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Reframing Public Space Evaluation through Multisited and Plurispatial Perspectives

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Abstract
This paper proposes a multisited and plurispatial methodological framework for evaluating public space as a justice-oriented method that foregrounds the lived trajectories of precarious migrants across overlapping spatial and policy scales. Ever since Vikas Mehta's Public Space Index (2014) articulated a multidimensional, site-based evaluative model, the field has increasingly approached public space evaluation as a hybrid practice combining observation, participation, and outcomes-based evidence, including policy considerations (UN-Habitat Global Public Space Toolkit, 2024; Ramos-Vidal, 2024; Mela, 2025). While these approaches offer valuable tools for assessing performance, they typically depend on aggregated metrics and assume relatively stable users and sites.
Drawing on social and design justice frameworks, the paper positions structurally produced vulnerability as a key standpoint for evaluation. Empirically, the paper draws on interdisciplinary research conducted in Belleville, Paris, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdown measures exposed the fragile infrastructures that sustain the lives of migrant and unhoused communities. Combining sensory ethnography, long interviews, embodied observation, collaborative mapping, and policy analysis, we trace the multisited trajectories through which vulnerable communities navigate urban space and multi-scalar governance structures.
Public space emerges through overlapping normative and policy migration frameworks - multiculturalism, interculturalism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism - which operate simultaneously across scales, and which shape conditions of recognition, belonging, and exclusion. Building on this, we propose a shift from site-based, score-driven assessments toward trajectory-oriented evaluation grounded in "narrative cartography." By conceptualizing public space as a plurispatial and transcalar interface, the framework connects spatial analysis with policy design and calls for collaborative evaluation teams that include researchers, community organizations, policymakers, and migrants themselves as experts of "lived space" (Lefebvre). This approach seeks to advance a more just and empirically grounded framework for understanding and evaluating public space within the mobility regimes that shape contemporary planetary urbanization.

Keywords: public space evaluation, migration and urban space, narrative cartography, spatial justice, transcalar urbanism

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> "*We were nine people - walking, walking, walking; sometimes we would walk thirty-five kilometres a day…In Paris we do everything by foot. I go to the public baths on rue de Meaux, then I pass Simon Bolivar, Secrétan, Atlas, Bozaris… then I come down to the Soupes - chorba, as the Algerians say - and afterwards I walk to the park. I stop, I greet people, tac tac tac… But how will I do this? It's impossible to draw a scheme of my daily trajectory*."
>
> Ahmed (interview, 2021)[1]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a bar in the Belleville neighbourhood of Paris - known for its vibrant mix of immigrant and bohemian cultures - was transformed into the Soupes de Belleville, a mutual aid soup kitchen, imagined by bar owner Pilote "as a dream-industry island in the maze of capitalism" (interview, 2021). There we met Ahmed, an undocumented, unhoused man from Marrakesh who had been living in Paris for two years without a residence permit, moving through the city with a shopping cart carrying his belongings.

As Ahmed drew us the maps of his journeys, we realized that his daily itinerary through Paris - between parks, mosques, night buses, soup kitchens, and the box where he sleeps in the northern suburbs - was homologous to his trajectories within a constellation of places that brought him to the city - through Turkey, Greece, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia, Switzerland and Italy (Figures 1 and 2). For Ahmed and many others, Belleville was only one node within a wider network of places. Thus, the experience of precarious migrants in Belleville's public space amid the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic revealed what was often obscured or dismissed as a concern relegated to the margins: that "public space" is not a bounded site but a dispersed infrastructure of survival.

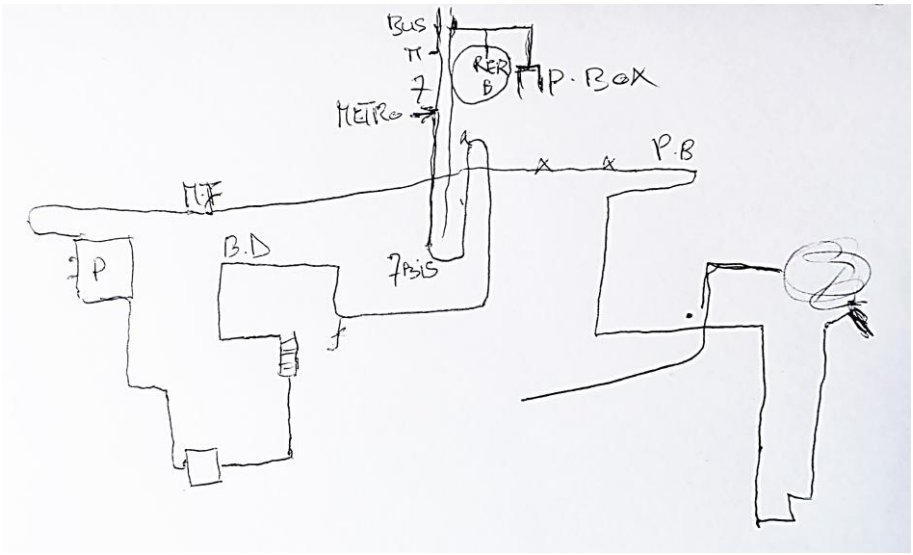


Figure 1. Ahmed's drawing of his daily itinerary in Paris, April 2021.

[1] The names of unhoused and migrant interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms.

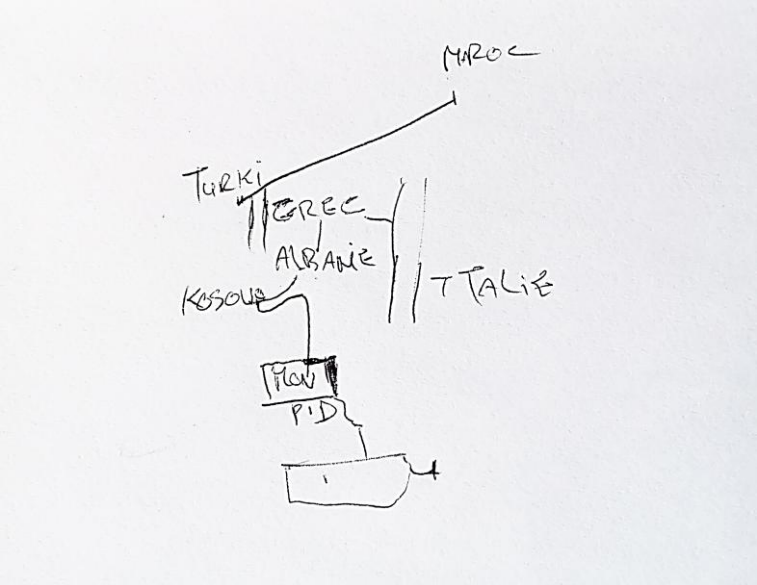


Figure 2. Ahmed's drawing of his immigration itinerary, April 2021.

Public space evaluation has traditionally relied on frameworks that look at fixed sites and generalizable indicators of quality, while privileging communal stability and wellbeing. As Sally Merry notes, referring to the use of indicators in governance, "indicators produce readily understandable and convenient forms of knowledge about the world that shape the way policymakers and the general public understand the world" (Merry, 2011, p. 92). Similarly, evaluations of public space generate forms of knowledge that can be easily understood and used by planners, policymakers, and citizens in local or national governments.

