The ‘publicness’ of public space
How public is a public square in the centre of Amsterdam?

WESTERMARKT – (Business card)
Representative of Amsterdams ‘publicness’ of space
Centre of Amsterdam | Between Raadhuisstraat and Rozengracht
www.cosmopolitancanopy.nl

Master Thesis
Specialization Urban Sociology
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University of Amsterdam

Anna Swagerman
UvA ID number 0580384

Supervised by Prof. dr. Jan Rath
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1. INTRODUCTION

There is an on-going debate on public space and how ‘public’ it should be (Mitchell, 1995). According to one perspective public space is perceived as originally a place where people should be able to interact freely without control from higher powers and where there is room for political movements. It should be owned by the people and constantly reproduced by them; accordingly disorder is accepted. Opposite to this view, others perceive public space as a place of order and control, where only a certain public should be permitted with the purpose to recreate and to be entertained. The concept of perception of public space already reflects the fact that there is not a uniform definition of public space. Different ideas and ideologies about public space are reflected in struggles over these spaces (Mitchell). Struggle over space is an interesting topic since it materializes certain struggles and developments present in society. Some argue that struggle is permanent and that consensus is equal to a constant “struggled-over reality” (Law, 2002, p. 1644).

So besides the views on how ‘public’ public space should be, what views are there on the current situation? How public is contemporary public space? Some argue that contemporary public spaces are not what they are supposed to be since there is no room for disorder or diversity. There is more “dead public space” (Sennett, 1992, p. 12) and there is a tendency of public space to exclude (Smithsion, 2008). Others emphasize more positive aspects of contemporary public space and believe it can still be a place for diverse encounter (Anderson, 2004). Both views will be central in this thesis and will later be elaborated on.

This debate and the attention for public space and the pressure on it, arose under the influence of city developments. The decline during the 1970s of Keynesianism, its corresponding policies and mass-production and the following rise of neoliberalism, broad about change in city structures. In social democratic Holland a modest version of neoliberalism was present compared to the United States (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The change in spatial structures entailed the rise of “world cities” (Massey, 2007, p. 33). The stressed link between the economy and these world cities can be perceived as a choice of vision and emphasis. A “battle (…) over representation” resulted for instance in a vision of London as a global economic city, highlighting its economic characteristics over other features (Massey, p. 38). This outcome of how the identity of a city is promoted can be the result of a political strategy rather than reality. The way things are framed can eventually be decisive for governmental
strategies and corresponding policies (Massey). The economic development not only changed the structure of the city by creating world cities but there are also reports of an increase in fear of the city, its public space and the strangers residing in it (Lofland, 1998).

When globally the economic crisis struck, the disadvantages of the neoliberal structure became apparent (Mayer, 2009). The arguments of people criticizing contemporary public spaces are rooted in this. Capitalism and privatization of spaces reflected on the appearance of public space. This is when statements about “the end of public space” appeared (Mitchell, 1995, p. 108). Although the crisis poses many dangers it can also increase possibilities for urban social movements based on the “right to the city” slogan (Mayer, p. 370). Notwithstanding it remains very hard for movements to accomplish something under the current climate (Mayer, 2000).

This on-going debate on the situation of contemporary public space appeals to a broader and more fundamental question concerning “the just city” (Fainstein, 2010). According to Fainstein there are three criteria that are essential for a just city: “democracy”, “equity” and “diversity” (Fainstein, p. 23). Integrating these concepts into the policy of cities will help to improve justice. Concepts such as the just city, the right to the city and spatial justice are receiving more attention. These concepts have in common that they proclaim that equity has a spatial component. Everyone should have equal access to space. “Space as a representational medium and trope is integral to the production of difference, and analytic attention to difference reveals important dimensions of the spatiality of injustice.” (Stanley, 2009, p. 1004).

So attention for concepts such as spatial justice is partially due to the tremendous changes in the city structure that evolved from the influence of the developing economy (Massey, 2007). This brought research on public space and to whom it ‘belongs’ to the forefront. The most recent conference on Sociology of Urban and Regional Development of the Research Committee 21 (RC21) was on “The struggle to belong. Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings” (“[The struggle to belong],” 2011). So the social aspect of the use of urban spaces is very current in sociology. Besides the developments in the economy, another reason for this interest is the fact that the issue of diversity in public space touches on just that what seems to be most admired by some about city life. “Great cities” such as London, New York, Hong Kong or Amsterdam are celebrated by people for their characteristics which are
opposed to small villages: diversity is embraced and people are more open and tolerant (Lofland, 2000, p. 143).

Clearly, as one of the discussed perspectives shows: even though cities might have the opportunity and conditions to realize the celebrated diversity, this does not necessarily mean that they execute it. There is always a difference between the representation of the city and reality (Lofland, 2000). Nevertheless we live in a world of increasing globalisation where people of different nationalities and backgrounds have to be able to share dense city spaces. More and more people will be living in cities so the way we share our spaces and how we reflect on this is essential. Investigating struggle over spaces can give insights in what is expected of these spaces or of public space in general, and what is actually happening. So how is the situation in Amsterdam with regard to these issues?

Also in Amsterdam the strive for justice is visible, for instance in the presence of the Occupiers at Beursplein. Amsterdam is an interesting city to explore the question on the ‘publicness’ of public space since it has a reputation with regard to spatial justice and diversity. It is reported that people in this city are tolerant when it comes to homeless, more than in the rest of Holland (Lindeman, Crok & Slot, 2004). Furthermore, Amsterdam is said to be a model for other cities regarding the three elements for a just city (Fainstein, 2010) and is mentioned as one of the few cities with a tolerant public space (Lofland, 2000). Lofland (p. 156) talks about “Amsterdam’s world-famous urbanity, tolerance and cosmopolitanism”.

Nevertheless, besides this presumed tolerance, struggle over public space in Amsterdam is also reported. Deben (2003) states that the use of public space by various types of people is becoming more difficult, especially for homeless. Struggle over space is for instance present at a square in the centre of the city, the Westermarkt. In an article in newspaper Parool (“Westermarkt in greep van overlast”, 2010) is described that a group of vagrants and alcoholics is causing nuisance to the entrepreneurs at the square by begging, screaming, stealing or dealing. The struggle at this square is in some way ironic since the square is famous for its tolerance in symbolic ways. The Westermarkt hosts one of the most famous museums regarding the repression of minorities, the Anne Frank House, and contains the first gay monument of the world. The square entails a uniquely large amount of users with diverse backgrounds and interests, from homeless to yuppies and from people visiting the church to gays attending liberating events. Accordingly, the opportunities for diversity are there which
makes it an intriguing location for conducting the research for this thesis. With regard to homeless in Amsterdam a research of the GGD Amsterdam, conducted in the winter of 2010/2011, reported an average of 240 homeless per night visiting shelters (Buster & de Wit, 2011, p. 7). There is no increase reported but Middle and Eastern Europeans make up an increasing share. Many of these people are addicted or have mental problems.

So the discussion on the ‘publicness’ of contemporary public spaces is also visible when looking at Amsterdam. On the one hand it is said to be famous for tolerance but there are also reports of difficulties and struggles. So a more nuanced situation might be at play. But what does this look like specifically and to what side of the possible extremes does the situation at a square in the centre of Amsterdam tend more to? The current emphasis on the social component of the use of public space, spatial justice and the struggle over ‘who belongs’, together with the increasing pressure on space due to globalizing cities, makes it interesting to look closely to these types of questions. There are extreme visions with regard to these questions as well as more nuanced perspectives. Some perceive that one end of both extremes governs; the vision of public space as ordered and controlled. But there are also clear indications that the fight still continues (Mitchell, 1995). Notions on the disappearance of public space might also be dependent on the definition: “On a good day, for those of us who see consensus as a struggled-over reality, all seems hopeful” (Law, 2002, p. 1644). Amsterdam especially might be representing this battle, as indicated by statements on its famous reputation for tolerance (Lofland, 2000).

Many theories regarding the ‘publicness’ of public space are based on research conducted in the United States. As mentioned, there is also research conducted in Holland by for instance Fainstein (2010), Deben (2003) or Blokland (2008). However, the majority of theories are based on the situation in the United States, which makes it precarious to apply them directly to the situation at a square in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, the trend of emphasis on the economy and globalization is also present to some degree in Western Europe (Fainstein). Furthermore it is stated that perception of public space is sometimes more essential than reality. Whereas crime rates might not be equal between the United States and Holland, there are nevertheless high levels of fear in some parts of Amsterdam (Lofland, 2000). Sennett (1992) also emphasises this importance of perceptions and expectations people have of public space.
In studying the visions on the presence of deviants at the Westermarkt, in this case homeless, it is essential to have a detailed idea about who these deviants are and because of what behaviour they are possibly excluded. Or better put: who are those people that subjectively deviate for some from what they perceive as common? Subsequently, prevailing views on the presence of these homeless in public space can be studied. There is an increasing relevance to look at these reflections of residents on public space and the presence of deviants, given the current attention for the social aspect of public space. Lastly, a focus on reactions and interventions following the perceptions is essential. The appearance of the downsides of the neoliberal structure and the corresponding emphasis on the social aspect of public space might create opportunities for people adhering to concepts as right to the city and justice (Mayer, 2009).

1.1 Research questions

The raised questions on spatial practices of homeless, the perceptions on this and on public space in general, and the interventions that come with this, lead to the main research question:

*How do homeless people behave in public space and how much space do they have to do so?*

The sub-questions derived from the main research question are divided into three topics:

1. **Homeless and their spatial practices**

   — *What spatial practices do the homeless actually employ at the Westermarkt?*

2. **Views on public space and the presence of homeless**

   — *What are the representations of different individuals and people working for institutions of the concept of public space and the activities of the homeless at the Westermarkt?*

3. **Reactions and interventions**

   — *What interventions are there and how do people reflect on them?*
Before looking at the research approach to answer these questions, we will elaborate on the central concept of this thesis; public space and ‘publicness’. Also the concept of ‘dead public space’ will be elucidated.

‘Publicness’ of public space

Public space is interpreted in multiple ways. As defined by the online Urban Dictionary (2005) it is “a place, in wide definition, for everybody to enjoy their coexistence and represent their collectivity and common interest without drowning or disaggregating their diversity.” But this space then can range from squares to highways and from shopping malls to libraries. So by stating that “public space is dead”, Sennett (1992, p. 12) makes a broad statement about all sorts of public spaces. Whereas, at the same time, he specifically limits the discussion to pseudo-public spaces such as ground floors of skyscrapers owned by companies. Here we will limit the term public space to only those spaces that can be logical places for social life or encounters, which will be clarified later. According to Lofland (1998, p. 11) in defining public areas it is important to distinguish between public spaces and public realms: “(...) Realms are not geographically or physically rooted pieces of space. They are social, not physical territories”. Both aspects are indispensable, a public realm corresponds to a geographical location and a public space entails a form of social use. In this thesis the concept of ‘public space’ will be used for the convenience, since it is the most commonly used term. So then what factors are related to the ‘publicness’ of public space?

‘Publicness’ refers to a public space that is inviting to a diverse public. Various characteristics are related to this. First of all, as explained before, there are physical as well as relational aspects to it. Furthermore, only spaces that could be logical places for social life or encounters (whether absent or not) are covered. Squares, streets and parks are examples of this definition of public space whereas high ways or crossings have different purposes and pertain more to public road. ‘Publicness’ also implicates the presence of strangers. As mentioned before, Lofland (1998, p. 10) divides space into public, parochial and private. The concepts of public and parochial realm are important for the way ‘publicness’ is interpreted and investigated in this thesis. About the public realm Lofland (p. 9) states: “(...) The public realm is made up of those spaces in a city which tend to be inhabited by persons who are strangers to one another or who “know” one another only in terms of occupational or other nonpersonal identity categories (for example, bus driver-customer).” But ‘publicness’ in this thesis not only
corresponds to public space and the interaction of strangers but also to the parochial realm. A space is often a combination of public and parochial interaction since the types of users vary. Some use the square frequently and experience a sense of community. All types of users are included in this research to study ‘publicness’ with regard to the toleration of homeless: passers-by, taxi drivers and tourists, which might consider the Westermarkt as a public space, but also residents, entrepreneurs and policy makers, which might experience some parochial aspects. All users influence the way diversity and tolerance is present in a space. Also inherent to a public space are inclusion and exclusion and a permanent form of “struggle” (Law, 2002, p. 1644). Lastly, an overall indication of how just a city is depends on the three elements democracy, equity and diversity and their interaction, as proposed by Fainstein (2010, p. 23).

When public space lacks ‘publicness’ it is sometimes referred to as ‘dead public space’, we will elaborate on this concept now.

**Dead public space**

The earlier described major changes in cities structures and the emphasis on deviants reflects in the appearance of some public spaces. According to Sennett (1992, p. 12), one of the important consequences for the physical appearance of the city is the earlier mentioned rise of dead public spaces. It is useful to highlight a division in emphasises that are made regarding this concept. Dead public space can be explained as:

- **Emptiness**: public space with hardly any activity, such as the ground floor of a skyscraper that is left open and only used for passage (Sennett, 1992). Empty space is found a lot around office areas where there are “privately owned public spaces” (Smithsimon, 2008, p. 327). “Bonus plazas” can be an example of dead public spaces (Smithsimon, p. 326). These are squares or public hallways that pertain to high-rise towers of companies. Many of these bonus plazas are empty and not inviting at all for people that do not work for the company. Their design aims at exclusion. They were built following a new law in New York, which entailed that companies were allowed to build higher as long as they ensured a public space at the ground floor (Smithsimon)
· Little diversity: public space with hardly no diversity in activity; it is exclusively used by a homogenous group; a square where there is little interaction between various sorts of people. People that ‘do not belong’ are excluded, such as a square that is cleaned from homeless (Deben, 2003).

