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Livable streets? Green gentrification and the displacement of longtime residents in Ghent, Belgium

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ABSTRACT

While urban greening initiatives are becoming increasingly prevalent, some critical scholars have started to question the neutrality of this movement. Specifically, scholars have demonstrated that urban greening can inflate housing costs and as such give rise to processes of gentrification and displacement. This article examines processes of green gentrification in a particular neighborhood of Ghent (Belgium) that has been profoundly greened during the last two decades. Drawing on in-depth interviews with both gentrifying and longtime residents, we find that longtime residents are experiencing significant displacement pressures as a result of urban greening. However, rather than predominantly caused by soaring costs, displacement pressures seem to follow mainly from the political, social, and cultural changes encompassing greening initiatives. Consequently, we draw a more complex picture of green gentrification, one that has important implications for the way this process should be addressed.

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Introduction

In recent decades both city planners and citizens have increasingly been promoting greening strategies as a way to effectively respond to issues of urban livability, public health, and climate change. Greening initiatives include, inter alia, the promotion of community gardens, parks, forests, recycling programs, street closures, street trees, sustainable housing, sustainable transportation, and urban farming. In their recently published book, Gould and Lewis (2017), however, argue that, despite the fact that these greening initiatives have the potential to address the issues mentioned above, they also entail a risk of causing or enhancing gentrification. This process, which has been described as *green, ecological or environmental gentrification*, has been observed by scholars in cities such as Atlanta (Immergluck & Balan, 2018), Chicago (McKendry & Janos, 2015), Detroit (Montgomery, 2016; Safransky, 2014), New York (Checker, 2011), Portland (Goodling, Green, & McClintock, 2015; Lubitow & Miller, 2013), San Francisco (Marche, 2015), Seattle (Dooling, 2009), Toronto (Dale & Newman, 2009), and Vancouver (Dale & Newman, 2009; Quastel, 2009). In bringing the concept of gentrification into the discussion on urban

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sustainability, critics claim that greening initiatives can be elitist in the sense that they can lead to greater inequality by displacing longtime residents (Gould & Lewis, 2017). Wolch, Byrne, and Newell (2014, p. 234), for example, state that:

[U]rban green space strategies may be paradoxical: while the creation of new green space to address environmental justice problems can make neighborhoods healthier and more esthetically attractive, it also can increase housing costs and property values. Ultimately, this can lead to gentrification and a displacement of the very residents the green space strategies were designed to benefit.

This paper contributes to the debates on green gentrification by using a case study approach to examine how processes of displacement take shape through or are engendered by the reworking and controlling of space via urban greening initiatives. More specifically, we focus on a greening initiative called living streets (*leefstraten*) which aims to improve the appearance and livability of urban environments through the introduction of green elements and was initiated in a specific neighborhood of Ghent (Belgium). In doing so, we are first and foremost interested in how urban greening initiatives that are built around ideological notions of “urban livability” (can) serve as a vehicle for place-making and/or displacement and in the complex interplay between public and private actors behind this. We do not aim to assess what is green or environmental about the Living Streets initiative, nor to determine whether this initiative has achieved its objective. By adopting a multidimensional notion of displacement, we aim to reach a more complex understanding of how processes of green gentrification and displacement (can) occur and play out in urban neighborhoods. In what follows, we first review the literature on green gentrification and discuss the diverse nature of displacement. Drawing on Marcuse (1985) and Davidson (2009), we argue that the concept of displacement cannot be equated with processes of physical dislocation and that analyses based on such equations run the risk of capturing the process of green gentrification in an incomplete manner. Next, we provide an overview of the specific research context before moving on to the methods and sample on which the analysis is based. In doing so, we pay special attention to the history of gentrification in the neighborhood and to the entanglement of the process with top-down greening initiatives. Finally, we present the main results of this study and discuss the main implications.

Green gentrification

Throughout the Western world, urban greening initiatives are becoming increasingly prevalent as city planners and citizens work toward a sustainable future. At first glance, environmentalism as a focus of attention seems to serve the public good in a variety of ways. For instance, urban greening can diminish the amount of greenhouse gasses (Gould & Lewis, 2017). Moreover, greening initiatives have the potential to promote public health (Wolch et al., 2014). But the benefits of environmentalism could well extend to other spheres. In fact, city leaders are increasingly conceiving urban greening as a vehicle for remaking deindustrialized spaces into places set for urban growth, investment, and the return of the middle classes (While, Jonas, & Gibbs, 2004).

In recent years, however, scholars from a variety of disciplines have scrutinized this “going green” movement (Gould & Lewis, 2017, p. 1) by pointing to issues of inequity. Whereas

promoters of greening initiatives have often treated discussions of urban greening as apolitical – this by drawing on universal values or scientific knowledge with respect to livability, sustainability, climate change, public health and safety (Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2009) – scholars are increasingly challenging such discourse. On the one hand, a number of scholars assert that the framing of greening initiatives as unquestionably good and hence as “too important to be dragged through the political mud” (Lubitow & Miller, 2013, p. 122) has “placed substantial constraints on the scope of legitimate contention and deliberation” (Davidson & Iveson, 2015, p. 546). In fact, one of the pivots of an apolitical or post-political consensus, it seems, is that it tends to marginalize, silence and/or render as illegitimate the voices of people who situate themselves outside this consensus (Swyngedouw, 2009). On the other hand, some scholars are (re)politicizing such discussions by challenging the neutrality of greening initiatives. In particular, there is a concern that greening initiatives could, intentionally or not, kick-start or exacerbate gentrification, (Faber & Kimelberg, 2014, p. 78). This concern has received empirical support over the course of the last few years. It has, for instance, been found that within environmental projects issues related to the social imperative are often overlooked, thereby ignoring well-founded concerns over affordable housing and property taxes (Bryson, 2012) which ultimately may lead to the displacement of both traditional businesses and the low-income communities they serve (Dale & Newman, 2009).

The irony of this is that low-income and minoritized communities, who have traditionally been living in neighborhoods with proportionally more toxic locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) and fewer green amenities (Anguelovski, 2016; Faber & Kimelberg, 2014; Wolch et al., 2014), are potentially facing new forms of injustice as a result of the very thing that was supposed to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. In fact, the current research on green gentrification suggests that the promotion of environmental goods and the cleanup of environmental bads could burden longtime residents with financial distress and eventually lead to displacement – this certainly in localities characterized by a high proportion of tenants. In this context, Anguelovski (2016) critically notes that greening initiatives could paradoxically become new LULUs for socially vulnerable residents. This is what Battaglia, Buckley, Galvin, and Grove (2014) observed when they note how a tree-planting program carried out in East Baltimore encountered opposition, *inter alia*, because some residents worried it could induce gentrification and displacement. Agyeman (2013) has therefore argued that environmental sustainability should not be considered in isolation from issues of social sustainability. In order to reach an environment that is sustainable for everyone, or what Agyeman has termed “just sustainabilities,” the author stresses the importance of a focus on the social needs and welfare of all citizens. In response to issues of gentrification and displacement, some residents, business owners, and academics are endorsing a “just green enough” strategy (Curran & Hamilton, 2012; Wolch et al., 2014), a balancing act that aims at environmental remediation without gentrification and displacement.