Yet public space, as experienced by those who inhabit its margins, is an ever-changing landscape where broader forces of unequal rights are materially enacted. Ahmed's trajectories raise methodological questions for evaluation: How can public space be assessed through localized evaluative frameworks when its use unfolds across multiple sites and regulatory systems? How can universalized indicators account for radically differentiated lived experiences? What does "accessibility" mean when public space is experienced as a shifting network of survival across a broader geography? Ahmed's story suggests public space should be understood as a dispersed field shaped by uneven power dynamics and conditions of mobility.

This paper suggests criteria for reframing public space evaluation through a multisited and plurispatial approach that illustrates the expansive spatial experiences of precarious subjects, focusing on unhoused "people on the move" (Ticktin and Youatt, 2021, p. 5). Our proposal conceptualizes public space as a field shaped by overlapping governance structures that derive from multiple sites, diverse group identities, and competing modes of integration. The argument builds on social justice frameworks that converge on a shared principle: that justice is assessed by examining how institutions affect those most vulnerable to harm. Vulnerability, in this context, is understood not as an individual condition but as one that is structurally produced (Gilodi et al, 2024, pp. 628–30), shaped by legal status, socio-economic precarity, racialization, and mobility regimes. Based on this understanding, we suggest that the weakest subjects constitute a

legitimate and necessary standpoint from which to evaluate public space.
The paper contributes an empirically grounded, methodologically innovative approach derived from the interdisciplinary collaboration of a four-member research team with backgrounds in design and sociology, focusing on Belleville, Paris. Conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study encountered a public space transformed by lockdown measures which exposed the everyday infrastructures of survival that sustained migrants when formal institutions withdrew. Through the consideration of plurispatial policy frameworks, sensory ethnography, long interviews, embodied observation, and collaborative mapping, the research traced the trajectories of individuals whose daily movements across Paris and beyond exemplified the multisited nature of migrant life. These narratives revealed the entangled nature of public space with transnational routes and multi-scalar governance frameworks, as well as its constant remaking through practices of solidarity and neglect.
As claimed in earlier publications, "to establish a 'routed perspective'" - one that does not privilege origins and roots over routes - "we must broaden our lens and seek connections far beyond the specificity of a given site" (Clifford, 1997; Traganou, 2009, p. 21). This paper also expands our understanding of the production of public space "beyond professional expertise to encompass the agentic and emergent actions of displaced people and solidarity movements" (Lichtman and Traganou, 2023, p. 5).
The paper begins with a brief review of theories on public space and migration/displacement, followed by a discussion of specific public space evaluation frameworks. Following this, we describe our interdisciplinary research in Belleville – tracing the inquiry that led to our multisited, plurispatial evaluation of public space, and we conclude by articulating the broader principles and implications of this approach.

1. Public Space, Displacement, and the Limits of Evaluation Frameworks

Conceptualizing Public Space through Notions of Migration, Displacement and Multisitedness

Public space has been subject to various, often conflicting interpretations across disciplinary perspectives and ideological positions. Whilst practically defined as streets, open spaces and facilities, the concept encompasses values, beliefs, institutions, and communication networks, as well as patterns of identification and interaction.
"Public space," "public sphere," and "public realm" are interconnected notions. Jürgen Habermas (1989) conceptualized the public sphere as a domain in which "society" engages in rational-critical debate and self-reflection. Numerous thinkers have questioned Habermas's belief in an idealized public sphere, viewing it instead as an exclusionary space that sustains the illusion of formal equality among participants, as if all individuals engage on equal terms in an open exchange of ideas, while in reality profound disparities persist in access, opportunity, and the capacity to be heard.
Nancy Fraser's influential critique (1990, p. 67) argues that Habermas's model is insufficient because it fails to account for power differentials. Instead, Fraser sees multiple, hierarchical publics, including "subaltern counterpublics" formed by marginalized groups whose communicative practices and political claims fall outside dominant spheres. Fraser (pp. 66–70) emphasizes the need to ask who is rendered visible, whose claims are recognized, and under what structural constraints participation occurs.
Don Mitchell (2003, p. 35) extends this concern to the materiality of public space,

arguing that it is where "the desires and needs of individuals and groups can be seen, and therefore recognized, resisted, or… wiped out." For Mitchell, public space is a site of ongoing struggle over visibility, access, and belonging, shaped by policing, property regimes, and the disparate distribution of rights. For Miodrag Mitrašinović and Vikas Mehta (2021, p. 3), public space today is practiced as "laboratory" for testing "impositions … and … restrictions on public life and limitations of civil liberties, but also… new strategies and tactics of resistance … as well as of authentic new ways of institutionalizing the emergence of multiple publics."

When viewed in the context of migration and homelessness, public space becomes a site where national borders, legal status, and systems of governance are materially enacted. Migration scholar Mariana Mazzucato (2021, p. 552) suggests abandoning "the assumption that social, political, economic and cultural contexts perfectly map onto the same geographical space" and instead adopting a "multisited" network approach that enables researchers to "broaden the unit" of analysis to incorporate "phenomena within the different localities that are relevant to migrants." Design and architecture theorists have examined "how displacement materialized in specifically designed articulations, and how institutions use technology and material means to establish normative regimes" (Traganou and Lichtman, 2023, p. 7). According to design theorist Mahmoud Keshavarz (2018, p. 163), a perpetual and fraught "borderwork" operates as "a designable space capable of speeding up some passages while blocking others." Borders, however, are not fixed in place. As architecture scholars Andrew Herscher and Ana María León (2020) postulate, "The border becomes a colonial construct at multiple scales, dividing property, cities, regions, states, and even species" (n.p.). Tracing this dispersed materiality "offers glimpses of colonial power at work even in realms of life outside border zones" (Traganou and Lichtman, 2023, p. 7). Research indicates that public spaces, despite claims of equal access, are also bordered spaces (Traganou, 2016).

For migrants who are both unhoused and undocumented, public space functions as an extension of domestic space - for sleeping, eating, seeking aid, maintaining social networks, and so forth - because their access to private or institutional spaces is curtailed. The Belleville fieldwork showed that while most residents retreated indoors during the pandemic, unhoused and undocumented migrants continued to inhabit streets, squares, and markets as essential spaces of survival, while at the same time experiencing the effects of accessibility obstacles and legal protection deficits. These conditions highlight the need for evaluation frameworks attentive to precarity, (in)visibility, and systems of exclusion.

1.1 Public Space Evaluation

From Site-Based Assessment to City-Wide Policy Frameworks

Several evaluative frameworks have been developed to assess the quality and role of public space. Defining public space in terms of access and use rather than ownership and recognizing that "unconditional universal access" (2014, p. 54) is rarely achievable, Mehta proposes a Public Space Index that focuses primarily on streets, plazas, squares, and parks. His framework evaluates the quality of public space across five dimensions: meaningful activities, inclusiveness, safety, comfort, and pleasurability. While the framework acknowledges inclusiveness, vulnerable groups appear only indirectly within criteria of accessibility and social diversity.

The evaluative approaches of the Happy Cities movement, endorsed by the World Health Organization since 1986, emphasize the relationship between urban happiness and quality of life. Scholars such as Sahar Samavati et al (2025) highlight equality and diversity as key planning principles that promote spaces which are accessible regardless of age, gender, ability, or socio-economic status. While this perspective broadens the social dimension of public space, it lacks emphasis on the structural conditions affecting vulnerable populations.

