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Discovering the culture-led regenerative transformation of a city. Walter Benjamin as an inspiration for the Eco-Flâneur

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Walter Benjamin developed the idea of the flâneur in 'Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism'. He used the powerful figure of the flâneur, a familiar character in the nineteenth century, to analyze modernity. In this paper, a close reading of the literature on Walter Benjamin and the flâneur is provided with a highlight on its relevance for a critical reflection on sustainability for higher education in management. The concept of the flâneur is taken further to eco-flâneur, i.e., strollers as students and teachers who see what is happening and changing in the city and how street life is being transformed towards sustainability. As an eco-flâneur they do not only discover the regenerative transformation of a city, but also co-create it. The eco-flâneur is suggested as an alternative pedagogy to unite soul, eye and hand, three elements that are brought into connection by Walter Benjamin and that are vital for a sustainability mindset. The concept of the eco-flâneur is used as a metaphor to rethink education and to suggest ways for transformative learning.

KEYWORDS

Walter Benjamin, eco-flâneur, regenerative, cities, transformative learning, Brussels

Introduction

*Mein Flügel ist zum Schwung bereit,
ich kehrte gern zurück,
denn blieb ich auch lebendige Zeit,
ich hätte wenig Glück.*

(Gerhard Scholem, Gruss vom Angelus)

Greetings from Angelus was written by Walter Benjamin's close friend Gerhard Scholem (Hamburger, 1982). The poem takes a central role in Benjamin's essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, completed in 1940 and originally published in *Neue Rundschau* in 1950. It is the last essay in the volume *Illuminations* introduced by

Hannah Arendt in 1955. Writing private poetry was a long tradition between German philosophers. The aim was not to publish it, but just to send it to their intellectual friends (Constantine, 2018). The cover of the collection of Scholem's poetry, translated by Scholem (2018), is not by accident the *Angelus Novus*, an ink drawing by Paul Klee. This piece of art was bought by Walter Benjamin in 1921 and kept like a guardian angel (Farago, 2016; Jeffries, 2016; Sennett, 2018; Wolfe, 2020). When it was stuck in Berlin when Benjamin left Germany, it was brought to him in 1935. He could not take it with him while he had to flee Paris in 1940, trying to pass the France-Spain border. Benjamin tragically committed suicide to avoid arrest by the officers of Nazi-occupied France. Just before leaving Paris, his last writings and the angel were given to Georges Bataille who kept it safe until after the war. The writings were then passed on to Theodor Adorno and the *Angelus Novus* to Gerschom Scholem who took care of it throughout his lifetime. Scholem's widow finally granted it to the Israel Museum in 1987.

The *Angelus Novus* was an inspiration for Walter Benjamin and he called it his most precious possession (Farago, 2016). The angel does not look like the traditionally imagined angel: "The angel stands suspended like a dummy or a marionette in a mucky yellow field; his wings are grand but inadequate, and he seems trapped between forward and backward motion" (Farago, 2016). Or as Benjamin (1955), p. 249 described the angel: "His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." The angel is confronted with a storm, i.e., progress, that it cannot stop (De Joya, 2014). Walter Benjamin (1955), p. 251 invites to think in a critical way about dogmatic believe in progress: "... the progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society ...". The angel is in-between two worlds, between a god and human, between past and future, between world A and world B, between the world we are living in now and the world we have left. The angel is also a wake-up call that there can be more than only a contemplating of what happened in the past. Like De Joya (2014) asks: "Are we, like the angel, hurled into the future against our will?"

Despite numerous and competing interpretations (Hope, 2020), in this article we want to use the spirit of the *Angelus Novus* as a call for critical reflection about the state of our contemporary society. Can we resist the exploitation of nature and man for the sake of growth or are the piles of debris hiding a new society that rises from its ashes? Higher education in

management plays an important role in the current sustainability challenges. The urgency to come up with transformations in what and how universities teach and how they create knowledge is recognised. Transgressing boundaries between disciplines is needed, but rare within higher education in management. In this article, literature is combined with a course on sustainable management. The aim of the paper is to highlight the relevance of Walter Benjamin and the flâneur for opening up the curriculum and encouraging business and management students to observe what is happening around them, to discover the regenerative transformation of a city and to co-create it accordingly. The article is structured as follows. In the second section the relationship between Walter Benjamin and sustainability is described. Then the analysis will be made about the meaning of the flâneur for the concept of the eco-flâneur. In the fourth section the pedagogical value of the (eco-)flâneur is explained with an illustration for higher education in management in the fifth section.

Walter Benjamin and sustainability

Walter Benjamin has a lot to offer in relation to sustainability. His *Angelus Novus* can be perceived as a sign of contemplation for the sustainability challenges we face nowadays. Is the storm of progress catapulting us towards the future, seeing the already massive debris growing, or will this work as a trigger for a transformation? Benjamin's (1955) emphasis on "the old co-ordination of the soul, the eye and the hand", referring to the French author and poet Paul Valéry, is similar to the emphasis on the combination of head, heart and hand which are often mentioned in relation with sustainability (Ivanaj et al., 2014). The four content areas of a sustainability mindset that Kassel et al. (2016) suggest, i.e., systems perspective, spiritual intelligence, ecological worldview and emotional intelligence, are made explicit according to thinking, being and doing, which are different ways of saying head, heart and hand (Molderez et al., 2021). To be able to stimulate regenerative transformations, the three are needed at the same time, although in education the emphasis is often only on acquiring knowledge in relation with sustainability.

