

# The Urban Struggle

The Influence of the Urban Environment on Spatial Behaviour  
and Experience Among Homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht



*“Being homeless is a fulltime job.”*

L. J. Jansma

**Source front page:** Personally generated on [www.chatgpt.com](http://www.chatgpt.com). The image generated by the program when the researcher requested a depiction of a homeless man in Utrecht was the stereotypical and unjust image often associated with the homeless: long hair, old and dirty clothing. The respondents in this study do not resemble this stereotype in any way. Personal care and looking neat are important aspects of their lives. Therefore, the prompt used to generate this image was: "Create an image of a man walking through Utrecht with a bag and a sleeping bag." The lack of private space means that well-groomed homeless individuals often carry all their belongings with them, while a man was chosen because the respondents are male.

**Quote front page :** Stefan, one of the respondents.

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Master Thesis in Human Geography

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## Preface

Presented before you is the master's thesis titled "The Urban Struggle: Space, Place and Experience Among Homeless EU-Migrants in Utrecht." This thesis has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Master's program in Human Geography, specializing in Urban and Cultural Geography, at Radboud University Nijmegen.

Throughout my years as a student, and particularly during the writing of my bachelor's thesis, I discovered the importance of engaging with a topic that genuinely interests me. Thus, the search for a thesis topic was guided by the criteria that it should keep me intellectually stimulated while also contributing meaningful conclusions. This led me to explore the issue of homelessness in the city I know so well: Utrecht. I believed that by framing personal stories within a scientific context, I could contribute to academia, society, and most importantly, the homeless individuals themselves. I was aware that this was not the easiest target group to choose, but this challenge was part of what made the research engaging. Professionally, I have taken significant steps and become a more critical researcher. Additionally, on a personal level, I have learned valuable lessons, met fascinating people, and thoroughly enjoyed the research process.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the respondents who helped make this research possible. Your trust in me and the bonds we built made this process extremely rewarding and enriching for me. I also extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. R. G. van Melik, for your guidance and support during this research. It was very beneficial for me to have clear agreements and the freedom to shape the process. You were a valuable brainstorming partner, critical when necessary and enthusiastic when appropriate. Further, I would like to thank all the staff at the Salvation Army, especially F. van de Velde and M. Yikilmaz, who provided me with access to the target group.

Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends for their support and occasional wise words during the research process.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Luud Jansma

Nijmegen, 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2024

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## 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research Motivation

According to estimates by CBS (2023), there are approximately 30,000 homeless individuals in the Netherlands. On estimation there are currently 5000 EU-migrant workers among the group of homeless, although the precise numbers are not available, indicating that one in six is an EU-migrant. These people have the right to equal treatment, however, these rights are often not granted due to local policy differences. According to aid organizations this treatment is against the Dutch law (Bouwman, 2023). Since a few years there have been growing concerns about this group of homeless people, with the lowest point being the passing of three Polish migrants in Utrecht (Thies, 2023). The gravity of this situation prompted the Leger des Heils (Salvation Army) in Utrecht to initiate a pilot program in 2022: a concerted effort to bridge the gap between service providers and the homeless EU-migrant community. This pilot is an important start in order to eliminate issues surrounding homeless people by conducting research to find the most appropriate care. The main goals of the pilot are to understand problems concerning the target group and to map opportunities and disadvantages within the current system (RTV Utrecht, 2023).

Yet, the journey toward effective solutions is far from linear. As recently as last January, Utrecht found itself in the grip of a chilling humanitarian crisis when six homeless individuals were turned away from night shelters in freezing temperatures, prompting aid organizations to state that the city had, in essence, "sank through the absolute humanitarian minimum" (Westland, 2024). This incident underscores the persistent challenges faced by the homeless EU-migrants and the critical gaps that persist within the existing support systems. At the same time, the situation is further worsened by the rapidly growing number of EU migrants. In the midst of these challenges, the voices of advocacy and urgency are amplified by PvdA council member Ilse Raaijmakers, who states that the troubles faced by this marginalized group in Utrecht surpass those encountered in other cities. Her call for municipal collaboration with aid organizations and the target group stands as something essential to resolve the deeply ingrained and persistent problems that continue to afflict the homeless EU-migrant population (RTV Utrecht, 2024).

A response is needed in order to unravel the complexities of homelessness among EU-migrants. Using insights in the lived experiences, challenges and aspirations of this marginalized community could help and contribute to a broader understanding of the interplay between urban policy, cultural dynamics and the human stories that weave through the streets of Utrecht. In this process the people involved should recognize the inherent value of telling the stories of these homeless people: shedding light on their narratives could empower the individuals in this community with providing a platform for their stories, while using their voice to create fitting policy changes. The urban environment serves as the habitat for this migrant group and has a significant influence on their day-to-day lives and experiences. Hence, it must be a focal element in efforts to assist the homeless and improve their lives.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The research objective is first to characterize, analyse and document the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht. The second objective is to identify which factors within the urban environment influence this spatial behaviour and the subjective experience of the respondents. To tell the personal stories of the homeless and utilize their narratives for shaping relevant policies, this research focuses on the central themes of urban environment, spatial behaviour and day-to-day experiences. The urban environment includes the built environment as well as the social environment, while spatial behaviour refers to the actions, movements and interactions of individuals within physical space. The day-to-day experience consists of personal value and experience of their daily activities. These concepts will be elaborated on more in the next chapter. In order to conduct this research and to determine the connections between these central themes, the following research question and sub questions are used:

*How does the urban environment influence the spatial behaviour and day-to-day experience of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

- What is the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?
- To what extent do exclusion, social interactions, the availability of shelter and resource generation influence the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?
- How do the homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht experience the urban environment?

### **1.3 Societal Relevance**

As stated before, the troubles surrounding homeless EU-migrants need to be undermined. In order to do so it is necessary to address the relevancy of social and urban inequalities which this marginalized group faces. As a result, it is crucial to highlight the significance of necessary practical implications and involved actors.

Marginalized groups, as the migrant homeless, are often victim to social and urban inequalities: they often have limited access to overnight shelter, limited access to basic services, they face discrimination, limited access to social services and they lack social support networks (Dickinson, 2023; Garapitch, 2008; Pleace, 2011; Shinn, 2010). Homeless EU-migrants furthermore often do not receive the treatment they are entitled to. Additionally, employers take advantage of the cheap labor force but are unwilling to contribute to potential burdens such as healthcare and housing costs. This combination significantly contributes to the homelessness experienced by this group of people (Huting, 2024). According to Meijer (2015) the situation is even as bad as ‘the current lack of care is at odds with human dignity’. In order to change this situation and drastically improve the living conditions of these people, they need to be given a voice. Like every user of the city, homeless migrants contribute to the cultural diversity and urban identity of cities.

Therefore, this research contributes to in the first place telling the personal stories of the homeless EU-migrants and in the second place to use their experiences to improve collaboration and development concerning the wellbeing of this subordinated group. In this process of improvement, the social and urban exclusion this group of people is facing every day should be reduced by working together with all actors. Paasche (2010) emphasizes the utmost importance of ensuring the inclusion of the marginalized group itself in the process. He states that top down policy concerning homelessness is often not efficient and sustainable, due to a lack of knowledge about the actual needs of the homeless. Policy makers and other relevant stakeholders have, for an extended period, facilitated the emergence of these inequalities. For example, in the ‘National Action Plan Homelessness’ in the Netherlands, policy concerning migrants is unfairly underexposed (Rijksoverheid, 2022). This research adds a crucial link between needed policy and the interplay between different organizations and the homeless. Aid organizations as well as the local municipality can benefit from the results by using the opinions and needs of the homeless in order to conduct fitting measures and policy.

Furthermore, this research adds to raising public awareness about the problems surrounding homeless migrants. While the subject is gaining increasing attention in the media lately (Bouwman, 2023; RTV Utrecht, 2023; RTV Utrecht, 2024), the personal stories and experiences are not often included in news articles (Bawarshi et al., 2008). This research will provide insights in the homeless’ perspective by prioritizing their individual narratives. Generally, the public holds a negative perception of homeless migrants, which can be explained by the fact that people often do not know much of their situation (Petit et al., 2019) or are influenced by stereotypes (Batterham, 2020). Making their narratives visible could enhance public understanding of their situation and foster closer connections among diverse city users.

In short, this research will reveal certain difficulties which influence the daily lives of homeless migrants in Utrecht, which will be used to suggest suitable policy implications in a more bottom-up style. The results of this thesis can offer valuable insights to urban policymakers, planners, aid organizations and local authorities in Utrecht. By comprehending how the urban environment shapes the spatial practices of homeless migrants, there is an opportunity to guide the formulation of more inclusive and effective urban policies.

#### 1.4 Scientific Relevance

Homelessness is an topic which has been researched many times in different contexts, for example reasons of being homeless (Heinze et al., 2012; Morrell-Bellai, Goering & Katherine, 2000), matters of exclusion (Diaz & Varela, 2010; Pleace, 1998), top-down urban policy (Bergamaschi, Castrignanò & Rubertis, 2014; Hartmann, Crawford & Burns, 2013), the intersection of homelessness and migration (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen & Bramley, 2012; Hermans et al., 2020) and spatial behaviour (Doucette-Préville, 2015; Martini, 2021). However, two recurring underexposed and less exposed themes within research are the experience of people within the marginalized group itself and the influence of the urban environment on their experience and spatial behaviour.

There is limited research available about lived experience within the urban context in combination with (undocumented) migrants according to Bergamaschi, Castrignanò and Rubertis (2014), who researched the homeless, public space and urban policy. Conducted research about day-to-day experience often focusses on social constructs within the context of homelessness: gender roles, the LHBTIQ+ community and ethnic differences (Eisenberg et al., 2019; Hail-Jares et al., 2023; Matthews, Poyner & Kjellgren, 2019; Meanwell, 2012; Olivet et al., 2021), while research concerning homelessness, lived experience and the urban environment is less sequent. However, in order to implement suitable policy, the experiences and perspective of the homeless should be used: cooperation with all stakeholders is the sole approach to addressing as many challenges as possible (Galbraith, 2019).

The second underexposed concept in the homeless context is spatial behaviour. Kaplan et al. (2019) suggest learning from homeless peoples spatial patterns and the factors that influence their behaviour could add to a more harmonious and inclusive city and therefore the gap in knowledge concerning spatial behaviour should be filled. Although research on the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals has been conducted, Harrell (2019) and Kaplan et al. (2019) critique the limitations of these studies, particularly their exclusive reliance on quantitative methodologies. As stated by Harrell (2019):

*“By including qualitative analysis we could hope to learn more, directly from those experiencing homelessness, about why they camp where they do, and the reasoning or factors that affect their movement patterns or activity space.”* (p. 49)

Therefore, this research will use a qualitative approach in order to contribute to filling this gap in research. Additionally, there is a paucity of research on factors influencing spatial behaviour. This gap needs to be addressed to provide a comprehensive understanding of spatial behaviour and its underlying motivations. Such research is crucial not only to elucidate what occurs in the daily lives of homeless individuals but also to explain why these behaviours and patterns arise.

## **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

This section provides a guide for readers on the structure of the thesis, along with an overview of the methodology used in this thesis. Additionally, the internship site where the research was conducted will be briefly discussed.

Chapter 2 of the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of existing literature relevant to the study. It will include a detailed examination of the central concepts derived from the research question: urban environment, spatial behaviour and day-to-day experience. Furthermore, the chapter will delve into factors within the urban environment that influence the other two concepts. Finally, a conceptual model will be presented to offer a clear representation of the interrelations between these concepts and how they influence each other.

Chapter 3 presents an in-depth description of the research methods and data collection process. The methodology employed in this study involved qualitative research methods, including observations and narrative interviewing with homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht. These methods were chosen to capture the lived experiences and spatial behaviours of the participants in a personal manner. To gain access to the target group, volunteer work was conducted at the Salvation Army in the centre of Utrecht. Further information about this volunteer work and the organization will be provided in the methodology chapter.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the key results, while chapter 5 addresses the sub-questions and the main research question. It also reflects on the research process, discusses the implications of the findings and provides recommendations for policy and future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Central Concepts**

In this first part of the literature review the central concepts will be explained which are included in the research question: How does the urban environment influence the spatial behaviour and day-to-day experience of homeless EU-migrants in? The second part of the literature review delves into influences on spatial behaviour, while the third part gives an overview of the discussed concepts in a conceptual model.

Homelessness is the state of lacking stable, permanent, suitable or secure accommodation. It encompasses those who do not have a fixed, regular and sufficient place to sleep at night; those residing in shelters, transitional housing or locations not intended for regular habitation (Salhi et al., 2018; Sullivan, 2023). Additionally, according to Tsemberis (2010), homelessness should not only be understood as the absence of physical structures but also as a deficiency in security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control one's living space.

#### **2.1.1 Urban Environment**

Ompad et al. (2007) define the urban environment as the specific characteristics or features of cities that influence actors' health. Fox (2024) is focussing more on the cultural aspect of cities and describes the urban environment as a built environment in which urban cultures exist and thrive. Geography Revision (2024) on the other hand states that high densities and infrastructure are central parts of the urban environment, with housing as a significant factor. This research will use the following definition of urban environment, which combines the three stated definitions: "The urban environment is a multifaceted construct that encompasses the distinct characteristics and features of cities impacting the health and behaviour of its inhabitants, the cultural contexts within which urban life flourishes and the physical infrastructure that supports high population densities." This definition will be used because the urban environment is characterized by its ability to influence health outcomes, as noted by Ompad et al. (2007), facilitates the existence and growth of urban cultures as described by Fox (2024), and is fundamentally structured around high densities and essential infrastructures, with housing highlighted as a crucial component according to Geography Revision (2024).

In this research the key components of the urban environment are exclusion, social interactions, shelter and (opportunities for) resource generation. These four concepts include the cultural and social aspects as well as the physical aspects of the urban environment, while being important aspects in the life of the homeless population. Exclusion is a critical component of the urban environment for homeless individuals due to its multifaceted nature, impacting both social and physical aspects. Homeless individuals often face barriers that prevent full participation in society, such as limited access to essential services, employment opportunities and social networks. This social exclusion perpetuates homelessness by creating a cycle of marginalization and poverty. Research shows that exclusion leads to significant health disparities and decreased quality of life for homeless populations (Hodgetts et al., 2007). Additionally, exclusion is reinforced by urban policies that often fail to integrate the needs of homeless individuals, further isolating them and limiting their opportunities for support and recovery (Parsell, 2011).

Social interactions are essential in shaping the urban environment for homeless individuals, providing critical support and resources. Positive social interactions can foster a sense of community, reduce feelings of isolation and enhance access to information and resources (Williams & Stickley, 2011). Research indicates that social networks among homeless

individuals often act as informal support systems, providing mutual aid and sharing of resources (Snow & Anderson, 1993). However, the quality of these interactions can vary and negative social environments can exacerbate issues such as substance abuse and mental health problems (Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005). Thus, fostering positive social interactions in urban environments is crucial for the well-being and resilience of homeless populations.

Shelter is a fundamental need and a third pivotal aspect of the urban environment for homeless individuals. Stable and adequate shelter significantly impacts physical and mental health, safety, and overall quality of life. Studies have shown that access to stable housing is essential for achieving positive outcomes, including improved health, employment opportunities, and social integration (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). The availability of shelter options in urban areas influences the daily routines and survival strategies of homeless individuals. Inadequate shelter forces many into temporary and insecure accommodations, perpetuating instability and making it challenging to break the cycle of homelessness (Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 2007).