When looking at the abovementioned studies, two critical observations can be made. First, there are few accounts that address the complex interplay between public and private actors in processes of green gentrification, particularly the interaction between the “green” place-making practices of gentrifying residents and municipal planning strategies directed at green gentrification (for an analysis of the latter, see Anguelovski, 2016). By doing so, we build on (a limited body) of recent work on green gentrification

that precisely keeps the focus on the multiple actors involved in it and how their practices and strategies intersect. Safransky (2014) and Montgomery (2016), for example, both on the basis of empirical research in Detroit, observe “public-private partnerships” in which private developers and the city council partner up for greening initiatives that increase land values. McClintock (2018) shows how local politicians in Portland mobilize citizen-based greening initiatives to engage in “ecological” city marketing. In the empirical analysis of this paper, we will zoom in on the role of civil society organizations – i.e. organized citizens – in public-private interactions in greening initiatives. This is particularly interesting as it is widely acknowledged that systems of governing within the Western world are undergoing vast change due to a restructuring of market-state relations necessitated by a regime shift within capitalism (Jessop, 2002). It has been argued that in this context a shift occurs from government to “partnership-based forms of governance” (Jessop, 2002, p. 455) or a “governance-beyond-the-state” characterized by “a greater involvement of individuals or actors from both the economy and civil society” (Swyngedouw, 2005, p. 1992). Although such horizontally organized institutional arrangements have often been welcomed as empowering and democracy enhancing, some scholars have fiercely criticized these new regimes of governance operating through networks and partnerships by pointing to potential democratic deficits (Swyngedouw, 2005); hence, making questions about the role of civil society organizations in greening initiatives all the more prominent.

Second, the existing research on green gentrification has mainly claimed that greening strategies can be problematic in low-income neighborhoods as these can lead to “displacement.” Although we agree with this statement, the reality is that most of these studies have articulated the concept of displacement predominantly in physical terms (i.e., as a loss of physical place). In this view, the process of green gentrification always unfolds in the same manner. First, green amenities are initiated, making a targeted neighborhood more popular. Second, this popularity results in soaring housing costs. Finally, as a result of these costs, vulnerable residents are physically dislocated and hence “displaced”. We believe that this view of displacement is problematic because it expresses the concept of place in an abstract sense (i.e., as mere position), hence obscuring the very (socio-political) place tensions that are at work in processes of green gentrification. Indeed, when displacement is interpreted merely in a physical way there is no issue with greening initiatives as long as these do not lead longtime residents into financial distress.¹ A failure to engage with the diverse nature of displacement thus could lead to an incomplete understanding of how neighborhood transitions occur as a consequence of greening initiatives. One notable exception to this is a recent paper by McClintock (2018), which pushes the analysis of green gentrification well beyond this limited understanding of displacement in merely physical terms. He shows how the racial viscosity of bike lanes and community gardens renders urban spaces as white and in so doing also undermines the sense of place of longtime African-American residents.

This paper aims to work with a broader understanding of displacement and builds on the literature on green gentrification by examining how the greening practices and strategies of a variety of actors, notably the municipal authorities, individual citizens, and civil society organizations, interact and get entangled with issues as gentrification and displacement. In so doing, we engage thoroughly with the concept of displacement and focus attention on the lived experiences of various groups of residents.

The diversity of displacement

There are diverse understandings of what the concept “place” actually means (see e.g., Amin, 2004; Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 2004). Most would agree that places are not only located (i.e., they have objective coordinates) and shaped (i.e., they take on a material form), but are also lived and allow people to consume and produce meaning (Agnew, 1987 as cited in Cresswell, 2004). It is here that the concept “sense of place” emerges, referring both to the (distinctive) characteristics of a location and to the attachment of people to such a location. Following from this, the concept of displacement should be distinguished from the process of physical dislocation. This idea is apparent in the work of Marcuse (1985), who differentiates direct from indirect displacement. Whereas direct displacement refers to processes of being forced to move from, or not being permitted to move into, a dwelling as a result of gentrification, indirect displacement refers to a process whereby the options within which a certain space can be consumed and produced change significantly:

[D]isplacement affects more than those actually displaced at any given moment. When a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement is already severe. (...) Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced. (Marcuse, 1985, p. 207).

As such, Marcuse seems to break with the (often allegedly necessary) relationship between displacement and rising housing costs and thus essentially with a view that sees displacement exclusively as a process of physical dislocation. Building on this broadened conception from Marcuse, Davidson (2009, p. 223) critically notes that, since place is linked to the ability to produce and consume meaning, displacement cannot simply be equated with a loss of physical place:

The problem with this understanding of displacement is that it reduces a socio-spatial *phenomena* [sic] to a purely spatial event. This leaves us with a number of problematic implicit assumptions, including the notion that spatial relocation equals (a sense of) displacement and that the absence of spatial relocation equates to the non-occurrence of displacement. Put simply, displacement understood purely as spatial dislocation tells us very little why it matters.

Taking into account that places cannot be seen as stable and pre-given entities but rather should be conceived as being constructed through place-making activities, Davidson suggests that a conceptualization of displacement should also include the wider political, social, and cultural changes going on in a certain place. In a recent article, Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard, and Lees (2019, p. 3) have built on this train of thought by arguing that changes such as these can sever “the links between residents and the communities to which they belong”, something that according to the authors can lead to displacement via a process of un-homing. Some scholars have empirically supported this thinking by demonstrating vulnerable longtime residents can experience feelings of displacement prior to the actual process of physical dislocation due to the new faces, the changing social histories, and the physical remodeling of the streetscape and its facilities that follow from gentrification (Atkinson, 2015; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Valli, 2015). In our empirical analysis we will

build on this expanded notion of displacement by examining how greening initiatives can generate a process of gentrification and displacement and how a variety of public and private actors interact to produce feelings of displacement.

Research context

Brugse poort: from gray to green

Brugse Poort is one of the twenty-five city districts of Ghent (Belgium), situated northwest of the city centre. It developed in the early nineteenth century as some large textile mills and a steel-producing company set up shop in the district. As these factories attracted a mass of people willing to work, a process of unplanned and speculative urbanization ensued, leading to a chaotic urban tissue, a lack of green space, poor housing, and a high population density, some of which remain to this day (Goossens & Van Gorp, 2016).