Referring to Walter Benjamin as a source of inspiration for rethinking management education and integrating transformative learning is uncommon (Molderez, et al., 2021). His work has been included in the analysis of many postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers (Branzila, 2017). Walter Benjamin is often characterised as an "outsider", as Gerhard Scholem wrote (Hamburger, 1982) and as an "heterodox thinker about politics and art" (Farago, 2016). The enormous number of articles and essays that he wrote during his short life is impressive because of its depth and diversity (Eiland and Jennings, 2014). Thanks to Walter Benjamin and his friend Siegfried Kracauer popular culture was invented as an "object of serious study". Especially

his critical evaluation of modernity and the consumer society made him a forerunner of cultural studies. There is only one explanation that his work is still inevitable after more than seventy years and that is the “power of his ideas” according to Eiland and Jennings (2014, p. 3).

In his well-known text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin (1955) makes a contrasting comparison between the doctor-surgeon and the healer-shaman. Using Baudelaire’s motifs, Benjamin introduces, as a metaphorical embodiment of the poet according to Baudelaire’s perspective, the figure of *the chiffonier*, the one who gathers urban waste and left-overs of the city, an occupation that brings him closer to Lévi-Strauss’ *bricoleur*. The occupations Baudelaire mentions: *flâneur*, *chirurgien*, *shaman*, *chiffonier* and *bricoleur* all resonate in Benjamin’s work, but there is a special focus on the first—the wanderer that drew the authors’ attention in this article. It also drew the attention of numerous celebrated authors like Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, Zygmunt Bauman, Gianpaolo Nuvolat who all regard *le flâneur* as an explorer of the city’s landscape and the ideology behind its representations. Bauman states: “It is the modern world which is the original *flâneur*, the Baudelaire/Benjamin human *flâneur* is but its mirror image, its imitation, the product of stocktaking, of forced adjustment and mimicry” (Bauman, 1994).

Benjamin’s (1999) Arcades Project also invites for a critical reflection on the contemporary state of cities. Only focussing on attractions and spectacles shows a superficial city. It increases the number of visitors, but at the same time shows its emptiness. When the action is over, people leave and have not taking anything else from it, like a deeper experience, a reflection on how the city and everybody who is part of it, is contributing to making it better than before. Raworth (2017) calls this “being generous”, i.e., “giving back to the living systems of which we are part.” Regeneration goes much further than restoring systems, but aims to bring them to “a better or higher state” (Du Plessis: 2022, p. 40). The speeding up of changes around us, like global warming, drought, floods, stress, poverty and biodiversity loss (Wilson, 2016; Wallace-Wells, 2019; IPCC, 2022; Roggema, 2022) can make us anxious and desperate, and especially the younger generation might lose hope. Particularly, cities will see the impact of this speed, but they also contain the seeds for transformation. The increasing negative impact shows that the stability of the past is making place for a growing uncertainty, instability. Instead of being afraid, perceiving uncertainty as part of life will become important and will emphasize that creativity is needed to think about and work on a world where planet and people flourish (Wahl, 2016). The destruction and collapse of existing systems can then be an opportunity for something new. Regenerative thinking focuses on the opportunity of creating new systems inspired by living systems (Reed, 2007; Du Plessis, 2022).

Applied to a city, regeneration does not only refer to materials and flows, but also to humans who must be taken

care of. Roggema (2022) touches upon the need for contemplation, for spaces that are left empty so that the city can become a mindful place. Empty “holes” must be created to be able to become “whole”. Public, physical and natural spaces invite people to wander and wonder, to reflect and to form a basis for transformative change. Transformative change is “a major alteration in the way that a person senses, perceives, or understands the world and the new internal representations of life and thought that he or she creates as a result of that seismic shift” (Holland, 2018, p.1, referring to Jack Mezirow, 2003). The transformation takes place through a process of learning, often called transformative learning. According to Sterling (2011) this is: “learning which touches our deeper levels of knowing and meaning, and, by so doing, then influences our immediate and concrete levels of knowing, perception and action”.

Transformative learning can be triggered by the climate change and its devastating impact on all living beings on Earth, but also by more aesthetic encounters such as art or poetry (Molderez and Ceulemans, 2018; Molderez et al., 2021). Little research has been carried out so far on the transformative learning impact (Michel et al., 2020) or on outdoor experiences in particular, Holland (2018) being an exception. Considering the need for transformational learning with regard to sustainable issues (Sterling, 2011; Michel et al., 2020) more research is needed on integrating experiences in the curriculum of higher management education that facilitate and encourage transformative change. Flannerism is perceived as an outdoor experience and its merits for transformative learning is the topic of the following sections.