Lastly, opportunities for resource generation are vital for homeless individuals to meet their basic needs and work towards self-sufficiency. Access to employment, social services and economic support enables homeless individuals to improve their living conditions and achieve stability. Research emphasizes the importance of providing low-barrier employment opportunities and comprehensive social services to support resource generation among homeless populations (Evans & Shaver, 2011). Urban environments that offer diverse and accessible resource generation opportunities significantly impact the ability of homeless individuals to transition out of homelessness. Studies highlight that without these opportunities, homeless individuals struggle to gain the financial stability needed to secure permanent housing and improve their overall well-being (Shinn, Rog, & Culhane, 2005). Together, these concepts influence the health of the homeless, facilitate their urban culture and identity and behaviour. The concepts will be outlined further in chapter 2.2.

The concept urban environment is being categorised in existing literature in different ways. Ompad et al. (2007) divided the urban environment in three categories: social environment, urban resource infrastructure and physical environment. Nissen (2008) refers to the dichotomy of public versus private space, which does not only refer to physical spaces but also to the visibility and invisibility of homelessness within society. He states that public space is conventionally distinguished from private space by factors including access regulations and the nature of the authority governing entry. Additionally, the differentiation is based on the types of individual and communal conduct allowed, as well as the regulations governing the usage of these spaces (Griffin, 2013; Nissen, 2008).

The distinction between public and private spaces can be elucidated by examining the criteria of access, authority and regulations governing conduct. Public spaces are typically open to all individuals without restrictions, allowing free entry and use by the general population. Examples include parks, streets, public squares, and beaches (Gehl, 2006; Katsavounidou, 2023). These spaces are usually governed by public authorities or municipal bodies, maintained by government agencies, and funded by public taxes. Conduct in public spaces is regulated by public laws and ordinances aimed at ensuring safety, order and general welfare. Activities such as walking, socializing and public demonstrations are allowed, though they may be subject to restrictions like noise limits or curfews (Mitchell, 1995).

In contrast, private spaces are restricted and typically require permission from the owner or governing authority for entry, limiting access to individuals with a legal or contractual right to enter. These spaces are controlled by private individuals, corporations, or organizations, which have the right to establish their own rules and conditions for access and use. Conduct in private spaces is governed by the owner's rules, which can be more stringent and specific than public regulations. Activities allowed are usually dictated by the owner's preferences and the intended use of the space, such as residential behaviour in a home or professional conduct in an office (Moroni & Chiodelli, 2014; Nissen, 2008).

The differentiation between individual and communal spaces further refines our understanding of spatial use. Individual spaces are areas designed for personal use and are typically controlled and occupied by a single person or a specific group of individuals with personal ties. These spaces provide privacy, personal comfort and control over the environment, with examples including personal bedrooms, private offices and personal vehicles. Conduct in individual spaces is determined by the occupant, allowing for a high degree of personal freedom and customization (Raman, 2010). Conversely, communal spaces are designed for collective use by multiple individuals or groups, facilitating social interaction, community activities and shared experiences. These spaces promote social cohesion, community engagement and shared resources. Examples include communal kitchens, shared living rooms in co-housing and community centres. Conduct in communal spaces is often governed by mutual agreements, community rules, or organizational guidelines to ensure harmony and cooperation among users (Zhu, 2015).

Understanding the distinction between public and private, as well as individual and communal spaces, is crucial for comprehending how space is utilized and regulated within urban environments. Public spaces, governed by public authorities, promote inclusivity and collective use, whereas private spaces, controlled by private entities, prioritize restricted access and personalized conduct. Similarly, individual spaces offer privacy and personal control, while communal spaces emphasize shared usage and community interaction. This nuanced understanding helps in creating urban environments that are inclusive and cater to the diverse needs of the population.

However, in the context of homelessness such divisions are less logical to establish. For the majority of the cities inhabitants the social and urban environment are not necessarily interdependent of each other. For most individuals, private life—encompassing activities, relationships and personal care—unfolds in the seclusion of personal space, shielded from the public gaze (Clapham, 2007). Homeless people's daily life on the other hand, and thus their social interactions, takes place within the public space in the city (Griffin, 2013). Individuals experiencing homelessness therefore lack the option to keep their activities and social interactions private from the public domain (Nissen, 2008). Thus, the public environment and the social environment are inherently interconnected in the context of homelessness and should not be separated from each other (McFadyen, 2022). The broader public typically views public and private spaces as distinct entities, whereas these spaces overlap in the context of homelessness. This dichotomy results in contrasting relationships with public space and competing assertions regarding how each group utilizes it (Doucette-Prévilla, 2015).

### 2.1.2 Spatial Behaviour

Spatial behaviour refers to how individuals interact within a given physical space, encompassing their movements, actions and responses to spatial problems and opportunities. It involves navigating the environment, utilizing space and adapting to spatial conditions (Allesandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli, 2018). Therefore, in the context of the homeless, spatial behaviour includes how homeless people move within the city, utilize different spaces (e.g., streets, parks, shelters), interact with their surroundings and other people, and make decisions about where to spend their time and resources (Jackson, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2019). The mobility of the homeless is a key concept within spatial behaviour, as this group is often on the move (Nozka, 2019). In this research important aspects of spatial behaviour will be frequently used routes and places, as well as routes and places which get avoided.

Mobility, in the context of homelessness, refers to the frequent movement of homeless individuals as they navigate urban environments to access essential services such as shelters, food, healthcare and social services. This constant movement is a survival strategy. Research by Snow & Anderson (1993) highlights that homeless individuals often develop intricate patterns of movement within cities to make use of available resources. Similarly, Cloke & Johnsen (2008) note that mobility is essential for homeless individuals to connect with support networks and avoid areas where they might be at risk.

Conversely, immobility is an inherent aspect of homelessness due to various factors such as legal restrictions, lack of transportation, health issues and social exclusion. Immobility can manifest as being stuck in certain areas due to the lack of resources to move elsewhere, or being confined to specific shelters that offer security and basic amenities (Kerr, 2019). The interplay of mobility and immobility is complex. While mobility is a necessity, it often leads to a state of enforced immobility. For example, homeless individuals may need to remain in certain areas where services are provided, leading to a form of spatial entrapment (Hall & Smith, 2013). According to Doherty et al. (2008), this spatial entrapment is exacerbated by urban policies that restrict homeless individuals to specific zones or areas, further limiting their mobility and access to opportunities.

Homeless individuals employ various strategies to navigate their mobility and immobility. The concept of "time-space" paths explored by Degen and Rose (2012) explains how homeless individuals organize their daily movements to optimize the use of resources while minimizing risks. However, these strategies are often disrupted by external factors such as police interventions, urban redevelopment and seasonal changes, which introduce additional layers of complexity and hardship. Furthermore, the balance between mobility and immobility has significant implications for the well-being of homeless individuals. Continuous movement can lead to physical exhaustion, mental stress and a lack of stability, while enforced immobility can result in isolation, reduced access to services and a heightened sense of marginalization (Cloke et al., 2008; Lowe & DeVerteuil, 2020).

"Mobility-as-navigation" is a conceptual framework that reconceptualizes mobility, not merely as the physical act of moving from one point to another, but as a nuanced process of navigating through space (Van Eck, 2024). It emphasizes that mobility involves more than just reaching a destination; it encompasses decision-making, spatial orientation and interaction with the environment. Within this framework, factors such as route planning, wayfinding, adaptation to diverse environments and overcoming obstacles are considered integral components of mobility (Psathas, 1976). This perspective offers insights into how individuals or groups navigate urban spaces, make decisions about their routes and interact with the built environment and other people. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of mobility and considering various

social, cultural, economic and environmental factors, the mobility-as-navigation approach aims to provide a deeper understanding of human movement within urban landscapes (Simon et al., 2020; Van Eck, 2024).

### **2.1.3 Day-to-day Experience**

The last concept used in the research question is day-to-day experience. The term addresses the experience of daily life in the city shaped by the urban environment. Day-to-day experience describes the feeling and emotions which everyday activities, occurrences and social encounters evoke (Meanwell, 2012). The day-to-day experience of homelessness encompasses a complex array of feelings, experiences and emotions, including boredom and loneliness. Homeless individuals often face emotional challenges marked by feelings of isolation from societal structures and personal relationships, leading to profound loneliness. The repetitive nature of seeking basic needs like shelter and food in combination with the exclusion of physical as well as communal areas can engender a pervasive sense of boredom (O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill, 2017). This boredom is not just a simple lack of entertainment but a deep-seated condition that affects a person's sense of time and self-worth. The social isolation that often accompanies homelessness intensifies this boredom, as it disconnects individuals from stimulating interactions and engaging activities that can break the monotony of their situation (Marshall et al., 2020). These emotional states are intertwined with the physical hardships of homelessness, influencing the overall mental and emotional well-being of those affected (Bower, Conroy & Perz, 2017; Machielse, 2006). Cloke, May & Johnson (2007) argue that studying the performativity and affect of homelessness can provide important insights into the lived experiences of homeless individuals and the power dynamics at play in the urban environment. This continual struggle not only shapes their day-to-day reality but also affects their long-term outlook on life and ability to engage with community and social services. Meanwell (2012) furthermore states that life on the street, social capital and shelter are important concepts which connect to and influence homeless experience.

Not every homeless person experiences the same situation within the urban environment. Homeless migrants, for example, might face additional problems. Migration profoundly influences the experiences of homeless individuals, introducing additional socio-economic and cultural hurdles that intensify their difficulties (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen & Bramley, 2014). Migrants often encounter significant barriers in accessing critical resources such as social services, housing and employment, mainly due to legal constraints, inadequate documentation or linguistic challenges (Mostowska, 2011). Furthermore, undocumented migrants may avoid official services for fear of detention or deportation, leading to their increased invisibility and isolation from potential support networks (Kaur et al., 2021). Social connections, crucial for resource and support provision, are frequently sparse for migrants, especially newcomers who lack established familial or friendship networks (Mostowska, 2013). This deficiency exacerbates isolation and complicates access to essential support systems necessary for overcoming homelessness (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen & Bramley, 2014). Cultural and language differences can also obstruct migrants' efforts to secure stable housing and employment, with misunderstandings and discrimination limiting service provision and increasing marginalization (Kaur, et al., 2021).

An important concept within day-to-day experience is place attachment. People form emotional bonds with particular places of environments, which is termed as 'place attachment' (Seamon, 2020). The concept is widely regarded as a component of a larger lived structure known as "place" and "the experience of place." (Donohoe, 2017; Malpas, 2018). Smith (2018) labelled six categories of such places:

- 1) Secure places, which provoke safety and security
- 2) Socializing places
- 3) Transformative places, related to personal growth and important events
- 4) Restorative places, which strengthen health
- 5) Validating places, which reinforce group and personal identity
- 6) Vanishing places, which have already vanished or are on the brink of disappearing

In these categories, place and place attachment are not only formed by the physical environment, However, it is more closely linked to the indivisible phenomenon of person-or-people-experiencing-place (Seamon, 2020). Therefore, in the context of the homeless population, place attachment is influenced by the social as well as the physical environment. Attachment gets formed on the one hand due to the overlap of public and private space, which results in using the physical environment in a rather unique way. This excessive use of the physical environment can provoke strengthened feelings of attachment (Haughton, 2020). Furthermore, the social environment plays an important role in forming attachment. A place, and the lived experience attached to it, can be influenced by the routines of different utilisers of that certain place (Seamon, 2020). The convergence of time and space contributes to and participates in a broader environmental ensemble labelled by researchers as a 'place ballet': an interaction of individual bodily routines that may evolve into significant venues for interpersonal and communal exchange, as well as imbued with meaning and attachment. (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Pearce, 2019 ).

Place attachment and spatial behaviour are interconnected in a bilateral way. On the one hand, homeless people form attachments within the urban context by navigating the city day after day and getting used to places (Sadkowski, 1993). On the other hand, however, the formed attachments within the city influence the mobility patterns of the homeless. This happens because they typically move from locations to which they feel attached to other places where they also feel a sense of attachment (Perera, 2000). Furthermore, by processes of displacement, the urban environment influences homeless person's place attachment (Vandemark, 2007). As the homeless experience displacement from one location, they must seek alternative places to reside. Frequently, they do not undergo this process alone and tend to develop connections with a (small) community in the places they are using frequently (Perera, 2000).

## **2.2 Influences on Spatial Behaviour and Experience**

The four factors influencing spatial behaviour are exclusion, social interactions, shelter and (opportunities for) resource generation will be clarified in this section. It is important to note that these factors are not isolated; rather, they continually interact with one another. This represents a complex interplay of factors that shapes not only individual choices but also the broader dynamics of homeless communities.

### **2.2.1 Exclusion**

The representation of homeless people by the public is evolving due to growing concerns about safety. Gradual changes are evident in the boundaries between public and private spaces, notably reflected in physical structures (such as fences and exclusive materials), personnel (including security forces and cleaners), and technological indicators (such as CCTV cameras). These dynamics give rise to "spaces of hybrid character", characterized by a blend of public and private elements, varying levels of accessibility and diverse degrees of usability (Nissen, 2008; Perry, 2013). In the context of homelessness, this change of accessibility and usability poses problems for their daily life: they are not welcome everywhere within public space and they are only welcome at certain times at places like parks where opening hours are used (Perry, 2013). Thus, the physical environment, which refers to parks and buildings (Weich et al., 2001) as well as streets, roads and footpaths (Ompad et al., 2007) is becoming less inclusive for homeless people. This form of exclusion undermines their right to engage in the public sphere as residents of the city and dramatically hinders homeless people's possibilities and daily activities, while the physical environment is their home and locus of their social environment (Griffin, 2013).

Another form of physical exclusion is caused by hostile architecture. Hostile architecture, also known as defensive or exclusionary design, refers to urban design strategies aimed at deterring unwanted behaviours, particularly by homeless individuals. This includes features like benches with armrests that prevent lying down, spikes on flat surfaces, and sloped window sills to discourage sitting or sleeping. The primary goal is to maintain public order and aesthetics by making areas uncomfortable or unusable for homeless people, often implemented in parks, commercial areas and transit hubs to discourage loitering and sleeping (Rosenberger, 2020).

While intended to improve the safety and cleanliness of public spaces, hostile architecture has significant ethical and social implications. These designs further marginalize homeless individuals by reducing their access to safe resting places, pushing them into less visible and often more dangerous areas (Wyatt, 2022). Hostile architecture can perpetuate negative stereotypes about homelessness, suggesting that homeless individuals are a problem to be managed rather than people in need of assistance. Limiting access to resting places and shelter can exacerbate health issues among homeless individuals, increasing their vulnerability to weather conditions and reducing their ability to find stable and safe environments (McCreath, 2024).

Critics argue that hostile architecture addresses the symptoms of homelessness rather than the root causes, such as lack of affordable housing and social services. There is a growing call for more compassionate and inclusive urban design that considers the needs of all city inhabitants. This includes designing public spaces that offer support rather than exclusion, such as providing benches with canopies, public restrooms and areas designated for rest that are safe and accessible (Petty, 2016; Wyatt, 2022).

