

Research Days 23-25 June 2026

How Can Places Support Mental Health and Community Connection ?

Hoover Seed Fund

With the ELMaC research group and IRSS,
UCLouvain



To register, please send an email to valerie.vanbutsele@uclouvain.be and let us know when you will be attending

Brief Program

June 23, 2026, from 6 to 9 p.m.

Friendly get-together at Tram{e}, a bookstore, gallery, and grocery store that brings people together, <https://trame.brussels>

- ~ Finger food spread
- ~ Why are places for connection and alternative spaces multiplying so rapidly? Open discussion!
- ~ Introduction of the book *Rencontres avec les Lieux de liens: santé mentale, recherche et cinéma*, by **Sophie Thunus**, **Alain Loute**, and the members of the Collectif La Bienvenue
- ~ Screening of the film *La Bienvenue*, directed by Maya Duverdier et Joe Rohanne

June 24, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

First research day at the Health & Society Research Institute, Room 447

https://maps.app.goo.gl/e4u1C4vGTBdd3Vbw5?g_st=ic

~ From 9 to 9:30 am

Welcome

~ From 9:30 to 11 am

Introduction: How Can Places Support Mental Health and Community Connection?

Sophie Thunus and **Alain Loute**, IRSS, ELMaC, UCLouvain

~ 30 minutes break

~ From 11:30 to 12:30 am

Un/Learning During Ruptures: Researching Transformative Organizations

Katherine Chen, The City College of New York and Graduate Center, City University of New York

~ Lunch time

~ From 1:30 to 2:30 pm

Designing Thresholds as Commons: Care as the Starting Point for Spatial Conception

Chloé Salembier, Uses&Spaces, LOCI/LAB, UCLouvain

~ From 2:30 to 3:30 pm

Being Out of One's Mind. Bodies, Mental Illness, and Public Space

Elisabetta Cinzia Rosa, LOCI, UCLouvain

June 25, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Second research day at the Health & Society Research Institute, Room 447

~ From 9 to 9:30 am

Welcome

~ From 9:30 to 10:30 am

Economically sustainable Placemaking: Single Site and Community-Based

James Mandiberg, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York

~ 30 minutes break

~ From 11 to 12 am

Renovations in Public Life: Exploring the Everyday Re-Creation of Community Spaces

Shawn Bodden, University of Edinburgh

~ Lunch time

~ From 1 to 2:30 pm

Flanders Court-watch: Drawing Attention to Courtroom Media and Methods

Kelli Moore, NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

~ From 2 to 3:30 pm

Group discussion: What role do places play in our research?

From 7 to 9 pm

For speakers and members of the ELMaC and La Bienvenue groups, dinner at a surprise venue, a liminal space between the city and nature.

Full Programme



Abstract

During these two days of research, we will focus on **community places and spaces** from the perspective of their **spatial, material, and organizational arrangements**.

Where are they located and what kinds of settings do they offer?

How are they connected to public space?

What other places do they interact with?

How do people access these places and how do they function?

Are they designed primarily for professionals and specific uses, or are they responsive to a variety of users?

How are these places emancipatory or "capacitating" environments (Pierron, 2014)?

Do they provide or mediate care limited to health, or do they support attention and responsiveness to others and to the environment (Tronto, 2010, 2020)?

Combining different theoretical perspectives from **public health, philosophy, human geography, architecture, urban planning, sociology, and organizational psychology**, we propose to explore a series of places, including **established community spaces, protest spaces, ephemeral spaces, and emerging public spaces**.

Specifically, we aim to examine the relationships among the spatial, material, and organizational designs of these places and their societal functions. These include not only those explicitly related to their primary missions (particularly in mental health, culture, and education), but also more informal or emerging roles. These roles may afford **social cohesion and inclusion** in contexts invigorated by increasing social and cultural diversity, as well as perceived growing social isolation problems.

This project originates from a series of research projects on mental health in Belgium and collaborations with researchers in the New York City.

Belgium's mental health field underwent several deinstitutionalization policies in recent decades. These gave people options besides psychiatric hospitals, which have been criticized for physically and symbolically segregating people with mental health issues from the rest of society.

New services have emerged alongside older ones, including community mental health services, sheltered housing initiatives, psychiatric care homes, and mobile psychiatric teams that provide home-based care.

Unlike psychiatric hospitals, which are often difficult to access due to their location on the outskirts of cities, these facilities are located in the heart of the city, close to where people live and work.

Like deinstitutionalization policies elsewhere in the world, these new facilities have made it possible to relocate where mental healthcare is

offered and reduce the number of psychiatric beds in Belgium.

However, is relocating these facilities within the city, into the social fabric, sufficient to enhance the social inclusion of people with mental health problems?

In other words, *does relocation alone re-spatialize, or assemble, a new carescape* (Ivanova et al., 2016) *encompassing different types of relationships, knowledge, and power divisions* (Poland et al., 2005) ?

