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EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal

Neighborhood Residents in Vulnerable Circumstances: Crisis, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract

The editorial introduces the articles in this thematic issue, which provides a multifaceted analyses on how residents of vulnerable neighbourhoods cope with stressful circumstances and various crises. The aim is to understand daily survival at the neighbourhood level amid rapidly changing conditions. The articles present both quantitative and qualitative analyses that make detailed observations of agency, resilience, and community in diverse sociocultural contexts.

Keywords

coping mechanisms; crisis; housing; neighbourhood; residential stigma; resilience; urban studies; urban transformation; vulnerability

1. Introduction

Today, cities are facing multiple crises, including financial crises, housing shortages, climate change, food insecurity, and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Living in an urban environment is often characterised by insecurity regarding finding a safe living space and obtaining enough income-generating opportunities. Moreover, on many occasions, there is a growing gap between the poor and the better-off. In low-income neighbourhoods, residents must cope with issues such as a shortage of financial means and inadequate housing. This leads to stress about daily survival, and frequently initiates a short-term perspective that obstructs planning for the future. Many poorer segments of society get stuck in poverty stress, while others have developed skills that allow them to escape from poverty. These coping mechanisms can be more or less successful.

In low-income neighbourhoods, people may collaborate to improve their living conditions. There are also social workers who work with the poor, aiming to improve their vulnerable circumstances. Various methods are used for these interventions; some are closely linked to neoliberal principles, while others oppose them and focus on alternative forms of community development. This thematic issue aims to gain a better understanding of the contemporary positions of neighbourhood residents in vulnerable circumstances, by analysing the perspectives of both the better-off and the poor.

2. Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods exist all around the globe, but it is not entirely clear what this really implies. The definition of a neighbourhood is not consistent, and one has to cope with imprecision. In practice, we can identify common characteristics, often linked with a community, that are based on definitions in the disciplines of urban studies, social geography, and environmental psychology. Moreover, neighbourhoods must address issues of place attachment and the built environment, both of which are inherent to their local context (Smets & Kreuk, 2008; Watt & Smets, 2014). Various descriptions of neighbourhoods include a combination of references to the home area (psychological benefits that include belonging and identity), locality (residential activities, social status, and position), and the urban and regional area (landscape of social and economic opportunities). Furthermore, neighbourhoods also need physical and social elements (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001).

Blokland (2003, p. 213) distinguishes socio-spatial features of a neighbourhood as "a geographically circumscribed, built environment that people use practically and symbolically." In practice, a neighbourhood is a spatially oriented whole that includes social relations among neighbourhood residents and their shared symbolic issues. Talen (2024, p. 189) elaborates that neighbourhoods need local institutions in public spaces for effective governmental administration, meeting places, and community facilities. To establish connections and nurture inclusion among the residents, mixed functions and housing also include school parks and local shopping areas.

We focus on a wide variety of resilient everyday practices in neighbourhoods by analysing communal horticulture, Covid-19 recovery, and activism. In the first article, the horticultural practices studied in Portugal have approaches that reflect formal, informal, and semi-formal types of urban allotment plots. The authors concentrate on the informal practices, and especially on how they can be considered as liminal spaces in which the gift economy thrives. Informal allotments offer food security, recreation, community building, and take environmental issues into consideration—at the same time, they are under threat and are being demolished. The author approaches the conflict as a difficulty of a formal system of territory management to embrace the informal system of urban allotment plots without annihilating it (Mota Santos, 2024).

The second article studies how the community members in the ex-mining communities of Northern England have had to cope with deindustrialisation. The focus is on how their work communities and identities come together in the everyday activities that play an important role in establishing a sense of belonging and social action. The article examines how residents aged between 60 and 85 consider changes in their experiences of work, community, and place over six decades. The analysis stresses how various projects to ameliorate structural marginalisation in the area have been perceived, and how they have succeeded, especially in relation to the increasingly multicultural community formation and the Covid-19 pandemic (Wallace, 2024).

In their article, Ward et al. (2024) look into youth activism in Scotland and how grassroots community organisations aim to support the improvement of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The young people in the area have had to deal with residential stigma and discrimination on the basis of their cultural beliefs. In the study, participatory parity creates opportunities for issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation. In other words, at the grassroots level youth and community organisations join hands when they face injustice and find resources to create a better urban environment in their neighbourhoods. This also helps them to develop alternative narratives to challenge the misrecognition of their neighbourhoods.

Volont (2024) focuses on changes concerning the future of Wilhelmsburg district in Hamburg, Germany. Its challenges include poverty, industry pollution, and infrastructural decay. In the 2000s local activists joined hands to create a better future for their neighbourhoods. In this respect, their cultural commons is a collectively created symbolic construct. The analysis is based on different types of grammars: justificatory grammar (common good), liberal grammar (openness to the public), and affective grammar. Together they play an important role in opening the future to collective imagination (expressions of affinity). These different approaches offer possibilities for protesting against fences surrounding the main public park to make it more accessible, but they signify also rejection of the construction of the motorway and expansion of the power plant. It is clear that the future often arrives step by step. The study claims that although the Wilhelmsburg citizens in Germany live in vulnerable circumstances, they do not necessarily see themselves as inherently vulnerable. Those who have gathered around the Future Wilhelmsburg initiative do not accept a vulnerable fate, precisely by sharing the time horizons of their spatial environment.

3. Vulnerability

The second section of the thematic issue concentrates on questions of vulnerability. According to Adger (2006, p. 268), "the concept of vulnerability has been a powerful analytical tool for describing states of susceptibility to harm, powerlessness, and marginality of both physical and social systems, and for guiding normative analysis of actions to enhance well-being through reduction of risk." In addition, Springhart (2017) has shown that discovering and revaluing vulnerability is essential to what it means to be alive and human. According to her, improving life means thinking about vulnerability in a way that distinguishes between vulnerability as a value of life and something that threatens and is worth fighting against. To understand the fragility of life, we need to distinguish between universal human (ontological) vulnerability and contextual vulnerability.

The concepts of marginalisation, subordination, and social abjection are often linked to the concept of vulnerability. Marginalisation and subordination are often used to label people who suffer from discrimination. Though people in vulnerable circumstances are often marginalised, marginalisation and subordination appeal to structures and social conditions that produce injustice and political action. In turn, social abjection refers to demeaning and oppressive rhetoric such as the term "scum," which some state leaders have used against the Roma and asylum seekers. Countering this kind of rhetoric requires a call for "justice, equality, and recognition by such revolting subjects" (Koivunen et al., 2018, p. 7). Though the concepts of abjection and vulnerability overlap, abjection "implies disgust, shame, and fear to a wholly different degree than vulnerability, which does not necessarily have anything to do with disgust, but is perhaps most often in relation to compassion" (Koivunen et al., 2018, p. 8). Various senses of vulnerability and social abjection are examined below.

Vázquez Brage (2024) begins the section with a systematic review of how vulnerability is measured in various European cities. It covers over 190 published articles from the last 20 years and provides a novel approach for conceptualising and measuring urban vulnerability. Vázquez Brage's review shows that urban vulnerability is understood to be a circular situation, arising in physical urban space with certain reputational characteristics. The author emphasises the subjective domain to understand the dynamics and relative status of vulnerability.

In the second article of the section, Sointu and Häikiö (2024) take a processual view to understand vulnerability and openness to the social ambivalence among the older adults living in Tampere, the third-largest city in Finland. Their analysis is based on four relational settings: being-with others; cooperation with others; contesting and being contested by others; and ruling and being ruled by others. The research data consists of seven focus group interviews that focus on the experiences and meanings of everyday encounters. The authors argue that in addition to previously identified dimensions of privacy and access, involvement and control are significant dimensions of the relational settings of belonging in an urban community.

In another fascinating case study, Anastasiou et al. (2024) explore how alternative housing initiatives, especially multi-actor housing, support the inhabitants' vulnerabilities linked to the housing crisis. They analyse the complex phenomena as a continuum of strategies of institutions and tactics of the workers and residents in their daily life and homing practices. The article investigates the quotidian practices of the residents and identifies the extent to which this arrangement supports inhabitants individually and maintains their ties to the local urban fabric. The authors consider that the project cultivates mechanisms that go beyond housing and contribute to the inhabitants' agency, security, and inclusion, and address their vulnerabilities.

The final article on the topic of vulnerability examines the multi-faceted consequences of housing displacement in Finland. The authors examine how everyday resistance is significant, even though it is not visible, unlike open protests and activities of the social movements. They break resistance down into four distinct but related categories: reflective, emotional, rejective, and face-to-face resistance. Reflective resistance focuses on unstable housing and living conditions that go together with losing homes and stigmatisation. Apart from reflective emotional resistance, injustice of displacement plays an important role that goes together with power relations. Rejective and face-to-face resistance employ a resistance strategy by refusing non-preferred housing options after evictions. The article represents voices that are rarely heard in the planning of the neighbourhoods and asks a powerful question about who has the right to the city (Juhila & Perälä, 2024).

4. Crisis, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms

The articles in the third section of the Special Issue reveal the complexities of how various groups of residents cope with stressful situations and outright crises. As these case studies show, their coping mechanisms are rarely straightforward, and they bring to light intricate dynamics that guide the reproduction of everyday lifeworlds at the local level. Mostly, the observations and results do not present grand schemes or weighty impacts, but rather, they focus on the more modest coping mechanisms of marginalised groups. This allows us to understand coping and striving for normality as significant senses of agency, despite their ordinariness (Tuominen, 2022). It is noteworthy how the authors have managed to trace down seemingly

quotidian societal dynamics that, often surprisingly, have remarkable consequences. The articles in this section approach the coping mechanisms from various perspectives: from long-term ethnography to large-scale censuses and multi-site comparative approaches among marginalised populations.