From flâneur to eco-flâneur

Walter Benjamin did not invent the term *flâneur*, but is linked with it because he first evoked the figure in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire (Lauster, 2007; Hughes, 2017). The idea of the *flâneur* was particularly developed by Benjamin (1985, 2006) in “Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,” first published in English in 1973. The themes of Baudelaire’s poetry, as well as his artistic figure had a long-lasting impression on Benjamin, perhaps due to his interest in the society of the 19th century. The city of Paris and its newly-built arcades, fostering modernity and those wandering through it, observing and not only that, appear in more than one of Benjamin’s *reflections*.

There is a definite connection between Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire, as unlikely as this may seem considering one is German and the other French, one is a narrator and the other a poet and they led such dissimilar lives in very different periods of time. However, Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* is reflected in Benjamin’s work and untimely death, as well. He also translated several poems in German and wrote quite extensively on Baudelaire; his essays are considered revolutionary and shed a whole new light on the Romantic poet: “The Baudelaire who

steps forth from these pages is the *flâneur* who affixes images as he strolls through mercantile Paris . . . a complex object: a largely apolitical writer whose poetry we must nevertheless comprehend before we can formulate any responsible cultural politics of modernity” (Benjamin, 2006).

Le flâneur is very typically French—mentioned by other authors as well, for example Balzac or Victor Hugo in his monumental work *Les Misérables*, when he writes that “to walk is human; to flanner is Parisian.” “The flâneur, or street prowler and wanderer, is glorified in the work of Balzac and Alexandre Dumas, and only later, in a different tone, in the work of modernists such as Aragon and Baudelaire” (Shields, 1994). Baudelaire therefore echoes the nineteenth century’s character and imprints him in the collective memory. Benjamin takes it even further, offering to *le flâneur* a philosophical dimension. *Le flâneur* of Baudelaire and later Benjamin’s, walks around the city just to see—he is essentially an attentive observer who tastes the world by pacing and watching it. Unmistakably, *le flâneur* is accompanied by a turtle, the slowest of the walkers, symbolizing the slow pace in which the stroller-observer takes in the city. Baudelaire and Benjamin’s wanderer has become so much part of the collective memory that even a very modern publication like Financial Times mentions him and the definition resembles the one above: “A flâneur is just a noticer of things, or what Baudelaire called a *botanist of the pavement* . . . the idea of aimless urban strolling had taken on an elitist air . . . Using one’s waking hours to roam without direction or purpose also goes against a culture of productivity.” (Ganesh, 2022). Despite the rush and speed that dominate modern societies, there is an urgent need for slowing down, for *le flâneur* to be able to develop a sustainable mindset, our reflective system must be triggered to shift perspectives in doing, being and thinking. This is how transformative learning can be fostered as a way towards creating another system.

Walter Benjamin used the powerful figure of the flâneur, a familiar character in the nineteenth century to analyze modernity. As Schipper (2017) highlights, Benjamin introduced the concept of the flâneur into academia in 1929 and since then it has been a source of inspiration for many scholars (McDonough, 2002; Shaya, 2004; Dameron, 2000; Gluck, 2006; Featherstone, 1998; Picton and Roger, 2015; Hughes, 2017; Comay, 2017; Kula, 2018; Degen et al., 2020). Hughes (2017) describes Benjamin’s flâneur as someone who explores, enjoys and embraces the city. He strolls without a particular aim. Benjamin (2006, p. 68) writes: “. . . the street becomes a dwelling place for the flâneur; he is as much at home among house facades as a citizen is within his four walls . . . “Although Benjamin (2006) focused on 19th century Paris, the concept is still relevant for the 21st century. Like Hughes (2017), p. 71 explains it: “. . . the flâneur becomes a plastic figure who can be moulded and extrapolated . . . “The flâneur wanders and by wandering through the city, any city, he wonders without having the purpose of reflecting about something in particular. The *movement* of *wandering* comes close to becoming *moved* because of the *wonder*. It happens in

between. And this fits with understanding a flâneur “as a mode of being, pertaining to a particular gaze, one who is always on the cusp of modernity” (Hughes, 2017, p. 69). This cusp is very relevant because new things happen on the edge. The “freewheeling flâneur” (Hughes, 2017, p. 82) is reminiscent of Robert Pirsig’s (1989) *Zen and Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig (1989), p. 14 emphasizes that “the travelling is more important than arriving somewhere very specific.” Having no purpose does not mean that there is no end. On the contrary, the end will be there, but this is unclear from the beginning. The focus is on the process and this process will eventually lead to an outcome, and end. This allows for openness to whatever happens in the meantime. Similarities with serendipity also become clear. Horace Walpole coined the term when he was reading a Persian fairy tale in 1754, *The Travels and Adventures of Three Princes of Serendip*. The princes made several discoveries by chance and perspicacity. This inspired Walpole to describe this phenomenon as “serendipity”. It is now also used as a methodological approach to refer to the ability of discovering interesting and valuable cases, sites, items, that one was actually not looking for. As explained by Copeland (2019), p. 2386 “serendipitous discovery is a process rather than an event and can be marked by several interactions of chance and wisdom that enable the valuable outcome.” It is precisely the context the individual is in and the interaction with it, that bring about this discovery. The flâneur strolls the streets in a serendipitous way which allows to detect what is happening in urban life.

