UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

CONTESTING URBAN PUBLIC SPACE AS COMMONS

A study on the common usage of public parks in Barcelona-Sants

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Abstract

Urbanisation is one of the major trends in globalisation. An influx of heterogenous urban dwellers to a densely built urban environment contains potential for conflicts. With increasing heterogeneity, public space in cities becomes the site of multicultural confrontation. Creating public space that is fairly and equally contributed and that guarantees equal access for everyone is thereby a key challenge in urban planning. This thesis investigates the meaning of public space in a post-industrial working-class neighbourhood and aims to understand public space as an Urban Commons. Based on a case-study design, two public parks located in Barcelona-Sants are examined according a theoretical frame combining the understanding of parks as Urban Commons with the Urban Design concept of spaces of in-betweenness. The thesis investigates, first, the spatial attributes of the parks, and, second, how those spatialities contribute to the commoning of those parks. Central is thereby the question how people access, enclosure and behave in spaces that do not directly indicate a certain use of that space. Through a methodology of direct observation, the thesis contributes to the literature on public life that understands social processes in strong interrelation with the physical space. It is exploring the possibilities of top-down provided public space to become common space that is creatively used by the residents and reflecting the local identity by applying a socio-spatial analysis.

Key words: Urban Commons, public space, spaces of in-betweenness, observation, socio-spatial analysis

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Abbreviations

CPR   Common Pool Resources

JRS   Jardins de la Rambla de Sants

PEI   Parc de l´Espanya Industrial

TC   Traditional Common

UC   Urban Commons

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1. Introduction

Cities all over the world are challenged by high numbers of migration to the urban realm. Marked by a high density – cities are covering not more than 3 percent of the world´s land resources (UN SDG 2015, Colding and Barthel 2013: 156) - they are representing the territorialisation of different global social, economic and cultural discourses (Swyngedouw 2004: 31). The public urban sphere in which residents move, interact and compete gains thereby in importance. Streets, parks, gardens and the like are contested spaces whose meaning of function and accessibility differ drastically from person to person (Low and Iveson 2016: 11). Those public meeting and melting points are object to diverse uses. They can be seen as spatial possibilities to show and contest politics and to make claims and demands (Dhaliwal 2012: 252). They can mirror global tendencies like capitalisation and financializations (Harvey 2013: 11) or be places of social gatherings and of leisure time (Peters 2010: 420). They can offer a home for homeless people (Rose 2019: 13) or be space for unwanted activities such as drug and alcohol consumption (Romo-Avilés et al. 2016: 138). In sum, they are spaces for a broad range of (both wanted and unwanted) activities. Confrontation on those public spaces between different groups of urban dwellers with their differing cultural, political, social and economic origins are rising the question of who has the right to the city (Marcuse 2009: 189). Understanding public spaces as an essential part of the daily life, the just use, provision of and access to public spaces are important conditions for a peaceful living together (Stavrides 2016: 32).

Barcelona as a global city is exemplary for the re-territorialisation of many global phenomena. It is a lively, ever growing urban agglomerate that resembles many features of global urban developments (Blanco 2009: 355). In the last decades, the provision of quality public space has played a major role in the city´s urban planning in supporting a post-industrial restructuring. Internationally, this urban planning has been considered a huge success, whereas on the local level it has been discussed very controversially (ibid. 356). On the one side, the city as one of the densest urban environments in Europe has a lack of public space, on the other side many of the urban transformations are perceived as the causes of mass-tourism and gentrification (Hughes 2018: 472) – two of the city´s biggest issues.

This thesis is looking at two public parks in the working-class neighbourhood of Barcelona-Sants. Public parks are providing space for spontaneous social encounters between very diverse urban dwellers. The thesis´ underlying normative valuation interprets urban public space as fuelling serendipities of social encounters in the public realm. Those intentional and unintentional encounters raise the awareness of differences in an increasingly diverse urban society and strengthen the appreciation of cultural and social heterogeneity (Stavrides 2016: 75). It is therefore investigating the creation of public spaces as common spaces. Applying the concept of the commons to public spaces starts with the premise of the community as the responsible actor for sustainably using and managing the two parks as a common resource (Kratzwald 2015: 28). Through making the parks a commons, people are interacting, contesting and agreeing on rules and activities in a simultaneously shared public realm.

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Among urban scholars, such as Amin (2008), Low (2011), Kuttler and Jain (2015) and Simoes Aelbrecht (2016), there is the belief that social relations and interactions in the public realm are strongly informed and shaped by the material and physical surroundings. The thesis aims to investigate this relation between the spatial attributes and the social interactions and aims to explore how one is affecting the other in terms of commoning the public realm. The thesis is thereby drawing on the Urban Design concept of *spaces of in-betweenness* (Simoes Aelbrecht 2016: 135). Those are defined as spaces designed with a certain looseness which makes them be open to interpretations of and adaptations to different user groups. Through their openness in design they offer spatial opportunities for the users to define and shape the spaces regarding their needs (ibid.)

Designed as a case study and based on the methodology of direct observations, this study examines the two parks regarding their spatial design and social activities. The two parks were given to the neighbourhood in the context of the internationally praised urban planning. By conducting a socio-spatial analysis, the thesis aims to explore if those given public spaces have the capacity to develop towards common spaces - spaces that are creatively interpreted by the different users and that resemble the local identity (Stavrides 2016: 106). It thereby aims to fill the gap in literature in combining urban design and planning with an examination of the socially attached meaning of public space. By exploring the relation between the designed spatial attributes and the in the space conducted activities, the thesis emphasises the role urban designers and planners can take in creating public space open for social encounters and diversity - a characteristic of the urban public that gains in importance considering the global movements to urban areas and resulting challenges (UN SDG 2015).

The thesis is structured as follows: after a short description of Barcelona´s urban planning of public space in the last four decades, of the relevance of studying the urban realm in the global context and a short review of the history of the commons concept and its adaptation to the urban realm, a literature review will be given. The focus is thereby set on the conceptional interpretation of public space as socially and culturally meaningful spaces and on case studies that interpret public space as an Urban Commons. In Chapter 5, the theoretical frame and the key concepts will be introduced. Based on the definition of common spaces as spaces taken by the users through emancipatory acts, the analytical and conceptional frame will be presented: the socio-spatial analysis based on the identification of spaces of in-betweenness will be used to explore the parks´ potential to become an Urban Commons. Chapter 6 describes the research process and design, discussing the two parks as an emblematic case study and drawing on direct observations as the methodology to study public space to answer the thesis´ research questions. Chapter 7 and 8 describe the findings of the study and critically engage with the question of the two parks becoming common spaces.

2. Aim and research question

Designed as an exploratory case study, this thesis is examining the two parks Jardins de la Rambla de Sants and Parc de l´Espanya Industrial, located in Barcelona-Sants. It aims to understand if those parks that are given to people through top-down urban planning have the capacity to develop towards common spaces. Based on the conceptional idea of spaces of in-betweenness, the two parks will be examined regarding how people creatively invent the different usages by individually and collectively interpreting the given spaces. Through the methodology of direct observations, that allows a combination of spatial and behavioural analysis, the following research questions will be answered:

- What are the material and spatial attributes of the parks in terms of spaces of in-betweenness?
- How are those spaces of in-betweenness approached and used by their users?
- How can this usage contribute to the understanding of the parks as Urban Commons?

Through the combination of an Urban Design concept and methodology with the Commons concept, the thesis contributes to understand the social relations and interactions in strong interdependence with the spatial and material surroundings.

3. Background

2.1 Barcelona and Sants as a global post-industrial neighbourhood

During the European industrialization in the 19th century, Barcelona´s economy was based on the textile industry. With the decline of this economic sector due to the textile crisis in the 1950s and the following shift towards the service sector, especially tourism, several of the city´s districts experienced drastic changes in the urban fabric (Dot Juglá 2019: 279). Together with the transition of the Spanish political system from dictatorship to democracy in the 1970s, there was a paradigm shift in the city´s urban planning, nowadays referred to as the *Barcelona Model* (Blanco 2009: 356). This internationally highly praised and locally rather criticised model can be divided in three major phases (ibid. 358; Degen and Gracía 2012: 3).

- During this first phase, from 1979-86, the planners focused on the provision of quality public space to enhance social cohesion and political participation. The newly built public spaces were supposed to strengthen the over decades oppressed Catalan identity. It aimed to connect the wealthier parts of the city with deprived areas, that housed mostly workers and migrants (Degen and García 2012: 3). Small-scale neighbourhood projects were prioritized over large-scale urban transformations, also contributing to the development of a barrio-based identity (Monclús 2003: 403).
- The second phase, from 1986 – 1994, must be set in the context of the Olympic Games 1992, wherein major large-scale urban developments were implemented. Architectural flagship

projects were used as a branding of the city as an international, for tourism attractive urban hot spot. This led, inter alia, to the development of the waterfront including the creation of urban beaches and to several sport facilities for the Olympic Games. It was meant as shaping a global identity of the city (Degen and García 2012: 6). The emphasis on small-scale qualitative urbanism, as it has been dominant in the first phase, shifted to a paradigm known as strategic urbanism, following a ratio of economizing the urban realm on the city-wide level (Blanco 2009: 359).

- The third phase, from 1995 to 2008, targeted the cultural sector as a driving force for economic activities to attract high numbers of international tourism combined with international investments. This phase of urban planning can be understood as top-down-processes, where financial investments instead of the citizens were the decisive actors. The development projects of this phase have been highly criticised. The newly created public spaces followed the rationale of an internationally confirm modern design that does not consider the local identity and that rather focuses on selling a "Barcelona culture" to an international audience (Degen and García 2012: 7).

Since 2008, related to the financial crisis, social movements have arisen, trying to take back decisive power over urban development that is based on the citizen´s demands and needs and that resembles the local culture (Ezaguirre and Parés 2018: 1). Now, the city´s and its citizen´s main concerns regarding the use and the provision of public space are centred around continuously increasing tourism and resulting gentrification processes (Bruttomesso 2018: 473). Public space is thereby the place where those struggles are expressed, especially with the question at hand for whom those spaces are made, for international tourists or the locals (Degen and García 2012: 11).

This thesis is focusing on public space provision not on the city-wide, but on the smaller neighbourhood level. Both case study sites are placed in Barcelona-Sants, a traditional working-class neighbourhood in the west of Barcelona (Fig. 1). Even though not (yet) directly faced with the skyrocketing of tourist numbers as happened in the city centre, the barrio is challenged with common socio-economic struggles related to post-industrial urban developments (El Periódico 2019). Sants was an independent municipality until 1897, when it got annexed to the city of Barcelona in the context of a broader territorial urban expansion. During the industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, Sants population grew fivefold due to the textile industries located in Sants. The textile companies La Espanya Industrial and El Vapor Vell, the major employers of the town, strongly influenced the working-class character and the strong identity its residents have with the neighbourhood. Sants´ streets and squares have been a setting for several worker´s movements; nowadays signs that express a historically strong affiliation with the independence movement of Catalonia can be found in its streets (Ajuntament 2019a).
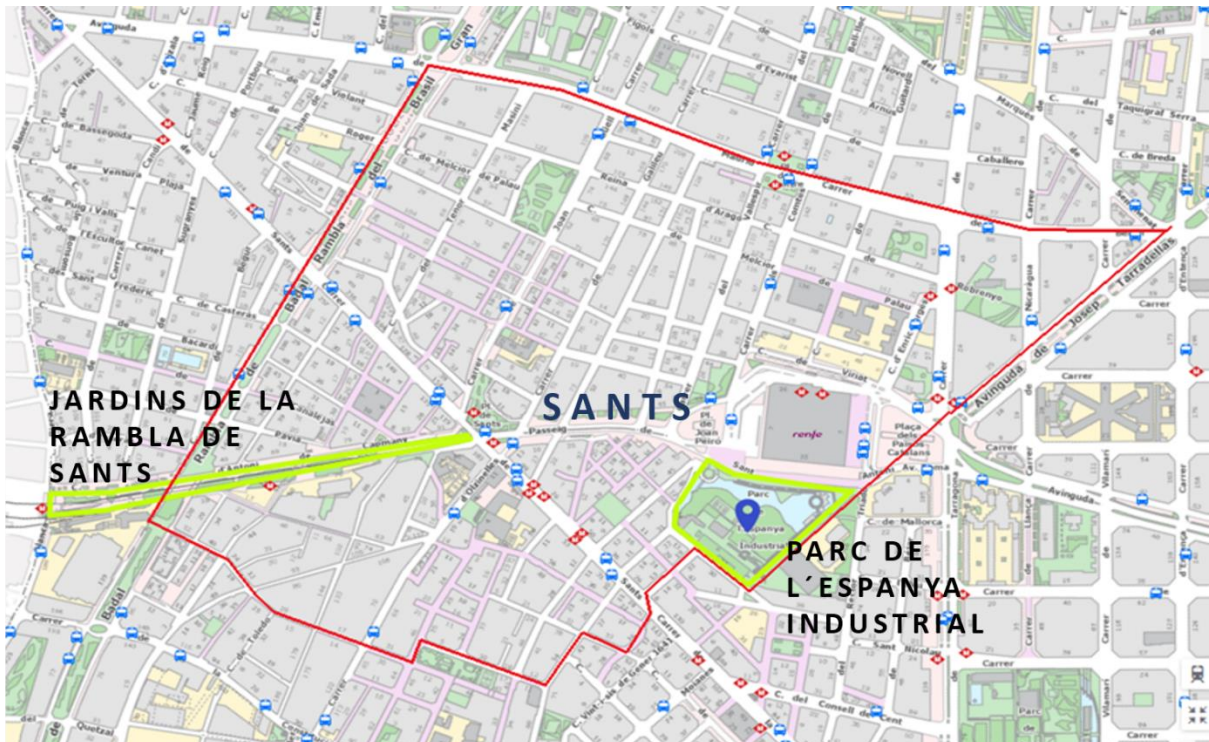
Figure 1: Cases study area and units of analysis
Barcelona-Sants and the two public parks Jardins de la Rambla de Sants and Parc de l´Espanya Industrial