Complementary perspectives are offered by Ignacio Ramos-Vidal and Elsy Domínguez de la Ossa (2024) and Maria Mela and George Varelidis (2025), who examine the relationship between public space characteristics and social cohesion - interpersonal encounters, social support, and the formation of social capital - by assessing frequency of use, walkability, and sense of community. Mela et al. also developed a participatory evaluation model that collects direct feedback from users, capturing how different demographic groups, including older residents, parents of younger children, business owners, and individuals with higher education, perceive and evaluate the same spaces. Despite considering community ties, participation, inclusion, and well-being, these two frameworks focus mainly on stable residential populations and thus do not portray the experience of people on the move and/or unhoused.

Ameliorating some of these limitations, the public space frameworks developed by UN-Habitat (2016, 2020) operate at a city-wide scale, shifting attention from individual sites to the network, distribution, and connectivity of public spaces. The "City-Wide Public Space Assessment Toolkit" and the "Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice" are aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, particularly SDG 11.7 universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces. These frameworks emphasize participatory assessment, digital inventories, and collaborative governance, involving cross-departmental reference groups and community participation in data collection. These tools identify gaps in accessibility and connectivity barriers across neighbourhoods, while also focusing on the need to more explicitly address vulnerable populations. Their data collection protocols recommend capturing the presence of all those who utilize the spaces, including understanding the needs of homeless people, informal workers, migrants, refugees, and persons with disabilities, and encouraging inclusive participation of these groups within assessment teams. Public space, described as "the poor man's living room" (2020, xi), is framed not only as a design or experiential issue but also as a matter of urban equity and social justice.

Taken together, these frameworks illustrate an expansion in public space evaluation from site-based qualitative assessments toward city-wide policy frameworks that integrate observation and community participation. While these approaches expand evaluative criteria, they still rely on aggregated perceptions, an epistemic approach that risks masking disparities between user groups with unequal access to space. Moreover, these frameworks focus on distributional outcomes rather than structural conditions - such as power asymmetry, precarity, and differential mobility - which shape how marginalized groups experience public space. This emphasis may create blind spots in evaluation, particularly regarding how spaces are produced (market, community, or state logics), reproduced (who maintains them and how), and transformed over time.

Critical Theory–Based Evaluative Frameworks of Public Space

Unlike fixed-site and metric-driven frameworks, our approach aligns closely with evaluative frameworks that focus on critical and social justice understandings of power dynamics affecting public space, as described in the critical perspectives of Setha Low and Kurt Iveson (2016) and Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020).

In their "Propositions for more just urban public spaces," Low and Iveson outline five interconnected dimensions of justice in public space, each grounded in a distinct body of critical theory and "both critiquing and informing the positions that are taken in public space disputes" (p. 10):

1) *Distributive justice* (pp. 16–17) foregrounds the uneven allocation of spatial resources and access, drawing particularly on David Harvey (1973) and Edward Soja (2010) to emphasize how privatization reshapes urbanity.
2) *Recognition* (pp. 17–18), based on Nancy Fraser's work (1990) on status hierarchies and "parity of participation," focuses on how marginalized identities are rendered invisible in public space.
3) *Interaction* (or *encounter*, pp. 18–19), building on the work of Iris Marion Young (2011) as well as Ruth Fincher and Iveson (2008), emphasizes the importance of meaningful encounters across difference rather than mere co-presence.
4) *Care and repair* (pp. 20–21) draws on feminist ethics of care, particularly Joan Tronto (2013) and Ash Amin (2008), to highlight maintenance, stewardship, and the uneven geographies of urban upkeep.
5) *Procedural justice* (pp. 21-22), also based on Fraser's work, is grounded in participatory democratic theory - about interrogating who has voice and power in shaping public space and how decision-making processes exclude different.

In *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, design and media theorist Costanza-Chock writes that design reproduces inequality when it centres "the imagined user who is typically white, male, able-bodied, documented, and financially secure" (p. 44), and proposes a Design Justice framework to guide justice-oriented intervention. Design Justice demands that those "most impacted by structural inequalities" define the problems and solutions that designers are called to address (p. 7). Based on these, Costanza-Chock proposes ten principles for Design Justice: "[1] sustain, heal, and empower... [2] centre the voices of those who are directly impacted…[3] prioritize design's impact on the community… [4] [consider] change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process… [5] [reposition] designer as a facilitator rather than an expert… [6] [consider] everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience… [7] share design knowledge and tools… [8] [create] sustainable, community-led and controlled outcomes…[9] non-exploitative solutions…[and] [10] look for what is already working" (pp. 6-7).

Our public space evaluation is oriented toward challenging the unequal distribution of risks, harms, and constraints of the marginalized, rather than toward normative expectations of public space or simply the distribution of amenities or resource allocation. Most important, we believe those who are most affected by structural injustice must be central participants in both its diagnosis and its remediation.

2. The Belleville Research

Belleville as a Migrant Palimpsest



Figure 3. The Soupes de Belleville, a solidarity project during the pandemic, Belleville, April 2021. Photo by Adèle Madeux.

Belleville, located at the intersection of the 19th and 20th arrondissements of Paris, has long been recognized as one of the city's most enduring immigrant neighbourhoods - a site of layered migratory histories and cultural heterogeneity. Successive waves of migration, from Eastern European Jews to North African, Asian, and Caribbean communities, have produced what scholars describe as a "mosaic pattern" of cohabitation and intercultural exchange (Simon, 1999, p. 101). Although gentrification has transformed parts of the area since the 1990s (Scott, 2015), Belleville retains its reputation as a zone of creativity, solidarity, and everyday cosmopolitan practice.



Figure 4. Citoyennes Interculturelles de Paris 20ème, an intercultural civil society association in Belleville that provides food-related services, Rue de Tourtille, June 2022. Photo by Jilly Traganou.

The fieldwork conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic identified Belleville not simply as a migrant residential neighbourhood but as a multisited node within wider spatial networks shaped by mobility, legal precarity, and informal infrastructures of support. The research team encountered Belleville as a palimpsest of migration, where everyday public space bore traces of both historically rooted solidarities and contemporary struggles. The presence of grassroots mutual aid initiatives - most notably the Soupes and Citoyennes Interculturelles de Paris 20ème (CIP 20) (Figures 3 and 4) - highlighted the neighbourhood's longstanding ethos of collective care and attentiveness to otherness and multiple forms of belonging. As formal institutions withdrew or reduced services during the pandemic, thus rendering structurally produced marginalization more visible than ever, these initiatives became some of the few active public infrastructures available to precarious migrants.

2.1 Understanding Normative Frameworks of Migration Governance

According to the PLURISPACE: Negotiating Diversity in Expanded European Public Spaces research project (Kastoryano et al, 2026), normative approaches to migration, incorporating four "-isms" - multiculturalism, interculturalism, transnationalism, and

cosmopolitanism - have significantly shaped public policy and academic discourse.[2] The normative claims of each approach differ in how they relate to diversity and difference, how they conceptualize citizenship and migrants' integration, and what kinds of governing configurations they entail. At the same time, these frameworks also illuminate how different forms of vulnerability - legal, social, and economic - are distributed and negotiated in urban space. The four-isms shaped the lenses through which we "read" Belleville, and our research looked for their distinct spatial expressions and complementarities.