Baudelaire describes *le flâneur* as a person with a special status, as only a privileged one could afford the luxury of strolling, unobserved, the arcades with shops from Paris, observing the mystery of the city and the crowds, without mixing with them: “a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes” (Baudelaire, 1970). Benjamin outlines *le flâneur* in a similar key, using Baudelaire’s *flâneur* to start an exploration of the mind in relation with the modernity of the city life, marking yet another affinity of thought between the two important writers. However, there are authors who see *le flâneur* as an activist, not just an idle wanderer of the city. Benjamin’s *flâneur* represents mainly his exploration of the modernity’s symbols, images and impressions, or as Kevin Milburn reads it: “the flâneur did not just observe urban life; but was, according to Benjamin, engaged in an “archaeological” process of unearthing the myths and “collective dreams” of modernity” (Milburn, 2010). Furthermore, authors like David Harvey, describe *le flâneur* as not only wondering idly, but walking with a mission: to map “the city’s terrain and evokes its living qualities” (Harvey, 2003), thus making the city accessible to the rest of the world. A similar perspective is encountered in the book of Shields—describing *le flâneur* as a figure of resistance to the “work-a-day pressure of the punchclock” (Shields, 1994), a character fighting his own individual fight against consumerism. Featherstone (1998) also discusses flannerism as “a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning embedded in the layered fabric of the city” (cited in Stevenson, 2003).

Walter Benjamin (2006), p. 99 contrasted two figures: the flâneur and the *badaud*: “In the flâneur, the joy of watching prevails over all. It can concentrate on observation; the result is the amateur detective. Or it can stagnate in the rubbernecker, then the flâneur has turned into a *badaud*.” A *badaud* is part of the public or of the crowd (Benjamin, 2006, p. 249) which means the flâneur is always in, but never of the public. The flâneur needs to observe the city he is in, to be open to the telling cases he might discover.

An “eco-flâneur” takes the romantic figure that was central in literary works by Poe, Joyce, Baudelaire, Döblin and Proust (Schipper, 2017) further. Being part of an era that puts sustainable challenges at the forefront, the “eco-flâneur” becomes the observer of the sustainable spectacles that emerge in the city. As much as the flâneur was essential for the streetlife in 19th Century Paris (Benjamin, 1969), the eco-flâneur can become a powerful symbol of the regenerative transformation of a city. The “eco-flâneur” is witnessing what is going on in the city and this witness makes him an active producer. By strolling in the city, the city invites the flâneur to reflect upon it. The eco-flâneurs are transformed into a “performative spectator” (Schipper, 2017, p. 193). The city then acts as a theatre and the eco-flâneurs are the artists, the co-producers of the city. They are not just detached observers, but by wandering and wondering they discover and become touched by their selection and interpretation of what is happening in the city. Writing as early as the beginning of the 20th century, Lewis Mumford advocated for progressive urban planning and discussed the city as “a theater of social action”. Flaneurism is an appropriate method of taking social action, from being environmentally friendly by walking instead of driving to discovering the city in a live interaction with the city itself and perhaps even modifying it for a better future. Also, the city is an appropriate stage for a flâneur—the very definition of the term involves walking as an observer, a spectator of the city life. As Mumford (1938), p. 4–6 puts it: “to embody these new possibilities in city life, which come to us not merely through better technical organization but through acuter sociological understanding, and to dramatize the activities themselves in appropriate individual and urban structures, forms the task of the coming generation.”

The eco-flâneur reminds of Robert Cooper’s (1983) interpretation of *Echo and Narcissus*, the Greek myth about Narcissus who rejected the affections of the nymph Echo. She eventually wasted away until only her voice remained. According to Cooper (1983), p. 202 this Greek myth is an allegory for the significance of the other: “As punishment for his inability to love others, the gods made Narcissus fall in love with his own reflection, which paradoxically he both possessed and yet could not possess. Narcissus rejected the life-giving structure of the outside society, mediated by other people. We know ourselves only through the echo of the Other.” Ec(h)o, as in ecology, is not something different from ourselves, but is more like a reflection of ourselves. It tells us something about ourselves and *vice versa*. The way we are also says something about how we

see ecology. It reminds us of our responsibility. Like in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, the echo of the cry for help, with the ears of our body, the cells of our brain, the awareness of our mind, symbolizing the body, the head and the heart (Benjamin, 1955). We can never shirk responsibility, because we have heard.

The pedagogical value of the eco-flâneur

In this section, we further elaborate on Walter Benjamin’s work and the pedagogical value of the (eco-) flâneur in relation to management education. The general aim of education has been debated for centuries, and is still under discussion today. For many philosophers, like Aristotle, the aim of education was the flourishing of the individual, oriented towards leading a good life. For the later Stoics, the aim was to liberate individuals from customs and habits (Abicht and Opdebeeck, 2016). The discussion focuses on the aim of education as providing people with knowledge. According to Kitcher (2009) three types of knowledge are foreseen: 1) knowledge of particular propositions that have been explicitly taught; 2) habits and dispositions to judge and to act in private and in social contexts; 3) skills to acquire further knowledge of the first two types. Providing knowledge has a social aim, and according to Mill (2002, cited in Kitcher, 2009), the principal task of education is preparing people for their role of citizens in a democracy, i.e., the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions about matters of public policy. He presents four perspectives on education: 1) promoting individual flourishing; 2) producing citizens who will participate well in current democratic institutions; 3) expanding public knowledge; 4) fostering the advancement of human culture (Kitcher, 2009).