Since the 1960s, Brugse Poort has witnessed a series of factory closures through deindustrialization, leading to a process of neighborhood decline. Moreover, many of the district's middle-class residents started to leave for the suburbs, thereby reflecting a wider process of urban flight. From the 1970s onwards, Brugse Poort also began to diversify ethnically as the remaining industry started to recruit labor migrants, mainly from Turkey and North Africa. Migration into Brugse Poort continued at a steady pace during the following decades. Since the expansion of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, migration from Central and Eastern Europe has also soared. As a result, in the 2013, half of the people living in Brugse Poort were of foreign origin (9,031 out of 18,246 residents). Given problems of drug abuse, poverty, unemployment, illegal dumping, and burglary, Brugse Poort gained a bad reputation.

Since the 1990s, however, Brugse Poort has been subject to gentrification as many white middle-class families began buying and rehabilitating the terraced houses originally populated by the industrial proletariat. Whereas gentrification was spontaneous at first, from 1998 it became government-induced through the planning and implementation of an urban renewal project, named Oxygen for Brugse Poort (*Zuurstof voor de Brugse Poort*). Next to improving the quality of life for longtime residents, Oxygen for Brugse Poort explicitly aimed at attracting middle-class families through the regeneration of the district via a broad environmental strategy. Alongside the development of a brownfield site of nearly 15 acres into a community park, Oxygen for Brugse Poort provided for the (re)development of six green spaces and the creation of a safe pathway for cyclists and pedestrians running through the district. Although influenced by neo-liberal discourses, it is important to note that urban renewal strategies in Brugse Poort were also coupled to a social agenda (Oosterlynck & Debruyne, 2013). This agenda, which took shape through a dialogue with local civil society, included, among other things, investments in a Community Health Centre, a social-artistic organization, and a social economy firm. Yet, urban renewal in Brugse Poort was not unanimously celebrated. The project met with resistance as some longtime residents felt that greening was not an end in itself but only a means for capital accumulation and gentrification (see for instance Figure 1, bottom right). Moreover, some highlighted the fact that Oxygen for Brugse Poort entailed evictions as the plan foresaw the demolition of 89 terraced houses – something that was proclaimed as necessary to (i) make room for the development of green spaces and (ii) clean up part of the poor housing stock in the neighborhood (Stad



Figure 1. Top left, view of the densely populated district; Top right, demolition of 89 terraced houses; Bottom left, children protesting against this demolition, slogan reads “we’re staying”; Bottom right, graffiti quote on the urban renewal project saying “It’s not for greening, but for money!!”. All pictures by Fixatief vzw except bottom left by the task group Stop the Demolition.

Gent, 2003). The opposition to the urban renewal project indicates how some (longtime) residents recognized green spaces as new LULUs (cf., Anguelovski, 2016), as greening was perceived as a means to fuel gentrification and hence initiate the displacement of vulnerable residents. Other fractions, however, were noticeably more positive toward the greening of the neighborhood. In fact, since 2015 some residents have been actively promoting additional greening through the creation of so-called living streets.

Living streets: an urban greening initiative

Living streets are an urban greening initiative that is driven by a hybrid configuration of public and private not-for-profit actors that include a civil society organization established (amongst others) by former city administrators, the municipal council, and loosely organized groups of residents. Both the nonprofit organization and the municipal council provide the framework within which neighboring residents can jointly take the initiative to make their street (partially) car-free for a period of two months. Artificial grass mats are rolled out and the reclaimed street is transformed into a décor in which one often finds picnic tables, raised garden beds, French boules courts, flowerbeds, and playhouses. Through a conversion of the vacated space, advocates aim to create a temporary place for greenery and social living. Throughout this period, advocating residents also experiment with sustainable transportation such as electric or cargo bikes for commuting and shopping. The ultimate goal is to gain insights into transportation and street design and how these can be reimagined so as to make the transition to a climate-neutral city.

In order to create a living street, advocating residents have to gain local government approval. For this to happen, they need to inform and consult other street residents through open information sessions and home visits. Through these encounters, the wishes and needs of all street residents need to be mapped out. Moreover, if a problem arises, solutions need to be found. Although advocating residents take the lead, Lab van Troje (Lab of Troy) coordinates the Living Streets initiative. This nonprofit organization, which initially came up with the idea, facilitates the communication between advocating residents and city officials. Furthermore, the organization supports advocates by providing both building materials to create a living street and flyers to inform the neighborhood. Lab van Troje was established by several attendees of a series of meetings convened by the city's environmental office and mobility department to discuss how to achieve a climate-neutral Ghent in 2050. Its aim is to initiate and coordinate experiments to stimulate the transition to a climate-neutral city.

Through an annual grant of 140,000 euros, the city council actively promotes the Living Street initiative. For the responsible councilman, living streets “are a great example of how people can *reconquer* [emphasis added] their city and street” (Prijs van 50.000 euro voor leefstraten, 2015) so that these can become “more pleasant and green” (Lab van Troje, 2014). What started off in 2013 as a small-scale initiative with two living streets has become an increasingly popular phenomenon. In the last round, 18 streets participated, of which no fewer than five rolled out in Brugse Poort (see Figure 2). As the initiative is lauded for its positive impact on issues of urban mobility and livability, it has been picked up by several European cities, such as Brussels, Ivanic Grad, La Rochelle, Milton Keynes, Rotterdam, Turin, and Zadar. Yet, living streets are not without controversy. Throughout the previous edition, various acts of vandalism were reported that often seemed to centre around the struggle for space or at least were a (criminal means of) objection to the project. In Brugse Poort, for instance, some panels providing information about the Living Street project were

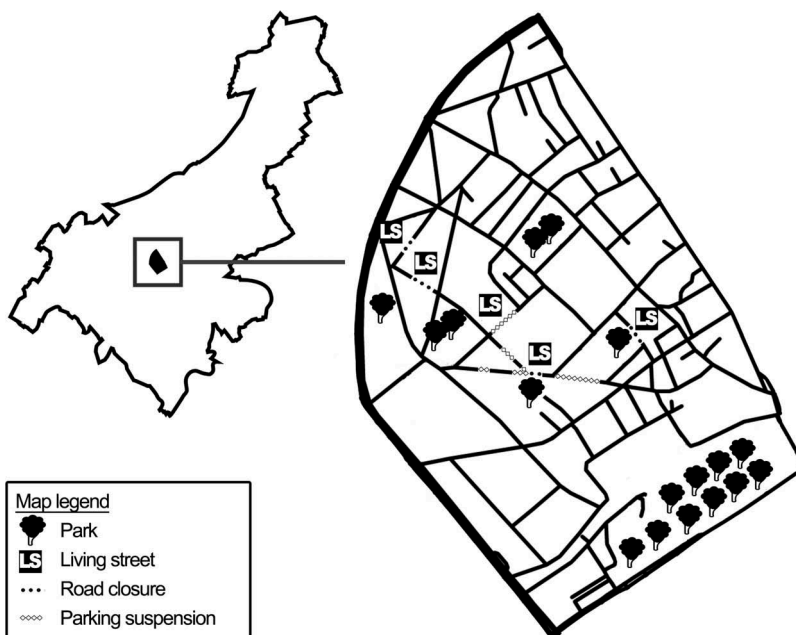


Figure 2. Map of Ghent with zoom on Brugse Poort and its greening initiatives.