Wikström and Eriksson (2024) study the conditions of housing provision for refugees in northern Sweden. Unlike the more conventional approaches to crises in housing, the authors take a strong stance against neoliberal integration strategies that justify restrictive housing policies for refugees. Their qualitative research methods point to the dynamics of "activation" and "individual responsibility" as principles for future integration. A closer look through detailed fieldwork, focusing on the grounds and premises on which the problem production is built, portrays a very different picture. The research shows how the perception of the housing crisis is used as an argument for maintaining a low level of refugee reception and undermining the welfare state's obligations. By a careful examination of how housing inequality is perpetuated, the authors show how the housing problem is represented as an individual problem.

Tkach's (2024) article presents a strong argument to illustrate the intersection of monetary and non-monetary relations and imaginaries in post-socialist Russia. Her case study concentrates on neighbour relations between various categories of homeowners and tenants and shows how their encounters tend to be stressful for the parties, but also involve intricate negotiations to avoid the total commercialisation of their relationship. She presents an anthropologically influenced perspective of the moral economy that includes the extra-economic sphere of norms, meanings, non-instrumental values, and practices that constitute the markets in the analysis of social interactions (see Palomera & Vetta, 2016, pp. 414–428). The ethnographic analysis covers cases in which the total commodification is compromised: a landlady who does not consider herself as selling a service but rather letting a stranger into her former home; a group of neighbours who establish an authoritarian community to resist market-based logics, and, on the other hand, "forced homeowners" who are distressed about their ownership, because it is a burden that ties them unwillingly to a specific location. These narratives portray homes against the totalising explanations of market interactions and reveal the elaborate coping mechanisms that the residents rely on during their everyday lives.

In contrast to the previously discussed detailed qualitative analyses, Zangger and Bank (2024) study the coping mechanisms based on large-scale panel data in Switzerland. The article concentrates on people's subjective well-being, and the analysis examines how it changed during various phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific focus is on the long-term impact of localised social capital on well-being and post-crisis recovery, providing an interesting view of the role of the neighbourhood and coping mechanisms. This allows us to study comparatively the effects of a major crisis among vulnerable groups and other segments of society. The researchers applied sequence analysis and hierarchical clustering to five Covid-19 waves in the panel data. They concluded that people who received a lot of support from their neighbours and friends before the pandemic were also likely to have had stable and very high levels of well-being after the crises. That is, their local support networks facilitated the recovery. Generally, the positive effects of the local social capital are more pronounced among vulnerable groups, but it is necessary to identify risk factors among them other than the rather obvious ones, such as income, health, and close neighbour relations.

Van de Wetering's (2024) work on coping mechanisms at the local level shows how research can benefit from a comparative approach to better understand how marginalised groups negotiate their community involvement.

She studies the changes in urban governance, especially regarding the questions of proximity, at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ethnographic research takes place in marginalised neighbourhoods in France and the Netherlands and challenges the role of "the local" in their governance. The authors argue that the notion of proximity is central in attempts to bridge the distance between the state and the urban residents but warn about a "local trap" that refers to a simplistic understanding that privileges the local scale to the others by default. Within the context of the pandemic, the article highlights the importance of regular contact between the urban professionals and residents and their physical presence, and notes that the state can be simultaneously proximate and far-away. Drawing on the two cases, the authors argue that the far-away state complicates how living conditions can be improved in marginalised neighbourhoods.

The last article in the section (Sullivan, 2024) focuses on the assessment of how a regeneration programme has been implemented in a marginalised area in the south of Ireland. Here, the data used are both quantitative and qualitative, and they cover a whole decade of observations, surveys, and participatory approaches. The analysis is based on the physical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable regeneration, to understand the challenges faced by the residents in vulnerable circumstances. The article studies the balance between the promise of regeneration—holistic long-term improvement of the area—and its potentially negative impacts, such as neglecting social investment in favour of large-scale capital infrastructure. The research illustrates especially how the Social, Economic and Environmental Plan (SEEP) has benefited the local community. The authors argue that the benefits are evident, but that there are shortcomings: For example, long-term planning is difficult because the support is based on one-year funding commitments and a narrow definition of estate regeneration.

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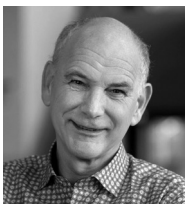
Pekka Tuominen is a social and cultural anthropologist specialising in urban transformation, the sociocultural qualities of space, and the moral dimensions of urbanity. He is currently senior research fellow at the University of Helsinki. His current research concentrates on urban transformation, segregation, and citizen participation in Helsinki.



Peer Smets is an engaged urban anthropologist who uses qualitative methods to deal with societal problems. He is employed at the Department of Sociology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His research mainly focuses on urban habitat conditions (housing and its living environment) in low-income neighbourhoods in the Global North and South. He has published on urban segregation, housing, housing finance, government bureaucracy, and social life in neighbourhoods. His current research focuses on urban collectives and poverty. His aim is finding solutions for better policies and implementation. In doing so, he links scientific insights with societal impact.

Section I.

Neighbourhoods

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ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Tackling Social Inequality in the City of Porto, Northern Portugal: Grassroots Horticultural Practices and the Desired City

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Abstract

Grassroots urban horticultural plots (*hortas*), part of the Porto Metropolitan Area in Northern Portugal, are presented as liminal spaces that hold a richness of community life and a "gift economy." Often in existence for several decades and encompassing groups of over 20 or 30 people, these informal communities are, nevertheless, not cherished by the instances of city governance that do not stand in the way of the destruction of these low-income urbanite horticultural communities. The use of de Certeau's concepts of "strategy" and "tactics" are used to try and explain this incompatibility between these two forms of urban (self) governance that hinders the right to the city by the low-income urbanites who have created these horticultural grassroots communities.

Keywords

food security; gift economy; informal communities; Porto – Portugal; right to the city; strategy and tactics; urban horticultural plots

1. Introduction

This article results from an exploratory and anthropologically informed look at a specific type of urban *hortas*—urban allotment plots (UAPs)—in the Porto Metropolitan Area (PMA), Northern Portugal. The article posits the existence of three types of *hortas*, i.e., three types of UAPs: informal (illegal; I-UAPs), formal (legal; F-UAPs), and informal/formalized (IF-UAPs). The cases under closer analysis, and part of the exploratory study here presented, are those constituting I-UAPs: these are working-class grassroots *hortas* and are here taken as opposed to both the City Council-created *hortas* (F-UAPs) and the urban middle-class

environmental-conscious associations-sponsored *hortas* (IF-UAPs), of which there are a growing number in the PMA.

The article will open by characterizing the nature of the social world inhabiting I-UAPs as being one where a "gift economy" lives. The article will then put forward the argument that, within a present-day trend of urban governance that promotes the idea of a sustainable city where the existence of urban green areas is seen as key (Guilland et al., 2018), the official instances of city governance have a radically different approach to the three types of UAPs: City governance promotes one type of *hortas* (F-UAPs), supports another one (the IF-UAPs), and ignores or actively allows the destruction of the remaining I-UAPs.

This article will explore the reasons why both I-UAPs (some of them in existence for over 30 years) are not cherished by city governance and why their destruction is accepted, even if unwillingly, by the low-income urbanites who have brought them into existence. The article will propose the argument that the inability of city government to identify grassroots I-UAPs as places where the right to the city (Harvey, 2012) is actively constructed by those urbanites most vulnerable to food security resides in a major ontological difference between the two forms of spatial action defined by de Certeau (1984): strategy and tactics, each one producing two of types of UAPs—F-UAPs and I-UAPs, respectively.

The exploratory study on I-UAPs presented here stemmed from practical work undertaken within the lecturing of the anthropology of space curricular unit, part of an integrated master's in architecture and urban planning at Universidade Fernando Pessoa, in Porto. The information on I-UAPs presented here results from traditional anthropological fieldwork, i.e., direct contact with the communities under study: From the overall sites identified by students, I chose two on opposite sides of the city and proceeded to go there regularly over the span of an agricultural cycle. The information was collected via participant observation and informal conversations, or "deep hanging out" (Clifford, 1996).

2. Informal Urban *Hortas* as Liminal Spaces and as Heterotopias

UAPs are not a new reality in urban contexts. In Portugal, the first UAPs arose in the city of Lisbon in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of large-scale rural migration away from inner regions and toward coastal areas and major cities such as Lisbon, the nation's capital. In Lisbon, new self-built neighborhoods lacked green spaces, a fact that, combined with the rural background of these new urbanites, led to the creation of many illegal allotment gardens (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016): In 1967, Lisbon municipality registered 128 ha of this type of urban allotments. I-UAPs continued to increase and in 1987 there were circa 301 ha registered by Lisbon City Council (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016, p. 57). Regarding the whole of national territory and F-UAPs, in 2013 there were 107 units distributed across 16 of Portugal's 18 mainland districts (Gonçalves, 2014). There are no such nation-wide numbers available regarding the informal, grassroots allotments (I-UAPs).

The grassroots I-UAPs are frequently located in the internal margins of the urban fabric, and although they display strong roots within the urban structure, they are not necessarily tied to the constant grey of the city. These patches of cultivated greenery display a relation to specific conditions (morphological, historical, legal, social) that have so far limited the built/urban development of the areas they are in. As a result, I-UAPS are frequently seen as places where the city has-not-yet-happened. They are liminal (Turner, 1969) places

in as much as they are "ambiguous, since their classification slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (p. 94).