Dead public space entails both aspects since they can overlap. It depends on the type of public space what emphasis predominates. For instance, at the World Trade Center area in Amsterdam there is a lot of privately owned public space that is empty. Also there is little diversity since the majority of users are employees of the surrounding companies. In the centre of Amsterdam there is less emphasis on the emptiness of space since there is a high density. Nevertheless, here public space can perceived to be dead due to little diversity of people or activities. This emphasis on little diversity will be the focus in this thesis since the research takes place in the dense centre of Amsterdam.

Structure of the report

First of all, in chapter two, background information on homeless and their characteristics will be provided followed by some theories regarding their spatial practices, to provide a context for the activities that are taking place at the Westermarkt. In the same chapter relevant theories regarding views on public space and the presence of homeless will be discussed as well as interventions. In chapter three the research location Westermarkt will be introduced followed by the methodology. The results are discussed in chapter four and will be presented according to the order of the posed sub questions. First the activities of homeless at the Westermarkt are introduced, followed by the various views of the users of the square on their presence and on public space in general. Then the interventions that are present and the reflections of people on this will be discussed. Chapter five will offer conclusions with regard to the ‘publicness’ of the Westermarkt and how much space homeless have to live their lives at a square in the centre of Amsterdam. Subsequently, implications of the research will be described followed by some recommendations.
2. MY RESEARCH APPROACH

As discussed before, there are diverging emphasises made, which broadly relate to two views on the situation regarding contemporary public spaces. Some say it is dead (Sennett, 1992), others state that there can still be ‘publicness’ and diversity (Anderson, 2004), or at least there is still a battle for it (Mitchell, 1995). World cities are huge and contain more public space than other areas. Various sorts of people are struggling over the use of these spaces. Homeless are one type of people who experience the tension of the use of public space and whether they are allowed to ‘belong.’ Some agree to their presence, while others do not and consider them ‘deviant’. But they are there. In studying the ‘publicness’ of contemporary public spaces and its tolerance, it is essential to have a detailed idea about whom the possibly ‘excluded’ are and because of what behaviour they might be excluded.

2.1 Homeless and their spatial practices

Definition and numbers

Talking about exclusion or diversity in public space raises the need to define the possibly excluded. Since the Westermarkt is the research location of this thesis the excluded on whom we will focus, are the homeless that are present at the square. The definitions of homelessness change according to different times and places and depend greatly on the perception of the ideas and corresponding policies that govern (Tipple & Speak, 2005). Due to the relatively strong welfare system in the Netherlands most of the homeless here do have the option of a shelter. Deben (2003) states that there are variations between “actual homeless”, “residential homeless” and “potential homeless” (Deben, p. 231). The first category is actually sleeping in the streets or at night shelters, the second category at hostels or asylums and the potential homeless reside in marginal accommodations such rented rooms or squats. Furthermore, “There are the recently homeless and the long-term homeless; the homeless include groups of addicts, mental patients, illegal immigrants, fortune hunters (…)” (Deben, p. 240). Duneier’s (1999) description of homeless also reflects this variety. Not all the men he observes living on the sidewalk are actually sleeping in the street. Some do have a home but just have this deviant lifestyle or are addicted to alcohol or drugs. So being homeless appears in different
forms. In this study we will associate with a broad definition of homelessness entailing the three distinctions as described by Deben.

In the winter of 2010/2011 GGD Amsterdam studied the size of the homeless population as well as their characteristics (Buster & de Wit, 2011). Besides the regular shelters the municipality of Amsterdam offers extra shelters during extreme cold in winter, so GGD seized the opportunity to study the visitors. The extreme cold results in dependence of various categories to seek shelter; so actual homeless as well as residential and potential homeless could be studied. During the extreme cold they reported an average of 240 homeless per night visiting the shelters (Buster & de Wit, p. 7).

**Characteristics and trends**

Concerning the characteristics of homeless in Amsterdam, the GGD reports 83% of the homeless to be related to Amsterdam in the sense that they are registered at the municipality of Amsterdam (GBA). During the period of extreme cold only 43% is GBA-registered (Buster & de Wit, 2011, p. 12). The non GBA-registered group is relatively young with an average of 35 years and only 7% of them are born in Holland. More than half of them come from Middle and East Europe; many have the Romanian, Baltic or Polish nationality. Most of them arrived in Amsterdam during the past year (66%) and half of the group is homeless for only less than a year. Of the people recently moved to Amsterdam (past 3 months) the majority claimed coming for job opportunities. Moving to Holland and squat evacuation are mentioned as the most important reasons for losing the most recent accommodation (Buster & de Wit, pp. 16-18).

The group with ties to Amsterdam is relatively older than the non GBA-registered group, with an average of 46 years. Concerning country of origin 32% of the group is born in Holland and 22% in Surinam or the Dutch Antilles; in total more than 70% has the Dutch nationality. Only 14% of them arrived in Amsterdam during the past year. For the group with ties to Amsterdam becoming homeless is mentioned mostly commencing after house eviction or after detention or staying in a care institution (Buster & de Wit, 2011, pp. 16-18)

Concerning the financial situation of the homeless with ties to Amsterdam many receive benefits (65%), a minority has legal paid work (10%) and a fourth does not have an (legal)
income. There are substantially more non GBA-registered homeless with no (legal) income (78%). Equal to GBA registered homeless 10% has legal paid work (Buster & de Wit, 2011, p. 19). Another important issue is drug abuse. 50% of the homeless with ties to Amsterdam use drugs or alcohol compared to 40% of the non GBA-registered homeless. The GBA-registered group uses heroin and cocaine more often while both equally use alcohol and cannabis. Regarding their mental health almost half of the homeless with ties to Amsterdam has mental health problems compared to a third of the non GBA-registered homeless (Buster & de Wit, pp. 19-21). GGD also investigated what percentage participated in a ‘field monitor’; an individualized approach of the municipality whereby individual needs are traced and mapped. The homeless with ties to Amsterdam are the main focus for this approach since their registration allows the opportunity to arrange more for them with respect to finances and housing. Slightly less than a third of the GBA registered homeless are participating compared to 4% of the non GBA-registered homeless (Buster & de Wit, p. 29). Lastly, concerning detention; roughly half of both groups have been in detention in the year prior to the research (Buster & de Wit, p. 20).

Concerning trends, there is no increase of homeless in Amsterdam reported compared to earlier years but there is a change in composition, since the group with ties to Amsterdam is decreasing while the group without ties to Amsterdam increases. In general, there are less homeless who are born in the Netherlands or Surinam and more come from Middle and East Europe or outside the EU. There are more GBA-registered homeless receiving a legal income such as benefits or legal paid work. Substance abuse did not change but there is less reliance on substance abuse treatment compared to earlier years (Buster & de Wit, 2011, pp. 29-31)

**Spatial practices**

In addition to defining who homeless are there are various theories about what they do; in other words their spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991). Results from the research of GGD tell us something about the activities of homeless (Buster & de Wit, 2011, pp. 19-21). As mentioned before, there is a low percentage of homeless with legal paid work: only 10%. Almost half of them use some form of drugs and many have mental health issues. Furthermore, half of them had been in detention in the year prior to the research. So drug abuse and criminal activities are part of the activities of homeless, while (legal) paid work hardly is. Besides this there are also other activities reported.
Duneier (1999, p. 9) deals with sidewalk life at Greenwich Village in New York and describes a group of people making up an “informal economic life” by sustaining themselves with activities such as book vending and panhandling. These economic activities are related to a social structure: Duneier uses Jacob’s concepts of “eyes on the street” (2011, p. 45) and the “public character” (2011, p. 89) to elaborate on this. She defines a public character as a person that spends a lot of time in a certain public space and therefore knows and speaks to a lot of people there. This person, along with others using the street, has his eyes upon the street; together they provide safety in a world of strangers by mutually observing what is going on (Jacobs, pp. 98-99). Duneier amplifies the scope of these concepts by stating that people that are said to increase safety by keeping an eye on the street can also be the ones leading a deviant lifestyle, the ones living in the street (Duneier, p. 43). They can be aware of what is going on, help one another out and are appreciated by residents. An example of such a public character is the protagonist in Duneier’s observations of sidewalk life: Hakim. Not only does he keep an eye on what is going on, he also serves as an “informal mentor” or “old head” for younger guys living on the sidewalk (Duneier, p. 37). Anderson (as cited in Duneier, 1999) explains the role of the old head in that he teaches to be responsible in all important aspects of life, such as work, family life or the law. Nevertheless, he also refers to a shift to the “new old head” which assimilates young men to the underground economy (Anderson, as cited in Duneier, p. 40). Here activities are encouraged such as drug abuse and stealing, or selling drugs to passers-by. There are more and more strangers: “(…) the people watching are no longer those whose eyes make it possible to assimilate strangers. In many cases, from the point of view of the residents, these people are the strangers” (Duneier, p. 116). Hakim is notwithstanding an example of an old head still able to motivate young men despite the current climate. The economic activities in relation to the structure of informal social mentoring represent an alternative for the underground activities. So according to Duneier, activities range from informal economic activities and social mentoring to criminal activities, with recently an increase of the latter category.

Clearly the spatial practises of homeless vary. How others perceive these activities does seem to be important to them since it is reported that homeless do engage in a process of identity construction (Snow & Anderson, 1987). In various ways homeless try to influence the way their peers reflect on them, for instance by telling stories about themselves. It can be argued
that they also care about how other users of the square reflect on them. This way they might try to ensure that they are not stigmatized.

So there are different reports on what activities homeless employ in space. It ranges from criminal activities and drug abuse (Buster & de Wit, 2011) towards activities that are beneficial for others, such as mentoring and keeping an eye on what is going on (Duneier, 1999; Jacobs, 2011). Furthermore, homeless are said to make an effort to influence the way they are perceived by others (Snow & Anderson, 1987). With regard to the ratio it seems that many do engage in criminal activities, but clearly more positive types of behaviour also exist. The question rises what the ratio is at the Westermarkt. Is there a clear majority engaging in criminal behaviour or are there also signs of other activities, such as looking out for each other? And is there an effort of homeless to influence the perceptions that others have of their activities?

Since there is less poverty and a more developed system of social support in Holland than in the United States, it could be argued that positive activities might be more present at the Westermarkt. For users of the square this would mean that they might not only experience deviant behaviour that corresponds to disorder, but also positive or neutral encounters. These experiences with homeless and their behaviour are inevitably linked to how people view public space and the presence of them. If it is the case that beneficial types of behaviour have an important share than views could be influenced positively. Especially if it is the case that homeless engage in influencing perceptions.

2.2 Views on public space and the presence of homeless

So homeless might realize that perceptions and images of others with which they share a public space are important. According to Mitchell (1995) and Sennett (1992) an image of a certain place, no matter whether it corresponds to reality, can sometimes be more important and defining than this reality itself. As mentioned earlier, there can be different imaginaries on the same city (Massey, 2007, p. 38). Some views can prevail as normal whether others continue to be presented as deviant (Stanley, 2009). Space can be seen as a “social construct” defined by Low (1996, p. 862) as “(...) the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and
actions that convey symbolic meaning.” So if space is a social construct then the question arises which ideas and constructs of public space prevail? Prevailing constructs will influence the way we think about spatial practices of homeless. These reflections are becoming increasingly important given the attention for the social aspect of public space.

Mitchell proposed the two earlier mentioned ruling constructs of public space that are present nowadays (1995). By some, for instance homeless, activists, or other citizens, public space is viewed as a place where there should be tolerance, where people interact freely without control or obligations from higher powers and where there should be room for political movements. Public space is owned by the people and constantly reproduced according to their actions; therefore disorder is accepted. Another, opposed view, conceives public space as a place where only a certain public is permitted, which should recreate and get entertained. There is control, order and safety and homeless or activists are perceived as inconvenient. Since these visions cause a struggle, the people who are most excluded, the homeless, “have become rather iconographic” (Mitchell, p. 125); they are symbols of the struggle. It shows that both visions are extremes since there is also the perspective that public space as a place for everyone is an ideal that never existed (Deben, 2003; Mitchell, 1995). It is stated that there has always been, already in Greek agora, a permanent struggle on who was included in the public and that a more narrow and ordered vision of public space governs but that there is still revolt against this. Struggles around inclusion and exclusion are permanent and as long as there are homeless this will always be the case. We will leave aside the question whether diversity in public space ever existed or whether it is only a normative ideal; this goes beyond the scope of this thesis since it would require elaborate historical investigation and remains very disputable.