vandalized with slogans saying “move!” and “selfish green assholes!”, thereby making questions about the relationship between greening initiatives and displacement pertinent. Even though one may rightfully wonder what is distinctively “green” about living streets, it is clear that the city council, Lab van Troje, advocating, and opposing residents alike make an appeal to notions of greenness in referring to the initiative. As such, rather than trying to settle the debate on whether living streets are *objectively* green, we follow the *subjective* definitions of the actors involved.

Data and methods

The results presented in the next section draw on interview data collected between June 2016 and February 2017. A total of 37 interviews were conducted with both long-time ($N = 20$) and gentrifying residents ($N = 17$). Most participants were recruited through adverts posted on Facebook groups concerning greening initiatives in the district. Additionally, residents who attended one of the living streets information sessions were approached to participate in the study. In order to explore the relationship between gentrification and greening initiatives, participants were categorized according to their socioeconomic profile. Participants were labeled as gentrifying when they mostly fitted the profile of a white middle-class gentrifier, here defined as a highly educated white person with a high occupational status who had recently moved to and bought a property in the district (see [Table 1](#) for an overview of respondents’ characteristics). In contrast,

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents ($N = 37$).

Characteristic	Longtime residents ($N = 20$)	Gentrifying residents ($N = 17$)
	No. of respondents	No. of respondents
<i>Gender</i>		
Females	9	11
Male	11	6
<i>Age</i>		
< 31	4	0
31-40	5	11
41-50	4	4
51-60	2	2
> 60	5	0
<i>Migration background</i>		
Has a migration background	8	0
Has no migration background	12	17
<i>Highest academic degree</i>		
High school degree	16	2
Bachelor’s degree	2	3
Master’s degree	2	11
Doctoral degree	0	1
<i>Occupational status^a</i>		
Never worked and long-term unemployed	1	1
Working class	8	0
Intermediate	8	2
Salariat	3	14
<i>Homeownership status</i>		
Owning	13	16
Renting	7	1

a Categories of occupational status are based on the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC). This classification is the EU variant of the International Standard Classification of Occupations 1988 (ISCO88).

longtime residents can be roughly identified as working-class or lower middle-class persons with or without a migration background who had lived in Brugse Poort as a child or have been living in the district for at least 25 years.²

Interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's preference and lasted between 40 and 180 minutes. The interview protocol followed a semi-structured format and questioned participants' perspectives on (i) the neighborhood and its identity through time, (ii) their ties in and with the neighborhood, (iii) broader neighborhood dynamics and the actors perceived to be implicated in these dynamics, (iv) greening initiatives in general and the living streets in particular, and (v) the politics at play in and the impacts of such initiatives, as well as the configuration of actors perceived to be pursuing these politics. Interviews were later transcribed orthographically and analyzed in Nvivo 10. Given our sampling method and relatively small sample size, the results presented in the following section should be interpreted with caution. For instance, it is likely that residents who were ambivalent or indifferent toward the issue of living streets neither responded to our call nor showed up at information sessions. Our objective, however, was not to get a precise image of the ratio of proponents to opponents with regard to neighborhood greening. Given our focus on nonphysical displacement pressures, it seemed reasonable to pay attention to residents who were highly involved in, or had an opinion about, the Living Street project. This is because we assume that when such pressures exist, we are most likely to identify them within this group.

Results

A new property hotspot

[I]n order to prevent any mistake they've given all these gray streets, all those city-corpses lying next each other, the names of flowers, the names of trees ... Not a branch, not a leaf, not a flower is to be seen ... The people in cedar street have never seen a cedar, ... they've never seen how the hazel starts to bloom with dark red buds, they've never felt the smooth bark of cherry trees, and have never caught the scent of blooming lilacs around them. (Boon, 2006, p. 376)

When renowned Belgian novelist Louis Paul Boon portrayed Brugse Poort in the 1950s, he drew an image of a dreary and shabby looking industrial district. While reading through this passage, one can see how Brugse Poort has undergone a metamorphosis. In fact, newspaper headlines such as "Everybody wants to live in Ghent (and most preferably in Brugse Poort)" (De Troyer, 2016) demonstrate how in recent years Brugse Poort has become known as a popular and hip neighborhood, suitable for family life. This has been reflected in property prices, which rose by 36% in the period 2010-2014 – a staggering number compared to the total increase of 17% for Ghent in the same period. Soaring housing costs in Brugse Poort are already being felt by some residents – an alarming tendency when one takes into account the fact that 51% of the district's residents are tenants, more than double Flemish regional average (i.e., 24%).³ Longtime residents frequently mentioned the fact that, as "the better sort" wants to live in Brugse Poort, housing costs have "gone up" and have become "expensive," making a permanent stay in the neighborhood increasingly unlikely for them and their children. Jack, who together with his wife and children has taken up residence in the house of his mother-in-law,

expresses how buying or renting a place in the neighborhood has become increasingly unattainable:

Here [in Brugse Poort], they are asking at least 200,000 euro for a terraced house without making much of a fuss. . . . If you don't have two incomes, it is no longer possible to acquire property. We're lucky to be able to live with my mother-in-law and to have no costs. My wife only earns 600 euros and I too only have a modest salary. If we were to live independently, we would be paying a 1000-euro rent and 200 euros on utilities. Combined with cable and internet, we would easily pay 1300 euros. (Jack, longtime resident)

Accounts from longtime residents hence make clear that physical displacement pressures are being experienced as a result of government-induced gentrification. Next to its proximity to the city centre and its relative affordability, one of the pull factors to this property hotspot are the many greening initiatives that have been implemented. Indeed, throughout our interviews it became clear that many gentrifying residents valued the green spaces that were developed in the course of the urban renewal project highly. Blake, for instance, recalls his views on the neighborhood when checking it out before acquiring property:

I had cycled a few times through Brugse Poort and you just got the impression this was a great neighborhood with some parks. . . . That is why we did not choose Ledeborg [another former industrial district of Ghent]. Ledeborg has a lot less green space. (Blake, gentrifying resident)⁴

Previous greening initiatives thus seem to have partly engendered a process of gentrification as these drew to the neighborhood a progressive fraction of white middle-class families that are culturally oriented toward not only urban but also ecological lifestyles and who have in the literature been referred to as the "sustainability class" (Gould & Lewis, 2017, p. 112). It is therefore worth looking in more detail at the dynamics between greening initiatives and gentrification.