Eizaguirre and Parés describe a strong identification of the locals with their "barrio" that manifests itself in form of social activism and diverse neighbourhood campaigns, such as Can Battló or Can Vies, two autonomous social centres in old industrial buildings that got squatted and are now a commons to the neighbourhood. Especially after the 2007/08 recession, several neighbourhood initiatives arose, resembling the feeling of a neighbourhood collectivity (Eizaguirre and Parés 2018: 8). This sense of a Sants-identity also got confirmed in talks with locals, who describe themselves as residents of Sants and not of Barcelona. During an informal conversation with an elderly women born and raised in Sants she said: "when I go to Plaza Catalunya (city centre of Barcelona, author´s note), I say I´m leaving Sants. It is like going to the city and leaving my town." (Field Diary 22.02.19, translation by the author). This strong feeling of belonging can also play an essential role in constructing and producing the commons, as will be shown in the following analysis.

Sants is also home to Barcelona´s main train station Estación Sants that got inaugurated in 1979. It connects Barcelona with Madrid and France; since 2008 also via a high-speed connection, whose construction in the centre of Sants has been very controversial and led to a lot of neighbourhood contestation. It is one of the central nodes of Barcelona´s public transport system, linking the centre with the urban periphery regions. With the construction of the railroads, Sants got cut in half, creating a physical border in the middle of the neighbourhood´s centre. (Dot Jutglá 2019: 279). Two public parks

located in Sants were chosen as the unit of analysis of this case study. The Jardins de la Ramble de Sants (JRS) and the Parc de l´Espanya Industrial (PEI) will be shortly presented in the following.

2.1.1 Planning process of JRS

The planning process of the JRS started in 2003 and aimed to re-connect the two neighbourhoods of Sants and La Bordeta that were physically separated through the construction of the highspeed railways. It is a 760m long, and nearly 30m wide elevated park that covers the railways. The residents often refer to it as the "cajon", the concrete box. The space has been centre of conflict between the locals and the municipality since the planning of the high-speed railways in the early 2000s. To reduce the level of noises, the neighbours wanted the railways to be built underground. After years of conflict, a compromise has been made to cover the railways with a concrete box. This led to the today existing elevated park that got inaugurated in 2016 (Cols 2016). The whole planning process included participatory elements led by a local architecture coop, during which the residents could raise their wishes for the desired public space. Despite this involvement, the process had been perceived as a rather top-down implementation (Ajuntament 2013: 8). The project has further been taken critically because of its relation to global landscape urbanism trends, being inspired by the High Line of New York, where the park has been used as city branding and been driving force for gentrification in the adjacent streets, a problem too well-known in Barcelona (Anguelovski 2017, Littke et al. 2016).

2.1.2 Planning process of PEI

PEI has been constructed between 1982 - 1985 on the ground of one of the biggest Spanish textile companies, La Espanya Industrial, that mainly contributed to the economic developments of Sants. After the closing of the company in 1969, the close-by residents launched several neighbourhood initiatives, demanding a public space. This led to the transformation of the previous industrial area into residential land as well as the park as it now exists. The park is located adjacent to the Sants train station. As a cultural heritage, parts of the old industrial buildings have been conserved, and are now used as a cultural centre and a school. In the context of the Olympic Games 1992, PEI has further been extended with a municipal sports centre (Ajuntament 2019b). Throughout the years, there have been several attempts to use the space for public neighbourhood events, such as the Fiesta Mayor de Sants. In 2010, the neighbourhood associations finally received the municipal permission to do so, which can be read as opening the space for neighbourhood-based activities (Memória de Sants 2011). The planning of the park followed a top-down process, too, but has been less controversial. Its creation has to be set in the first phase of the Barcelona urban planning model, where the public space development followed a rationale to serve the needs of the residents and where neighbourhood developments were perceived positively by the locals (Degen and García 2012: 3).

2.2 Global urbanisation and the relevance to Global Studies

The data collected and used in this thesis refers to two urban parks on the local neighbourhood level. Nonetheless, the problematization connects to discourses on the global scale and is therefore highly

relevant for the academic field of Global Studies. Cities became the epicentres of economic activity and attract high numbers of migration to urban areas. By 2030, an estimated 5 billion of the world´s population will live in urban agglomerations (UN SDG: 2015).

Most readings on globalisation and urbanisation explain the high influx to cities through the underlying global economic structures, namely global capital and the hunt for surplus in an internationalised world marked by free trade (Harvey 2013, Sassen 2005). Concepts such as Sassen´s *Global Cities* and Harvey´s *Right to the City* show the connection between the global and local which cannot be understood separately. The *global city* aims to recapture the territorialisation of global trends in local events. While there are international institutions and arrangements, parts of the economy are localised in the cities (especially in the finance and service sectors). Concentrating capital and related a neoliberal ratio in the urban sphere increases already existing inequalities and power dynamics (Sassen 2005).

Conflicts around those power relations are brought to the streets and are embedded in the broader debate on who has the right to the city. Harvey defines this right as "some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical way" (Harvey 2013: 5). According to him, the right to urban space is one of the fundamental Human Rights (ibid.). Central in this (mostly leftist) debate is the focus on the marginalised and disadvantaged groups of society. The demonstration on Tahrir square in Egypt 2011, as the beginning of the Arab Spring, the 15M-demonstration on Plaza Catalunya in Spain, related to the financial and housing crisis in 2007/8 as well as the global Occupy movement are all resembling those struggles to shape the frame society is living in (ibid. xvii). Common to all the protests is the taking-over of urban public space to claim political rights.

This connection between the rather abstract, immaterial phenomena on the global scale and the very local happenings that determine the everyday life is well described by the term *glocalisation* (Swyngedouw 2004: 37). Economics and politics are thereby re-territorialized. People, in search for work and better living-condition, are migrating to the hyper-urban realm. In this context, the different scales and their related politics are crucial in understanding growing inequalities and power dynamics (ibid. 31). The two parks analysed here are exemplifying this. They resemble the smallest scale, the very local neighbourhood. Nonetheless, as described in Section 2.1, they face challenges that are strongly interlinked with the city-, regional, national and global scale: their creation and contestation has to be understood in light of city-wide transformations to a post-industrial realm and is connected to struggles of defining a Catalan identity in demarcation from the Spanish nation-state. Further, international phenomena like the Olympic Games and touristification that got localized in the city, make it impossible to understand the parks without referring to different spatial scales of glocalisation.

The debate on the right to the city is not just hold in academia, but also entered international policy making. In respect of the expected massive influx of dwellers to urban areas, Goal 11 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aims to provide the world population with inclusive, safe,

resilient and sustainable cities. Especially target 7, namely the provision of "universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities" (UN SDG 2015) is relevant for the right to the city understood as the right to common public spaces such as parks.

2.3 A short overview of the commons concept

Related to the demand for the right to the city that implicitly can be read as a critique on the current global economic structure, the conception of common pool resources (CPR), or in the urban jargon: Urban Commons (UC), gained momentum (Kip et al. 2015: 9). Its core value lies in transferring agency to the urban dwellers and is considered as an alternative model that goes "beyond market and state" (ibid.) and that describes "beyond capitalism dynamics" (Stavrides 2016: 38). Focusing on collective action that neither demands public nor private governance schemes, the commons concept has been proposed in the literature as the opportunity to develop social just measures in urban planning (Kratzwald 2015: 28).

The commons concept originally got developed as a response to Garret Hardin´s famous *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) that describes the dilemma of common goods that are prone to overuse and exploitation by individuals striving for their self-interest instead of the greater collective good. The Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom dedicated her working life to prove this assumption of overuse to be wrong. By analysing traditional CPR, such as pastures, forests and lakes and related governance schemes that go beyond the by Hardin proposed dialectic of necessary interventions of either a Leviathan state or the (unregulated) market, she showed that a sustainable cooperation and management in small groups is possible and sustainable (Ostrom 1999). Ostrom formulated eight design principles that serve as a frame to create successful collective management systems (ibid: 91). In recent years, scholars from different academic fields discovered the idea of the commons as a valuable multidisciplinary frame to understand and explain many social dilemmas (Agrawal 2013: 88).

Hess (2008) termed this arising literature on the commons as the *New Commons*. While traditionally natural resources, like watersheds and woodlands, and their institutional governance schemes have been on the centre of investigation, the New Commons scholars adapted the concept to other less explicit areas. Instead of talking about the CPRs and related property rights, the new commons literature understands the commons in broader terms and multiple scales (Hess 2008: 39). Hess divides for example in the different categories of cultural, neighbourhood, knowledge, social, infrastructure, market and global commons to which Ostrom´s formulated design principles do not necessarily apply to (ibid. 38). The focus shifted to analysing collective action and participatory processes to understand the creation and value of the commons, in the literature referred to as *commoning* (ibid.: 37).

Even though Hess does not directly talk about the UC, Parker and Johansson (2011) situate them in several of the categories she identified. Those UC can be infrastructure such as streets or the sewage

system; they can describe neighbourhoods, including gated communities and housing coops; or be market commons such as market spaces with street vendors and Business Improvement Districts. Further examples are e.g. community gardens, parks, libraries, or public security (Parker and Johansson 2011: 5ff). This thesis will focus on *urban public space as commons* and analyse two public parks in Barcelona as an UC.

While Ostrom´s interest lies in the sustainable government of natural resources, urban scholars emphasise the role of and effects on the community the creation and maintenance of the UC can have. Especially readings from neo-marxist scholars such as Harvey (2013) or Bollier (2015) create this image of the commons as a utopian or ideal way of forming a (urban) society that is based on a collective thought and different valuations of the environmental surroundings. They imply a critique on the current neoliberal paradigm that accordingly is creating a socially unjust society. Harvey identifies the core of the commons thought as the "principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified" (Harvey 2013: 73). Bollier attributes the commons with the possibility to form and shape people´s relation with each other and with the natural environment that increases the personal agency and identity (Bollier 2015: 6). The commons concept has been chosen as the conceptional frame of this thesis, because it connects to the challenges of the global urbanisation trends. As stated above, population living in urban areas will drastically increase in the next decades. This leads to a diversification of the society in increasingly denser built environments. The understanding of the commons as embracing cultural diversity and collectivity, as promoted by Harvey and Bollier, connects to this urban discourse by providing an idea on how we imagine the mundane space to live in.

4. Previous research

Public spaces have been subject of studies in various academic fields. In public health, studies e.g. examine the benefits of quality public space on the physical and mental well-being (Markevych et al. 2017; van den Berg et al. 2016); environmental studies, focusing on green public spaces, analyse the importance of the provision of urban ecosystem-services in resilience and adaptation strategies (Meixa et al. 2018, Shah and Garg 2017). Those are, undeniable, important aspects of public spaces but will not be centre of this thesis´ focus. Instead, public space will be examined regarding the social and political value it can generate, based on the reading of public space as a commons. In the following, a short review will be given on how previous research conceptionally interprets the social and political value attached to public space and will in a second step look at concrete case studies that analysed public spaces in different cultural contexts as common spaces and that emphasized the spatial attributes of those spaces. Based on this literature review, the gap in the existing research will be identified and the thesis´ delimitations will be presented.