So given these important ruling ideologies, what views are there on the current situation? How is the situation concerning the ‘publicness’ of public spaces? As mentioned earlier, there are statements about public space being dead. These statements are based on the idea that diversity of people and activities at squares, plazas or ground floors of buildings tends to disappear since these places are not inviting to everyone. Public space is said to be empty, and more importantly, there is a lack of diversity. People do not tolerate a diverse public, homeless are related to disorder and public spaces are ‘cleaned’ by removing them (Davis, 2006; Lofland, 1998; Sennett, 1992). Deviant groups are perceived as “(…) stain on their beautifully designed new squares” (Deben, 2003, p. 243). There are various theories that
communicate the governance of order and control and the exclusion of disorder. The “broken windows theory” is said to apply to the situation in many cities (Duneier, 1999, p. 158). It holds that merely seeing chaos and disorder in a certain neighbourhood through for instance a broken window or an abandoned car, is inviting for crime and chaos to happen. It appears as if people do not mind and are not attentive. People nowadays are said to desire order and homeless are a sign of chaos, which would be inviting for crime. Another theory linked to this idea of order and control in public space proposes the “NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) syndrome” (Dear, 1992, p. 288). This captures the fact that some residents or community organizations do not necessarily mind new city developments, as long as it is not near their own houses. This might also hold for the presence of homeless. An important factor determining the level of acceptance is the familiarity with the behaviour of deviants. Knowledge about probable behaviour, of for instance homeless, is said to increase tolerance (Dear, p. 293). The United States is famous for this privatization and control over space and here conflctions between citizens’ perceptions of public space and reality are very present. This is visible for instance in the struggle concerning the presence of homeless at People’s Park (Mitchell, 1995).

Besides these perceptions people in cities are said to have it is important to realize that this cannot be discussed separately from their expectations. According to Sennett (1992) there is a trend towards applying expectations of private relations onto public interactions. He states that there did exist a public life as for instance in the 18th Century when people surrounded themselves with strangers and valued these interactions. Comparable to the situation in a theatre there was a “public geography”; there were definitions of the public world and through these codes one would feel at ease when surrounded by strangers (Sennett, pp. 38-39). Nowadays we see public interaction as an obligation and we do not value social interaction. “(…) Confusion has arisen between public and intimate life; people are working out in terms of personal feelings public matters which properly can be dealt with only through codes of impersonal meaning” (Sennett, p. 5). Accordingly public space is not valued and turns into dead public space. Sennett states that capitalism is one of the causes of this development; first of all the force of privatization caused people to perceive their family as a save place away from the hard society. Public life came to be seen as “morally inferior” when compared to the standards of family life (Sennett, p. 20). Furthermore, mass production produces a homogenized public making it harder for people to indicate each other based on clothing; the stranger became more of a mystery and a public geography disappeared. There is an
obsession with privatism. Lofland (1998, p. 168) also confirms this; there is “fear and loathing” towards the city, its public space and the strangers residing in it. Homeless are said to be included in this concept of the stranger; people dislike and fear the homeless.

Apparently a lot of evidence points towards a situation of a contemporary public space where order and control is preferred, where there is fear of strangers and accordingly the chance for diversity is banned in various ways. Homeless are generally not included in the definition of “the public” using public spaces (Mitchell, 1995, p. 115). But there are also theoretical notions that correspond to a more positive outlook on diversity in contemporary public space. First of all, besides the discussion of whether disorder is accepted or not, as we saw in the preceding paragraph, some emphasise that not all activities in public space of homeless correspond to actual disorder or deviance. There are also informal economic activities taking place and some engage in informal social mentoring (Duneier, 1999). Furthermore, Anderson (2004, p. 15) discusses “cosmopolitan canopies” that are present in global cities. These are crowded quasi-public places in which strangers are encouraged to meet, such as certain markets, stations or squares. “The existence of the canopy allows such people, whose reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and so work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference.” (Anderson, p. 28). According to Anderson people obtain a “folk ethnography” by the encounters with strangers. Since cities become increasingly diverse these forms of encounters also happen more often. In some cases they allow people to confirm or adjust stereotypes, recognize commonalities and “(...) stretch themselves mentally, emotionally and socially” (Anderson, p. 29).

Furthermore, there are some indications that especially in Amsterdam there might be a tolerant public space. It is reported that people in Amsterdam are tolerant when it comes to homeless, more than in the rest of Holland (Lindeman, Crok & Slot, 2004). They are more used to homeless and accordingly view them more positively. A majority claims to see them as vulnerable and only 8% perceives them as being criminal (Lindeman et al., p. 53). Less than half of the people living in Amsterdam experience homeless to be a cause of nuisance. There is even some evidence that indicates that the NIMBY syndrome might not be that present in Amsterdam. Almost three quarters of people in Amsterdam report they would not mind if a shelter for homeless was built in their neighbourhood (Lindeman et al., p. 55). This is in accordance to the reports of Dear (1992): when there is familiarity with the behaviour of
‘deviants’ tolerance will increase. Additionally, as shortly noted before, Amsterdam rates high on the overall concept of justice (Fainstein, 2010). The city is considered to have a good balance between democracy, equity and diversity. There is a good social welfare, less excess in rich and poor and an effective democracy. The majority of public spaces are said to represent the diverse population. Amsterdam is considered to be cosmopolitan and one of the few cities with an actual tolerant public space (Lofland, 2000). It is even said that the tolerance of people in Amsterdam might go too far when it comes to the tourists they host: “What the citizens of Amsterdam, by simply living their lives in a compact, minimally segregated city with a hard edge and a reasonable level of safety, have learned to tolerate, the executive from Chicago and the family from Spokane are likely to find unendurable. To make the world safe for such visitors is to risk destroying the precious environment of their hosts.” (Lofland, p. 156).

So to summarize, there are diverging descriptions of the current situation of the ‘publicness’ of public space. Theories broadly relate to the two visions described by Mitchell (1995). But the debate on the situation regarding contemporary public spaces is not necessarily rigid, since many adhere to more nuanced perspectives. It is for instance argued that it is too much to say that this is “the end of public space” (Mitchell, p. 125) and that the vision of public space as originally a tolerant place where everyone is welcome is more an ideal than reality. It is clear that there are different emphasises made in the debate.

The question rises whether these views that are largely based on the situation in the United States will be manifest in Amsterdam as well. Is there little diversity in a public space in the centre of Amsterdam? Is the presence of homeless at the Westermarkt considered as chaos and disorder causing an increase of crime and do people mind the proximity of this issue to their own homes? Furthermore it is interesting to investigate whether people’s expectations of the situation at the Westermarkt can be considered as saturated with privatism and fear. Or does the reputation of Amsterdam, as described by many, hold? And are there indeed manifestations of appreciation of encounters with homeless at the Westermarkt that point to a “cosmopolitan appreciation of difference” (Anderson, 2004, p. 28)?

Despite a lot of notions on order and control, perceptions of homeless as disorder and fear of strangers, there is clear evidence that points towards the presumption that for Amsterdam it is a different case. Since capitalism does not govern as much as in the United States, it might be
that there is still a rather diverse public space. Furthermore, this might also result in less obsession with privatism and fear of strangers. Also, it seems that if there do exist cosmopolitan canopies, they should certainly be in Amsterdam, given the evidence regarding its reputation. Moreover, if it is the case that a good share of spatial practices of homeless in Amsterdam is not only criminal but also neutral or even positive and people seem to be quite tolerant when it comes to homeless, then there is a good chance that public spaces in Amsterdam can be considered quite public.

Visions on public space and its diversity correspond to the interventions and reactions taking place. There are interventions on different levels that can impact deviants in urban public space, from policies of the government or municipality to individual residents showing certain interactions or starting initiatives. The type of interventions and corresponding reflections on this can also provide information on the ‘publicness’ of spaces.

2.4 Reactions and interventions

There are various findings that relate to the vision of order and control, which we have seen earlier. With regard to interventions imposed from above, the design of public space is very important. According to Lofland (1998, p. 196) there is a trend in the United States that aims at building a “private city”. There is a lot of empty space and architects such as Ebenezer Howard “designed precisely in opposition to “the “disorder”, “crowding”, and “impurity” of the nineteenth-century city” (Lofland, p. 207). Lofland argues that the design of space is used to structure interaction between groups; through design some can be encouraged while others are discouraged to reside in a certain place. There are many constraints imposed by for instance building “large enclosed markets” (Lofland, p. 192). Sennett (1992) also reports on this method of isolation through design. There are many buildings without relationship towards their surroundings and benches are placed in empty spaces that discourage people to take a seat and relax; they would feel “(…) profoundly uncomfortable, as though one were on exhibit in a vast empty hall (Sennett, p. 13). Developers design bonus plazas in such a way that they do not attract the public anymore (Smithsimon, 2008). Accordingly, Davis reflected on Los Angeles as being a “fortress” (2006, p. 228) describing the “pseudo-public space” of Los Angeles that is designed in such a way that it ensures homogenisation (Davis, p. 257).
These theories about exclusion by design correspond to concepts as cleaning and controlling and also relate to the earlier described broken windows theory (Duneier, 1999). Besides that this theory refers to visions on diversity in public space, it also describes subsequent responses. According to Duneier it results in the state establishing “social controls” (Duneier, p. 10) through cleaning the streets by removing homeless and trying to control deviant behaviour. The way a place looks is so important that there are policies for removing homeless. “Even ‘progressive cities’ have distinguished themselves by adopting laws that prohibit people from sitting or lying on pavements in business districts.” (Mayer, 2000, p. 148).

Corresponding to the above mentioned theories there are also interventions imposed which are meant to convey the idea of diversity in public space while actually there is no correspondence with the reality. Signs, symbols and representations in the city are said to become increasingly important: “(…) contemporary designers of urban “public” space increasingly accept signs and images of contact as more natural and desirable than contact itself (Mitchell, 1995, p. 120). For instance, placing several benches at a square would already be enough to communicate the idea of a socially interactive square, regardless of whether they are designed invitingly. All these reports on design for control and cleaning places from homeless point towards a tendency of interventions which are certainly not aimed at increasing the ‘publicness’ of public spaces.

However, besides all these findings about interventions from above that correspond to a public space where order, control and fake ‘publicness’ governs, there are also different statements. More positive reports on interventions mostly relate to reactions of citizens themselves. These reactions are associated with the before mentioned development of neoliberalism in the 1980s and the structural economic changes which affected the structure of the city (Massey, 2007). The economic crisis posed many dangers but also increased the possibilities for urban social movements based on the right to the city slogan and justice movements (Mayer, 2009). Their claims are more validated since the disadvantages of the neoliberal structure became apparent. According to Mayer (2000) there is a trend posed which emphasises the importance of the initiatives of local residents to counteract exclusion and marginalisation of deviants in public space. Since some findings indicate that Amsterdam might embody a special position when it comes to diversity in public space, it could well be that apart from more controlling interventions by the government there might be a different,
more tolerant, pattern when it comes to citizens themselves. Apart from real movements this can also show from simple interactions at the square. But how can we define and analyse these interactions of citizens with regard to tolerance in public space?

One way might be to look at the way homeless are positioned in interaction patterns in public space. There are some findings that indicate certain normative patterns regarding behaviour in public space, so it might be interesting to see how interactions at the Westermarkt between citizens and homeless relate to this. If homeless are included in interaction patterns just like any other type of users group, this might reflect something about the tolerance that is present. But before determining the interactions it is important to discuss the possible types of spaces or realms since the way one defines an area can influence the normative interactions. As explained before, most users might perceive the Westermarkt as a public realm, but for some that use the square more often it can also feel as a parochial space. Consequently, we will look at both types of interactions. Based on interactions proposed by Lofland (1998) for the public realm and Kusenbach (2006) for the parochial realm a combination is created to measure interaction at the Westermarkt against. The composition is based on those interactions that demand the most of the users of the Westermarkt. If these interactions appear to be present, this will show that interaction with homeless is quite normal when compared to interactions with other users.

- “Cooperative Motility”: This is defined as the cooperation of people with regard to their movements, to ensure there are no incidents (Lofland, 1998, p. 29).

- “Civil Inattention” or “Friendly recognition”: This means that people are aware of each other without interacting (Lofland, 1998, p. 30), or do interact by greeting each other (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 289). “Civil inattention makes possible copresence without commingling, awareness without engrossment, courtesy without conversation.” (Lofland, p. 30). Whereas, when people experience a more parochial environment they might greet each other in a friendly way.

- “Restrained- or Parochial Helpfulness”: The first type of interaction entails the fact that people ask for assistance and are generally responded with regard to common information about the time or public transport (Lofland, 1998, p. 32). When experiencing a more parochial
ambiance people might help each other out with small things, such as watching a pet or lending a bicycle (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 291).

- “Proactive Intervention” means that people are watching out for each other without other asking for it (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 294).

- “Civility toward Diversity” or “Embracing and Resisting Diversity”: Civility entails that one reacts in a polite way when faced with a person that looks deviant, for instance with regard to a disability or a deviant clothing style (Lofland, 1998, p. 32). Embracing or resisting diversity shows that people are taking an explicit stand with regard to deviant people (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 296)

Given these common patterns of interaction between citizens in public and parochial spaces, it might be interesting to relate interaction between citizens and homeless to these patterns. This can tell whether homeless are tolerated as being ordinary users of the square or whether they might embody a deviant position.

To sum up, interventions imposed on a governmental and municipal level are said to focus on the maintenance of order and control and range from the design of public space (Smithsimon, 2008) to policies on cleaning and controlling disorder (Duneier, 1999). Also signs might be used to communicate the idea of ‘publicness’ while reality might be different (Duneier). On the level of citizens there are findings that do focus more on openness than on order and control. People adhering to the right to the city movements might have increased opportunities nowadays (Mayer, 2009) and this might also reflect in simple interactions between citizens and homeless. There are normative patterns with regard to interactions in public space, which can be used to measure against the interactions that people have with homeless (Lofland, 1998).

