

# Research Plan

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## Problem statement

Over the past decades, tourism has increased significantly world widely. With 51% of all international tourists arriving in 2019<sup>1</sup> overtourism has especially become a problem in Europe. While tourists are flocking European cities and city marketing is capitalizing and expanding urban tourism, the quality of life in the popular tourist areas of these cities is declining.<sup>2</sup> One such tourist area is Amsterdam's city centre. Here the changes in the experience of place are negatively affecting the residents' quality of life, by causing feelings of alienation.<sup>3</sup>

Given that each place has its own unique character, atmosphere, appearance, feel, sounds or smells, the everyday experiences that residents have with their environment and their ability to identify with it, can create a sense of connection and belonging to this place.<sup>4</sup> However, when massive and overwhelming changes occur in these urban environments (such as the presence of tourists), the everyday experience of these places also changes, and the residents can no longer identify with them. As a consequence, the opposite effect occurs and for the residents of Amsterdam's city centre the experience of place suddenly evokes feelings of estrangement from their own surroundings.

In the city centre of Amsterdam, there are primarily three matters related to tourism that cause the changes in the experience of place: overcrowdedness, nuisance (noise pollution, dirt and deterioration of the place's physical appearance) and the change of the commercial landscape by tourist shops. In addition, it is also tourists' lack of responsibility and connection to a place, which causes some tourists to produce nuisance to residents, subsequently causing feelings of alienation in the process.

However, as it is everyone's right to visit other places in the world, tourism in Amsterdam is most likely going to stay. Therefore, residents must create new connections to their surroundings in order to preserve the liveability and residential function in the city centre. Since architecture has the ability to positively influence peoples' sensory experience of space, architectural interventions mitigating feelings of alienation can be added in the city centre of Amsterdam, so that new meaningful connections with these places can arise. In order to achieve this, these interventions therefore must evoke a sense of identification, belonging or connection, as well as provide the opportunity for meaningful interactions between tourists and residents.

This had lead me to establish two main research questions:

What *architectural interventions* can evoke a new connection with the places overwhelmed by the tourists, for the residents of these places?

How can the design or staging of *architectural atmospheres* provide the possibility for meaningful interaction between tourist and residents?

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<sup>1</sup> World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2019). International Tourism Highlights 2019 Edition. Madrid, Spain: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

<sup>2</sup> Henley, J. (2020, January 25). Overtourism in Europe's historic cities sparks backlash. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/25/overtourism-in-europe-historic-cities-sparks-backlash>

<sup>3</sup> Couzy, M. (2017, May 31). Centrubewoner raakt vervreemd van eigen buurt. *Het Parool*. Retrieved from <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/centrubewoner-raakt-vervreemd-van-eigen-buurt~bcb7f85a/>

<sup>4</sup> Pinkster, F., M. & Boterman, W., R. (2017). When the spell is broken: gentrification, urban tourism and privileged discontent in the Amsterdam canal district. *Cultural Geographies*, 24(3), 457-472.

## Theoretical framework

With the research being for a large part focused on the *experience of place* in relation to *tourism*, notions of *the structures of space in a tourist city*, *perception* and *narrative* must be investigated first, before the research method and approach can be set up. This investigation will take form in a pre-liminary literature study.

First, the study on *the structures of space within a tourist city* will help me gain a better understanding of how certain places in Amsterdam's city centre have changed due to tourism, while also helping me define and select the locations in Amsterdam's city centre to investigate during the main research. For this study, two sociological theories about arrangements of social space and tourism will be related and applied to the urban context of Amsterdam. Erving Goffman's *front and back regions* <sup>5</sup> will explain the social structure of a place, while Dean MacCannell's theory on *staged authenticity* <sup>6</sup> will elaborate further on these notions, while explaining what attracts tourists to these places and examining the changes of these places in relation to tourism.

Next, the study on *perception* will provide me with an understanding of how people experience space in different ways. This understanding will then help me to establish the different characteristics and perspectives of the resident and tourist characters, through which perspectives I will explore the locations in Amsterdam's city centre. As the theory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty <sup>7</sup> will explain how people perceive space and sensory objects through their *embodied experience*, sociologists John Urry and Jonas Larsen <sup>8</sup> will discuss how people perceive the world through the *filters* of their ideas, desires and expectations, which are *framed* by their social background.