Furthermore, have these new facilities been considered within a broader *landscape* (Milligan, 2003), composed of other care and social spaces where mental health may still be stigmatized?

Studies in the United States and Europe have revealed that the implementation of *deinstitutionalization policies has not addressed the issue of exclusion, social isolation, and marginalization of individuals with mental health issues* (Mandiberg, 2012; Thunus et al., 2019).

One reason cited is the inadequacy of community resources available to support people outside of hospitals. Another reason is the lack of collaboration and coordination between these resources and psychiatric hospitals (Nicaise et al., 2021; Thunus et al., 2019).

But *the issue of place*, i.e. the physical, social, and temporal organization of space, has received little attention in recent studies on deinstitutionalization. Nevertheless, pioneering work such as that of *Foucault and Goffman* on asylums (1961), or that of psychiatrists in the field of *institutional psychotherapy* (cf. Robscis, 2024), has problematized the *link between the spatial and temporal arrangement of psychiatric institutions and the processes of mental and social alienation* observed therein.

Our recent research in the field of mental health documents the development and use of alternative community spaces, known as *"places for connection"*, where spatial, material, and organizational dimensions appear to influence the experience of their members, who are persons with lived experience (Thunus & Zabeau, 2024).

This has raised the questions presented at the beginning of this text, as well as other more specific ones, such as:

What physical and symbolic thresholds must be crossed to access these places?

What kinds of mobility do these places support? How are they connected to other public spaces, such as green spaces?

How can members contribute to the creation of these places? Can they bring objects or rearrange the interiors? Can they initiate activities?

What meaning do members give to these places? Do they see them as more of a "home" (Launay & Loute, 2023), or as social and cultural spaces, such as cafés or meeting places (Thunus et al., 2025)?

The observations and questions gathered here have fueled our project to bring together an international and multidisciplinary group of researchers to initiate a joint theoretical and methodological reflection on community spaces and the roles they play for their members and in society.

Annotated program

June 24, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

First research day at the Health & Society Research Institute, Room 447

On the first day, *Sophie Thunus and Alain Loute*, IRSS, ELMaC, UCLouvain, will return to the emergence of the issue of place in the context of research on deinstitutionalization policies in the field of mental health.

To prepare, they suggest reading:

Thunus, Sophie, Chen, Katherine K., & Mandiberg, James M. (2026). "Placemaking Borderlands: How Organizations Can Support Emancipatory Inclusion". *Journal of Change Management*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2026.2651524>

Launay, Pauline et Loute, Alain (2023). "Soigner la fin de vie (comme) à la maison: une nouvelle domestication des subjectivités?", *Cahiers François Viète*, III-15 <https://doi.org/10.4000/cahierscfv.4426>

Katherine Chen, The City College of New York and Graduate Center, CUNY, will address the organizational dimensions and practices underlying places that are oriented towards relationship building and social change and how to study these.

To prepare, she suggests reading:

Chen, Katherine K. and James M. Mandiberg. 2024. "Legitimizing Organizations via Research: Facilitating Possibilities through the Study of Relational, Emergent, Transformative, and Change-Oriented Organizations (RETCOs)." *Public Integrity* 26(3): 260-373.

Chen, Katherine K. 2022. "Learning how to be a Scyborg: How prefigurative organizations can promote capacity to decolonialize organizations." *Voluntary Sector Review* 13(1): 117-133.
<https://doi.org/10.1332/204080521X16346541850357>

In the early afternoon, **Chloé Salembier**, Uses&Spaces, LOCI-LAB, UCLouvain, will introduce the thresholds of care. Her talk reimagines thresholds as collective spaces where care work's hidden labor becomes visible. Drawing on "the personal is political", it exposes how housing's privatization reinforces gendered, racial and class-based hierarchies. By centering care as a design principle, it proposes reclaiming intermediate spaces as commons: site where dependency and vulnerability are not a burden, but a foundation to build the community.

To prepare, she suggests reading:

Hayden, D. (1980). "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work." *Signs*, 5(3), S170-S187.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173814>

Vestbro, D. U., & Horelli, L. (2012). "Design for gender equality - the history of cohousing ideas and realities". *Built Environment*, 38, 315-335.

Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of Capital and Care. *New Left Review*, 11(100), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.64590/nt2>

Next, **Elisabetta Cinzia Rosa** (LOCI, UCLouvain) will focus on urban public spaces and how they affect (or do not affect) mental health, examining concepts such as "therapeutic" or "healing landscapes" as well as "existential territories", and questioning the relationship between space, body and mental illness when being "outside".

To prepare, she suggests reading:

Curtis S. 2016. "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano? Introduction to Geographical Perspective on Health for the Mind and the Body". In Curtis S., *Space, Place and Mental Health*. Routledge (pp. 16-58).

Rose N., Fitzgerald D. 2022. "Another Urban Biopolitics is Possible". In Rose N., Fitzgerald D., *The Urban Brain. Mental Health in the Vital City*. Princeton University Press (pp. 176-199).