These theoretical findings raise questions whether at a square located in the centre of Amsterdam the governmental interventions by design, cleaning and controlling also take place. And are their signs manifest at the Westermarkt that reflect what actually happens at the square or is there a discrepancy? Furthermore, when compared to general normative patterns (Lofland, 1998; Kusenbach, 2006) do residents interact normally with what they might consider deviants at the Westermarkt? And what does this convey about tolerance? The
earlier mentioned statement of Mayer (2000, p. 148) that “even ‘progressive cities’ have
distinguished themselves by adopting laws that prohibit people from sitting or lying on
pavements in business districts” suggests that the prevalence of order might also be the case at
the Westermarkt. But given the fact that the situation here is not necessarily comparable to the
United States it remains to be seen. It can be argued that, given the reputation of the city,
people in Amsterdam might especially seize the increased opportunities for initiatives related
to marginalisation of deviants. This might also show in simple interactions at the
Westermarkt.

Given the questions that arise based on previous literature about what homeless do, what
people think about this and how they react, the appropriate research location to investigate
this will be introduced. Subsequently methodological information about how the research is
conducted will be provided.
3. METHODS

3.1 Westermarkt

The Westermarkt is an appropriate place to reflect on the situation of diversity in urban public spaces in Amsterdam. The square is located in the centre of the city, adjacent to the Jordaan. It is close to the nine streets area; between the Keizersgracht and the Prinsengracht and it connects the Raadhuisstraat with the Rozengracht. The famous Westerkerk is located in the centre of the square. The Westermarkt ranges from the street North of this church to the street South of it. The square at the East Side of the church, next to the Keizersgracht, is also the Westermarkt.

Figure 1: Location of the Westermarkt in the city of Amsterdam. Retrieved from http://maps.google.nl/
The street at the West Side of the church is officially the Prinsengracht but this part will also be integrated in the definition of Westermarkt since it is very likely that activities that take place at the Westermarkt will incorporate this space. When in 1631 the Westerkerk was finished, residents named the square Westermarkt (“Westermarkt,” 2012). The neighbourhood Jordaan used to be inhabited by the working-class and migrants (“[History of the Jordaan],” n.d.). During the 19th century the Jordaan impoverished severely up until the renovation in the 1970s. Ever since this renovation the neighbourhood came to be inhabited by educated people, students, yuppies and artists. They caused the development of restaurants, shops and cafes. The Westermarkt offers the opportunity of a rich diversity since there is a uniquely mixed crowd making use of the square, representing diverse interests.

Users of the Westermarkt

The Anne Frank House is located at the North Side of the Westermarkt and is one of the three most visited museums of Amsterdam; roughly a million tourists from all over the world visit the museum and accordingly the Westermarkt (“[Visitors],” n.d.). Then there is the Westerkerk, with roughly 300 to 350 people attending the weekly Sunday service and from April till October over a 100,000 tourists visiting the church (“Beleidsplan 2012-2016 Westerkerkgemeente Amsterdam,” 2012). Residents are also using the square; there are two student houses adjacent to the Westermarkt, and several houses and maisonettes. Entrepreneurs make up a large part of the people using the square. At the South of the square, adjacent to the road, there is an Albert Heijn supermarket, which accounts for a lot of people visiting the Westermarkt. Furthermore, there is a liquor store, a souvenirs shop, a sandwich shop, an Internet shop, a café and some diners at the South Side. Located in the niches around the church are several small shops with souvenirs, cheese and paintings. At the South Side of the church, on the square itself, there are four kiosks selling flowers, fish, and french-fries. The fourth kiosk is a gay and lesbian information point. This information point is related to the presence of a gay monument, which is found at the East Side of the square since 1987: it is the first in the world (“Westermarkt,” 2012). Due to the presence of this monument, there are a lot of festivities at the Westermarkt, especially during the gay parade and liberation day. Taxi drivers are another important group of entrepreneurs at the square. At the East Side, adjacent to the gay monument, there is a taxi stand where almost permanently several taxis are parked. At the North Side of the square there are several offices that cause employees to use the square during their lunch break. Finally, the Westermarkt is a very popular place for a
large group of people to hang around: the homeless. Taken together the Westermarkt is a square that harvests many different groups of users and accordingly various interests. This variety of users and interests, together with the urban location and corresponding density, accounts for the Westermarkt as an appropriate research location. Also, the before mentioned factors which Amsterdam is famous for, such as diversity, liberty and tolerance, should especially be present at the Westermarkt, since it is quite a symbolic place for minorities.

Figure 2: Westermarkt satellite map. Retrieved from http://maps.google.nl/
In the following chapter I will introduce the methods with which the research at the Westermarkt will be conducted. First the type of research will be described, followed by a description of the informants as well as the procedure, and lastly some complicating factors.

### 3.2 Methodological approach

**Qualitative case study and research population**

The research is approached from a qualitative perspective. This is due to several characteristics. First of all the data are obtained through a case study design since the only research location is the Westermarkt. Theory is therefore deduced in an inductive way. Furthermore, the conduct of homeless in public space and the ideas, opinions and representations on this that people adhere to, are the focus of the research questions. So the interpretations of people of the “social world” are investigated. These characteristics typically fit a qualitative approach (Bryman, 2008, p. 366).

The informants for this research are people from the different groups of users of the Westermarkt, ranging from individuals to people representing institutions. Interviews are conducted with someone working at the Anne Frank foundation, the sexton and administrator of the Westerkerk, passers-by, several types of residents ranging from students to workers, entrepreneurs of the souvenirs shops and the Albert Heijn, taxi drivers and two homeless. Furthermore, there are informants that do not use the square but are in other ways related to the Westermarkt, such as the neighbourhood manager, the GGD and policy workers at the municipality.

**Data collection, procedure and analysis**

Data is collected by conducting interviews and observations during the summer of 2011 until the winter. Being a resident of the square for years already, allowed me to enrich the 12 extensive interviews and the planned observations with informal conversations when spontaneously meeting informants or seeing something happening at the square. These unplanned data collections range from all days of the week to all hours of the day. The square was for instance observed at midnight after a night out, early in the morning before going to
work, or during lunch when doing groceries. This enriched the data and together with the planned research conduction accounted for an overall idea of the state of affairs.

The planned interviews and observations are both semi-structured and broadly focus at certain topics while maintaining the freedom for the informants to talk about what they consider relevant. The main topics are related to the three main themes of the research: the spatial practices of homeless, views on this and on public space in general, and corresponding reactions. The duration of the interviews was roughly an hour. Observations were non-participatory of nature due to some difficulties regarding safety. The police warned for drawing attention of the homeless by accompanying people to the square while interviewing them. For instance, by accompanying the police or policy makers, homeless might perceive me as being in favour of certain controversial views. Also, it was strictly discouraged to conduct interviews with homeless since they might be suspicious when using drugs. According to the police my residential security might be at stake. In my opinion there was indeed a risk involved. First of all, the fact that there is a core group using the Westermarkt increases the change of recognition in the future. Another important reason for deciding not to take the risk is that it might harm the chance of observing without being noticed, which will change general patterns. Furthermore, various homeless suffer from mental illnesses and are on drugs, which makes their behaviour unpredictable. All users of the square are confronted with this but since they might link me to controversial views while talking to informants, this poses an extra risk.

So to answer the questions of this research, observations, interviews, spontaneous encounters and chats were used and enriched with documents on the Internet and newspaper articles. Furthermore, mail was obtained that residents of the Westermarkt receive regarding issues related to the square. Because it is discouraged to interview homeless, data was used of two interviews with homeless that were conducted during a previous research at the Westermarkt. Broad context information was gathered through observations, to get a sense of the ambiance at different hours and to obtain information about the design of the square. The first question regarding the spatial practices of the homeless at the Westermarkt was answered through observations as well as interviews. Observations were conducted of what homeless were doing by walking around or sitting at the benches. As mentioned before, data of spontaneous observations was also used. To enrich, confirm or contrast the observational findings regarding the activities of the homeless, there were also questions posed about their activities.
during the interviews. The second main theme regarding views on public space and homeless residing there, was answered mainly through interviews. Sometimes by asking direct questions such as: “what is your perspective on homeless using public space?” But also by reading between the lines of the whole conversation. Data on interventions and reactions to the situation at the Westermarkt were obtained by interviewing users of the square as well as people representing institutions. Observations were also informative with regard to interventions, since interactions with homeless and reactions to situations were visible at the square.

The broad variety of moments of the day during which the research is conducted, combined with the informal data that enriched the regular research moments, accounts for the reliability and validity of this investigation. Being able to be present at the research location a lot, allows for a consistent idea of the issues regarding the square. Besides this, there are also factors that hinder the research. One of the limits is that people who are highly involved in the situation are very keen on being interviewed. Since they have a lot to say, this poses the risk of perceiving the square to be in huge trouble. People that do not experience an interest in the presence or absence of homeless are less aware of what is going on and show less interest in being interviewed. This makes it harder to abstract information out of their statements. On the other hand, it is also an important finding that some people do not even notice the homeless and do not care. Furthermore, the fact that homeless are not included as informants poses certain limits. It would have been enriching to hear their view on the dynamics between the different groups using the square. The little data from a former research at the square was used to compensate for this.

Open and focused coding was used to draw meaning out of the data (Charmaz, 2006). Analyzation started already during the collection of data to confirm or shift directions. As soon as there did not appear any more outstanding new information the analysis was started more profoundly.
4. RESULTS

4.1 Homeless and their spatial practices

In this chapter a description will be given of the homeless residing at the Westermarkt and findings on their spatial practices will be presented. This way the first sub question will be answered:

- What spatial practices do the homeless actually employ at the Westermarkt?

First of all, findings on characteristics of homeless at the Westermarkt will be presented. Subsequently, their activities at the square are introduced. As mentioned earlier, the use of the word ‘homeless’ in this thesis reflects a broad variety: from “actual homeless, to potential and residential homeless” (Deben, 2003, p. 231). But who are the people at the Westermarkt specifically? First of all, we will look at the general terms that people use when talking about the group. In the article of Parool (‘Westermarkt in greep van overlast’, 2010) they were introduced as “vagrants” and “alcoholics”. Talking with people from the police, the local shops, the municipality, residents and taxi drivers, confirms the use of the term alcoholics, it was the most common denomination. The term vagrant was hardly used by anyone. There were some reports on a minor number of vagrants using the square and hanging around near a parking lot at ten minutes walking distance from the Westermarkt: the Q-Park. But this seemed an almost negligible number. Other commonly used terms are: dealers, junks and ‘people that are hanging around’ (by some referred to as ‘hangenden’). Some used the term ‘homeless’ but others corrected them by stating that almost all people of the group have a place to go to at night. A wide variety of living circumstances were reported, from houses or rented rooms to night shelters. It seemed as if hearing an outsider use the term homeless raised the need by many to clarify that these were not only people with shared difficulties concerning their living circumstances; an essential characteristic is also there alcoholism and drug addiction. Nevertheless, for the convenience and considering the earlier proposed broad definition of homelessness (Deben) the use of the term is validated for this thesis.

The earlier mentioned research of the GGD already showed that during extreme cold there are roughly 200 people a night dependent on shelters in Amsterdam (Buster & de Wit, 2011, p.
7). So Amsterdam is not a city with thousands of people sleeping on the streets. At the Westermarkt numbers range according to the time of the day and day of the week. The maximum amount of homeless using the square during the week is around 15. But there are also times when only four or five homeless are hanging around. At Sundays it is relatively quiet. Many interviewees attribute this to the opening hours of the Albert Heijn; at Sundays the supermarket opens two hours later and closes two hours earlier than during weekdays.

With regard to the more specific characteristics of the homeless, information that interviewees reported was in line with the GGD research (Buster & de Wit, 2011). Broadly, there are two groups: ‘locals’; people who are born or who spend most of their lives in Amsterdam or other parts of Holland, and ‘foreigners’; mostly referred to as Eastern Europeans or ‘newcomers’. The locals are also referred to as ‘the core group’. Locals seem to be around the age of 50 while the newcomers are around 35 years old. The core group came to the Westermarkt due to a constant movement away from places where alcohol bans are established. Their former location was the Albert Heijn Food Plaza at Nieuwezijdsvoorburgwal, where they left after bans were established. Many of the locals are disapproved for work by the government and receive disability benefits. One informant, a street vendor at the square, hangs around with some of the homeless and experienced street life himself. He explained their situation very straightforward: “In their late teens they were the ones relying on the formerly called ‘Arbeidsbureau’. There were two trays there. They would ask you whether you really wanted a job, and if you confirmed this, your dossier was put in tray X. If you did not want one, your dossier was put in tray Y. This way they did not waste their effort and you were put on disability benefits. These people started to hang around on the streets out of boredom. The situation at the Westermarkt is what came out of it.” Of course this explanation might be simplified and hard to verify, but it largely expresses the role of the government according to some. Another important characteristic that the homeless share, according to many informants, is that they suffer from psychological problems. They were labelled by one of the informants as ‘therapy resistant’. Observations at the square confirmed the division according to nationality, the presence of a core group and psychological problems. Signs such as muddled conversations, substance abuse and a shabby appearance pointed in this last direction.

So difficulties regarding housing circumstances and work, alcoholism, and psychological problems are common reflections on the people hanging around at the Westermarkt. Looking
at these characterisations raises questions about the corresponding activities of the homeless. Is there a ratio which leans towards criminal behaviour or do factors as a good welfare system go hand in hand with more nuanced activities which enables other users of public space to tolerate the homeless more easily? To reflect on this the spatial practices of homeless at the Westermarkt will now be described.

