Stitching the neighbourhood together at BUUR West
- the *enactment* of a social infrastructure in Nijmegen Oud-West

Figure 1: fieldwork at BUUR West [painting], Adore Lakerveld

Master's thesis Urban and Cultural Geography
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Abstract

This research explores the labour and care practices that are put into maintaining a social infrastructure. This research is conducted during seven months of ethnographic fieldwork at BUUR West, including the shadowing of three employees during their workday. This master thesis aims to complement research done by others investigating the influence and role of social infrastructure on our cities. In this way, this thesis attempts to show why these spaces matter in the urban fabric, and why they should be maintained and protected.

What makes the neighbourhood café BUUR West different from a regular café is that visitors can take a seat without any further (financial) commitments or can join an activity. Researching the infrastructural labour of the social infrastructure at BUUR West identified four broad themes: *physical maintenance; activity management*; *communication, outreach and being facilitating*; and *cooperation and professional anchoring*. Both employees, volunteers and visitors are needed to carry out the different types of labour. For maintaining the social infrastructure, practices of care are in many ways intertwined with the aforementioned enactments and labour. BUUR West functions as an everyday non-institutional care space, where care practices are visible among colleagues, among visitors, and between the two groups combined.

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1. More than just a space - an introduction to the research

1.1 Context and background

Every Thursday night I walk into a local pub to meet up with some friends. Whenever I enter the pub, I wave to the owner, nod to the regular, smile to the smokers and have a chitchat with the bartender. As Hans Schnitzler puts it in his book *philosophy of the pub*, "they all are as familiar to me as they are unfamiliar" (Schnitzler, 2024, p. 150, own translation). The day after, I see other friends at the university and walk past the bartender I saw last night. At the end of the day, I drop some stuff off at the 'givebox' at BUUR West, where I bump into some employees I know, where we share updates of the café. The pub, the university and BUUR West are all part of my social infrastructure, the physical places and organisations that shape the way I interact with other people (Klinenberg, 2018).

Social infrastructure refers to "the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 3). As loneliness rises, and society polarises, we need places where people can gather to stitch together our fractured societies (Klinenberg, 2016, 2018; Schnitzler, 2024). As Latham and Layton (2019) state: "Cities need infrastructure […] not only because of their practical utility but also because they are spaces where people can socialize and connect with others" (p. 9). These spaces where people can meet and mix regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or income become increasingly harder to find (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019, 2022).

One of these spaces is a neighbourhood café in the western part of Nijmegen, BUUR West. What makes BUUR West different from a regular café is that visitors can take a seat without any further (financial) commitments or can join an activity.

In this master thesis, I want to show how one part of the social infrastructure of a residential area in Nijmegen is enacted, or performed, by its professionals and visitors. This thesis will dive specifically in the enactment of the maintenance of the neighbourhood café, the way employees are actively connecting with the neighbourhood, the practices of care I found at BUUR West and its relation to the social infrastructure of Nijmegen Oud-West.

1.2 Research objective and questions

The research aims to shed light on the labour and care practices that are put into maintaining a social infrastructure. This master thesis aims to complement research done by others investigating the influence and role of social infrastructure on our cities, for instance of public libraries, shopping malls or sidewalks. In this way, this thesis attempts to show why these spaces matter in the urban fabric, and why they should be maintained and protected.

The following question will be examined in this research and will guide the master thesis: *How is a social infrastructure enacted, looking at the people working at BUURWest, its visitors and other organisations in the neighbourhood of Nijmegen Oud-West?* To help answer this question, sub-questions were formulated:

1. *How does BUUR West fit in the established organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West?*
2. *How are "practices of care" performed by the visitors of BUUR West and its activities?*
3. *What is the role of the people working at BUUR West in sustaining a social infrastructure for the neighbourhood, examining their practices of care and maintenance?*

The questions were investigated during seven months of *ethnographic fieldwork,* including the *shadowing* of three employees during their workday. This data was obtained during a research internship at BUUR West between April 2025 and November 2025. The theories and concepts about *practices of care* and the *maintenance* and *enactment* of a social infrastructure will be further examined in chapter 2.

1.3 Relevance

1.3.1 Societal relevance

There is a growing body of literature in both the academic and public literature that recognises the importance of social infrastructure in today's society. The *societal relevance* will explain the importance of addressing social infrastructure for future funding and support of these infrastructures, and present a few questions addressed by BUUR West.

This thesis aims to provide insights for BUUR West, and other parts of a social infrastructure on how they can improve their maintenance and collaboration as a social infrastructure. Social infrastructures are in all sorts of subtle ways entangled with maintaining people's physical and mental health (Umberson & Montez, 2010). For instance, recognising each other and placing each other socially, can counteract feelings of anonymity and alienation. Through light, repeated contact in the living environment, residents can build up 'public familiarity' among one another (Berden et al., 2025; Pettersen et al., 2026). It is important to keep in mind the kinds and qualities of facilities that allow social life to happen, the kind of sociality that is afforded by them, and how this can be recognized as a sort of public life (Latham & Layton, 2019). Since different places require different needs and preferences, it is important to provide diverse and inclusive social places to foster a sense of belonging among all social groups (Pettersen et al., 2026). As Latham and Layton (2019) state, attention should be given to locating and understanding the spaces and facilities that are facilitating sociality and social connections and *how* these spaces work. Research on social infrastructure "can document what should be protected, curated, and encouraged in urban environments" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 9).

These documentations are helpful to develop a deeper awareness of the stresses and challenges these spaces face to remain open, accessible and properly maintained (Latham &

Layton, 2022). Even though these kinds of spaces are encouraged by municipal policy in Nijmegen (Nijmegen, 2025), a lot of social enterprises are having a hard time gaining enough financial and social support (Kırmızı, 2024). It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the enactment of a social infrastructure and why it needs financial and social support.

Furthermore, the interorganisational collaboration based in Nijmegen West, *Meebouwers*, and employees of BUUR West are wondering what their position and their 'duty' is to society, to try and tackle a number of challenges. For instance, a growing polarisation can be seen in today's society, that is fragmented, split and conflicted, where people are afraid of 'the Other' (Klinenberg, 2016). Furthermore, older people are more fearful in public space than young people (van Melik & Pijpers, 2017). Kırmızı (2024) shows that the extreme comfort of Japanese cities lead people to believe that they can do everything on their own, in solitude. This results in people caring less about their fellow human beings, communities, politics, or the environment. Employees of *Meebouwers* and BUUR West see these changes in their neighbourhood as well, and try to involve and activate local residents to physically and socially improve their neighbourhood. This thesis aims to illustrate *how* employees and residents are already maintaining and creating places for social gathering.

Furthermore, this research will generate fresh insights for professionals at BUUR West and other social organisations in Nijmegen West about their contributions to the neighbourhood and their enactment of a social infrastructure. For example, employees of *Huize Rosa* (residential care centre in Nijmegen) want to have more connection between the neighbourhood and its residents, and are reaching out to BUUR West to gain some inspiration. Some results of this thesis can help articulate possibilities for organisations such as *Huize Rosa*. Additionally, several employees at BUUR West indicated that it is difficult to find the "field of tension"[1] among their visitors, and wonder how inclusive they really are. This study offers some insights into BUUR West's visitors, identifying bottlenecks and suggesting areas for improvement that they can reflect upon. Lastly, the findings of this thesis can be helpful for a potential new location of BUUR.

As a result, this thesis dives into what kinds of encounters take place within a specific social infrastructure, how social infrastructuring is enacted and looks in particular at practices of care. These insights will be shared with BUUR West.

[1] "spanningsveld"

1.3.2 Scientific relevance

This thesis contributes to the ongoing scientific discourse on social isolation; social infrastructure and how it is enacted; practices of care; and leisure clubs. This study explored the ways in which BUUR West enacts being part of a social infrastructure in Nijmegen Oud West, who its visitors are and which practices of care can be found. Using ethnographic fieldwork and the shadowing technique leads us to new insights into the multiple ways of the maintenance of these kinds of spaces. The research aims to shed light on the labour and care practices that are put into maintaining a social infrastructure.

Klinenberg (2016) calls for more scientific attention regarding the impact of certain interventions on loneliness. Where you live can have influence on social isolation. In certain social environments, local contact and mutual support is promoted, while other social environments foster social isolation. Neighbourhoods with a strong *social infrastructure* - residential density, busy sidewalks, commercial activity, well-maintained public spaces, and community organisations – show that in times of trouble, for instance the Chicago heat wave of 1995, experienced few fatalities. People who were living in these neighbourhoods knew each other and were aware of who might need help and support (Klinenberg, 2016, 2018). "As most policy makers and engineers see it, when hard infrastructure fails, as it did in the great Chicago heat wave, it's the softer social infrastructure that determines our fate." (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 23).

Solnit (2024) reminds us that our society is in the midst of a "loneliness pandemic", which has an impact on our mental and physical health, and is now a subject of medical concern. As stated before, some social environments foster more mutual support and local contact than others. Research to the concept of social infrastructure, helps us to identify multiple dimensions of urban life and explain how some places and facilities influence our behaviour (Latham & Layton, 2019). Thus, public space allows people of different backgrounds in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and class to meet and mix (Latham & Layton, 2019; van Melik & Pijpers, 2017).

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the influence and role of social infrastructure on our cities. For instant on public libraries (Klinenberg, 2018; Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024; Robinson, 2020), the local pub (Schnitzler, 2024), men's sheds (Power, 2022), or the Dutch department store HEMA (van Melik & Pijpers, 2017). This list is certainly not representative of the multitude of studies on this subject. Latham and Layton (2019) make an attempt to articulate why these places of social infrastructure matter This master thesis wants to add to this body of literature, because "thinking with social infrastructure broadens and deepens understandings of the kinds and qualities of social life that exists in cities (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 8).

Given that social infrastructure becomes visible when 'hard' infrastructure fails, and it can counter political polarisation, research should be conducted on the provision and politics involved (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019). Documenting the social infrastructure of what should be protected, curated, and encouraged in urban environments becomes more important because of the contemporary political climate, in which the pressure on public institutions in many Western countries grows (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019; Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024). The term of 'social infrastructure' has gained more interest in

recent years as a way of thinking through relationships between infrastructures and the social lives they enable (Horton & Penny, 2023). However, it is important to keep reflecting critically on these types of spaces. For instance, how and for whom they are designed, financed, and enacted.

Further, next to the provision of social infrastructure, *how* the social infrastructure gets maintained is also important. Not only the physical aspects of the social infrastructure are the only ingredients of a well-functioning social infrastructure. Rivano Eckerdal et al. (2024) dive into the way of how librarians contribute to the (re)making of the library that connects with local communities. They describe social infrastructure not only as a noun, but as a verb – *social infrastructuring.* For example, the activities performed in libraries involving librarians, patrons, library resources and the places in which they are situated, are all part of the infrastructuring of the library (Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024). In recent years, scholarship studying the infrastructural turn has emphasised how the physical provision of social infrastructure facilitates urban social life, yet the specific focus on infrastructural labour has remained understudied (Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). Few studies have investigated the enactment of social infrastructure in a Dutch setting about neighbourhood café's. This thesis uses the term 'enactment' to research this phenomenon of how employees are actively engaged in maintaining and improving the social infrastructure of which they are part of.

Latham and Layton (2022) emphasise how "the social life of cities is about relations of intimacy and care that are all too often overlooked and undervalued" (p. 665). However, as Kırmızı (2024) notes, this account by Latham and Layton fails to shed light on informal care forms in social infrastructures. Part of the research will be investigating the multiple practices of care that are carried out at BUUR West by employees, volunteers and visitors. These 'practices of care', as described by for example Tronto and Fisher (1990), can be found in various forms when people encounter each other. Tronto (2013, p. 30) argues that "politics should enter upon assigning responsibilities for care, and for ensuring that democratic citizens are as capable as possible of participating in this assignment of responsibilities". Since individuals can only exist because they are members of these various social (care) networks (Alam & Houston, 2020), writing about the enactment of, for example, a neighbourhood café can shed light on these responsibilities.

There is a growing body of literature on the intersection of social infrastructure and practices of care found in these spaces (see: Alam & Houston, 2020; Kırmızı, 2024; Strüver & Franz, 2025; Williams et al., 2025). Strüver and Franz (2025) see that "practices of care are key elements of urbanity and thus of sociospatial relations, including everyday experiences in and of urban places and spaces" (p. 1). Williams et al. (2025) suggest the generative possibility of care as an evaluative frame and central practice that sustains public spaces of informal care. This thesis will provide various insights within this context, by shedding light on the labour and care practices that are put into maintaining a social infrastructure. More specifically, how they are put to practice at a neighbourhood café in Nijmegen: BUUR West.

Tronto and Fisher (1990) argue that the outlined images of care are often not focusing on caring itself, but on the actors involved. They try to reconceptualise caring in a way that is comprehensive, integrated and feminist. Readers are invited to put their own caring experiences next to their analysis to see if it is helpful. In doing so, they are not just trying to provide a

theoretical orientation that merely reproduces, but help to change of how we think about caring. Alam and Houston (2020) use the phase of "caring with" by Tronto and Fisher to analyse "everyday non-institutional care spaces" in cities. They "observe that these care spaces involve particular labour, conditions and agencies in time and place that help recognise actually emerging and everyday care practices producing democratic infrastructural outcomes" (p. 1). The practices of care proposed by Tronto and Fisher (1990) are also included in this master thesis and will be helpful for researching the relationship between care and urban social infrastructure or "everyday non-institutional care spaces" (Alam and Houston, 2020, p. 1).

The existing body of research on social cohesion suggests that it develops through repeated human interaction and joint participation in shared projects, not "merely from a principled commitment to abstract values and beliefs" (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 19). This human interaction and joint participation in the field of crafting and other leisure activities peak my interest. The role of craft and knitting in creating communities and identity, especially among women, has attracted the attention of researchers of various fields (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Robinson, 2020). Existing research recognises how these activities, especially for women, can be a form of empowerment and encounter (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Robinson, 2020). This "women's talk in leisure contexts, particularly those with other women, serves both as a prime site of leisure and as a forum for self-empowerment and autonomy" (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007, p. 105). Researching places as knitting – or other leisure – clubs, give this often unseen sociality a podium. Part of the fieldwork conducted at BUUR West, was volunteering and participating at the weekly sewing- and knitting club. Drawing upon literature about knitting clubs in England and Canada, this study investigates this topic in a Dutch setting.

Concluding, this thesis will contribute to the ongoing scientific discourse on social isolation; social infrastructure and how it is enacted; practices of care; and leisure clubs. And is specifically interested in the relationship between care practices enacted in "everyday non-institutional care spaces" (Alam and Houston, 2020, p. 1) in a Dutch setting. This thesis combines literature on social infrastructure with literature on the infrastructural labour required for BUUR West to function.

1. 4 Reading guide

This thesis has been organised in the following way. The second chapter of this thesis, a *literature review*, will present a diverse set of theories and concepts to get an insight in relevant literature about social infrastructures, the enactment of social infrastructures, infrastructural labour and practices of care. The third chapter is concerned with the *methodology* used for this study. This chapter will first discuss the research design and context. Then, the methods used in this research, ethnographic fieldwork, including the shadowing of three employees during their workday, will be explained and supported. The analysis of the data will also be explained in chapter three. Chapter four presents the *findings* of the research, focusing on certain topics as stated in the research objective and questions. These topics are *the organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West*; *visitors of BUUR West*; *the enactment by the employees*; and *practices of care.* Furthermore, this chapter will answer the sub questions of this master thesis. The last chapter addresses the *discussion* and *conclusion* of this master thesis.

2. Understanding the enactment of social infrastructure - a literature review

To understand how BUUR West would fit in a social infrastructure, and how employees are actively involved in the maintenance and enactment of it, some theories and concepts need to be explained. This chapter will present a diverse set of theories and concepts to get an insight in relevant literature about social infrastructures, the enactment of social infrastructures, infrastructural labour and practices of care. Attention will also be given to the regular encounters that they enable. This chapter will end with a conceptual model, showing the relation between the discussed topics and the research questions.

2.1 Social infrastructure

In social and urban theory the term 'infrastructure' is often a focal point. In geography this is due to Graham and Marvin's (1996; 2002) work on physical infrastructure about for example water, power, transportation and telecommunication. Infrastructure is therefore often understood in only physical terms, as arranged systems of highways, pipes, wires, and such. Simone (2004) sees that "[t]hese modes of provisioning and articulation are viewed as making the city productive, reproducing it, and positioning its residents, territories, and resources in specific ensembled where the energies of individuals can be most efficiently deployed and accounted for" (p. 409).

Latham and Layton (2019) give an overview of the influence of several types of infrastructure on people. Most work on infrastructures dives into the context and unequal provision of infrastructure in urban life: excluding the urban poor and disadvantaged. Thinking of infrastructure as part of everyday life, helps recognise how inequality and unjust social and structural processes are operationalised through infrastructures in contemporary cities (Alam & Houston, 2020). For many researchers in this field, infrastructure is an important part of the urban fabric and the support of urban life. Infrastructure is "technological, material, social, but also – and perhaps most crucially – political" (Alam & Houston, 2020; Latham & Layton, 2019: 2). Latham and Layton (2019) find the term 'infrastructure' useful at a conceptual level, "precisely because it is about the background structures and systems that allow social, economic, cultural, and political life to happen" (p.3). These infrastructures are actively performed and experienced as producing and re-producing interdependent power dynamics of other agencies, structures and practices, and are therefore relational (Alam & Houston, 2020).

Star (1999) describes a set of characteristics of an infrastructure useful for understanding and researching it. Infrastructure is *embedded*, it exists within established networks and relationships. In addition, it is *transparent* when being used, it is not necessarily noticed and has a type of 'taken for grantedness.' However, when the infrastructure is no longer functioning, it does become visible. The infrastructure is *durable*, it can be used repeatedly. The infrastructure involves *a process of learning* how to use and behave in a type of infrastructure, with all sorts of norms and routines. Infrastructures are also able to work because they can draw on *existing standardized ways* of carrying out functions and designing components. Further, they are within the context of existing structures of provision. Infrastructures are big, layered and complex, and thus cannot be easily changed instantly.

Simone (2004) wants to add to the notion of infrastructure, the activities of people in the city. Residents have the ability to engage in complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices, without having clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These conjunctions become an infrastructure.