4.1 Social and cultural meaning of public space

Next to private domestic and work spaces, public spaces are central spaces where social interaction happens and certain features of culture, collectivety and sociality are manifested (Francis et al. 2012: 402). Especially French social scholars, such as Foucault, Lefebvre and Bourdieu, understand public space as strongly influencing political and social power dynamics (Low 2011: 392). In the broadest sense, they have in common that space contains a meaning that is manifested through humans taking action and interacting with each other and with the environment (ibid.). In the following, a short literature review will be given on research that understands urban public spaces, defined as openly accessible by members of the public (Francis et al. 2012: 402), as politically, socially and culturally contested.

In the Marxist tradition, public space can be interpreted as the manifestation of urban capitalisation, as understood by Harvey. Privatisation or the private management of public space, commercial ads in the public domain as well as planned gentrification processes mirror this understanding of the capitalised public and are leading to increasing separation of the rich and the poor (Harvey 2013: 14). As a critical lens to these urban developments, research has been conducted e.g. in analysing the impact on urban environmental justice. By examining the provision of green public space in Western cities, a correlation between newly created green public spaces and increasing numbers of displacement of marginalised residents could be noticed. In this line, public spaces must be critically examined in the complex role they can play as a possible driving force for gentrification processes (Anguelovski et al. 2018a: 459). The probably most famous example for this development is the New York High Line, that, examining economic structures of the neighbourhood, constituted on the one side a huge economic success, but also created and deepened social injustices through the displacement of low-income households. Implementing urban flagship projects as an urban branding strategy is thereby strongly connected to the fundamental question on whose right to the city (Littke et al. 2016: 356).

Public space further can be understood in terms of political contestation. Social and political struggles are held in public space. The 15M-demonstration on Plaza Catalunya are exemplary for social movements that inhabit the public to make their political claims. The 15M-movement arose in Spain in 2011 during the aftermath of the financial crisis that hit Spain especially harsh. In Barcelona, mass demonstrations happened on the Plaza Catalunya, the square that is understood as the centre of the city and central node for tourism and international consumerism (Dhaliwal 2012: 257). "Politics *of* space" become "politics *in* space" (Amin 2002: 397, emphasis in original), meaning that locally raised demands are connecting certain physical spaces with national, transnational or even global struggles. The chosen location for the demonstration, the Plaza Catalunya, is thereby spatially resembling the roots of the struggle the activists are fighting against.

These notions of public space are all related to bigger societal scales, that connect the local public space to broader global phenomena such as the international economy or socio-political happenings on the

national/ international level. Public space can also be understood as resembling very local identities, based on a communal or individual perspective.

For grasping the by the users attached social meaning of a space, references are made in public space research to the geographic concepts of space and place. While traditionally the concepts have been understood as two distinguishable terms – space as the global, the other, the abstract and place as the we, the here, the intimate -, Amin (2002) argues for a strong interdependence of both concepts. Accordingly, the everyday local places exist through a multitude of spaces (ibid. 389). Places are constructed through social practices, Stavrides describes it as "place is the learned language that a society´s members use in the different contexts of their interaction: space is a spoken or "practiced place"" (Stavrides 2016: 237). Linked to the understanding of place and space is the *sense of place* (Masterson et al. 2017: 2). Individuals and groups relate a certain meaning and attachment to places and create a dependence and identity in regard of this special setting. People develop a sense of place that consists of a mixture of local identity, history, but also global networks; so different people sense and experience space differently, representing the different scales from the very local to the global (ibid.).

Other scholars connect public space with the concept of social capital that describes "the ways in which individuals and communities create trust, maintain social networks, and establish norms that enable participants to act cooperatively toward the pursuit of shared goals" (Foster 2006: 529). This social capital arises especially in locations where people, such as neighbourhood communities, share a physical space and generate trust and social cohesion through this act of sharing (ibid. 539). Exemplifying this, Peters (2010) examines the role public parks play in fostering integration of migrants in the Netherlands. Even though she did not encounter active interaction between multi-ethnic park users, she argues that sharing a public space enhances awareness of each other and contributes to the creation of social cohesion and capital (ibid. 420).

Based on those notions of public space, namely the misuse of public space for economic profit-making, the expression of politics and political contestation, the collectively and individually attached meaning and sense of place as well as the creation of social cohesion and capital, they can be interpreted as a commons. They are marked as spaces being in a constant state of contestation and negotiation (Stavrides 2016: 106). Those processes of contestation and negotiation have been studied empirically and are strongly influenced be the social and cultural context. In the following section, five empirical case studies will be presented that take different lenses on the interpretation of this contested and negotiated realm.

4.2 Empirical studies on the Urban Commons

Urban parks have been studied as UC focusing on the process of creating the commons through the implementation of collective management schemes, especially focusing on participatory processes. The

different example commons thereby vary strongly in the level of involvement of a higher authority in this "formalization" process which succeeded differently in a long-term sustaining of the commons.

Radywyl and Biggs (2013), with their comparative study on three different UC in New York City, showed that the success of the commons is strongly dependent on the existence of an engaged community and of a public authority that takes in a supportive and non-dominant role in the custodianship of the resource. The transformation of the Times Square into a pedestrian zone, that followed a clear top-down approach and did not include any group of users, could not lead to the creation of a long-term sustainable commons (ibid. 163); while the once-a-week transformation of a street into a playstreet proved to enhance the feeling of a neighbourhood community. The creation of this UC got successfully initiated by the neighbourhood as a bottom-up-process. With increasing involvement of the city planning department, mostly for the provision of funding, and a more formal management system, the community lost attachment to the commons (ibid. 165). The most successful case in providing long-term sustainable commons has been the example of an online-platform created by two activists that collects and provides data regarding vacant lots in the city and offers support in starting community-based urban gardens. By creating a city-wide network that is acknowledged by the municipality, but still independent from this authority, the two initiators could create a project that scaled up and got strengthened over time (ibid. 168).

Gilmore´s (2017) case study exemplifies a process of commons-creation that is intentionally controlled and planned by external actors to achieve a park´s long-term cost-effective maintenance. She looks at a public park in Manchester whose maintenance was challenged by a cut in public funding. The "commoning" of the park was seen as the solution to the lack in funding because it puts the community/ users of the parks as the managers of the resource. By voluntarily participating in the stewardship of the park, the park would be maintained. Through participatory events organized by a group of researchers a sense of place should be created, so the users would contribute to the commons. A long-term involvement of the park´s users could not be achieved which happened according to Gilmore due to "the city council´s failure to act as enabling body for the collective use of common rights and rules" (ibid. 43). This wanted involvement of the public authority contradicts the here used definition of the commons. The thesis´ two example parks, both as well owned and management by a public authority, will be examined regarding their capability to develop towards a commons without the active involvement of a legal authority as "enabling body". Further, the creation of commons follows the idea of a community-based resource that has to be initiated from the community itself and that cannot be forced into being from the outside.

The following study, even though not directly analysing public space, focuses on the success of creating and sustaining the commons that is dependent on the capability to scale-up and formalize the management system. Eizaguirre and Parés (2018) show that, based on a very involved and engaged community, the commons could be more effective with increasing cooperation with and support from a

legal authority. Their study on the effectiveness of social innovative initiatives in Barcelona-Sants gives useful insights regarding the creation of commons in the very specific context of this thesis´ setting. They analyse bottom-up initiatives in Sants that arose after the failure of the local government during the recession 2007/08. Eizaguirre and Parés examine two projects founded by local social activists: Can Battló, a community centre located on a squatted industrial area, and the PAH, a platform for people affected by mortgage. What is interesting in their findings, contrary to Radywyl and Biggs (2013), is that both initiatives gained in scale and effectiveness with increasing support from the public authority. Important thereby is that both initiatives that resemble the local culture of neighbourhood-activism were extremely preserving the autonomy in their decision-making (Eizaguirre and Parés 2018: 13).

Those studies show that the success of the commons is strongly context-dependent. Based on the characteristics of the community and their relation to the municipal authorities the establishment of UC varied in their level of long-term success. While they focus on the formalization processes of creating certain rules and management schemes, they take not into account the attributes of the resources themselves.

The following study conducted by Kuttler and Jain (2015) concentrates on the physical attributes of the commons. They show in their study on an urban market place in India that commons can be constituted in absence of a clearly defined group of commoners and boundaries. Those commons, defined as the physical appropriation of the market space through the vendors and their constant negotiation on the rights to use that space, are so-called defensive commons. Due to the cultural context, in which the market space has the attached meaning of an economic resource, this kind of common is not contributing to the commons understood as empowerment of the people and as creating social cohesion (ibid. 77). Central in their analysis is the understanding of the commons in very spatial terms, namely as "the everyday appropriation of physical space and the production of social space" (ibid. 73). The theoretical frame of this thesis will draw upon this idea, but in a cultural context where the meaning of public space is associated with spaces of social gathering and leisure.

The importance of the physical attributes of public spaces is more in-depth analysed in a study conducted in a newly master-planned park in Lisbon, Portugal. Even though not focusing on the creation of the commons per se, Simoes Aelbrecht (2016) looks at the implications Urban Design can have on informal meetings between strangers. Without clearly presenting the benefits of encounters between strangers, she identifies spaces of in-betweenness, spaces that are designed with a certain looseness, so they do not clearly imply a determined way of usage. Her study analyses a public space that has been highly criticized because of its modernists design that "controls" the users in their interpretation of the space (ibid. 146). By pointing to the loosely designed spatial attributes, she showed that even those top-down projects have the potential to develop towards spaces enhancing social encounters and togetherness, a thought that is also pushed by the commons concept. Simoes Aelbrecht is emphasising the impact spaces have on the establishment of social relations and interaction and demands more research that

connects social and spatial analysis (ibid. 148). This is where the motivation of this work is centred. Through the application of a theoretical frame that connects physical spatial elements with an social analysis the thesis aims to contribute to fill this gap in research.

4.3 Gap

Based on the notions of public space as described in section 4.1, the thesis attributes public space the central role in creating and mirroring the social and political meaning of the community. While most studies focus on the practical challenges of creating and sustaining management systems, based on Ostrom´s defined design principles, very little studies focus on the visualization and expression of politics and social relations through the spatial attributes of public spaces. The provision of public space might indeed contain participatory elements in the planning phase, but mostly follows a top-down implementation. Still, through their creative usage and through practices of defacement they express a local identity shaped by the users. For understanding the creation of commons, spaces that are owned and were planned by the municipality have to be analysed regarding their physical spatial attributes. This demands a drawing on a combination of Urban Design and Social Science methodology.

Both Simoes Aelbrecht (2016) and Amin (2008) identify a gap in research that is combining this spatial and social analysis. Humans are very much influenced by their physical environment. The urban infrastructure, objects and nature are shaping how we behave and move around (Amin 2008: 8). Following this argumentation, Simoes Aelbrecht (2016) describes the need for more case studies that explore the interrelations of space and society with emphasis on the very specific cultural and social context (ibid. 148). Especially in the urban realm, this physical infrastructure is constructed through urban planners and designers. By examining the very spatial aspects and how they are used in social ways, the thesis contributes to an understanding of the public as socially important realm of the daily life and can give insights to urban planning processes on how public space should be designed to become of social importance.

4.4 Delimitations

UC studies cited in Section 4.2 focus on the participatory elements during the planning processes of the parks. The two parks examined in this thesis were constructed in very different phases of urban development and followed a different paradigm regarding the involvement of the users in the design process. This thesis is not specifically looking at the planning and the involvement of the citizens in this process, but rather emphasises the actual usage of the common resource in the present. Due to the chosen analytical frame that focuses on the spatial aspects of the commons and the method of observations, the thesis is focusing on the common resources as it now exists and is understood by the users. While above cited studies focus on the management systems, this thesis aims to understand the resource more in its material characteristics and how this influences its common usage.

Public space research is often linked to the concept of sense of place that relates spaces with the individually attached valuation of the space (Masterson et al. 2017: 2). The sense of place is essential for the understanding of parks as commons since it creates the awareness of the common space and contributes to its maintenance. Its stewardship is more realistic the more people see a meaning and a certain benefit in the common/ the public space. Due to the chosen method of observation, the data at hand does not allow the examination to what degree the users developed this sense of place regarding the chosen parks. To explore this more holistically, the conduction of interviews, surveys, or a mixed-method approach would be needed. This would go beyond this Master thesis´ scope.

Due to the limited time-frame, the data can be considered a snapshot of the current socio-political developments. Especially the observed political contestation of public space can be related to the high media coverage on the Catalan Independence movement and the trials against the movement´s leaders in spring/ summer 2019. For a deeper understanding of the political meaning of the places, observational data collection is needed that covers a larger time period and that more strongly considers demographic neighbourhood changes, maybe through a mixed-method approach applying quantitative measures. The thesis will talk about the politization of space referring to the Catalan independence movement but will not explain and explore the deeper meaning of this complex political and historical struggle.