Besides exclusion from physical areas, social exclusion is a common issue for homeless people as well (Pleace, 1998). Homelessness often leads to isolation and disconnection from community and family. Public stigma and misconceptions about homelessness further exacerbate this isolation, as individuals are often labeled and judged based on their housing status, rather than seen as whole persons with diverse backgrounds and capabilities. The homeless often feel not accepted, welcome or even seen by other users of the city. This social isolation can critically influence their wellbeing and possible reintegration into society (Bower, Conroy & Perz, 2017; Van Straaten et al., 2018).

Understanding the concepts of visibility and invisibility is crucial in analysing the dynamics of homelessness in contemporary society. These terms highlight how homeless individuals are perceived and treated in public spaces and by societal institutions, shaping both public policy and social attitudes. Pospech (2020) developed a three-part theoretical model focusing on the relationship between physical visibility and its implications for public policy:

- 1) **Categorical Invisibility:** This occurs when homeless individuals are not recognized as a distinct social category. Society fails to see them as a specific group with unique needs and characteristics, thereby ignoring their existence and the specific challenges they face.
- 2) **Moral Invisibility:** This form of invisibility happens when homeless people are not perceived as morally significant. They are often seen as undeserving of attention and empathy, leading to a lack of moral consideration and societal support.
- 3) **Policy Invisibility:** Policy invisibility is when homelessness is not addressed adequately in public policies. This includes the absence of effective legal frameworks, social programs, and resources needed to tackle homelessness, resulting in a systemic failure to address the issue.

Homelessness is a serious social issue, but through categorical and moral visibility, homeless individuals can become morally stigmatized and criminalized. Their presence in public spaces is seen as “problematic” not because of their dire situation but due to concerns about safety, cleanliness and visual appeal (Amster, 2003). However, visibility itself cannot be criminalized. This is why policies like drinking bans often fail; the emotional and sensory discomfort caused by the mere sight of a homeless person cannot be adequately addressed through legal categories (Knox, Mayrand-Thibert & Pucci, 2023).

This paradox is evident when trying to solve a social problem using criminal law tools. People tend to react to the presence of homeless persons alone. They often do not have to do something. Research showed that when the homeless are in a place where there are many people, at least some of them will react negatively (Hejnal, 2013). Increasingly, the criminalization of actions like drinking hides the unspoken reality that the visibility of homeless people is seen as the primary issue. In the media, aesthetic and sensory concerns are framed in moral terms, leading to calls for action by policymakers (Knox, Mayrand-Thibert & Pucci, 2023).

Areas characterized by exclusion or where individuals do not feel welcomed are referred to as ‘negative places’ (Gertner & Kotler, 2004). In the context of homelessness, negative places are specific locations or environments that homeless individuals actively avoid for reasons such as safety concerns, negative experiences or the fear of law enforcement actions (Fahnoe, 2018; Gibbeson, 2020). This deliberate avoidance, known as ‘place avoidance’, is a critical behaviour that provides insights into the spatial behaviour of homeless populations, highlighting the significant impact urban environments have on their daily lives and survival strategies (Fahnoe, 2018).

Several factors contribute to place avoidance among the homeless. Safety concerns are paramount, with many homeless individuals avoiding places where they have previously experienced or perceive a high risk of violence, theft or harassment. The lack of personal security in public spaces forces them to seek out areas where they feel relatively safer, even if these locations offer minimal shelter from environmental elements (Langegger & Koester, 2016). Negative experiences, such as being moved on by property owners, business operators or the public, can also lead to the avoidance of certain areas. The emotional and psychological impact of such experiences influences where homeless individuals choose to rest or spend their time, making them more cautious (Fahnoe, 2018). Additionally, areas heavily patrolled by police or security personnel are often avoided due to the fear of arrest, fines or the confiscation of personal belongings, as these locations are perceived as hostile environments (Rudin, 2018). The stigma associated with homelessness can make certain public spaces unwelcoming, exacerbating the sense of social isolation for those who feel judged or unwelcome.

### **2.2.2 Social Interactions**

The social environment refers to the combined norms, values, interpersonal relationships and interactions among members of social groups within urban communities (Coutts & Kawachi, 2006). An important part of this social environment is social capital, which includes the interconnected relationships, mutual assistance and shared resources found within social networks and communities (Coleman, 1990). These resources are utilized to overcome challenges and pursue opportunities by homeless people (Ayed et al., 2020). Another part of the social environment includes municipal structures, health- and social services (Ompad et al., 2007). In the context of homelessness, social interactions encompass (Alessandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli, 2018):

- 1) Engaging with peers in public spaces, including parks, streets and shelters.
- 2) Seeking assistance from organizations, others users of the city and government agencies.
- 3) Forming networks and support systems with other (homeless) individuals
- 4) Interaction with other users of the city that is not centred around assistance but rather social contact (Mabhala, Yohannes & Griffith, 2017).

These interactions influence the decision-making processes that shape where homeless individuals choose to reside, seek employment and access essential resources. Consequently, social interactions are intricately tied to the spatial mobility and settlement patterns observed within the homeless population (Alessandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli, 2018). The spatial tactics employed by homeless individuals, such as choosing shelter locations or accessing resources, surpass mere physical necessity and mirror complex social dynamics, encompassing the avoidance of stigma and the quest for community (Proulx et al., 2016). Feeling socially included and welcome in such places often plays an important role in their decision-making (Bell & Walsh, 2015).

Two other relevant concepts within existing literature are co-presence and co-mingling. Co-presence refers to the simultaneous existence of multiple individuals in the same physical space, while co-mingling implies interactive and integrated social engagement among those individuals. Co-presence without co-mingling occurs when people share a space but do not engage in meaningful social interaction or relationship-building. This phenomenon is common in various contexts and can be explained through the theoretical lenses on the next page:

- 1) **Spatial segregation** highlights that physical spaces can be designed to allow for co-presence without encouraging co-mingling. For instance, open-plan offices, public transportation, and urban parks are spaces where individuals may be present together but remain socially separate due to the design and norms governing these spaces (Legeby, 2010).
- 2) **Social Identity Theory** posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, often leading to in-group and out-group dynamics. Even when individuals from different groups are co-present, they may not co-mingle due to perceived social boundaries, differences in identity or lack of shared interests (Ellemers & Haslan, 2012).
- 3) **Theory of Interaction** by Goffman distinguishes "focused" and "unfocused" interactions. Focused interactions involve direct communication and engagement, while unfocused interactions involve mere acknowledgment of others' presence. Co-presence without co-mingling often involves unfocused interactions where individuals recognize each other but do not engage beyond superficial acknowledgments (Goffman, 2023).

Alessandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli (2018) delve into how individuals navigate the balance between exploring new locations and maintaining social connections, while also utilizing familiar spaces. This is shaped by various factors, including social interactions and spatial behaviours, which are intertwined and mutually influence each other (Toole, 2015). The research suggests that people's movements and social bonds are not random occurrences but are significantly influenced by their personal characteristics and social networks. These findings have implications for understanding the spatial behaviour of homeless populations, as their movements and social interactions may similarly be guided by a combination of personal choice, social connections and available resources. This concept holds particular relevance in the context of homelessness, where spatial behaviour and social interactions are notably influenced by the need to find safe and accessible spaces, as well as the presence of supportive social networks (Alessandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli, 2018; Iwata & Karoto, 2011).

In addition, Proulx et al. (2016) synthesise spatial cognition and social cognition with the concept of self, proposing that our self-understanding is intricately linked with our social and spatial engagements. It argues that individual differences in how we perceive and engage with our environment are shaped by a combination of personality traits and spatial and social experiences (Rad & Bin, 2013). This perspective holds significant importance in comprehending the lived experiences of homeless individuals, as their interactions with social networks and physical spaces profoundly impact their self-perception and conduct within urban settings (Proulx et al., 2016).

### 2.2.3 Shelter

A homeless shelter is a physical establishment or facility designed to provide temporary accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness (Baral et al., 2021). However, the homeless use unofficial places as shelter as well. Public space and transit systems are two examples of places which are not only utilized by the homeless population in the prescribed manner, respectively recreation and commuting. The fact that homeless people use these places as shelter, to sleep, elevates the significance of these places for many homeless individuals beyond that of the average city user (Bergamaschi, Castrigagnò & Rubertis, 2014; Ding et al., 2022). Research indicates that homeless individuals choose shelters based on various factors, such as proximity to essential resources for survival, ease of access and safety considerations (Simon et al., 2020). The choice for places of shelter could have an important influence on the

spatial behaviour of the homeless. Navigating through the city and looking for shelter are often part of their daily life, while these are also places to which the homeless tend to return (Bergamaschi, Castrigagnò & Rubertis, 2014).

The provision of shelter services and the layout of urban spaces significantly influence homeless individuals' access to shelters and their daily spatial behaviours. Research underscores the necessity of taking into account the urban environment when designing and positioning shelters, asserting that urban planning and infrastructure play a pivotal role in either facilitating or impeding the accessibility of services for homeless communities (Franklin, 2006; Franklin, 2017). The spatial arrangement of shelters shapes the movement patterns of homeless individuals, as evidenced by the study's findings indicating that the proximity of shelters directly impacts their decisions regarding relocation and settlement, often resulting in a preference to remain in close proximity to these facilities (Jolley, 2020). However, this clustering can also lead to heightened visibility and, at times, stigmatization of homeless populations within certain urban areas (Martini, 2021).

Fahnoe (2018) delves into the nuanced relationship between the emotional experiences of homeless individuals and their spatial behaviour and in particular their avoidance of places that provide social services. This avoidance is influenced by negative experiences or perceptions associated with these services, which could include feelings of stigma, fear or discomfort. These emotional geographies play a pivotal role in understanding the navigation of urban spaces by homeless individuals. Negative emotional associations with shelters or social service providers can prompt increased movement and dispersion across the city as individuals seek out environments where they feel safer or less exposed to judgment (Daya & Wilkins, 2013). This behaviour underscores the critical importance of fostering more inclusive and supportive atmospheres within shelters and service centres to address not only the physical needs but also the emotional well-being of homeless individuals (Fahnoe, 2018).

#### **2.2.4 Resource Generation**

The first aspect of resource generation is income generation. Homelessness profoundly affects how individuals generate income, often driving them towards informal or peripheral economic activities such as panhandling, collecting deposit refunds and other, legal as well as illegal, street-based enterprises (Reinhard & Palys, 2021). These strategies emerge due to obstacles like lack of identification, unstable living situation and societal stigmatization, which hinder access to formal employment. Panhandling provides immediate, though often stigmatized, cash flow, making it a prevalent method among the homeless. Similarly, gathering bottles and cans for deposit refunds represents a viable income source by leveraging urban waste resources. Both approaches necessitate minimal skills and resources, suiting the uncertain conditions associated with homelessness (Van Doorn, 2004; Lee & Farrell, 2003).

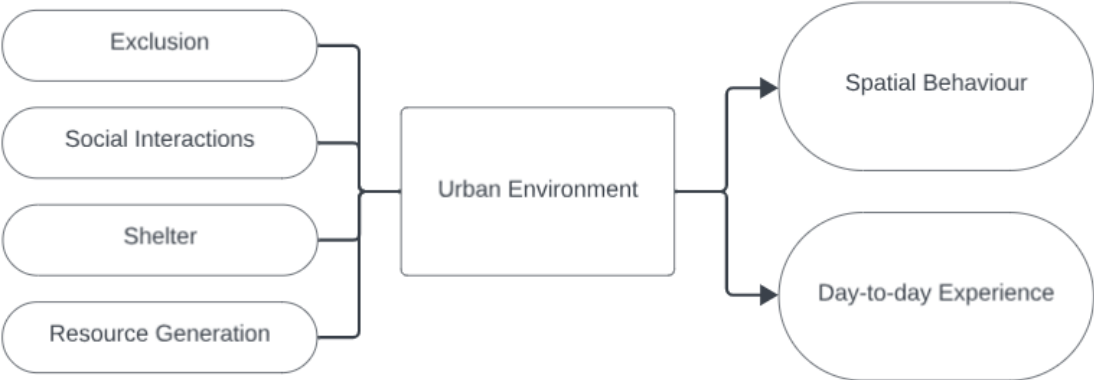
The income generation tactics of homeless individuals significantly influence their spatial behaviour (Reinhard & Palys, 2021). Urban zones offering abundant opportunities for panhandling and recycling often see higher gatherings of homeless populations. Commercial areas, tourist attractions and locales with significant pedestrian traffic are preferred for panhandling due to the potential for higher earnings. In contrast, regions near large supermarkets or recycling facilities become key sites for deposit refund collection (Lee, Tyler & Wright, 2010). This dynamic creates a distinctive movement and space utilization pattern in urban settings, as homeless individuals alternate between areas of economic opportunity and necessity, shaping their daily movements and social interactions according to the economic geography of survival (Reinhard & Palys, 2021).

The second aspect of resource generation is food generation. Food generation for the homeless includes leveraging resources like food banks, soup kitchens and other charitable services that provide prepared meals or ingredients. Additionally, homeless people may rely on soliciting food from acquaintances or shoppers near supermarkets. These essential services and opportunities often become central points around which homeless individuals plan their daily activities (Booth, 2006; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002).

**2.3 Conceptual Model**

Figure 2.1 below illustrates the conceptual model that emerged from the mentioned literature. Exclusion, social interactions, shelter and resource generation constitute the urban environment of the homeless population. The urban environment influences the spatial behaviour of the homeless and their experience of the daily life in the city.

*Figure 2.1: Conceptual Model*



The literature review has elucidated the theoretical and empirical foundations relevant to this study. Building on these gained insights, the subsequent chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study. The methodological framework is designed to address the research questions derived from the literature review. It details the research design, data collection techniques and analytical strategies used to investigate the phenomena under study. By aligning the research methodology with the theoretical constructs and empirical gaps identified in the literature review, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge base in a meaningful and rigorous manner.

### **3. Methodology**

To conduct this research, qualitative methods were employed using two instruments: narrative interviewing and observations. In-depth narrative interviews were conducted with six respondents and the researcher completed approximately 170 hours of observations, in which short conversations with people from the target group were included as well.

The research is inspired by an interpretivist point of view, due to the personal and social circumstances which play an important role in creating the experience of homeless people. This suits the objective of the research which aims to understand interpretations and meaning that this marginalized group assigns to their experiences; thus, the subjective nature of experience is of considerable importance within this research (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Narrative interviewing is essential for capturing the stories, daily patterns and experiences of the respondents. The main and sub-questions of this research are focused on personal stories, and this interviewing method emphasizes these narratives. This instrument is important in understanding personal feelings, because it helps create a safe space and a more authentic conversation, which allows the interviewed person to express themselves freely (Belina, 2022). This instrument acknowledges the significance of storytelling as a means through which individuals comprehend their experiences and shape their sense of self (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015; Wang & Gaele, 2015). Using this informal way of interviewing is important for this research because of the possible sensitive and personal topics which could be discussed in the context of homelessness (Umamaheswar, 2018). Moreover, this research method is adaptable to different cultural norms and communication styles, which supports the research because of possible differences within the group of EU-migrants and their possible differences with the interviewer (Au, 2019). Finally, this approach allows for adaptability and in-depth responses. The interviewer can pursue interesting and unexpected topics based on responses and the open-ended nature ensures the opportunity to share personal perspectives and insights (Longhurst, 2003).