Some spaces and facilities in the urban fabric contribute to the *public* life of cities. And cities are full of these intricate and often surprising social networks, where people can build relationships and provide important resources in times of stress (Latham & Layton, 2019). A frequently cited example is about the Chicago heat wave in 1995 by Klinenberg (2018). His research showed that the death rates of the heat wave were much lower in certain areas of the city than others. Most areas with low death rates had well-functioning *social infrastructures*, "the physical places and organisations that shape the way people interact" (p. 12). Engagement with other neighbours and the established meaningful relationships in the neighbourhood, resulted in people who knew each other and were aware of people who might need help and support.

Social infrastructure are places and sites where strangers can meet and mix with others, interacting across differences, with whom they share their neighbourhoods and cities. In other words, "social infrastructure refers to the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 3). These places allow people to gather, support community life and encourage people to experience culture, exercise and live alongside one another (Latham & Layton, 2022). Furthermore, these spaces are important for countering social isolation and creating places for all, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or income (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019, 2022). Social infrastructure is seen as a necessity for the formation of social capital (Kırmızı, 2024). However, these spaces are often overlooked and undervalued, even though they are needed for supporting the robust public collective life in cities (Latham & Layton, 2022).

The way in which the term 'social infrastructure' is used in academic literature is outlined by Latham and Layton (2022). Firstly, a central focus in some studies is "people as infrastructure", as Simone (2004). These studies highlight the way social infrastructures are dependent on the relation between people, instead of the dependence on physical infrastructure. Secondly, researchers attempted to evaluate the sociality arising around conventional hard physical infrastructures, such as water, sanitation, and energy. How people come together around places that sustain life, in often underfunded and under-supported urban environments. A third focus in social infrastructure literature looks at the social infrastructures of social care. This body of literature focuses on the availability of services that provide health, education, and social care. Often focusing on the gendered labour that supports such services in places as hospitals, schools, care homes, and mental health services that provide care for a whole range of vulnerable people. Lastly, a great deal of previous research has focused on social infrastructures as public and quasi-public spaces and places that support social connection. Klinenberg (2018) is a well-known example of this view on social infrastructures.

Latham and Layton (2019) identified multiple types of social infrastructure. *Public institutions* as public libraries; a diverse *commerce* with a public character; *recreational activities* that facilitate particular kinds of activities and practices as amateur sports, fitness, parks and playing fields; places of *religion* and worship; and in *transit* where daily interaction

can take place while walking, cycling, or using public transport. Neighbourhoods with a strong social infrastructure show residential density, busy sidewalks, commercial activity, well-maintained public spaces, and community organisations. This shows that these spaces do not necessarily be specially designed for encounter. Van Melik and Pijpers (2017) show how spaces as hobby- and community centres are even avoided by older people. They meet and mix with one another at self-selected spaces of encounter, such as malls, shops, on the street, or on their balconies. The informal character of for instance a shopping centre provides a neutral and accessible setting for diverse forms of social contact (Pettersen et al., 2026). Therefore, it is important to attend diverse spaces, facilities, institutions and groups that create affordances for social connection while researching social infrastructure, considered that these spaces are often overlooked and undervalued aspects of collective urban life (Latham & Layton, 2019).

Rivano Eckerdal et al. (2024) build on the premise that public libraries function as social infrastructures and move on to explore *how* this is *enacted* by librarians' everyday work life. They dive into the way of how librarians contribute to the (re)making of the library that connects with local communities. Thereby, they "underscore that libraries are ever-changing entities and conceptualise this process as a verb – *social infrastructuring* – and not just as the noun infrastructure" (p. 207). This thesis uses the term 'enactment' to research this phenomenon of how employees are actively engaged in maintaining and improving the social infrastructure of which they are part of. Enactment in this thesis refers to the idea that the social infrastructure only becomes reality through the actions and interactions of employees and visitors.

As with many other (social) infrastructures, there is a large 'taken for grantedness' aspect in the case of, for example, the library. But a social infrastructure should not be simply taken for granted. The enactment of a specific social infrastructure in a caring way, requires often small-scale acts of tinkering. These efforts "are ongoing and never finished" (Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024, p. 219).

Most studies on social infrastructure give an optimistic account of how spaces afford encounter and social connection. However, such accounts tend to overlook the fact that social infrastructures are unequally distributed and accessible, context-dependent, and contested through their use by different people (Strüver & Franz, 2025). Horton and Penny (2023, p. 1712) point out that "the civic-liberal approach does not sufficiently attend to power relations and structural antagonisms, which differentially and unevenly shape how, for whom, and to what ends social infrastructures are assembled and maintained". Social infrastructures can become places of exclusion, gentrification or even increase inequality (Horton & Penny, 2023). Furthermore, social infrastructures have shown to temporarily or partially disguise the fact that public institutions are underfunded by neoliberal politics (Strüver & Franz, 2025). To prevent social infrastructures causing more inequality, or work as a temporarily relief for the crumbling of state-underfunded social services, we need to be sensitive about how these social infrastructures work, which (political) voice they reproduce and how they are brought to life (Strüver & Franz, 2025).

2.2 Regular encounters and shared interests

When repeated and meaningful, interactions can develop into social relationships that are crucial to sustaining wellbeing (Pettersen et al., 2026; Umberson; & Montez, 2010). Social

interaction includes a wide range of gestures, expressions, conversations and shared activities that can lead to connection and relationship. Goffman defined social interactions as "any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence" (Goffman, 1959, p. 26). In some instances, people keep returning to the same spaces and keep engaging with familiar faces. People can build social ties on the basis of regular encounters and shared interests, such as sports and leisure clubs (Amin & Thrift, 2002). The regularity of such activities is accompanied by developing familiarity between one another (Robinson, 2020). Also being among equals or peers can have revitalizing effects (van Melik & Pijpers, 2017).

Many leisure clubs can be found around the world in community centres, libraries or at home. Here the "combination of novice, experienced, and master crafters […] allows members to both participate in a leisure activity, and to interact with and learn from others sharing a common interest in a craft" (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007, p. 93). These spaces and activities can be a "reason to gather".

Take for example the activity of knitting. Although easily and often practiced alone, knitting is an activity now widely practiced in a group. Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) write about the sharing of information in a library based knitting group. Most people who joined the group were interested in the activity of knitting, but eventually, most people kept coming back to the group for the social aspect. Relationships are built because of the knitting group. The people who go to the knitting group were likely to have common interests and preferences and it became a site for the sharing of activities, the shared enactment of women's identities and the performance of caring (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). While knitting, your hands are busy, but your mind can easily stray to other matters. Chatting while knitting is therefore a normal course of events, and the chatting is 'justified' because participants are still being productive (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). Because of the variety of experience and skill of the craft, knitting assistance is frequently being asked by the members of the knitting group. Knitters provided both requested and unrequested advice on patterns, materials and techniques. They also discussed all sorts of other topics, "anything and everything, really" (p. 107).

Robinson (2020) is also interested in spaces of understated connection and care. She observes how a knitting group in a library in South London became a place of multicultural recognition, precisely because the group was not framed as a *multicultural* knitting group. It was portrayed as one of the many routine activities of the library, and is seen by its members as both ordinary and dependable. This resulted in a space of understated connection and care, positioned as 'ordinary' and not an intervention. This allowed the possibilities for recognition and connection that "come […] out of shared practice, out of doing something together" (Noble, 2009, p. 62).

Not only are people in a knitting group learning from each other, they are also learning to be amongst each other. Moments of affective connection, hopeful gestures and talking about grief or mourning, are not taken into account when evaluating social infrastructures. These fragile, but powerful moments escape "capture, impossible to describe as an 'outcome' in official metrics, but powerfully demonstrates the library knitting group's capacity to offer a dignified space of recognition and care that lies beyond its official parameters" (Robinson, 2020, p. 568). Because of the regularity of the recurring activities, familiarity is developed between members. In the observed knitting group of Robinson (2020), this familiarity was

signalled by expressions of kindness and moments of intuitive connection. Also the knitting group observed by Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) showed moments of care, for instance the sharing of information, patterns and help, as well as making physical (knitted) items for their loved ones and the continuation of the craft: "[t]hrough their craft production, the women assumed the role of caretaker to the craft, and a promoter of its continuation" (Schofield & Littrell, 2001, p. 47).

However, research on older people's leisure clubs show that these can often serve as parochial domains. It shows that the "sustained participation in these spaces offers ways to link past and present identities and interests, yet they target fairly homogeneous audiences and foster in-group ties only" (van Melik & Pijpers, 2017, p. 287). This also reveals that "[p]articular spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at give places and times" (Simone, 2004, p. 409).

In both Robinson (2020) and Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) next to the shared values and interest of the group, the infrastructure of the library made making new connections among strangers in a safe environment possible. In both researches, the priority of these groups were not always high for the library due to the ordinariness and hard to measure outcomes. As Amin (2006, 2012) claims, the functioning of the public and collective spaces is dependent on the production and maintenance of the sense of trust. This entails "both a basic trust in others using the space, as well as a trust in the provision and maintenance of the facilities themselves" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 4). Therefore, it is important to consider the kinds and qualities of facilities that allow social life to happen, the kind of sociality that is afforded by them, and how this can be recognized as a kind of public life" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 4).

2.3 Infrastructural labour and practices of care

As it becomes clear, the production and maintenance of the facilities themselves are an important part of sustaining a meeting space. Certain work is done that creates, sustains, and performs infrastructures, known as *infrastructural labour* (Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). This labour is needed for the physical and social upkeep that is essential to the functioning of social infrastructure. Stokes and De Coss-Corzo (2023) define 'infrastructural labour' as "intentional human work, whether waged or unwaged, which is fundamental in sustaining collective life by enabling, mediating, maintaining, and modifying infrastructural assemblages" (p. 437-438). Work on infrastructures have highlighted how infrastructures require human communities to maintain them (Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). Throughout this thesis, the term 'enactment' will be used to describe this type of labour.

Next to focusing on the materiality of infrastructures, some forms of labour in sustaining infrastructure are more 'peopled'. These are often unseen infrastructures and embodied practices that shape neighbourhoods and cities and let them function. These infrastructures often rely on socially productive and care labour (Alam & Houston, 2020; Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023).

As discussed before, Rivano Eckerdal et al. (2024) treat libraries as social infrastructure and discover practices of care that are enacted by the librarians in their daily work routine. These "practices of care" are based on the work of Tronto and Fisher (1990). In their research, they first summarise and critique previous feminist theories of caring. Care has been a concern

of feminism since the second wave situated in the second half of the twentieth century (Kırmızı, 2024). Gilligan (2014) defines care in relation to feminism as follows: “Care is a feminist, not a ‘feminine’ ethic, and feminism, guided by an ethic of care, is arguably the most radical, in the sense of going to the roots, liberation movement in human history” (p. 101). Fisher and Tronto (1990) argue that the outlined images of care are often not focusing on caring itself, but on the actors involved. They try to reconceptualise caring in a way that is comprehensive, integrated and feminist. Tronto and Fisher (1990) are aware that we as a species, have no choice about engaging in caring activities.

> *“On the most general level, we suggest that caring can be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.* (Fisher & Tronto 1990, p. 40)

Tronto and Fisher (1990) go against the idea that caring is to be seen as separate sphere for women’s moral and emotional work, as this does not comply with women’s daily realities.

Recent scholarship has used ‘care’ as care for human and non-human animals, which is sensitive to particular needs. Everyone needs care in various forms throughout their lives and everyone is capable in one way or another, to care for someone or something (Kırmızı, 2024). This results in care not being limited to only institutional care in for example hospitals, nurseries of families. It is about everyday relationships of care through social infrastructures (Kırmızı, 2024).

Care is an everyday practice sustaining our worlds. Fisher and Tronto (1990) explain a number of phases of “practices of care”, which show the “rich and knotty texture of our caring experience” and gives answer to the question why caring can be “both so rewarding and so exasperating” (Tronto & Fisher, 1990). The five components are consisting of *caring about*, recognizing a need for care; *caring for*, taking responsibility to meet that need; *care giving*, the actual physical work of providing care; *care receiving*, the responses of the caring process; later, *Caring with* was added, emphasising that care is multi-dimensional and context-specific (Tronto, 2010; Tronto & Fisher, 1990). As noted by Alam and Houston (2020), this last phase *caring with* is useful, since it recognises care as a dynamic relation where both care giver and receiver actively participate to achieve meaningful care. The care receiver must receive and utilise the care practices to achieve meaningful care.

These five phases of care can be performed by one person, as well as divided by multiple individuals or groups. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 120) suggests to rethink the reciprocities of care through "collective webs of obligations” rather than “individual commitments”. It is also not a linear, step-by-step plan you can follow, but these phases of the caring process may be intertwined in chaotic and contradictory styles (Alam & Houston, 2020; Tronto & Fisher, 1990). There are also preconditions to the stages of care: the most important of these ability factors are *time*, *material resources, knowledge and skill*. Previous feminist theories have highlighted the hidden, ordinary and just forms of practices of care that weave together the ecological, material and social fabric of cities (Alam & Houston, 2020). As described in the last

phase, care does acknowledge the complexities and tensions that are part of an unevenly structured world, as stated by Mol et al. (2010, p. 14):

> *"Care is attentive to such suffering and pain, but it does not dream up a world without lack. Not that it calls for cynicism either: care seeks to lighten what is heavy, and even if it fails it keeps on trying. Such, then, is what failure calls for in an ethics, or should we say an ethos, of care: try again, try something a bit different, be attentive."*

Sheringham (2025) sees how care work and caring infrastructures are embodied, relational and "peopled" (p. 276). However, building infrastructure around people can be ambivalent. Firstly, when responsibility is being taken by someone to sustain a social or caring infrastructure, the number of people who take responsibility is diminishing (Hall, 2020). Furthermore, care practices often rely on unpaid work to enable encounter and social relationships (Hall, 2020). Because infrastructures are producing and re-producing, there is a danger that the often gendered, racialized, and classed bodies that perform care work become infrastructured (Strüver & Franz, 2025). Since these (care) infrastructures are often 'people as infrastructure', Hall (2020) stresses that the labour of social and caring relationships are built on this often invisible or ignored work. In light of this, she argues: "social reproduction is thus itself an infrastructure upon which to build societies and economies—a complex network of people, practices and politics, labour, love and life" (Hall, 2020, p. 89).

Practices of care risk being invisible in our daily society. They are not easily measurable or evaluable, and are often nonverbal (Mol, 2010; Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is hard to research which institutions provide good care. The research of Fisher (1990) shows that caring often seems to consist of something 'extra'. But how is this 'extra' to be discussed in institutional terms? This question is raised in Tronto (2010). Organisations that focus on the outcomes of their work, rather than their profits, often work better. Tronto (2010) reformulates this idea around care institutions:

> *"Care institutions have to think about the nature of the caring process as a whole in order to guide their actions. This requirement does not only demand that the 'needs' of the 'customers' come first but also that the needs of care workers, the allocation of responsibility and proper assessment also happen within the organisation"* (p. 162)

This shows the complexity of care, and that of all the people involved in care. Enacted care practices in care institutions are important to research to understand how they support marginalised and precariously situated groups and individuals in cities. However, unequal access to caring infrastructures is related to power dynamics that influence how and where people are able to care for oneself and one another (Strüver & Franz, 2025). Alam and Houston (2020) seek "more ordinary and intimate notions of care as alternate infrastructure" (p. 2). They emphasize the importance of identifying and valuing every day, non-institutional spaces and the skills of the people who build and maintain them. By doing so, they try to effectively re-

centre alternative formal and informal cultures of care, which is essential for inclusive urban development (Alam & Houston, 2020).

It is therefore important to realise that care is not only needed by people who are 'vulnerable', but everyone needs care, in some way or another (Kırmızı, 2024; Tronto & Fisher, 1990). Because who should determine the needs of those who 'need' care? (Tronto, 2010). Care is multidimensional and contentious; it is "not something forced upon living beings by a moral order, yet it obliges that for life to be liveable, it needs to be fostered" (De La Bellacasa, 2017, p. 198). Concluding, caring infrastructures aim to enable people to care for themselves and others in a satisfactory manner (Strüver & Franz, 2025). However, they are often invisible or ignored. 'Practices of care' are used in research to unravel the ways in which care is practiced to sustain our worlds.

2.4 Conceptual model

Collectively, these studies outline a critical role for social infrastructures in rethinking the urban landscape and the way these infrastructures are enacted. Social infrastructures contribute to the public life of cities by being important places for social connection. It can influence societal problems as loneliness, polarisation and in some instances, even death rates. Nonetheless, these places are often underfunded and undervalued. However, critics have also argued that the optimistic account of the social infrastructure does not fully show the whole picture. Furthermore, questions about how these (social) infrastructures are being preserved, are raised by scholars looking at the infrastructural labour. The physical and social maintenance are important parts of the enactment of the social infrastructure. Using 'practices of care' can be a theoretical lens to analyse the enactment of the social infrastructure.

Based on the discussed literature, a conceptual model is designed (Figure 2). The social infrastructure needs to be sustained by *enacting* the social infrastructure. This entails two parts: enactment of the physical space and the social relations. The physical space needs to be maintained, which is an ongoing activity. Second, social relations can lead to regular encounters and practices of care. These practices of care are both performed by the care giver, and the care receiver, which have a dynamic relation.

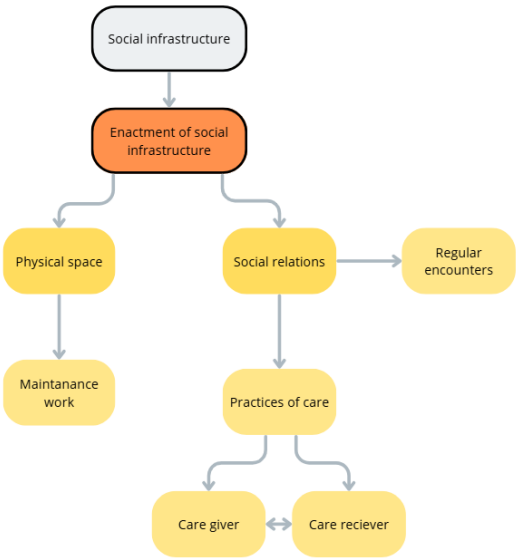

Figure 2: Conceptual model

3.The ethnographer and the shadow – methodological considerations

3.1 Introduction

This research includes seven months of *ethnographic fieldwork,* including the *shadowing* of three employees during their workday to answer the research questions. This data was obtained during a research internship at BUUR West between April 2025 and November 2025. BUUR West is a neighbourhood café in Nijmegen Oud-West. In this research, the methods mentioned above will be used to investigate how different people within the organisation connect to the neighbourhood and its residents. The aim of this research is to understand how a social infrastructure is enacted, and which practices of care are performed. In addition, this research focuses on how various other organisations in Nijmegen Oud-West work together with BUUR West. The following research questions are addressed:

1. *How does BUUR West fit in the established organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West?*
2. *How are "practices of care" performed by the visitors of BUUR West and its activities?*
3. *What is the role of the people working at BUUR West in sustaining a social infrastructure for the neighbourhood, examining their practices of care and maintenance?*

To answer the first and second research question, notes from the ethnographic fieldwork are used, with additions of the shadowing method. Research question three will be mainly answered by the notes from the shadowing method, with additions of the ethnographic fieldnotes. First, chapter 3.2 will describe the research design and context. Then in chapter 3.3, the research methods will be explained and their ethical considerations will be discussed. Lastly, the method of data analysis will be described in chapter 3.4.