The research design has been set up as a case study that analyses the public life, an aspect of society that is strongly dependent on the particular cultural context. The chosen case is located in Barcelona, Spain, where public space already plays a crucial role in the daily life. It is part of the Spanish culture to come together and spent time on the Spanish plazas. Barcelona has been chosen as the setting of this study because of its very active discourse on the planning and provision of public space. Its street and squares have been historically important spaces for the city´s cultural and political becoming and play today an essential role in the struggle of preserving and forming a collective Catalan identity. Those attributes that are emblematic for the city of Barcelona make it especially interesting to study public space and public life in this city. The same study conducted in a central or northern European city would probably have led to completely different results. The study´s outcome is strongly dependent on broader social and cultural aspects of the examined population. The thesis thereby aims to understand the usage of public space in this very specific Spanish context.

5. Theoretical frame and key concepts

Before turning to the analysis and interpretation of the study´s finding, the theoretical and conceptional frame will be presented. First, a definition of common spaces will be given to conceptionally draw a line to the here very often used term of public space. In the next step, the analytical frame will be explained that connects the parks´ spatialities with social interaction and social meaning of the space, drawing on the concepts of spaces of in-betweenness and collective culture. In the final subsection, the

commons concept will be adapted to the here analysed resource, namely the two parks. Those three sub sections have been graphically summarised in Figure 2 and form the base for the analysis in Chapter 7.

5.1 Understanding public parks as Common Spaces

One could argue that already the frequent and successful usage of the parks as planned by their designers makes them a commons per se. During the observations, both parks proved to be highly visited and seemed to be appreciated by their users. Still, the usage alone will not be understood as commoning. Both parks are owned and maintained by the municipality of Barcelona, they are per definition public spaces and public property (Kratzwald 2015: 31). They do not constitute as a commons until their usage does contain some sort of emancipatory act; meaning that the citizens themselves define how to use and form the spaces (ibid. 33).

This thesis understands the parks as commons based on Stavrides´ definition of *common spaces* whose ways and rules of usage are interpreted by the users themselves and not by an authority such as the municipality or the urban planners (Stavrides 2016: 2).

> "People actually mould this kind of space [common spaces, author´s note] according to their collective needs and aspirations. Common space is shared space. Whereas public space, as space marked by the presence of a prevailing authority, is space "given" to the people according to certain terms, common space is space "taken" by the people." (ibid. 106).

The two example parks examined here were planned and designed by architects commissioned by the municipality of Barcelona. Certainly, there was some involvement of the residents. In case of the PEI the locals were asking for the creation of the space and in the case of JRS the planning process even included participatory elements, but still the creation of the parks followed the logic of the creation of public space. Referring to Stavrides definition of common space, those parks are spaces "given to the people".

This thesis aims to understand if those spaces that are given to people through top-down urban planning have the capacity to develop towards common spaces. Based on the idea of spaces of in-betweenness, as explained in the following section 5.2, that have been planned and designed by an external actor, the two parks will be examined regarding how people creatively invent the different usages by individually and collectively interpreting the given spaces.

5.2 Socio-spatial analysis: identifying Spaces of In-betweenness

The thesis´ aim to understand commoning processes in relation to spatiality and the spatial aspects of the common resource demands for an analysis that draws on concepts of Urban Design. For a public park becoming a common space, with local people using the space regarding their needs while guaranteeing the acceptance of diversity, the parks need to provide *spaces of in-betweenness*. Those are spaces that due to their design do not pre-determine a certain use of a space but leave room for the users

to define and attach a meaning to the place, so they can host a broad range of diverse uses (Simoes-Albrecht 2016: 144). From an architectural/ urban design perspective, those places can be:

- Threshold spaces: contact spaces that force users into necessary proximity and offer spaces for a "time-out" such as entry points with benches or cafés. They are usually marked by a high visibility (ibid. 136).
- Edges: spaces that create spatial divisions and structure, such as park benches. They can be used for active and passive social mixing, both in more hidden places or in the very centre of the park (ibid. 138).
- Paths: if not only used and designed as a pass-through and if provided with several cross-points, they enhance the chance of social informal encounters. Smaller paths provide space to observe the co-users and support the awareness of fellow humans and related diversity, if broad and wide they invite to non-defined uses, such as inline-skating (ibid. 139).
- Nodes: spaces where different paths and activities cross, e.g. the entrances or the centres of the parks. They serve as point of interaction when people have to stop and interact, intentionally or unintentionally (ibid. 140).
- Props: spaces with play equipment, street furniture, art work or the like. Depending on the location of the props they can be important places for parks to become commons because they offer possibilities for interaction (ibid. 144).

Those in-between spaces are crucial attributes of the parks that contribute to making the public space a commons. While UC scholars not directly relate back to this Urban Design concept of in-betweenness, their terminology used for describing desired public spaces nonetheless demands for the creation of spaces that are not pre-defined in their use and that leave room for interpretations by the citizens. This suggests an analytical frame that combines spatial in-betweenness with the UC understanding of public space. To put in a nutshell, Stavrides (2016: 75) coins the term of *heterotopic spaces*. Those spaces can be seen as social pores where heterogenous users common a space; they are "places where difference meet" (ibid. 72). They contribute to visualize diversity and heterogeneity. In the same line, Amin (2008) uses the concept of *thrown-togetherness*, "the relatively unconstrained circulation of multiple bodies in a shared physical space." (ibid. 10). He thereby refers not only to the sharing of the space with other, maybe culturally different, persons, but also with different non-human objects.

Understanding urban parks as common spaces demands a reading of those undefined spaces affecting and shaping social relations. While the commons concept focuses on the (inter-)human relations (who are the human users? How are the humans managing a certain non-human resource?), Amin connects the creation of the commons, or - as he calls it – the collective culture, to non-human aspects, such as technology, nature, objects (Amin 2008: 8). Consequently, the above described spaces of in-betweenness, that had been identified in both parks through the method of observation, will be examined according to Amin´s four keywords that favour the creation of the commons, namely multiplicity,

symbolic use of space, conviviality and technological maintenance - given they do not follow certain power dynamics or processes of exclusion (ibid. 11). In the following, those four keywords will shortly be explained:

- *Multiplicity* describes the existence and tolerance of diversity. Related to spaces, it also describes the planned opening of space to multiple uses by different users. Because of existing power dynamics in the urban society, this opening sometimes demands careful interventions from an authority, to guarantee the usage of spaces without social exclusion. Multiplicity can in this regard mostly be interpreted as a characteristic of both the community as well as the rules/ social relations they decide on (ibid. 15).

- The *symbolic use of space* could be read as the iconic design of the parks through buildings and statues or planned mass-events taking place in the public. Related to the idea of the commoning of public space, it rather refers to an unintended transformation - at least unintended by the planners - of the public space as a symbolic visualization of politics and cultures (through art/ graffiti/manifestations) (ibid. 16ff). Stavrides refers to this symbolic use of space as practices of defacement. By changing a space´s surface the person´s/ group´s identity and memory gets expressed and detached from a certain authority. Graffiti and the disruption of the city´s design can be read as practices of commoning (Stavrides 2016: 183).

- *Conviviality* describes the tolerance and acceptance of a multicultural living together. It describes the shared experience of a park and its infrastructure. This term gains on importance with an increasing heterogeneity in urban areas (Amin 2008: 19). In this thesis, it is mostly understood in terms how the users accept different interpretations of the shared space, referring to rival behaviour regarding the parks´ usage.

- The last keyword is the one of *technological maintenance*, referring to the infrastructural non-human attributes of the spaces, such as well-working equipment of the parks or sewage systems. They themselves are not directly leading to making a common but are a necessary condition. The park and its maintenance must be provided, so that people can use it. In this thesis it is referring to the physical aspects of the parks, thus the resource itself (ibid.).

By combining those two concepts, Simoes Aelbrecht´s spaces of in-betweenness and Amin´s keywords of collective culture, the thesis contributes to a reading of the social processes in the public realm in strong interdependence of the spatial and material environment. The spaces of in-betweenness will be examined regarding fulfilling those four keywords. The four terms can be understood as the basis criteria to be fulfilled so that commoning processes can take place.

5.3 Defining common spaces: common resource, community and commoning

Before turning to the analytical part, it will be shortly explained how the two example parks can be understood as Urban Commons. Even though the commons concept entered mainstream academia, it still lacks a clear, widely used definition of what characterises a commons, especially an Urban

Commons. After reviewing different UC scholars, Kip et al. identified three elements that are common to the different definitions: there must be, first, a common resource, that, second, belongs to a defined group of users who, third, develop rules/ institutions/ commoning practices to use the resource (Kip et al. 2015: 13). Defining those three elements related to the here examined parks encounters different challenges due to the urban context that will be shortly explained in the following.

The two urban parks are the shared resource that differs in their characteristics from the by Ostrom defined traditional CPR. The successful creation of the parks as commons is dependent of those characteristics (Bollier 2009: 5). First, to be understood and used as a commons, the parks need a high number of users. Different than a lake that can be overfished, an urban public space does primarily profit from more people using it. It is a sign of a good quality urban space when people spend time there. Nonetheless, a public space does not provide infinite depletability. Its value then decreases when it gets overcrowded and e.g. causes congestion and a feeling of human disorder. Second, UC are ideally open to an infinitely big group of heterogenous commoners whereas TC are characterized as excludable goods, meaning the groups of users is adequately small to create social trust and strangers can be excluded from the use of the resource. Third, public parks can attract rivalrous usages. Different groups of users expect different uses of the shared space. Some people might e.g. go to the park to get some tranquillity from the noisy city, while others might mingle there and listen to loud music (ibid.; Kip et al. 2015: 15).
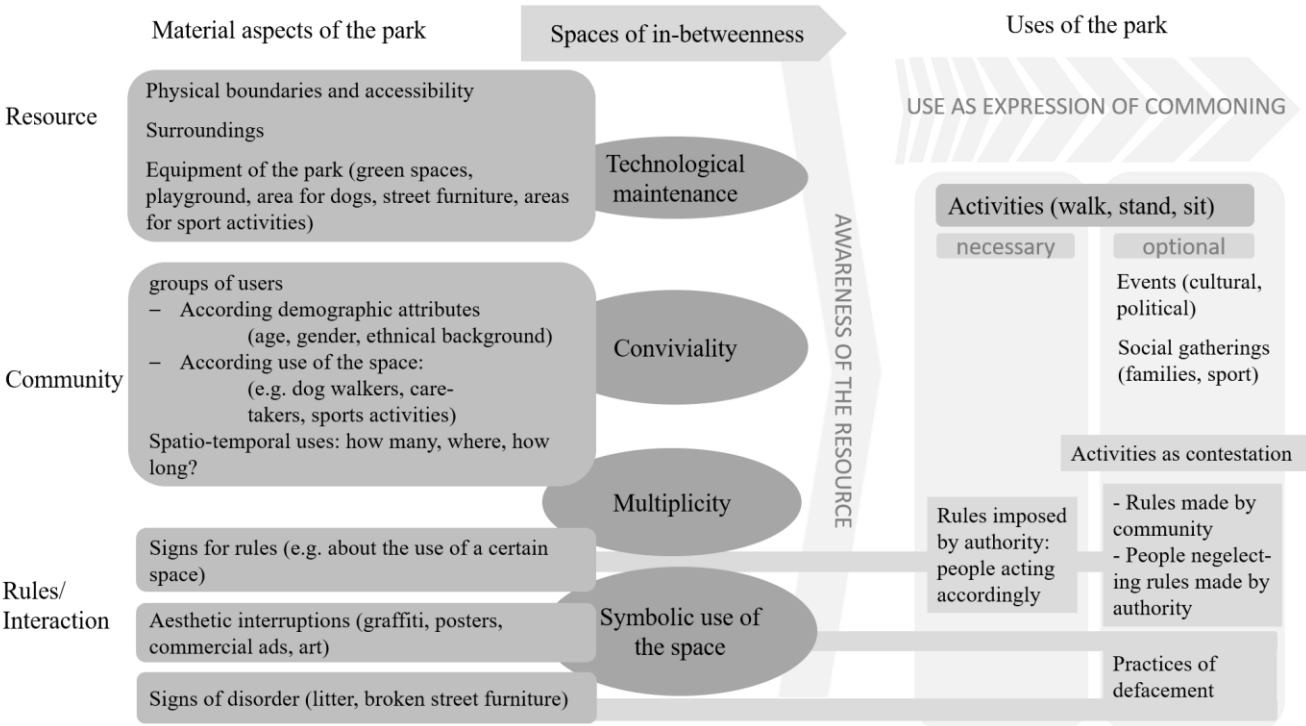

Figure 2: analytical frame based on the socio-spatial understanding of public space.
The graphic presentation draws on the different concepts and methods used in the thesis, such as spaces of in-betweenness (Simoes Aelbrecht 2016), collective culture (Amin 2008), common spaces (Stavrides 2016) and methodological studies on public life (Gehl and Svarre (2013))

Defining the group of users, as the second element of making the commons, encounters difficulties in terms of their heterogeneity and related different claims for and meaning of the use of public space. Individuals value the UC differently. The benefits of public parks cannot be measured in monetary terms, positive effects such as effects on the individual well-being or a stronger social cohesion are not directly noticeable. Depending on many factors, such as age, gender, cultural background, or profession, the urban common has different value to different people. To understand the park as a commons, it has to be assured that people are aware of it as a CPR (Kratzwald 2015: 34; Stavrides 2016: 45).