Multiculturalism is a difference-sensitive approach to integration, emphasizing the need to revise citizenship and national identity in order to recognize group identities. It operates from the idea that the nation-state remains the main context for integration. The emphasis is on racial and ethnic equality and on enabling minorities to publicly challenge negative stereotypes, promoting self-definition, and securing institutional accommodations (Modood, 2005). A significant percentage of Belleville's population comes from immigrant backgrounds, and many residents live in social housing. Thus, practices of multiculturalism are evident across the neighbourhood, especially in communal public spaces near housing. As visiting researchers, we often observed groups of people engaging in ethnic-cultural festivals that included food sharing and other communal activities. These gatherings function not only as expressions of cultural identity but also as collective strategies for negotiating marginalization and reinforcing social support networks. Applied to public space, multiculturalism privileges cultural visibility and anti-discrimination but sometimes assumes that the political community is territorially fixed and democratically inclusive. This assumption might exclude undocumented or transient migrants whose legal precarity limits their access to formal recognition.

Interculturalism frames integration as a citizenship-making process that fosters connections among people from diverse backgrounds - including nationals - to achieve a cohesive society. A key outcome, and interculturalism's raison d'être, is the formation of a new public citizenship identity: a "culture of diversity" that promotes awareness, recognition, participation, and representation while encouraging the creation of shared public spaces (Zapata-Barrero, 2019). Due to Belleville's immigrant history, local government has supported the growth of numerous cultural associations, with policies such as the "contrats de ville," which allow public service organizations to rent municipal spaces at low cost. These associations reflect both genuine and state-incentivized interculturalism. An example is CIP 20, a collective kitchen run by women from diverse backgrounds that provides mutual aid across the city (Figure 4). Such initiatives demonstrate how intercultural infrastructures can also operate not simply as Low and Iveson's "co-presence" (described above), but as spaces of care and support that mitigate social and economic precarity. Yet while interculturalism emphasizes interaction and encounter, such interactions rarely unfold on equal terms. When looking through this framework alone, observers might overlook a symmetry of power between groups.

[2] The HERA-funded PLURISPACE project was led by Riva Kastoryano (France) in collaboration with Tariq Modood (UK), John Erik Fossum (Norway), and Rikard Zapata-Barrero (Spain).



Figure 5. Belleville Market, June 2022. Photo by Jilly Traganou.

Transnationalism recognizes the multiple links and affiliations that connect migrants across borders, emphasizing solidarities that extend within the European space and between migrants' countries of settlement and origin. These transnational connections influence how public space is structured both within and beyond national and local boundaries, expanding notions of territorial, cultural, and political belonging (Kastoryano, 2007; Kastoryano, 2016). Belleville's renowned ethnic markets, largely run by immigrants, attract visitors from across Paris, including former residents and their descendants (Figure 5). Many goods are sourced through transnational networks, with the markets offering ethnic foods - Asian vegetables, Middle Eastern spices - as well as cultural items, such as Muslim pilgrimage objects. Market activity also fosters intercultural encounters: During our observations, we met Rami, fundraising for a Sufi Mosque back in his native Dakar, and François (known locally as "the fool"), who sparked exchanges with passersby while creating chalk drawings of the Qur'an's Surah 101 on the pavement of Place de Ménilmontant (Figure 6). These encounters illustrate how transnational networks intersect with everyday urban practices, often contributing to informal infrastructures that sustain migrants navigating uncertain economic and legal conditions.

Cosmopolitanism, through its universal moral claims, challenges democracy's reliance on a bounded political community (Fossum and Olsen, 2022), resulting in various expressions on the ground. Belleville's ethos of solidarity and rebellion is rooted in its history as a

stronghold of the Paris Commune. This legacy endures in commemorative statues, leftist bookstores, murals, and ongoing demonstrations for progressive causes. During the pandemic, mutual aid efforts such as the Soupes embodied this ethos, serving as "space[s] of representation… in which particular groups and individuals can make themselves visible" (Figure 3). Characteristic of what Fuyuki Kurasawa terms "cosmopolitanism from below" (2004, p. 241), these efforts emerged through informal urban interactions and spontaneous solidarities among residents and newcomers. Unlike institutional cosmopolitanism, this version was enacted by grassroots actors in the absence of state support, forming "a loose constellation of 'subaltern counterpublics'" (Kurasawa 2004, p. 235). These practices blurred the boundaries between public and private spaces - an everyday condition for those living on the margins - while shifting the focus from demands for recognition or redistribution by those in power toward the self-managed prefiguration of alternative social relations and infrastructures of care.
In our research, these four-isms were treated not as abstract typologies but as interpretive lenses - heuristic devices structuring the research design and guiding field inquiry. They functioned also as methodological prompts that shaped where our attention was directed, shaping site selection and interview choices, while our empirical engagement made visible and tested the -isms' assumptions and limits.



Figure 6. Chalk drawing in Ménilmontant Square, April 2021. Photo by Adèle Madeux.

2.2 Design-Led Ethnographic Study

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space (1991), our team focused on lived space: embodied practices, affective encounters, and informal trajectories that structure everyday urban experience. This focus aligned with design-ethnographic traditions (Pink, 2015) and with a design justice orientation attentive to "who might be harmed" by public space policies or transformations (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 24). The methodology reflected a cross-disciplinary integration of design-led mapping practices with a dual attention to material and embodied experience on the one hand, and sociological interest in institutions, regulations, and governance structures on the other. Fieldwork was conducted over multiple observation periods between 2021 and 2024, combined with desk research, policy analysis, and collaborative critical cartography that led to new research questions and research reframing. Our ethnographic study of Belleville adopted a mixed-methods approach combining sensory ethnography, long-form semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and an experimental technique we termed "narrative cartography." The research team began mapping Belleville from the onset, treating cartography not simply as an output but as a heuristic mode of inquiry that both shaped and was shaped by the fieldwork process.

Interviewees were selected through a snowball sampling strategy, in an effort to capture differentiated experiences of public space under current and past conditions of mobility, precarity, and housing insecurity. The sample included approximately 25 interlocutors with various experiences: migrant, unhoused, current and former residents, participants in voluntary associations, employees or owners of local establishments, artists with studios in the area, and street artists. Participants were identified through field-based engagement in mutual aid sites, neighbourhood enterprises, and general public spaces in Belleville.

Our analytical procedure followed abductive logic, moving between field materials (interviews, sensory notes, mapping exercises) and the conceptual frameworks structuring the study, attempting to ground-truth the four -isms and test their limitations. Rather than applying a predefined coding scheme, we cross-read data against the four -isms and inscribed it in our emerging cartography, leading to new questions and eventual categorization across three interrelated scales: micro, meso, and macro. This allowed for empirical observations that both informed and revised the interpretive relevance of each framework, producing an iterative feedback loop of fieldwork, cartographic translation, and theorization.

Given the engagement with undocumented and precariously housed participants, the study followed a relational ethics approach emphasizing ongoing verbal consent, use of pseudonyms or anonymization where requested, and the omission of sensitive locational data that could expose individuals or informal infrastructures to policing or displacement. The study focused on how situated trajectories reveal broader structural spatial and governance dynamics that may resonate across other contexts of precarity, avoiding statistical generalization.