3.2 Research design and context

In researching social infrastructure, "attending to the diverse spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection can highlight overlooked and undervalued aspects of collective urban life" (Latham & Layton, 2019: 8). Latham and Layton (2019) and Klinenberg (2018) advise to locate and understand spaces that facilitate sociality and social connection and *how* and why they matter to the communities that use the space. Research in care or social infrastructure practices are often hard to quantify or measure and are often non-verbal and not immediately visible (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019; Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024; Star, 1999). It is nonetheless important to study them. Also Alam and Houston (2020) and Kırmızı (2024) call attention to investing the relationship between care and social infrastructure or "everyday non-institutional care spaces" by conducting qualitative research methods. Using qualitative methods, these practices of care and social infrastructuring are uncovered.

3.2.1 Location

The internship and research on practices of care and social infrastructuring are conducted at BUUR West, a neighbourhood café located in Nijmegen Oud-West. The district Oud-West (*Old-West*) is for most residents of Nijmegen known as a "real working-class district" (*volksbuurt*) (Dorna, 2020). De Biezen is the oldest neighbourhood in the Western part of Nijmegen (figure 3). Characteristic of de Biezen, or still more commonly known as 'het Waterkwartier', is the urban structure. Especially, many small, pre-war or immediate post-war cooperative housing units can be found, with relatively low rents. However, the composition of residents is changing and housing prices have doubled over the last 12 years (Statistieken wijk Nijmegen-Oud-West).

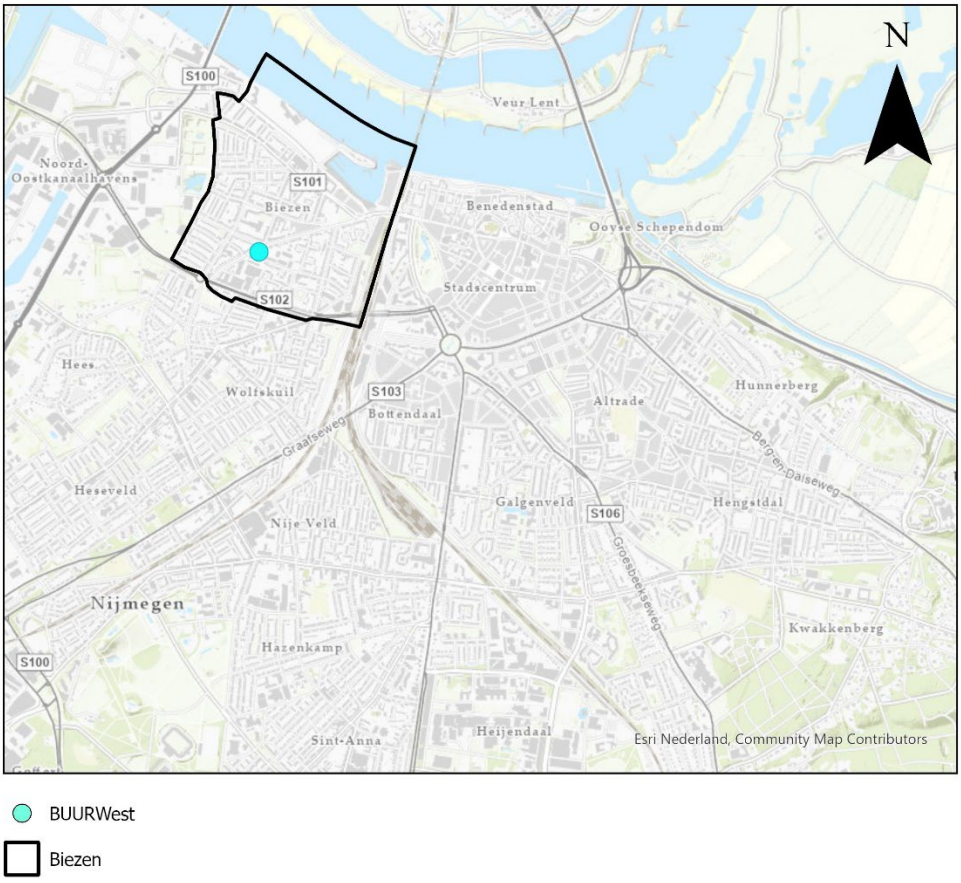

Figure 3: map of Nijmegen, with Biezen outlined

BUUR West is positioned at the ground floor of the residential institution *De Griffioen*. This residential institution is specifically equipped for people with a demand for long-term healthcare. The residents of de Griffioen are an important target group that BUUR West serves on a daily basis.

BUUR's first location originated in 2016 as a civic initiative in the neighbourhood Brakkenstein, Nijmegen. Supported by housing corporation Talis, the municipality of Nijmegen and several other organisations, BUUR was created: an accessible meeting place and café with a social character (*Dit is BUUR West*) . BUUR West is the "younger sibling" of BUUR Brakkenstein and opened in 2022. In a larger indoor space and on the terrace, drinks, snacks

and lunch can be ordered for a fairly low price. Various activities are also being organised every day of the week. BUUR West tries to be a welcoming and lively place, where care, welfare, catering and activities can take place (*Dit is BUUR West*). In addition to providing catering services for residents of Griffioen, BUUR West has a much broader mission. One of their slogans tells us: "BUUR verbindt de buurt" (*BUUR connects the neighbourhood,* own translation). They try to facilitate creating a network of strong shoulders of the neighbourhood. With a team of about 20 employees, they try to achieve that goal by working together with the residents of the neighbourhood, other organisations, and providing space, organise activities, and work facilitating.

Several people work at other locations of BUUR as well, for instance in Brakkenstein. However, the people I met while conducting fieldwork at BUUR West are introduced below. Mark is the 'boss' of BUUR West, one of the founders of BUUR and also part of the Griffioen partnership. Iris is a team coach and is involved in the catering and housekeeping teams. Bianca and Sanne are both community connectors (*buurtverbinder*). Robin is part of the welfare team and is involved in in-house activities at BUUR West, as well as working a few hours a week as the janitor. There are also between ten to twelve catering staff. As mentioned, there are a number of people who work at various BUUR locations and are involved in areas such as communication, visual design, and administration. A number of volunteers help with activities on different days of the week.

3.2.2 Time period

The internship for this thesis has been conducted over seven months, between mid April 2025 and mid November 2025. Two to three days per week, participation or assistance was given to activities, shadowing was conducted, or meetings were attended. This duration has been chosen based on conversations with employees of BUUR West prior to the internship. They told about how they "kind of figured out how it all works" after about three months of being present at BUUR West. Furthermore, one of the participants in a thesis previously conducted at Griffioen informed the researcher "that his connection with Griffioen was too short of time to explain the social cohesion of the community" (Mourik, 2023, p. 16). The ethnographic fieldnotes for this thesis also align with these remarks, and my own understanding of the organisation becomes clearer further into the internship and fieldnotes.

3.3 Methods of data collection

3.3.1 Ethnographic fieldwork

Ethnography is a qualitative method where the researcher immerses themself in a community or organisation to observe behaviour and interactions. Or in other words, "[e]thnography is what you do when you try to understand people by allowing their lives to mould your own as fully and genuinely as possible" (Desmond, 2014, p. 561). It entails following people you want to know better over a longer period of time, observing and experiencing what they do, and recording as much action and interaction as the researcher can (Desmond, 2014). As an ethnographer, you participate in their daily activities and routines, and develop ongoing relations with the people in it. The ethnographer writes down what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others, creating a written record (Emerson

et al., 2011). By immersing in other's people's lives, the researcher is getting to know what is important and meaningful for the other (Emerson et al., 2011).

In this study, ethnographic fieldnotes were taken over several months of being an active volunteer at BUUR West. I assisted in various activities, such as a children's activity at BUUR West, summer activities with several other organisations and attended a few meetings. Because of the wide range of activities BUUR organises, the research also focused on participating, helping and observing these places of communal activities. This form of group participation can be both helpful of gathering information, and to fulfil participants' need to socialise, form a caring community, and participate in communal activities (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). Part of the fieldwork has been participating and supporting '*BUUR's naaiclub' (BUUR's sewing club).* This is a club for different kinds of handwork, held every Friday afternoon. Furthermore, I was part of establishing, participating and supporting the painting club, held every Tuesday morning. A review of the fieldnotes taken can be found in Table 1.

Activity of fieldnotes	**Number of fieldnotes**	**Further explanation**
Activity summer / children's / cooking	6	Assisting in various activities: Summer activities with other organisations of Nijmegen Oud-West; children's activities at BUUR West; cooking activity with local resident
Attending meetings	4	Attending various meetings: establishing new painting activity; *meebouwers* meetings
Meeting with supervisor / employee / calls	9	Meeting with: supervisor; employees of BUUR West; calls with other organisations or employees
Painting club	8	Establishing, assisting and participating in the painting club of BUUR West
Sewing club	10	Volunteering, assisting and participating at the sewing / handiwork club of BUUR West
Shadowing*	3*	Following selected people closely in their everyday occupations. *Will be explained extensively below
Other	4	Other fieldnotes
Total	**44**	

Table 1: Overview of fieldnotes

In a lot of ethnographies, the objects of analysis are certain *groups* of people or certain *places*. Researching groups and places work well as ethnographic objects; you can say that they work a bit *too* well. Those seemingly innocent decisions rest upon countless ontological assumptions, and argue that the world is made up of a collection of "isolated groups and places" (Desmond, 2014: 551). Following Emerson et al. (2011) in this thesis, immersion in other's people's lives gives "the fieldworker access to the fluidity of others' lives and enhances his sensitivity to interaction and process" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 3). Social worlds are always under symbolic construction, and are created and sustained through interaction with others. This research is interested in how a specific social infrastructure is enacted, therefore this ethnography is a place-bounded ethnography.

By participating actively in a certain environment, the ethnographer cannot stay fully neutral. By choosing this method, the resulting data will automatically not be completely objective. Emerson et al. (2011, p. 15) explain this as: "*What* the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected with *how* she finds it out." However, as an ethnographer, you are not seeking "the truth", but rather try to unravel the multiple truths apparent in others' lives (Emerson et al., 2011).

I have actively participated in the before mentioned activities. Participating in the activity ensures that "the participant-observer is learning not only through observing, but also through direct contact with fellow participants and the expertise shared" (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007, p. 96). In addition, by participating in the activity, I acquired insider status. This kept the option of approaching the members open and built trust (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). These activity groups gave a great opportunity to get to know the organisation and some residents of the neighbourhood and the Griffioen.

I have made descriptive fieldnotes, but it is important to note that they have been exposed to perception and interpretation of the researcher. Writing fieldnotes then, is not just passively copying "facts" about "what happened". Rather, these descriptive accounts select and emphasise different features and actions while ignoring and marginalizing others. This inevitably framed them in a certain way, because "these presentations reflect and incorporate sensitivities, meanings, and understandings the field researcher has gleaned from having been close to and participated in the described events" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 13).

As said before, ethnography is a method where the researcher immerses themself in a community or organisation to observe behaviour and interactions, and produces written accounts of that world (Desmond, 2014; Emerson et al., 2011). In this study, the experiences, observations and reflections of me at BUUR West were written down in "jottings", and later worked out in One Note. Jottings are "a brief written record of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 29). Most of the jottings were written down at the end of the day, or in between certain activities. These jottings were used to compose a more elaborate account in One Note, by using the jottings to move through the day and filling in and making connections between segments, based on memory.

Ethical considerations in ethnographic fieldwork

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork comes with a set of ethical considerations. In this subsection the *presence of the ethnographer*, *writing fieldnotes, generalisability* and *asking permission* are being discussed.

Firstly, the presence of the ethnographer has influence on the setting. However, this should not be seen as 'contamination' of that setting. Rather, these effects might provide the source of learning and observation for both parties involved (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). When a new person enters the setting, the forming of social ties and changes in the existing structure also show themselves. Furthermore, the ethnographer is not just a fly on the wall, but an active participant. Continuing participation in the lives of others shows the ongoing and fluid processes of interaction and interpretation, which the researcher experiences first hand (Emerson et al., 2011).

Secondly, there are implications for writing fieldnotes. Emerson et al. (2011) write about four implications: *connecting "methods" and "findings; the pursuit of meanings; writing*

fieldnotes contemporaneously; and *the importance of interaction detail*. Further, Tuck and Yang (2014) observe that much of the work of the academy is to reproduce stories of oppression in its own voice. This often involves writing pain narratives. Their article "R-Words: Refusing Research" addresses this issue well. I was aware that during the research, I would encounter stories from people which are not simply mine to take (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Balancing the question if certain events could be used as data or not writing them down with respect to them being sensitive, classified or personal, has constantly been on my mind during and after the fieldwork.

Furthermore, generalisability of this research can be limited because this research is based on findings in one organisation. Generalisability is often understood as an 'ongoing challenge' in qualitative research (Gamble & Hewlett, 2024). However, this research does not aim to tell a generalizable story, but rather the story of what is encountered at BUUR West during the fieldwork. Nevertheless, factors can be identified that may be transferable to other (local) settings (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007).

Lastly, although asking consent or permission is highly valued and time is spent on it, strained relations and ethical dilemmas are not completely avoided by informing others of one's research purposes. "While participants might have consented to the research, they might not know exactly what the research involves or what the researcher will do to carry it out" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 37). Furthermore, especially marginal and transient members of the setting are hard to keep updated of the research identity and purpose, despite efforts to inform them. Both before and during the period of observation, access and consent were negotiated (Czarniawska, 2007; Robinson, 2020). The goals and interests about conducting an ethnographic study at BUUR is discussed at the first meeting with employees of BUUR West. Written consent by the organisation has been achieved early on. Also, the role as a researcher has been discussed openly to the people being followed and observed, and pseudonyms are used.

It is important to note that the ethnography is a construction of what I have experienced, a version of the world, and it worked more as a filter, than as a mirror of reality (Emerson et al., 2011).

3.3.2 Shadowing

During my fieldwork at BUUR West of, mostly, my own experiences, three employees have been *shadowed* during one of their workdays. This section will explain the basic principles of the shadowing technique and will discuss a set of practical and ethical considerations regarding shadowing.

Shadowing is a method linked to multiple other qualitative methods (Johnson, 2014; McDonald, 2005; McDonald & Simpson, 2014). As McDonald and Simpson (2014) point out, some methods used in qualitative research are using the same principles as shadowing, but are not called "shadowing". This can lead to reinventing the wheel "without the benefit of the theoretical and empirical support available for almost any other technique for accessing data." (McDonald & Simpson, 2014, p. 4). The literature of Czarniawska (2007) , Johnson (2014) and McDonald (2005) have been used in this research to get to know the method theoretically.

The shadowing method in this study consisted of following three selected people closely during one of their daily work routines (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). While being shadowed, they would explain to me what they and others were doing, which is simultaneously

a reflection of their workday (Czarniawska, 2007). Shadowing the three employees included moving around with them, observing what they were doing and saying, and talking to them about what they were doing. The participants I shadowed, Sanne, Robin and Bianca, have different roles in the organisation of BUUR West. Sanne and Bianca are both a 'community connector' (*buurtverbinder*) and engage in activities and support of local residents. Robin is supervisor of in-house activities and is janitor of part of the building. These three participants were selected because of their work both inside BUUR West (Robin) and outside in the neighbourhood (Sanne and Bianca). By following a person inside the organisation, the shadow can get a more focused and specific experience of the things relevant to a particular expert role (McDonald, 2005). The shadow technique gave this research a more in-depth view in the working life of the employees of BUUR West, instead of only my own experience as a volunteer.

Everything the participant does in the shadowed workday, is written down by the shadow. Next to the notes taken during the day, a 'shadow guide' was used during the shadowing of the participants to outline the structure and expectations of the day. This guide was used at the beginning and end of the day, and can be found in Appendix A. At the end of the day, a "rich, dense and comprehensive data set which gives a detailed, first-hand and multidimensional picture of the role, approach, philosophy and tasks of the person being studied" is created (McDonald, 2005, p. 457). This data has been analysed, which will be discussed in section 3.4. This rich data gives a perspective situated within the organisational contexts, and is guided by the participant's movement throughout the day. Wherever the participant would take me, I was bound to follow. It is "this lack of control over the data by either the researcher or the actor that offers the opportunity to surface insights that go beyond the preconceptions of the researcher or the extant organisational literature" (McDonald & Simpson, 2014, p. 14). In a conversation held at the beginning of my fieldwork with Sanne, she was surprised about this type of qualitative research:

> Sanne had definitely an open mind about being "shadowed", but she wanted to choose a day when she would have a lot to do. I told her that wasn't really necessary. Sanne: "But will you really shadow me when I'm working on my laptop?". Adore: "If that's part of the day, then yes". I told her that there were studies in which people were shadowed over a period of two years. Sanne: "Being a researcher is such a strange profession."[2] (Fieldnotes, 18 June)

An advantage of being present the whole day, is that the researcher will actually see what *is* going on, instead of what *should be* going on. It gives a more realistic representation of the interruptions, events, dramas and emergencies throughout the day, instead of a chronological description of a 'ordinary' day (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). A weakness of interviews for example, is that "interview [...] responses are notorious for discrepancies between what people say that they have done, or will do, and wat they actually

[2] "Sanne stond er zeker voor open om 'geschaduwd' te worden, ze wilde wel graag een dag kiezen dat ze veel te doen had. Ik vertelde dat dat niet per se nodig was. Sanne: "Maar ga je me dan ook echt schaduwen als ik op mijn laptop zit". A: "Als dat bij die dag hoort wel ja". Ik vertelde haar dat er studies waren dat mensen twee jaar werden geschaduwd, Sanne: "Wat is onderzoeker toch een raar beroep" (Fieldnotes, 18 June)

did, or will do" (Ronson, 2002, p. 311). Whereas shadowing is a method that keeps pace with space and events as they unfold in real-time (McDonald & Simpson, 2014).