I-UAPs are liminal also because they are the result of an activity (agriculture-based food production) the city has historically relegated to its outskirts—or, in the present globalized world, displaced to other regions and continents. Presently, the idea of "a city" does not generally entail agricultural practices (Gottdiener, 2014, p. 19)—and this is one of the elements producing the liminal quality of I-UAPs. Other elements are some topographical or hydrological characteristics of the land being cultivated (for instance, narrow and steep terraced plots, or flood plains of small secondary water lines that flow toward a major water line). But perhaps the most relevant element that produces the liminal quality of I-UAPs is the undefined legal status of the cultivated plots: In the over 30 cases known to this research, the communities not only do not own the property they are cultivating, but they also do not know to whom that land belongs. They only know that the land laid idle and thus grabbed hold of the opportunity to produce their own food. From the outside—and because they are usually hidden by untamed shrubbery intentionally left untouched—I-UAPs are perceived as urban emptiness (Figure 1). Thus, they are invisible to the untrained eye: and invisibility is also a quality of liminality (Turner, 1969).

Nevertheless, in the instances analysed through fieldwork, connectivity and urban growth have forged a rich community urban-life setting of green-hidden islands amidst the grey urban structure (Figure 2). In fact, I-UAPs are liminal spaces only from the outside; from within (i.e., by being part of the community, or by being a visitor to it, as I was through fieldwork) it is very visible how I-UAPs carry out the essential work of interconnecting humans and nature (the latter taken in a very broad sense) and of humans with other humans, thus producing community. These liminal spaces and their social systems are tantamount to other-places that are protected and stewarded by the local communities that produce them: These urban non-urbanized places fall perfectly into Foucault's (1967/2004) definition of heterotopia: "kinds of places that are outside all places, even though they are effectively locatable. These places, because they are absolutely other than all the locations they reflect and speak of, I'll call them, as opposed to utopias, heterotopias" (p. 15).

In every I-UAP, each individual grower has their own plot(s). The number and size of each plot per grower can vary, being related to the organic way these communities came to exist. Usually there is a pioneer stage,

Figure 1. The invisibility of I-UAPS (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon).

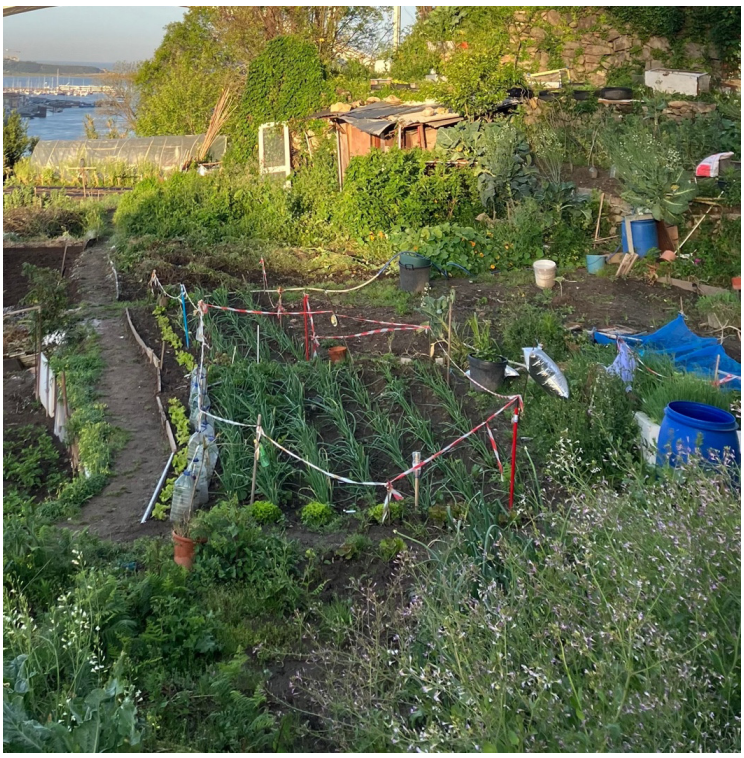

Figure 2. I-UAPs as green hidden islands (© Paula Mota Santos).

in which one, two, or three individuals start by clearing the land to then grow produce. As one of the oldest growers in site A stated:

> It was me and António, to start with. We came here in our spare time and started to clear the land; and as we cleared it the supporting walls of the terraces started to become visible. It was hard work!

Others joined the initial settlers later, at different points in time. The factors bringing these people together as a horticultural community are varied but usually fall along vicinal proximity, previous acquaintance, kinship, and/or professional ties. As one of the growers from site B said:

> I used to walk past this way in order to go to work, and I started to see that there were people going in there…and one day I walked in and I saw the cultivated plots: It was beautiful!…I immediately wanted to have one, and I started asking who I should talk to in order to have a small piece of land to start growing vegetables.

Due to the legal liminal nature of I-UAPs, new intended growers don't know who to reach to get the authorization they need if not from those who are already farming the land and act as gatekeepers of the community ethos.

2.1. Morphological and Social Structure of I-UAPs: Two Examples

This article will present the I-UAP cases of *horta* A and *horta* B: *Horta A* (Figure 3) is located on one of the edges of the city, being an area of natural stormwater drainage. The verticality of the place and the steep

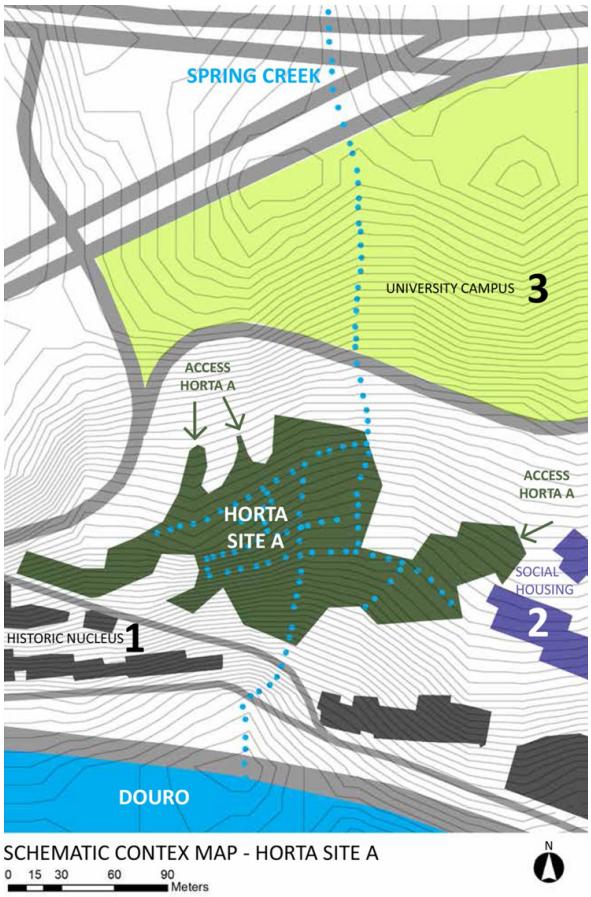

Figure 3. *Horta A* (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon): One part is located over the top of a cliff that goes down to the riverbank, while the other is surrounded by (1) a historic nucleus of the city, (2) a mid-late twentieth-century community housing project, and (3) a contemporary campus of one of the city's universities.

slope contributed to the overall erosion, mainly due to the continued water run-off, washing the topsoil away. The site has two different elevations: one part is located over the top of a cliff that goes down to the riverbank, while the other is surrounded by a historic nucleus of the city (mostly nineteenth-century houses), a mid-late twentieth-century community housing project, and a contemporary campus of one of the city's universities. The land is the property of this university and the growers use it with the tacit approval of the institution. The number of growers that constitute this community is circa 15 people (both male and female, although the former predominates). The total area of the cultivated plots is 20,000 m^2. According to the information collected through fieldwork, cultivation has been taking place on this site for over 25 years.

The food grown by this community ranges from potatoes to beans, tomatoes, onions, lettuces, cabbages, spinach, and, in some cases, strawberries. A few of the people also have chickens, a goat, and in the past, rabbits. The water has been collected and centralized on the highest point of the urban stream flow: This community decided to build a small water retaining structure for that stream (Figure 4). The construction work was carried out by themselves, sharing labour, materials, and any related expenses. From the ensuing pond, water is distributed by dug-out canals and pipes to each corner of the community *horta* in order to irrigate people's crops.

Figure 4. Water structures built by the growers (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon).

Water use is regulated by communal agreement: Some growers irrigate their plots in the morning while others do it in the afternoon; the detailed community arrangement as to water use regulation is something that further fieldwork will pursue. The initial apparently invisible subdivision of the space by the growers results in the *horta* looking like one big horticultural patch that reveals itself to us only as one crosses its entrance, emerging before our eyes like a secret garden. Accessibility to it is limited, having only three points of entry (Figure 3) and being very well protected—there are makeshift gates with locks for which you need keys (Figure 5). Growers say since the land belongs to the university, they feel responsible for what is going on inside the *horta*. Although this was the reason they initially gave regarding the importance of keeping control of the access to the grounds, continued fieldwork revealed that both the unkept shrubbery of the external edges of the *horta* and the locked entry points helped avoid the theft of produce by people from outside the community.

Figure 5. *Horta* A: makeshift gate (© Paula Mota Santos).