Knott et al. (2022) describe that the process of relationship building fosters trust and openness, which allows a more personal and in-depth exchange of information. Consequently, a period of over four months, from February till June, was dedicated to developing these relationships. According to existing literature, narrative research is optimally employed to capture the experiences of a relatively small number of individuals, typically ranging from six to twelve (Adhikari, 2021; Beitin, 2012). Additionally, Kim (2016) recommends a minimum of three in-depth conversations per participant. However, it is recognized that sustained communication with this target group may encounter difficulties (Zuccherro, McDannold & McInness, 2016). Due to a variety of reasons, it was not possible to conduct three interviews with six respondents. Consequently, efforts were made during the study to increase the number of participants to enhance the research outcomes and the validity of the results, as advised by Creswell (2007).

Although narrative interviewing offers numerous benefits, it also comes with certain drawbacks. First, emotion, and thus experience as well, is not easily identified within scientific research (Clifford, Cope & Gillespie, 2023). Furthermore, narrative interviews depend on participants' willingness to share their stories and their expectations regarding the interview process may vary considerably (Ntida, 2020). Also, this method may not be effective for every participant. Some individuals might be involved less directly in the discussed topics, struggle to produce coherent narratives, forget to tell about relevant experiences or need more structure in order to provide valuable information (Clifford, Scope & Gillespie, 2023; Lawlor, 2000; McAlpine, 2016). Reasons behind these possible limitations could be language barriers,

influence of alcohol and/or drugs and the circumstances during the talks, for example the case where they are outside or the lack of privacy (Clifford, Scope & Gillespie, 2023; McAlpine, 2016). These disadvantages were addressed by being transparent during the research as well as by giving the respondents the time to get to know the researcher and participate in the research only in manners that align with their personal preferences. Also, the participants were given as much time as needed in order for them to answer questions, tell stories or take breaks. Therefore, being patient was, as stated by Cloke et al. (2000), an important aspect of the narrative interviews.

The second instrument employed in this research is personal observations including informal conversations with the target group. The observations occurred mainly at the Salvation Army day centre and during the soup bicycle initiative around the city. In total, from the onset of data collection, an average of twice a week was dedicated to these activities, amounting to approximately 170 hours. This instrument was used because of two reasons: First, the observations were necessary in order to blend in and become familiar within the personal space of the respondents. Secondly, the personal observations during this research were essential for understanding the spatial behaviours, daily routines and interactions of the respondents. Thus, the observations were used in order to generalize and understand the data collected by narrative interviewing. Key themes of the observations included: group dynamics and social interactions, daily routines and movements, service utilization, emotional and behavioural responses and adaptations to the urban environment. Furthermore, the observations included short and informal conversations. These conversations complement the data by providing context to observed behaviours and allowing researchers to gather personal narratives and emotional responses, thereby offering a deeper understanding of individual experiences within the homeless community (Parsell, 2010). Relevant observations were systematically recorded using field notes.

Observational methods enable researchers to gain firsthand insights into the daily lives, routines and interactions of homeless individuals without being overly intrusive (Rose, 2022). This approach can capture nuances of behaviour and social dynamics that might not be readily disclosed in interview settings (Hoolachan, 2016). The observations were conducted during two types of voluntary services provided by the Salvation Army. Firstly, observations were made during the daily drop-in service of the Salvation Army, where homeless individuals can access free food, drinks, showers and social interaction, among other things. The second method of observation was during the so-called 'soup-bicycle', an initiative by the Salvation Army where staff cycle around the city in the evening distributing food to homeless and other needy individuals.

An attempt was made to incorporate a third instrument into the research, namely the visual instrument of mental mapping. This instrument would have been useful for answering the first research question and for creating clear maps of the spatial behaviour of respondents. Participants were asked to create mental maps of the city, highlighting frequently used routes, important places and areas they perceived negatively. Mental maps enrich the depth of collected data, provide a more holistic understanding of participants' viewpoints, and contribute to more visual and expressive results (Brennan-Horley, 2010; Townley et al., 2016; Tyminski, Hung & Drummond, 2022). Furthermore, the use of mental mapping could benefit the research because this visual method is more individualized, allowing participants to feel more comfortable sharing information (Doukani et al., 2018; Jung, 2014), and it can partially address verbal communication issues such as language barriers and the inability to provide concrete and clear answers, resulting in more comprehensive conversations (Packard, 2008; Tyminski, Hung & Drummond, 2022). However, it was not possible for the majority of the respondents to produce useful mental maps, which could explain the gap in the literature as described by Tyminski, Hung & Drummond (2022). Lack of structure in their routes, a lack of connection with places

and unfamiliarity with the city were reasons behind this, while some respondents did not seem to fully understand the assignment. Ultimately, it was decided to include a self-made map in the results section, based on the conversations, observations and the few mental maps that were successfully created. This map thus still provides a depiction of the areas frequently used by the target group in the city.

### 3.2 Operationalisation

The ensuing questions in table 3.1 are developed to address the core research question and its related sub-questions. While their formulation aims to lend structure to the dialogues, the methodology emphasizes open-ended conversations, accommodating the potential for storytelling and subsequent follow-up questions. Therefore, not all questions are used in every conversation nor in the following order: they have been used as a memory aid and to provide some structure to the conversations while the focus is on the narratives of the respondents. In addition, the questionnaire was utilized to provide structure for the researcher while recording responses during the interviews. As explained in chapter 3.4, the interviews were not recorded; consequently, the researcher had to document or voice the relevant findings immediately afterward. The operationalization framework facilitated this process by aiding in the recall and organization of pertinent information. Furthermore, at the outset of the research, an extensive review of the questions listed in the table was conducted in collaboration with one of the respondents to ensure their suitability for achieving the research objectives.

Table 3.1: Operationalisation Scheme

<b>Part of sub-questions</b>	<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Concrete questions</b>
Open questions in order to start the conversation	Daily life	-Can you describe your average day? -Can you describe challenges that you face regularly?
To what extent do social interactions influence spatial behaviour and daily experience?	Social interactions	-Can you tell me about your daily social contacts and interactions? -Do you visit or avoid specific places where social interaction is more likely or to escape certain social interactions?
	Daily experience	-Can you describe the importance of social interactions in your day-to-day life?
To what extent does shelter influence spatial behaviour and daily experience?	Shelter	-Can you tell me about the process of finding shelter at day and night? -How does the availability of shelter influence your movements within the city?

	Daily experience	-How do you feel about the available shelter?
To what extent does resource generation influence spatial behaviour?		-How do you generate resources? -How does generating resources influence your movements within the city?
To what extent does exclusion influence spatial behaviour and daily experience?	Exclusion	-Do you ever feel excluded within the city? Can you tell me about times you felt excluded in the city? -In what way did this exclusion influence where you choose to spend time?
	Daily experience	-How does it feel to be excluded?
Final questions about daily experience		-Can you describe how you feel about the city Utrecht? -Do you ever feel bored or lonely? If yes, can you explain/elaborate?
	Place attachment	-What places in the city do you feel a strong connection to and why?
What is the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?	-Navigating the environment -Utilizing space -Important places -Negative places	Respondents are asked to make a mental map of Utrecht in which they can show frequently used routes and places as well as places and routes which they avoid.

### **3.3 Sampling of Respondents**

#### **3.3.1 Salvation Army in Utrecht**

In 2022, the Dutch cabinet formulated the 'National Action Plan for the Homeless' and the 'Action Plan for Vulnerable Homeless EU-Citizens'. The goal was to support all (potential) homeless individuals, particularly in the four major cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht), through an integrated, person-centred approach and the establishment of a comprehensive network of basic services (Rijksoverheid, 2022). However, this policy primarily benefited those with a demonstrable connection to the city or region where they reside and whose underlying (complex) issues necessitate intensive housing support. For individuals who do not have the right to care services in the city where they reside, such as the majority of EU-migrants, there is hardly any shelter and insufficient assistance available (De Wit et al., 2023). There is limited visibility of these groups, making it challenging to provide the necessary support, while in 2023, 10% of the homeless in the four major cities were EU migrants (CBS, 2023). It should be noted that not all cases of homelessness are known, especially among the homeless migrant population. The number of homeless EU-migrants in the four big cities in the Netherlands is rapidly increasing. These individuals come here as labour migrants, and if they lose their job, they end up on the streets because they often do not have the right to overnight shelter. According to Salvation Army staff in Utrecht, there has been and still is insufficient visibility of this growing group of migrants. Thus, Utrecht is one of the four cities in the Netherlands where the situation is most critical, and research is most relevant for the group of EU-migrants (De Wit et al., 2023; Huber, Doorn & Davelaar, 2022).

Participants were recruited through volunteer work at the Salvation Army in Utrecht. The Salvation Army is an organization that provides (social) assistance to those in society who need it, such as the homeless. There are various ways in which this group of people is helped, for example, through the day shelter where the researcher conducted volunteer work. The Salvation Army's day shelter was open every day from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM during the research period; however, from July 1<sup>st</sup> 2024, the closing time is moved up to 4:00 PM. During opening hours, homeless individuals, as well as those without permanent housing and others in need, can access the facility. It provides a place where free food is distributed, free showers and toilet facilities are available, clean clothing can be obtained and social relationships can be formed and maintained with both visitors and staff. Additionally, individuals in need can make appointments with doctors or organizations that offer assistance with for example finding employment or returning to their country of origin.

#### **3.3.2 Sampling Strategy**

Permission and cooperation were granted by the Salvation Army to identify potential participants within its operational framework. According to Knott et al. (2022), it is crucial to first establish an informal relationship with this target group. Initial interactions, therefore, prioritized getting acquainted and deliberately avoided sensitive topics related to the research. This face-to-face recruitment strategy was designed to foster personal connections. The data collection process spanned four months, providing ample time to build personal bonds, which facilitated the approach to a number of potential respondents for interviews.

Privacy was safeguarded during the sampling and the research through several key measures. First, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the study, the methods used and their rights. This ensured participants were aware of how their information would be used and had the option to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using pseudonyms in all data

records and publications. Data collected during the research was stored securely, with access limited to the research team. Digital data was encrypted, and physical data, such as field notes, was kept in personal storage. Particularly sensitive information that could potentially harm participants if disclosed was either not recorded or was generalized to maintain confidentiality during interviews and observations.

Not every targeted respondent was interested in discussing or assisting with the research. Consequently, the selection of respondents ultimately depended primarily on their willingness to assist. This process often was time-consuming, but eventually, six respondents were found for in-depth interviews. The recommendation by Kim (2016) to conduct three in-depth interviews per respondent was not achieved. The reason for this was the difficulty in scheduling follow-up appointments with the respondents, who were often unreachable, not in the disposition, or lacked interest altogether. To maintain the highest possible validity of the research, six additional respondents were recruited with whom brief conversations were held to gather more information. Combined with personal observations this approach enabled the successful collection of sufficient data. However, the absence of multiple interviews, with as consequence that not every respondent had the same time for discussing the questions, could affect the depth and consistency of the data collected across different participants.

Table 3.2 below shows an overview of the respondents. Pseudonyms are used in order to protect the privacy of the respondents. Furthermore, the information available about the respondents is not uniform. Often, details such as age, other personal characteristics or sensitive topics were not asked during conversations, with the objective of fostering a natural conversation. In the context of establishing acquaintance and building friendship, it frequently seemed neither logical nor relevant to pose such questions in the context in which the discussions were conducted. The table indicates that all respondents are male, which is a logical consequence given that the majority of visitors to the Salvation Army are men. Additionally, the respondents predominantly come from Eastern Europe, which aligns with the demographic composition of homeless EU migrants. Most respondents are frequent visitors of the Salvation Army, likely a result of sampling through this organization.

Table 3.2: Overview of Respondents

	<b>Stanis</b>	<b>Ivan</b>	<b>Dimitar</b>
<b>Country of origin</b>	Lithuania	Bulgaria	Bulgaria
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Male	Male
<b>Language during interview</b>	English	English	English
<b>Need for translation website</b>	No	No	Sometimes
<b>Sleeping outside or inside</b>	Outside	Outside	Inside
<b>Frequency of visiting Salvation Army</b>	Every day	Every day	Once or twice a week

	<b>Jakub</b>	<b>Gregor</b>	<b>Stefan</b>
<b>Country of origin</b>	Poland	?	Romania
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Male	Male
<b>Language during interview</b>	English	English	English
<b>Need for translation website</b>	Often	No	No
<b>Sleeping outside or inside</b>	Outside	Outside	Outside
<b>Frequency of visiting Salvation Army</b>	Every day	Multiple times a week	Every day

### **3.4 Recording and Analysing Data**

In this study, the decision was made not to record audio during conversations. This choice was first prompted by the often noisy environments in which the conversations took place, which would have compromised the clarity of audio recordings. The conversations took place in the common area of the Salvation Army or on the street to maintain a natural atmosphere rather than a professional one during the discussions. Additionally, recording a conversation could detract from the personal and informal atmosphere that is sought in narrative interviewing and in short, informal discussions. Furthermore, the prospect of being recorded could deter potential respondents due to privacy concerns or their discomfort with being recorded. To preserve data, the approach adopted involved seeking a quiet location immediately after a conversation to verbally summarize or write down key information from the interaction. Additionally, field notes and a research diary were utilized to record relevant observations, thoughts and feelings.

In order to analyse the conversations a narrative analysis is used. Narrative analysis centres on examining the stories or narratives individuals create to comprehend their experiences. It entails interpreting how individuals construct, understand and convey their personal narratives (Smith, 2016). The used approach is the one of narrative constructionism, which is a socio-cultural approach that conceptualizes human beings as meaning-makers who use narratives to interpret, direct and communicate life and to configure and constitute their experience and their sense of who they really are (Esin et al., 2014; Schiff, 2013). Unpacking stories into narratives is the central point of this approach. The analysis involves scrutinizing the structure, content and context of narratives to uncover embedded themes, patterns and meanings. This process includes examining elements such as plot, characters, setting and dialogue within the narratives (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019).

The data will be presented in the results chapter through a map that displays locations of significance or frequent use by the target group. Additionally, vignettes and paraphrases are employed to vividly illustrate the personal narratives of the respondents and the observations made by the researcher. Quotes are not used because the interviews were not recorded. The paraphrases used in the results section were reconstructed based on the notes taken immediately after the interviews. This ensures that the tone, message, and context are preserved as much as possible. The respondents were aware that the conversations were not being recorded, but that notes would be taken.

### **3.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

There are multiple possible limitations to the research, namely: the language barrier, positionality and the Salvation Army as gatekeeper, while there also are several ethical considerations. However, by keeping the research and the cooperation with the participants respectful, transparent and reflexive it was possible to narrow these down as much as possible.

A first potential research limitation to consider is the language barrier among participants, given their diverse backgrounds and differences with the researcher. The interviewer and interviewee did not always share fluency in the same language, while scholars caution that relying on translation can jeopardize the reliability of data (MacKenzie, 2015; Wong & Poon, 2010). Lincoln et al. (2016) highlight that involving students, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level, in interpretation may present valuable opportunities for research socialization. However, it could also impact data quality due to their lack of experience in both research and translation. To address these limitations, the researcher took sufficient time during conversations with the target group to ensure mutual understanding. Where necessary, translation programs were utilized to prevent any misunderstandings. This was only necessary for one of the interviewed respondents; however, such programs were often required during interactions with other homeless individuals. It is possible that some potential respondents found it too inconvenient to be interviewed through such a program.