Furthermore, shadowing is different than more traditional forms of qualitative research in two ways. Firstly, shadowing gives a different level of analysis. As mentioned earlier, shadowing will give a "rich, dense and comprehensive data set which gives a detailed, first-hand and multidimensional picture of the role, approach, philosophy and tasks of the person being studied" (McDonald, 2005, p. 457). Secondly, it is different in the unit of analysis. The researcher shadows individual people in an holistic manner, and records both their opinions, as their behaviour at the same time. "Thus, actions are contextualized by the running commentary and every opinion is related to the situation which produced it." (McDonald, 2005, p. 456).

Practical and ethical issues of shadowing

As recommended by Johnson (2014) and McDonald (2005), I read about the shadowing technique and its practical and ethical issues beforehand. This leaded to "enhanced reflexivity, the development, and deployment of strategies to mitigate or eliminate risks, fewer surprises for researchers in the field, and ultimately ethical practice" (Johnson, 2014, p. 37). The practical and ethical struggles and issues are being discussed in literature about shadowing including Czarniawska (2007), Johnson (2014) and McDonald (2005). The following topics will be discussed: *re-negotiating access*, *blending in, going native, confidentiality, anonymity,* and *note taking on the move.* Most of these "ethics in practice" (Johnson, 2014) relate to the actions that are taken by researcher "in situ" as they encounter and address ethical issues in the field.

Re-negotiating access

While conducting shadowing as a method, access must, to a certain degree, be continuously re-negotiated, both with newly introduced persons, as with the participant (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). I encountered a lot of different people while conducting shadowing research. For a research Johnson (2014) writes about, he sent all employees of the company where he shadowed the CEO an email about his research. However, he still encountered a lot of different occasions where consent was hard to gain. In this research, there was not an email sent to all people involved, but I have always tried to introduce myself as 'a research-intern'. Similar to the example of Johnson, this research also included a lot of examples of encounters with people who interacted quickly with the participant, without them really knowing they were being involved in an academic research project. Frequently, these informal, quick conversations happened while walking from one place to another, and were quite rich in information. When encountering these types of situations, Johnson (2014, p. 29) would be reminded that "although unreported in observational studies, covert practices often inadvertently become an important part of overt studies." If the criteria of "proportionate reason" (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000) can be complied of conducting ethical research, covert practices can be part of the shadowing method (Johnson, 2014). Sometimes gaining (written) consent can be a delay and obstruction in the day of the participant (Johnson, 2014).

Blending in

While conducting research as a shadow, blending in is needed in order not to attract attention to the activity. Most experiences with shadowing as stated in Johnson (2014) and Czarniawska

(2007) and also in this research has shown that after the initial curiosity has died off in a matter of a few minutes, people begin to ignore the researcher.

Going native

Johnson (2014) pays attention to the risk of "going native". Similar to participant observation, there is the sense that objectivity and focus can be lost while conducting non-participant observations. Although non-participant observation has a smaller risk in becoming objective, this research was a bit different because of the role as a volunteer, next to researcher. While conducting the shadowing research, I already knew a lot of people at BUUR West, and had formed a relationship with some of them. Objectivity in shadowing research has been called a challenge in some literature as Johnson (2014), because a close relationship between the observer and participant will develop. Engstrom (2010, p. 55) calls attention to this relationship being built as necessary for conducting research:

> *"If the researcher tries to remain distant she or he cannot work to build rapport with the subjects he or she observes. This increases the possibility that the shadowee will restrict access to certain activities or, worse, come to resent the presence of the researcher."*

Czarniawska (2007) also sees entanglement more as an opportunity than as a problem in conducting research. Because of this symmetry between participant and shadow, the people they study *don't* get objectified. This change of perspective has been noticed by many anthropologists who began to study industrialized countries.

Confidentiality

While shadowing, you constantly come into contact with sensitive information and situations, both with an organisational as personal nature (Johnson, 2014). Sometimes while shadowing, it would be explicitly stated that certain information should not be written down, or sometimes I would ask it myself. However, sometimes this did not happen and I needed to judge for myself whether a) it would be necessary as data at all, and b) if it was "simply mine to take" or harmful (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Note taking on the move

A more practical consideration about shadowing is the many notes taken throughout the day while constantly being on the move. "All solutions are welcome: taking notes whenever seated; dictating reflections whenever alone; and finally, writing up as much as possible at the end of each day" (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 57). The endless writing would lead some participants of this study to laugh at the amount written down at moments that they considered as quite 'normal' or 'boring'. Also entering a new environment, I would be initially completely unaware of what all the conversations and jokes were about. Keeping track of questions for later was sometimes difficult. The amount of data and intense days are described by researchers as mentally, physically and emotionally demanding (Czarniawska, 2007; Johnson, 2014; McDonald, 2005)

If there are so many practical and ethical considerations, why would anyone support shadowing methods? Being aware of the practical and ethical issues involved in conducting research is a must and most people will behave in a manner that is socially acceptable in that setting. "The

point is never to behave like a fly on the wall [...], but to behave like a responsible adult, showing respect and sympathy to others" (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 56). In addition, shadowing can be seen as mutual observation between the participant and the shadow (Czarniawska, 2007). Furthermore, during shadowing, the shadow also becomes aware of their positionality and other people's views and actions. Czarniawska (2007) advocates for more sensitive, richer and humbler studies resulting from this view, and the importance of alterity, as opposed to the often generalised studies.

> *"Their main purpose is to remind the reader the importance of alterity: the difference (including the alterity of the self), as superior to the importance of identity – the sameness. The very idea of fieldwork lives or dies with it."*
> Czarniawska (2007, p. 121)

3.4 Data-analysis

The notes taken during the ethnographic fieldwork and the shadowing were, as previously stated, transcribed to OneNote. Then, the data is analysed using thematic analysis, based on the work of Braun and and Clarke (2006). During the analysis of the data, special interest is given to the *dimensions of social infrastructure* and *practices of care* (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Research is conducted at one location. Therefore are the results of the data compared to the theory as described in the theoretical framework.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

The digitalized fieldnotes are analysed using *thematic analysis*. This analysis is already conducted during the period of the internship. The results of the analysis were discussed with Iris to help the researcher to focus on perspectives in the results that are relevant for understanding the enactment of the social infrastructure (Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024).

Thematic analysis is a process of searching for patterns and meaning within or across a dataset. In this research, the analysis is conducted using the six steps or phases as described by Braun and and Clarke (2006) and following advice about analysing ethnographic fieldwork from Emerson et al. (2011). Patterns and codes were analysed using Atlas.TI and Microsoft Word. The themes and codes found in the ethnographic fieldnotes can be found in Appendix B. Using these themes and codes, a narrative was created and written down to try to "produce coherent, focused analyses of aspects of the social life that have been observed and recorded, analyses that are comprehensible to readers who are not directly acquainted with the social world at issue" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 171). The results chapter will include excerpts from the fieldnotes, translated to English. Since it is sometimes difficult to translate certain words, phrases, or actions with the same nuance as in native language, the original Dutch version will be included in the footnotes.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or *themes* in data. According to Braun and and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis does not require a detailed theoretical knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis, and can therefore provide a more accessible form of analysis. Unlike various qualitative research methods, thematic analysis is not tied to a pre-existing theoretical framework. It can

therefore be used for different purposes within different theoretical frameworks (Braun & and Clarke, 2006).

A theme describes something important from the data in relation to the research question. In addition, a theme represents a pattern or meaning in the data set. Themes or patterns within the data can be found in an inductive or a deductive manner. An inductive approach means that the themes are strongly linked to the data itself, and the themes are sought without a particular "coding frame". A theoretical, or deductive, approach is usually driven by the researcher's theoretical interests. Consequently, this approach is more analytically driven and looks in more detail at specific questions and themes in the text (Braun & and Clarke, 2006). Even though in this research some specific topics were being studied, the analysis has been "data driven", thus inductive. This means that this research formed a conclusion based on the fieldnotes in general and found themes throughout the fieldwork (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007).

3.4.2 Dimensions of social infrastructure

According to Latham and Layton (2019) there are a number of dimensions to the provision of social infrastructure that can make it more or less successful. These dimensions were used when analysing the fieldnotes. An important note is that these dimensions are designed to review a social infrastructure, and not one specific part of the infrastructure. However, they do give some tools to make sense of the object of analysis.

- Abundance of provision: Social infrastructures need to be easy to find and convey more than a sense of functionality.
- Diversity of social infrastructure: A range of activities and communities should be available, that can require a range of facilities and spaces. In addition, the infrastructure should be designed, built and maintained with a wide demographic in mind.
- Maintenance of social infrastructure: How the social infrastructure is maintained, has influence on how the provisioning is experienced and how trust is developed. This maintenance is both physical in means of repairing materials and surfaces, as well as social, spaces and facilities need to feel cared for and safe.
- Accessibility: The social infrastructure should be accessible across society, regardless of age, race, class, sexuality, or gender.
- Responsive to peoples' wants and needs: The facility's use and purpose may shift and evolve over time, which can be seen while tracing how the social infrastructure is practiced. Social infrastructures should be responsive to these changes.

3.5 Concluding

This research includes seven months of *ethnographic fieldwork* including the *shadowing* of three employees to answer the research questions. This data was obtained during a research internship at BUUR West between April 2025 and November 2025. BUUR West is a neighbourhood café in Nijmegen Oud-West, the oldest neighbourhood in the Western part of Nijmegen. The data is analysed using thematic analysis and shaped the thematic narrative using excerpts out of the fieldnotes.

4. The enactment of a social infrastructure at BUUR West - Results and analysis

When you cross the threshold of BUUR West, you enter a cosy, well-maintained café (figure 4). Soft music plays in the background, people chat, and the smell of coffee fills the air. You are greeted by the customers sitting at the tables around the entrance, or by the bar staff. There are often a few tables or benches still available where you can take a seat. Many of the visitors are elderly, but there are also people working on their laptops, or children playing in the playing corner (figure 5).

Figure 4:BUUR West, Fleur Weijers

Figure 5: Playing corner, Fleur Weijers

Every week at BUUR West has the same structure, with different activities and people you meet each day. Almost every day of the week offers activities you can participate in, both as a resident of the Griffioen, and as a resident of the neighbourhood. From bingo on Tuesdays and music afternoons on Thursdays, to (WII) sports, painting, and a sewing- and knitting club. Every afternoon people can attend a simple lunch buffet, which you can sign up for in advance. Fresh soup is served at the table. In the evening, dinner is available at a set time, which visitors have to sign up for as well. Once a month however, BUUR West stays open on a Thursday evening for a pub-quiz and additional bites and dinner. The people who attend the activities vary depending on the activity.

This chapter will discuss certain topics as stated in the research objective and questions. Chapter 4.1 gives an overview of the organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West, where BUUR West is located. In chapter 4.2 the different visitors will be introduced and different challenges will be laid out. The enactment by the employees of the neighbourhood café will be discussed in depth in chapter 4.3. Chapter 4.4 is concerned with the practices of care found in regard of the enactment of a social infrastructure. Lastly, a conclusion will be given on the three sub-questions.

4.1 The organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West

The first sub-question aimed to get insight into the established organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West, and how BUUR West fit in this landscape considering that they are 'newcomers'. This section will briefly introduce different social organisations located in Nijmegen Oud-West, then explain different interorganisational collaborations in the neighbourhood. Lastly, the added value of BUUR West in the neighbourhood will be supported.

The different neighbourhoods of Oud-West have been attracting various social organisations over the last decades, which are working for and with the neighbourhood. For instance, organisations can be found which are pleading for more attention for 'silent poverty' (Quiet), people in a socially vulnerable position (Huis van Compassie), or social work (Bindkracht10). The organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West is extensive and is experienced by many people I encountered during this research as "complicated". Restaurants, cafés and small parks are scattered throughout the neighbourhood, but not many shops can be found.

An important note is that the Western part of Nijmegen is quite big, and is still physically growing. Since most social organisations can be found in certain neighbourhoods in Nijmegen Oud-West, other neighbourhoods of Nijmegen (Nieuw-)West don't have many meeting spots (Iris, notes, 13 November). The interorganisational collaboration *Meebouwers* are actively trying to reach out to neighbourhoods of Nijmegen West and its business, organisations and residents. While various organisations, such as Bindkracht 10 and BUUR West, are trying to facilitate many initiatives of neighbourhood residents, an interorganisational collaboration has been launched by the municipality this year. The province of Gelderland and the municipality of Nijmegen have signed a 'neighbourhood deal' to improve the quality of life and social involvement in the Nijmegen-West district. A subsidy of €400,000 was granted for this purpose. This led to the creation of the "Meebouwers*"*. Various organisations in the neighbourhood, BUUR West included, are combining their existing expertise, networks, and resources. This enables them to facilitate initiatives from local residents in various ways. For instance, they have helped opening up a pet foodbank, have gained excess to a subsidy for someone who is working on a cookbook with recipes of local residents, or use their network to help a resident with the opening of a *Michi-Noeki.*

What stands out in the fieldnotes about the collaboration of the Meebouwers, are the many "get-togethers"[3]. I saw how quickly those contacts and connections were made among the employees of the different organisations. I have written down the quote: "I could connect them to each other"[4] on a multitude of occasions. For example, during a meeting with all participants of the Meebouwers, the representative of the municipality made a connection:

Sometimes connections are made very quickly between an idea and someone's contact, in order to make something happen.

- This was also the case with the display window [about information of initiatives]: Erwin stepped away for a moment and a little while later, he already had a first location for a display window, because he knows someone who owns all the buildings around Molenweg,

[3] "Onderonsjes"
[4] "die zou ik met elkaar kunnen verbinden"

Bart. Erwin was smiling and said that Bart had said, "It should have been there a long time ago."

- After that, they immediately agreed to arrange a time to walk around together and see where they specifically wanted to place it. (Fieldnotes, 4 September)[5]

The Meebouwers find it difficult to get foothold on new areas of Nijmegen West, since most of their network and resources are located in Nijmegen Oud-West. They are now investing more energy and resources in finding collaborations with organisations, groups and enterprises in different parts of Nijmegen West.

However, both myself and Bianca noticed that the collaboration within Meebouwers does not always run smoothly. For example, I noticed that the various organisations work within their own 'system'. One example of this is that there are three different documents in which things, such as time sheets and the various activities, have to be logged. In addition, these documents are not kept up to date equally by everyone. Not all "meebouwers" have the same number of hours available for this collaboration, which can lead to a mismatch in responsibilities and tasks. After a Meebouwers meeting during Bianca's shadowing on 18 September, she said that she still feels that some of the other members lack some enthusiasm and perseverance.[6]

A different collaboration in which BUUR West is deeply involved, is the collaboration of the Griffioen. The organisation of BUUR West is inextricably linked to the Griffioen (Iris, notes, 13 November). BUUR West is positioned at the ground floor of the residential institution *De Griffioen*. This residential institution is specifically equipped for people with a demand for long-term healthcare. 'Griffioen' is both the name of the building and the partnership between BUUR West (catering, activities), Riverland Healthcentre (functional fitness), Sterker (day care) and ZZG Zorggroep (healthcare). De Griffioen is a structure of the several organisations that work closely together, with their own role within the cooperation. ZZG is a healthcare institution that accommodates in a building of Talis, a housing corporation. In addition to providing care to residents, ZZG is also responsible for providing them with catering, welfare, and activities. These tasks are carried out by the other organisations.

Instead of all organisations working on their own 'islands', they work in certain clusters around care processes. These clusters, or teams, are for instance *welfare*, *housekeeping*, and multiple *care*teams. These teams can consist of employees of different organisations within the cooperation. The starting point of this work process is that all teams are contributing to the residents' care in their own way. The process of the making of the policy implemented at the Griffioen is mainly driven by criticism and questions from the employees of the different teams (Iris, 13 November).

The tasks of BUUR West in this cooperation are consisting of the catering, the organisation of activities, and connection with the neighbourhood. BUUR West is there for

[5] "Ook worden er soms heel snel verbindingen gelegd tussen een idee en een contactpersoon van iemand, om iets waar te kunnen maken.
▪ Zo ook bij de etalage: Erwin liep even weg en een tijdje later had hij al een eerste locatie voor een etalage, omdat hij iemand kent die alle panden rondom de Molenweg bezit, Bart. Erwin was aan het lachen en vertelde dat Bart had gezegd "het had er al lang moeten zijn"
▪ Ook wordt er daarna direct kortgesloten over het regelen van een moment om er samen even een rondje te lopen en te kijken waar ze hem specifiek willen plaatsen." (Fieldnotes, 4 september)

[6] "pit missen"

inextricably linked to the Griffioen, and cannot exist without this connection in this specific form. The most steady stream of income (and biggest share of) is via ZZG.

Next to BUUR West providing catering and activities for the residents of the Griffioen care facility, they are also catering to the neighbourhood. Since many other (social) enterprises already exist in the area, you may wonder what added value they bring to the neighbourhood.

BUUR West is in contrast to other organisations and café's located in Nijmegen West, a place where people are welcome who don't fit in a certain target group. This is in contrast to Huis van Compassie for example, which cater mainly to people in a socially vulnerable position. BUUR West is a neighbourhood café. People can take a seat without any (financial) obligations. They are specifically well equipped for people who are using mobility equipment. However, 'the neighbourhood' is still in a way a target audience, and how inclusive are they really? Iris and Bianca mentioned multiple times that they want to attract 'strong shoulders' out of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, they indicate that the presence of local residents themselves, already cause a more lively[7] atmosphere, and more social control. For me personally, this description fits with people between 25 and 60, which stands out against most residents of the Griffioen who make a big part of the clientele.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Prigoda and McKenzie (2007), multiple physical, social and organisational characteristics of the people who use social infrastructure at a certain place and time are shared. People need to be able to get to BUUR West, for instance live nearby and are physically able to get there. BUUR West has certain opening hours, which is also significant for the people who are able to use the social infrastructure.

