-measures and how according social interaction should take place. Thereby the potential for social interactions, a preconditional quality that makes a city safe, sustainable, and healthy (Gehl, 2013), was upheld. Following the analysis of the actors building up to this conclusion, its continuously important democratic function in a society and economy has thereby become highlighted. Where privatized life is increasingly favoured, it has shown to be the city's pounding heart in times of COVID-19.

## The Reflexive Performance of the author of this thesis

I started this thesis with the intention to formulate hands-on design principles for planning and design in the tradition of environmental design approach as popularized by Jan Gehl in combination with social constructivism. However, as the process of my thesis progressed and my constructivist perspective got more solidified, I found that to formulate singular principles for building would be inconsistent with the core principles of my own approach. Namely, in studying the science of public space, I wanted to develop a more fundamental approach to its reality before presenting any normative principles on how the public space should be planned for in the context of COVID-19.

Still a final performative layer to this thesis is made explicit. Specifically, by thinking about it, reading about it, talking about it, exploring the effects of COVID from different perspectives, it has enlarged both my practical and theoretical outlooks on what the public space is and could be. Indeed, I deconstructed the public space into theatre. I went there and simply watched. I played my role as a researcher. Finally, I reconstructed how the relationalities revolving this public place are enacted in Wageningen.

In making assumptions about reality in this way, I hope to have an effect on this reality, as my teachers and colleagues, future practitioners and academics in the field of spatial planning, might read my work and, if it is worthwhile, even think and talk about it. Hence, this thesis does perform agency and will contribute to the enactment of public space itself. At last it has shown that COVID-19 has and continuously will force planners and designers to think about and reflect upon the function and meaning of existing spaces in a new way (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020).

I thought and reflected upon the function and meaning of existing spaces by taking an original approach to studying public space and writing all of that down. Doing so, the COVID-19 measures were not used as explanatory resource in making final recommendations for planning, design, or management of the public space but rather as effect and outcome. As such, this study serves to celebrate the publicness of the Wageningen marketplace. By conclusion it ultimately serves to celebrate the everyday function it has had in a time where I have witnessed loneliness and social isolation taken unprecedented proportions.

Considering everything, a special round of applause is giving to the following, arguably mundane, and familiar, material characteristics of the place: Shout out to how the marketplace is an outside space. The inviting fresh air of its open space never raised any second thoughts on entering its stage. Secondly, the marketplace and surrounding urban fabric allowed for a flexible set-up. Without having to get too close, it initially permitted its actors to fearfully circumvent each other and later it allowed them to normally greet.

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## Appendix

The transcribed interviews are available upon contacting me through e-mail: marieke.dehaas@wur.nl