Spatial practices

The most important activity reported is drinking alcohol, mostly beer. Informants with different relations to the square all reported that almost all of the homeless drink alcohol. The locals drink more than the newcomers. One interviewee reported that the locals were recognizable by their beer can. Another major activity is hanging around with friends and talking. Observing the homeless and talking to informants showed that gathering with acquaintances and mutually drinking beer and chatting, is what most do. They sit around at the various benches of the square. A typical scene at the Westermarkt would be three groups of homeless hanging around. Three persons of the first group at the East Side of the square; one sitting on a bench, another leaning on a bike and a third standing next to the bench, all of them drinking beer. A second group would be sitting at the South Side of the square around the benches, and a third group standing in the niches of the South Side of the church. I often observed one person out of each group taking the lead and speaking loudly. Almost as if they were giving a lecture. The content of the conversations was muddily. Some appeared drunk, others sober.
According to the informants that are present frequently, such as the shop owners and the police, many homeless are ‘dealers in order to make a living’. This means they deal to be able to eat and drink and to use some drugs themselves, but they are not major dealers. Locals are said to deal more than Eastern Europeans. Only after being informed about this activity of drugs dealing at the Westermarkt it was recognizable during the observations. People arrive at the square on scooters to quickly exchange drugs and money, or go for a walk with one of the homeless to deal at one of the bridges nearby. Homeless use drugs themselves as well but according to the perpetrator manager of the Westermarkt their main activity is drinking. A cheap variant of cocaine, is popular among the homeless. Due to the sale of medicines and XTC pills the Westermarkt is nicknamed ‘Pill square’ by some. Medicines are obtained since some of the homeless use tranquilizers because of their disabilities. They receive medicines on receipt but instead of taking them all themselves, they use them for trade on the square. There are diverging statements on this issue: some refer to the GGD being the biggest dealer of all and being careless in its distribution of pills to enable the regulation of drug abuse. This way homeless sell the majority of the distributed pills in order to earn money for beer. Also
medicines on receipt are said to be easily available. Nevertheless, according to others, only a minor number of medicines find its way to the market since people are supervised at the location where the pills are distributed. Personal use is ensured since the medicines have to be taken instantly and blood values are tested. Apart from this discussion, it can be stated that there clearly is confirmation of the presence of an underground economy (Duneier, 1999).

*Stealing and begging* is also reported as a spatial practice of the homeless but according to many informants this is mainly done by Eastern Europeans. They rob tourists or passers-by and chase them away by begging for money. Although robberies were not observed during the research, the police and some entrepreneurs working at the square confirmed this. When talking to residents about these activities, some were aware of the drug abuse and stealing while others did not know about it.

Furthermore there are many disturbances reported by entrepreneurs, such as *fights among homeless during the distribution of earnings, noise pollution, offensive group formation, chasing away tourists by making offensive comments or urinating and defecating at the square*. During the observations fighting was not observed but there were some heavy discussions where the police had to intervene. Homeless peeing at the square was observed twice. Although tourists are forced to pass the homeless to visit the Anne Frank House, to buy souvenirs or to catch the tram, there were not many comments observed that were directed towards them. Talking to several tourists showed that most did not notice the homeless and are not aware of the activities they employ. Lastly, homeless sleeping at the square was only observed a few times.
Besides complaints, informants also reported homeless to be engaged in more neutral or positive activities. They claimed that some homeless are *cleaning the square*. This was observed frequently as well: homeless were picking up beer cans and throwing them away in bins. Some entrepreneurs at the Westermarkt reported that people of the core group sometimes help them to carry heavy things or assist them when they are in trouble. Also it was reported that some homeless oblige others to behave well. According to one of the entrepreneurs they do so to secure their own presence at the square. In a prior research at the square one of the homeless reported that he sometimes enforced others to behave well. “Some are ruining it for others” was a statement used by two homeless that were interviewed. This does confirm that there is some form of informal mentoring (Duneier, 1999). Furthermore, one of the homeless that was interviewed during the previous research reported to be the main character of a novel written by someone working at the university. He explained that the book was about a woman who faded in the midst of a crowd and was only noticed by him. He took care of her and they developed a connection. The homeless was clearly very proud when talking about this. It reminded me of the public character Hakim, which Duneier (p. 6)
described. Although this homeless was not constantly present he appeared to be regularly at the Westermarkt. Apparently, someone was inspired by him and perceived him as someone who has his eyes on the street (Jacobs, 2011)

Besides all these activities that homeless employ it was confirmed that they are also concerned with influencing the perception that people have of them, as proposed by Snow & Anderson (1987). Picking up beer cans or other waste happened quite often just as entrepreneurs were standing outside of their shops, to verify what was happening at the square. Furthermore, the confirmation that some homeless were warning others when they did not behave well, in order to ensure their own presence at the Westermarkt, also shows that they are aware that they have to meet a certain image.

Above mentioned results correspond to the described theories on homeless and the activities they employ. It can be concluded that criminal activities make up a large share of their spatial practices: drunkenness in public, drug abuse and other types of nuisance. There is definitely an underground economy present (Duneier, 1999). At the same time, there are also signs that homeless look out for others at the square and make an effort to influence the ideas that people have of them, as predicted by Snow and Anderson (1987). They try to create motives for others to tolerate them by cleaning the square and controlling deviant behaviour of their peers. This confirms the presence of informal social mentoring (Duneier) and eyes upon the street (Jacobs, 2011). Furthermore, a lot of times the homeless are just loitering around and do not seem to harm anyone. Overall, the question regarding the ratio can certainly be answered by stating that a majority is involved in criminal behaviour, but executes this together with activities that can be considered harmless. Their main activity is hanging around and drinking beer. This does confirm that a good share of the activities can also be perceived as neutral or even positive. Users of the Westermarkt might therefore not necessarily experience the activities of homeless as merely deviant or intolerable. This will influence the ‘publicness’ of the square positively. Nevertheless, it seems that what for some is bearable, is for others insurmountable. As described, tourists, passers-by or residents are not always aware of the dealing and drunkenness while for entrepreneurs the experience of nuisance is a daily reality.

It appears that tolerance, and thus the ‘publicness’ of public space, is not only influenced by the reality of spatial practices, but is mainly dependent on the perspective of the type of user.
So although criminal behaviour does take place, this is certainly not the reality for everyone using the square. That is why we will now elaborate on the different views that prevail.

4.2 Views on public space and the presence of homeless

In this chapter, the views of the users and institutions related to the Westermarkt on public space and the homeless residing at the square will be described. This way the second sub question will be answered:

- *What are the representations of different individuals and people working for institutions of the concept of public space and the activities of the homeless at the Westermarkt?*

**Variety of interests and intensity of use**

Since the perceptions and experiences of the Westermarkt appear to be dependent on the type of user we will elaborate on this first. In talking to various people living and working at the Westermarkt it was obvious that there are a wide variety of interests at stake and the intensity of use of the square varies greatly. Entrepreneurs use the square a lot since they are managing their shops every day, while residents generally report to do groceries after work but are not present as much during the day. Then there are a constant number of tourists and passers-by that are crossing the square to visit tourist sights or to get from A to B. In general they only use the square once and then leave to other parts of the city. This creates a situation in which some are more dependent on what happens at the Westermarkt than others.

Clearly, the tension of the question of tolerance and dealing with the ‘publicness’ of public space is mostly felt for people like the entrepreneurs or people working at the Westerkerk. Also the tension is present for the people that manage the square: the police, policymakers and a variety of related agencies. One entrepreneur stated that residents do not mind what happens at the square as much since they come home at night to a clean square. In talking to the various users that are not present frequently this difference in experience showed, for instance during an interview with an informant who visits the square every two weeks to attend a carillon concert. This informant spends every now and then at least an hour enjoying - what he called- “the history and peacefulness at the square”, sitting on one of the benches.
He reported he hardly noticed the homeless. In his opinion homeless should be able to use the square, although they cross the line if they would be dealing drugs or causing nuisance. Two other residents, residing in the student complex next to the Anne Frank House, reported to be conscious of the presence of the homeless since they crossed the square every day to do groceries, but they did not care; “they are just there”. It was hard for these people to judge potential claims of nuisance. The general attitude was one of tolerance towards the homeless residing at the square but at the other hand sympathizing with other parties that might experience difficulties. Nevertheless, some also stated that claims of nuisance are related to money issues and pointed towards the fact that tourists can also cause nuisance since they arrive in large groups and are overwhelmingly present. One taxi driver reported that he was ok with the homeless at the square since he found the idea that everyone should be in line oppressive. According to him we just have to cope with reality and with people that are acting different.
Views of both types of users will be highlighted in this thesis; people that are not present the whole day and generally do not experience the total range of activities, as well as frequent users of the square such as entrepreneurs or the police. For the convenience we will refer to these groups as ‘low users’ and ‘high users’. Furthermore, the views of individuals will be discussed simultaneously with those of people working for institutions. This will contribute since the personal views of this last group of people will inevitably affect the way they execute their tasks. A second reason for discussing the views of individuals and people working at institutions simultaneously is that there did not appear any important differences. Reports of informants of institutions correspond largely to the views of intense users of the
square. This is the case since people working at the municipality, the police and mental health institutions are very aware of what is going on, just like the entrepreneurs that are constantly present at the square. They have background information of the homeless and of what is going on. Furthermore, they are the ones that are informed about claims of nuisance and attend meetings where all the related organizations are present to provide updates. So when talking about views of ‘high users’, this can also include informants working at the various institutions.

Besides the fact that employees of various institutions inevitably form their opinions they are not in a position to merely follow these personal views. During their work they mainly obey and execute laws and regulations. These laws and regulations they follow inevitably represent viewpoints of the corresponding institutions but these only reveal themselves through the interventions imposed. Later, in paragraph 4.3, we will look at the interventions from above and we will be able to see some of the principles that are the basis of institutions. But we will now only focus on personal views of individuals and people working for institutions, either low or high users of the square. Before discussing these views in detail, it is necessary to look at general ideas that different people have of the purpose of the Westermarkt since this might influence their tolerance towards the presence of homeless at the square.

**The purpose of public space**

The majority of the informants perceive the Westermarkt as a *public space* and almost everyone stated that public space was meant for everyone. Some also defined the square as a *parochial realm*, together with its public character. “It should be a place for the neighbourhood as well, but there is nothing in it for them.” Some entrepreneurs and an informant from the police and the Westerkerk, argued that there is a lack of community at the square. The manager of the Albert Heijn reported that she noticed that people were in need of this. When organizing communal activities, many of her clients respond very positively.

Another reported purpose of the square is that it is a location for *events*. Regularly there are parties in the Westerkerk and during the gay parade events take place outside at the square. Some people do not mind this but reported a need for improvement regarding the process of cleaning. Others preferred the purpose of the square to be just there to be ‘beautiful’ instead of being a typical ‘users square’ for harvesting festivities.
Furthermore, when talking about purposes of the square, major prevailing words during the conversations were ‘tourists’ and ‘business card’. According to many, a major purpose of the Westermarkt was to attract tourists. Many problems of appearance were perceived to invalidate the image that tourists should have of the square. This matched the fact that when asking about the function of the square and its primary users, tourists were mentioned most frequently. Many people with economic interests at the square made these statements, but a majority of others as well. People seemed very aware of the presence and the importance of the tourists and frequently mentioned the enormous amount of millions of tourists visiting the Westermarkt. Someone even referred to the square as a ‘gateway’ for famous attractions and perceived the benches at the square to be intended for the tourists.

Nevertheless, there was also a vast minority of people that was indignant about the idea of the ‘business card’ function of the square. Someone working for the police called it “lunacy caused by an overemphasis on money”. In his opinion, people should not be complaining about anything else, apart from reporting nuisance. Several residents and taxi drivers also did
not share the emphasis on the importance of the image of the square for tourists. They did not perceive that there was much lacking and tourists were not prominent in their considerations about the Westermarkt.

Clearly the purpose of the square varies greatly according to different views and the intensity of use. From just being ‘a beautiful square’ and a ‘business card’ for attracting tourists, towards a square intended to simply use and to have fun at. There were some trends though. Most of the informants using the square intensely, adhered to a combination of the two extremes. On one hand the square should be ‘clean, intact and safe’ and communicate a beautiful image to the tourists, but on the other hand most people did tolerate the various festivities. Although some would prefer the festivities to take place outside the historical centre, they are very willing to tolerate and communicate reasonably if only the image of the square would not be harmed. So there was tolerance but only under certain conditions. For low users there was in general less need to reflect on the purpose of the square and there were no major changes demanded.

**Views on the presence of homeless**

In addition to discussing the views on the purpose of the Westermarkt, the views on the presence of homeless will now be introduced. The factor of ‘intensity of use’ will also be accounted for. The statement by one of the informants working at the police “Where roses flourish, there grows no weed” represents the connection between this paragraph and the preceding one. Some informants argued that the earlier mentioned ignorance to protect and value the square was related to the fact that homeless choose the square to hang around. According to several informants the presence of homeless would decrease when the square would look better. This perception is in accordance with the broken windows theory (Duneier, 1999). People also felt that a cleaner square and less homeless would increase feelings of safety. These reports were mostly true for people using the square intensely. This shows that there is some evidence for one of the discussed views on the situation regarding the ‘publicness’ of contemporary public spaces: the idea that order and control is what many people desire (Duneier, 1999; Mitchell, 1995; Sennett, 1992).
Nevertheless, there were no large confirmations for concepts related to this more negative outlook on the ‘publicness’ of a space in Amsterdam. This view was certainly important, since elements of control were clearly present, but it did not seem to prevail on its own.