4.2 Visitors of BUUR West

This leads us to the second sub question. This question aims to answer who the different visitors of BUUR West and its activities are and which practices of care they show. The regulars and the other visitors of BUUR West will be introduced, as well as the clashes that sometimes occur between and inside the different groups. Lastly, questions will be raised about the clarity towards the neighbourhood about their target audience.

Many regular visitors of BUUR West you encounter (whether daily or not) are mainly residents of the Griffioen. Most residents of the Griffioen have lived in Nijmegen Oud-West for a big part of their lives. The residents are overall elderly with a care need. At the start of my ethnographic fieldwork, I wrote a lot about this group of people, as they made quite a big impression on me. Many people I saw often, sat in roughly the same spot in the room, surrounded by the same people. My first impressions were that they behaved often in a "grumpy"[8] or "unfriendly" manner towards each other and the staff. During my first conversation on location, Iris also mentioned the certain "in-crowd" (notes, 17 April) that sometimes dominates the space. This creates a division between people who live there and those who do not. During my fieldwork, I continued to observe and pick up conversations, which made me also notice a different kind of dynamic among the "in-crowd": the relationship between the residents. The excerpt below, I wrote down in the beginning of my fieldwork, illustrates this dynamic. I was studying at a table with two other friends at BUUR West, when

[7] "bruisend"
[8] "nors"

everything was gradually being set up for the bingo activity. There was a lot of commotion because people wanted to sit at certain tables, with certain people:

> A few people were standing somewhat awkwardly looking at our table. I made eye contact with Lena. Tables and cabinets were being moved around. A lady came and stood by our table. Lena and I started tidying up our things a bit, freeing up two seats. The lady took this as an invitation and sat down with us. We had a chat about the bingo starting at 2 p.m., but she always arrived early to secure a table by placing coats on the chairs: "if there are no coats or bags on the chairs, anyone can still take a seat." She didn't want to sit with everyone, but always sat with a regular group of people. […] When the rest of her group arrived, we went outside: our table was no longer ours. (Fieldnotes, 8 April) [9]

When I presented this scene in one of my first conversations with Iris and Mark, they looked at each other and Iris said that this was a "striking example"[10] (notes, 17 April). Furthermore, my own opinion of a certain resident has been shaped by stories I have heard from other people on multiple occasions. This further highlights that a certain "in-crowd" is present, within the residents of the Griffioen. As noted by Massey (2005, p. 7) space should be approached as "a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out… always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed". Furthermore, looking at Horton and Penny's critical view on the accounts of social infrastructures, we need to be sensitive which (political) voice spaces reproduce (Strüver & Franz, 2025). The reproduction of certain discourses can be seen at BUUR West by this "in-crowd". Since many visitors are residents of the Griffioen, they share certain characteristics. This also reveals that "[p]articular spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at give places and times" (Simone, 2004, p. 409).

Although in the first few months of my research I regularly noted that people often sat in the same place, or with the same people, this is much less evident in my notes from later in the period: it also became normal for me. If I wanted to chat with certain people, or say hello, I could quickly find them in their usual spots. Next to the regular visitors who are residents at the Griffioen, many neighbourhood residents are also regulars. While some of them are also elderly, another portion of regular visitors consists of parents with children.

These two groups are sometimes in direct opposition to each other. While helping with a children's activity on 11 June, Robin and I were discussing about a group of residents who were sitting at the entrance of BUUR West. They were smoking cigarettes, while partially blocking the entrance to the café and the terrace with their mobility scooters and walkers. Residents of the Griffioen are allowed to smoke outside, except in front of the entrance. However, children were playing on the terrace where they normally smoke. Robin and I were

[9] "Een paar mensen stonden wat ongemakkelijk naar onze tafel te kijken. Ik maakte oogcontact met Lena. Tafels en kasten worden verplaatst. Een mevrouw kwam bij onze tafel staan. Lena en ik ruimde al een beetje onze spullen op, waardoor er twee plekken vrijkwamen. Ze zag dat als uitnodiging en ging bij ons zitten. We hadden een gesprekje over dat de bingo ging beginnen om 14.00, maar dat zij er altijd al vroeg was om er een tafel te bemachtigen door op de stoelen jassen te leggen: 'als er nog geen jas of tas ligt, mag iedereen er nog plek nemen'. Ze wilde niet met iedereen zitten, maar zat altijd met een vast clubje mensen. […] Toen ook de rest van haar gezelschap arriveerden, zijn we naar buiten gegaan: onze tafel was niet meer van ons". (Fieldnotes, 8 april)

[10] "treffend voorbeeld"

not sure how to deal with this situation. We understood why the smokers would take place in a different spot, but it was also not ideal that the children and their parents had to walk past them.

The target group of BUUR West is not equally clear to all residents of the neighbourhood, since its opening to the local residents in 2023. Several times, I overheard people say that they were surprised that they were "welcome after all"[11] (Lieke, fieldnotes 10 October), when they visited BUUR West for the first time. While that is an important part of BUUR West's goal: connecting the neighbourhood and being a "living room" of the neighbourhood. The presence of "strong shoulders" from the neighbourhood already brings new energy and social control. It is also an organisation that is committed to provide for people who do not feel the need to connect with others. BUUR's philosophy is that all local residents benefit from a connected neighbourhood (fieldnotes, Iris, November 13). In one of our first conversations, Mark and Iris indicated that it is difficult to find that "field of tension"[12] and how inclusive they really are. Perhaps these questions require them to think critically about what their target group really is, and how they advertise this to the neighbourhood. As Carmona (2015, p. 27-28) mentions, "cities should offer something for everyone in the right locations, rather than everything for everyone everywhere".

As stated in the second research question, I paid special attention to the practices of care performed by the visitors of BUUR West and its activities. These care practices were observed among visitors in various ways. I encountered many such moments during the sewing- and knitting club of BUUR West. For example, people often complimented each other on their work and were curious about updates on each other's lives. My favourite moments of care during this club were instances when people taught each other things or helped each other with projects. This happened much more often than I had expected.

- Almost everyone was trying to explain something to each other: Lisa [participant] asked me for help while fixing a tablecloth. The two new participants were teaching each other how to knit. Luisa was helping Ria with [the neckline of] her sweater, which she had been struggling with for a long time. Luisa found it very difficult to explain it to her in Dutch, even with the help of pencil and paper. She became frustrated with herself and felt bad about it. The twins were learning to crochet together, one was already a little better than the other and were teaching each other.
- When looking around at all those women doing handicrafts, I got a strange and happy feeling. I can't quite put my finger on it. I think it was a kind of pride that we were all pottering away together, chatting and learning from each other.13 (Fieldnotes, 27 June)

This excerpt shows, first of all, the many ways in which people can teach each other a craft. Furthermore, collaborating and teaching each other new techniques does not always run

[11] "we waren er dus tóch welkom"
[12] "spanningsveld"
[13] "• Bijna iedereen zat aan elkaar wat uit te leggen: ik werd om hulp gevraagd door Lisa bij het fixen van een tafelkleed. De twee nieuwe mensen, was de een de ander aan het leren breien.
Luisa was aan het helpen bij Ria met [de hals van] haar trui, waar ze al erg lang tegenaan loopt. Ria vond het super moeilijk om het haar uit te leggen in het Nederlands, ook met behulp van potlood en papier is het haar niet gelukt. Ze raakte gefrustreerd van zichzelf, ze voelde zich er niet goed over. De tweeling was samen aan het leren haken, de een kon het al iets beter dan de ander en leerde het elkaar.
• Toen ik om me heen keek met al die handwerkende vrouwen om me heen, kreeg ik helemaal een sort raar en blij gevoel. Ik kan het niet zo goed plaatsen. Ik denk een soort trotsheid dat we daar met z'n allen lekker aan het prutsen waren en gezellig aan het kletsen en van elkaar aan het leren."(Fieldnotes, 27 June)

smoothly. Dutch is not Luisa's first language, and she was unable to explain to Ria how she would finish the sweater. In addition to the language barrier, Luisa and Ria also learned different knitting techniques in their youth. Besides differences in country of origin, there can also form a barrier based on age when learning new things. For example, I learned a lot of crochet and knitting techniques or use patterns from videos on YouTube. When someone asked me for the pattern for one of those projects, there was a bit of an awkward clash. Writing down the pattern was quite difficult, and sharing the video was not always possible with someone over 80 years old. Nevertheless, we naturally became adept at this, and a few months later I also helped Luisa more often with learning new techniques. It felt very special to explain something to someone aged 80, and then see her concentrating fully on mastering it.

The sewing- and knitting club was also a place where sudden encounters sometimes fell perfectly into place: what is also known as serendipity. When people come together, accidental discoveries can happen out of nowhere, unannounced, leading to new insights or inventions The following excerpt shows how this happened to Lisa, the previous volunteer of the group:

> Lisa told me something a while ago and I realise I hadn't written it down yet. We were talking about the sewing club and BUUR and the different people who attend every week. Lisa told me how Femke ended up here because she wanted to learn how to sew. Lisa sat with her several times during the club, but after a while she said jokingly: "actually, I hope some kind of guardian angel will come along and teach you how to sew". Fifteen minutes later, Luisa walked in out of nowhere. Since then, she has been sitting with Femke every week, sewing and explaining it to her.[14] (Fieldnotes, 27 June)

Since BUUR West started operating at its current location, there has been a noticeable change in the visitors of the space. Before BUUR West started providing catering services for ZZG, the residents of the Griffioen hardly ever came into contact with local residents. The only people who were allowed to use the space were the residents of the care institution. Until the middle of the 20th century, there has never been a society where big groups of individuals were living alone for longer periods of time (Klinenberg, 2016). Unfortunately, this has changed. Social isolation in society may be less widespread than many think, but it does occur more with certain people and places than others. For instance, older people have a higher risk for social isolation, due to their physical frailty and deaths in their social circle (Klinenberg, 2016; Power, 2022). By opening the doors to local residents and creating a meeting space, social isolation can be counteracted.

Currently, both Iris and I have observed that the composition of BUUR West's visitors changed over the course of my research. At the beginning, the main visitors were still the residents of the Griffioen, with a few (regular) residents from the neighbourhood. By the end of my research, children and their parents were playing, students or workings with their laptops, and other elderly people from the neighbourhood were joining daily. The dynamic changed with the arrival of more local residents. Before my research began, they tried to attract the

[14] "Lisa vertelde me een tijdje terug iets en ik zie dat ik dat nog niet had opgeschreven. We hadden het even over de naaiclub en buur en over de verschillende mensen die er wekelijks zitten. Lisa vertelde toen bijvoorbeeld over hoe Femke hier terecht is gekomen omdat ze wilde leren naaien. Lisa heft verschillende keren met haar samen gezeten, maar na een tijdje zei ze voor de grap: eigenlijk hoop ik dat er een soort reddende engel binnenloopt die je kan leren naaien. Een kwartier later kwam daar uit het niets Luisa binnen. Ze heeft sindsdien elke week met Femke samen zitten naaien en het haar uitgelegd." (Fieldnotes, 27 June)

neighbourhood with their restaurant. Until the spring of 2025 their restaurant opened in the evening, with a different menu from during the day. However, this closed down because "it just didn't work here" (Iris, fieldnotes, 24 April). In my opinion, the change in (regular) visitors is now mainly due to maintenance of the material, the range of activities, outreach and facilitation work, and professional anchoring.

4.3: The enactment by the employees of the neighbourhood café

In order to maintain BUUR West as part of a social infrastructure, certain types of labour must be carried out. Four broad themes emerge from the analysis of the ethnographic fieldwork, including the shadowing, about the enactment of a social infrastructure at BUUR West. These are as follows:

- Physical maintenance;
- Activity management;
- Communication, outreach and being facilitating;
- Cooperation and professional anchoring.

These four themes will be discussed, using various excerpts from the fieldnotes.

4.1.1 Physical maintenance

As previously mentioned, Latham and Layton (2019) provided different dimensions that can make a social infrastructure more or less successful. One such dimension is the maintenance of social infrastructure, and entails how the social infrastructure is maintained, which influences on how the provisioning is experienced and how much trust is developed. This maintenance is both physical in means of repairing materials and surfaces, as well as social, spaces and facilities need to feel cared for and safe.

The maintenance of the physical at BUUR West is mostly carried out by Robin, who works as a janitor at BUUR West, aside from being in charge of the inhouse activities. She is employed to carry out general upkeep at BUUR West, spending a few hours a week improving the physical structure. The tasks vary from hanging artwork, rearranging the layout of the café, repairing broken materials, or tending to the plants. The fact that someone is now permanently employed to carry out these kinds of tasks, indicates that it is necessary to invest time and money in this regard.

In addition, the "brand identity"[15] of BUUR at the Brakkenstein and West locations is fairly similar: a homely and warm atmosphere. This is based on the intention to be a living room for the neighbourhood. The layout of the restaurant and other rooms at BUUR West is designed to accommodate different visitors. As many visitors use a walker or wheelchair, there must be enough space between the tables to move. There is also a playing corner where children of different ages can play. The nook by a large window prevents children from easily going outside without their parents knowing. In addition to a larger space, often referred to as "the restaurant" or "the café", there are also other rooms designed for different purposes. There is a fitness room, several small meetings rooms and the "Atelier". This "atelier" is a room next to the café, with large tables and a large cupboard containing lots of materials. Because it is a smaller, separate

[15] "huisstijl"

room where only people participating in a particular activity are allowed to sit, the atmosphere is different from that in the café. The sewing- and knittingclub is held at the Atelier, for instance.

The toilets are decorated with art by local residents. The art on display changes every few months, accompanied by the opening of "the smallest art exhibition"[16] on a pub quiz night. During this event, questions are asked to the artists, champagne is served, and toilet paper is ceremoniously cut.

This labour that is put into the general upkeep of BUUR West, makes in my opinion the space feel cared for and safe. Furthermore, the exhibition of art of local residents, and the 'ceremony' to herald it, further demonstrates the local and social character of the neighbourhood café.

4.1.2 Activity management

Almost every day, BUUR West organises activities for residents of the Griffioen and other local residents. The range of activities can be found on the website and other social media, is distributed via flyers, or spread by word of mouth.

Robin is in charge of the organisation and maintenance of the in-house activities. Some activities, such as the sewing- and knitting club, are initiated by BUUR West itself. However, some activities are also initiated by requests from (local) residents. For example, the painting club held every Tuesday morning, was requested and initiated by a few local residents. Setting up the painting activity went fairly quickly. Wendy, Sabrina and Rosa all wanted a place and time to sit with others to paint. The following excerpt shows how quickly I became involved in the process as well, after I said that I would like to set up a creative activity myself:

> Robin was also very enthusiastic about me setting up an activity. They are now working with various local residents to set up a painting club. I said that sounded like a lot of fun, and I believe Robin is going to act on that. (Fieldnotes, 11 June)[17]

That same day, I was added to a WhatsApp group with the other residents who had been brought together by Robin. A few weeks later, we had a meeting discussing the club. The following excerpt is from the notes taken during the meeting:

> Sabrina was a bit uneasy at first and had many questions about what was and wasn't expected of the activity and of them, but after Robin's enthusiasm and clarifications, she became more and more enthusiastic and relaxed.
> I though the meeting went quickly and we smoothly reached a consensus on the overall structure of the activity. We're just going to see who shows up and how we want to organise it further. The first date has been set and Robin has reserved the Atelier for that time slot for the coming months. (Fieldnotes, 1 July)[18]

[16] "de kleinste kunstexpo"

[17] "Ook over het opzetten van een activiteit was [Robin] erg enthousiast. Ze zijn nu bezig met verschillende buurtbewoners om een schilderclub op te richten, ik zei dat me dat erg leuk leek en Robin gaat daar nu geloof ik wat mee doen." (Fieldnotes, 11 June)

[18] "Sabrina was in het begin wat onrustig en had veel vragen over wat er wel en niet van de activiteit en van hen werd verwacht, maar na enthousiasme en verduidelijking vanuit Robin, werd ze steeds enthousiaster en relaxter. Ik vond het overleg snel gaan en we [kwamen] soepel tot een consensus voor

The time and weekday for the club were decided during the meeting: ten to twelve on a Tuesday morning. This was a time when Sabrina, Wendy and I could meet up most of the weeks. However, scheduling a specific activity raises questions: who can participate and who can attend given the time and day?

As mentioned by Prigoda and McKenzie (2007), multiple physical, social and organisational characteristics of the people who use social infrastructure at a certain place and time are shared. For instance, participants of the painting group who choose to be at a certain event in the neighbourhood café, share a number of characteristics of which they may not be aware. They chose to be present in a neighbourhood café, and specifically at the painting group. On a weekday programme, they are able to get to the café and participate during normal working hours. And their appearance at the painting group provides clues about their age, taste, level of experience and income.

Furthermore, most activities at BUUR West are women-dominated. The next excerpt depicts a conversation between a new resident of Griffioen about her participation in activities at BUUR West:

An lives with her husband at the Griffioen. She said that she has settled in quite easily, but her husband hasn't really. He doesn't go "downstairs" [BUUR West] very often. I think you see this quite a lot here. Women quickly find clubs and make contact, while men are slower to join in. (Fieldnotes, September 2) [19]

Klinenberg (2016) mentions that men have a higher risk of social isolation than women, because their social networks are often smaller. Both the excerpt, and Klinenberg's findings raise questions. Why are these men less likely to come "downstairs" to BUUR West and therefore stay at home? Could the range of activities have an influence on this? Do they feel uncomfortable downstairs, and if so, what is the reason for this?

Robin has indicated that activities such as the painting and sewing club are effective to bringing residents of Griffioen and local residents of the neighbourhood together. However, specific activities are also organised primarily for local residents. These include children's activities, organised in collaboration with SAAM. SAAM is an organisation with a group of permanent volunteers who organise activities to bring parents and their children together. On the last Friday of every month, SAAM and BUUR West organise a changing range of children's activities. In addition to play, creativity and sports, lemonade and fruit are also provided. Sometimes older people who attend Sterker's day care centre, also join in.

