

Vladimir Bovt - The Complaint Officer

Time: During the day, when the market and shops are open.

Location: Places where people come together and talk, such as market stalls, terraces, a queue or a bench.

Materials: A notebook and pen or a phone if you prefer to write digitally.

Duration: Minimum of 1, maximum of 2 hours during the busy times of the day

1. Stand or sit near a group of people without directly participating in their conversation. Choose a place where people are talking spontaneously, such as a market stall where they are waiting for their turn. Look around calmly, pretend you are waiting for someone.
2. Listen carefully to what people are saying. Pay special attention to complaints, frustrations or shared annoyances. These can be small, everyday complaints ("Those tomatoes have become expensive!"), but also larger issues.
3. Write down the complaints as soon as you hear them, word for word, without judgment. Keep a list of what you hear. Write down the complaint as literally as possible, including the tone and emotion if relevant.
4. After about 10-15 minutes, move to another location and repeat the process to get a diverse picture of the complaints in the Nieuwstraat.

Reports:

Kathrin:

I entered the market via Nieuwstraat. I went to various places to pick up bits of conversation. I hadn't expected many complaints, but there were more than I thought. Perhaps I considered more sentences to be complaints because of the way they were expressed. I recorded them on my phone, so if you, Vladimir, want to hear them, let me know.

The complaints ranged from people who didn't like staying/waiting/found the quality inadequate/were dissatisfied with the price or the goods. They differed in age, gender and background. Most complaints were expressed between people who knew each other. People standing in line usually didn't talk or complain. It was rather in private moments that people shared what was bothering them.

Steef:

What makes this performance special is that you place yourself on the periphery. You listen to passers-by and try to classify what you hear as useful or useless. You are very much engaged with others without knowing the form or context.

Especially the repetition: constantly looking for other places to listen, while the people you are listening to are just doing their shopping.

Walking by is the most interesting part of this performance. When people are standing in line, they are aware of others and their conversations are more superficial. When they are moving, there is less close contact with strangers and the conversations become more personal. You only catch snippets, small impressions of a conversation that you quickly walk past.

People complain about all sorts of things, but cause and effect remain out of hearing distance.

Notes The Complaint Officer