Especially John Dewey outlined the role of education in democratic societies, with a specific focus on enabling citizens to lead flourishing lives, and contributing to progressive improvement of society. Within this context, Dewey stressed the importance of critical thinking (Lambrechts et al., 2013; Lambrechts, 2020). Within the current context of sustainability issues in society, the fundamental questions regarding what needs to be taught, what kind of education is required, what needs to be revisited: what does individual flourishing mean in a society in light of sustainability issues? A critical view on traditional customs in society is essential, and education needs to enable citizens in a democracy to develop these critical thinking abilities (Nussbaum, 2011).

Martha Nussbaum stresses the importance of the arts in higher education, as a way to encourage broad development of the learner: “Leading business educators have long understood that a developed capacity to imagine is a keystone of a healthy business culture” (Nussbaum, 2011). While some initiatives have been exploring this role (e.g., Shrivastava et al., 2012; Molderez and Ceulemans, 2018; Molderez et al., 2021), today it seems

rather uncommon to introduce arts-based pedagogies in management education. It is within the context of critical thinking that the eco-flâneur proves its pedagogical value.

The notion of the eco-flâneur could serve as a way to open up the curriculum, and encourage students in business and management education to observe what happens around them. While the original flâneur was the aristocrat, detached, the gourmet of the street, the eco-flâneur might serve specifically as an observer of the regenerative transformation of a city. Benjamin's notions of connecting soul, eye and hand, could be connected with contemporary interpretations of sustainability mindsets and competencies, focusing on head, heart and hand (Molderez et al., 2021). Such individual sustainability competencies have been studied in the context of management education (e.g., Lambrechts et al., 2018). They have been conceptualised and defined, yet mainly with a focus on the knowledge component (i.e., head), thereby overlooking the importance of heart and hand. Recent developments in this field, such as the European sustainability competence framework "GreenComp" (Bianchi et al., 2022), outlines these competencies with focus on knowledge, attitudes and skills. These could be connected with head, heart and hand as well (Molderez et al., 2021). As such, the eco-flâneur, while observing, develops specific understanding of urban transformation and transition processes. While performing the act of strolling around the city, a more holistic development of sustainability competencies is encouraged, touching head, heart and hand.

Being an eco-flâneur in higher management education: Discovering regenerative transformations in Brussels

There are different ways of stimulating critical thinking abilities in higher management education. The concept of the flâneur is taken further to eco-flâneur, i.e., strollers as students and teachers who see and reflect upon what is happening and changing in the city and how street life is being transformed towards regeneration. The eco-flâneur is suggested as an alternative pedagogy to unite soul, eye and hand, three elements that are brought into connection by Walter Benjamin and that are vital for a sustainability mindset. Eco-flâneur is also used as a metaphor to rethink education and to suggest ways for transformative learning and education (Balsiger et al., 2017). A flâneur was the aristocrat, detached, the gourmet of the street, while the badaud was more associated with the working people, emotional, the gourmand (Shaya, 2004). Education should integrate both: the detached observer looking for knowledge and the one who is touched by what he observes. But there is more than image. Students can also be stimulated to become an eco-flâneur, i.e., one where hands, hearts and heads are united (Ivanaj et al., 2014). Inspired by

Paul Shrivastava's (2010) article "Pedagogy of Passion for Sustainability" we will elaborate on how to combine sustainable management with physical exercises. It also fits in the growing attention for slow experiences, like slow food, slow fashion, and in the importance of walking, not only to explore the beauty of nature (Somerville, 2022) or to protest in a peaceful way (Kumar, 2021), but because of its health effect (Hansen et al., 2017; Degen et al., 2020; O'Mara, 2021; Grant and Pollard, 2022) and transformational capacities (Warfield and Hetherington, 2018) even when it concerns urban walking (Herrmann-Luncke, et al., 2020). Routine walking is conceptualised as a territory-making process. Mindful of the social context and bodily experience, walking offers insights into the possibilities of making points of connection with the performances of plants and animals (Grant and Pollard, 2022).

The eco-flâneur will be used as an alternative pedagogy to illustrate another way of discovering the regenerative transformation of a city while relying on different models of social entrepreneurship (Alter, 2003; Bruder, 2020; Klomp and Oosterwaal, 2021), named as "Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade." This is not just a promenade, but a discovery of what is going on in a city (Mahmoud et al., 2022). The method will give the participants the possibility to experience the city by themselves, i.e., to discover the regenerative aspects of the city, to see a city with different eyes and to be open for innovative initiatives that are regenerative.

In the article "Pedagogy of Passion for Sustainability," Paul Shrivastava (2010) listed possibilities that connect sustainable management with physical exercises. For example, he suggested strategic flexibility through yoga; competitive strategy through football or basketball; cooperative strategy through games and social activities that require cooperation such as dancing. Strolling like an eco-flâneur could be added to the list.