Our research team acknowledged the colonial histories of cartography, its capacity to flatten difference and temporalities, and its potential to expose hidden populations. For this reason, we made an ethically motivated decision not to visualize sensitive informal infrastructures or hidden sites that could endanger migrants during the pandemic lockdown period, thus refusing to employ extractive or risk-producing forms of representation.

2.3 Multi-scalar Empirical Findings

Micro / Embodied Encounters

At the micro-level, we encountered Belleville through sensory experience-sounds of the market, traces of prior gatherings, signage, chalk drawings, and spontaneous interactions in spaces such as Place de Ménilmontant and the Soupes kitchen. These encounters indicated that rather than a sphere of deliberation and exchange, public space was a site of social reproduction, a space of survival, sustenance, shelter, care, and informal work. Our field research noted shifting norms and rhythms of public space usage during the lockdown, particularly the stark contrast between empty commercial streets and the persistent presence of unhoused, undocumented, or otherwise precarious migrants in mutual aid places and spaces of transnational exchange such as the Belleville market.

Meso / Associational Structures



Figure 7. Poster in the streets of Belleville, April 2021. Photo by Adèle Madeux.

The meso-level focused on formal and informal organizations operating in and around Belleville that highlighted the uneven geographies of urban upkeep noted above by Low and Iveson as essential elements of care and repair justice. Signs posted in windows and on walls - announcing cultural associations, social services, political debates - were read as markers of an active public sphere, albeit partially hidden from view due to pandemic-related restrictive policies. Intercultural local associations such as CIP 20, despite

temporarily suspending certain activities, continued to operate behind the scenes, distributing meals and sustaining intercultural networks. Street posters, including those responding to the high-profile murder case involving an elderly Jewish woman, revealed deep tensions and competing visions of multiculturalism in the neighbourhood (Figure 7).

Macro / Trajectorial Narratives

The macro-level encompassed the multisited trajectories of migrants whose transnational exchanges and movements extended far beyond Belleville's boundaries, exposing the unequal allocation of access, an important aspect in Low and Iveson's distributive justice framework. Ahmed's cognitive maps revealed networks of formal and informal gathering sites, social services points, and infrastructures of both mobility and exclusion across and beyond Paris, highlighting a spatialized system of survival and its obstacles that could not be captured by neighbourhood-level assessments alone (Figures 1 and 2). These narratives showed that Belleville is part of a constellation of spaces across Paris, France, and transnational routes in Europe and elsewhere.

2.4 A Migrant's Narrative

Ahmed - a Moroccan-born, undocumented, unhoused man in his fifties - played a central role in shaping the study's micro-, meso-, and macro-scalar insights. Our research team member Adèle first met Ahmed while volunteering at the Soupes kitchen, where he described his daily routine, sleeping sites, hygiene practices, and social networks, as well as associations that he and his network relied upon and transnational movements across Turkey, Greece, Albania, countries of the former Yugoslavia during 1990s war, Switzerland and Italy before his arrival to Paris in 2021.

Ahmed's stories were accompanied by two hand-drawn homologous maps: one showing his daily route between his sleeping spot in Paris's northern suburbs and Belleville, and another logging his journey across Northern Africa and Europe. Ahmed described this years-long journey as a process of "walking, walking, walking… sometimes 35 kilometres a day," relying on mosques, fields, and various support networks for food and shelter (Figures 1 and 2).

In Paris, Ahmed's network included sites such as some of the 115 emergency shelters; public baths; the Poissonniers mosque; and spaces of solidarity such as La Chapelle, a gathering area for people on the move in Paris. Ahmed's daily and weekly trajectory - from sleeping in a box, to washing in municipal baths, to eating at Soupes in Belleville, to circulating by bus at night - appears at first glance as a series of disconnected public spaces. Yet Ahmed's narrative highlighted vulnerabilities, and his trajectories offered a ground-level view of public space as a survival and solidarity infrastructure rather than a civic amenity.

While Ahmed's narrative plays a prominent role in our analysis, it is not treated as a representative case but instead as an expression of spatial experiences observed across multiple interlocutors and sites. His trajectory makes legible multi-scalar patterns of displacement, access, and informal urban support.

2.5 Research Insights

Cosmopolitanism from Below and Pandemic Solidarities

The Belleville research revealed how grassroots solidarities sustained migrant life during the pandemic, capturing Kurasawa's cosmopolitanism from below. At a time when

formal institutions retreated, new and continuing mutual aid initiatives transformed open areas, storefronts, and sidewalks into essential infrastructures of care. The Soupes was one such crisis-response solidarity project, established in September 2020 to confront the increased inequalities resulting from the pandemic. Initiated by Pilote, a business owner who decided to convert his bar into a soup kitchen to provide mutual aid for the unhoused, the Soupes brought together people from different immigration backgrounds with messages like "You are beautiful" and "Love is my religion." These practices contrasted sharply with institutional cosmopolitanism, demonstrating that cross-cultural solidarity emerges most robustly through everyday material practices rather than abstract moral universalism.

The pandemic thus made visible the limits of state authorities' capacity to protect vulnerable subjects whose lives unfold in public spaces. Like other places in Paris, Belleville's plazas and markets appeared "empty" from the majority perspective of the average citizen, as most people had withdrawn into their home for fear of contamination, yet several public spaces were still densely inhabited by those who lacked protections. At the same time, our Belleville research exposed the limits of current public space frameworks, which prioritize recognition, dialogue, and shared civic culture without tackling the profound inequalities shaping migrant experience, by revealing an expansive network of public spaces that function in tandem as an infrastructure of solidarity sustained by community members rather than public authorities.

From Multicultural Neighbourhood to Trans-scalar Structures of Exception

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered humanitarian and policy deficits across the world that in many cases were not previously foregrounded. During this period, Belleville's public space emerged as part of a trans-scalar terrain, shaped by border policies and administrative precarity. The research taught us that Belleville was never just a multicultural residential neighbourhood, but part of a dispersed geography of survival that sprawled across metro lines, peripheral parks, municipal baths, soup kitchens, mosques, and improvised sleeping sites in the city's dispersed public spaces. The urban fabric captured what Doreen Massey has described as place "constructed on a far larger scale … which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world" (1991, p. 28) - a relational production of place always in motion, always under construction.

The Belleville research also highlighted an urbanism structured by the governance of exception. Migrants navigated spaces according to shifting conditions of tolerance: They were allowed to sleep in certain peripheral parks and not others. They rode buses to avoid police encounters or unsafe conditions. The enforcement of rules varied spatially and temporally. A park that tolerated informal gathering in the afternoon might be aggressively policed at night, bus lines were coded as dangerous or safe depending on police rotations, and so on. Migrants held in their head maps based on their experiences of various places and on word-of-mouth communications with each other that were constantly updated and that redirected their moves.

This precarious experience echoed what Ananya Roy (2005) identifies as the production of informality by the state itself: the "planning of unplanning," where certain populations are subject to neglect or criminalization. For migrants in Paris, these exceptions extended far beyond Belleville. Their routes into the city had already been shaped by

the Schengen regime, asylum bottlenecks in Italy and Greece, the reality of deportation, and adverse conditions at home that pushed them to migration. Belleville's streets intersected municipal policies, national asylum laws, European Union border regimes, and global migration networks. A police patrol enforcing a municipal order, for example, might be responding to a national anti-camping regulation shaped by EU-level asylum reforms.