This activity started when I first joined BUUR West in April. The first few times, attendance was low: often only the parents with children who had organised the activity. However, as the months progressed, more and more people started coming. They heard about

de inrichting van de activiteit. We gaan gewoon vooral even zien wie er op af komt en hoe we het verder willen inrichten. De eerste datum staat gepland en Robin heeft het atelier op dat tijdsstip voor de komende maanden gereserveerd." (Notities, 1 July)

[19] "An woont samen met haar man bij de Griffioen. Ze vertelde dat zij best makkelijk is geacclimatiseerd, maar haar man nog niet echt. Hij gaat niet zo snel naar 'beneden'. Ik geloof dat je dit best veel ziet hier. Vrouwen zoeken snel clubjes en contact op, terwijl mannen niet zo snel mee komen." (Fieldnotes, 2 September)

it through word of mouth, saw it on a flyer or through another channel. On the last Friday of October, almost a third of the restaurant was filled with children and elderly people doing crafts, and parents supporting them or chatting.

The activities are most of the time prepared by volunteers. These are mainly people who participate in the activity themselves, and arrive a little earlier to set everything up, welcome the other participants and ensure that the activity can begin. At the end, the same person is responsible for tidying everything up. Volunteers can get free coffee and tea.

Regular attendees and the volunteers are important for new activities: they ensure continuity, even if they do not know whether people will show up. Given that the sewing- and knitting club has been running for quite some time now, Robin pointed out and discussed that it is no longer necessary to have a volunteer present every week. There are always enough people present, and the bar staff at BUUR West can quickly set up and clear away the necessary equipment.

Even though a permanent member is needed to ensure the continuity of an activity, there is a danger in the activity becoming too dependent on one particular person. Robin referred to her education, which taught her that the activity should be able to continue in the usual way when a person in replaced. But in reality, she believes that this is not necessarily the case. "Ilse's cooking club without Ilse… Then there would be no cooking club" (Robin, fieldnotes 10 July). Robin is torn about this: it is important that the group dynamics do not depend on one person, but it is also important that someone keeps the fire burning. Furthermore, participants also return to certain activities because the person who organises them brings a certain "vibe" (Robin, fieldnotes, 2 October). For an activity to continue, it is important that the various participants have a certain sense of ownership (Robin, fieldnotes).

There is a lot to do at BUUR West. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I wrote a lot about the number of activities, and especially that I was losing track of them myself. The next excerpt I wrote as a reminder while shadowing Sanne.

[Reminder]: It's just a lot. Lots of activities, different people. It's constantly about activities and groups and other organisations. I really don't have a good overview. How do they keep track of everything? (Fieldnotes, 10 July)[20]

As the months passed, I gained a better overview of the activities, and the activity agenda became increasingly structured. Communication toward the neighbourhood residents also became more streamlined: the BUUR West website was changed; more attention was paid to social media; and visibility through flyers and posters also increased.

[20] ! Het is gewoon best veel. Veel activiteiten, verschillende mensen. Constant gaat het over activiteiten en groepen en andere organisaties. Ik heb het overzicht echt niet zo goed voor de geest. Hoe houden ze het overzicht?? (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

4.1.3 Communication, outreach and being facilitating

In order to attract people from the neighbourhood to participate in the activities organised by BUUR West or to welcome them in the café, communication with them is essential. Various methods are used for this purpose.

First of all, lots of posters and flyers are made to distribute in the neighbourhood. BUUR's cheerful house style is implemented. One of the chefs who works at BUUR West is also deployed a few hours a week to create visual promotion for the various locations of BUUR. Some flyers or visual material are also created by Sanne, Bianca and Robin. In addition, these flyers have to be printed, collected, and above all, distributed. On several occasions, I have cycled through the neighbourhood with Sanne or Robin to distribute these flyers in various places. It is essential to think tactically about where you will and are allowed to distribute the flyers and posters. Consider, for example, putting up a poster for a children's activity at a playground.

In addition to physical media, online efforts are also being made to raise awareness of the organisation. BUUR is active on various social media platforms, where they regularly post about activities and their calendar. Daphne is employed to manage the online media on behalf of BUUR. The local newspaper, *de Wester*, and the Griffioen's own newspaper, *de Griffel*, are also used for this purpose. Texts are written and photos are taken to share what BUUR has been doing and what is planned for the future.

Nevertheless, many people find their way to BUUR West through word of mouth, me included. Furthermore, I regularly invited friends myself, or mentioned it in a conversation. An example of this happened during one of the summer activities in Leeuwensteinpark, an activity organised by a lot of organisations from Nijmegen Oud-West. I struck up a conversation with someone who had just retired and was looking for some regular activities to participate in. I told her about the sewing- and knitting club at BUUR West. She was enthusiastic and I told her the time and place. The following Friday she joined the sewing club.

BUUR in general is not afraid of using somewhat experimental methods to share their philosophy. During the shadowing of Bianca on 18 September, Mark and Bianca were working in a meeting room while she received an email from Daphne. BUUR West would be a polling station for the upcoming national election, and they wanted to make a banner for this event. A general slogan was needed, Daphne believed. But a little sneer, or nod to The Hague is what Mark found interesting. Bianca and Mark were talking about how it is not only the people in The Hague who are responsible for the wellbeing of someone's hometown or neighbourhood. They should stop complaining, and start taking action.

Eventually, a banner was hung up a few weeks in advance of the election with the text:

"*Together we create the neighbourhood,*

Are you also coming to vote?"[21]

In addition, flyers were produced and handed out after voting. The remaining flyers were left in various locations in BUUR West. The front of the flyer (figure 6) addresses visitors directly: "A good neighbourhood is something you create together"[22]. Various options for what people

[21] "De buurt maak je samen. Kom je ook stemmen?"

[22] Title on the front of the flyer: "Een goede buurt maak je samen"

can offer as a neighbour to others. The back of the flyer (figure 7) states: "What BUUR does"[23], with various actions written out that BUUR West itself undertakes to create a "pleasant, involved" neighbourhood.

Figure 6: front of flyer

Figure 7: back of flyer

There is a difference between BUUR West connecting or communicating with the neighbourhood and BUUR encouraging local residents to connect with each other. As mentioned earlier, one of BUUR's goals is to bring the neighbourhood socially closer together. They approach this in various ways. Bianca and Sanne are largely responsible for this and are *buurtverbinders*, neighbourhood connectors. They are actively trying to facilitate or make connections in the neighbourhood. They are for example organising neighbourhood coffee gatherings, and supporting local initiatives with their resources.

Every few weeks, BUUR West's 'cargo bike'[24] is taken out of the basement and parked in a specific area in the neighbourhood, with jugs of coffee and an LP player. The aim is to encourage neighbours to meet each other over a cup of coffee. A week in advance, Bianca and Sanne distribute flyers and ring doorbells. They prefer to invite them in person, so that the local residents have already seen them once. If no one is home, they leave a flyer in the letterbox. The flyer not only states when and where they will be visiting, but also invites people to bring their own LP so that they can play it. In some neighbourhoods, there is a new or ongoing initiative that they want to involve more people in, or inform them about. For example, creating a neighbourhood vegetable garden. The flyer then also includes some information about this initiative and the option to ask questions about it. In general, more people attend these

[23] Title on the back of the flyer: "Wat BUUR doet"
[24] Bakfiets

neighbourhood get-togethers if there is a specific "hook" to talk about, such as information about the vegetable garden.

Bianca and Sanne are also involved in connecting the neighbourhood in a different way: supporting local initiatives. While shadowing Bianca during her workday on 18 September, we went with Annie, a local resident, to an architectural firm.

> Meanwhile, Annie and Bianca chat to me about why they are here: Annie would like to have a small kiosk / Büdchen in the park opposite to her house, a Michi-Noeki. Many people […] walk from the city [centre] to West, and there really should be a small place where they can have a coffee, have a chat, sit down for a while, charge their phone or something of that nature. Annie would like to help set that up. Bianca then arranged to talk to an architectural firm, which is where we are going now. [25] (Fieldnotes, 18 September)

Bianca and Annie know each other through the *wijkkenners*, a group of committed residents from Waterkwartier. They consider it important for people in the neighbourhood to get to know each other and look out for one another. Bianca is assisting Annie in the process of realising the 'Büdchen' project. The meeting with Laurens at the architectural firm was less successful than expected: the firm was mainly invested in highlighting certain themes with various groups, such as the municipality, and would not actually be building it. The municipal vision[26] of Nijmegen, *de nabije stad* (the nearby city, own translation), states that: "We want to offer opportunities for people to meet and develop initiatives"[27] (p. 11, own translation). Nevertheless, still few managed spaces that encourage encounters can be found in Nijmegen. During this meeting, Laurens stated: "the municipality is aware of these issues, but is not actively addressing them."[28]

Bianca and Annie are still in touch and have taken various steps to put it on the agenda. Annie has raised the issue several times at the neighbourhood council, and is slowly gaining support. Currently, the *"Keet Kraijenhof"* plan can be found on *mijn Wijkplan*, a digital platform where residents and the municipality can come together to improve their neighbourhoods. Bianca and Annie have also been distributing flyers and have been present with the cargo bike to answer questions and discuss the idea with local residents. They are taking it one step at a time, and in the summer of 2026, they want to start trying things out at the site of the shed. This will allow them to work with the local residents to find out what works for them and how to organise it.

At the same time, it is also important to find a balance in terms of how much initiative should come from BUUR West, how much they should 'carry' the initiative. On the day I shadowed Robin, she was busy answering emails about various discussion groups held at

[25] "Ondertussen kletsen Annie en Bianca me bij over waarom ze hier zijn: Annie wil graag een klein kioskje/ budchen in het parkje tegenover haar huis, een Michi-Noeki. Veel mensen […] lopen van de [Binnen]stad naar West, en er moet eigenlijk een soort klein plaatsje zijn om even koffietje te drinken, praatje te maken, even te zitten, telefoon kunnen opladen of iets dergelijks. Annie zou dat graag willen helpen opzetten. Bianca heeft toen geregeld om een keer te praten met een architectenbureau, daar gaan we nu heen." (Fieldnotes, 18 September)

[26] Omgevingsvisie

[27] "We willen kansen bieden voor ontmoeting en het ontplooien van initiatieven", *de nabije stad*, p. 11

[28] "De gemeente is dus wel met deze thema's bezig, maar blijven weg van de daadwerkelijke invulling ervan." (Laurens, fieldnotes, 18 September)

BUUR West. Robin was considering the extent to which she should take the initiative herself to help and support them.

> Now [Robin] is reading their email and replying. She wants to give them a boost. Robin wanted to discuss this further and contribute her ideas, but that did not happen.
> […]
> Robin: "Actually, I should leave this to them." […] support them and give them access to the space, but leave the tasks and initiative to the group itself. [29](Fieldnotes, 31 July)

This excerpt shows that Robin sometimes finds it difficult to strike that balance. She is very enthusiastic about these kinds of discussion groups, and they are a nice addition to the range of activities offered by BUUR West. Various organisations and initiatives that undertake activities at BUUR West do not pay rent, as BUUR West can offer this as an extra activity. At the same time, she is not responsible for them herself, and indicates in her email that there is room for them, but that she herself will not be involved in the content and organisation of the activity.

This balance can also be seen in the literature of Rivano Eckerdal et al. (2024). One of the modes of social infrastructuring they found in public libraries was "drawing boundaries". Library employees need to draw boundaries to visitors by communicating what the library cannot help with or support. The results of this thesis reflect those of Rivano Eckerdal et al. (2024), which show that employees of BUUR West are also continuingly questioning where they should draw the line between what they are able to facilitate and what they do not.

4.1.4 Cooperation and professional anchoring

Given that there are many different initiatives and activities in progress, it is important to maintain a clear overview. While shadowing Sanne on 10 July, she shows me a document where all activities and ideas are documented, including who they belong to and who is working on them. Regular meetings are also held with various Griffioen employees so that initiatives can be discussed and picked up.

BUUR West's internal communication came to light at various moments during the shadowing and fieldwork. I noticed that many things are discussed and arranged quickly in between other tasks. While shadowing Sanne, we were working in the same room with Robin, Bianca and Iris several times during the day. Sanne emphasised several times that she liked sitting and working together in one room and to "connect the dots".[30] At the end of the day, I asked her why she emphasised this on multiple occasions. She explained that they do not always work on the same days, or may be working elsewhere in the neighbourhood for example.

I observed these brief interactions throughout my fieldwork, not only within BUUR West. Interorganisational collaboration also occurred using these "quick" moments. At the summer activities, I saw how many people already knew each other. About eight organisations organised these summer activities with the municipality. I saw Nils, an employee at Huis van

[29] "Nu is [Robin] de mail van hen aan het lezen en terugmailen. Ze wil graag een boost geven. Robin wilde daar nog graag over praten en meedenken, maar dat is niet gelukt.
[…]
Robin: "Eigenlijk moet ik dit bij hen laten". […], juist wel ondersteunen en ruimte bieden, maar de taken" (Fieldnotes, 31 July)

[30] "lijntjes te leggen"

Compassie, in particular making quick appointments, and chatting with people from other organisations and local residents (fieldnotes, 13 August).

When I presented my findings to Iris at the end of my fieldwork in November, I noted that social infrastructures often rely on these fuzzy, dynamic and social instances and needed to be highly adaptable. She however pointed something else out too:

It is important to ensure the "professional anchoring". An existing foundation is now in place [at BUUR and the Griffioen], and how people interpret that is very different from how someone else might do so. However, there is an existing foundation that cannot be changed very quickly. And that is also important. It works in a certain way, and it must be possible to build on it. Cooperation within the Griffioen is also important in this regard.[31] (Notes, November 13)

Iris wanted to emphasise to me that the adaptability of, for instance certain activities or social ties, is only possible if the foundation of professionals and the organisation is stable. This is in line with research of Amin (2006, 2012), where he claims that the functioning of the public and collective spaces is dependent on the production and maintenance of the sense of trust. This entails "both a basic trust in others using the space, as well as a trust in the provision and maintenance of the facilities themselves" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 4).

4.4 The missing piece: practices of care

Nevertheless, I feel that the 'something extra' referred to by Tronto (2010) does not necessarily emerge from these different components of enactments of the employees. In my research, I paid special attention in my analysis to "practices of care", which may be the answer to the "something extra".

Practices of care are in many ways intertwined with the aforementioned enactments and labour. I did not specifically search for the different "phases" as proposed by Fisher and Tronto (1990). I made a distinction between practices of care and anti-practices of care – situations and places of neglect. I wrote the following fieldnotes based on a conversation with Robin after the sewing- and knitting club.

Also Sylvia [participant of club] left, and I stayed chatting with Robin, as I hadn't seen her for a long time and we got talking. I also told her about my thesis and my findings on practices of care, that I see many small moments of care coming from her, more than with any of the other people I have shadowed. I gave her some examples. She was a bit quiet and thought about it. We chatted more about BUUR and I told her that I really like the people who work here. Robin agreed and said that was one of the reasons why she was still working there.[32] (Fieldnotes, 3 October)

[31] "Het is belangrijk om die professionele verankering te waarborgen. Er is een bestaande basis nu aanwezig, en hoe mensen dat nu invullen, is ontzettend anders dan iemand anders dat zou kunnen doen. Echter is er een bestaande basis, waar niet zo heel snel verandering in en kan worden gebracht. En dat is ook belangrijk. Het werkt op een bepaalde manier, en er moet op gebouwen kunnen worden. De samenwerking binnen de Griffioen is hierbij ook belangrijk" (Notes, 13 November)

[32] "Ook Sylvia ging weg en ik bleef nog kletsen met Robin , gezien ik haar lang niet had gezien en we Aan de klets raakte. Ook vertelde ik over mijn scriptie en de bevindingen over de practices of care, dat ik veel kleine momenten van care bij haar zie, het meest van alle andere mensen die ik heb geschaduwd. Ik gaf daar wat voorbeelden van. Ze was wat stil en erover na aan het denken. We kletsen nog wat over BUUR en ik vertelde dat ik de mensen die hier werken zo ontzettend leuk vind. Robin stemde daar mee in en zei dat dat een van de redenen was dat ze hier nog werkte." (Fieldnotes, 3 October)

You notice a certain camaraderie among the professionals who work at BUUR West, which is performed with certain care practices. There is a pleasant atmosphere among them, which is not always as serious. While shadowing Sanne, for example, Robin came walking up with a safe whose lock would not open: the key was nowhere to be found. Sanne and Robin watched a video together that told them how to break open such a lock themselves:

Sanne and Robin are now working on the lock, the video is still on repeat, and you can hear a tune repeating itself. The other person present (Jetske) finds it funny and takes a picture.[33] (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

The employees of BUUR West also joke around a lot with each other, and they have inside-jokes that regularly come up. At the same time, they keep a close eye on each other about how they are doing. Iris in particular is very concerned about this. She often came up to me to ask how I was doing and how I was feeling. The following excerpt stuck with me, because Iris took the opportunity during a chaotic day to focus on Robin:

Iris asks Robin if she is overstimulated and if everything is okay. She takes a book with wordrunners out of a package that arrived from 123 Inkt, so that they can do it together. They sit next to each other and fill in the puzzle. It is a moment of calm.[34] (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

Practices of care between staff and the visitors are also common. As mentioned in an earlier excerpt, I observed these care practices particularly with Robin. Robin is frequently present at BUUR West and knows most of the regulars by name. In the summer, Robin also tends to the food forest in the garden of BUUR West. Robin is often the only one picking berries there. She shares them with those present, and eats the rest herself. While shadowing Robin, I encountered many moments like this:

We leave the morning meeting to drill a hole in a wall of the restaurant. Robin tells a resident in the hall that she looks good today. She grabs some things to drill with. When we are in the restaurant, I compliment her on the new cupboard in the children's corner. Robin is happy about it; she had been looking for a cupboard like that for a long time. […] Robin quickly runs back and forth to grab a few more things. She has two minutes before the café opens. "I'm going to make some noise", she calls out to Iris and the hostess. It's louder than she thought, so she puts in earplugs. She stands on a step ladder. "Ouch, Robin bangs her head against a lamp", Robin says, reflecting on my presence as I write down her day.[35](Fieldnotes, 31 July)

[33] "Sanne en Robin zijn nu samen met het slot bezig, de video staat nog steeds op repeat aan en je hoort een deuntje zichzelf herhalen. De andere aanwezige (Jetske) moet er van lachen en maakt een foto." (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

[34] "Iris vraagt of Robin overprikkeld is en alles oké en pakt een zweeds puzzelboekje uit een binnengekomen pakketje van 123 Inkt om samen te gaan doen. Ze zitten naast elkaar en zijn de puzzle aan het invullen. Het is een momentje van kalmte." (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

[35] "We lopen weg van de dagstart om nog even te boren in het restaurant. Robin zegt tegen een bewoner in de hal dat ze er vandaag goed uitziet. Ze pakt wat dingen om te boren. Als we in het restaurant zijn, geef ik een compliment over de nieuwe kast in de kinderhoek. Robin is daar blij mee, ze was al lang op zoek naar zo'n kast. […] Robin rent snel heen en weer om nog wat te pakken. Ze heeft nog 2 minuten voordat het restaurant open gaat. "Ik ga even herrie maken", roept ze naar Iris en de gastvrouw. Het is heftiger dan ze denkt en doet oordoppen in. Ze gaat op een trapje staan. "Auw.... Robin stoot haar hoofd tegen een lamp", zegt Robin reflecterend op mijn bijzijn terwijl ik haar dag opschrijf"(Fieldnotes, 31July)

In this excerpt, Robin compliments a resident, is putting her energy in improving her surroundings, and warns the others present that they can expect some noise. These are in my opinion all care practices.