It might be a bit odd to focus on the city of Brussels for a promenade. Charles Baudelaire hated Brussels because there were "no shopwindows. Strolling—something that nations with imagination love—is impossible in Brussels. There is nothing to see and the streets are unusable" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 81). Since the time of Baudelaire a lot has been changed for the better. According to the Global Destination Index (GDS) Brussels ranks number 14 and this is mainly due to the large percentage (23%) of green areas such as forests, public gardens, parks and sportgrounds. Nevertheless, in the Top 20 Sustainable Smart Cities in the World, Brussels is not ranked. Yet, Brussels is not really known for its outstanding close concentration of sustainable examples. Strolling through the city as an eco-flâneur triggers within the stroller the possibility to see as a philosopher, as a critical thinker and discover how the city and its street life are transforming.

In line with the chronicle under the heading of "Promenade à Paris" of the early *Le Petit Journal* founded in 1863 (Shaya, 2004), the Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade (SEP) was created as

a tour for fresh news with respect to sustainable organisations. Shaya (2004), p. 51 refers to a chronicler who makes the purposes of the SEP explicit: “I am a flâneur, and even I am sometimes surprised at the strange sights that seem to rise out of the soil of this Paris that we think we have always known.” Streets are like an open book for the regenerative transformation of a city and ready to discover for an eco-flâneur.

Every city can be used as a case, but, since the Campus Brussels of the Faculty of Economics and Business is located in the city centre, it is rather obvious to start as a stroller here. However, students always look surprised when they are asked to put on walking shoes when the “Sustainable Entrepreneurial Promenade” (SEP) is announced. Studying sustainable business models by taking a walk through the city centre of Brussels is not an ordinary way of teaching a topic in a curriculum for Higher Education in Management. Nevertheless, in pedagogical articles related to sustainability, combining body and mind is strongly recommended. But doing it effectively is not so obvious. SEP has been part of the course on Sustainable Management since 2013. SEP was created in the spirit of the eco-flâneur. Because of the act of strolling with a sustainable gaze, participants are walking like an eco-flâneur: discovering things without knowing what this will be beforehand. Teaching the students to look with different eyes, to blur the boundary between knowing and experiencing, to be open for a different view of the city, the city enacts knowledge.

The students are free to walk any route from point A to point B. They are instructed to walk in silence to fully surrender to what the city has to offer. The starting point is at Brussels Campus and the ending point is at the Place du Jardin aux Fleurs (Bloemenhofplein). The square itself is an iconic example of how a public place can be transformed in a short period of time. Just by a few strategically placed flower boxes that counteract the traffic, the place flourished from a place of urban tragedy over traffic accidents and senseless violence to a meeting place for residents, school-age children and youth (Dhondt, 2022a). This is just one example of how the walk gives students the opportunity to zoom in on the city’s policies, such as the importance of the pedestrian zone, and to illustrate gentrification.

Formed harmony like at the Place du Jardin aux Fleurs is difficult to find in the middle of the city in Brussels, especially at the location of the KU Leuven Campus Brussel. Located close to the central station, the campus connects to the shopping district and the Queen’s Gallery, which is rather an ode to the consumer society. Nevertheless, the gallery gives plenty of opportunities to think about sustainable chocolate and the Fairtrade label. Other retail chains can also provide input for an eco-flâneur. For example, Dille and Kamille (2022) with their success story of almost 50 years of dedication towards zero plastic gives space to think about the use of natural materials. Yet the question is whether commercial institutions will prevail over public places and cultural institutions during the promenade.

Between long streets of commercial shops and eateries, numerous non-commercial institutions with a social interest

can be spotted as an eco-flâneur. For example, Cinema Nova (2022) which is right around the corner from the campus is dedicated to independently produced films. The street scene of the social venue indicates eccentricity and hints at the grind of the variety of different creative forms of expression. The cafe-bar also welcomes different disciplines to bring them together for meetings, debates, exhibits, installations, performances, workshops and concerts. Yet, only the eco-flâneurs who take it slow and stop in front of the venue notice that the letters Nova are made from old materials such as a wheel, a chair leg and a baseboard.

Cinema Nova’s goal is to explore alternative realities within the increasingly commercialized and polarised society. We notice the emergence of artistic platforms in Brussels that share similarities in their social values. The Kaaitheater (2022) devoted to the performing arts, wants to reflect the polyphony of Brussels society. They show their openness to the broad spectrum of artists and visitors with their motto “How to be many?” MAD Brussels (2022) aims to encourage creative minds to be innovative, sustainable and inclusive with their Centre for Fashion and Design. They support junior designers to develop their brand and label. Together they want to bring that creative aura to Brussels. A success story that blossomed from Brussels’ social initiatives is that of Siré Kaba. The Belgian fashion designer with Guinean roots wants to bridge the gap between Africa and Europe. By means of her clothing designs, she succeeds in contradicting the poor image people have of Africa. In a social workplace in Molenbeek, she makes her colorful and elegant wardrobe (BRUZZ, 2021a).

Close to the end location of the walk, the statue Zinneke Pis is located. The urinating dog is thematically related to one of Belgium’s most famous monuments, Manneken Pis. The fact that Zinneke is representing hybrid breeding, is symbolic of the cultural diversity within Brussels. In 2021, the city of Brussels registered 183 different nationalities (Flemish Community Commission, 2021). This means that Brussels is the most cosmopolitan city in Europe and therefore a laboratory for cultural diversity. According to the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (Government of the Brussels Capital Region, 2018), diverse populations contribute to Brussels’ identity and the city’s economic dynamism, social and cultural diversity and attractiveness on a Belgian and international level. Would anybody strolling by Zinneke make the connection with the multicultural city?