Brugse poort: a great place?

Gentrifiers not only consume but also aim to produce urban green space. In fact, interviews indicated that it is mainly gentrifying residents who are promoting additional greening, inter alia, by taking the lead in the Living Street project:

[Through the Living Street project] you get to know a lot of people in the neighborhood. It feels more familiar now . . . Recently, I was going home at night by bicycle and I arrived at this nearby square and I was filled with love. I was thinking "this is a really nice neighborhood." Although I was a little drunk, I really thought "this place is great". (Esther, gentrifying resident)

As illustrated by Esther's comment, gentrifying residents actively engage in place-making practices through their participation in the Living Street project. Indeed, by appropriating and transforming the concrete road into a place for greenery and social living, gentrifying residents are creating their/a sense of place and homeliness. These place-making practices contrast with the common place identity of Brugse Poort. In fact, according to gentrifying residents it has been normal in Brugse Poort "to park your car in front of your home and as such take up public space," this because many take the view that "a street's only function is to accommodate traffic". The changes in the fabric of

Brugse Poort, the new materialities that are being introduced are, however, perceived by gentrifying residents as “very positive,” as an uncontested good that serves the public interest. In their view, participation in the project is a way to be of service to Brugse Poort and its residents. For instance, advocating residents explained that through their “volunteering,” they endeavored to “upgrade” the neighborhood, hence making it “more pleasant” for its inhabitants. These accounts strongly reflect assumptions held by gentrification proponents that gentrifiers will defend and improve their neighborhood through a variety of actions (see e.g., Byrne, 2003; Duany, 2001). Whereas green gentrification increases housing costs, proponents argue that the process also brings benefits to low-income residents who manage “to stay put” (Hartman, 1984).

By remodeling the street, by slowing down traffic, by making the street green, and by providing a place for social living, a place is created which is pleasant to live in. (Penny, gentrifying resident)

When reading through Penny’s account, one could indeed easily conclude that the removal of environmental bads and the introduction of environmental goods improve the quality of life for longtime residents. Our analysis, however, showed that the Living Street project was highly contested, rather than unanimously welcomed. Multiple conflicts arose between gentrifying and longtime residents that centred around the struggle for space. These struggles were not so much about the materialities of space as about the meanings that are linked to it. For several longtime residents, the living streets project contrasted with the identity and character of Brugse Poort they used to know:

Half of them aren’t even from Brugse Poort and they want to upgrade the neighborhood with living streets. But living streets have nothing to do with Brugse Poort, totally nothing! That this used to be a run-down neighborhood? Yes, that is correct, but it was a run-down neighborhood open to all. (Guy, longtime resident)

What longtime residents were thereby noting is that the Living Street project not only changed the very fabric of Brugse Poort but also its identity. Guy, for instance, was suggesting that the project was remodeling the orientation of the neighborhood to a place which was no longer “open to all.” Although such statements romanticize the neighborhood’s past and easily gloss over the inter-racial tensions that have marked neighborhood life over recent decades, the images they evoke nevertheless give us a “vision of the present,” a vision of where the neighborhood is now (May, 1996, p. 200). By projecting the image of a close-knit community from a time that never was, longtime residents try to point out the formation of (new) conflicts and exclusions in the neighborhood; conflicts that in contrast to previous decades dominantly have a class rather than a racial dimension.⁵ Indeed, sentiments like these often came to the fore because living streets themselves were perceived as something of, by and for a selective class – a class that was very much related to what Gould and Lewis (2017, p. 112) named the “sustainability class”. In fact, several longtime residents argued that they considered the Living Street project to be a “privatization” of public space by a “clique” or “community” of what at times was referred to as “hippies,” “hipsters,” “ecologists,” “middle-class families,” and “newcomers”. Related to this, some residents indicated that it would not be “appreciated” if they were to go and enjoy the living streets, while others noted that they would end up

“sitting alone”. This feeling was echoed by Marilyn, who was keeping herself away from the project:

[The living street advocates] have created islands and I am against it. They are proclaiming that they are there for everyone but you should go and get a look at who is sitting there ... I know I have the right to go and sit there. However, I don't go there because I don't feel up to it. I prefer sitting at Fonteineplein because there I sit between my people. Then I sit on the place that was created by the city to make the neighborhood come together. (Marilyn, longtime resident)

This process of segregation and/or self-segregation also worked the other way around. Gentrifying residents, for instance, frequently mentioned how they did not go to sit at Fonteineplein (i.e., a public square with trees around it) because the square was felt to be “unattractive” and “claimed” by minoritized residents. For some gentrifying residents, this was even one of the reasons to advocate for living streets as through this initiative, green spaces could be created that were according to one's tastes and over which one could have a certain degree of control.

Whereas gentrification proponents proclaim that a rising tide lifts all boats (Duany, 2001), accounts by longtime residents call into question these supposed trickle-down effects. Indeed, several longtime residents revealed how they felt neither allowed nor willing to tap into these new “livable” and “green” neighborhood spaces. The perception that living streets were a project of, by and for “a clique” that was different from “our people” caused longtime residents to link the project to the rapid changes that have been going on in the neighborhood. However, these changes also resulted in living streets being almost immediately perceived as selective. Throughout our interviews, longtime residents frequently mentioned how new businesses, organizations and a “better class” took up residence in the neighborhood. Whereas this influx was celebrated at first, many gradually changed their opinion. This is mainly because longtime residents came to the conclusion that these new businesses and organizations were catering to a selective public and that gentrifying residents were not interested in making real connections. Moreover, longtime residents have seen how through this process many longtime residents and shops have left the neighborhood, which led to a loss of place. Opposition to the Living Street project should thus also be understood as an active opposition to these changes, this because living streets were seen as a symbol and part of a changing neighborhood.