Also the bar staff know many regulars by name and are aware of their interests. There is a great deal of interaction between the staff and the visitors: conversations, jokes, or small gestures. Everyone who enters is welcomed as a standard practice. During the sewing- and knitting club, someone from the bar staff also come by to take orders from the participants. This is often accompanied by asking what everyone is working on and giving compliments. Since most participants come every week and the same bartender often works on Friday afternoons, she can often predict what everyone wants to drink.

Next to practices of care, moments of serendipity, as previously mentioned in chapter 4.2, may also be the 'something extra' of Tronto (2010). When people come together, accidental discoveries can happen out of nowhere, unannounced, leading to new insights or inventions. This can be seen with brief interactions between for instance BUUR West's employees which can enable new connections and solutions. Discussing my findings and struggles during the fieldwork period also gave me and several colleagues new ideas. In one case, Robin and I were chatting about our talk the week before, as can be read in the excerpt of 3 October.

> We […] talked about our conversation last Friday, [Robin] started talking about how she had been thinking about it. What I had said about those little moments of care that she often shows had got her thinking. She wondered whether that might be wearing her out too much. That all those "little" moments cost her a bit too much energy. I said, half-jokingly, that maybe she should stop doing that for a certain part of the day, for example after 3 o'clock, because that is when most people have used up their main energy. Robin laughed and suggested that maybe she should just not do it in the morning, so that she would have enough energy for the rest of the day.[36] (Fieldnotes, October 7)

Among many BUUR West employees, I noticed and discussed how socially intensive the work can be. Dealing with the same people a lot, always being socially "on", or hearing yet again that the food is really not that tasty. Some of the practices of care that I see among the workforce are related to the anti-practices of care of some other visitors. Part of the enactment of this organisation consists of resolving conflicts between the target groups. I have performed this myself on several occasions, such as on 8 August.

> There was a new person at the sewing club whom I had met during the summer activities, and encouraged to come and have a look. She was working on a project to make a pair of trousers a bit bigger, as she was going to throw them away otherwise. Ria and Corrie [other participants] didn't understand why she would do that, and weren't reacting very nicely. They were just being downright rude, so I said something about it.

[36] "We hadden het ook nog over ons gesprek van vorige week vrijdag, [Robin] begon erover dat ze er nog over had nagedacht. Wat ik had verteld over die kleine momentjes van care die ze veel laat zien, hadden haar aan het denken gezet. Zo vroeg ze zichzelf af of dat haar niet juist te veel uitblust. Dat al die kleine momentjes haar iets te veel energie kosten. Ik zei[, half grappend,] dat ze misschien een bepaald deel van de dag, bijvoorbeeld na 3 uur, dat niet meer moet doen, want dan zijn de meeste mensen door hun voornaamste energie heen. Robin moest er om lachen en stelde zelf voor het misschien maar eens in de ochtend niet te doen, misschien hield ze dan de hele dag genoeg energie." (Fieldnotes, 8 October)

I walked the new woman to the door and told her that I was glad that she had come and that I was sorry that it hadn't been as pleasant, socially speaking. I said that I hoped she would come again in the autumn, as I thought it would be a bit busier then.[37] (Fieldnotes, 8 August)

This excerpt shows that even within a certain activity, there can sometimes be friction among its participants. There was a new participant at the sewing- and knitting club, but she was not treated kindly by the other member of the group. I did not see this woman at the club again after this experience.

While I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that everyone always greeted each other when they arrive, Iris sometimes found this to be a burden. She said that some people take it personally and negatively if she does not greet them. And not all of the love and energy that goes into practices of care is received by the visitors. This is reflected in the fourth and the fifth phases of caring: *care receiving*, the responses of the caring process; and *Caring with, the* emphasising that care is multi-dimensional and context-specific (Fisher & Tronto, 1990).

Not all care practices result in a response of the care receiver, or can even have a negative effect. A few examples are failed attempts to teach, making fun of other people, or not understanding each other and not being on the same page. The next excerpt shows how while attending the *dagstart* (morning meeting), several people were talking about the same activity, but were not on the same page.

Claudia and Denise [employees of Sterker] had decided to organise it only for the residents of the Griffioen, but Sanne and Robin do not agree with this actually. They wonder why the neighbourhood cannot be involved. This would increase the target group
[…]
[Reminder:] It is remarkable that the target groups of the various people in the meeting are different. So they started talking about the same idea, but Denise and Claudia from the welfare team were thinking about the residents of Griffioen without saying so, while Sanne and Robin were thinking primarily and foremost about the people from the neighbourhood and the Griffioen. [38] (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

In the end, there was not much focus on including the neighbourhood for the activity. As a result, no effective promotional material was produced, and almost no local residents attended.

In addition, the bar staff puts a lot of effort into getting to know visitors, for example by knowing their name and their usual order, but they do not often receive appreciation or recognition for this from visitors. Throughout my fieldwork at BUUR West, I noticed the sometimes negative relationship between Griffioen residents and the staff of BUUR West. On

[37] "Er was een nieuw persoon aanwezig bij de naaiclub die ik had ontmoet tijdens de zomeractiviteiten en had aangemoedigd een keer te komen kijken. Ze was bezig met een project om een broek groter te maken, gezien ze hem anders toch weg ging doen. Ria en Corrie begrepen niet waarom ze dat zou doen en waren er niet leuk op aan het reageren. Ze waren gewoon ronduit stom aan het doen, ik heb er wat van gezegd. Ik ben even met de nieuwe vrouw meegelopen naar de deur en heb gezegd dat ik het fijn vond dat ze er was en dat ik het vervelend vond dat het niet zo leuk was, sociaal gezien. Ik heb gezegd dat ik hoop dat ze er weer eens is in de herfst, gezien ik dan denk dat het weer wat drukker is." (Fieldnotes, 8 August)

[38] "Claudia en Denise hadden het bedacht alleen voor de bewoners van Griffioen, maar Sanne en Robin zijn het daar eigenlijk niet mee eens. Ze vragen zich af waarom de buurt niet betrokken kan worden. Hierdoor vergroten ze de doelgroep. […] ! Opvallend dat de locatie doelgroep van de verschillende mensen in het overleg, anders zijn. Dus dat ze begonnen met praten over eenzelfde idee, maar dat Denise en Claudia van team welzijn het zonder te zeggen hadden over de bewoners van Griffioen, en Sanne en Robin vooral en allereerst dachten aan de mensen uit de buurt én de griffioen." (Fieldnotes, 10 July)

several occasions, the bar staff were spoken to harshly, or shouted at from the other side of the café, to bring coffee. Perhaps this behaviour is the result of reproduction among residents. But there may also be a difference in needs and expectations of what BUUR West actually offers.

The residents of Griffioen live in the adjacent institutional care facility. Here, they can expect to receive institutional care, including housekeeping for example. After all, this equipment for care needs is the reason why these residents live at the Griffioen. However, in my view, BUUR West is an everyday non-institutional care space. Built on the work of Alam and Houston (2020) the present study raises the possibility that the expectations of some regular visitors, is not in line with the current state of affairs at BUUR West. Most of the regular visitors are residents of the care institution de Griffioen. Most people working at BUUR West speak about BUUR as an alternate everyday non-institutional care space (Alam & Houston, 2020). Residents of the Griffioen can enter BUUR West via a door inside of the building, and do not come into the front door. Hence, it could be hypothesised that the expectations of the residents of Griffioen, are that they receive the same level of care as in their care home. However, the type of care supported by BUUR West is different from for instance the care provided by ZZG or Sterker, even though they are located in the same building.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that the expectations of the residents of the Griffioen to provide a more institutional care form in BUUR West are valid, given that BUUR West has taken over certain tasks from ZZG. Residents of the Griffioen therefor also contribute to the existence of BUUR West and its personnel.

4. 5 Concluding

The insights derived from the main themes found in the data helped answer the sub-questions that were formulated. The first sub-question aimed to get insight into the established organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West, and how BUUR West fit in this landscape considering that they are ‘newcomers’ . The different neighbourhoods of Oud-West have been attracting various social organisations, which are working for and with the neighbourhood for a long time. These organisations are for example fighting against ‘silent poverty’ (Quiet), people in a socially vulnerable position (Huis van Compassie), or are conducting social work (Bindkracht 10). The organisational landscape of Nijmegen Oud-West is extensive and is experienced by many people as complicated. Restaurants, café’s and small parks are scattered throughout the neighbourhood, but not many shops can be found. Also interorganisational collaboration can be found at *Meebouwers*, which aim is to combine their multiple networks, resources and knowledge to facilitate initiatives of residents of Nijmegen West.

The second sub question aims to answer who the different visitors of BUUR West and its activities are and which practices of care they show. Most regular visitors who you meet, sometimes daily, are residents of the care facility the Griffioen. Most residents of the Griffioen have lived in Nijmegen Oud-West for a big part of their lives. The residents are generally elderly with a care need. As noted by Iris and the ethnographic fieldnotes, the composition of visitors changed in BUUR West during the duration of my fieldwork. At the beginning, the most dominant part of visitors were the residents of the Griffioen, with addition of several neighbourhood residents. At the end of the fieldwork, children with their parents and students or people working behind their laptop could be found daily at BUUR West. A change in clientele

can change the atmosphere of the neighbourhood café. As stated previously, the presence of local residents, can cause a more lively atmosphere, and more social control.

Different practices of care are found while observing the visitors of BUUR West. I came across most of them while actively participating in the sewing- and knitting club. Most common are giving compliments to other participants and learning from each other. These practices of care are also noted by Prigoda and McKenzie (2007), while observing knitting clubs in libraries. Most commonly seen care practices in the restaurant are meeting and chatting with each other, and saying hello to one-another.

The third sub-question, in which the role of people working at BUUR West and their enactments of maintaining a social infrastructure for the neighbourhood, is explored in most detail. To maintain BUUR West as a part of the social infrastructure, some type of labour has to be conducted. Four broad themes emerge from the analysis of the ethnographic fieldwork and the shadowing method about the enactment of a social infrastructure at BUUR West. The first theme arises in *physical maintenance* of the space. Someone is employed to improve the material structure. This can be mounting frames, rearrange the layout of the café, fixing broken material, or keeping the plants alive. This makes the space feel safe and brings a sense of trust.

The second theme of the enactment is *activity management*. Almost every day, people living at the Griffioen, or in the neighbourhood, can participate in a diverse set of activities. The selection of activities can be found at their website, are distributed via flyers or word-of-mouth advertising. These activities are initiated by BUUR West, or by local residents. Most of the participants of the activities I was regularly attending were women and were both attended by residents of Griffioen, as well as the neighbourhood. Regular attendees and volunteers are needed to ensure the continuity of an activity. The selection of and communication about these activities, have been more streamlined in the duration of my fieldwork.

The third theme that emerged from the fieldnotes, was the *communication, outreach and facilitating role* of BUUR West. Communication is needed towards the local residents to inform them about the happenings at BUUR West. For instance, keeping them updated on activities, or the more general notion that people are welcome at BUUR West. Next to communication to the neighbourhood about the happenings at BUUR West, they are also actively trying to connect the neighbourhood. By reaching out to the local residents, they are connecting neighbours to each other, and facilitate local residents with their own initiatives. Two people are employed as *buurtverbinders*, where they actively pursue this goal of BUUR. A balance need to be found to what extent they can be facilitating with other people's initiatives.

The last theme emerged at the end of the fieldwork, and is about the need for *professional anchoring and cooperation*. The internal communication between employees at BUUR West was quite informal, and based on mutual trust. Quick moments of sharing information, keeping in touch with each other or asking questions, could be seen throughout the fieldwork. Furthermore, the professionals working at BUUR West are needed to maintain the social dynamics of the social café, since the social infrastructures can collapse if no responsibility is being taken by certain people. The professional anchoring (*professionele verankering,* Iris) is the reason all activities can take place, the café can open at 10 am and the coffee machine has enough beans to operate. The cooperation with the other organisations of the Griffioen is the main reason BUUR West can operate in its current state (Iris, 13 november).

Many of these enactments are accompanied with practices of care, based on the works of Fisher and Tronto (1990). The practices of care I found between different people working at BUUR West and its visitors, were mainly how and how much they interacted with each other. Knowing each other by name, saying hello to each other, or a physical touch, to distributing berries out of the garden. Practices of care among people working at BUUR West, I mainly picked up the aimable connection between them all. This was carried out by making jokes, or inside-jokes with each other, but also giving each other space and looking out for each other.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study explored the ways in which BUUR West enacts being part of a social infrastructure in Nijmegen Oud West, who its visitors are and which practices of care can be found. Using ethnographic fieldwork and the shadowing technique leads us to new insights into the multiple ways of the maintenance of these kinds of spaces. The three sub questions were reflected upon, which help to answer the main research question in this final chapter of the thesis: *How is a social infrastructure enacted, looking at the people working at BUUR West, its visitors and other organisations in the neighbourhood of Nijmegen Oud-West?*

5.1 Answer to the main research question

The internship and research on practices of care and social infrastructure are conducted at BUUR West, a neighbourhood café located in Nijmegen Oud-West. The different neighbourhoods of Oud-West have been attracting various social organisations over the last decades, which are working for and with the neighbourhood. What makes BUUR West different from a regular café is that visitors can take a seat without any further (financial) commitments or can join an activity. Researching the enactment of the social infrastructure at BUUR West identified four broad themes: *physical maintenance; activity management*; *communication, outreach and being facilitating*; and *cooperation and professional anchoring*. Both employees, volunteers and visitors are needed to sustain these enactments.

These themes are explained in more detail in chapter four, with examples from the fieldwork. Overall, it can be said that it is necessary for the social infrastructure to be constantly maintained. This requires the involvement of various individuals. These individuals may focus on a specific task within the maintenance, or perform various tasks. It is important to keep in mind that the social realm is inherently relational, fuzzy, dynamic, and open to change. However, the findings demonstrate that multiple people providing professional anchoring, are needed to sustain a more or less successful social infrastructure.

Cooperation with colleagues of other organisations, mainly the partnership of de Griffioen and the Meebouwers, show that working together effectively influences the ability to connect the neighbourhood residents. By combining their time, material resources, knowledge and skills by multiple organisations, they network quickly and use their own expertise to be effectively applied.

Next to the enactment and maintenance of the neighbourhood café, this thesis was specifically interested in the practices of care performed by the visitors and employees of BUUR West while maintaining the social infrastructure. For maintaining the social infrastructure, practices of care are in many ways intertwined with the aforementioned enactments and labour. BUUR West functions as an everyday non-institutional care space, where care practices are visible among colleagues, among visitors, and between the two groups combined. Nevertheless, several clashes (or conflicts) can also be found at BUUR West.

5.2 Theoretical reflection

The findings of this master thesis can shed new light onto prior studies. As mentioned in the literature review, Star (1999) described a set of characteristics of an infrastructure. If we compare these characteristics to the dimensions Latham and Layton (2019) present about *social* infrastructures, some differences come to light. For instance, infrastructures should be *durable*, they can be used repeatedly and not be easily changed instantly. However, this dimension is not mentioned by Latham and Layton, and other dimensions are added, even though their article is mainly based on the characteristics of Star (1999). For instance, the maintenance of a social infrastructure is explicitly mentioned, as well as the responsiveness of people's wants and needs. The use and purpose of a part of an infrastructure may shift and evolve over time, and the social infrastructures should be responsive to these needs.

I encountered this responsiveness while conducting research at BUUR West, as well as in many other studies about other social infrastructures. Employees at BUUR West were constantly being responsive to multiple assets of the social character of BUUR. For instance, keeping an eye out for new volunteers, changing the layout of the café, or trying to connect the 'right' people to enable local initiatives. These findings are consistent with that of van Melik and Spierings (2020, p. 17), who argue that public spaces are neither socially nor spatially self-sufficient, and therefore "should be regarded as dynamic processes constituting and constituted by constant flows of and encounters with people, practices, goods, physical environments".

This thesis aims to give more insights into the enactments of a social infrastructure, or the infrastructural labour needed. Certain work is done that creates, sustains, and performs infrastructures, known as *infrastructural labour* (Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). As previously mentioned, Latham and Layton (2019) provided different dimensions that can make a social infrastructure more or less successful. One such dimension is the maintenance of social infrastructure, and entails how the social infrastructure is maintained, which influences on how the provisioning is experienced and how much trust is developed. This maintenance is both physical in means of repairing materials and surfaces, as well as social, spaces and facilities need to feel cared for and safe. Four themes emerged about the enactment of the neighbourhood café as part of the social infrastructure: *physical maintenance; activity management*; *communication, outreach and being facilitating*; and *cooperation and professional anchoring*. These data must be interpreted with caution because it is collected at a specific part of the social infrastructure of Nijmegen, while the dimensions suggested by Latham and Layton (2019) are designed to review a social infrastructure as a whole.

Work on infrastructures have highlighted how infrastructures require human communities to maintain them (Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). These infrastructures often rely on socially productive and care labour (Alam & Houston, 2020; Stokes & De Coss-Corzo, 2023). This thesis specifically looked at practices of care practiced at BUUR West by its employees and visitors. One of the first struggles I encountered while explaining my research objective stemmed from the conceptual disparity of 'care': the most common Dutch translation of 'care' fails to encompass the full meaning of the English term.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis are consistent with those of Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 120) who suggests to rethink the reciprocities of care through "collective webs of obligations" rather than "individual commitments". Iris sees a lot of options to relieve care

infrastructures with little efforts by multiple people. Next, the findings also show how hard it can be to balance these collective webs of obligations and individual commitments. Sometimes, activities or tasks are simply worked out by individuals.