Horta B is located on a flood plain of a small creek (Figure 6). This type of land formation (i.e., flood plains) has been avoided by the development grid of the city due to the unstable ground conditions. The location is an area where the city meets in a multi-scalar way: the city ring-road, social housing estates (where the majority of the growers reside), the remains of a *quinta* (former agricultural estate), a historic hamlet, and a water corridor. They all coexist in an extensive open space where the cultivated plots (aggregated in more than one unit) occupy circa 68,500 m^2. In this article, I will only be referring to a smaller section of the complete area, (*horta* B), occupying circa 19,000 m^2.

The small creek that runs through the site brings water from the coastal hills (100 m elevation) into a bigger creek that runs through the city to the River Douro. The water quality of the creek is extremely poor, being polluted by industrial units located upstream, on the exterior of the ring-road. Using water as the main resource (Figure 2), people have been growing food produce such as potatoes, beans, tomatoes, onions, lettuce, cabbage, spinach, and some fruit trees. The community of growers of *horta B* is constituted of more than 30 individuals (both male and female, with a predominance of the former) and they have been cultivating this particular section for more than 22 years. The growers do not know who holds the deed of the land they are cultivating; it might belong to the city, but no one is sure.

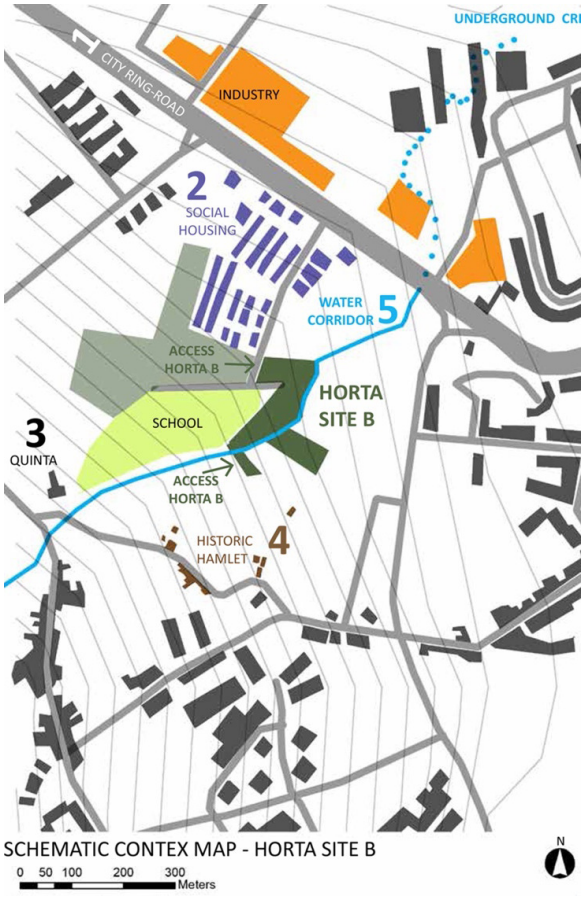

Figure 6. *Horta* B (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon): (1) the city ring-road, (2) social housing estates (where the majority of the growers reside), (3) the remains of a *quinta*, (4) a historic hamlet, and (5) a water corridor.

2.2. Hortas as Community Space: Practices and Discourses

At both these I-UAPs, horticultural growers mainly come from nearby housing communities, although not exclusively. Some of the growers might live further away, but almost all of them have connections to the *horta*'s initial settlers through family or work. These horticultural "communities of choice" are constituted mostly of retired men and women. All the physical activities and the daily chores that these urban agricultural units demand imply a lot of effort and time, but *hortas* are spoken of by growers as something that "does them good"—by which they mean, *hortas* keep them active, healthy, happy.

According to these growers, *hortas* are keeping them away from the *tasca* (a modern-day tavern predominantly associated with the working class in Portuguese society, where men, especially, can consume large amounts of alcohol). Thus, the *horta* is a source of well-being because it steers men away from the *tasca*, but also because it implies an outdoor, physically active lifestyle. The fresh air, growers state, is a source of well-being, and the combination of it with physical work "clears the mind of bad thoughts" (i.e., depression, so often associated with old age and the ending of an active work life). The *hortas* are also the place for socializing with food and drink, namely when the weather is dry and sunny.

The wholesomeness of the *horta* is mirrored in the high quality of the food produced. As the growers say: "The food I buy in the supermarket, God knows where it comes from and what stuff they put on it! This one, I know it is healthier because I grew it myself—and it tastes better too!" Thus, to the betterment of the growers' health through an active, outdoors lifestyle, the *hortas* bring the improved quality of the produce itself. An additional advantage of this practice is the contribution it makes to the household economy. Growers do refer to the fact that, by growing their own food produce, "a lot of things need no longer be bought at the supermarket." However, this contribution to the family budget (i.e., food security) is never presented as the main impetus for their horticultural practices. The economic contribution is clearly and discursively recognized, but never central. Growers mostly refer to the pleasure they derive from the horticultural activity as the main reason to engage in it—and because "it is good for you."

In fact, the *hortas* are not just a space: They are places, as defined by Tuan (1977/2001): They are centers of felt value (Tuan 2001, p. 4).Thus, besides being spoken of as a place that "is good for you," *hortas* as an urban terrain are also characterized by the circularity of "the gift," in the sense described by Mauss (1925/2000) whereby gift-giving is steeped in morality. By giving, receiving, and returning gifts, a moral bond between the persons exchanging gifts is created (i.e., *community* is created). So, what is the gift-giving that takes place in the *hortas*? The element that immediately circulates is food produce.

Growers refer quite often to the pleasure they have in offering some of their surplus produce to family, friends, and neighbors. As the wife of one of the cultivators of *horta* A, and an active element in the horticultural activity herself, said, standing in front of a $2m^2$ section packed with lettuces: "Our son and his wife are very happy with the produce we give them: potatoes, onions, tomatoes, lettuces…I mean, I can freeze the tomato surplus, but lettuces no. And how many lettuces can one eat, really?"

Close relatives are the most frequent beneficiaries of the growers' activities. Growers refer to the fact that, although their children (already adults and with families of their own, often living far away from the *horta*'s location) appreciate the produce their parents grow and offer them, they do not show interest in initiating such

horticultural practices themselves, much to their parents' regret. With the difficult economic scenario Portugal experienced in 2008, but particularly from 2011 onward—the year in which the Portuguese government and the European Commission signed a Memorandum of understanding on financial assistance to Portugal—this "gift of food" is now even more welcome than before. Additionally, some of the growers do speak of selling their produce, but only to "people we trust." Even with this latter group, the main goal of the horticultural activity is never to sell. This importance of I-UAPs to low-income urbanites' sense of food security increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second element that circulates through a gift economy is labor. The pooling of labor is a well-known social feature in agricultural societies at time of peak labor demand. Concerning the *hortas*, very often growers referred to the fact that if one of them is off sick and is not showing up regularly at their plot, they will carry out the necessary tasks so that the crop is not lost. Consequently, you very rarely find unattended plots in I-UAPs. In times of more intensive labor requirements, everyone receives help from their neighbor. Family or friends frequently help when it is harvesting season, when a structure needs to be put up (like the water management structures referred to above), or when goods need to be transported to and from the *hortas*. As one of the growers from *horta* A referred:

> I came to know of this man who had good potato seed [i. e., for planting], so I talked to my son, who has a car, and we arranged to go to Paranhos [a Porto civil parish on the opposite side of the city to where this *horta* is] and collect the sacks with the seeds.

Perhaps the most visible result of this communal pooling of labor is the water management structures built by these two communities and depicted in Figure 4:

> We all agreed on the need to build this tank. We agreed on which day to do the work, so we would all be available. The building materials were agreed upon and then bought by Ferraz. His daughter and son-in-law have a car and were available to help with the transportation. Then we divided the costs equally.

The third element that circulates through a gift economy is knowledge. Quite frequently there is a rural connection to these growers' biographical paths: Some have migrated to the big city, or if already born in Porto, their parents had migrated to Porto. Some of their agricultural knowledge comes from this ancestral-village connection, mostly as childhood memories or knowledge obtained via the parents and the occasional visits to their village. However, this does not happen with all of the growers: Some approached the initial settlers/pioneers, not only to ask permission to cultivate a section of the land but to learn from them how to grow things successfully. As one of the youngest growers, part of the community of *horta* A, said:

> I did not know much at the beginning….I learned everything from Costa: when to plant or seed; but also how to make solid frames out of cut canes for the beans to grow. I learned pretty much everything from him!

3. Formal Urban *Hortas* as *Topoi*

A strong trend in current city governance is the concept of sustainable city where the keeping of green areas is considered a key point in the assessment of the quality of life in an urban setting (Guilland et al., 2018). One of

the first F-UAPs programs in Portugal was initiated in 2003 by LIPOR, the inter-municipal entity managing the waste of eight municipalities in the north part of the PMA (Martinho da Silva, 2014). Additionally, on the southern part of the PMA, and across the river from Porto, we can find the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia, which in 2014 had an urban garden allotments network constituted by six allotments (completed and in use) "that occupied 11,202m^2, plus three others to be completed…that will occupy 13,322m^2" (Martinho da Silva, 2014, p. 42). In 2014, with the already functioning in-project urban allotment gardens, the area encompassed in Vila Nova de Gaia was 43,435m^2 (Silva, 2014). In 2023, the Vila Nova de Gaia allotment gardens were fully functional (Pereira, 2023).