Secondly, a possible flaw within the research is the possible positionality of the researcher. Personal biases and conceptions may, especially when researching people from a vulnerable group, influence data and play a part in framing questions. As described by Tillman (2002) the question is ‘whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of others in a study’. For research about homeless people it is important to understand and reflect on differences, as they can influence the understanding and challenges of homelessness (Shaw et al., 2019). Cultural background, socioeconomic status, gender differences and educational background are potential variables that must be considered in the research to ensure unbiased outcomes (Merriam et al., 2001). Ultimately, no female respondents participated in the study. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of homeless individuals are male and establishing contact with the few female homeless EU-migrants proved difficult. Consequently, gender is a characteristic that the researcher shares with the respondents.

To address these limitations, it is essential for researchers to practice reflexivity. This involves reflecting on their own positionality and acknowledging how it may influence the research. Researchers should actively manage their biases, engage in continuous self-reflection and seek input from diverse perspectives (Bourke, 2014). In order to do so, a research diary was used for documenting the process of research, including thoughts, reflections, decisions and challenges encountered. It served as a tool for reflexivity, allowing the researcher to critically engage with his methodological choices and the impact of his own biases (Nadin & Cassell, 2006). Another, partial, solution is ‘engaged reflection and representation’ as described by Milner (2007) where researchers and participants engage in reflection together in order to minimize the positionality and to increase mutual understanding. This form of conversation was useful in this research due to the informal nature which gives time and space for reflection. During the research, providing feedback on findings in subsequent conversations served as a way to be reflective. The participants could use the conversations to reflect and think about previous conversations, while also having the opportunity to incorporate new perspectives and narratives.

Furthermore, while the Salvation Army serves as a valuable gateway to the target group, this could influence the research as well. Exclusively depending on Salvation Army for participant recruitment may have introduced sampling bias. The population using the organization's services may not reflect the entire spectrum of homelessness in the community, thereby limiting the generalizability of the study findings. Through the Salvation Army only people who already make use of the organizations aid can be reached, thus, it is important to reflect on this possible limitation as well as try to find a way outside of the organization to recruit participants during the research. Also, the connection with the Salvation Army might influence participants' responses to questions. The ongoing relationship of individuals with the organization may have resulted in desirable answers or doubt about certain topics that could cast a negative light on the organization. The solution to this problem was to keep asking follow-up questions and give the respondents time to get to know and trust the researcher.

Finally, conducting research in the context of homelessness creates a few ethical questions. Acknowledging and managing power dynamics between researcher and researched, and mutual understanding were crucial to ensure that the participants' voice is heard. Although many issues are commonly considered in research, research with homeless people may raise exceptional challenges (Runnels et al., 2009). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) identified a few categories of such challenges: informed consent, privacy, harm and exploitation, where other authors add a fourth: sensitivity to cultural difference, gender and power relations (McDowell, 1992; Sidaway, 1992). Securing informed consent from homeless individuals poses challenges given their living conditions and potential mental health issues. The researcher needs to express the study's purpose and benefits in a clear and accessible manner, while the researched should give their unconstrained consent (Janani, 2018). Moreover, the researcher should maintain the privacy and anonymity of its participants at all times. What happens with the achieved data will thus be communicated clearly with the participants (Cloke et al., 2000). Third, negative consequences should be avoided. The participants might experience an obligation to participate in the research due to their vulnerable circumstances or their ties to the Salvation Army (Runnels et al., 2009). Therefore the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized with assurance that their decision will not affect either services or support they receive. Lastly, the researcher demonstrated sensitivity to the rights, beliefs and cultural context of the individuals being studied, as well as their position within patriarchal power relations.

In short, (engaged) reflection and openness are the significant pillars of an ethical just research. The researcher utilized a research diary to conduct reflexivity throughout the study. This approach enables a continuous reflection on the research process, allowing the researcher to critically examine their own biases, assumptions and influences on the data collection and analysis. This practice of reflexivity enhances the credibility and depth of the research findings by ensuring a more transparent and self-aware methodology. Keeping this in mind as well as working together instead of working on the target group ensured a positive and respectful research.

### **3.6 Summary of Methodology**

In this research, qualitative methods were employed using narrative interviewing and observations. Six respondents participated in in-depth narrative interviews, and approximately 170 hours of observations, including informal conversations with the target group, were conducted. The interpretivist approach was adopted to understand the personal and social experiences of homeless individuals, emphasizing the subjective nature of their experiences.

Narrative interviewing was crucial for capturing respondents' stories and experiences, creating a safe space for authentic conversations. This method's adaptability to different cultural norms allowed for in-depth responses and fostered trust. Although the goal was to conduct three interviews per participant, logistical challenges led to fewer interviews, supplemented by brief conversations with additional respondents. Observations at the Salvation Army day centre and during the soup bicycle initiative provided insights into the spatial behaviours, daily routines and social interactions of the respondents, complementing the narrative interviews and offering a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Participants were recruited through volunteer work at the Salvation Army in Utrecht, with informed consent and anonymity ensured. Data was recorded through field notes and a research diary, and narrative analysis was used to interpret the stories and experiences shared by the respondents. Potential limitations included language barriers, researcher positionality, and reliance on the Salvation Army for participant recruitment. Ethical considerations focused on informed consent, privacy, and the voluntary nature of participation, ensuring a respectful and transparent research process.

The comprehensive qualitative methods used in this research have provided a rich dataset capturing the nuanced experiences of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht. The following results section will present key findings, highlighting the spatial behaviour and personal narratives of the respondents, offering detailed insights into their daily lives and challenges, illustrated through vignettes, paraphrased narratives and visual representations.

## 4. Results

The aim of this study is to characterize, analyse and document the spatial behaviour of homeless EU migrants in Utrecht and their subjective experiences of the urban environment. The results in this chapter are structured to address each subquestion sequentially. Initially, the chapter outlines the general spatial patterns observed among the homeless migrant population, highlighting key areas of activity and avoidance within the city landscape in chapter 4.1. Following this, the influences of various factors on these spatial behaviours are analysed. Lastly, the homeless' subjective experiences of the urban environment are explored through analysing their narratives.

### 4.1 Spatial Behaviour

*What is the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

The research indicates that homeless individuals in Utrecht do not adhere to a structured spatial pattern. Instead, their mobility is characterized as flexible and dynamic, with certain anchor points which vary per person. The location of the Salvation Army in the city centre is an example which five out of six respondents visit frequently. Other anchor points are for example parks, popular (temporary) places to sleep or supermarkets. However, their daily movements generally vary widely, as well per person as per day. Homeless individuals in Utrecht exhibit a high degree of mobility, while often being concentrated in and around the city centre. The neighbourhoods located far outside the city centre are seldom or never visited by the respondents, whereas observations have shown that this is indeed the case for Dutch homeless individuals. The behaviour of respondents is influenced by factors like resource availability, personal safety, weather conditions and social networks. This flexibility enables them to adjust to the changing urban landscape and the distribution of resources. Locations like the Salvation Army serve as crucial anchor points providing meals, shelter and social support, which not only attract regular visits but also lend a semblance of stability and routine to their otherwise unpredictable lives.

There are times when patterns of consistency in (sleeping) locations emerge, potentially due to safety, comfort, familiarity with the area or the presence of a community with other homeless individuals. Such consistency may also indicate periods of reduced mobility due to health issues or adverse weather conditions. However, the daily life of a homeless person in Utrecht remains largely unpredictable, with each day significantly different from the last, shaped by immediate needs, interactions or actions by local authorities. This daily variability underscores the complexity of homelessness as a social issue, where stability is fleeting and each day presents new challenges. Ivan's story provides a clear illustration of the inconsistency in the daily routines of the respondents.

**Ivan:** *I walk around a lot during the day, covering quite a bit of ground as I move through different parts of the city. Typically, my day begins early, often just after dawn, because sleeping outside means I wake up with the sunrise. Usually, I start the day by walking around. Walking keeps me busy and helps distract my mind. Walking the same route every time gets very monotonous, so I often just wander. Lately, I often start from Moreelsepark because I often sleep there now. If I find some cans or bottles, I look for a nearby supermarket to return them. It depends on where I am at the time, as I have quite a bit of time to kill between waking up and the Salvation Army opening. In the afternoons, I often stay at the Salvation Army for a while but not usually the whole day, depending on the weather. If the weather is nice, I might*

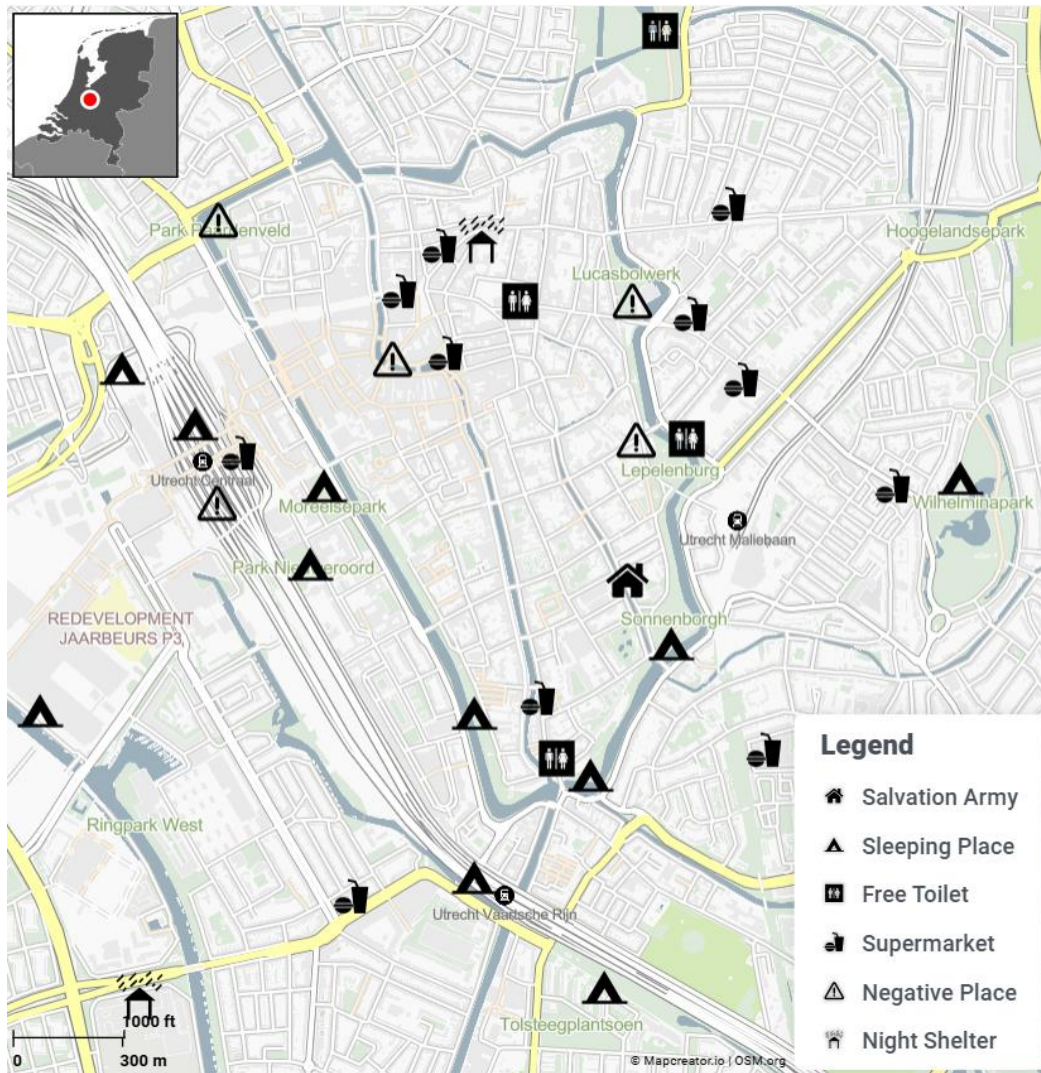
*sit in a park, by the Singel, or just keep walking. It doesn't really matter what I do or where I go each day; I don't see myself getting a job anytime soon, so I have all the time in the world.*

Observations indicate that homeless individuals who have formed a social group within the population appear to have slightly more structure in their spatial behaviour compared to those who are often alone. Groups of homeless individuals, such as several Polish individuals, tend to frequent the same locations for extended periods. A possible explanation for this is that they cannot easily contact each other and are therefore dependent on standard meeting places.

Furthermore, the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals in Utrecht varies significantly between day and night. During the day, respondents frequently visit anchor points and search for resources. These locations offer essential services like food, showers and social support, structuring their daytime routines. At night, the focus shifts to finding safe, secluded sleeping spots, often away from the city centre. Chapter 4.2 will elaborate on this further. This nocturnal movement highlights their need for security and reduced visibility, contrasting with the more resource-driven daytime behaviour. This spatial temporality is influenced not only by different times of the day but also by weekly, seasonal and event-based variations.

Due to the flexible nature of the respondents' mobility, it was rarely sensible to create a mental map of the city that showed frequently used routes. However, to provide an illustration of the spatial behaviour of the homeless, a map of the city centre was created based on interviews and personal observations, highlighting locations that are often visited or important, see figure 4.1 on the next page. An important consideration is that the map is far from complete and, for instance, does not show the sleeping locations of all homeless EU-migrants as well as there are many homeless who change sleeping location frequently. However, the map does include sleeping places which where (frequently) used by the respondents. Additionally, the usage of the mapped locations varies greatly among individuals and some locations utilized by individuals are situated further outside the city centre and therefore are not included on the map.

Figure 4.1: Relevant Locations in Utrecht.



Source: Compiled by author, based on interviews and observations.

The map above shows that the Salvation Army is located in the city centre. During the day, respondents are often found there and frequently move around the vicinity. Supermarkets, scattered across the city, are recurrent points where the homeless return for returning bottles and cans, and to generate resources. Furthermore, there are few free public restrooms in the city, forcing respondents to urinate in the open, posing associated risks. In the evening, the spatial pattern becomes more dispersed, as indicated by the respondents' sleeping places. The city centre is avoided and quiet locations such as parks are sought out.

The negative places marked on the map include, firstly, Utrecht Central Station. Here, the homeless generally feel unwelcome due to other visitors or are chased away by the police, although attempts are occasionally made to find a sleeping spot in or around the station. The second place is Park Paardenveld, located next to the police station, and therefore avoided. The popular street Oude Gracht in the city centre is also avoided due to its busyness. Park Lucasbolwerk in the eastern part of the centre is avoided because the municipality has imposed a ban on homelessness and gatherings there. Finally, Park Lepelenburg is a location with mixed perceptions. It has one of the few public restrooms that is always open and is visited by some people from the target group, while others avoid it due to unpleasant experiences with other groups of homeless individuals.

## 4.2 Influence on Spatial Behaviour

*To what extent do exclusion, social interactions, the availability of shelter and resource generation influence the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

### 4.2.1 Shelter, Social Interactions and Resource Generation

The findings indicate that shelters like the Salvation Army which provide day centres with essential services such as free food, drinks, showers and clothing among other things, are pivotal in organizing the daily routines of the homeless. Respondents frequently structure their day around the availability of these services, often visiting these centres multiple times to meet their basic needs and to find a temporary refuge. Five out of six respondents visit the Salvation Army at least once a day, while observations indicate that a substantial group of Eastern European migrants visit the day shelter daily or almost daily. The distribution of free food is a significant motivating factor for many of these individuals. These findings underline existing literature by Bergamaschi, Castrigagnò & Rubertis (2014) which stated that shelters influence spatial behaviour and are places to which the homeless often return.