Contestation over this greening initiative, however, also revolved around issues other than the perceived privatization of public space and gentrification in a more general sense. More specifically, interviewees considered that the greening of Brugse Poort changed certain expectations of how to act and behave in the neighborhood. These social expectations were a source of conflict between residents in the struggle for space. Faiza, for instance, recalled a discussion she had with some living street advocates in which she linked the redevelopment of the road to the implicit norm of traveling in more sustainable ways and leaving your car further away:

I told them [the living street advocates] “Am I not free to do what I want? If I don't want to ride a cargo bike, then I'm not going to. You cannot force me, right?” And they reply by saying “Yes, but people expect that they will always have a parking spot in front of their house”. I say “But you expect to have a green space in front of your house ... Well, I expect to see my car when I open the door.” (Faiza, longtime resident)

It is important to note that opposition from longtime residents to these expectations was not only driven by mere esthetic preferences or tastes that were related to issues of habitus. Rather, the position that residents took was also associated with the context in which they lived. In fact, as many longtime residents were employed in low-skilled jobs (see Table 1) – jobs which were often heavily dependent on car use due to (i) their concentration in remote areas with few public transport options available, (ii) the related work schedule, and/or (iii) the duties of the jobs themselves – multiple interviewees expressed the unfeasibility of traveling other than by car. The appropriation of parking spots for greenery and social living, together with the implicit norm of parking further away, was therefore viewed with hostility in a neighborhood characterized by severe parking problems. This was illustrated by Mourad, who cleverly juxtaposed his context to that of advocating residents:

I never thought I would be saying this but I've forgotten the issue of drug dealers in the neighborhood because they've never bothered us ... But they [i.e., the living street advocates] are telling you what to do ... They are changing your way of living. Not everyone is lucky enough to sit there with a glass of wine for the entire day. Not everyone is lucky enough to have the opportunity to work from home. We need to work. We need to earn our bread ... I am encountering difficulties because I am a cabdriver ... We always try to reach a client within 15 minutes. When I need to walk 15 minutes to my car alone, I will get into trouble. (Mourad, longtime resident)

Indeed, while the Living Street initiative is making the neighborhood more “pleasant” and “livable” for gentrifying residents, the opposite could be the case for other residents whose presence and ways of living are increasingly coming under threat. The latter is the result of two related processes.

First, it is clear how some ways of life are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain as the automobile is being pushed out of certain spaces. In fact, throughout interviews longtime residents consistently noted how the neighborhood has changed for the worse and how the Living Street project has made things “less livable”. As such, some residents felt that advocating residents “took the greatness out of Brugse Poort”. Accounts such as these not only challenge the assumption that longtime residents will be able to reap the benefits of gentrifiers’ hard work to make the neighborhood “livable,” but also question whether the concept of livability itself is something that can be looked upon as objective. What makes up a livable neighborhood thus seems heavily dependent on the context in which one lives. Consequently, what the Living Street project seems to be putting into practice is neither an objective nor a shared vision of *livability* but rather an elitist one that reflects the lifestyle of the urban professional.

Second, as living streets are rebranding the neighborhood into a “healthy,” “green,” and “sustainable” place, bodies and practices that do not meet this image are coming under scrutiny and are increasingly excluded. Several longtime residents felt that they were being labeled by advocating residents as “asocial” or “embittered”. Moreover, some interviewees had the feeling they were being “bullied” and “pushed out” by gentrifying residents who wanted “them and their cars gone”. Although the full implications of this process have yet to be played out, it points toward an impression shared by several longtime residents that their presence and conduct is being marginalized as the greening of the neighborhood advances. This led some residents to believe that they were being left with only two choices, either “adapt or move”.

While the Living Street project is being lauded for giving back the streets to residents, it seems that the project is also working against residents. Whereas gentrifying residents are carving out a place strictly tailored to their tastes and ways of living, longtime residents are feeling increasingly out-of-place and are no longer associating themselves with the neighborhood.

No say in the neighborhood

Conflict over the Living Street project, however, also centred around the ability to claim rights to define and cast space. In fact, many longtime residents not only resented the living streets in themselves but also the way they came into being. Several interviewees felt that the project had been “imposed” and “forced down one’s throat”. For these residents, Brugse Poort used to be a place of equality and freedom in which they could break free from the socio-political hierarchy reflected in a broader society in which many found themselves at the bottom. Such romanticized and nostalgic sentiments often came to the fore when interviewees were pointing toward the remodeling of the neighborhood. In fact, the Living Street project was perceived as epitomizing and reinforcing a change in neighborhood governance. Whereas in the past it was felt that one could dwell among equals, now one had the feeling that gentrifying residents were taking the driver’s seat. Several longtime residents described entering a new reality of “*foie-gras* politics” in which they were only allowed to give ear to, and agree with, decisions not made by them. Through these accounts, interviewees also noted the political effectiveness of advocating residents and the ease with which these managed to close off several streets from car usage for a period of two months:

[Advocating residents] can get anything they want. They come up with an explanation. They have connections. They know their way around . . . It is a clique, the chosen ones. They can do anything, they are allowed to do anything and they do not care about anyone but themselves. In the past, this was a nice neighborhood. (Imane, longtime resident)

As Imane’s comment illustrates, the ease with which advocating residents crossed boundaries with the public sector and rearranged the neighborhood according to their view of it caused not only feelings of indignation but also a loss of a sense of belonging.

This was certainly the case as many longtime residents felt that their voice did not matter – or no longer mattered – to municipal policy makers. For instance, one resident born and raised in Brugse Poort proclaimed that the “longtime population didn’t count any longer” to city leaders. In turn, another interviewee said that he and other longtime residents had the feeling they were “no longer welcome in the city”. These statements correspond to the well-documented emergence of entrepreneurial modes of urban governance (While et al., 2004), in which the aim of city leaders to bring back and retain middle-class families allows the interests of such families to come to the fore at the expense of those held by low-income communities. The impression of epistemic exclusion, namely that the voice, the knowledge, opinions, and interests of certain fractions are of no concern for city leaders, was indeed widely shared by longtime residents. Amy, for instance, recalls how her and her husband’s opposition to the Living Street project was largely ignored:

You feel like you're not being understood but you also have the feeling that they [i.e., public officials] are not listening. For example, in the beginning I sent two e-mails to the ombudsman of the city of Ghent. Eventually I got a reply saying "madam, we will forward your complaint to the organization [i.e., Lab van Troje]". In other words, you can shut your mouth because they don't care. My husband went to the open information session and was asked if they [i.e., advocating residents] could have his name because they were interested in what he said. But in the end you don't hear from them because they don't care. (Amy, longtime resident)

As Amy's comment suggests, longtime residents felt that they were up against a set of actors (advocating residents, nonprofit organization, public officials, ombudsman) between which boundaries were rather fuzzy and which jointly marginalized their voice. Several interviewees, for instance, maintained that their "opinion didn't matter". Nevertheless, our analysis made clear that often advocating residents, members of Lab van Troje and/or the city ombudsman genuinely entered into a dialogue and looked for solutions when problems were reported to them by longtime residents – a process which could be time consuming. For example, we know of instances where advocating residents insulated someone's door against (potential) noise disturbance coming from the living street, set up a living street differently to minimize nuisance, reserved parking space in the living street for a person suffering from an illness, and parked their own cars further away, to name but a few.