The process of becoming a member of an F-UAP is very different from the one taking place in I-UAPs. Since F-UAPs are created by the local City Council (often in partnership with other local entities), there is a formal enrolment process via an online application form that any citizen interested in accessing a plot will have to fill in and then wait to see if the application is successful. Upon acceptance, there is a small amount to be paid yearly (30 to 35 EUR). Also, following a successful application and ensuing enrolment, citizens will have to obey the Regulation Code that organizes the functioning of these F-UAPs. Part of the obligations are the following: attend educational courses on sustainable farming; use only sustainable farming techniques; comply with the working hours defined by the Council; make proper use of composting techniques; and keep communal spaces in good order. The entry of people with pets is prohibited (except service dogs), as well as using hoses for watering, making fires, building any sheltering structure, granting use of the plot to a third party, and having no agricultural activity for over four weeks (Regulamento nº 442/2018, 2018).

Several studies paid attention to Vila Nova de Gaia City Council's F-UAPs, namely Martinho da Silva (2014), Martinho da Silva et al. (2016), and Pereira (2023). Regarding the citizens' motivations collected by these studies—mostly taken from the application forms (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016) and a phone-contact survey (Pereira, 2023), but not from direct contact with the citizens/growers—we can find some similarity to the reasons expressed by the citizens of the I-UAPs communities in Porto this work focuses on. Thus, according to Martinho da Silva et al. (2016, p. 59), the reasons most frequently indicated for applying for an F-UAP plot were "to supplement family budget; occupation of leisure times; access to organic farming; practice of physical exercise; environmental concerns." The phone survey conducted by Pereira (2023, p. 37) to 117 users of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs, indicated the following reasons: production of more healthy food (30%); occupation of free time (27%); and enjoyment of agriculture practice/contact with the land (24%). However, there seems to be a noticeable difference between the social universe of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs and the I-UAPs this study focuses on. According to Martinho da Silva et al. (2016, p. 59), "more than 1/5 of the applicants (21%) have higher education or leading professional professions." Although the study on I-UAPs in this article follows a qualitative approach and, as such, quantitative data cannot be here offered, the fact is that the identification of such level of formal education within the communities of the I-UAPs contacted was almost non-existent (one case in *horta* A and two in *horta* B). Also, the vast majority of the individuals in the I-UAPs in Porto, met through the fieldwork carried out, were retired, while the numbers supplied by the studies on Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs indicate only 50% (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016 p. 59) and 46% (Pereira, 2023, p. 37) of retired people.

These differences notwithstanding, the information collected by Pereira (2023) on the F-UAPs is similar regarding the use of the produce, namely that (a) the whole of the production is for the growers' own consumption and not for sale (p. 42), that (b) when the yield is quite high growers end up offering produce to

relatives and friends (p. 43), and that (c) one the major benefits of the horticultural practice are the higher quality of their produce compared to supermarket-bought, the savings this allows in terms of household expenses, and the improvement of the quality of life through the occupation of free time and the carrying out of outdoor physical activity (p. 47).

Although this exploratory study is focused on I-UAPs, once fieldwork had allowed me to fully grasp the sense of community I-UAPs hold, I visited a couple of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs to compare the two realities. Not only is the F-UAPs space very different (more formal and proto-urban, with perfectly aligned paths and numbered plots), but also the sense of community as witnessed in the I-UAPs in Porto was not *really* present, with neighboring plots presenting very different levels of care and attention to the produce being cultivated. In Porto's I-UAPs, due to the "economy of the gift" that inhabits them, all plots look fairly evenly cared for. This happens because, as already stated, not only knowledge on how to grow produce circulates, but also labour does, with holders of neighboring plots lending a helping hand whenever needed. Also, the much smaller area of Porto's I-UAPs when compared to the Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs, allied to the informal and socially interconnected way through which, in the Porto's I-UAPs, one can obtain a little plot to cultivate, lends itself to a much tighter community fabric than the formal online process of accessing a plot the Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs use.

A third type of *hortas* has been emerging in the PMA that is the outcome of civic associations, constituted by middle-class citizens with a higher level of formal education who have come together propelled by environmentally conscious action and social solidarity. Although acknowledging their existence, a more detailed analysis of these *hortas* is not part of this article.

4. Chronicles of Destruction

The previous sections have highlighted how grassroots *hortas* (I-UAPs) and City Council *hortas* (F-UAPs) can actually be different social universes (i.e., the way the actual horticultural space comes to exist, the way one becomes a member of the community, the actual sense of community—or lack of it—and the formal layout of the cultivated space itself), even if holding similar horticultural practices. In fact, it is possible to acknowledge a tripartite typology of *hortas* by looking at the social universes that have brought them into existence: I-UAPs (informal grassroots plots) are associated with low-income individuals; F-UAPs (formal municipality allotments) are associated with low-income individuals and upper/intermediate/professionals; IF-UAPs (more informal/formalized pots) are associates with upper intermediate/professionals. Additionally, it is possible to identify different goals/concerns per type of community (Table 1).

The argument is that the official/formal instances of city governance relate better to both F-UAPs (which is to be expected, since these result from City Council initiatives) and IF-UAPs than to the grassroots I-UAPS. In fact, City Governance relationship with I-UAPs is one of total non-acknowledgment of the added value these communities have in producing a (sustainable) city. For instance, in April 2020, as the first confinement of the Covid-19 pandemic was in place, the growers of a Porto I-UAP located in a pocket of unbuilt land, in the central area of Francos, were faced with the entry of heavy machinery into the cultivated grounds. Once in, they proceeded to destroy it. This I-UAP was home to circa 24 growers who, in a matter of days, lost everything: their produce, infrastructures, tools, and even animals. A week before the arrival of the heavy machinery, a man—not from the community—appeared and told one of the elements of the community "they

Table 1. Goals per plot typology and respective growers' communities.

Goals/concerns	Low-income and intermediate professionals	Upper and intermediate professionals
Health concerns	I-UAPs F-UAPs	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Recreation	I-UAPs F-UAPs	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Food security	I-UAPs	—
Food safety	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Environmental concerns	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Education	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs

had only a few days to take their things out of the cultivated grounds because construction was going to take place there." A week later, on the 28th of April, the front page of *Público*, one of the main national daily papers, had a piece on this destruction. This was the first time that a matter related to an I-UAP had made it to the front page of a national newspaper. The title read: *Porto: They Destroyed Their Community* Hortas *Leaving Them Even Poorer* (Pinto, 2020a). The piece described the aftermath of the destruction, voicing the growers' absolute grief for their loss. The images that accompanied the piece portrayed a landscape of destruction punctuated by isolated human figures who looked displaced in desolate grounds that were, until some days ago, a vibrant place, home to several forms of life, from plant to animal, to community.

In the face of the destruction of their *hortas*, members of this I-UAP did not claim for themselves the right to the land: They demanded a different way for this destruction to have happened, "with more time and with more humanity," as one of the growers put it (Pinto, 2020a). Even if the long and continued use of the land ascribed them some rights under Portuguese law—and the oldest and longest-standing grower in this I-UAP was an 89-year-old woman who had her plot there for over 40 years—respect for private property (a deep core value in northern Portugal) prevailed. Some historical context might help explain these urbanites' deep respect for private property. April 2024 marked 50 years since the 1974 Portuguese democratic revolution, which ended 48 years of a right-wing dictatorship. Back then, in the heated days of the revolutionary period, only southern Portugal saw a land reform in which the fields of large private agricultural estates were expropriated and given to the agricultural laborers, who had organized themselves into agricultural cooperatives. Back then, in the revolutionary period, no land reform took place in northern Portugal. In my conversations with I-UAP growers, whenever I approached the matter of land ownership, they always mentioned the fact that, at some point in the future, they would have to leave their *hortas*.

Nevertheless, after the destruction that took place in April 2020, one of the growers decided to fight back and hired a lawyer. As they stated, the loss of the *hortas* would always be a difficult blow to them, "but in the situation we are now in [i.e., the pandemic and its confinement, and related loss of jobs] these *hortas* were more important than never" (Pinto, 2020a). In the face of the limelight the unprecedented national-level news coverage shed over this community situation, Porto City Council was forced to step in. Although there was tacit evidence of the land owner accepting this community presence and its use of his land throughout the several decades of the *horta*'s existence, Porto's City Council said there was nothing it could do to revert

the situation. Recognising the important role the production of the *hortas* had for the livelihood of the low-income urbanites—but at the same time stating the absolute right of the owner to take full possession of his land—Porto City Council offered the growers the possibility of acquiring a plot in the now existing Porto City Council F-UAPs. However, the people who had lost their *hortas* in Francos had to join the several hundreds of urbanites on the waiting list for a plot in any of the Porto City Council F-UAPs. This meant that accessing a new *horta* would not take place soon, nor in a location near their homes, which made the offer totally ineffective regarding the losses suffered. And although the growers had identified a plot near the now destroyed *horta* location (and thus, near also to their homes/housing estate), the City Council stated that it could not cater to a specific group of citizens in the city: The Council's work toward increasing the offer of F-UAPs was for all of the Porto citizens (Pinto, 2020b). The legal action against the owner of the land fell through due to the inability of the growers to bear the costs that legal representation and litigation involved.

5. When Strategy Overruns Tactics: The Unavoidable Demise of the Urban *Horta* Heterotopia?

Throughout my fieldwork with I-UAPs, I had often feared the future that I viewed as almost certain: a future in which these fantastic community places would disappear. This certainty of mine derived from two elements: (a) the impossible relation between the liminal state of these territories and the growers' absolute respect for private property, a relationship often mirror in the growers' statements that eventually they might have to abandon their *hortas* because the land they cultivated was not theirs, and (b) because the formal instances of City Governance ignored these spaces and saw them as tinged by marginality (due to the illegal nature of the occupation of the soil). Therefore, when the *Público* article came out, I was confined at home, like everybody else at the time, and no longer in the terrain (to be noted, this *horta* was not part of the set of I-UAPs I had been in contact with).