*I can't and shouldn't ignore the services provided here. I need the free food to feel energized throughout the day, as Jakub stated. Stefan shared, I usually come here in the morning for some food and return in the afternoon for more. In between, I like to relax and walk around the neighbourhood.* As mentioned in Chapter 3.4, this section utilizes paraphrases rather than direct quotes.

Jolley (2020) stated that the proximity of shelters directly impacts their decisions regarding relocation and settlement, which is partly true. During and around opening times of shelter, the respondents often tend to remain in close proximity to the facilities. However, this is not the case at other times, when places that are not close to the shelter are specifically sought out. Martini (2021) described the negative consequences, like heightened visibility and stigmatization, for the homeless due to clustering close to places like the Salvation Army. As shown by Stefans following story, respondents tend to avoid such places at night. Stefans story is representative of the group of respondents:

**Stefan:** *During the day, I am mostly found in the city centre. Naturally, it's close to the Salvation Army, where I go for something to eat in the morning. Some days I stay there longer and other days shorter. If I only stay there for a short time, I often come back later that afternoon for more food or drink. Yes, I often stay near the Salvation Army during the day, but only during its opening hours. In the evening, when I'm looking for a place to sleep, I prefer to stay away from the Salvation Army and actually the city centre. To find a suitable sleeping spot, it's better to look on the edge of the Singel or even beyond. I do this to minimize the risk of being seen, sent away or worse.*

Despite the primary utility of these centres for resource acquisition, they also emerge as crucial sites for developing and maintaining social relationships. These interactions, however, are predominantly with staff rather than other homeless individuals, due to language barriers and trust issues that limit deeper community bonds.

*I visit the Salvation Army because the people understand my situation and offer support without judgment, as said by Gregor. It's always nice to talk to some of the staff. I really appreciate their help, Stanis explained. These findings comply with existing knowledge, which states that the homeless often choose places where they feel accepted (Bell & Walsh, 2015).*

Other respondents highlighted the social divide inside the shelters: *No, it's not for me. Look around. There, the Polish group, there some Arabs, and of course the Dutch*, as stated by Dimitar, who also stated that the language barrier often makes it impossible for him to build a social network within the Salvation Army. The lack of contact is a reason for him to only visit shortly for the necessary resources. Another example is Gregor, who indicated: *I don't trust many other homeless, but some are nice, and Like I said, I prefer talking to the people working then the other homeless*. The social divide within the homeless population is not clearly reflected in the existing literature. Existing literature on exclusion primarily focuses on being marginalized, whereas it is evident that homeless individuals also consciously position themselves outside the group within the community. This self-exclusion has an important impact on spatial behaviour as it causes the respondents to avoid places where certain people reside. Respondents also tend to avoid other homeless individuals outside of shelters. It often appears that a hostile or grim atmosphere emerges, making them feel uncomfortable in places such as parks where groups of homeless people congregate.

Ivan explains, *At night, at some popular parks, I don't like being there. Many times many of them are aggressive or under influence, drunk. Then I prefer to sit alone somewhere else*, while Stefan describes a distinction between indoor and outdoor environments: *I don't trust most of the other homeless. In here it is okay, but life is different when back on the streets*. This division among the homeless population has also become evident during personal observations. During the observations, it quickly became evident that there were both many small groups within the target population as well as individuals who remained alone. For several migrants, the language barrier was a significant reason for this. Additionally, migrant groups of friends within the Salvation Army were not always equally accessible to both staff and other homeless individuals. These groups consistently congregated in the same corner with the same people, without much interaction with others. Salvation Army staff noted that even within these groups, conflicts often arose and persisted due to mutual dependency: the homeless form groups to share resources and knowledge. Furthermore, brief conversations with both staff and homeless individuals revealed that the atmosphere on the streets greatly differs from that within the shelter. Drunkenness, fights and distrust are much more common on the streets, often harming relationships within the population.

Language barriers, internal conflicts and mistrust cause many homeless individuals to live in isolation within the community. The concepts of trust and mistrust are frequently discussed in existing literature regarding the relationships between homeless individuals and service providers or police officers (Irestig et al., 2010; Zakrisson, Hamel & Wrang, 2004). However, these concepts are less commonly examined in studies focusing on social relationships within the homeless population. There are groups of homeless individuals who speak the same language and exhibit a sense of group cohesion: they consistently seek each other out and appear to be friends. However, this group formation leads to loneliness among other homeless individuals. Homeless individuals who have minimal contact with other homeless individuals appear to make different spatial choices compared to those who do engage in such interactions: they are more likely to avoid places to steer clear of other homeless people outside of shelters. Of the six respondents, five reported often actively avoiding other (groups of) homeless individuals. Nonetheless, the social contact offered by the shelter remains highly valuable for these respondents; both the (often minimal) contact with other homeless individuals and the interaction with staff contribute to their continued visits to the shelter during the day.

Night shelter is not provided by the Salvation Army but by independent organizations. However, in Utrecht, the number of available spots is very limited and EU-migrants often do not have access to them. Consequently, the majority of EU-migrants end up sleeping on the streets. Only one out of six respondents is currently using night shelter. He leaves the shelter early in the morning and often returns to the city centre to spend the day. He described his routine:

**Dimitar:** *I don't like the night shelter; people are not always so nice. I usually go there at the time I go to sleep and leave early in the morning. The atmosphere is not always pleasant, so I prefer to spend as much time as possible outside. Nearby is Transwijk Park, which I visit often and enjoy. Additionally, I spend most of my time in the city centre to get some food or find a job. These two activities generally fill my days. I walk around a lot, but besides the park and the Salvation Army, there are no specific places or routes that I frequently visit.*

Ivan and Stanis add to Dimitar's story: they both tried night shelters in the past but they both experienced tensions and troubles with other homeless people. These findings are consistent with existing literature that describes a nuanced relationship between negative experiences (such as those at shelters) and spatial behaviour, wherein negative experiences lead to the avoidance of certain locations (Daya & Wilkins, 2013; Fahnoe, 2018).

Resource generation extends beyond the confines of shelters, with all respondents engaging in collecting cans and bottles for deposit returns. This activity not only provides a small income but also influences their movements across the city: *I need the money for a beer or some extra food, so it's okay, and it kills time. You can understand that I know the city very well now*, Jakub remarked. Stefan said: *Yes, for me searching for cans to get some money is very important in choosing where to go. I can always use some extra money*, underlining the importance of the survival strategies employed. During observations, it also became clear that collecting and returning bottles and cans plays a significant role in shaping spatial behaviour. Any opportunity to earn deposit money is seized by individuals from the target group. It appears to be the easiest way for them to obtain money and they feel less ashamed collecting deposits than begging. Homeless individuals often arrive with a few cans or even bags full. Later in the day, they go to a supermarket to return them.

Some homeless persons are targeting specific hotspots like parks, while others wander more randomly. Random wandering while avoiding possible hotspot is a strategy which is not described in existing literature, while it creates a clearly different spatial pattern than targeting hotspots does. These strategies also vary during events in and around the city. Some homeless individuals, for example, seek out sports matches of FC Utrecht and events such as city marathons and King's Day to collect deposit bottles and cans, as these are places where relatively more money can be earned. However, it appears that a portion of the homeless population avoids these locations because they fear being easily recognized as homeless and not being accepted by the crowd.

#### 4.2.2 Exclusion

The phenomenon of exclusion significantly shapes the spatial behaviour of the respondents in this study. As stated in chapter 4.2.1 homeless individuals consciously position themselves outside of community groups. Existing literature primarily discusses exclusion in terms of being marginalized by society, which has a significant effect on the respondents behaviour as well. Exclusion profoundly impacts their movement and choices of locations within the urban environment, as well during the day as during the night.

*During the day, I avoid crowded places. I often feel out of place there and sometimes even encounter hostility, Ivan said, while Dimitar adds: I often feel invisible. People look through me, and sometimes worse, they treat me with disdain. I feel excluded almost everywhere that isn't specifically for the homeless.*

It is not always the case that homeless individuals are actually unwelcome, but they often feel this way. Only one of the six respondents never feels excluded, although he does feel that he is occasionally given strange looks. Conversations with three other respondents also revealed that they often feel excluded. Overall, this leads homeless individuals to avoid certain places in the city, though these places vary per respondent, as negative places can arise from personal experiences (Fahnoe, 2018). The findings corroborate existing knowledge, which shows that homeless individuals often do not feel accepted by other city users and avoid places due to this social exclusion (Bower, Conroy & Perz, 2017; Gibbeson, 2020). An interesting finding is the difference in how respondents perceive exclusion during the day versus at night, as evidenced by Stanis' story:

**Stanis:** *During the day, I often feel different from 'normal' people. I get stared at and it's clear that I'm not welcome everywhere, and thus I don't feel welcome. Even though I appear well-groomed, it's obvious that I'm homeless because I always carry these two bags and my sleeping bag with me. However, one advantage of the day is the high level of social control. I've gotten used to people not wanting me around, but during the day, they don't act on it much. As a result, I can pretty much go wherever I want during the day without being explicitly sent away or worse.*

*At night, I experience this very differently. I look for secluded and sheltered places to sleep. The lack of social control at night increases my fear of being attacked in the dark. I've encountered drunk people with bad intentions more than once. Even people without bad intentions exclude me more at night than during the day. I am frequently driven away from sleeping spots and have to keep moving. Therefore, it's better to stay in the quietest possible neighbourhood outside the city centre at night.*

The story is similar to those of the other respondents. All respondents who sleep outside generally try to do so outside the city centre or at its borders, because they are otherwise afraid of being sent away, either by the police or by bystanders. Additionally, four respondents describe that exclusion has a significant negative impact on their sleeping patterns, with poor sleep affecting their outlook on the future, as described by Gregor: *How can I find a job and work if I can't even get enough sleep at night?* Finding (or looking for) a job is a crucial theme in the lives of all respondents. While sleep plays an important role in this issue, it is also essential for the homeless to appear clean and well-groomed if they want to secure employment.

### 4.2.3 Personal Care

The availability of personal care facilities, such as toilets and showers, significantly influences the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals. Access to these essential services impacts not only their daily movements and choices of locations within the city, but also their physical and mental well-being. Personal care facilities for the homeless are scarce and unevenly distributed throughout the city, and respondents do not always know where to find them. Shelters like the Salvation Army provide some access to showers and toilets, but their availability is limited to specific hours. Two respondents claim that their life and routine are largely determined by staying near restroom facilities, as Jakub explains:

**Jakub:** *Dixies (portable toilets) and other facilities largely determine where I spend my time. During the day, I can obviously use the facilities at the Salvation Army, but there are also 16 hours in the day when it is closed. I always take into account whether there is a place nearby to relieve myself. I often try to use public restrooms, but they are often extremely dirty and, for example, there is always a group of homeless people at Park Lepelenburg that I avoid. At night, it is even more difficult since the places where public restrooms are located are not suitable for sleeping.*

Three of the four other respondents concur that they regularly have difficulty finding an appropriate place. Public urination is not always an option due to the fear of receiving a fine, but it is sometimes necessary, as Stefan explains: *When I have to go, I have to go. It's as simple as that. I don't have the convenience of being able to use a bathroom at home, and constantly walking into a restaurant or bar isn't appreciated either.* It appears that the fear of being judged or confronted when attempting to use facilities in public spaces leads to avoidance behaviour, which crucially influences the respondents' spatial behaviour within the city. Furthermore, all respondents agree that the availability of public toilets is insufficient. For example, there are a few so-called toilet lifts that rise from and retract into the ground, but these are not always accessible. Additionally, the public toilet in Park Lepelenburg is sometimes avoided by respondents due to other homeless individuals and addicts who frequent the area and cause disturbances.

The availability of personal care directly impacts health and hygiene. Poor hygiene can lead to increased health issues, making it necessary for individuals to stay closer to medical facilities or places where they can clean themselves regularly. During observations, the importance of personal care was also clearly evident. Individuals from the target group frequently utilized the free showers and collected clean clothing. There were also instances of homeless individuals visiting the shelter briefly just to use the toilet. The researcher once engaged in a conversation about this with a Polish man who was only inside for a short time. It emerged that the toilets in the nearby park were extremely dirty, leaving him with no choice but to return to the shelter. These examples suggest that the spatial behaviour of the homeless is often compelled by the availability of facilities for washing and toilet use. Stanis highlights the importance and influence of personal care on his day:

**Stanis:** *Where to pee, poo, eat and wash myself? In the morning, the first thing I do is find a place to wash myself a little, at least my face. It is very important for me to be somewhat clean and to present myself decently. Firstly, it makes me feel comfortable, but also, if you look dirty, people tend to treat you more like a homeless person. Therefore, I try to look neat and clean. Unfortunately, this is not always possible since there are few opportunities for me to wash myself. During the day, I can go to the Salvation Army, but after that, there aren't many*

*options; I often visit public taps to freshen up a bit. I spend a lot of time on this, partly with a view to looking for a job. If I don't look decent, I won't be hired anywhere.*

Cleanliness affects how homeless individuals are perceived by others, which can either mitigate or exacerbate feelings of exclusion. Those who have regular access to showers and toilets at facilities like the Salvation Army are likely to experience less social stigma and, consequently, less avoidance behaviour. Conversely, the inability to maintain personal hygiene can lead to greater social exclusion, further isolating individuals, impacting their spatial behaviour and the search for more stable living conditions.

The importance and influence of personal care as described in this chapter are supported by existing research by Leibler et al. (2017), which highlights that homeless individuals experience significant barriers to self-care and personal hygiene. These results further add that these barriers play a leading role in the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals.

### 4.3 Experience

*How do the homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht experience the urban environment?*

Homeless EU migrants frequently encounter substantial difficulties in securing stable and safe shelter within urban settings. Many report that formal shelters are often overcrowded and impose restrictive entry requirements, which many migrants do not possess. Observations also indicate that there are insufficient places for homeless individuals to stay overnight. The situation is particularly dire for EU migrants, who often do not have the right to overnight accommodation. They can only access temporary extra shelters in cases of freezing weather conditions. Once the cold weather subsides, however, they are forced back onto the streets. As a result, they are compelled to rely on informal or temporary accommodations, such as sleeping in public spaces. These alternatives are not only uncomfortable but also expose them to adverse weather conditions, health risks and vulnerability to crime. The necessity of sleeping outdoors daily takes a significant toll on both the physical and mental health of the respondents, who express a pervasive sense of constant insecurity and instability due to their precarious living conditions. Lacking adequate shelter, combined with experiences of exclusion and discrimination, significantly diminishes their future prospects. The pervasive sense of exclusion not only hampers their ability to integrate but also adversely impacts their mental health and overall well-being. The overall life experience of the respondents in urban environments is characterized by a relentless struggle for survival amidst adversity. Their lives are marked by instability, exclusion and marginalization, yet they demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. All respondents express a profound sense of loss and disappointment, having migrated to urban centres with hopes of better opportunities, only to confront harsh realities.