June 25, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Second research day at the Health & Society Research Institute, Room 447

The second day will begin with presentations focusing on the concept of community and the links between communities that claim to be different, or to operate differently, and the roles they play in specific sectors and in society.

First, **James Mandiberg**, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, will introduce an approach to community-level placemaking – the community and economic development of identity communities of stigmatized, service-dependent populations, illustrated with *proof-of-concept* research examples in mental health, aging, and intellectual & developmental disabilities. He will argue that integrating economic development with community and social development is critical to creating sustainable community opportunities for such excluded populations.

To prepare, he suggests reading:

Mandiberg, James M. (2010). "Another way: Enclave communities for people with mental illness." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80(2), 167-173.

Mandiberg, James M. (2012). "The Failure of Social Inclusion: An Alternative Approach through Community Development." *Psychiatric Services*, 63(5), 458-460.

Mandiberg, James M. & Edwards, M. (2013). "Collective identity formation in the Mental Health Clubhouse Community". *International Journal of Self-Help and Self-Care* (Special Issue on Mental Health Clubhouses), 7(1), 19-39.

Next, **Shawn Bodden**, University of Edinburgh, will discuss the everyday political work of community spaces from an ethnographic perspective and examine space-making as a form of social learning. Shawn will devote part of his session to a participatory zine-making activity to facilitate methodological reflections on researching (with) community spaces, which

will lead us into the afternoon discussions and presentations.

To prepare, he suggests reading:

Bodden, Shawn. (2022). "A work-in-progress politics of space: Activist projects and the negotiation of throwntogetherness within the hostile environment of Hungarian politics". *City*, 26(2-3), 397-410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2022.2055930>

Bodden, Shawn. (2024). "Talking politics, doing theory". *Dialogues in Human Geography*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206241278734>

The afternoon methodology panel will begin with a contribution from **Kelli Moore**, NYU, on the subject of ethnographic observation practiced at Antwerp's Court of Assize and Court of First Instance.

To prepare, she suggests reading:

Jellema, P., Annemans, M., & Heylighen, A. (2023). "Drawing the researcher into data: drawing as an analytical tool in qualitative research". *Qualitative Research*, 23(5), 1398-1417.

Moore, K. (2025). "Striking Evidence: Counter-forensics of Courtroom Assemblies," *World Records Special Issue on Just Evidence*, <https://worldrecordsjournal.org/striking-evidence/>

This will be followed by an open discussion in which all the researchers around the table will be invited to talk about how places are integrated into their research.



Bios of the presenters

Alain Loute holds a PhD in philosophy, is Associate Professor of ethics at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and is a member of the Institute for Health and Society Research at UCLouvain. His research explores the technical and material mediations of care from an ethical and philosophical perspective.

Sophie Thunus holds a PhD in human and social sciences and is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Public Health and a member of the Health and Society Research at UCLouvain. Her research focuses on alternative forms of organization in the field of health and mental health and is based on innovative methods that combine, for example, research and cinema.

Katherine K. Chen is Professor of Sociology at The City College of New York and Graduate Center, CUNY. Besides chairing her department, she co-organizes network A “Community, Democracy, and Organizations” at the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics. Her publications include *Enabling creative chaos: The organization behind the Burning Man event* and *Organizational imaginaries: Tempering capitalism and tending to communities through cooperatives and collectivist democracy*.

Chloé Salembier is a social anthropologist and Professor at UCLouvain’s LOCI Faculty, where she explores the spatial dynamics of social inequalities through the *Uses&Spaces* lab. Her research links environmental crisis, housing precarity, and care deficits, analyzing how these shape—and are shaped by—gender, class, and race. Using qualitative methods, she studies housing as both a site of oppression and a space for social transformation. Her work bridges academia, public institutions, and civil society to advance spatial justice.

Elisabetta Rosa is Professor of urbanism at UCLouvain and a member of the LAB Institute. Her research engages with marginalised people, including Roma migrants and people experiencing homelessness, to question urban design and the un-inhabitability of the city. She is currently developing a new line of inquiry exploring the relationship between reparative urbanism and mental illness.

James M. Mandiberg is Professor of Management and Chair, Organizational Management & Leadership Program at Hunter College and Graduate Center, CUNY. Earlier, he managed deinstitutionalization programs in NYC and Los Angeles, a community-based mental health system for a large California County, and co-created the first Japanese subacute residential mental health program.

Shawn Bodden is Research Fellow and Community Research Lead in the University of Edinburgh’s Department of Sociology. His research investigates community spaces and their enrolment in political projects and social activism.

Kelli Moore is Associate Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University who writes media-histories about legal evidence. Her current ethnographic research in the Benelux region focuses on court-watching, examining the role of the courtroom audience—rather than juries and law professionals—in legal processes. This work builds upon an international archive of audience participation through innovative notation practices.

References

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