Common spaces have been described as spaces taken by the people. This "taking" of the spaces will be read as the commoning, the third element of the commons. Commoning can be understood both as the creation of formal rules and management systems or as social relations and informal existing norms (Bollier 2009: 3). In this thesis, special emphasis is set on the expression of commoning referring to the latter, the informal aspect, both in material terms as well as through social interaction.

With "material expression of commoning" I am referring to the visualization of claiming and contesting space. Therefore, the two parks have been examined in terms of existence of signs for rules (e.g. designated dog-areas, rules for the use of the playground, etc.), aesthetic interruptions that play with those existing rules (graffiti, art, commercial ads and the like), and signs of disorder (such as litter, general lack of maintenance) – namely mainly practices of defacement.

In relation to the social interactions of commoning, behavioural aspects of the park users were observed, based on Gehl and Svarre (2013) and their division of the main activities of *sit, walk and stand* into *necessary* and *optional* activities in public life. Necessary activities are taking place under all conditions, e.g. people using the place as a transit space to reach public transport or the nearby market place. Those activities will not be understood as contributing to commoning, while the optional activities, such as strolling or sitting to enjoy the environment, are enhancing the awareness of the commons and thereby might lead to a sense of place (ibid. 16). In this analysis, Gehl´s list of optional activities will be expanded to activities that involve forms of social interaction and recognition of multiplicity, such as sport activities, social gatherings, and family time. Another emphasis will be put on activities that can be read as acts of contestation. This relates back to behaviour according rules, both visible in form of signs and invisible such as social norms, e.g. are people using the paths designated for walking or are they rather "enclosuring" green areas; are people using the park equipment according the designated use? Neglecting pre-given rules, also in form of practices of defacement, can be seen as an act of contestation and will be interpreted as commoning processes.

6. Methodology

The thesis´ research design is created as a case study with two units of analysis. Those units have been examined trough a methodology that is both applied in Urban Design and in Social Sciences and hence mirroring the interdisciplinary thought of this study by providing a socio-spatial analysis. In the following, the selection of the case study and its units and the research process will be described. Further, the conduction of the method of observation and its related shortcomings and ethical considerations will be presented.

6.1 Case study

In order to answer the above raised aim and research questions, this thesis will take the examples of the Jardins de la Rambla de Sants and Parc de l´Espanya Industrial as the two units of an emblematic case-study design. Gerring defines the case study as "*an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units*." (2004: 342). In this line, the examined parks are identified as a common single case study through which the examination of the everyday usage of the spaces will be used to understand broader social processes (Yin 2014: 52). The parks´ examination serves as an attempt to deeper engage with current issues of the neighbourhood´s transformation and resulting heterogenization of the parks´ users.

Further, the chosen parks, their users as the unit of analysis and the neighbourhood as the broader context mirror different current developments of global urbanism and social movements. I therefor also understand the two example parks as a paradigmatic case "that highlights more general characteristics of the society in question" (Flyberg 2006: 232). In urban planning, the creation and provision of public space gained momentum following the idea of just and sustainable cities. The construction of an elevated park started in New York with the flagship project of the High Line and is now widespread tactic of urban development in several cities around the globe. Thereby, old unused infrastructure gets refurbished and redesigned as parks, providing green amenities by creating natural environments in highly urbanized contexts, as such also the Jardins de la Rambla de Sants in Barcelona (Littke et al. 2016: 356). While JRS resembles this urban trend of elevated parks, PEI shows possibilities for new uses of industrial areas while integrating the historical heritage of those sites and mirrors the development in many former industrial European cities that have to deal with an economic restructuring of the urban realm, e.g. from industrial and working-class neighbourhoods towards the service sector (Anguelovski et al. 2018b:7).

The research process has been marked by an ongoing re-writing of the theoretical frame and research question, led by experiences in the field. As it has been shown in Yin´s (2014: 60) graphic representation, the research process started with the idea to understand public space usage under the lens of the commons theory. The case selection then happened simultaneously with the design of the data collection process in form of direct observations. The two parks as the units of analysis were chosen, according to

Gerring (2004: 344), for a stronger presentation of results. Instead of just using one case unit, which impedes the possibility for broader generalization of the studied social phenomenon, Gerring argues for "within-unit cases" (ibid.) to be able to draw causal relations. The first park, JRS, has been chosen as unit of analysis after some informal field visits that were led by vague ideas on the UC concept. The park is located in a neighbourhood that shows characteristics resembling many issues of global urbanism, such as the transformation to a post-industrial economy and further constitutes a very active neighbourhood community. Also, the park follows an international trend in urban landscape architecture as it has been designed and constructed following the idea of the both praised and criticized project of the New York High Line.

A second case unit has then been chosen under the following criteria: first, due to the geographical proximity to the first unit, the group of users are expected to have the same socio-economic and demographic background, since the two parks are located within the same neighbourhood and are just a five-minute walk apart from each other. Second, the two parks follow a completely different spatial design and show different forms of commoning processes, supporting the initial thought of understanding commoning in strong relation to the spatial aspects, when given a similar group of users. Third, the two parks have been constructed in very different phases of the city´s urban transformation. Parc de l´Espanya Industrial was built during the first phase of the Barcelona Model (see Section 2.1) in 1986 when the creation and up-valuation of public space was highly welcomed by the locals and followed the paradigm to create spaces for and together with its users. The opening of Jardins de la Rambla de Sants 30 years later must be examined in relation to a period of major transformations of the urban fabric that caused high levels of gentrification. It has been perceived by the residents as the exemplification of globally common struggles about neighbourhood developments, in times where the Barcelona locals actively combat for them unwanted developments.

This thesis studies two parks in the same neighbourhood, and therefore sets the unit of analysis in context of this specific neighbourhood. Still, not all residents of that neighbourhood are using the public parks and especially not simultaneously. Given the choice of method – direct observations – and the specific time of data collection the analysis is based on a random sample of the neighbourhood´s population (Yin 2014: 32). The case study design has been chosen as an exploratory process to understand in how far public green space can be read as an Urban Commons (Gerring 2004: 350). Applying the exploratory methodology of observations, the usage and behaviour of the parks´ users have been examined in relation to the physical aspects of the space to see if and how the users approach, enclosure and contest the space.

6.2 Research Process

The research process has been performed in a continuously iterative process of literature review regarding the theory and unstructured field visits, that were guided by keywords of the UC. After the first data collection process a structured observation protocol has been created which is based on

methodological studies on public life, such as Gehl and Svarre (2013), Simoes Aelbrecht (2016) and Littke et al. (2016). During one week of fieldwork in July, the structured direct observations had been conducted. With the collected data at hand, the final version of the theoretical frame has been created, as shown in Figure 2 and outlined in chapter 5. Based on this, the in-depth analysis has been conducted.

The first idea was to use a mixed-method approach, and combine the data collected in direct observations with an archival analysis of planning documents and online media articles. Due to the scope and time frame of this thesis and the theoretical frame that developed towards a focus on spatial elements, the observational data turned out to provide ample material to support the theoretical understanding. During the analysis, the archival type of data still will be used in a supportive way. This data has been collected with online search engines such as Google and considered local and regional newspapers, as well as the information provided by the municipality of Barcelona. Some of this data has been available only in Catalan, a language the author is not fluent in. Online language translators such as google translate and deepL supported the reading of this data in Spanish.

Further, access has been provided to quantitative data of a study conducted in Sants and its two adjacent neighbourhoods Sants-Badal and La Bordeta (Estrada and Roset 2019). This data is based on a bigger unit of analysis, since it consists of three instead of just one neighbourhood. The data has been collected in form of a survey; the 154 respondents were randomly approached in the public realm of the three neighbourhoods. The survey provided data regarding four topics: the level of gentrification perceived by the residents, the satisfaction with the provision of green space, the social cohesion in the neighbourhood and the mental well-being of the study area´s residents. Because the scale of the quantitative data does not match with the scale provided in this thesis, the data has rather been used as an informal double-check on the locals´ opinion and use of the public parks, to eliminate some of the shortcomings of the observational method that will be elaborated on in the next section. Further, the survey´s questions on social cohesion could be used to see if the residents understand their neighbourhood as a community, a characteristic that would support the understanding of the two parks as UC. Readings on the history of social activism in the neighbourhood of Sants implied such an existence of trust and social cohesion, which could be confirmed through the quantitative data.

6.3 Observations

The thesis´ aim is to understand the relation between the spatial aspects of a public park and how they influence and affect humans using and interacting with the space and with each other. Therefore, a methodology has been chosen that connects the examination of the space with human interactions: non-participatory observations have been used to understand the parks in terms of commoning.

The first field visits were guided by themes and topics that could be identified in the different readings on commons, Urban Commons and public spaces. This rather inductive approach combined with an iterative process of literature review and methodological analysis helped to develop a critical

understanding of the commons concept. Several informal visits to the study sites took place throughout spring 2019. Those were used as pilot studies and where led by a Grounded Theory approach. Further, they were also used to gather first data on material aspects of the space, such as design, furniture, surroundings, and signs of disorder (litter and graffiti) and to see during which time the parks would be used the most. Since the literature interprets common spaces as (politically) contested spaces, special interest was also set on signs of a political expression in the parks. Therefore, the parks were visited before some major socio-political events, such as the women march on 8th March, the Spanish general election on 28th April, the international labour day on the 1st May and on dates with a lot of media attention regarding the trials against the Catalan independence leaders throughout the spring. For the more structured observations, one week in July 2019 has been chosen to collect data on the behavioural aspects in public space[1].

During the pilot visits throughout the spring, the late afternoon and evening hours have been identified as the parks´ peak-hours where most social interaction happens. During the mornings and noon-time, park users where mostly individuals, walking to do errands or to work out. Just very little interaction has been observed that can be understood as commoning. In this regard, observations following an observation protocol were mostly conducted during the evenings in July because the parks are more visited during summer times than in winter/ spring.

Before entering the field to analyse the behavioural aspects of public life, the role that had been taken as the observing researcher had been clarified, answering the questions how, where, when, who, why and what, as recommended by Fyfe (1992: 129): the direct observation was conducted as a detached observer. The data was recorded in form of a field diary, supported by photos, which facilitated a more detailed description of the happenings (Gehl and Svarre 2013: 32). The author therefore noted down the more general patterns and information on gender and age to identify different groups of users/ commoners and made a list of activities that could be seen fulfilled in the public realm.

The observations were guided conceptionally to answer the three question of what the common resource is, who the commoners/ users of the resource are and if there are signs of commoning processes, which have been explained more thoroughly in Section 5.2 and 5.3. To answer those three questions, the observation protocol had been divided in two main themes: first, spatial observations to understand the physical and material aspects of the space, and second, behavioural observations to examine social relations and interaction within the space. Those two themes are also the base for the theoretical frame.

Due to the size of both parks it is not possible to oversee the parks from one single location. During the observations, positions had been changed every 20 to 30 minutes to get a good impression over the happenings at different spots of the parks. With increasing knowledge over locations of the study sites,

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[1] An overview over the observation times and dates can be found in Annex 1.

spaces of special interest, e.g. with a lot of human interaction, could be identified. Those spaces, later referred to as spaces of in-betweenness, were the spaces mostly observed. Observation duration was between 2 and 5 hours, depending on the weather and number of users in the parks.

6.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher´s role was the one of "an invisible non-participant who takes in the big picture without taking part in the event" (Gehl and Svarre 2013: 5) by conducting covert observations. This role raised indeed some ethical considerations. The researcher was intensively studying individuals and their behaviour/ interaction in the public sphere without them knowing being observed. The standard procedure of Informed Consent that is usually applied in qualitative research is difficult to achieve in this set-up of the study.

The data has been collected in the public realm on a space that is accessible by everyone. The Social Research Association explicitly mentions the distinction between researching and collecting data in the public and private realm, wherein especially in the former the paradigm of privacy cannot be guaranteed, independent of who is the observer that might be a journalist, a private person enjoying the public space or precisely the researcher. Consequently, the necessity of Informed Consent is applied with less rigor (SRA 2003: 33). While the researcher´s role in studies following a participant-observation protocol in the private or semi-private such as clinical studies has to be chosen more carefully, the research methodology in form of non-participatory observations on public life often has been seen as less contentious in terms of ethical considerations (Petticrew et al. 2007:6). After thorough considerations and knowing the data collected that does not contain any critical or harming information, the role of the detached observer, including the watching of people and taking photos without informed consent, has been considered the best tool to study unbiased public life and to answer the thesis´ research question.