Lastly, the study on *narratives* will help me with the set-up of my research method. After first forming an argument on how architecture and literature are interconnected, which will be based on the readings of David Spurr, <sup>9</sup> Klaske Havik's theory on *urban literacy* <sup>10</sup> will provide me the knowledge on how literature can be used as a research tool in architectural research. Different literary means such as *narratives* will be discussed. After that, Elaine Scarry's theory on the *instructions of a writer*<sup>11</sup> will explain how our imagination can construct the written sensory world as if it was real and will help me with the writing of the narratives.

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<sup>5</sup> Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre.

<sup>6</sup> MacCannell, D. (1973). Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(4), 589-603.

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004). *The World of Perception*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.

<sup>8</sup> Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Spurr, D. (2012). *Architecture & Modern Literature*. United States of America: The University of Michigan Press.

<sup>10</sup> Havik, K. M. (2014). *Urban Literacy – Reading and Writing Architecture*. Rotterdam: nai010 publishers.

<sup>11</sup> Scarry, E. (2001). *Dreaming by the Book*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

## Research method

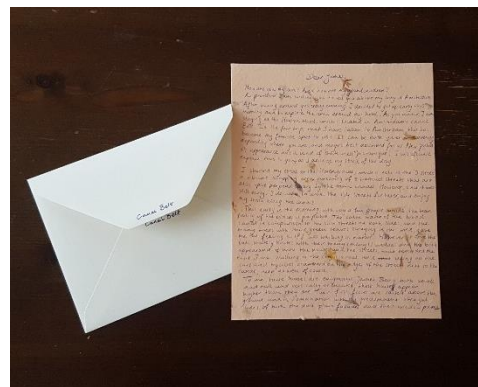
To investigate the experience of place in the city centre of Amsterdam, I am researching the *embodied experiences* of these places where tourism has evoked feelings of alienation among its residents. I am doing that in two ways:

- by *immersing* myself in place and *observing* myself, other residents' and tourists' actions;
- By *creating narratives* from both the resident's and the tourist's perspective, in order to design inclusive spaces where alienation is bridged.

The first part of this research is a *fieldwork study*, in which I practise an *emic approach*. From the perspective of a narrative's resident or tourist character, I will immerse myself in place by visiting the locations and investigating media sources concerning informative content about the experience of these locations (e.g. old photographs, newspaper articles, short documentaries, video guides, Instagram posts of locations, etc.). When immersed in place, I will start observing from either my own perspective or from the pre-established perspectives of the narratives' characters which are based on *the preliminary literature study*. Having chosen a character, I will observe myself by monitoring the sensations I feel when experiencing, as well as the thoughts and associations that will emerge in my mind. In addition, I will observe other residents' and tourists' actions in order to gain an understanding of how they use these places and what in these places is of importance to them. These observations will be recorded on site with field notes.

After the fieldwork study, the experiences recorded in the field notes will be used to *create narratives* from both the resident's and the tourist's perspective. The documentation of the character's experience will be done in different ways. For each character's narrative different literary means will be used, which selection will be based on the narrative itself. Such literary means can be experiments with the use of language (e.g. a more formal writing style or the use of emoticons) or with the structure of a text or content<sup>12</sup> (e.g. structuring the narrative on the basis of architecture or the content of a song). These narratives will then each be documented in a different literary form so that the characters of the narratives can be distinguished by the reader. Examples of such literary forms can be letters, diaries, e-mails, WhatsApp texts, Instagram posts, etc.

A particular literary precedent that inspired me on how to look and write about the experiences gained in the city was Walter Benjamin's *Arcade Project* (1982). With the character of *the flaneur* strolling around the city of Paris and observing urban life, Benjamin allowed himself to describe the city by its sensory experiences of urban space as well as by the behavioural actions happening here<sup>13</sup>. One of the tourist characters that I created for the narratives, the American lady, is inspired on this literary type and describes her strolls in the city of Amsterdam in a similar way. Her narratives are documented in the form of a letter (see example).



Letter American Lady (Oosterwoud, 2020)

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<sup>12</sup> Havik, K. M. (2014). *Urban Literacy – Reading and Writing Architecture*. Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 95.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

## Reflection

Starting with how tourism is changing the experience of place in Amsterdam's city centre by causing feelings of alienation, I defined two research questions on *architectural interventions* and *architectural atmospheres* that could evoke new meaningful connections for the residents of these places by mitigating feelings of alienation. The reason for focusing these questions on architectural interventions and architectural atmospheres was based on architecture's ability to positively influence peoples' sensory experience of space. However, in order to establish my method on this, first a pre-liminary literature study on the *experience of place* in relation to *tourism* had to be conducted. After investigating the notions of *the structures of space in a tourist city*, *perception* and *narrative*, I then was able to select the locations, establish the different characteristics and perspectives of the narrative's characters and to define the narrative's production. Here I also established an argument on why narratives are the right choice for me to use as a part of the research method, as literature has the ability to describe the experience of place in a multi-sensory way while also addressing the use of public space at the same time.