The dog’s name Zinneke is derived from the river Zenne that once flowed through Brussels. According to the mythical stories of the founding artist Tom Frantzen (2013), the dog was of a tough breed: it survived being thrown into this river. Next to this story, the river Zenne has an eventful past in Brussels. The river that once brought prosperity to Brussels and is an integral part of its development also has its cruelty. Periods of flooding, disease outbreak and bad odour prompted the construction of the Zenne Tunnel in 1886. The river that once had a large presence in

Brussels still flows in serenity through the centre today. Yet, only when searching for silence the underground river will show itself (BRUZZ, 2021b). On the Saint-Géry (Sint-Goriksplein) next to the brasserie Lion d'Or, there is a courtyard with a minuscule piece of flowing water—a water entity that follows the old trace of the Zenne. Stepping into the courtyard, a change of environment can be noticed. A shift from a surrounding of fast-paced life bustle of the city reigns to one where the calmness of flowing water can be seen, be heard, and perhaps even be felt. A humble island amongst a modern-day hectic setting where one can come to rest. There are more such sites in Brussels, but they will only show themselves during the process of discovery.

The route that the students stroll along starts from the lively city centre and goes in the direction of the canal. In many Western cities, a similarity can be seen: the Canal area is often known as the city's problem neighbourhood where poverty and violence are prevalent. This is no less true in Brussels. Yet, in recent years we have seen changes in the streetscape: old empty factories are being transformed into places where creativity and social initiatives can flourish. A good example is the former Citroën factory, a massive building resembling a cathedral of steel and glass. Its location, close to the historic centre and next to the canal, was in the 1930's the ideal place for Mr. Citroen to place the largest car factory of that time (Centre Pompidou, 2022). However, over the years, the dynamics and needs of the city have changed tremendously. Automation and the outsourcing of production made room for initiatives that can fulfil contemporary needs. The iconic factory building is rethought in a way that fits better in the Brussels of the 21st century: an international cultural centre. This way of integrating the old and the new is an illustration of how culture, wellbeing and sustainability are interrelated to one another.

As students walk towards the canal, they see more and more of the city's real character as a result of those transformations. Here are a lot of alternative organizational forms such as social enterprises and hybrid organizations that mix social and business goals. The Salvation Army is a good example. Service to the urban poor is supported by participation in the market. After all, clothing sales are held at regular intervals in which everyone can participate. The proceeds benefit their operation (Dhondt, 2022b).

Close to the Salvation Army, the brewery **Brussels Beer Project** (2022) can be found. Although the brewery has a standard business model of selling beer, they fit in the concept of a regenerative city. Metropolitan cities are known for having many people living on a small piece of land. Likewise, where a lot of people live, there are a lot of food surpluses. This makes circular initiatives within food processing indispensable in a regenerative city. Brussels Beer Project is the pioneer in making beer out of recycled bread and is known for its upcycling projects. The word "project" in their name reflects that they do not see themselves as a normal brewery but rather as a project built on collaboration, experimentation and positive impact. A project

that has been started with a few hundred crowd funders and almost 10 years later has grown to a community ten times the original size. A community that is constantly considering how to make a greater positive impact with the project. For this reason, the announcement was made that they will no longer export beer outside of Europe starting in 2023. This decision was made even though the expectation is that this negatively affects their revenue in the short term. However, the founders resist against short-term thinking and make choices that fit their long-term sustainable vision. This long-term vision aligns with their recently obtained American sustainability label B-Corp and their goal of becoming best in class in environmental impact and others (BRUZZ, 2022).

However, the discovery of alternative forms of organization becomes particularly interesting when the Canal is crossed to Molenbeek. **Atelier Groot Eiland** (2022) applies the "employment model" on a large scale. Their goal is to combat poverty by supporting as many Brussels' residents as possible in their search for work. Their projects are therefore very diverse: from a restaurant, to a joinery, to a city vegetable garden, and an organic shop where, through training courses and work experience, people once again believe in a different future. What all the projects have in common is the shared focus on sustainability, social entrepreneurship and alternative economic business models. As a "cooperative model," the Foodhub is one of their exemplary projects. In addition to organic products that often come directly from small and medium-sized producers, attention is paid to the participation of customers, employees and producers. Foodhub wants to pay a fair price to the producer and advertises how that price is structured. For example, as far as their olive oil in bulk is concerned, 69% of the final price goes to the producer and 3% to transport. And suddenly you wonder why not everything can be so transparent. Learning how to stroll therefore achieves its goal: thinking about surprisingly different alternative ways of doing business.

After 40 min of being an eco-flaneur, the students shared their experiences in the form of a reflection report. First, they described two elements of the city that fit in their view of a regenerative city, then their conception of a regenerative city and finally their reflections on the experience.