Mitrašinović and Mehta (2021) have argued that public spaces emerge from multilevel governance, and public space in Belleville is one of the numerous outcomes of such intersections. Evaluation of public space must therefore follow routes and structures of exception, while being attentive to multiple scales of governance that affect mobilities between public spaces and across borders.

2.6 Multisited Narrative Cartography: Re-imagining Belleville's Boundaries

Using Belleville's public space as a portal to the broader spatial experience of migrants, our purpose was not to capture the myriad itineraries that intersect in its territory but to recognize a (dis)continuum of space access and policy. The maps capture and intersect key aspects of the inquiry outlined above - manifestations of the four normative concepts; embodied, associational, and trajectorial layers of the research findings; and storytelling and cognitive mapping by Ahmed.

The first map (Figure 8) is an axonometric depiction of Belleville, marking a web of key immigrant spaces of civil society and public provision as identified through our fieldwork: the Soupes, community kitchens and other immigrant-led associations, Belleville's park, the street market, and social housing sites. We selected these map locations through both our micro-/meso-/macro-scale sense-making in Belleville's public spaces and the ground-truthing of -isms. These are public sites of encounter, marginality, and negotiation, shaped by intersecting local and global forces, national policies, and cosmopolitanism from below which emerged more forcefully during a time of heightened vulnerability and systemic state withdrawal.

The second map (Figure 9) situates Ahmed within a broader mosaic map of Paris based on his own narrative. Echoing the Situationist dérive, the map traces Ahmed's daily circulation and broader psycho-geographical experience across Paris: where he sleeps, bathes, stores his belongings, eats, and socializes. Belleville appears as one node in a network of spaces in Paris shaped by structures of exception and unequal access to essential life resources.

The third map (Figure 10) zooms out of Paris and France, offering a bird's-eye view of the broader geography of Ahmed's transnational trajectory as it emerged from his storytelling. From North Africa to Southern Europe, the Balkans, and France, Ahmed's journey is not a linear path from A to Z but rather a zigzagging itinerary shaped by transnational border regimes, deportation, and asymmetrical possibilities of passage.

As much as Belleville is a bounded area of exception, distinct from the rest of Paris, it is also part of a multisited spatial reality, connected to various locations in Paris and outside of France, bringing together disparate trajectories that unfold beyond its immediate boundaries.

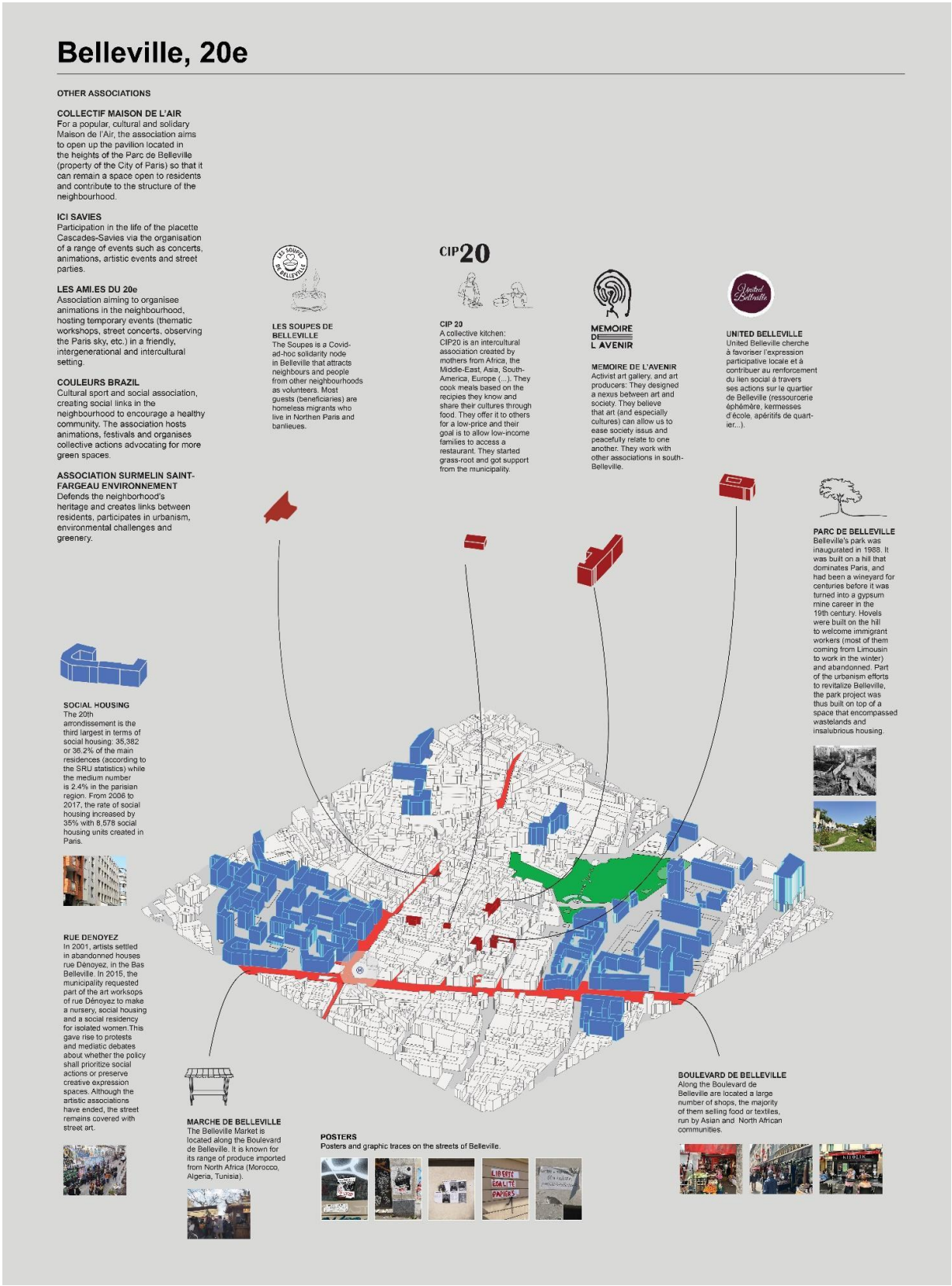


Figure 8. Belleville and its major public and civil society spaces and Institutions, 2021. Map drawn by Dalia Amellal.