The prevalence of the vision of contemporary public space as ordered and controlled was not the case since, first of all, the Westermarkt did not seem to be a dead public space with regard to little diversity (Sennett, 1992). Striving to exile all homeless was hardly present among the people I spoke to. There was a clear trend in the way people perceived the presence of the homeless in that they reported to tolerate them unless they were not causing major difficulties and as long as there were not too many. These conditions for tolerance mostly applied to people using the square intensely. Others did not need to set these conditions for tolerance since they were less confronted with possible nuisance. A lot of people viewed the presence of homeless as corresponding to city life and were in favour of a rich diversity of users of the Westermarkt. They claimed to be specifically ok with the core group since these were the ones who were able to control themselves. Nevertheless the fact that their presence attracted more and more peers was perceived as crossing the line for high users. The majority also draw the line when criminality appeared; liveability and security should not be at stake. This trend of tolerance together with a desire for change was for instance reflected in the statements of the chairman of the association of entrepreneurs ‘Van Dam tot Westertoren’. She explained that she has a reputation of being ‘a bitch’ since she is very persistent in striving for ‘clean, intact and safe’ and against nuisance. At the same time it became clear during the interview that she sympathised with the homeless, tried to think along when difficulties occurred and preferred communication over calling the police. She stated: “Physical violence or gambling is the limit. Hanging around and drinking a beer is fine with me. I’m a cosmopolitan woman, beer, drugs, I know it all.” This informant was the most persistent in her strive against nuisance of all interviewees of the research. She complaint about things that could seem small details to others regarding the physical appearance of the square, but at the same time she clearly knew the group and tried to solve things with their interest in mind as well. Clearly, high users as well as low users show a lot of tolerance.

Given the fact that there appears an overall trend of tolerance, the question rises whether, as hypothesized, there is indeed confirmation that the earlier described NIMBY syndrome does not hold for Amsterdam. It results that most people, regardless of their intensity of use, do not think that the presence of homeless at the Westermarkt can be avoided by finding another
location for them. Many stated that by doing this, the problem would only be replaced. So there appeared to be a sense of responsibility for the situation the homeless were in. Apparently, there were people that do suffer from the situation to some extent but most are willing to tolerate this. They try to improve the situation with all possible interventions apart from sending all the homeless to a place further away. There was only a small minority who thought that the group should not be at a square in the centre, but more at the peripheries where there is less density.

Up until now it can be concluded that there is a combination of tolerance, which goes hand in hand with some elements of control. This control mostly holds for the users that are present most frequently at the square. We will elaborate more on these elements of control later. First it is interesting to see whether this prevailing tolerance, together with the fact that the Westermarkt harvests many different types of users, creates the conditions for a cosmopolitan appreciation of difference (Anderson, 2004, p. 28). This is certainly the case since even the people that complain the most do have encounters with the homeless. They ask for assistance to carry things, greet the group when passing by and try to solve things before they get out of hand. Also there is a lot of interaction between tourists from all over the world and the shop managers, taxi drivers, people working at the church and the Anne Frank House. Many people working at the square speak several languages and therefore interact easily with the visitors. This reflects an appreciation of diverse types of people: (...)“people tend to positively acknowledged one another’s existence in some measure.” (Anderson, p. 16). This cosmopolitan behaviour and the easy interaction with strangers, including the homeless, points towards the fact that at the Westermarkt people do have a “public geography” (Sennett, 1992, p. 38). Contrary to what Sennett posed, users of the square do seem to know how to interact with strangers or homeless and can even tell by the way tourists look in what language to approach them.

Several times, students were observed when they were giving directions to tourists and entrepreneurs or taxi drivers showed pride when reporting the amount of languages they are able to speak. Sometimes an entrepreneur approached a homeless to talk about something happening at the square and another reported to share leftovers with them. Interaction with strangers or people that some consider deviant, such as homeless, certainly appeared to be appreciated and public interaction is not considered meaningless.
Together with showing tolerance and interaction with strangers there were people that, as mentioned before, longed for more sense of community. Although it does not prevail, what does this desire of community and association entail? As mentioned earlier, some considered one of the purposes of the square to be a place for the neighbourhood to gather. Especially high users would appreciate it if more people knew each other and cooperate together. This desire for community depends on the intensity of use again: taxi drivers, residents and passers-by seem to care less about experiencing a sense of community. However, this certainly does not hold for all since a reasonable group of clients of Albert Heijn that are living in the Jordaan are said to appreciate initiatives that enabled them to interact with neighbours. The urge for social cohesion is one of the reasons why the association of entrepreneurs, ‘Van Dam tot Westertoren’, was established. The entrepreneurs would appreciate a sense of cohesion while being in a public space. Not all entrepreneurs are in favour of the association, several did not respond to invitations. Some people of the association reported to feel disappointed and did not understand why others did not want to communicate. Apparently, it seems that certain attitudes and desires can go hand in hand: accepting and interacting comfortably with strangers but at the same time longing for a sense of community.

Given the quite tolerant views of people with regard to public space and the homeless residing in it, it is probable to find a relation with their expectations of the situation. Although some people did report to long for more sense of community there does not prevail an obsession with privatism, as proposed by Sennett (1992). The expectation of some entrepreneurs that all should be willing to cooperate in an association and in activities to create a sense of community, can be perceived as the application of private expectations onto a public situation. But this does not prevail. The described fear of strangers, by for instance Sennett and Lofland (1998), associated with devaluing public interactions, is also not that present. When ones safety is clearly on the line, due to nuisance or violence, entrepreneurs report to be very afraid. But there is no fear reported for strangers in general.

Although the reported fear is not related to strangers in general, the fact that the prevailing sense of tolerance at the Westermarkt goes hand in hand with some clear elements of control due to nuisance, raises the need to elaborate on this. Low users report to sympathize with people experiencing nuisance but do not report as much complaints themselves. According to them, tourists or traffic can also pose difficulties at the square. We will now look at what the
nuisance encompasses that some experience and what people specifically complain about regarding the appearance of the square.

**Nuisance and the appearance of the square**

Among the people most intensely present at the square there are clearly claims of nuisance. The municipality and the police confirm the presence of a problem and high numbers of complaints. Overall, there prevails the idea that something has to change. Some entrepreneurs report that they are scared due to riots and the bad ambiance caused by group formation and alcohol or drug abuse. Also tourists are robbed and there is a lot of theft at the supermarket. According to the supermarket manager of Albert Heijn, roughly ten times a day there are robberies out of which eight will go unnoticed. According to some entrepreneurs, the unsafe ambiance causes a loss of tourists visiting the souvenirs shops surrounding the church. During an interview conducted at one of these shops we were interrupted by something happening at the square; the police spoke to a group of homeless and arrested one of them. A few hours of interviewing and observing already made clear that there was a lot going on. Some informants were very emotional during the interviews, they were angry and upset about since their limits were reached.

Furthermore various informants, from entrepreneurs to the police and the municipality, reported that they would prefer a change in the appearance of the square. But what does this specifically entail? Many report that the street furniture, such as benches and street kiosks, are directed outward. If directed to the centre, the Westermarkt would feel more like a square. Placing flower boxes is also a recurring desire for many. Some even reported the appearance of the square to be grey and unheimisch. Furthermore, I accompanied an inspection walk which was initiated by the association of entrepreneurs ‘Van Dam tot Westertoren’ in order to obtain a certificate for save enterprises. Members of the association together with people from the police and municipality were able to point out things at the square that did not meet their idea of ‘clean, intact and safe’. Weed near benches, graffiti tags and non-functioning lampposts were things they denounced. This experience of nuisance was not shared as much by residents, taxi drivers, tourists or passers-by. Neither did they complain much about the appearance. Many tourists said they loved the square. A taxi driver stated indifferent; “Het ligt er mooi bij toch?!”. 
Given all these findings on the views of the presence of homeless it can be argued that there is overall clear evidence that the Westermarkt in Amsterdam is quite a ‘public’ public space. Even the entrepreneurs who complain the most tolerate a lot and are in favour of a varied public using the square, including homeless. The Westermarkt cannot be considered a dead public space (Sennett, 1992) and neither is there confirmation of the NIMBY syndrome (Dear, 1992). On the one hand, the presence of homeless is considered by some as chaos and disorder but at the same time people do take responsibility for it since they do not see a solution in sending them further away. The Westermarkt can be considered a cosmopolitan canopy since various strangers interact together and tolerate each other’s presence (Anderson, 2004). Homeless are also included in this interaction. The proposed obsession by Sennett with privatism and a general fear of strangers does not prevail at the Westermarkt. However, high users report to experience extreme nuisance, which makes them emotional and afraid. Some of them also expect all entrepreneurs to associate and desire a higher sense of community.

These high users also expect certain conditions to be met in exchange for their tolerance: there should be less homeless, their behaviour should cause fewer nuisances, and the appearance of the square should improve. This is in accordance with the broken windows theory and shows that there are certainly some elements of order and control present (Duneier, 1999; Mitchell, 1995; Sennett, 1992). In this regard, ‘publicness’ can be conceived as a process. Due to their intense use of the square, high users end up in what can be called a ‘process of publicness’. It is not a strictly demanding ‘exchange process’ however, since the decrease of nuisance is clearly not a prerequisite for tolerance. Some people might state it that way, but when we look at what actually happens, people are still quite tolerant even though some of their demands are not met. However, the idea of an exchange process would be ideal according to some high users; if they promise to tolerate some homeless hanging around, the homeless in return agree to cause less difficulties. Furthermore, it is also remarkable that many users of the Westermarkt perceive tourists as a very important factor in their considerations about the square. As predicted by Lofland (2000), there is an attempt to adjust the square to the prerequisites of tourists since many want the Westermarkt to fulfil a ‘business card function’. What they might forget is the fact that in many countries the situation is far worse with regard to homeless residing in public space. People that use the square less intense, such as tourists, passers-by, residents or taxi drivers, are less concerned with this and are more satisfied with the current situation.
Since views appear to be quite tolerant the question arises how these perceptions influence reactions and interventions. We will now look at the various interventions imposed on the Westermarkt, either from above by institutions as well as by citizens themselves. If the way people view the presence of homeless at the square is quite tolerant, this has to show as well in how they react to interventions imposed from above, how they handle situations themselves and how they interact at the square.

4.3 Reactions and interventions

In this chapter reactions and interventions will be discussed, and the corresponding reflections on this. This way the third and last sub question will be answered:

- What interventions are there and how do people reflect on them?

There are interventions on different levels that impact deviants in urban public space; from policies of the government and municipality to individual residents taking up initiatives and showing certain trends in the way they respond to what is happening. First we will look at interventions imposed from above.

Interventions by institutions

The government proposed a plan together with the four largest cities of Holland with regard to homelessness and the problems related to this group, which runs from 2006 until 2013 (Rijksoverheid & G4, 2006). There are two phases in which the focus shifts from targeting the severest problems towards prevention and recovery. One of the key features is that as many homeless as possible are being monitored. The municipality governs at the level of clients by enabling ‘field management’ and also manages at policy level by deciding which institutions and services are provided. There is a so-called ‘chain approach’ for people like the group residing at the Westermarkt. People working for the related institutions provided information about this approach. The aim of it is to repeatedly target the ten most serious cases. Various authorities such as the public prosecutor, the police, mental health service (GGD), substance abuse treatment service (Jellinek), the service for work and income (DWI) and people from ‘field work’ (Street Corner Work) enable this approach by working together. Once a week
they come together in a ‘chain unit consulting hour’ to discuss the various cases, to set up individual trajectories and to consult clients with various questions. Also there is a ‘habitual offender consulting hour’, where habitual offenders among homeless are discussed. The police discuss the various cases to see whether clients are in an appropriate care trajectory or whether they have to be send to an institution for habitual offenders. This institution (ISD) restricts their freedom for a certain amount of time. Lastly, there is an intervention called ‘the cleaning street’. This means that each of the various authorities check the same homeless persons and their conditions at the same time. Investigated is for instance whether these selected persons need mental healthcare, how their financial situation is and if there are outstanding fines. Sometimes this entails a ‘cleaning action’, which means that various homeless are removed from the Westermarkt to start their participation in different trajectories.

One of the organizations enabling the chain approach, the before mentioned ‘Street Corner Work’, is a specialized team which roams around Amsterdam at scooters to monitor what is happening among the homeless. Each member of the team is responsible for a certain area and talks to the people there to subtly try to verify which services are needed in order to improve their situation. If the homeless accept help, Street Corner Work refers them to the right authorities. Several times I saw someone from this team sitting down with the homeless and having a chat.

Besides the ‘chain interventions’ there is also an important legal intervention, which is applied in various parts of Amsterdam to combat nuisance of homeless. This is the establishment of an alcohol ban. As discussed before, this ban causes homeless to move from one place to another. We have seen that the most important activity of the homeless is drinking beer, so if they are not allowed to do this at a certain location they move somewhere else. Informants of various institutions reported that bans at the Nieuwezijdsvoorburgwal and the Korte Prinsengracht caused the increase in the presence of homeless at the Westermarkt. The municipality did not decide yet to impose an alcohol ban at the Westermarkt but are certainly in the process of considering the possibilities. As explained by a policy maker, it is imposed once all other interventions to combat nuisance did not work out. This is already the case at the Westermarkt at the moment, so the ban is probably on its way.
A last important intervention by the municipality is imposed through the design of the Westermarkt. The benches at the square are designed in such a way that they do not enable people to sleep on them, due to the size and the armrests. Furthermore they are placed outward which according to some people discourages to take a seat since they feel exhibited. Although they allow a view over the Westermarkt, they are not placed in a secure corner or in a circle but in the middle of the square, which might not increase the feeling of ‘cosiness’. This corresponds to theories posed about isolation through design (Sennett, 1992). At the same time it depends on the point of view since enough people do choose to take a seat, mainly homeless or tourists. Also theories on empty space and design to ensure homogenisation (Davis, 2006; Lofland, 1998; Smithsimon, 2008) do not correspond entirely to the situation at the Westermarkt. Various types of people are sitting on the benches and although not all parts of the square are crowded there are no parts that are extremely empty. This also tells us something about the intervention that Mitchell (1995) proposed about introducing signs and symbols to communicate the idea of tolerance and ‘publicness’. There are definitely elements that communicate this: the benches signal social interaction, the gay monument, the information kiosk and the presence of the Anne Frank House signal the acceptance of minorities or ‘deviants’. But by looking at the findings that are discussed up until now, there are indications that the Westermarkt might be quite a diverse public place, which means these signs might not diverge largely from the reality.