The urban elements that stood out to the students range from holistic concepts that involve a considerable amount of brainwork to the fine details that are only seen when standing still in the city. Most answers included urban biodiversity. For example, the number of different green walls shows that the students see nature in a regenerative city as indispensable. But even more creative solutions were noticed such as plants placed in hanging ashtrays, sidewalk tiles replaced with greenery and a hotel for insects. Also, the social initiatives were just as much noticed by the students. The elements range from small elements that make the city liveable for different groups such as wheelchair infrastructure to social initiatives to bring people together in a cafe run by volunteers or a community vegetable garden. Getting

around in a city also resonates with the students and various alternatives to the car and car-free zones have been named. Lastly, the students have a good eye for circular initiatives to reduce the pile of waste that city folk creates. Different R's derived from the European waste strategy towards a circular economy (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2022) are reflected in this: QR-codes to Refuse physical flyers, shops that only sell local products to Reduce transport emissions, Reusing items through a vintage store, entrepreneurs that upcycle items to Repurpose and garbage bags to Recycle paper.

The aspect that the students did not have to rush and that their goal was to wander around was considered pleasant. It gave them the opportunity to observe the elements that they pass by in everyday life. Also, for most it gave the feeling of calmness even though they were present in the big city. For others, the task of discovery actually brought a sense of enthusiasm by "seeing what others do not see." Surprisingly but profoundly positive, all the students indicated that they think it is appropriate to include such a promenade like the eco-flâneur in a management programme. Most students justified the positive response with the fact that they interacted with a different "mindset", "look", "perspective", "eye", "thinking", or "sense" with their surroundings. A few described that this active thinking creates a certain awareness. The awareness described ranges from the different ways of thinking to the creation of awareness for sustainability. The exercise required them to think deeply about how they view the concept of sustainability and the city provides a source of inspiration. Yet, the downside of the awareness is also reported: the negative side of the city also comes in harder like the number of unsustainable businesses, trash and bad odour. However, this is an opportunity for students to interact with the reality of the city and to reflect on how their mental concepts fit within reality. Students articulated the eco-flâneur as a possible bridge in the theory-practice gap in different ways such as "chance to bring theory to life," "real problems and solutions," "using the theoretical topics," "thinking about possibilities," and "it's not always easy to understand everything by only learning the theory." Some students even went a step further and theorized that the competencies used during the promenade would also be useful for their later careers: "you can get creative ideas to include in your organization" and "for the managers to think more out of the box." Although, a minor group of students kept their answers within the state of the moment and spoke about the promenade as a fun activity that was good for group cohesion and that the outdoor activity is good for their wellbeing.

In addition to the students' positive responses, they were also asked how the experience could be improved. Since the promenade is an exercise that students do not usually practice, finding regenerative aspects in the city was seen as a challenge. As a result, the majority of students felt that the activity was too short: they wanted more time to explore the city and reflect upon their thoughts. Others expressed a need for examples because they do not yet fully understand the concept of a regenerative city. Also, a need for guidance was expressed since

it was hard to "slow down the pass" or to find "the right thing." The students' overall conclusion was that "it takes some practice to really become an experienced eco-flâneur."

Conclusion

Transformative learning experiences can be facilitated according to Sterling (2011), but "by their nature" not guaranteed. The eco-flâneur was created for the purpose of stimulating transformative learning, although it is only a small element in a bigger curriculum of other courses that focuses on other types of learning. Nevertheless, being different in a landscape that is focussing much on "doing things better", and "doing better things", "seeing things differently" (Sidiropoulos, 2014; Michel et al., 2020), might have a better effect on the students than imagined.

In the same lines as Shields (1994), Harvey (2003), Milburn (2010) and Featherstone (1998) the concept of the Eco-Flâneur is attempting to assume the same role of an observer noting what is wrong, reading the landscape and the city in different keys and perhaps taking a stand against what spoils its face and what is not in accordance with the environment. Walter Benjamin was critical for progress. Progress leaves behind the vulnerable, the Earth and her inhabitants, including humans. A city should also be a heaven for them. The organisations that were discovered by the students and teachers during the experience of the eco-flâneur, showing this other side of a city, the roots of a city, they work for the common good and illuminate the seeds for a regenerative city. Benjamin's beloved Angel of History is then also a metaphor for faith in a different future, a regenerative one where we give more back than we take. The modern eco-flâneur is a responsible person, observing and at the same time aiming to make a difference. Modern times ask for action and re-action, especially in our endangered world, so perhaps *le flâneur* is now ready to step out of the Baudelarian pages and become an activist.

Students flâneuring the city of Brussels discover its cultural landmarks, and come up with new ideas for a more regenerative city, thus co-creating the city. They observed things to be improved, they came up with feasible ideas to make the city more regenerative. These conclusions can be afterwards put in practice by communicating them to the people in charge, for instance the mayor's house. Alternatively, they can be used in projects that would involve everyone working together and changing the face of the city for the better.

Not all cities are inclusive enough for all categories of people. The accessibility functions according to the principle: the city should fit and accommodate all, equally. The students-flâneurs can be an agent of change in this regard, too, by noticing where things can be improved for the less fortunate. After all, it is not enough for the public offices to make the city physically accessible, there is work to be done on people's mentality, to help them notice and think about the people with different abilities around them. The lack of

inclusiveness or solutions implemented incorrectly are as damaging as carelessness—the lack of empathy between people, the lack of awareness of those around us.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

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