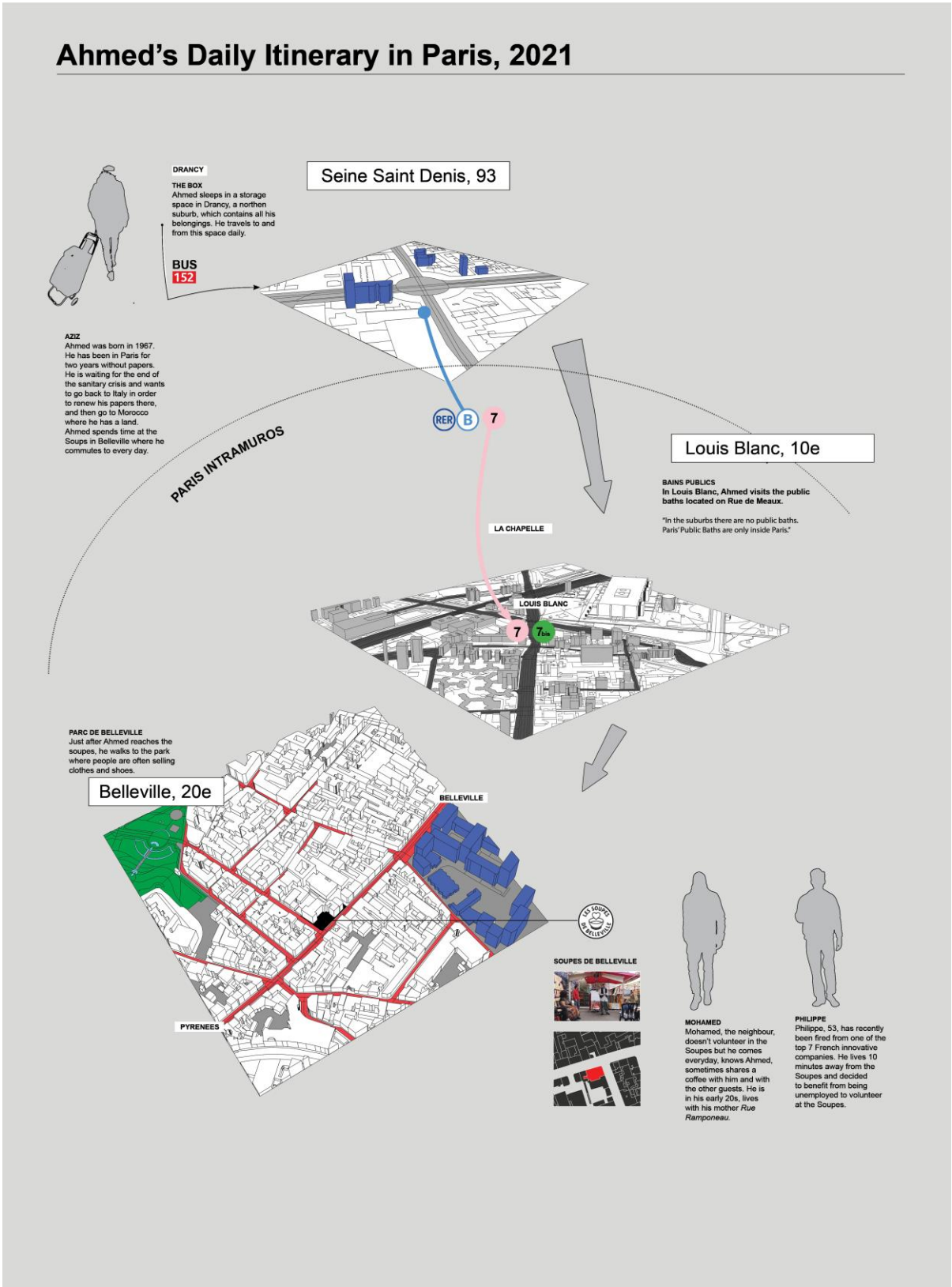


Figure 9. Ahmed's daily itinerary through public spaces in Paris, as described in April 2021. Map drawn by Dalia Amellal.

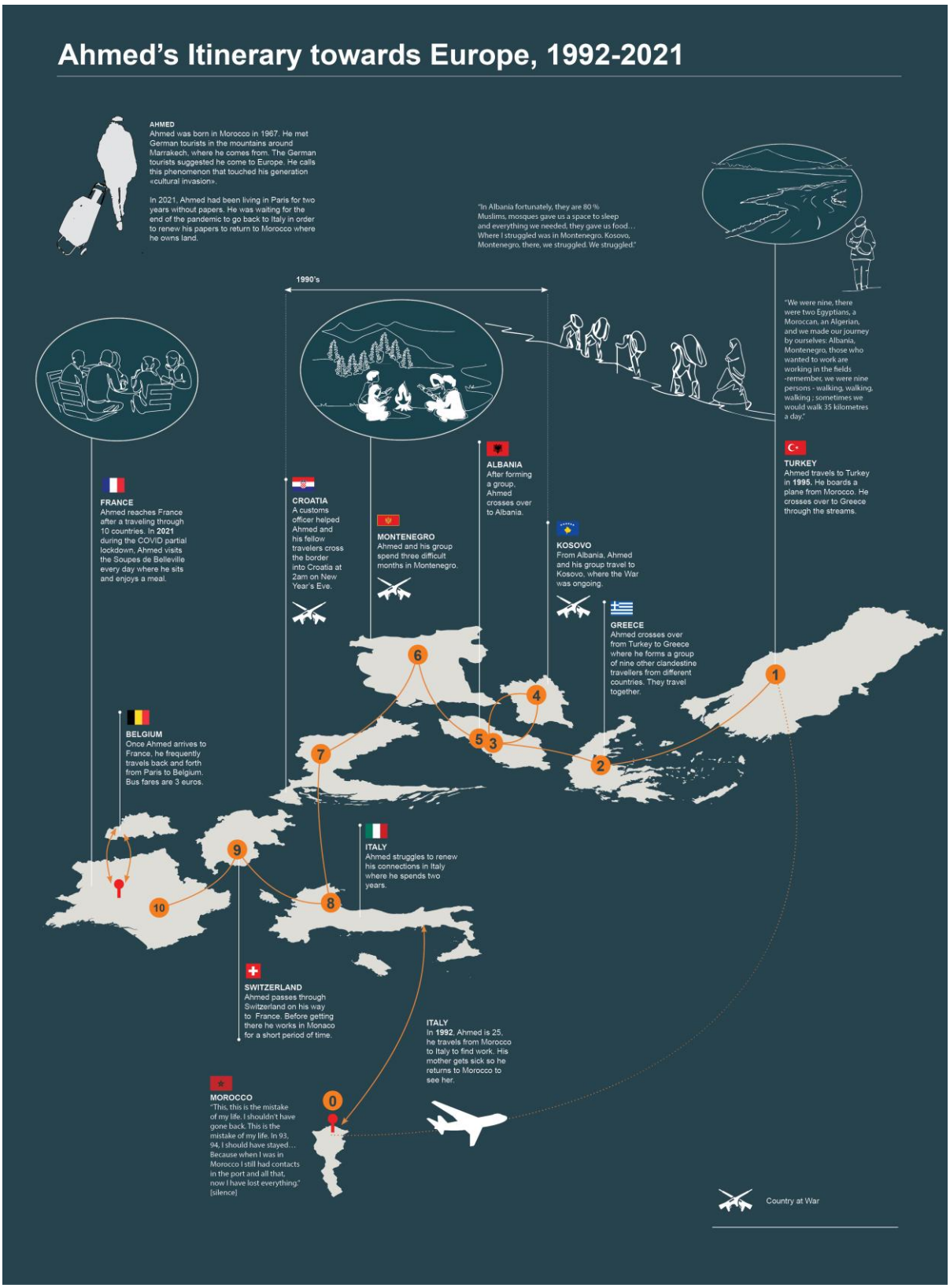


Figure 10. Ahmed's immigration itinerary from Marrakesh to Paris, 1999-2021.
Map drawn by Dalia Amellal.

Rather than generating universal scores, our narrative cartography endeavours to produce situated inscriptions capable of informing planners, mutual aid organizations, public health agencies, and migration policymakers about the uneven operation of public spaces and the trans-scalar realities that affect them and are affected by them. This study can help identify infrastructural gaps, mobility barriers, and governance fragmentation in an effort to support more equitable and coordinated arrangements of public space.