Another limitation on the behalf of the observing researcher is the gathering of information regarding age, gender, ethnicity and the like of the observed persons. The classification along those categories is based on very subjective experiences. Especially when it comes to ethnical/ cultural background, the research subjects had been "classified" according the author´s understanding of e.g. a European, Latin-American, Arab, etc. person. This is subjectively based on the outer appearance of a person and the spoken languages/ dialects the author could identify and does not consider where the person was born or raised. The categorisation of age is as well based on subjective experiences, and the categorisation of gender into the binary thinking of male-female does not reflect on already marginalised genderqueer persons. Those limitations are arising from the chosen methodology, for their avoidance a research design based on surveys and (semi-)structured interviews would have been the better tools.

Even though the mentioned shortcomings are an essential critique on observation as a method to study public life, it has been considered the right methodology to answer the thesis´ research question since it provides unbiased data, especially relating to the spatial physical aspects that is difficult to generate with

other qualitative methods, such as (semi-)structured interviews. The park users behave in their "normal" way, without changing to behaviour they think might be expected, they can be captured in their mundane daily life (Clark et al. 2009: 348). It further enables the researcher to better grasp the negotiation and reproduction of "accepted behaviour" in the public realm, a crucial point in the commons concept, especially when the given studied population is quite heterogenous in its characteristics (Vertovec 2011: 23). Observations also allow the connection of humans (inter-)acting with each other and with their environment. Spatial observations give room to understand the interdependences of non-human and humans (Amin 2008:8). Further, the observational method helps to fill the research gap as identified by Simoes Aelbrecht (2016) who demands for more mixes of spatial and social analyses to better understand the importance and meaning of public space for the conviviality of urban dwellers.

7. Analysis

Before turning to the final discussion of the parks´ potential to become common spaces in Chapter 7.3, the first two research questions will be approached. Both parks have been examined regarding their spatial attributes and the provision of spaces of in-betweenness. Those spaces will first be described and in a next step interpreted regarding their usage according the through the commons concept identified themes.

7.1 Parc de l´Espanya Industrial

7.1.1 Spatial description of PEI

PEI is spatially embedded in its adjacent neighbourhood due to its location on the city´s ground level. Nonetheless, it is completely fenced, partly with a stone wall, partly with a look-through-fence. It is accessible from two sides, the side connected with the Estación Sants, and from Carrer de Muntadas (Fig. 3). All four accesses are in form of gates, that will be closed during night time (Fig. 4). On two sites, the park is surrounded by residential houses, one site is connecting with the train station building (Fig. 7) and the fourth site is adjacent to the sports centre built for the Olympic Games in 1992. From there, skyscrapers are visible, leading to the feeling of being in a hyper-urbanised context. On this site, the park is bordering the district of Eixample, a rather wealthy neighbourhood built in the 1880s. The close-by train station Sants makes it also easy to access by public transport from other parts of the city.

Besides the municipal sport centre, only accessible from the park area, the space provides several sport facilities, such as basketball courts, boule pitches, a soccer field, as well as table tennis tables, a playground and a fenced dog area (Fig. 5). The industrial heritage of the site has been considered in the design process. At the centre of PEI, the cultural centre Casa de Mig is located in a conserved building originally belonging to the textile company. Adjacent to it, also within the park area, there is a primary
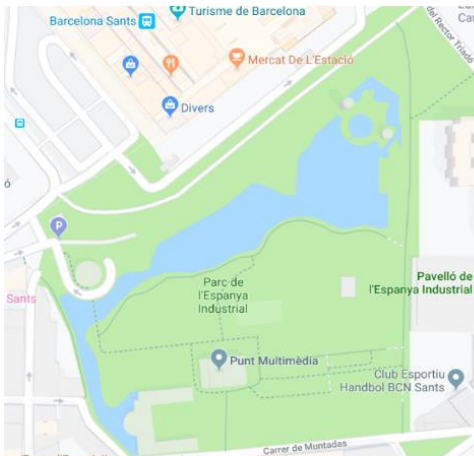
Figure 4: access gates to the park

Figure 5: PEI´s equipment: café, basketball field, children´s playground

Figure 3: Ground-plan of PEI, source: google maps

Figure 6: public art

Figure 7: view over the park and the adjacent train station

school. Case de Mig and an elevated path that connects two of the accesses on opposite sides divide the park physically into two halves.

One half contains the playground area, the café - a popular mingling place- and the primary school. Entering the park from Carrer de Muntadas, the area is nearly completely covered by old plane trees, making the space very green and providing a lot of shade, especially for the playground area. This side feels less like an urban park but more as a residential neighbourhood plaza. The other half, and its more artistic design, can be described as a stage-audience setting. Coming from the train station, big white stairs, surrounded by several lighthouses, as well as several benches are directed towards the sport area and the artwork, mostly in form of sculptures (Fig. 6 and 7). They invite visitors of the park to contemplate the different props of the park and direct the attention to the park centre with its sport facilities. This generates a feeling of high visibility. This side of the park also contains a lawn divided by some small paths as well as an artificial lake that covers nearly a fourth of the park´s surface (Fig. 6/7). This, contrary to JRS, generates the feeling of an integration of natural aspects into the park´s fabric.

Generally, the park is designed in a way that clearly defines different areas and their type of use. The more artistic part of the park is a place to mingle and observe, while the sport fields indicate the active usage. The park has several smaller paths, not necessarily leading to a central crossing point. In contrast to JRS that connects two metro stations, PEI is less designed as passthrough space, but more to spend time, partly because of the municipal institutions based in the park.

7.1.2 PEI´s Spaces of In-betweenness

To examine the potential of the park to develop towards common spaces, spaces of in-betweenness have been identified. All over the park, there are different edge-spaces, mostly benches that are directed towards the different features of the park. Edges with a high usage have been identified around the playground area, including the park´s café. They are mostly facing the play equipment. Further important edges are benches around the sport pitches and the white stairs. Generally, most of the edge spaces are marked by a high visibility.

Spaces that showed diverse groups of users, doing both temporary and stationary activities, were identified as nodes: those are in PEI the basketball court that is located at the very centre of the park, with several paths crossing there and several edges facing it as the stage, as well as the playground that is surrounded by two of the parks access gates and the café.

The threshold spaces, such as the access gates and entrances to the institutions in the park (gym and cultural centre) did not show much social interaction between the park users. Only at the entrance to the school, parents and children were interacting, mostly with short conservations and greetings. The rather narrowly designed paths served as a passage and did not seem to fulfil activities in form of social encounters. This was also due to the fact that people were walking straight through the lawn and not using the paths designated for walking. The lawn, where signs explicitly forbid the actual usage, was identified as a very popular spot for stationary activities, such as having a picnic, social mingling or for dog-owners and their dogs. Especially non-human park users (dogs) were also approaching the park´s water spaces. Those space, even though not planned from the park designers and municipality, are spaces that inspire the users to creative usage, therefore they are identified as spaces of in-betweenness. Since they initially were not thought of spaces to be used, they will be referred to as *unintended spaces*.

Spaces of in-betweenness provided by the park´s props are especially around the elements that invite for an active usage, such as the play equipment. The props in form of artwork, e.g. the sculptures and the lighthouses, could not be observed as spaces where people interact with each other or with the artwork, even though those elements are used to promote the park on the city-wide level or to tourists (Ajuntament 2019b).

7.1.3 Activities and usage of PEI

The spaces of in-betweenness are defined as spaces that entail a certain looseness in their design, and that, referring to multiplicity, are open to a broad range of users. The spaces in PEI, even though they enhance social encounters, are very much determined in how to use them and by who to be used. During the observations, the different elements of the parks have been approached by the anticipated groups of users.

The playground area, including the café, served as a space of stationary activities for children and their supervising persons. The children were interacting with the play equipment, but also using the wide path

surrounding the play area to play hide-and-seek or catch, or to inline-skate. Benches around this central node were used by the supervising persons, mostly middle-aged, white and dominantly female. Interaction appeared between the children, also between unknown children, between children and their supervising person, and between the parents, who mostly seemed to socially engage with other parents they knew in form of short greetings or chitchatting (Fig.8).

The spaces around the basketball court were identified as the space with most interaction. During the observations, the basketball court was constantly in use, mostly by young male users, aged approximately between 15 and 25, with multi-ethnic backgrounds. Especially during the evening hours, this spot became very crowded. People passing-by often stopped for a small chat or a greeting. The basketball fields were also surrounded by other people watching the players (Fig. 9). Thereby, the spaces have been used according the by-design-implied function, namely the sports activity. The users of the sport fields, besides the basketball also the volleyball field and the table tennis tables, where mostly male, while often girls and young women where centred around those amenities. It can be argued that, even though the sportsmen could be identified according to observable attributes as ethnically mixed, the design of the space excludes a certain group of users, such as female users, because those sports activities are considered "male activities". The concept of multiplicity is thereby not fulfilled, since certain groups have not been taken into account as users. This raises issues on the gender aspect of urban planning and connects to a debate on cities, especially with an industrial background, as designed for men and their work (Ortiz Escalante and Gutiérrez Valdivia 2016).

The other parts of the parks are not indicating a very specific form of use since they are more designed as an observing or hang-out spot. On the different benches, stairs and lawns that are spread all over the park, users have been very heterogenous in terms of age, gender and cultural background: people on their own, couples and withs, and smaller groups of three to five persons of different ages could be observed. Activities of younger users, such as teens, included listening to loud music and dancing, chatting with each other, taking photos. Other users were reading, interacting with their phone, having a picnic or talking to family or friends. The different users, alone or in a small group, could see each other but were due to the width of the space not in close distance. Thus, social interaction between strangers did not occur further than observing each other from distance.

A little form of contestation and defining the space´s usage could be observed in the user group of dog-owners. Even though the park is equipped with a special zone for dogs, that is fenced and rather small, dogs were seen mostly on the lawn or in the water, both spaces whose usage is explicitly prohibited by signs (Fig. 11).

The different user groups are sharing the space, as it seemed during the observation, without rival behaviour. They were thereby often in enough distance to not disrupt the other park users, one could listen to loud music without limiting the co-users benefits of the park. This can be interpreted as fulfilling

Figure 8: the playground area and its paths and edge-spaces, PEI

Figure 10: public art referring to the park´s and barrio´s history

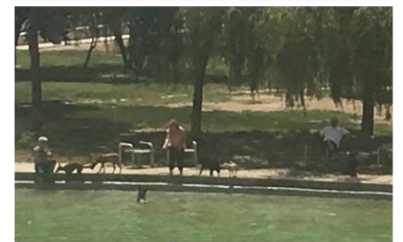Figure 9: the basketball court, its adjacent paths and edge-spaces in PEI

Figure 11: empty dog area; dogs approaching the water space

the keyword of conviviality. The symbolic use of PEI´s spaces has been observed as intended and controlled by the managing authority. The sculptures, such as of Neptune and Venus are put into the park as part of the equipment, but do not resemble any local identity. Other art pieces, such as a huge painting on the building conserved as cultural heritage is referring to the worker´s congress in Sants 1918 where the barrio´s workers united demanding fair working condition. The painting is connecting the park to a historically important movement that shaped the barrio´s identity (Fig. 10) (Ajuntament 2018).

The park users have been identified as being very heterogenous in terms of age and cultural background. The playground area attracted mostly Spanish families; the basketball court was used by young male users with very different origins. The rest of the park showed users, both female and male, from early teens to middle-age, with different ethnical backgrounds. Very few elderly people could be observed. Besides those users, of which some seem to use the space on a regular basis, people with suitcases as well as tourist have been spotted. For travellers, the park is a good space to wait for the train, for tourists it is an interesting space in terms of the very artistic design that is also promoted on different travel blogs online.

7.2 Jardins de la Rambla de Sants

7.2.1 Spatial description of JRS

JRS is an elevated park, that floats over the neighbourhood in 8-10 m height. Over its 700m length, there are several access possibilities by elevator, escalators as well as normal stairs. On each end of the JRS is a metro station located, so the park thus serves as a passage to reach public transport which makes it easily accessible from other parts of the city (Fig. 12). The surroundings of the park are mostly

residential. Over the whole length of the park, there are several bars, cafés, and grocery shops on the street level, but due to the aerial location of the JRS not directly accessible. At the end of JRS, visitors of the park can overview industrial areas, partly abandoned. The park also opens the view to the underlying railroads.