*Being homeless is a full-time job*, Stefan says, visibly displeased. It proves to be an exhausting and monotonous process. A significant part of the day, respondents are occupied with obtaining food, earning money, maintaining personal hygiene and relocating. Meanwhile, their social circles are insufficient and they face exclusion from the wider community. These findings align with existing literature by O'Neill (2017) and Marshall et al. (2020), which indicate that the repetitive nature of seeking basic needs, combined with social isolation, severely impacts the overall mental and emotional well-being of the homeless. Two concepts recurrent in the literature are loneliness and boredom, both of which play a crucial role in the daily lives of the respondents. Ivan and Dimitar discuss feelings of loneliness and boredom, experiences echoed by all respondents.

**Ivan:** *I do not have many social contacts, and as a result, I often feel lonely. I often feel isolated. It makes the city feel like a hostile place, despite the kindness of some. Yes, I am bored a lot. Being alone is not easy all the time. I have some friends in Zwolle but I almost never see them; we sometimes speak on the phone. To kill time I walk around a lot through the city. I like music, so often I just walk around for hours and listen to music. I never check the time because I feel like time moves much slower when I know what time it is.*

**Dimitar:** *I find Utrecht a beautiful and peaceful city. On a good day, I can really enjoy the parks and the city centre. Currently, I have only one goal: to find a job. That is what occupies me all day, and I don't have much else to do. Without a job, loneliness often takes over, and I lack a sense of purpose in life. My brother also lives somewhere in Utrecht, but I never speak to him. I don't really have friends.*

Both interviews and personal observations, along with brief conversations, have revealed that boredom is a recurring theme among the homeless population. There are various ways in which homeless individuals cope with this boredom, such as walking extensively, attempting to collect money or simply sitting somewhere. Additionally, it is common for individuals to resort to

alcohol or drugs out of boredom. Being under the influence appears to be a favoured method for many within this population to pass the time and improve their mood. Consequently, life in the city for this group of people is characterized by the pursuit of basic needs, alongside feelings of loneliness and boredom.

Furthermore, this research aimed to identify locations where respondents indicated a sense of place attachment, or a feeling of connection to certain places in the city. It appears that place attachment in the context of homelessness is not a relevant concept. All six respondents reported that there are no places in the city where they feel genuinely connected. The reason they return to certain places is more practical; these locations serve a specific purpose for them. For instance, a spot in a park or by the water is often visited because it is quiet, a sleeping place is chosen because it is inconspicuous and less frequented by the police, or the Salvation Army is visited to meet basic needs. Repeatedly returning to such places does not result in any meaningful attachment to them.

Although respondents report that there are no places with which they feel a significant attachment, certain forms of place attachment nonetheless prove to be relevant in their lives. Observations and responses to questions not explicitly related to place attachment indicate that the day shelter provided by the Salvation Army offers a safe environment where respondents and other visitors feel accepted. These characteristics align with the concept of a "secure place" as described in chapter 2.1.3. Additionally, the Salvation Army also functions as a "restorative place", which enhances health. Conversations revealed that the resources and services available during day shelter are essential for maintaining sufficient energy throughout the day. Furthermore, for some of the target group, socializing places such as parks or the day shelter are relevant.

These findings provide crucial insights into the daily lives and coping strategies of the respondents. However, to fully understand the implications of these behaviours and experiences, and the underlying reasons behind them, a deeper analysis is necessary. The following discussion and conclusion chapter will interpret these results in the context of existing literature, explore their broader implications and suggest potential avenues for policy and practice to support this vulnerable population.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

This concluding chapter begins by addressing the sub-questions formulated in the introduction. The answers to these sub-questions are then utilized to address the main research question. Following this, the chapter includes sections for methodological and personal reflections, and concludes with policy implications.

### 5.1 Sub-questions

#### 5.1.1 Spatial Behaviour

*What is the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

The research reveals that the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals in Utrecht is characterized by its lack of a structured pattern and high degree of flexibility and dynamism. Instead of following a fixed routine, homeless individuals navigate the city using various anchor points, such as the Salvation Army, parks, temporary sleeping spots and supermarkets. These conclusions align with the expectations based on the concept of spatial entrapment around facilities and resources, as described by Kerr (2019) and Hall and Smith (2013). The anchor points provide essential resources and support, creating a semblance of stability amidst their otherwise unpredictable lives. This study highlights the considerable mobility exhibited by the homeless population, driven by factors such as resource availability, personal safety, weather conditions and social networks. This flexibility allows them to adapt to the changing urban landscape and the distribution of resources. These findings align with research by Snow & Anderson (1993), who highlight that resources play an important role the mobility of the homeless. Although some consistency in sleeping locations can emerge due to safety, comfort or health issues, their daily movements are largely unpredictable, shaped by immediate needs, external interaction and temporalities.

In conclusion, it appears that the mobility of homeless individuals does not need to be efficient and often even is preferably inefficient in many cases. This alternative interpretation of mobility results in significant differences in their movement patterns compared to other city users. In general, the spatial patterns of other city users exhibit regularity (Liu et al., 2009) and efficiency (Zhou & Peng, 2020; Zhou, Yang & Deng, 2010). Additionally, the temporality of their spatial behaviour makes it challenging to create a comprehensive map of their movements. The findings underscore the complexity of homelessness as a social issue, characterized by fleeting stability and daily challenges. Future research should adopt a more nuanced approach to map their spatial behaviour accurately. This could involve the use of GPS trackers to specifically capture their movements and longitudinal studies to capture temporal variations. This allows for the identification of potential seasonal patterns, enabling adjustments to be made to address the varying needs of individuals within the target population.

### **5.1.2 Influences on Spatial Behaviour**

*To what extent do exclusion, social interactions, shelter and resource generation influence the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

The research confirmed that the spatial behaviour of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht is profoundly influenced by a complex interplay of factors including exclusion, social interactions, shelter availability and resource generation. Homeless individuals often navigate the city based on these elements, which shape their daily routines and interactions within the urban landscape.

Exclusion significantly influences the movement patterns of homeless individuals. The fear of being judged or confronted often leads them to avoid certain areas during the day and seek secluded places at night to minimize the risk of being sent away or attacked. This behaviour highlights the broader societal issue of stigma and marginalization faced by homeless populations. These findings align with existing literature concerning social exclusion (Fahnoe, 2018; Pleace, 1998) and exclusion by authorities such as police (Rudin, 2018). However, physical exclusion does not play a substantial role in the life of the respondents, which contradicts prior research (Griffen, 2013; Nissen, 2008; Rosenberger, 2020).

Furthermore, current research has established that exclusion occurs predominantly from non-homeless individuals towards the homeless (Bower, Conroy & Perz, 2017; Van Straaten et al., 2018). However, this study reveals that exclusion also exists within the homeless population. There are instances of group formation, bonding and friendship among the homeless, but there is also evident exclusion, conflict and mistrust. Exclusion occurs in two ways: first, through individuals being marginalized by others, and second, through self-exclusion. This study provides limited insights into the prevalence of these forms of exclusion within the population and their impact. Further research could focus on these forms of exclusion and the relationships within the target group to provide a clearer understanding of their complicated social relations.

Being excluded from other homeless people is a part of the social interactions in the lives of some homeless. Social interactions among homeless individuals significantly influence their spatial behaviour and day-to-day experiences. These interactions encompass engagements with peers in public spaces, seeking assistance from organizations and forming networks and support systems. Such interactions impact decision-making about where to reside. Shelters like the Salvation Army play a pivotal role in facilitating these interactions by providing a space for socialization and support, partly because the homeless feel accepted there. These outcomes conform to existing studies by Alessandretti, Lehmann & Baronchelli (2018), Bell & Walsh and Proulx et al. (2016). However, language barriers and trust issues often limit deeper bonds within the homeless community, leading to a preference for interactions with staff over peers. This dynamic underscores the importance of supportive social networks in shaping the spatial behaviour and daily routines of homeless individuals. These findings may be explained by the fact that the respondents generally appeared to be lonelier than average within the target group, based on the fact that all respondents do not have much contact with other homeless individuals. Consequently, the presence and influence of social interactions might have a completely different impact on their lives compared to other homeless individuals.

For the respondents, social interactions primarily occur within and around the Salvation Army, confirming the interconnectedness of these concepts. The availability of shelter furthermore is a critical factor influencing the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals. Shelters provide essential services such as food, showers and temporary refuge, significantly impacting their daily movements and choices of locations, as previously indicated by

Bergamaschi, Castrigagnò & Rubertis (2014). Many homeless individuals structure their day around the availability of these services. However, the atmosphere within shelters can sometimes deter prolonged stays, with individuals often seeking quieter, more secluded areas for nighttime shelter. Negative experiences also appear to play a significant role in the decision to seek official shelter or not, which aligns with existing literature (Daya & Wilkins, 2013; Fahnoe, 2018). The layout and distribution of shelters within the urban environment thus play a crucial role in shaping the movement patterns and spatial decisions of homeless populations.

Resource generation, including income and food acquisition, profoundly impacts the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals. Common income-generating activities like collecting deposit bottles and panhandling necessitate movement across the city to areas with high foot traffic or commercial activity, which is consistent with previous research (Reinhard & Palys, 2021). As described by Lee, Tyler and Wright (2010), events and gatherings also influence these movements, as some individuals seek out such locations for better income opportunities. However, these results add that some of the homeless avoid places and moments where a large number of individuals gather to minimize recognition and potential stigma. Food generation through services like soup kitchens or soliciting from acquaintances also dictates daily routes and locations frequented by homeless individuals. This dynamic highlights the intricate relationship between survival strategies and spatial behaviour within the urban environment. These outcomes are consistent with prior research in the field (Dachner & Tarasuk; Reinhard & Palys, 2021).

In summary, the four concepts cannot be viewed in isolation, as they influence each other and often overlap. However, it is clear that resource generation plays the most significant role in shaping spatial behaviour. The respondents shape their lives and behaviour primarily around the acquisition of basic necessities. The extent to which each concept impacts an individual varies among homeless persons, underscoring the complexity of the motivations behind their spatial behaviour. The influences of personal care facilities and boredom on spatial behaviour are less or not present in existing literature, although they appear to play an important role. This will be further elaborated upon in chapter 5.2 when addressing the main research question.

### 5.1.3 Experience

*How do the homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht experience the urban environment?*

Homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht experience the urban environment as a landscape of profound challenges and relentless adversity. Their daily lives are shaped by a constant struggle for basic necessities, compounded by a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability. The difficulty in securing stable and safe shelter is a significant issue, with formal shelters often overcrowded and requiring identification or proof of residency—documents many migrants do not possess. Consequently, many are forced to sleep in public spaces, exposing them to harsh weather conditions, health risks and crime. This precarious living situation takes a considerable toll on their physical and mental health. Exclusion and discrimination further diminish their future prospects and ability to integrate into society. The sense of marginalization adversely impacts their mental health and overall well-being, creating a vicious cycle of instability and insecurity. Despite their resilience and resourcefulness, many migrants express a profound sense of loss and disappointment, having moved to urban centres with hopes of better opportunities only to face harsh realities.

The daily lives of these individuals are occupied with securing food, earning money, maintaining personal hygiene and constantly relocating. This exhausting and monotonous routine leaves little room for meaningful social interactions. Social isolation is a recurrent theme, with many experiencing feelings of loneliness and boredom. For instance, Ivan describes feeling isolated and perceiving the city as a hostile place despite occasional kindness from others. Similarly, Dimitar speaks of his days being dominated by the search for employment, with loneliness often overshadowing his existence due to the lack of social connections. To cope with boredom, many homeless individuals resort to walking, collecting money or using substances like alcohol or drugs. This behaviour highlights the profound impact of social isolation on their mental and emotional well-being. The pursuit of basic needs dominates their daily lives, overshadowed by feelings of loneliness and boredom. These conclusions reflect existing research which describes the presence and importance of loneliness and boredom, and the overall lack of mental and emotional well-being (Bower, Conroy & Perz, 2017; Marshall et al., 2020, O'Neill, 2014).

The concept of place attachment is largely irrelevant to this group, which contradicts existing studies by Haughton (2020). The respondents indicated no genuine connection to any particular place in the city. Their return to specific locations is purely practical—these places serve essential functions, such as providing quiet spots, inconspicuous sleeping locations or basic services at the Salvation Army. This practical use of space, rather than emotional attachment, underscores the transient and utilitarian nature of their existence in the urban environment. It appears that the respondents do not experience a sense of attachment, which contradicts existing literature (Vandemark, 2007). However, two forms of place attachment identified by Smith (2018)—a secure place and a restorative place—do seem to be present. This suggests that respondents have a different perception of attachment than what is described in the literature. The respondents use these places as anchor points, as described in studies by Perera (2020). Further research could explore the various forms of attachment and the roles they play in the lives of homeless individuals and the influence it has on spatial behaviour, as the respondents in this study could only convey their own perceptions of place attachment. For context, it would be useful to know how long the homeless individuals have been in Utrecht or the Netherlands. It is possible that individuals who have been in Utrecht for a longer period feel more connected to certain places; an aspect on which future research could focus.

## **5.2 Research Question and Conceptual Model**

### **5.2.1 Answer to Research Question**

The previously discussed sub-questions have been used to address the main research question: *How does the urban environment influence the spatial behaviour and day-to-day experience of homeless EU-migrants in Utrecht?*

In conclusion, the urban environment plays a significant role in shaping both the spatial behaviour and the daily experiences of homeless EU-migrants. The urban environment encompasses various factors, opportunities and constraints that daily impact the lives of the homeless. The results of this study demonstrate that Utrecht's urban environment serves as both a resource and a barrier for homeless EU-migrants. The availability and distribution of services, public spaces and social dynamics affect how these migrants navigate the city. The research has shown that these influences can vary greatly from person to person, yet there are several commonalities. In addition to exclusion, social interactions, shelter and resource generation, personal hygiene facilities and boredom also play a crucial role in the daily lives of the homeless. These findings address the gap in the literature concerning spatial behaviour as outlined in the scientific relevance section. This study initiates the process of illustrating the various factors that influence the spatial behaviour of homeless individuals.

Personal hygiene, in the context of spatial behaviour, is a topic with limited existing research. Therefore, future research could focus on the availability and accessibility of public restrooms, showers and water points in the city. It is essential to consider the needs of the homeless in such research to propose the most effective policies. Boredom, on the other hand, is a recurring theme in existing literature (Marshall et al., 2020; O'Neill, 2017). This research adds that boredom influences the spatial behaviour of the homeless. The desire to pass the time leads to wandering to random locations, indicating that mobility does not necessarily need to be efficient.

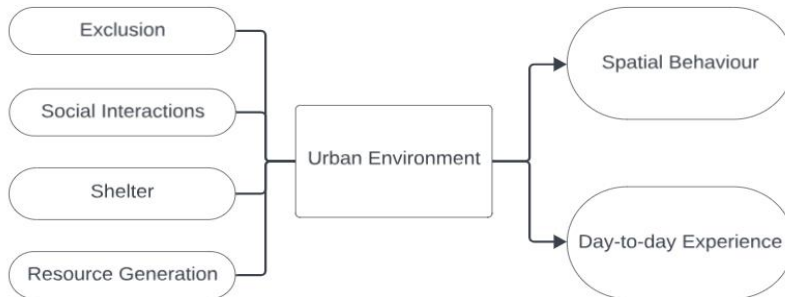
The day-to-day experience of the homeless is characterized by monotony, boredom and often loneliness. Day shelters play a crucial role in mitigating these negative aspects of homeless individuals' lives, especially because life on the streets is starkly different from that in a controlled environment. Due to exclusion, they struggle to participate in daily life. The lack of perspective often leads to an overall experience of homelessness as being aimless. Providing perspective and hope from society could offer a fresh outlook, allowing this group of people to look forward and improve their future prospects. These results contribute to filling the existing gap in knowledge concerning the interplay between the urban environment and personal experiences. Future research should centralize finding solutions to (partly) solve the problems concerning boredom and how to efficiently improve future prospect.