However, this does not change the fact that the Living Street project stems from an implicit yet predetermined notion of livability – a notion which seems not to be open for discussion. As such, rather than starting from a *tabula rasa* which would allow and encourage engagement with different ideas on what makes up a livable street, the project holds on to the idea that a livable street comes down to the removal of certain environmental bads to make way for certain environmental goods. In turn, views that challenge such a notion of "livability" or its encompassing configuration of a livable street tend to be trivialized and rendered illegitimate. Indeed, as the Living Street project was believed to be serving the public interest, some advocating residents openly wondered "why an issue was made out of [the project]" and dismissed the opposition of some residents, who situated themselves outside the consensus, as "ridiculous," "sour," "conservative," and "outdated". These limitations (i.e., the failure to transcend and discuss a predetermined notion of livability) seem to symbolize and sprout from the unequal power relations between advocating and opposing residents. Indeed, not only has the concept been developed and introduced by a selective group – a concept which moreover reflects their interests – it also received support from city officials who hold the decisive power:

I went to this meeting prior to the initiation of the living streets ... The majority of the attendants were against it ... Lab van Troje was doing their presentation when I asked them "Will this go through or is it still uncertain? Have we come here to have a say or are we just here to take note of the plan?" ... They told me nothing was decided yet. In the end, however, they got images and told us they were going to do this and that. So actually, everything had already been decided. (Nicole, longtime resident)

To complicate matters further, it seems that through the living street network responsibility was shifted to particular residents and civil society (e.g., as Amy's statement makes clear, complaints addressed to the city were not answered but instead forwarded to Lab

van Troje). However, as these actors were not elected, they could neither be voted out nor held accountable (cf., Rigolon & Németh, 2018). Within such an “accountability void”, opposing residents seemed to have a hard time in making their voice heard and contesting the initiative in an effective way. It is important to note that during the interviews longtime residents frequently emphasized that they didn’t need to get their own way – this whether or not they were in a weak bargaining position. In fact, several interviewees explicitly indicated that they could well imagine living streets being “convivial” and “enjoyable” for certain families. Longtime residents therefore did not object to the aim of gentrifying residents to achieve a sense of place and homeliness. However, they did object that the place-creation practices developed by gentrifying residents were jeopardizing their own sense of place and homeliness. To resolve this issue, some longtime residents argued that a sort of compromise should be reached that was acceptable to both parties. Nevertheless, it was felt that only they were willing to reach such an agreement.

Taken together with the perceived lack of interest on the part of city officials for their concerns, longtime residents felt that they neither had nor could have any impact upon the future direction of the neighborhood, something which resulted in feelings of disempowerment:

This is my neighborhood! Of course, it is also the neighborhood of those ecologists . . . I just think it is terrible that we no longer have any say in our own neighborhood. . . . Half of the people do not agree with this project. It is terrible that a group of people succeeds in ruffling the feathers of a whole district. We have lived here for ages. They have just arrived but they are making the rules. (Cynthia, longtime resident)

By emphasizing that she has been “living here for ages,” Cynthia is trying to claim rights based on her historical ties to the neighborhood. Although such “autochthonous claims” have been criticized as undemocratic – in that they often work to force assimilation upon newly arrived residents (for a critique, see Amin, 2004; Massey, 2004) – these claims can also be seen as a last-ditch effort in a context in which many felt powerless. In other words, what longtime residents seem to be after when holding on to such claims is not the production of unequal power relations but the destruction of such relations.

Feelings of powerlessness were often conjoined with the perceived ease with which gentrifying residents (were allowed to) exert influence over Brugse Poort. In fact, some longtime residents were under the impression that advocating residents were impregnable. In this context, Marilyn, for example, noted that after the previous edition of the Living Street project one picnic table and some planter boxes were not taken away by advocating residents for a whole year. The fact that advocating residents were able to get away with noncompliance with mutually made agreements – this even after the police station and other officials had been informed – typified to longtime residents that advocating residents not only acted “arrogantly” but also received, unlike themselves, unconditional support from city leaders and that, in practice, there was a rather selective public-citizen partnership at work here. This sentiment was echoed by other longtime residents, who compared their rights with those of advocating residents. Aamir, for instance, recalled how a request for a one-day street closure on the occasion of *Eid al-Fitr* at the location of the mosque was denied for security reasons. When linking this request to the one made by living street promoters, Aamir explicitly wondered why his fraction’s voice did not matter as much as that of other fractions who were able to pull the

strings. These instances make clear how in a context of gentrification, longtime residents, whether or not justified, are increasingly experiencing a stratification into first- and second-class citizens. As longtime residents find themselves at the bottom of this rearranged hierarchy, some no longer have the feeling that Brugse Poort (also) belongs to them.

Taken together with the changed identity of the neighborhood and the increasing marginalization of certain ways of living, this causes feelings of being out-of-place and a tendency to withdraw from the spaces that once used to be places of homeliness:

I really am a stranger in my own neighborhood. We have the impression that we aren't getting a say on a thing around here. This creates a situation in which you come home, get in, close the door and don't want to have anything to do with what is going on outside. . . . I always used to say "Brugse Poort is great, I like living here," but that they have taken away. (Bilal, longtime resident)

For some residents, displacement pressures have become so "severe" (Marcuse, 1985, p. 207) that they are planning to move out of the neighborhood. This decision is often linked to the idea that things will only change for the worse in Brugse Poort. Indeed, several longtime residents expressed their anxiety that (parts of) the Living Street project would become permanent – something which seems not implausible given the fact that the project has served as a source of inspiration for street reconstructions. In contrast, other residents expressed concerns about processes of gentrification in general. The net result, however, is the same, namely, residents who are increasingly considering leaving the neighborhood in ways that hardly can be described as voluntary:

There are more and more of those people who are moving here. Each home that is vacated, which is up for sale, is being bought by them . . . They are really alternative people . . . They are just like aliens: an invasion which is bullying the others into leaving . . . I'm moving in September because I can't handle it any longer. . . . I have the feeling a lot of people are leaving, mostly people who have lived here for ages. But it [the Living Street project] is represented oh so beautifully . . . I am closing my window, closing my curtain, I am using earplugs and I put my headphones on. Outside, there are the elites, . . . about ten families. They are organizing this. They decide which activities will be held. Other people are counting down the days to July 16th when it [i.e., the Living Street project] will be taken away. (Faiza, longtime resident)

Conclusion

If we are to develop a rich understanding of (green) gentrification, we need to give serious consideration to the diverse nature of displacement (Davidson, 2009). As we argued at the start of this article, to conceive displacement as physical dislocation is to do injustice to the very place tensions that are at work in processes of (green) gentrification. This paper examined how urban greening can be entangled with issues such as gentrification and displacement by adopting a multidimensional notion of displacement. It shows that – at least in the perception of opposing residents – the boundaries between the public actors, such as municipal officials and local politicians, and the private actors, such as nonprofit organizations and loosely organized citizens, that are pushing these initiatives through are quite blurred and fuzzy, which further adds to feelings of powerlessness amongst opposing residents.