At home, in confinement, reading the newspaper piece, as events unfolded I was saddened but (a) energized, reading that the growers were fighting back, (b) saddened that they could not take their legal fight through, yet (c) happy that the City Council had recognized the importance of I-UAPs to the communities that brought them into existence, and (d) saddened and angry (but not surprised) that the City Council took a formal, and consequently, ineffective approach to offering redress to these growers' losses. In *Público*'s first piece, one of the growers is quoted as saying: "I rebel against this because this shows only one thing: The powerful, the ones with money, they can do anything" (Pinto, 2020a). So, besides a neo-Marxist approach to this statement, how can the dynamics of this particular event (that is relevant beyond itself) be illuminated?

The forms of spatial behaviour defined by de Certeau (1984) might provide a useful frame to elicit this relation between the formal and informal domains of city life as objectified in the *hortas*. The following is de Certeau's definition of strategy and tactics, to which I've added references to the *hortas* following this exploratory study:

> I call *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power [Porto City Council]…can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own [the legal framework, namely related to private property and urban land use] and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats [the I-UAPs]…can be managed. (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 35–36)

> By contrast with strategy,...a tactic is a calculation determined by the absence of a proper locus [the I-UAPs as liminal and invisible, as argued in this article]. No delimitation of an exteriority [their illegal status, namely as far as land property goes] provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy [see the destruction of the I-UAP in April 2020]. The space of the tactic is the space of the other. (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 36–37)

Strategy (the Porto City Council) works to limit the sheer number of variables affecting city governance by creating a place (the city as governed by the City Council) in which the environment can be rendered predictable if not properly tamed. By contrast, tactics is the approach taken when the subject is unable to take measures against the variables (the inability of growers to proceed with legal action against the destruction of their I-UAP in 2020). The modality of spatial performativity of tactics is most aptly put by Buchanan (2000, p. 89):

> Tactics are constantly in the swing of things and are as much in danger of being swept away or submerged by the flow of events as they are capable of bursting through the dykes, strategy erects around itself and suffusing its protected place with its own brand of subversive and incalculable energy. Tactics refers to the set of practices that strategy has not been able to domesticate.

The destruction of the I-UAP in April 2020 clearly shows how the spatial modalities of action of the City Council and that of the urbanites who constituted the horticultural informal grass-root communities not only speak different idioms, as the possibility of translation, and thus of communication and dialogue seem not to be conceivable. Additionally, although the eradicated *horta* was not part of the ones my fieldwork had taken me to, and if its destruction stands as the coming true of an anticipated fate, *horta* A presented in this article is now also facing oblivion. The construction of a new bridge is planned, one that will cross the River Douro from Vila Nova Gaia to Porto, carrying a new line of the Greater Porto subway network, and with it, the demise of this I-UAP, the beginning of which can already be seen (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Destruction of the shrubbery perimeter "wall" (© Paula Mota Santos 2024). Note: Compare this with Figure 1 (site A), which portrays this very section a couple of years before.

6. Conclusion

The previous sections have highlighted the differences between three types of UAPs that can be identified in the city of Porto. The differences underlined by this exploratory study were both in terms of how these *hortas* came to exist (from informal to more formal processes) and in terms of the needs they fulfill for each type of community inhabiting each type of UAP, namely: health concerns, recreation, food security, food safety, environmental concerns and education (Table 1). This article focused primarily on I-UAPs.

The three types of UAPs presented here (being constituted by different social universes, having different goals, and thus being the result of different social dynamics that brought these different UAPs into existence) have not constructed any forms of connectivity between them, despite sharing some goals/concerns, namely health concerns and recreation (Table 1). I posit here that this absence of connectivity between these types of UAPs is mostly rooted in the social class differences that can be identified in the constitution of the community of each type of UAP (Table 1). For instance, I-UAPs are inhabited/made to exist mostly by working-class urbanites, while IF-UAPs are mostly constituted by middle-class urbanites, often holders of university degrees. Additionally, these social class differences are themselves constitutive of the different processes at the root of each type of UAP, a characteristic that also contributes to this absence of connectivity between the three types of UAPs.

The study here presented was able to identify how the heterotopic spaces of I-UAPs are usually (mis)read as an urban emptiness, as urban black holes. From the outside (literally and metaphorically) it seems that "the city" does not exist there (Figure 1). But these places are immensely socially productive, as their inhabiting by a "gift economy" identified by this exploratory study clearly shows. A black hole in physics does not, in fact, refer to an emptiness but to a location of immense energy. In the same way, I-UAPs are not urban emptiness, but spaces in which there is a concentration and exchange of energy vital to making a city exist—and this characteristic is a clear and central contribution from this exploratory study, which works towards a better understanding of the social reality that these *hortas* hold within them.

This study also identified the creation of these I-UAPs as a coping mechanism created by urbanites who are the ones most at risk regarding food security, and thus, also at risk regarding social exclusion. However, because these grassroots *hortas* belong to the realm of the informal (*tactics*), they are placed at a clear disadvantage in the formal (*strategy*) urban governance system—a disadvantage that the chronicle of the 2020 destruction of an I-UAP presented in this article so clearly highlights.

If, according to Zukin (1995, p. 7), building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labor, and capital, with the look and feel of cities reflecting concepts of order and disorder, the question that begs for a productive answer is: How does a formal system of territory management (city governance) embrace an informal system (the I-UAPs horticultural communities) without annihilating it? Because as Harvey (2012, p. xvi) states:

> Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced, and that one of their claims is to the unalienated right to make a city more after their own heart's desire, we will arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense.

The first step in this desired future would be, firstly, the recognition by city governance of how much these communities build the new city that is in the desired present-day urban charters, followed by the recognition of the rights to the soil these long-standing communities might have acquired. Ideally, also, these I-UAPs should formalize themselves and acquire legal status and existence, so that they would become a subject with will and power able to claim the right to maintain the city more in line with their own hearts' desires. However, both paths would imply the ability to move away from the dichotomy tactics–strategy that de Certeau (1984) delineated. The overcoming of this dichotomy is the real challenge urban governance needs to face if these *hortas* and their working-class communities are to be removed from the margins and brought into the city proper while keeping their form of community.

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Conflict of Interests

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ARTICLE

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Neighbourhood Change, Deprivation, Peripherality, and Ageing in the Yorkshire Coalfield

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Abstract

Low-income neighbourhoods in contemporary England continue to be buffeted by roiling economic inequalities and social policy absences. Long-term residents have a unique perspective on this socio-spatial stress. This article zooms in to examine the condition of one spatial manifestation of these broader forces: peripheral council/public housing estates in the deindustrialised North of England—in this case the ex-coalfields of West Yorkshire. Neighbourhood conditions are seen through the eyes of residents aged between 60 and 85 years. The article explores their accounts of the local economic, social, and political changes which have interlaced their experiences of work, community, and place over six decades. It also examines how irregular regeneration projects, emergency initiatives and local organising have tried to address and ameliorate structural marginalisation in recent years, not least during the Covid pandemic. The article provides a historically contingent account of contemporary socio-spatial stress, one that emphasises the significance of long-term residence and feelings of not only loss and nostalgia, but hopeful and resilient attachments to place.

Keywords

coalfields; deindustrialisation; housing estates; marginality; neighbourhoods; oral history

1. Introduction

The UK remains in the grip of a cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis and growing socioeconomic inequality (Joseph Rowntree Foundation [JRF], 2024) and local government budgets have not recovered since the austerity of the 2010s (Institute of Fiscal Studies [IFS], 2024). These trends are intersecting with existing classed and raced hierarchies to produce differentiated landscapes of neighbourhood deprivation and

marginality (Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2021). Social scientists have long attended to such dynamics. However, the tumult of the 2016 Brexit referendum not only destabilised political culture in the UK, but it also introduced new readings of, specifically English, socio-spatial exclusion and vulnerability. At the most ideological pole, populist commentaries heralded peripheral communities for allegedly holding fast to "traditional" values and rejecting the imputed cosmopolitanism of the EU project (e.g., Goodhart, 2017). These accounts were bolstered by survey-based values research which posited a nation polarised between the conservative social and political inclinations of older, white working-class populations and the liberal pretensions of those living in cities and University towns (e.g., Sobolewska & Ford, 2020). Ethnography-inclined social scientists accepted some of these terms of debate and set about understanding dynamics of marginality and disaffection in post-industrial districts (e.g., Koch et al., 2021; McKenzie, 2017). At its worst, this research obscured and flattened understandings of working-class life within contemporary England just as socioeconomic inequalities and polarisations were intensifying (JRF, 2024). Further, it implicitly or explicitly ranged the attitudes and needs of poor whites against those of racialised migrants, refugees, and citizens of colour (see Mondon & Winter, 2020). This has been fanned by the neo-nationalist currents within English politics reflected in the Labour government's adoption of a "securonomics" agenda (see Reeves, 2023). According to Davies and Gane (2021), this amounts to a "post-neoliberal" mobilisation of England's "white natives" and is aligned with broader currents flowing through the Global North as elites compete to pose as sentinels of 'tradition' and 'security' in the face of accumulating social, political and economic shocks.