Overall, the interventions imposed by the authorities share some common principles, which give a clue about their standing points, as explained in paragraph 4.2. We will now elaborate on these ideas and views that are the basis of the interventions just described. Some of the principles correspond to the idea of contemporary public space as a place where there is little diversity, and a lot of order and control. We will elaborate on this first. To start with, the idea prevails that the current situation regarding homeless in public space is not ideal; interventions are imposed to achieve change. When asking people working at the various institutions why there is need for improvement, many point towards the fact that there are claims of nuisance and that public space has to be ‘clean, intact and safe’. This is in accordance to the ideas of cleaning and controlling (Duneier, 1999; Mitchell, 1995; Sennett, 1992). According to a policy maker of the municipality, nuisance is not measurable and therefore there are no boundaries for complaints. Their job is simply to increase feelings of safety and quality of life. This desire for change is also confirmed by documents about plans and policies. As mentioned before, Amsterdam is part of a plan proposed by the government.
and the four largest cities to improve the circumstances of homeless and to decrease the
nuisance and criminality they cause to a minimum (Rijksoverheid & G4, 2006). Another
ruling principle is that \textit{monitoring and registering} homeless makes it easier to be in control of
the situation. This not only happens from behind the desk but also by imposing the earlier
mentioned Street Corner Work. This monitoring also relates to the idea of controlling public
space and deviant behaviour. So does the principle of \textit{cleaning}: intervening by removing
homeless from the square. The ideas behind this removal vary, some informants working for
the police or the municipality do not refer to the ‘business card function’ of the Westermarkt
and the importance of appearance; they just aim at improving the quality of life and safety.
The appearance is secondary. Others do feel that the square needs to be beautiful, attractive
and safe; the presence of homeless does not do justice to this in their opinion. Apparently the
broken windows theory does partially hold for the Westermarkt (Duneier, 1999).

Nevertheless, some other principles of interventions do not reflect the idea of a contemporary
public space where control and little diversity governs. They show that the elements of
control go hand in hand with mild standing points and confirm the idea that there are positive
aspects to it; there is diversity and homeless are not necessarily related to disorder and
deviance. First of all, the intervention through \textit{design} is not very extreme; there is no
obsession with homogenisation since homeless are not prohibited to sit or hang around at the
Westermarkt. So Mayer’s (2000) statement about progressive cities that are prohibiting
people from hanging around, does not hold for now. The design of the benches does not allow
sleeping on them and the setup could be better but it does not impose large constraints to
ensure homogenisation. Furthermore, there is no alcohol ban yet. Until things are not getting
out of hand and residents, being ‘low users’, do not start complaining, the municipality
apparently does not prefer to ‘replace the problem’. This reflects quite a lot of tolerance since
there are many claims of extreme nuisance of high users. Although there is evidence that the
ban will be imposed in the very near future, the fact that the process of imposing it is strict
and requires a lot of consideration also shows that elements of order and control can be
considered mild. Lastly, a common principle is that various informants of authorities reported
that they do not aim at exiling all homeless or drug abuse. They do tolerate them to a certain
extent but pose certain conditions that have to be met with regard to nuisance and safety of
other users of the square.
Overall, the interventions imposed by the authorities seem to correspond to theories on cleaning and controlling homeless in public space, but it does come across quite mild. Homeless are offered all possible assistance and there is no obsession with creating a homogenised public. According to many, exiling all deviants and criminal behaviour does not correspond to reality in a big city. Controlling and monitoring the homeless at the Westermarkt clearly goes hand in hand with quite a lot of tolerance.

**Reflections on institutional interventions**

First of all it is interesting to reflect on whether the imposed interventions actually seem to affect the spatial practices of the homeless or whether they are just there to communicate the idea of change. According to the earlier mentioned research of the GGD, there is no increase of homeless reported (Buster & de Wit, 2011). There is only a change in the composition with regard to nationality. It could be argued that the interventions are effective in at least ensuring that the number of homeless remains stable. Nevertheless various people of institutions as well as regular users of the Westermarkt report that the activities that are experienced as nuisance are hard to target. The trajectories that are offered to homeless sound promising but they easily return to old patterns. With regard to specific activities, homeless are not stopped from drinking alcohol until they commit an offence. Dealing drugs or stealing and fighting are acted against when noticed by the police. Regularly there are undercover police officers at the square and a few times I observed someone getting arrested. Through the chain approach and ‘fieldwork’ there is an active attempt to provide services where needed and to ensure that homeless that are willing to improve their situation are directed to the various institutions. Overall, the activities of homeless are influenced by the interventions imposed from above in that the institutions execute their power as well as possible. Nevertheless, the laws and regulations also pose certain constraints, which do not enable the police to target all problems that are experienced as nuisance.

So what do the various users think about the attitude and the corresponding interventions of the authorities? Do they feel represented by the interventions? There are many informants that feel fine about the way the authorities handle the Westermarkt. They do not complain and do not necessarily mention a need for change regarding the situation with the homeless. These are mostly people like residents, taxi drivers, passers-by, students living in the student residency at the square and tourists. People that use the square more permanently have more
interaction with the authorities and were more opinionated about the interventions. Let’s go over the interventions one by one and see how people reflect on them.

First of all, the system of the chain approach is something that several people regarded as positive. The overall idea is that there are many institutions available for the homeless and that there are social workers present at the square. Some entrepreneurs report to regularly see someone offering assistance. Nevertheless, there is also the idea that the cooperation between the various authorities and institutions is not at its best. ‘The chain’ is still in need of improvements. Some people working at the institutions did confirm this; the cooperation does not always go smoothly. The manager of the Albert Heijn for instance stated that she would like the idea of someone coming over every now and then, to check how things are going. There is a lot of homeless visiting the supermarket and sometimes they are causing difficulties. Therefore the manager knows a lot about what is going on. She is surprised that she is not asked regularly to communicate this information to contribute to the shared knowledge of the chain approach. The idea of the approach of targeting repeatedly the ten severest cases is something that many users of the square support. Nevertheless the increase of the group at the Westermarkt and the fact that many return after unsuccessful trajectories is reported by some to be disturbing.

The second intervention that is reflected on by users of the square is the issue of alcohol bans. The choice of the municipality to not impose a ban until less ‘aggressive’ interventions are tested is supported by many. This is remarkable and is another evidence that points in the direction that the Westermarkt is a tolerant place. Even some people complaining about extreme nuisance think that the ban is not the best solution to the issue. If nothing else works it is has to be imposed, but they support that all other possible interventions have to be tried first since the ban might replace the problem. Homeless who are getting drunk cause a lot of nuisance and their whole presence at the square relies on the fact that they are allowed to drink. Nevertheless, people seem to be willing to take the responsibility and regard the alcohol ban as an easy way out. One of the entrepreneurs reported that she does not want to be a ‘game breaker’ since the ban would also prohibit residents from enjoying a glass of wine in front of their houses. Several other informants also supported this. The fact that they do not support an easy solution to a difficult problem reflects a lot of tolerance. A remark to this however is that many people report that their limits are reached now. Although they do not perceive the ban to be a good solution, they feel they have to change their mind and support it
since the nuisance becomes unbearable. A member of the district council of the VVD as well as resident of the square, also pleads for the ban, as stated in the earlier mentioned article in Parool (“Westermarkt in greep van overlast”, 2010). He thinks that the fact that homeless move to another area should not be a reason to tolerate the situation at the Westermarkt. He points at the fact that the entrepreneurs experience nuisance, and “since public space is for everyone they should also be able to enjoy it.” According to many informants this is the reason why the ban is not imposed: mainly entrepreneurs experience trouble, if there are not a lot of residents that do complain, there will not be a ban. According to the same newspaper article the police is also in favour of a ban since this enables them to punish for public drunkenness. Nevertheless some informants working at the police adhered to the prevailing idea that the ban would not solve the issues. Overall, even though the intervention of the ban will probably be imposed in the near future, the fact that the process of implementing it is so deliberate and that people perceive it is a last resort reflects a lot of tolerance.

Intervening through design seems to be something that some residents are in favour of while others are not. As we saw before, some argue that the appearance of the square should improve in order to decrease the homeless and the nuisance they cause. This was addressed as something the municipality should take better care of. The improvements that were demanded are related to the process of cleaning after festivities. The prevailing sense was that the square should be treated gentler. Since it is an historical and beautiful place it should be cleaned immediately after events take place. Also when construction work takes place, people should be aware of the vulnerability and the value of the square. Someone working at the Westerkerk felt indignant about the fact that a construction cabin was placed right next to the statue of Anne Frank. He did not understand how people could treat a special place so rude, since this is where many tourists take pictures. The beauty of the square was also ruined by the placement of mobile toilets during events, according to the same informant. The overall idea by high users of the square is that policy makers do not have a clue about the importance of the square and the amount of visitors. Two informants stated that squares in Holland are nothing compared to Italy. In Florence a square is allowed to be beautiful while here the municipality allows it to deteriorate. Furthermore, an informant complained about the fact that the benches are only made for individual use, they are too small to sit together and the distance between the benches is quite large. That the municipality might have done this in order to prevent homeless from gathering with large groups seems to be something that some people are not aware of.
Figure 8: Toilets placed at the Westermarkt during an event

Apart from reflecting on imposed interventions, people that use the square a lot also pose some suggestions with regard to new interventions that would improve the situation. A prevailing idea during the interviews is that alcohol is the cause of most of the problems that arise. The addiction that all the people hanging at the Westermarkt share is an alcohol addiction. Interventions should focus on targeting this issue. Several people claim that alcohol is socially accepted which causes an underestimation of the problem. There has to be a special ‘users area’, just as there is for drug addicts. Someone working for the police perceives alcoholism as the largest addiction of Holland and states that at the Westermarkt every dealer is an alcoholic as well, so this has to be the target for intervention. He calls the majority ‘therapy-resistant’ however, so the problem is complicated.

It can be concluded that people overall feel quite represented by the common principles that form the basis of the authoritarian interventions. There is correspondence between their views described in paragraph 4.2 and the imposed interventions by institutions. People that use the
square modestly feel most represented by the interventions of the authorities. There are some improvements suggested with regard to the interventions but there are no major difficulties experienced. The claims of nuisance that they report are not mainly related to homeless but also to other issues at the square, such as the queue of the Anne Frank House or construction works. High users feel partially represented by the authorities. They desire, just like the institutions, a certain change and are posing various conditions that should be met. The various interventions to realize this are supported but should be improved. The chain approach needs fine-tuning with regard to cooperation, and with regard to design high users believe that keeping the square more ‘clean, intact and safe’ would decrease the presence of homeless. The authorities do not totally succeed in meeting the conditions that make some people experience safety and a good quality of life when working at the square. Some high users feel unsafe and their quality of life decreases due to nuisance caused by the homeless. The prevailing idea of some informants is that the police would like to do more to counteract trouble, but the municipality constraints them. First things have to change with regard to rules and regulations before the situation can improve.

With regard to the idea of ‘publicness’ at the Westermarkt, institutions as well as individual users seem to think alike. The interventions of authorities are not aimed at exiling all homeless. When looking at the views of people in paragraph 4.2 this is something they feel represented by. As long as things do not get out of hand and limits are not reached, they perceive the presence of homeless at the Westermarkt as an inevitable aspect of city life. Overall, people share the attitude of the authorities in that there should be mildness and tolerance combined with elements of control. However, high users of the square would prefer the elements of control to increase. According to some, their limits are reached.

If this tolerance combined with control really is the prevailing ambiance, this has to show as well in how individuals react, intervene and interact at the square themselves.

**Individual interventions**

Comparing normative patterns of Loiland (1998) and Kusenbach (2006) with regard to interactions of citizens can be used to measure against the interaction that people have with homeless and how they intervene with regard to their presence. Everyone I spoke to perceives the Westermarkt as a public space. As mentioned before, some people using the square more
frequently also see it as a parochial realm. Therefore the normative patterns that are used to measure interactions at the Westermarkt against are a combination of patterns related to public (Lofland) as well as parochial realms (Kusenbach).

- **“Cooperative Motility”** (Lofland, 1998, p. 29): All types of users of the square negotiate about who uses what space. Homeless are also included in this cooperation of people with regard to movements ensuring there are no accidents. When tourists for instance sit down at one of the benches they make sure to not bother the homeless. People crossing the square to do groceries also make sure to pass in such a way that they do not have to disturb the group. So there is cooperative motility, also in relation to the homeless.