These conclusions underscore the critical role of urban environments in shaping the spatial behaviour and daily experiences of homeless EU-migrants, which will be further clarified in the renewed conceptual model in the following chapter. By highlighting the interplay between urban infrastructure, social services and migrant survival strategies, it calls for a rethinking of urban policies to create more inclusive and equitable cities. In chapter 5.4 the conclusions will be used to suggest policy implications.

### 5.2.2 Revised Conceptual Model

The results of this research have contributed to the conceptual model based on the literature presented in chapter 2.3, which is shown in Figure 5.1. The revised version of the model is presented in figure 5.2, which integrates findings from the study to enhance our understanding of the complex interplay of the discussed concepts.

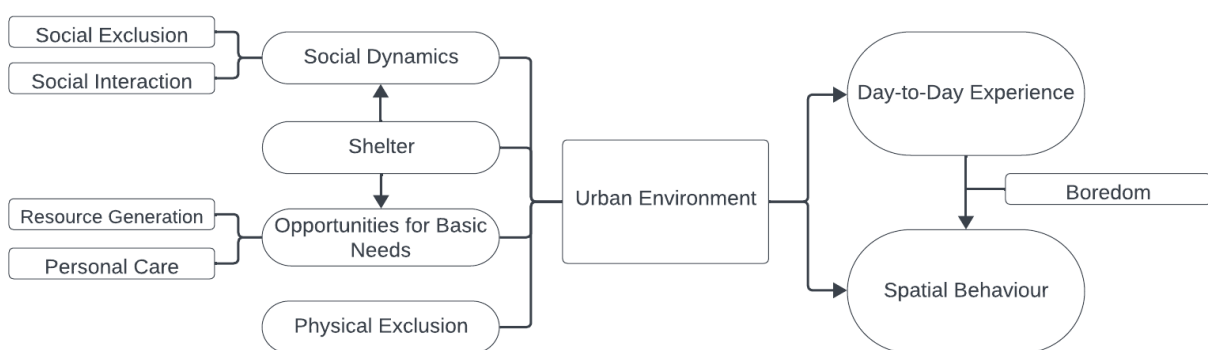
Figure 5.1: Original Conceptual Model



The study has shown that contact with other people cannot be viewed in isolation, and the distinction between exclusion and social interactions cannot be made. Therefore, social exclusion and social interaction have been combined into social dynamics in the new model. The interplay between these social dynamics and shelter is further clarified in this research. It appears that both exclusion and desired interactions largely occur in shelters, making shelters significantly influential on the social dynamics of homeless individuals. Additionally, shelter has a crucial impact on the opportunities that homeless individuals have for meeting their basic needs, for instance, because they can eat, drink and shower there for example.

The initial conceptual model included only resource generation as a component of the search for basic needs; however, the research has shown that personal care plays an important role in the daily lives of the respondents. Social dynamics, shelter and opportunities for basic needs, together with physical exclusion, form the urban environment in the context of homelessness. Although physical exclusion did not emerge as influential regarding spatial behaviour in this research, this form of exclusion may still be impactful in a different context or location, as described in multiple previous studies (Griffin, 2013; Nissen, 2008; Perry, 2013; Rosenberger, 2020; Wyatt, 2022).

Figure 5.2: Revised Conceptual Model



Lastly, the influence of day-to-day experience on spatial behaviour has been added to the model. This research shows that boredom leads homeless individuals to, for example, walk around to pass the time, thus influencing where they go. The impact of other factors of the experience of the target group on spatial behaviour remains unclear. As indicated in chapter 5.1.3, this could be an area for further research.

## **5.3 Reflections on Research Process**

### **5.3.1 Reflection on Research Methods**

The reliability of the research has been sufficiently safeguarded. The use of asking the same core questions during the narrative interviews ensured consistent and structured data, thereby reducing variability in the data collection process that could stem from interviewer bias. To further bolster reliability, this guide was extensively discussed with one of the respondents prior to deployment to ensure that the questions were aptly formulated to address the research questions.

However, the research is not generalizable. The process of recruiting respondents was challenging due to a lack of interest from part of the target group, language barriers and difficulties in integrating into certain groups of homeless individuals as a researcher. Consequently, all respondents were somewhat proficient in English, all male and often appeared relatively isolated, due to a lack of social networks compared to homeless individuals who have formed friend groups. As a result, the interests and experiences of non-English-speaking homeless individuals, those within social groups and females were not adequately represented. Follow-up research could also focus on these unreached groups of homeless individuals. It would be beneficial to speak the same language as the intended respondents. Despite these limitations, this study centres on the personal stories and experiences of the participants, thereby providing valuable insights into the lives of the respondents utilized. These narratives highlight individual experiences and perspectives, contributing critical qualitative data to the field.

As described in chapter 3.2, the conversations did not include questions about the characteristics of the respondents in order to develop a meaningful relationship. It did not seem necessary or appropriate to pose some questions. In hindsight, personal data can provide significant insights into the experience of homelessness and would have been useful to include in the research. Future research can learn from this and aim to create a clear picture. For instance, the duration of homelessness, reason for homelessness, reason for coming to the Netherlands, length of stay in the Netherlands, age and educational background could influence their behaviour and experience.

As a student of urban and cultural geography without direct personal experience of homelessness, the researcher approached this study as an outsider to the community that was researched. This position had its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it helped the researcher to observe and collect data with minimal potential biases associated with personal involvement in the issues at hand. Although the researcher initially had a preconceived notion about the homeless population, which could have influenced the research. However, the initial perception of the target group quickly changed.

On the other hand, the researchers outsider status required extra effort to gain the trust of the homeless population, who might have perceived the researcher as someone unable to fully understand their experiences or who might misrepresent their voices. Upon entering the field, the researcher's primary role was to observe, engage and understand the lives of homeless individuals without influencing their natural behaviours or environments. This delicate balance involved maintaining professional distance while developing sufficient rapport to encourage open and honest communication. The ethical demands of researching a vulnerable group heightened the researchers sensitivity to the potential emotional and psychological impacts his presence and inquiries could have on participants. Throughout the study, the researcher endeavoured to approach the homeless population with respect and humility, acknowledging their expertise on their own lives. He adopted an empathetic listening approach, crucial for building trust and enabling participants to share their stories freely. This method not only enriched the data collected but also underscored his responsibility to authentically and respectfully represent their experiences. Ultimately, it can be stated that trust relationships were established, facilitating an environment in which respondents could narrate their stories

truthfully and in their own manner, without judgment being cast upon them or their lives.

The Salvation Army served as a critical gateway to the homeless population, providing an entry point to the community and a space where individuals were more accessible and open to engagement. The organization's established trust and rapport with the homeless community were instrumental in facilitating my initial contacts and ongoing interactions. However, reliance on the Salvation Army also introduced specific dynamics into the study. The participants the researcher engaged with through this organization may have had experiences and perspectives different from those not involved with the Salvation Army, potentially skewing the data. Their views could be shaped by their experiences with and attitudes toward this organization, highlighting the complex interplay between researcher positionality, methodological choices and participant interactions in shaping research outcomes.

Lastly, the final gap in literature concerning the inclusion of mental maps in qualitative research was not addressed. As detailed in chapter 3.1, it proved unfeasible to incorporate this research method into the study.

### **5.3.2 Personal Reflections**

One of the principal challenges in researching homeless populations lies in the essential task of building trust. Many homeless individuals have negative past interactions with various systems and individuals, which understandably makes them sceptical of outsiders. As a researcher, entering their environment demanded a demonstration of genuine empathy, patience and respect for their autonomy and personal boundaries. This necessitated spending considerable time simply being present in the community, engaging in daily activities and consistently respecting their experiences and knowledge. In this process, it was important not to prioritize my own interests or those of the research. For instance, there was a moment when I sat with a respondent who was visibly distressed. Instead of pressing for answers, I simply listened as he shared his story, providing him with my undivided attention and support. In the end, there was no time to discuss topics relevant to the research, but I supported him as a friend. Another example is when I arranged to go for a walk with a respondent and conduct the interview. To maintain contact and schedule a time, we exchanged phone numbers. Ultimately, he cancelled five times due to various reasons such as poor sleep, the weather, or his mood. This required patience on my part, which was eventually rewarded as the interview was conducted two weeks later. This thoughtful and measured approach was critical for fostering rapport and ensuring that participation was both voluntary and well-informed. At the beginning of the research, it was challenging to adapt to the situation and the target group, but as time progressed, it became easier to establish contact.

Ethical considerations were paramount, given the vulnerability of the population. The research continuously tackled issues concerning privacy, informed consent and the potential for re-traumatization. It was vital to ensure that participants fully understood the research's purpose and how their data would be used, necessitating ongoing communication and regular adjustments based on feedback from participants. Additionally, there was a consistent ethical duty to provide participants with information about resources and support, ensuring that the research interactions did not amplify their vulnerabilities. Efforts were made to clearly explain to potential respondents who I am, why I am conducting research, what the research is about, and what their potential role would be. For instance, a potential respondent who could not fully understand the research was approached. In this case, it was decided not to involve him further in the study. Additionally, respondents were informed that they could always approach the researcher with questions or comments or withdraw from the research at any time.

Working closely with homeless individuals often significantly impacted the researcher's emotional resilience. Listening to personal stories filled with loss, trauma, struggle and sometimes ongoing crises can be deeply moving. The researcher, however, did not perceive this as negative or challenging, as it also indicated a bond of trust with the homeless individuals.

This aspect of the research underscored the importance of being emotionally prepared and having solid support mechanisms for conducting sensitive research. At the same time, it presented opportunities for growth both as a person and as a researcher

The transient nature of the homeless population posed logistical challenges that necessitated significant adaptations in research methodology. Traditional data collection methods were adapted to suit the unstable and unpredictable conditions in which many homeless people live. Flexibility in scheduling, selecting interview locations and the format of questions was essential. Interviews, for example, might be shorter or conducted in multiple sessions, and locations would vary based on where participants felt safest and most comfortable.

Engagement with the homeless population deeply influenced the researcher's perspective both personally and professionally. It challenged pre-existing beliefs about homelessness, enhanced understanding of the structural and individual factors contributing to it, and showcased the resilience and resourcefulness of the affected individuals. This involvement often led to a more profound commitment to advocating for policy changes and improved services for homeless individuals. It is therefore important to consider that the researcher has formed a bond with several respondents and to take this into account in the research, as these personal bonds could have influenced the research or the results.

In summary, conducting research within the homeless population involved a complex array of challenges and opportunities for growth. It required a flexible and responsive approach to methodology, ethics and interpersonal relations. The lessons learned from navigating these challenges not only enriched the research outcomes but also significantly aided the researcher's development as a compassionate and ethically conscious professional.

## 5.4 Practical Implications

Policymakers should focus on creating inclusive urban policies that ensure equitable access to services and resources for homeless EU-migrants. This includes enhancing social services and promoting community-based initiatives that foster social inclusion. Proactive urban planning is essential in addressing the needs of homeless populations by designing public spaces that are safe and accessible. Incorporating the perspectives of homeless individuals in the planning process ensures that their needs are met. Looking to the future, if inclusive and supportive policies are implemented, we can expect a reduction in homelessness and improved quality of life for EU-migrants in urban environments. This would lead to greater social stability and a more cohesive community.

The insights from Utrecht can inform urban policies in other cities facing similar challenges with homeless EU-migrants. The need for inclusive urban planning that considers the needs of all residents, especially the most vulnerable, is a key takeaway. Policies should aim to create equitable access to resources and integrate marginalized groups into the social fabric of the city. If the current situation remains unchanged, homeless EU-migrants will continue to experience marginalization, leading to increased social tensions and public health issues. The lack of adequate support and inclusive policies could exacerbate homelessness and poverty, undermining social cohesion and economic stability in urban areas. To address the challenges faced by homeless EU migrants in Utrecht and improve their overall well-being, several policy recommendations should be considered:

- First, improving shelter accessibility is crucial. By eliminating restrictive entry requirements and ensuring there is sufficient space, shelters can become more accessible. This change would provide stable, safe places for homeless individuals to stay, thereby reducing their exposure to adverse weather conditions and health risks. Without sufficient sleep, respondents find it challenging to reintegrate into society, while it profoundly impacts their emotional and physical well-being.
- Enhancing social support networks is also essential, due to the importance of feeling included for the homeless. Facilitating social interactions and support systems within shelters can foster a sense of community and trust among homeless individuals. This can be achieved by creating spaces and programs that encourage socialization. Social events and collaborative projects could foster social interactions, teamwork and cohesion amongst the homeless, while simultaneously mitigating boredom. Meanwhile, language boundaries could be, partly, solved by Dutch lessons. Currently, a weekly discussion group is one of the few activities that fosters solidarity among the homeless population, with the aim that no one within the population feels excluded. A supportive environment within shelters helps mitigate the negative effects of social isolation and exclusion. Therefore, it is essential to keep the day shelter open for as long as possible.

Furthermore, the homeless must also feel included in the broader society. Exclusion by non-homeless individuals plays a significant role in the daily lives of the homeless. Understanding and acceptance should be promoted through campaigns and education by entities such as the municipality and the Salvation Army.

- Supporting resource generation is another key area. Developing opportunities for income generation that do not stigmatize homeless individuals is vital. Integrating services that provide basic needs without restrictive conditions can help individuals focus on rebuilding their lives rather than becoming more reliant on institutions. The primary goal should be to reintegrate homeless individuals into society, offering them the tools and support needed to achieve independence and stability. Additionally, centralizing institutions that provide services to the homeless can facilitate quicker and more efficient solutions. By having a centralized hub of resources and support, homeless individuals can access the help they need more easily, leading to better coordination and delivery of services.
- Finally, improving access and findability of personal hygiene facilities is crucial as well. Ensuring that public toilets, showers and water points are accessible and easily locatable can significantly impact the health and self-esteem of homeless individuals, making it easier for them to participate in societal activities and find employment. To adequately meet the needs, additional toilets and care facilities must be made available in the city.
- The research has shown that homeless individuals face various problems, with two central aspects of their lives caught in a vicious cycle: the lack of a job and the lack of a place to sleep. Opportunities from the environment and society can significantly improve this situation. Collaboration between the municipality, involved organizations, and local businesses regarding campaigns and job opportunities can gradually help homeless individuals reintegrate into society.

By implementing these recommendations, we can create a more inclusive and supportive urban environment for homeless EU-migrants, as described in the societal relevance, ultimately helping them regain their footing and reintegrate into society. These measures not only address immediate needs but also work towards long-term solutions that promote stability, dignity and hope for the future. The research has shown that homeless individuals face various problems, with two central aspects of their lives caught in a vicious cycle: the lack of a job and the lack of a place to sleep. Opportunities from the environment and society can significantly improve this situation. Collaboration between the municipality, involved organizations and local businesses regarding campaigns and job opportunities can gradually help homeless individuals reintegrate into society.

Let the personal stories from this research aid in the fight against marginalization, fostering understanding and connection within the city. Collaboration could become a powerful weapon in the battle against homelessness; together we can address all the problems and struggles highlighted in this research.

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