Entering JRS from the Plaza de Sants, the park is highly integrated into its surrounding urban fabric. The park´s entrance is located at the neighbourhood´s central square Plaza de Sants, a busy town centre with several shops and public amenities, such as libraries, schools, a cultural and an elderly centre being in proximity (Fig. 13). Walking from there into the park, the JRS slowly wins on altitude, feeling disconnected from the near-by visible buildings. The first 100 m are constructed as a wide, open path, with little green features, giving the design a very urban and artificial feeling. Arriving at more central parts of the park, there are several green islands, which are physically disconnected from the paths. It is not an integrating design of natural elements to interact with, but rather to watch from the distance. Signs put by the municipality forbid to enter the green areas (Fig. 14).

Figure 12: ground-plan of JRS, Graphic Carles Cols, published in El Periódico, 2016

Figure 13: entrance to the JRS from the neighbourhood´s central square

Figure 14: wide paths, next to green spaces and rules neglecting the interaction with the natural elements

Figure 15: central crossing node as the main meeting point

Figure 16: playground and chiringuito as a space for social gathering

Figure 17: final stretch, open to multiple uses (inline skate, cycling) with view over the railways

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Along the main path, the JRS provides numerous benches to sit, as well as sports equipment. Besides the main path, there are smaller paths providing more hidden spaces. After 400m, there is the central nodal point where you can access from the underlying metro station, from the Rambla de Badal (the main pedestrian boulevard of Sants) as well as from both ends of the JRS. It is one of the central nodes both for intentional as well as unintentional social interaction (Fig. 15). Continuing further towards the end, the parks provides a playground area, sports equipment, as well as a chiringuito (Fig. 16), a little stall typical for Spanish public spaces providing beverages, which has been out of service during the field work. The play area is fenced, and for the size of the park and the number of users rather small. Also, both the play area as well as the sports equipment are not provided with a lot of shade.

Continuing towards the end of the JRS, that connects with the underlying metro station Mercat Nou, the park splits up in two arms that open the view to the railways, some industrial sites as well as the adjacent municipality of Hospitalet de Llobregat, that is directly bordering with Sants and the JRS. This part of the park is object to multiple uses, especially sports activities, such as skating and cycling (Figure 17); although not clearly indicated by the park´s design. The other arm provides rather hidden spaces and an educational garden with historically important local plants, such as vine branches.

7.2.2 JRS´s Spaces of In-betweenness

In JRS, the spaces are less institutionalised. Besides the chiringuito that is partly used by a coop organizing children play events on the weekends, the park does not contain any buildings or municipal institutions. Over the whole length of the park, benches are positioned along the paths, both very visible but also in more hidden spots, generating a feeling of more privacy. Following, the park provides the user with numerous edge spaces that allow an observing of each other, especially of passers-by. Only a few benches are directed towards the park´s equipment.

The park´s central spaces are designed as very wide and open. Only a few spaces are very defined in their usage, such as the playground area. This area can be understood as a threshold space. It is located next to one of the access points, contains several benches as edge spaces, and different play and sport equipment. Consequently, it "forces" different park users into close proximity. A central element of the park is the main wide-open path that connects Plaza de Sants with the park´s final stretch. Due to the flat concrete ground, it can be used for sports activities such inline skating, skateboarding, running and cycling. The path is also used as a space for stationary and social activities; numerous people doing small-talk and chitchatting. Generally, this space is contributing to creative usage due to its width and undefined design.

This main path is connecting the three main nodes. Those are at the entrance to the park at Plaza de Sants, where several streets from the barrio meet and amenities such as cafés and bars are located. Further, the Plaza constitutes a huge square with a little fountain, as well as several benches. The space has been used by a broad range of users. A second node is in the middle of the elevated part where two

access points (both by elevator and electric stairs) meet. It is also marked by an open undefined expanse, partly structured by benches. The third node is on the very end of the park, with on elevator connecting to the metro station and some stairs to sit on that create a stage-audience setting towards the final open stretch used by (inline-)skaters. All three nodes have been subject to very different interpretation of usage, such as taking a stroll, doing a work-out, dancing, having small conversations, biking, etc.

Besides the playground and sports equipment, the park does not include any props such as public art. As described above, the park contains green fields as a form of beautification. They could be understood as props, since they contain educational signs giving information on the type of plants. They are visually excluded through little fences surrounding them, by the slightly elevated position and through signs forbidding to enter the fields. Still, same as in PEI, the park users are approaching them, mostly dog-owners and their dogs. They are spaces, whose use has been adapted to the needs of and by the park users. Therefore, they also can be classified as unintended spaces of in-betweenness.

7.2.3 Activities and usages of JRS

In JRS, the edges spaces proved to be important spaces for a heterogenous usage of the public space. Benches on the main path, all very visible, were used by many elderly persons and singles – either reading, listening to music or observing the passers-by. The edge spaces on the side paths, more hidden, were used by little groups of teens, often watching videos on their phones, listening to music or smoking weed. The feeling of more privacy generated through the less visible location let to usages that are a contestation of social norms, such as the teens consuming weed and alcohol, and young couples being intimate with each other. Further, those hidden spaces showed a higher amount of litter, mostly empty alcohol bottles, and smeared graffiti. They are spaces used for the botellón, a cultural trend of Spanish teens to meet up during night time on public squares and streets. This is perceived negatively because of the high consumption of alcohol, the remaining litter and the loud noises (Romo-Avilés et al. 2019: 144). The media discourse on JRS shows that the usage of the park for botellón is creating very mixed feelings regarding the park for the adjacent neighbours (betevé 2016).

The playground area - even though not shaded, with fewer play equipment than in PEI and less space - seems to attract different groups of users. Besides the children playing there, both with the equipment and along the adjacent paths, the edges around were also approached by teens and elderly persons who did not supervise any of the children. Users were ethnically more mixed than in PEI. During the observations, Spanish persons and users with Latin American accents could be identified, as well as persons with ethnical backgrounds other than that. On the weekends, the space got very crowed due to a weekly event for children. They were handcrafting or playing with outdoor toys provided by a coop. The children were thereby interacting a lot with other, also unfamiliar, park users. Supervising persons stayed either on their own or interacted with known people (Fig. 18).

Another popular spot for social interaction has been identified at Plaza de Sants (Fig. 19). This space had been subject to diverse uses, not pre-defined through the spatial design. The space is not really inviting to actively interact with the material surrounding. It is a wide grey concrete area, with little green elements as a form of beautification. Nonetheless, the square is used by elderly persons on the edge-benches, mostly watching and observing, but also families, couples and withs, playing on the ground and using the open wide spaces for sports activities such as skating or playing catch. Further, the users are interpreting the space in regards their own identity. This becomes evident through a high number of graffiti referring to the independence movement and relating to the Sants-identity (Fig. 20). They can be seen as practices of defacement that express the political culture through a symbolic use of the space. Due to the very grey and urban design of the space, one would assume that this space mostly serves as a pass-through. However, it is one of the spaces that showed most features of social interaction and political contestation. This might be related to its geographical location at the very centre of Sants, where several streets and public transport points meet and that is easily accessible also for elderly people. Further, it is located next to an autonomous social centre, located in a squatted building, that is emblematic for Sants´ social and political identity (Eizaguirre and Parés 2018: 8).

During the observations a group of daily users could be identified. The park´s central node turned out to be a popular hang-out spot for a group of young guys (Fig. 22), approximately aged 15-25 years, talking with a Caribbean accent. They were approaching the spot around 15pm and stayed at the same location several hours. Activities were e.g. listening to loud music, smoking, both weed and shisha, drinking, and driving around with e-scooters. This can be interpreted as contestation of public norms, both through obviously illegal behaviour, such as drinking alcohol and smoking weed in public, but also through inhabiting the space by causing a high noise level. Instead of choosing a more hidden location, their hang-out spot is very visible and due to the location at the park´s centre highly visited by very heterogenous persons. Surprisingly, other park users did not seem to be very bothered, the benches in close distance were used by elderly peoples, couples, other teens, and individuals. People passing-by sometimes even started dancing to the music. The park users who share the space simultaneously show a high level of acceptance towards each other, even though there is a high diversity between the different users. People were watching each other and being aware of differences. This is supporting the notion of public space as open to conviviality and multiplicity.

JRS shows a strong symbolic use of the space. Over the whole park as well as on the several accesses, walls and the park´s equipment are sprayed with graffiti. While some of them could be labelled as "smearing", there is a high number of graffiti presenting the very local political discourse. The conflict around the Catalan independence movement, that received a lot of media attention throughout Spring 2019, because of the trials against the movement´s leaders, is visible through practices of defacement. The same graffiti were changed and transformed over several weeks, showing a negotiation process of political identity on the public realm, where opponents and proponents used the park to express their

Figure 18: weekly play event for children at the playground

Figure 19: people using Plaza de Sants for social mingling and observing

Figure 20: contesting political expression through defacement. Visual confrontation of independence opponents and proponents

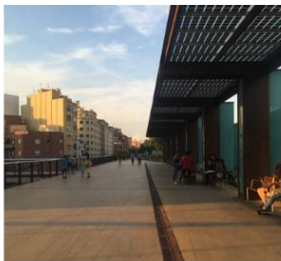**Figure 21**: Dog-owners and dogs "enclosuring" the greens

Figure 22: central node in JRS. Different users approaching the space for multiple uses

opinion regarding the movement (Fig. 20). Besides the very controversial Catalan-discourse, the park´s surface as a visualization of common struggles got also used by feminist and workers organization, both in form of graffiti and posters. This political contestation, even though not observed in direct social interaction, can be interpreted as a "taking" of the public realm, a commoning process. Through the actively happening negotiation, the park users are developing an identity towards the space.

The park users are, over the whole stretch of the park, very mixed. While in PEI, different users approach different parts of the parks, JRS´s different spaces seem to be more open towards the different interpretations and the sharing with other users, a fact that is both enhancing the multiplicity and conviviality of the space. While observing at the central node, Spanish (and different Latin American accents), Catalan, Arabic, English, Mandarin, and German could be identified as spoken languages, resembling very heterogenous groups of locals. Many of them were taking a stroll, running or cycling around the JRS and not doing stationary activities. Sometimes they stopped for small-talk with people they knew. Especially at the elevators that access the park, a high number of spontaneous social encounters between the users could be observed; the accesses serve as threshold spaces. Generally, the users seemed to live in the close-by neighbourhood, no tourists were identified. The users also covered a bigger age-range, contrary to PEI, many elderly people were spending the evening hours observing other persons.

7.3 Results and Discussion

The socio-spatial analysis based on the observational data showed that both parks proved to be highly visited. The same users could be recognized after some days of fieldwork which affirms that the park users appreciate the park as a resource for leisure and social gatherings, and value it positively. Also, both parks were used by heterogenous persons, covering different ages, genders and cultural backgrounds which shows that the parks are attracting different users. Relating to the characteristics of a common resource (Sec. 5.3), both parks were enjoyably crowded so that the presence of co-users added value to the park as resource, they were approached by a broad range of users, which gives hints of not excluding certain groups, and they served as spaces for diverse uses, in some parts more rivalrous than in others. Further, during the field visits both parks were maintained by municipal gardeners. The main infrastructure is, beside some broken benches, overall working. Except for litter and graffiti - that was significantly more in JRS and generated a feeling of visual disorder - both parks can be described as fulfilling the condition of technological maintenance. Still, JRS showed stronger aspects of "being taken" by the users - the very broad criteria used here to define a common space. In the following, drawing on Amin´s keywords of collective culture and the spatial attributes, the above described findings will be discussed relating to the idea of commoning a shared urban public space.

PEI is, due to its square-shaped form and stage-audience setting, marked by a high visibility. Other park users can be easily observed, although from some distance. This setting, combined with the existence of different municipal institutions, such as the cultural centre or the sports centre, generates a feeling of a rather controlled space. The feeling of control gets strengthened trough the stone walls as the physical boundaries and the access gates. In contrary, the physical shape of JRS as a 700m-long elevated boulevard makes is more difficult to oversee the whole park and the different users. In JRS, spaces that are marked with little visibility and that provide the feeling of privacy proved to be spaces where norms and rules got contested, e.g. by teens testing their social boundaries or by dog-owners that were approaching the green spaces. Further, PEI is closed during night-time and not accessible for any group of users, while JRS during the night transforms into a popular spot of the youth. Especially the visual defacement of the space, through graffiti and litter, happens during night when the controversial practices are less visible. It therefore can be argued that the level of visibility influences the contesting of spaces and of hitherto related social norms.