To study then the *embodied experiences* of the places overwhelmed by tourists, a research method of conducting a fieldwork study and creating narratives was defined, in order to design inclusive spaces where alienation is bridged. Especially the emic approach of immersing myself in place by visiting both the locations in real life as well as investigating media sources concerning informative content about the experience of these locations, happened to be a very useful method during the restrictions of lockdown. With Amsterdam being a popular tourist destination and today's strong influence of social media to capture everything that happens in our lives, a lot of content on the experience of Amsterdam's city centre being overwhelmed by tourists could be found. In addition, the visitations to the locations which are normally overrun by tourists, now for the first time provided a clearer view on what the local architectural atmosphere and identity of these places are. This in combination with narratives' ability to describe both the (sensory) experiences of a place and the its use, will provide me with ideas on users, program, experience of space and architectural atmospheres, which will help me answer the research questions and ultimately achieve my research goal on evoking new meaningful connections for the residents of Amsterdam's city centre by mitigating feelings of alienation.

Other methods such as interviews with both residents and tourists would have been harder to conduct given the lockdown restrictions and the limitations on approaching the residents of these places that I do not know personally.

## Self-assessment

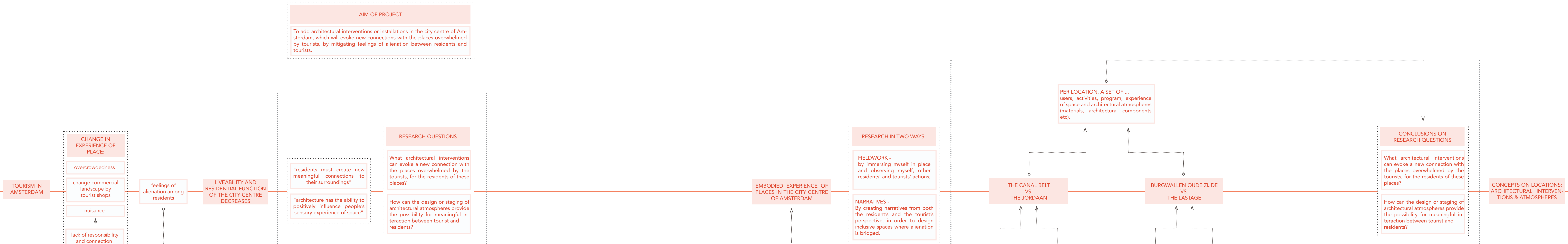
Following the course as an Explore Lab student, the beginning of the lectures series were relevant and useful to me, as it helped me to focus on translating my large fascination into a smaller topic fit for a project. Klaske Havik's lecture on *Methods of Analysis* explained and described the different epistemes, methodologies and tools in such a clear manner, that when trying to define my research, I often looked back to the episteme of phenomenology to see which topics, key-voices and research tools I could use. In addition, Aleksandar Stanicic's How-To lecture was both informative and interesting, as it precisely described the structure of research, while also giving for each aspect an example. Especially his message of just trying to base your research on a topic that you are truly interested in, helped me with making discissions about my own research topic.

Following then the Masterclass on *Disciplinary Mergers and Multi-disciplinary Encounters* by Heidi Sohn, Klaske Havik and Stavros Kousoulas, this masterclass helped me with applying both the artistic disciplines (literature) and the social disciplines (sociology and ethnography) to my research of the experience of space in a tourist city like Amsterdam, by providing me a way of structuring how they are related to the research as well as to each other.

However, writing the research plan itself was not very helpful in setting up my research. As an Explore Lab student, I would have preferred either to use the research plan extensively as a format to define and design my research during the first 5 à 10 weeks of the semester, or to use the research plan as a reflection on the research method after the P2, when all the research has been finished. Now two weeks before the P2, writing about the set-up of our research comes to late for it to be useful for its purpose, while the reflection on the research method is too early, as it is possible that not all research has been finished yet.

Furthermore, I also think that what is expected from the research plan should be defined more clearly (for example providing a format) and firmly. Changing in the middle of the course the amount of words from 5000 to 1500 words as well as other expectations was very confusing. I do believe the research plan course can be extremely helpful with setting up the research, however certain adjustments based on the expectations, timing and maybe even the studio's should be made.

DESIGN



RESEARCH