The upshot of these "culture war"-style, neo-nationalist accounts of socio-spatial deprivation, is that they deflect from the material deprivations and marginalities afflicting different communities and foreclose who is documented and represented as "working class." In response, white-coded, unitarist accounts of a "left behind" working class have been consistently challenged by critical scholars (e.g., Antonucci et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2019) as has the efficacy of "post-industrial" as a framework for contemporary, multi-polar class alliances (see Luger & Schwarze, 2024). Similarly, scholars have challenged whitewashed accounts of working-class histories as they pertain to industry, community and solidarity (e.g., Anitha & Pearson, 2018; Shilliam, 2018) and emphasised how racialised structures of the post-war British economy and culture hierarchised access to stable jobs, homes, and welfare services (e.g., Virdee, 2014).

This article exists in dialogue with these critical interventions. It attends to a "classic" location in the neo-nationalist imaginary: White British-majority neighbourhoods in the deindustrialised zones of Northern England. However, it does not do so to privilege the experiences or resentments of White British working-class people (not least because poverty is a deeply racialised structure of English society; see JRF, 2022), but to re-assert how some of the traditional matrices of analytical sociology—mechanisms driving wealth inequality, histories and patterns of social division, and the lived dynamics of urban deprivation—can help us understand the condition of people and communities living with gradual structural marginalisation. This is to focus on a specific fraction of low-income, working-class households. There are different English spatial geographies one could select to explore these patterns—struggling inner cities, coastal towns, rural communities, suburban fringes—but here I focus on the coalfields of Yorkshire. The article works in the spirit of a longitudinal, explanatory account of the currents that shape working-class lives, with the always-present possibility of everyday resistance. The article unfolds as follows. Next, I summarise the scholarly debates and lineages that frame the article and with which it should be read in dialogue. Then we learn more about the case study methodology structuring the article, before turning to the data which

explores: memories of deindustrialisation, interpretations of change, and resources of hope. We conclude with some methodological and analytical reflections.

2. Literature Review

My conceptual framework for understanding the specific problematic of council housing estate trajectories and conditions in post-industrial locations is informed here by several established areas of scholarly literature. Taken together, they help build an account of economic, political, and social change over time which we can place in dialogue with the dataset presented later in the article.

Firstly, there are a range of classic studies from the post-war period when researchers, working in nascent academic departments, interpreted working-class life through the lens of social change in industrial communities (e.g., Dennis et al., 1956; Hoggart, 1957; Jackson, 1968). To this, we can add more recent historiographies of the post-war era exploring how changing employment structures shaped working-class communities and identities (e.g., Lawrence, 2019). Secondly, neoliberal hegemony initiated the fragmentation and relegation of working-class communities, with scholars highlighting both the structural decomposition of post-war public or council housing estates (e.g., Watt, 2021) and disinterring the social, political, and emotional impacts of the "half-life" of deindustrialisation on industrial communities (e.g., Emery, 2020) and the place attachments of older people (e.g., Degnen, 2015). Given the significance of coal mining to the UK industrial economy and the monumental trade union defeat of the 1984–1985 Miner's Strike, community and marginality in and around now-defunct pits and coalfields has received specific attention (e.g., Bright, 2011; Walkerdine, 2010; Warwick & Littlejohn, 1992; Webster, 2003). Beyond the lens of industrial decline, the distinct territorial unit of the post-industrial Northern English town surfaces through profiles of racial diversity (Barbulescu et al., 2019) and the problematics of "community cohesion," Islamophobia and racist policing (e.g., Bagguley & Hussain, 2001; Miah et al., 2020; Wallace & Favell, 2023).

Thirdly, into the post-2008 austerity and Covid-19 periods, researchers in the UK have documented projects of ongoing urban securitisation and welfare state retrenchment undermining municipal safety nets and community infrastructures (e.g., Lewis et al., 2023; Patrick et al., 2022; White, 2020). The public and private rental housing stock on which poor households rely has been exposed as deadly (e.g., Apps, 2021) and substandard, especially for low-income migrants (Lombard, 2023) and refugees (Brown et al., 2022), whilst increases in food banks, warm banks, school holiday hunger, and bed poverty are now standard indicators of the UK's decaying social fabric (see Butler, 2024). The North of England was disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, demonstrating the ongoing salience of 'north-south' territorial divides in health and wealth inequalities (see Bambra et al., 2024).

Finally, social policy interventions in low-income English neighbourhoods are increasingly threadbare. The 1997–2010 Labour government was infamous for its plethora of area-based initiatives, aligning neoliberalised regeneration logics with community empowerment agendas as documented by, for example, Wallace (2010) and Watt (2021). The 2010–2015 Coalition government implemented a fiscal austerity regime that swept away these thickets of neighbourhood assistance, replacing them with voluntarist "localism" initiatives, and an extreme rise in food banks and their usage (see Lambie-Mumford, 2017). The last decade has seen further dwindling of local welfare budgets (Butler, 2024) and as a result, local authorities have been reliant on localised webs of Covid-era mutual aid networks, episodic charitable

funding, and severely under-funded statutory social work services. These austerities and abandonments have intersected with rises in food and energy costs to increase the number of households living in "deep poverty" (JRF, 2024) and a spreading mental health crisis (ONS, 2022), two trends which disproportionately affect minoritised households (e.g., JRF, 2022) and older people living in excluded neighbourhoods (e.g., Dahlberg, 2020).

3. Case Study Neighbourhoods

The article zooms in on the Metropolitan Borough of Wakefield, a sprawling urban region home to over 350,000 people. The Borough is part of the larger West Yorkshire conurbation that includes the economically dominant city of Leeds and its smaller neighbour, Bradford. The Borough is comprised of the historic, small city of Wakefield (population 109,000) and the "Five Towns" of Castleford, Normanton, Featherstone, Knottingley and Pontefract (see Figure 1).

The two case study areas are the East Moor and Warwick council housing estates. Both estates are scored among the 10% most socioeconomically deprived in England (Wakefield District Council, 2024) and have above-average numbers of children in poverty (Wakefield District Council, 2024). They are paradigmatic examples of English housing estates—purpose built in the early- to mid-twentieth century to stabilise the reproduction of labour supply for nearby industries—which have subsequently lost reliable sources of local employment and leisure. Understanding their condition through the eyes of long-term residents provides insights that can be extended to similar neighbourhood housing contexts in contemporary England.

East Moor is a large estate (pop. 3200) located close to Wakefield city centre. According to the 2021 census, the main ethnic groups are white British (66%), Asian British (13%), and white "Other" (in this case, Eastern

Figure 1. Map of the Wakefield District.

European households) 10% (Local Government Association [LGA], 2022a). The estate was built in the 1930s, less than a mile from Parkhill colliery. Our oral history testimonies suggest close interconnections between pit and estate right up until it closed in 1982. Today employment and educational attainment levels are poorer on the estate than the UK average (LGA, 2022a). Most people rent their home from a social landlord although some are "right to buy" leaseholders who either live in their home or have rented it on the private market (LGA, 2022a). East Moor is knitted, to some degree, into the fabric of Wakefield city by bus links or a 20-minute walk. Today, East Moor has tree-lined streets typical of a "garden suburb" and retains a local rugby team and two schools. It is increasingly surrounded by new-build housing estates as Wakefield city expands and seeks to attract salaried commuters.

By contrast, the Warwick estate is located in Knottingley (pop. 13,000), the most easterly of Wakefield's Five Towns (see Figure 1). The town has a distinct identity rooted equally in farming and heavy industry linked to coal mining, glassware manufacture, and engineering. The Warwick estate (pop. 3800) was built in the 1960s to house miners, working at the nearby Kellingley colliery (1.5 miles to the east and started production in 1965), and their families. From our oral histories and local research (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 3), it is understood that almost all the original Warwick households had a family member working at the pit. Kellingley was the last pit in the UK to be closed in 2015. The Warwick was extended throughout the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate more families, but parts were demolished in the 1990s (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 4). Today, according to the 2021 census, it is majority white British (87%), with white "Other" (6%) as the next biggest group (LGA, 2022b). There are some three-generation families living on the estate (Warwick Ahead, 2012, p. 3) There is an even split of households who rent from a social landlord and those who are "Right to Buy" leaseholders, some of whom have moved on and leased to tenants on the private rental market (LGA, 2022b). Employment and educational attainment levels are poor relative to both the UK (LGA, 2022b) and the Knottingley average (LGA, 2024). The Warwick is peripheral to other parts of Knottingley, and buses do not travel there after 5 pm due to episodes of violence (local warehouse employer TK Maxx sends a private bus to escort its employees). Like East Moor, the Warwick is also increasingly surrounded by new-build housing estates and there are fears locally that the estate might be demolished in the near future.

4. Methodology

The article draws on data collected during the 2018–2022 ESRC-funded project Northern Exposure: Race, Nation and Disaffection in "Ordinary" Towns and Cities After Brexit. Four towns and small cities (Wakefield, Preston, Middlesbrough, and Halifax) were purposely selected for investigation of long-run social, economic, and political change. To recruit our participants, we targeted distinct neighbourhoods each with varying degrees of racial diversity and socioeconomic deprivation in each town and city. This article reports on two of these neighbourhoods. In each neighbourhood, we interviewed ten residents aged between 65–80 years. All were White British although some had migrated 'internally' from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the North-East of England in the 1960s and continue to inhabit hybrid identities and cultures beyond those offered by the categories of "England," "Yorkshire," or "the North." Eighteen of the twenty had lived in, or near to, their current home for most of their lives. Two were incomers who had married local people. All identified as working class although there were stark variations in incomes and asset wealth, a typical legacy of the hollowed-out industrial employment structure in the UK (see Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021). In Knottingley, all had connections to the local pit either having worked there, been married to a miner, or had family working there. In East Moor, half the sample had direct connections with the local pit.