During the field visits, spaces defined as nodes, with different probs, edges, and paths crossing, proved to enhance serendipities of different users. Those spaces are expressing and visualizing conviviality and multiplicity. The spaces were e.g. in PEI the playground area and the basketball court and in JRS the Plaza de Sants, the central node and the playground. As described above, JRS´s nodes showed a more undefined design that leaves room for the users to interpret its form and function. In PEI, the usage of the play and sports area followed the dominant heteronormative interpretations of the given spaces, children and female supervising persons could be found on the playground area while young men were

playing basketball. They were used by the people as intended by the planning authority, but not contested and re-interpreted for and by other users. Contrary, the unclear design in JRS led to negotiations around that space in form of different user groups using the given spaces for different activities. Since there is no pre-given function or indicated user group, the spaces are more open towards multiplicity. Further, props such as the play equipment and the benches are positioned with less distance to each other than in PEI. This enhances the awareness of each other. In how far it strengthens the creation of social cohesion and social capital cannot be measured by observations alone, but still interactions between the different park users where noticeably higher. Especially at JRS´s central node, where people automatically pass through when using the park, the users were forced into close distance. At this point, social interaction between strangers could be observed between the different groups. Dogs proved to be a threshold to start a short conversation, both between different dog-owners but also between children and other users that wanted to pet the dog. Others were reacting to music played by the group of young male teens by dancing or singing. Especially close to the elevators, where people had to wait for the use, smaller interactions were noticed between seemingly strangers. In PEI, besides the café, no such a threshold space could be identified where people were forced through the design in such as close proximity. The café will not be considered here in detail. It constitutes a private space, even though located in the public park, because it excludes users, that do not consume in the café, from its usage.

An important aspect of the commons is the creation of rules and institutions, that "govern" the commons. In both parks, rules made by the municipality were visible in forms of signs at the parks´ entrances but also next to the different equipment, either prohibiting to walk, sit, or play on the green and blue areas, or defining the usage and user groups of certain equipment such as the playgrounds and the sport equipment. The opening hours of the park facilities in PEI are also an expression of publicly imposed rules.

Both in JRS and PEI, users were contesting those rules. This could be observed within the group of dogwalkers and their dogs. Both human and non-human were approaching the lawn and the lake in PEI and the green islands in JRS. In PEI, they preferred the wide green lawn over the very small fenced dog area, and in PEI, two spots developed towards a popular mingling place that filled up rapidly during after-work hours. Dog-owners of all ages, that came there daily, used the spot to mingle and spend around one hour on the little green fields, where the plants slowly start to disappear due to the frequent entering of the greens. Even though their taking-over of the space was destroying the park´s design - the plants - this space developed towards a space of in-betweenness where the different users, both human and non-human interact with each other and with the material space. The dog-owners develop a form of social cohesion and neighbourhood identity. Their re-definition of the greens as beautification towards an actively used and approached space in both parks shows that there is a lack of enough green fields for non-human urbanites. By taking over the physically separated natural elements, they common a green space that they/ the dogs wish for (Fig. 11/ 21).

Contesting pre-existing rules in form of social norms could further be discovered in the user group of teens and young adults, especially in JRS. With activities such as listening to loud music, inhabiting the spaces through driving around with e-scooters and by smoking and drinking in public, they were testing out their social boundaries. Both parks were approached by teens and young adults, but in JRS activities of those users can be more interpret as the contestation of social norms. Besides the above described group of young men at the central node, several hidden spaces were enclosured by young peer-groups. While the direct observations did not show any signs for conflicts between the different park users regarding this behaviour, articles in local newspaper and social media proved a disagreement of the close-by residents with this behaviour. To reduce the noise level and for providing a feeling of safety, night guards were employed during the summer months in JRS (Diputació Barcelona 2018).

Both parks are designed to host a broad range of activities and users. Relating the spatial design to the creation of multiplicity and conviviality, the provision of spatial nodes is central in fulfilling those two keywords. Conviviality as the shared experience of a shared space is strengthened by providing spaces that lead heterogenous persons into close distance. The sharing of a space and observing of each other from distance is certainly raising awareness of cultural and social differences, as has been shown by Peters (2016), and as it could be observed in PEI, but being thereby in close distance enhances direct social interaction. This had been noticed at the different nodes on JRS and can contribute to conviviality. The creation of multiplicity, meaning spaces being open towards different usages, strongly depends on the design. As has been argued before, spaces that indicate a certain usage such as sports equipment and the sport courts, are determining the group of users and are thereby excluding different people. This demands for more debates on feminist urban planning and design, considering the different needs and social implications of urban spaces. In PEI, those spaces are indeed successfully used, approached and appreciated which characterises a good quality urban space, but they are designed for pre-dominantly male users and mirroring certain social inequalities. As it is described above, it takes an emancipatory act to make public spaces common spaces. The initiation of this emancipatory act could be facilitated through an open spatial design. It is difficult for female users to approach a highly used space and claim it for their own use. Therefore, careful intervention of a public authority could take in a supportive role.

An emancipatory act in claiming and defining public space as common space can further be seen in the symbolic use or rather symbolic defacement, as it happened in the JRS. Through the expression of political and cultural opinions, the park can be understood as politically contested, relating to the question of the Right to the City. The different groups that were using the space to put their posters and make political claims are broadly all dealing with common socio-economic struggles of urban transformations and developments. Related to the already mentioned discourse on the Catalan independence movement, there were several campaign posters for the election of the Mayor of Barcelona in May 2019, mostly from En Comú, a party that is known for its strong support of and relation to social activism and bottom-up movements. Further, graffiti and posters from feminist groups

were drawing attention to gender inequalities, and the posters from CNT, the national federation of workers, were inviting to several events relating to the issues of the formation of the post-industrial neighbourhood. The CNT has a strong history in Sants. It was the labour union that organised the congress of workers in 1918 located in Sants and is therefore strongly related to the history and identity of the barrio. Both, the visual expression of the feminist and workers´ groups are thereby referring to controversial global urban challenges and discourses on the very local neighbourhood level. The defacement of the park´s surface for a political expression between independence proponents and opponents is strongly resembling one of the most important and dominant local political discourses, not only held in Sants but also on the city-wide, regional and national level and describes the constant negotiation between the different groups in regard of this public space.

To sum up, the spaces in JRS seem to be more contested and creatively interpreted by the park users than the spaces in PEI, both through the material defacement in form of graffiti or litter, and in form of social behaviour. As it has been examined, this can partly be related to their looser design in terms of spaces of in-betweenness and to less visibility which open space to test boundaries of existing social norms. To understand the spaces as commons, a few questions are still to answer, for which the chosen research methodology does not provide the right data.

The two parks have been chosen because of their close distance and with the assumption of having a similar group of users. Still, contestation and processes of commoning differed in the two parks. One assumption for the different approaching of both parks relates to the concept of sense of place. PEI is located next to Barcelona´s central station where daily many travellers, national and international, pass through. During the field days, some of the visitors, carrying backpacks and suitcases, seemed to use the park as an extended outdoor waiting hall of the train station. Further, it is adjacent to the district of Eixample that is associated with being a wealthier part of the city and not having the working-class identity. This might influence the users in developing and shaping an identity regarding the park, a sense of place, that is resembling the very strong identity of Sants. JRS, even though just five walking minutes away, is located at the very centre of Sants, with several Sants-identity shaping institutions and organisations adjacent. This might lead to the feeling of JRS being the more "local" park.

Second, the differences in contesting the given spaces could also be explained through a sense of place developed in relation to the different planning phases. PEI was designed, constructed and inaugurated in the 1980s where locals were more receptive towards neighbourhood developments and the up-valuation of public space was very welcomed by the residents. Contrary, the planning of JRS has been more controversial and contested from the very beginning. It arose out of a compromise regarding the to-be-built high speed railways in the early 2000s and included a nonetheless participatory but dissatisfying planning process. It has to be related to a time-period in which major transformations of the urban fabric had been highly criticised on the city-wide level for being too modernistic and for causing high levels of gentrification. To examine the sense of place, a more holistic methodology would

be needed, combining the observation with an archival analysis of planning process and interviews with the specific park users regarding their perception of the space.

8. Conclusion

This study was designed as an exploratory study to understand the connection of physical spaces of in-betweenness and social interactions and contestation of the park users in two example sites. It could be shown that with a higher invisibility and through the provision of wide-open spaces, users were more inventive in shaping and creating the different meanings of shared spaces. Even though the two parks can be considered top-down initiated public spaces, the design of the parks can support the encounter of heterogenous residents and contribute to commoning processes. The relatively close distance of the different props, edges and paths are creating supportive thresholds for a shared experience of differences.

PEI, through its stage-audience setting and the resulting high visibility in most parts of the park, is making its users being aware of co-users, that might be culturally or socially different and that use the park´s spaces for different activities. This is undeniable an important feature to enhance social acceptance. It is a park that is highly used and known on the city-wide level for the provision of amenities such as the basketball court. The field visits were suggestive of the park being of high quality for the users. But, to answer the research question, it did not show any emancipatory act of the users to "take" the park and make it a commons.

In JRS, users were forced into closer proximity through the given spatial design. More interactions between the different users could be noted. Further, the park users showed more contesting behaviour, in form of contesting social norms by young teens testing their social boundaries through illegal activities, or in form of negotiating political identities through practices of defacement. The park constitutes a successful public space, too, confirmed by the high usage of its different spaces and equipment. Through the contesting and negotiating behaviour of the park users, different practices can be read as practices of commoning.

The commons concept has been chosen because of its underlying idea to put the community, the local residents of Sants, at the centre of the use and interpretation of the public space. UC scholars have argued that UC strengthen the receptiveness of different users to cultural and social differences. The here observed practices of commoning, as the contesting of social norms and the defacing of the park´s design, can indeed be understood as commoning processes. However, they also refer to the initially raised perspective of public space as a space for both wanted and unwanted activities. Arguing for the creation of the commons does not automatically imply arguing for conducting illegal behaviour in the public and deface the aesthetics of a space. In fact, it implies arguing for autonomous users that are given space through inventive urban planning to create and shape their individual and collective identity

regarding this space. What those observed activities can do for the provision of common space and the creation of UC is that they constitute an initiator of a public discourse on what the space should be for the neighbourhood and how the users imagine a peaceful sharing of this space.

The findings of this study raised several questions for further research. Besides the already mentioned need to investigate the developed sense of place, research could, first, provide useful insights regarding feminist urban planning, examining the heteronormative usage and attached meaning of certain spaces. By exploring the implications of the different spaces as resembling the dominant gender stereotypes, the urban materiality could be better understood to create and influence a just and equal society, emphasising the importance of public spaces designed for female and genderqueer users. Second, the enclosure of the green areas by dogs and their owners in both parks showed that there is a substantial lack in the provision of public space for non-human park users. This demands a post-human reading and examination of urban planning and public space provision and the recognition that the urban realm, even though shaped and created by humans, also offers habitat for different non-humans taking over urban spaces.

This thesis has shown that the interpretation and contestation of the meaning of public space is highly contextual. By examining and comparing two parks in the same neighbourhood of Barcelona-Sants, it became apparent that the interpretation of public space as a common space is strongly dependent on its spatial design. However, further research is needed that connects the usage and contestation of the different parks to historical and archival events. To understand the connection of the physical space and the social relations and interactions more holistically, more case studies are needed in different cultural settings.

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Table 1: observation times and dates

PILOT FIELD VISITS (to both parks)

22.02.19	10.00 – 13.00	
27.02.19	15.00 – 18.00	
08.03.19	10.00 – 13.00	International Women´s Day
24.04.19	16.00 – 19.00	General Election Spain on the 28th April
01.05.19	10.00 – 12.00	International Labour Day

STRUCTURED FIELD VISITS

Jardins de la Rambla de Sants				*Parc de l`Espanya Industrial*			
Date	*Weather*	*Time*	*Total hours*	*Date*	*Weather*	*Time*	*Total hours*
16.07.19 (Tuesday)	Hot sunny summer day, little clouds and a bit of breeze	16.00 – 20.00	4h	15.07.19 (Monday)	Hot sunny summer day	16.00 – 20.00	4h
17.07.19 (Wednesday)	Hot and humid, around 20pm heavy thunderstorm	18.00 – 20.00	2h	17.07.19 (Wednesday)	Hot and Humid	09.00 - 11.00	2h
18.07.19 (Thursday)	Sunny nice day, little breeze	19.30 – 22.00	2,5h	19.07.19 (Friday)	Sunny nice day, some clouds	19.30 – 22.00	2,5h
20.07.19 (Saturday)	Sunny nice day, little breeze	18.00 – 22.00	4h	21.07.19 (Sunday)	Sunny nice day, little breeze	17.00 – 21.00	4h
23.07.19 (Tuesday)	Super hot and humid day	09.00 – 13.00	4h	23.7.19 (Tuesday)	Super hot and humid day	15.00 – 19.00	4h
Total hours observation			15,5h	Total hours observations			16,5h