3. Conclusion: Toward a Multisited and Plurispatial Evaluation of Public Space

This paper argues that public space evaluation must be fundamentally rethought if it is to account for structural inequality and the embodied experiences of those most affected by differentiated conditions of citizenship. Vulnerability-centred evaluation converges around the principle that justice is best assessed through its effects on those whose lives are most exposed to legal precarity, bodily risk, and exclusionary governance. Thus, the paper proposes a shift from site-based, aggregate models toward a trajectory-oriented approach. This shift requires understanding public space as multisited and plurispatial, shaped by overlapping normative logics of migration and belonging. Building on existing evaluative approaches, this framework does not discard established criteria such as accessibility, safety, or participation, but perceives them as situated and contested.

While grounded in the Belleville case, our evaluative framework is adaptable across a variety of urban contexts (Table 1). It proposes a method that can be recalibrated according to various spatial, political, and institutional conditions. The following protocol summarizes how this framework engages empirical material across four interconnected layers of inquiry:

1) It identifies **exposure events** - here, the pandemic - as moments when vulnerability is intensified through displacement, policing, infrastructural withdrawal, environmental risk, or episodes of controversy (Yaneva, 2012). Such events serve as entry points for research and, ideally, can be identified before a crisis fully unfolds.
2) It examines **nodes** - here, Belleville - understood as public spaces that support everyday survival and social reproduction. These sites become focal points for fieldwork, generating diverse forms of evidence, including sensory ethnography, participant observation, collaborative mapping, and semi-structured interviews.
3) It traces **trans-scalar trajectories** - here, Ahmed's - through interviews and participant-drawn maps, focusing on the routes through which vulnerable individuals navigate border regimes and public-space networks to access vital conditions for life, including sustenance, shelter, hygiene, care, income, and social relations.
4) It considers **governance structures -** here, those related to migration - as institutional, legal, and spatial arrangements that regulate mobility, belonging, and access across multiple scales, paying particular attention to exceptions, gaps, and inconsistencies.

Table 1. Multisited and Plurispatial Public Space Evaluation Protocol. Developed by Jilly Traganou, Riva Kastoryano, Dalia Amellal, Adèle Madeux

Multisited and Plurispatial Public Space Evaluation Protocol

Layer of inquiry	***Focus***	***Data Inputs***	***Analytic Procedure***	***Outputs***
Exposure Events	Identify moments where vulnerability intensifies through displacement, policing, infrastructural withdrawal, or environmental risk, before crisis	Policy documents, field observation, interviews, regulations	Trace how controversy or crisis reorganizes access, visibility, and mobility across public spaces	Identification of risk conditions and governance failures
Nodes	Locate public spaces sustaining survival, encounter, and social reproduction	Sensory ethnography, participant observation, collaborative mapping	Analyze how spaces function as infrastructures of care, exclusion, intercultural interaction, or solidarity	Maps of solidarity infrastructures, civil society and public-sector actors; Spatial identification of missing critical infrastructures
Trajectories	Trace trans-scalar routes through which vulnerable subjects access shelter, food, hygiene, care, work, and social networks	Narrative interviews, participant-drawn maps, embodied observation	Understand mobility and immobility across multiple sites and scales in a given city/country, including transnational routes and informal support systems	Mobility maps, infrastructural gaps, barriers to access
Governance Structures	Examine institutional, legal, and policy frameworks regulating migration, mobility, and public space access	Migration policy analytical data, municipal regulations, NGO practices, field data	Cross-read empirical findings against four overlapping normative frameworks: multiculturalism (recognition), interculturalism (interaction), transnationalism (cross-border networks), and cosmopolitanism (solidarity beyond national frameworks)	Identification of fragmented governance, differential recognition, and uneven rights regimes
Cross-scalar Synthesis	Integrate empirical and critical cartographic findings into evaluative claims	Combined field materials and interdisciplinary interpretation	Abductive and iterative synthesis between mapping, theory, and fieldwork, allowing empirical findings to test and revise the relevance of the four "-isms" in public space networks	Narrative cartographies, policy implications, and recommendations for planners, NGOs, and public agencies

Our particular focus on migration was guided by **four overlapping normative frameworks**: multiculturalism, foregrounding recognition and the visibility of difference; interculturalism, emphasizing interaction and the production of shared civic cultures; transnationalism, extending the spatial field beyond the nation-state through networks, flows, and diasporic attachments; and cosmopolitanism (particularly in its vernacular "from below" form), articulating ethical and material practices of solidarity that exceed national institutional frameworks. While each of these four -isms captures a partial dimension of this condition, their intersection reveals the full complexity of public space.

Our reconceptualization strengthens the connection between spatial analysis and policy. As Schneider and Ingram have shown, policy design constructs target populations through processes of inclusion and exclusion that are inherently political (1993). The four -isms express distinct policy imaginaries that shape these constructions, each producing different configurations of deservingness and undeservingness, of visibility and invisibility. A plurispatial and multisited evaluative framework allows for a critical assessment of how such policies materialize in space and how they might be reoriented toward greater equity.

Our evaluation approach is both informed by and manifested in **narrative cartography** that inscribes routes, traces exposures to risk, and identifies conditions of exception across municipal, national, and transnational scales. Developed as a multistage interpretive mapping method, narrative cartography combined our various findings, generated new research questions that prompted research reframing, and synthesized insights into spatial diagrams that move beyond the scale of a singular public space to emphasize broader field dynamics. In the Belleville project, narrative cartography functioned not only as a heuristic research tool but also as a carefully designed research outcome with attention to how spatial knowledge is visually constructed and communicated. We recognize, however, that future evaluation teams may choose to employ narrative cartography primarily during the research process rather than as part of the final output.

Last, this evaluation paradigm demands a reconfiguration of expertise. Evaluation teams should include representatives of community associations and mutual aid groups who have deep knowledge of local and trans-local needs and informal infrastructures, as well as interdisciplinary research teams that combine design, ethnographic, and quantitative research methodologies. Furthermore, these teams should work across institutional silos and connect municipal agencies, from urban planning and transportation to social services and public health. They should extend collaboration across national, regional, and transnational policymakers and organizations that relate with migration and public space governance at different scales.

Yet, together with Miriam Ticktin, we should remain alert to the "feeling of control in those who care for the 'innocent,'" which creates a "class of saviours" (2020, n.p.). Thus, above all, evaluating teams should give "voice and power" to migrants themselves, as the "experts of lived space," whose trajectories form the basis of evaluation - a necessary component for establishing procedural justice.

This framework's novelty lies in bringing together insights from critical urban theory and migration policy studies and applying them to public space evaluation through the development of a mixed-methods qualitative framework. In doing so, it advocates for a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to understanding how public space participates

in both the production and the potential mitigation of structural harm. Integrating multisited narrative cartography with a plurispace perspective, the framework reorients public space evaluation toward questions of justice, suggesting that it is necessary to comprehend migrant trajectories, multilevel governance, and regimes of exceptionality not only in a certain city or country, but also across borders. Such an approach hopes to offer a more adequate account of the contemporary planetary urban realities of migration and exclusion, and to provide a foundation for more equitable and politically responsible public space governance and design across borders.

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