- **“Civil Inattention”** (Lofland, 1998, p. 30) or **“Friendly recognition”** (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 289): This is also present at the Westermarkt since people are aware of the homeless but do not necessarily interact with them. They might glance at them while passing but do not comingle. This mostly holds for users of the square that are not frequently present; residents, passers-by, taxi drivers or tourists. People using the square a lot do greet the homeless. The core group that is using the square for a long time know the entrepreneurs that work at the square. Therefore some choose to greet each other when passing by.

- **“Restrained-“** (Lofland, 1998, p. 32) or **“Parochial Helpfulness”** (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 291): People who use the square modestly show restrained helpfulness in interaction with homeless. I saw twice a tourist asking for directions to one of the homeless. Some entrepreneurs reported that every now and then they ask for assistance from the homeless to carry something or when there is theft in their shop. In return, they are also helpful to the homeless since they for instance share left over’s. One of the entrepreneurs also told me that she stood up for a homeless that was being arrested since she knew he was not guilty.

- **Proactive Intervention** (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 294): In some situations people do intervene without being asked. For instance, some homeless ensure that their peers are behaving well. They do this, amongst other things, for the sake of the entrepreneurs, without being asked.

- **Civility toward Diversity** (Lofland, 1998, p. 32). or **Embracing versus Resisting Diversity** (Kusenbach, 2006, p. 296): Civility towards diversity is definitely the case at the Westermarkt. According to some, the homeless do look deviant with regard to their clothing
style but I did not observe people reacting impolite when confronted by them. People who use
the square frequently do formulate explicit stands with regard to the presence of the homeless.
According to the results, most people embrace diversity as long as it does not cross the line
with regard to nuisance and insecurity. There were hardly no informants that were in any case
against diversity, if so this was always related to problems they experienced.

The fact that the interactions between the homeless and other people using the square are in
accordance to patterns that are proposed as normative for public and parochial space, reflects
something about the ‘publicness’ of the Westermarkt. Homeless are included as general users
of the square. Behind these attitudes might be opinions or desires for change but this clearly
does not disturb the general interaction at the square. With regard to the Westermarkt serving
as a parochial realm for some, the interactions with homeless are the same as with any other
type of user of the square. They are part of the community and seem to be respected and
tolerated as long as things do not get out of hand.

Besides including homeless in the general interactional patterns there were no reports about
real ‘movements’ that adhered to concepts as the right to the city (Mayer, 2009). There does
exist a ‘homeless union’, which tries to convince people of the fact that the people hanging at
the Westermarkt should not be stereotyped. By distributing letters in the neighbourhood they
try to convince people that not all homeless are causing nuisance. In these letters they
requested the possibility to drop by to talk to residents and ask their opinion on the people
residing at the square. I phoned them several times to get in touch but this did not work out.
Since this union is part of a political party in Amsterdam, it could be argued that they are only
there to improve their image, but this is only hypothetical. Nevertheless, their existence does
reflect the fact that people do care about the homeless and are in favour of including them in
public life at the square.

Overall people do feel represented by the interventions imposed from an authoritarian level in
that they are in favour of a ‘public’ public space. Most informants also support that this
tolerance goes hand in hand with elements of control that the institutions exert. For some that
are very dependent on the square there are certainly some improvements demanded with
regard to the elements of control and corresponding interventions. They experience that limits
are reached when it comes to their tolerance. On an individual level the users of the
Westermarkt contribute to the ‘publicness’ of the square by including the homeless in their general normative patterns of behaviour.

By answering this last aspect of reactions and interventions we accounted for all of the sub questions that were posed. This brings us to a connection of all the findings and the introduction of some final remarks and recommendations.
5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter conclusions are drawn out of the discussed results and will be connected in the light of the theoretical framework, to provide an overall view on the main question of this research. Also some critical reflections on the research will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be given.

The focus of this thesis was to investigate the ‘publicness’ of a public space in the centre of Amsterdam. Ideas about the current situation concerning the tolerance of ‘deviants’ in contemporary public space diverge from statements about the elimination of disorder (Sennett, 1992) to the celebration of cosmopolitan canopies (Anderson, 2004) or more nuanced statements about a continuous battle over who belongs in public space (Mitchell, 1995). Specifically was investigated to what side of the extremes the situation regarding the ‘publicness’ of public space tends more to and what does this situation look like in detail. Since Amsterdam is said to represent the presumed battle, due to its reputation for tolerance (Lofland, 2000), the research is conducted among various types of users of a square in the centre of this city: the Westermarkt. The people at this square that are considered ‘deviant’ by some are a group of homeless. This led to the main question:

- **How do homeless people behave in public space and how much space do they have to do so?**

Homeless people at the Westermarkt are on the one hand involved in harmless behaviour such as hanging around and drinking beer but also devote an important share to criminal activities. They are offered a lot of space since the general attitude of people is a combination of assistance and tolerance combined with mild elements of control, even for the ones experiencing nuisance. Consequently, it can be concluded that the Westermarkt is a ‘public’ public space.

When looking at the characteristics and activities of the homeless it seems that they represent a wide variety of living circumstances. Many suffer from psychological problems, do not have legal paid work and all share an alcohol addiction. They employ criminal activities but also show positive behaviour. In accordance to research of Duneier (1999) and Buster and de
Wit (2011) there is an underground economy present. But as proposed by the same researcher as well as by Jacobs (2011), the homeless also look out for each other. Furthermore, they try to influence the image that others have of them, as predicted by Snow and Anderson (1987). With regard to the ratio it appears that a clear majority is involved in criminal behaviour that causes nuisance, but executes this together with activities that can be considered harmless, such as hanging around and drinking beer. As predicted, people at the Westermarkt therefore not only experience negative interactions with homeless. The fact that an important share of the spatial practices is not harmful also enables neutral or even positive encounters.

An important finding is that the objective reality of the ratio of these spatial practices is not the most important factor that determines people’s views. The representations that individuals and people working for institutions have of the concept of public space and the activities of the homeless at the Westermarkt, are highly influenced by their intensity of use of the square. Since high users, such as entrepreneurs and people working for institutions, are present at the square more frequently, the tension of tolerance towards homeless is mostly felt by this group. With regard to their ideas about public space and the purpose of the square, they adhered to a combination of two extremes. On the one hand the square should be ‘clean, intact and safe’ and communicate a beautiful image for especially the tourists. At the same time, high users also tolerated the square to be used for festivities, as long as the image of it will not be harmed by maltreatment. Low users of the square, such as residents, passers-by and tourists, perceived the purpose of the Westermarkt to be fine as it is, they do not demand major changes.

Looking specifically at views that people adhered to with regard to the presence of homeless shows that all types of users of the square were in favour of tolerance to a certain extent. The Westermarkt is certainly not a dead public space (Mitchell, 1995) and can be considered a cosmopolitan canopy since it hosts a diversity of users who interact together and tolerate each other’s presence (Anderson, 2004). People know how to approach the homeless or tourists from all over the world. An obsession with privatism and fear (Sennett, 1992) and the NIMBY syndrome (Dear, 1992) do not apply. Although the situation at the Westermarkt clearly tends more to the direction of tolerance and cosmopolitanism, there is a combination with mild elements of control. In some cases the broken windows theory applies since some frequent users relate the homeless to chaos and disorder (Duneier, 1999; Mitchell; Sennett, 1992). Furthermore, these high users are involved in a ‘publicness process’. In return for their
tolerance they demand certain conditions to be met: less homeless, fewer nuisances and a better appearance of the square. However, this process is flexible; even the entrepreneurs that complain the most do not desire to exile all homeless, even though their demands are not met.

The interventions at the square also show the combination of tolerance and control. The interventions of authorities correspond to theories on cleaning and controlling (Duneier, 1999) but come across quite mild. There is no attempt to create a homogenised public through for instance design (Lofland, 1998; Sennett, 1992) and homeless are offered all possible assistance. This mild control also shows from the fact that, given many years of complaints, the alcohol ban is only up until now in consideration. Low users feel represented by how the situation is tackled while high users demand some improvements since they experience extreme nuisance. When it comes to interventions of individuals the combination of tolerance and control also shows. As predicted by Lindeman, Crok and Slot (2004) users of the Westermarkt, when observed according to a combination of normative patterns (Lofland, 1998; Kusenbach 2006), contribute to the ‘publicness’ by including homeless in their interactional patterns.

There are some remarks to the described conclusions however. First of all, there is a lack of information from the homeless themselves. Their perspectives on the situation might have enriched the data since it remains questionable whether they experience the tolerance that is attributed to the Westermarkt. This is essential since this is in the end what social issues as spatial justice are trying to denounce: feelings of acceptance in space for everyone. However, the warnings of various professionals and a personal assessment of the situation did not allow interviewing the homeless. For future research related to ‘publicness’ of urban public space it is recommendable to create the circumstances that will enable this.

A second implication is related to the construct validity, which is vulnerable in this research. ‘Publicness’ is a very broad and multi interpretable concept. In this research it was operationalized by the extent of space that was given by people and institutions to the homeless. The tolerance that people’s views and reactions to the presence of homeless revealed was leading for drawing conclusions on ‘publicness’. But the results can also be interpreted differently. They show that high users complain a lot and an alcohol ban will be the result of this. Nevertheless, in this research these developments are not interpreted as harming the evidence for tolerance and the presence of a battle for ‘publicness’. The reason
for this interpretation is that people seemed to have endured a lot and tried for years to improve the situation with mild elements of control before supporting the ban as a last resort. However, on the basis of these results, one could also say that the battle for a ‘public’ public space is lost at the Westermarkt. The question here is whether endurance of nuisance for years can be interpreted as evidence of ‘publicness’. One could also dispute this by perceiving the fact that people’s limits are reached as evidence that they prefer order over ‘publicness’. In this research the first interpretation was chosen since the overall ambiance at the square and during the interviews pointed more in that direction, but it is important to realize the vulnerability of this. The increasing interest in belongingness in public space (“[The struggle to belong],” 2011) and the multi interpretability of ‘publicness’ demands detailed descriptions of the definitions that govern. It might be interesting to see whether the people that are part of the various battles over space, are aiming at the same ‘publicness’. Possibly there are trends in what one demands for defining a space as ‘public’. Knowledge about this is important since demands influence policies and eventually the situation at hand for homeless as well as for other users of public space.

Another remark relates to the fact that the intensity of use of people at the Westermarkt appeared to influence their experiences of homeless. This means that considering a space to be public and tolerant is correlated to the composition of the type of users. The Westermarkt hosts few residents and many entrepreneurs when compared to other squares. This might harm the generalizability of the results since other squares generally host more low users. Public spaces cannot be compared without taking this into account. However, the fact that the Westermarkt hosts more high users than a general square in Amsterdam also supports the conclusions that it represents ‘publicness’. Since high users experience more tension with regard to tolerance it can be considered even more special that there is tolerance at the Westermarkt. A recommendation with regard to this is also related to the before mentioned knowledge on the concept of ‘publicness’. When investigating what the ‘publicness’ entails that people aim for at a certain place, it is essential to take into account the dimension of ‘frequency of use’. This can for instance be important when the municipality is considering policies and interventions for a certain public space. If they realize that what they implement at one square does not necessarily hold for another due to the composition of users, this might increase the quality of life. Policymakers might have thought that the Westermarkt is an appropriate square for permitting homeless since there are not a lot of residents. Nevertheless, when taking ‘frequency of use’ into account, it shows that owning a shop somewhere results
in more tension with regard to tolerance than residing somewhere. Maybe policy can focus on supporting ideal matches between the social composition of a space and the permission of the presence of homeless.

A last recommendation entails research into the ‘publicness process’ in which high users appeared to be involved. It might be interesting for institutions that are working with public space to take this perspective of negotiation into account. If people experience the use of public space as an exchange of interests it is important for professionals to relate to this. When they advise and manage different interests it might for instance work to promise high users some things related to the appearance of the square, such as flower boxes. In return high users will be asked to tolerate some nuisance caused by the homeless.

All these conclusions and the corresponding remarks and recommendations relate to the broader issue concerning “the just city” (Fainstein, 2010). The rise of world cities and the corresponding density and globalisation raises the need for reflection on public spaces and on what we think about ‘who belongs’ (“[The struggle to belong].” 2011). Clearly, the ‘publicness’ of contemporary public spaces lies somewhere in between the extremes of obsessive order (Duneier, 1999; Mitchell, 1995; Sennett, 1992) and cosmopolitan canopies (Anderson, 2004). This is represented as a battle or struggle (Law, 2002), which is assumed to be alive in cities such as Amsterdam (Lofland, 2000, p. 156). Going over the conclusions of this research shows that this battle is indeed more than alive here. The Westermarkt does honour to the reputation of the city’s presumed cosmopolitanism, diversity and tolerance and combines it with mild but clear elements of control. It is a special square where some come to pray, others to party and thirds leave their countries from all over the world to commemorate the victims of intolerance of World War II. Homeless are also tolerated in this diverse social world. While writing this conclusion a phone call informed me that after deliberate consideration the alcohol ban is definite; a more current issue is hard to find. This will force the beer loving homeless to continue their way. Nevertheless, the Westermarkt represents a ‘public’ public space where years of tolerance have been provided, for some reaching limits. The issue of diversity and tolerance in public space touches on just that what so many admire most about city life. Therefore, the situation at the Westermarkt is exemplary and valuable. Some people mentioned the word ‘business card’ in relation to the square which reflected their desire for it to be a beautiful representation of Amsterdam: ‘clean, intact and safe’. The Westermarkt certainly is ‘a business card’ for the rest of the city and a public space that
Amsterdammers can be proud of. But as this research shows, it mostly is since it represents a unique battle, supported by the tolerant attitude of many people using the square, for a ‘public’ public space.