Whilst previous research has conceived the relationship between greening on the one side and gentrification and displacement on the other almost exclusively in economic terms, this study points out a more complex picture. Focusing on a greening initiative in a gentrifying neighborhood, this article shows that urban greening can induce a variety of displacement pressures, including not only physical displacement but also the loss of a sense of place. The reason for such a widespread displacement lies in the fact that green gentrification is causing more than just soaring housing costs. In fact, when these initiatives are launched, led, and supported exclusively by a fraction of gentrifiers, who have been named the sustainability class, the chances are not only that they will be based on elitist notions of livability but also that such notions will trump the sense of place of others. Indeed, our results indicate that greening initiatives promoted by gentrifying residents have significantly redefined the place-identity of the neighborhood and its socio-political hierarchy, which in turn has led to increasing feelings amongst longtime residents of being out-of-place and marginalized. One should, however, be aware that the strong feelings and sentiments expressed by longtime residents in relation to the Living Street project are not only intertwined with this greening initiative but also with the process of gentrification in a more general sense. Although, due to our selection method, we may have missed out on a significant proportion of residents who are ambivalent or indifferent toward the Living Street project, this does not undermine our finding that indeed for at least a sizable section of the population, displacement pressures are occurring as a result of greening initiatives in Brugse Poort.

This article does not argue against the greening of low-income neighborhoods, which have traditionally been confronted with few green amenities (Anguelovski, 2016; Faber & Kimelberg, 2014; Wolch et al., 2014). On the contrary, it would be unwise to (partially or fully) maintain environmental injustices in an attempt to forestall new injustices that often come with the gentrification of a neighborhood. However, as our analysis makes clear, it would be imprudent to celebrate and support (all) urban greening initiatives in low-income neighborhoods by definition. In this respect, some authors have argued that urban greening in low-income neighborhoods should be accompanied by protective measures, such as rent controls (Wolch et al., 2014). While such proposals deserve more attention, we argue that financial relief alone is not enough. In order to avoid other displacement pressures, it is also essential to approach place-making as a process that is shot through with power differentials that need to be attended to. This implies not only that city leaders relinquish a growth agenda as an impetus for initiating or supporting urban greening – as this growth agenda is inevitably wedded to the well-off segments of the populations – but also that greening initiatives are embedded in a democratic process in which power relations are evened out and public-private boundaries can be crossed by all sections of the citizenry to the same extent. It is important to note that this democratic process is not automatically established when power is devolved from the governmental level to citizens and/or to actors within civil society. Rather, we call on policy makers to take up two matters.

First, we encourage policy makers to take responsibility for both the environmental and social consequences of greening initiatives, even when these initiatives are (also) driven by nonprofit organizations and/or took shape via institutional arrangements that engage in the act of “governing-beyond-the-state” (Swyngedouw, 2005). This is not only because environmental nonprofit organizations involved in these horizontally networked forms of participatory governance often only focus on their core domain, but also because policy

makers are the only ones within these (opaque) ensembles who are elected and thus have a responsibility to the wider public (cf., Rigolon & Németh, 2018). As our results make clear, in the absence of accountable actors, a situation in which critical questions are not answered and where the citizens asking those questions are sent from pillar to post is not that far away. Ultimately, such “governing-beyond-the-state” could paradoxically lead to an increasing foreclosure of available space for any real contestation and hence, as we have demonstrated, a process of disempowerment and feelings of displacement amongst a fraction of citizens who do not participate or are not included in these institutional arrangements.

Second, rather than persisting with a post-political consensus, we want to push policy makers to make room for (thorny) discussions of the kind of (green) environment that is wanted, even when this would give rise to a substantial amount of dissent. As argued by Swyngedouw (2009, p. 611), “[t]he key political question is one that centres on the question of what kind of natures we wish to inhabit, what kinds of natures we wish to preserve, to make or, if need be, to wipe off the surface of the planet (...) and on how to get there.” Multiple socio-physical green configurations are possible; however, none is neutral (cf., Swyngedouw, 2007). Each configuration carries a unique assemblage of social consequences as it allows, gives rise to or facilitates certain practices, processes, discourses and people, while at the same time also marginalizing, hindering, or excluding others. Indeed, as the discussion of Fonteineplein makes clear, not all socio-physical “green” configurations will necessarily lead to gentrification. This is because some configurations will not be *subjectively* observed as green by some actors, this regardless of whether or not they are *objectively* green. In this sense, our results also demonstrate that the subjective perception of gentrifiers on what is green carries more weight in processes of green gentrification than what is objectively green (cf., Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Likewise, green and livable neighborhoods could, but should not necessarily, be equivalent to street closures and the introduction of artificial grass mats, raised garden beds, and picnic tables, which has mainly privileged gentrifying groups over others. It is thus necessary to let go of predefined and incontestable notions of what makes up a green and livable environment and treat environmental issues for what they are (i.e., inherently political). If not, this could lead not only to a process of post-political silencing (cf., Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2009), but also, and as a result of the former, in feelings of displacement.

In a sense, all of this comes down to the incorporation of social justice in the process, procedure, and outcome of greening initiatives (Agyeman, 2013). As has been argued by Agyeman (2013, p. 160), there is a “need for ‘social sustainability’ issues to be foregrounded in a sustainability agenda that is still dominated by green, environmental, and stewardship narratives and concerns”. Only then will it be possible to arrive at just sustainabilities of, by and for all residents that avoid a stratification into winners and losers through a self-fueling process of green gentrification.

Notes


1. We believe that this conception also explains the current lack of attention to the experiences of longtime residents in the literature on green gentrification.
2. This does not mean that there are no longtime middle-class residents in Brugse Poort in general and in our sample in particular. However, in both cases they are a small minority, something which is unsurprising given the district’s history.

3. Percentages have been calculated on the basis of the official 2011 census figures, which can be downloaded from http://www.census2011.be/download/statsect_nl.html.
4. Pseudonyms are used for all respondents. Respondents were ensured confidentiality by not disclosing any information they provided or by doing this in such a way as not to reveal their identity. All quotations have been translated by the authors.
5. Moreover, it could be argued that the class conflicts springing from the Living Street initiative unintentionally gave rise to a process of de-racialization. In fact, by unifying longtime residents with and without a migration background in their common opposition to the initiative, living streets have partially resolved old racial tensions between longtime residents.

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