There are also preconditions to the stages of care: the most important of these ability factors are *time*, *material resources, knowledge and skill*. Previous feminist theories have highlighted the hidden, ordinary and just forms of practices of care that weave together the ecological, material and social fabric of cities (Alam & Houston, 2020). These studies are in line with the findings of this thesis, which show how professional anchoring is needed to sustain the social meeting place. As well as the positive results if the time, material resources, knowledge and skills are combined by multiple organisations, as seen by *Meebouwers.*

Because infrastructures are producing and re-producing, there is a danger that the often gendered, racialized, and classed bodies that perform care work become infrastructured (Strüver & Franz, 2025). In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that a lot of people who are working and performing care work, are women. This study supports evidence of previous work.

Some studies emphasise the importance of identifying and valuing every day, non-institutional spaces and the skills of the people who build and maintain them. By doing so, they try to effectively re-centre alternative formal and informal cultures of care, which is essential for inclusive urban development (Alam & Houston, 2020). Built on the work of Alam and Houston (2020) the present study raises the possibility that the expectations of some regular visitors, is not in line with the current state of affairs at BUUR West. Most of the regular visitors are residents of the care institution de Griffioen. Most people working at BUUR West speak about BUUR as the alternate everyday non-institutional care space (Alam & Houston, 2020). Residents of the Griffioen can enter BUUR West via a door inside of the building, and do not come into the front door. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that the expectations of the residents of Griffioen, are that they receive the same level of care as in their care home. However, the type of care supported by BUUR West is different from for instance the care provided by ZZG or Sterker, even though they are located in the same building.

In some instances, people keep returning to the same spaces and keep engaging with familiar faces. The results found at the sewing- and knitting club at BUUR West confirm that people can build social ties on the basis of regular encounters and shared interests (Amin & Thrift, 2002). As observed by Robinson (2020) and Prigoda and McKenzie (2007), as well as in this thesis, the variety of experience and skill of the craft results in that knitting assistance is frequently being asked by the members of the knitting group. Knitters provided both requested and unrequested advice on patterns, materials and techniques. Also, the sewing- and knitting club at BUUR West is seen by its members as both ordinary and dependable. This resulted in a space of understated connection and care, positioned as ‘ordinary’ and not an intervention. This allowed the possibilities for recognition and connection that “come […] out of shared practice, out of doing something together” (Noble, 2009, p. 62). Not only are people in a knitting group “learning from each other”, they are also “learning to be amongst each other”. Consistent with the literature, this research found that the participants of the sewing- and knitting club were also learning to be amongst each other. These moments sometimes coincided with questions or conversations, and did not always proceed without discomfort.

Robin mentioned frequently that the sewing- and knitting club at BUUR West worked well to mix local and Griffioen's residents, as well as people from different migration backgrounds. As a result, she was very open to the idea of creating more activities of this kind. This outcome is in some extent contrary to that of Pain et al. (2000), which state that older people's leisure clubs target fairly homogeneous audiences and foster in-group ties only. The fact that Robin notices that these kinds of groups work well, and has a different 'vibe' from the café, means that there is a certain recognition. Most of the time, these fragile, but powerful moments escape "capture, impossible to describe as an 'outcome' in official metrics" (Robinson, 2020, p. 568). This research is in line with Robinson (2020), since it demonstrates the capacity of the sewing- and knitting club, as well as other activities held at BUUR, that offer a dignified space of recognition and care.

One unanticipated result of this study was how frequently uncomfortable encounters would take place, but how they were also quite easily managed by the professionals at BUUR West, for instance by Robin.

Based on the findings, a revised version of the conceptual model presented in chapter two can be found below (Figure 8). Certain themes emerged from the findings of this paper about the enactment of the neighbourhood café BUUR West which are implemented in the new conceptual model. These enactments are all influenced by a diverse set of practices of care, pursued by different employees of BUUR West, as well as its visitors. Still, these practices of care are both enacted by the care giver, and the care receiver, which have a dynamic relation.

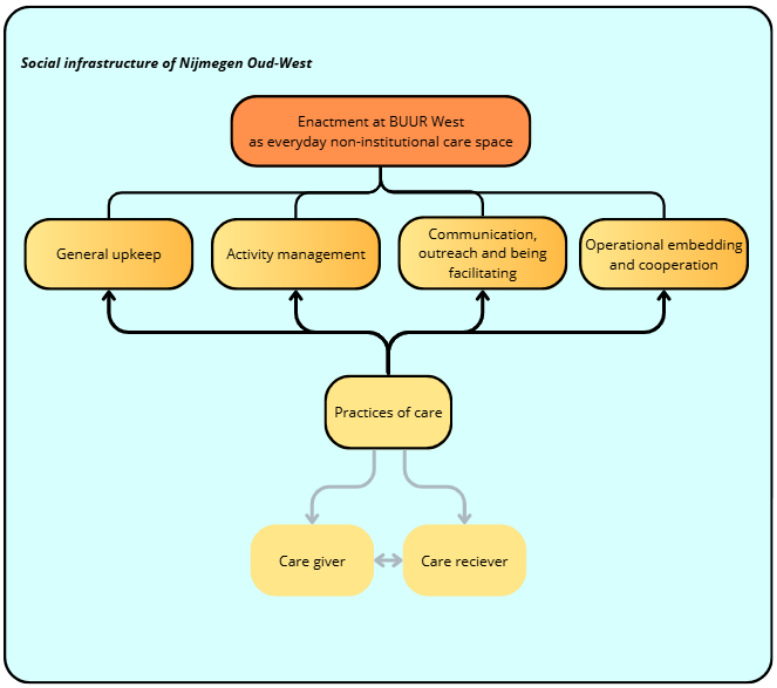

Figure 8: revised version of conceptual model

5.3 Limitations

While the research can offer valuable insights, it is equally important to reflect on its limitations. Firstly, conducting ethnographic fieldwork is tedious, and demanding. Often, I did not write everything down on the computer the same day I experienced it. Most of the time, I used my jotting on my phone or in my notebook to reconstruct it a few days later. That was sometimes quite hard and my mind would forget (small) interactions or actions. If I would conduct a new ethnographic research, I would force myself harder to write everything down as soon as possible. Furthermore, I made the distinction between events that happened that day and my own 'journal', which would dive deeper into my feeling about certain events. I would intertwine them more if I would do it again, to give a more in-depth view that ethnographies can entail.

A second limitation of this study is about the shadowing technique. I followed three different people around for one workday. This can lead to having only one perspective on their workday and the events happening. Furthermore, I knew the people I shadowed quite some time when conducting the shadowing method. This would lead sometimes to me (unintentionally) interfering with certain topics or activities, and not be a complete shadow.

A notable mention about this study is the change in 'momentum' (Iris, notes 13 November) that happened at BUUR West while conducting my fieldwork, which I explained earlier. For instance, Robin and Sanne found their place at the organisation, as well as activities starting and gaining more attraction. Furthermore, I entered this fieldwork period at the start-up of *meebouwers*. I would have liked to continue to monitor closely its developments in the neighbourhood.

Lastly, the intensity and importance of the cooperation of de Griffioen, has been pointed out to me at the end of the internship. I did not question the financial and organisational stability as much as I would like to admit, which is mainly due to this partnership. However, since the scope of the partnership of the Griffioen, it would be too grand to explore it further in detail for this master thesis.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations for future research

Future research could investigate this partnership of the Griffioen in more detail, especially based on the literature of Tronto (2010). "Care institutions have to think about the nature of the caring process as a whole in order to guide their actions. This requirement does not only demand that the 'needs' of the 'customers' come first but also that the needs of care workers, the allocation of responsibility and proper assessment also happen within the organisation" (p. 162). It is therefore interesting to research the process of the making of the policy implemented at the Griffioen, since Iris told this is predominantly driven by criticism and questions from the employees of the different teams. Further research could also be conducted at BUUR West and the Griffioen, to specifically question why not all residents of the care facility are visiting the catering and the activities held at BUUR West. Mark estimated that about half of the residents of the Griffioen visits BUUR and its activities. A further study could also asses the long-term activities, achievements and workings of Meebouwers. I would be personally very interested in how and if the interorganisational cooperation can achieve their goals in the district of Nijmegen

West. Especially since the municipality of Nijmegen is also invested in this cooperation. This can mean that these kinds of initiatives for caring communities are now acknowledged by urban planning as an integral element of the public life of Nijmegen (Strüver & Franz, 2025).

5.4.2 Recommendations for BUUR West and other social organisations

The findings of this study can help BUUR West and other social organisations to further develop their practice of maintenance and care of the social infrastructure.

Firstly, BUUR West needs to keep on proclaiming their target audience, if they want the neighbourhood to be involved. The activities specifically equipped for local residents, as well as the engagement with (social) media should be supported. It is important to note that during my fieldwork, the blend of visitors have already started changing due to this enhancement. The share of visitors that are neighbourhood residents, is already expanding. One thing that I noticed while standing outside of the building, is that the name of 'Griffioen' is written in a larger font then the BUUR logo. This can lead people to believe that they are not welcome at BUUR, since most residents in the neighbourhood associate the name 'Griffioen' with elderly, and do not know the name of BUUR. The outside of BUUR should look as inviting as the inside of the neighbourhood café

Secondly, there may be a need to set the expectations of what BUUR West offers to the residents of Griffioen as well. The residents of Griffioen live in the adjacent institutional care facility. Built on the work of Alam and Houston (2020) the present study raises the possibility that the expectations of some regular visitors, is not in line with the current state of affairs at BUUR West. In my view, BUUR West is maintained as an everyday non-institutional care space. Since most residents of the Griffioen enter through a door inside of the building, it should be made clear to the visitors, that they are entering a different kind of care space.

Furthermore, the range of activities may be reconsidered. In particular to create a variety of activities that may attract male residents. This might bring more male residents of the Griffioen, as well as the neighbourhood, to BUUR West.

Lastly, I wholeheartedly support the flyers that were distributed after the national election at BUUR West. The front of the flyer addresses visitors directly: "A good neighbourhood is something you create together"[39]. The back of the flyer states: "What BUUR does"[40], with various actions written out that BUUR West itself undertakes to create a "pleasant, involved" neighbourhood. A few clear texts were used to explain how you, and BUUR West can contribute to a more social, and caring neighbourhood.

[39] Title on the front of the flyer: "Een goede buurt maak je samen"
[40] Title on the back of the flyer: "Wat BUUR doet"

5.5 Conclusion and final thoughts

One of the research aims was to complement previous research on social infrastructure, leisure clubs and practices of care. This thesis has provided a deeper insight into these topics by reviewing them in the context of the neighbourhood café BUUR West located in Nijmegen. Taken together, these results suggest three main lessons in this context.

Firstly, the social realm inherently relational, fuzzy, dynamic, and open to change. However, professional anchoring is needed to maintain the (social) organisation. Furthermore, this is the reason why literature on *social* infrastructures do not suggest the infrastructure to be durable nor hard to change. They should be responsive of the needs of the people who use the social infrastructure, both the visitor and the employee.

Secondly, the balance between regular visitors who live at the Griffioen and 'newcomers' who live in the neighbourhood is sometimes hard to manage. Different groups, or a broad target group, can lead to conflicting situations. However, it is important for BUUR West to keep facilitating catering and activities for the residents of de Griffioen, as they took that responsibility of ZZG. Since one of the main goals of BUUR is to connect the neighbourhood, they should be clear that everyone is welcome at BUUR West and which services they provide. During the length of the fieldwork, this outreach and communication has been streamlined more and more.

Lastly, practices of care can be found everywhere at BUUR West and are enacted in a lot of different ways by different people. However, since care giving and receiving is a dynamic relation, both care giver and receiver should actively participate to achieve meaningful care. By setting clear expectations for people who enter BUUR West, whether it is through the front- or the side door. Whether their intentions are being an institutional care space serving as ZZG, or being an everyday non-institutional care space. BUUR West can be an alternative culture of care, which is essential for inclusive urban development (Alam and Houston, 2020).

BUUR West is a comfortable place in the neighbourhood, where employees and visitors welcome you with open arms. The people you meet, and the conversations you make can open doors to new relationships, opportunities, or inspiration. BUUR West is maintained by a multitude of employees, volunteers and visitors, who all contribute to the social infrastructure of Nijmegen Oud-West. These spaces should be protected and funded, in order to sustain the robust public collective life in cities they support. Together, all these spaces, facilities, organisations and people stitch together this infrastructure of today's society.

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Appendix

A. Shadow guide

Beschrijving van BUUR en persoon met wie ik mee loop

Beschrijf je impressies van BUUR als de sessie start:

1. Wie is er aanwezig?
2. Hoe ervaar je BUUR momenteel? Hoe ziet, ruikt, klinkt en voelt het aan?
3. Welke taken staan op de planning voor degene die je schaduwt?
4. Zijn er specifieke verwachtingen voor de dag?

Beschrijf je impressies van BUUR aan het einde van de sessie:

A. Wie is er aanwezig?
B. Hoe ervaar je BUUR momenteel? Hoe ziet, ruikt, klinkt en voelt het aan?
C. Waren er onverwachte gebeurtenissen tijdens de sessie volgens de persoon die je schaduwt?
D. Waren er onverwachte gebeurtenissen tijdens de sessie volgens jezelf?
E. Wat maakte deze dag speciaal?
F. Wat maakt deze dag een gewone dag?
G. Hoeveel en welk soort tijd (persoonlijk, professioneel) was beschikbaar voor de mensen die je deze dag tegenkwam?

BUUR als een sociale infrastructuur die *practices of care* uitvoert

I. Welke vormen van *practices of care* ben je vandaag tegengekomen?
II. Welke vormen van het tegenovergestelde van *practices of care* – situaties en plekken van verwaarlozing (eenzaamheid en verlating) - ben je vandaag tegengekomen?
III. Welke vormen van *social infrastructuring* ben je vandaag tegengekomen?
    a. “social infrastructure refers to the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection”
    b. Letten op: inclusion, durability, process of learning

B. Codebook

Theme	Subtheme	Code
(RQ1) Theme: Griffoen as organisation and building	Organisational landscape	Griffioen as organisation and building
		Image of Griffioen and BUUR
(RQ1) Theme: Interorganisational collaboration in West	Other	Sudden encounters
	Organisational landscape	Communication between organisations
		Joint activities in Nijmegen West
		Knowing people of other organisations
		Meebouwers
		Meedoenregeling
		Michi-Noeki
(RQ1) Theme: Organisational landscape in West	Other	Sudden encounters
	Organisational landscape	Communication between organisations
		Joint activities in Nijmegen West
		Knowing people of other organisations
		Meebouwers
		Meedoenregeling
		Michi-Noeki
(RQ1) Theme: Organisational landscape in West	Organisational landscape	Bindkracht 10
		Cornhole
		Huis van Compassie
		Municipality
		Quiet
(RQ1) Theme: Organisational structure and perception	Other	Nijmegen Oud West
	Organisational landscape	'de sociale kaart'
		A lot of organisations in West
		Complicated structure of organisations
		Image of Griffioen and BUUR
(RQ2) Theme: Anti Practices of care (users)	Users & POC	Anti- practices of care (users BUUR)
		Failed attemps to teach
		In need of more assistance than available
		Making fun of eachother / joking around
		People sitting alone
(RQ2) Theme: Current users and 'culture' / in-crowd / Griffioen	Users & POC	'In-crowd'
		Age difference
		Claiming space at the restaurant
		Conservative way of thinking
		Grumpy or unfriendly
		Nijmeegs accent
		Not putting energy and effort in
		Older people
		People living at Griffioen
		People sitting alone
		People sitting together

		Smoking outside
		Vulnerable group of people
		Women
	Organisational landscape	Image of Griffioen and BUUR
(RQ2) Theme: Gap in needs (users)	Users & POC	'Buurtcirkels'
		Desire for more engagement with neighbours
		Desire to engage in joint activities
		In need of more assistance than available
		Turbulence
(RQ2) Theme: Other users	Users & POC	Intelectual disability
		Migration background
		Parents of small children
		Vulnerable group of people
(RQ2) Theme: Participants of activities	Users & POC	Nobody showed up
		Participants of painting club
		Participants of sewing club
(RQ2) Theme: Practices of Care (users)	Other	Chatting with eachother
		Making space for others preferences
	Users & POC	Giving (unused) items away
		Giving compliments
		Helping each other with projects
		Learning from eachother
		Making fun of eachother / joking around
		People knowing each other
		Practices of care (users BUUR)
	Organisational landscape	Not speaking the same language
(RQ2) Theme: Regular users and familiarity	Users & POC	Familiar faces keep returning
		People knowing each other
(RQ2) Theme: Target audience	Users & POC	Target audience (in BUUR's eyes)
(RQ2) Theme: Topics of discussion	Users & POC	Dementia
		Topics of discussion
(RQ3) Theme: activity management	Other	A lot of activities at BUUR West
	Enacting by employees	Activities at BUUR
		Continuity of an activity
		Dependent on one person
		new input for activities and collaboration
		Opening hours on google
		Organising activities for the neighbourhood
		Preparatory work for activities
		Restaurant did not work
	Users & POC	Nobody showed up
(RQ3) Theme: Anti Practices of Care (workforce)	Other	Not understanding each other / not being on the same page

	Enacting by employees	Anti- practices of care (employees BUUR)
		Gossip among employees / talking about other employees
		Making fun of each other / joking around
(RQ3) Theme: Communication and outreach	Other	Sudden encounters
	Enacting by employees	Advertising activities
		Chat GPT
		Communication, mails and texts
		Connecting people
		Connecting with the neighbourhood
		Facilitating role for BUUR
		Name of the sewing club
		Other organisations contacting BUUR
		Signing up for activities
		Trying to make a community
(RQ3) Theme: Organisational framework and resources	Other	BUUR Brakkenstein and West differences
		Financial support / finances
		Material structure of BUUR
		Organisation of BUUR West
	Enacting by employees	Goal of BUUR
		Maintenance of physical / material
		Plans for workday employee
		Price of coffee
		Tinkering
		Trying something temporarily
	Users & POC	Target audience (in BUUR's eyes)
		Volunteerwork