We adopted an oral history methodology and asked participants to narrate their personal recollections of social and spatial mobility, family formation, employment, housing, political events, and everyday community life. This enabled us to build analyses of how macro-currents of social, economic, and political change throughout the last six decades interpellated individual biographies, household mobilities, and urban geographies. Oral history methodology is useful for understanding these intersections between private and public and is typically mobilised to produce historical records which are inclusive of "lay" voices to offset, challenge, or compliment "official" narratives (Bornat, 2012). Our interviews were loosely structured and lasted typically ninety minutes. They took place either over the phone, in a local community centre, or in people's homes. We also conducted informal interviews with stakeholders, working in local authority and NGO roles, familiar with each location. We also visited neighbourhoods on multiple occasions to help contextualise the oral history data, visiting community centres to observe everyday interactions in both cases and walking each neighbourhood several times to build our own understandings of social and physical conditions. The article is informed by these testimonies and interpretations, but draws largely from the oral history interviews.

5. Findings

Both East Moor and the Warwick are legacies of forces emergent during English industrial modernity: the centrality of coal mining to national and colonial economies, trade unionism, uneven welfare state settlements, and "down to earth" working class identities and solidarities (Savage et al., 2005). They are both located in West Yorkshire, a significant regional economic power underpinned historically by its abundant coalfields, farmland, and canal and river network which pass through both Wakefield city and Knottingley. The historic "whiteness" of both estates reflects, perhaps, the social homogeneity of British coalfields more generally (see Massey & Wainwright, 1985; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021), or the "everyday political whiteness" (Ambikaipaker, 2018) and racist exclusions undergirding industrial work (see Virdee, 2014) and municipal housing provision in England (see Henderson & Karn, 1987). That said, East Moor has been diversifying gradually since the 1990s whilst the Warwick was linked from the start to a "cosmopolitan" pit (see Phillips, 2017)—many of the original miners being incomers from Scotland, Wales, and the North-East of England. In any case, it stands to reason that the decline of coalmining would change these estates irrevocably (Warwick Ahead, 2012). Whilst the estates were indelibly linked with the two pits, these were by no means the only employment options available to residents:

> We had three…glassworks which probably employed about 1,000 people each. We had about eight or nine foundries which probably had 20 people each all backing up the glassworks with the moulding, etc. We had a couple of engineering works which trained a lot of apprentices, you know, good engineering works. We had a shipyard. We had a power station. And then, while all that was going on when I was in me early 20s, they built Ferrybridge power station and Eggborough power station…you could literally pack a job in on the Friday if you didn't like it and start somewhere else on the Monday. (Johnny, 79, the Warwick)

Whilst women from the Warwick recounted similar memories, of course paid work had to be negotiated around marriage and child-rearing. Over in East Moor, in the 1950s, local hospital laundries and textiles factories were major employers for women:

> A couple of my friends went to work at Double Two [shirt manufacturer founded in 1940] and they said: "Why don't you come and give it a go?" And I did and I stayed there until I got married…it used to be in Kirkgate, in a factory, and my sister worked at an engineering place, she was a secretary, and if we came out she wouldn't walk on the same side as me because I worked in the factory, but you know it didn't bother me, it was hard, so then one of my friends got a job at Stanley Royd Laundry and she said: "They want people, why don't you come?" So I went and I actually got a job before I got married in 1959…you did all the nurses uniforms and things you know, and all the patient's nighties and things, but it was a good company and it was a lot smaller than Double Two so you knew people, and I stayed there until I was pregnant, and I left there and I didn't work again for quite a while. (Stella, 82, East Moor)

Here, Stella exemplifies how intra-class tensions could play out in working-class families and communities in an era often coloured with nostalgia about homogeneity and solidarity (see Lawrence, 2019). If local economies were robust, social lives were also reported to be relatively full. Both estates had allotments, musical troupes, choirs, and several pubs and social clubs, albeit these could be tough environments with established divisions, codes and, possibly, exclusions (see Schofield, 2023; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021):

> At the weekend wives were allowed in. [Laughs] It's a bit sexist like, but that's the way it was. The wives went out on a Saturday night and Sunday night….But during the week the lads would just go out and have their crack together and you know that's the way it worked. But Kellingley club and the Warbottle and the SYD club were the three places that we used, you know, predominantly by all the miners and the wives at the weekend. You know, as I say everybody had their locals. (Sammy, 61, the Warwick)

Beyond the estate, there were a huge number of pubs in both Knottingley and Wakefield city and a network of dance halls, variety clubs, and sports venues across the region where passions for rugby league, dancing, and performance could be enjoyed.

The Thatcher Government was determined to defeat the National Union of Miners (see Gildea, 2023), completing the decline of Britain's pits as major employers (Bennett et al., 2000). However, the devastation wreaked by this project played out differently on each estate. The 1984–1985 Miner's Strike created untold hardship for families on the Warwick where dozens of families were connected to the pit. The few miners on the Warwick who broke the picket and returned to work early are still remembered vividly as "scabs":

> [They] moved very quickly because at the end of the day, whoever it was, windows through, scab written on outside of the house on the doors, you know. That happened, you know. I'm not saying I did it. I mean I know it happened because I know, you know, people who moved from the area because it happened. (Sammy, 61, the Warwick)

In East Moor, by the time of the 1984–1985 Strike, Parkhill had already closed. One participant connected the pit closure to wider patterns of deindustrialisation within Wakefield city, creating a growing sense of social instability:

> I just felt that families were breaking apart….And I think a lot of that started when, when we first came up here of course there were pits. There were [pause], there were a lot of engineering firms. There were

> railway. Lot of people worked for them. There were the big laundry where a lot of women worked. There were lots of employment for people. All that employment started to go fairly quickly in a short time, you know. Once the mines finished, the laundries finished, the engineers finished. And people were moving away out of the area, the older people were going into flat[s]. The miners a lot of them migrated to the Selby coalfields. A lot of the jobs at the laundry, which the local women used to have, the big laundry, were finishing. (Carey, 79, East Moor)

Although Kellingley pit stayed open until the 2010s, the Warwick, according to residents, never fully recovered from the 1980s. As jobs were cut, household incomes dwindled, and the fun, edgy, social dramas played out in pubs and clubs dissipated (compare with Dahlberg, 2019). Similarly, on East Moor the social spaces gradually closed and daily habits were forced to change (echoing the findings of Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 2021):

> We didn't travel to work like we do now. All teachers that were at our school, they all lived local. So, that's shattered the community a little bit when pit shutdown…people moved away or didn't have any money. Clubs and pubs bit by bit found it more and more difficult and shutdown…like I said travel more to work don't they. They might travel an hour, an hour and a half in your car every day. Where it used to be local." (Simon, 61, East Moor)

The biggest employing sectors in the Wakefield region today are healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics (Wakefield District Council, 2024). Indeed, one policy stakeholder described the contemporary employment profile as a "shit jobs miracle" referring to the amount of low paid, insecure jobs now available in huge packing and picking warehouses, including Amazon near Knottingley. Further, many of the daughters and granddaughters mentioned by our participants work in the care sector and need cars to commute, bringing an additional expense. Participants also noted that Knottingley still has three glass factories albeit these were interpreted by one participant as offering unpredictable shift patterns, destabilising local webs of (masculinised) leisure and solidarity:

> Whereas in the old days everybody worked…eight hour shifts, now everybody who is working [is] on 12 hours. All the big factories are on 12 hours….So you're not going to come home from work at 7 o'clock and go training to play rugby, or take a rugby team, or be a scout master. Or if you're on nights you can't do it anyway, can you? So all that side of it's died…we've no rugby league team, when we've had two or three. We've got one team of cricketers where we used to have three. We've one soccer team where we used to have three or four. So all the sport's sort of gone you know. (Johnny, 79, the Warwick)

Elsewhere ex-miner Johnny—an experienced volunteer—mentioned how bureaucratic "red tape" around registering and running sports teams had become more onerous over recent years and speculated that the leisure, not just working, habits of young people had changed, suggesting other factors affecting local sporting cultures. More broadly, almost all participants expressed dismay at the lack of amenities and facilities on their estates and in nearby locations. In East Moor, where grocery shopping options are minimal—this was often focused on the recent loss of the traditional open-air market in Wakefield city. Markets offering vibrant spaces and affordable produce are a well-understood resource for low-income households (see Gonzalez, 2018) and for older people "ageing in place" (see Phillips et al., 2021). They can also be avatars for a problematic form of urban nostalgia (Watson & Wells, 2005). Gill, however, hankered

less for an imaginary past than a present less dominated by the shopping mall and out-of-town leisure park operators courted by Wakefield council since at least the 1990s (see Goodchild, 2023):

> It's so disjointed Wakefield now, you used to be able to walk round and you'd be able to see everybody and talk to everybody….I think these, like the Riding Centre and Trinity Walk [shopping malls], they've spoilt it, I mean we had a lovely big market where Trinity Walk is…it used to be buzzing, but now it's just dead, and it's so sad…they're just putting flats up. I mean we've got the cinema at the Riding Centre but it's nothing, we used to have four cinemas in Wakefield, and shops and that used to go down into Kirkgate and down Westgate and there's nothing now. I mean we've got the theatre which is nice, but other than that there isn't anything. (Gill, 74, East Moor)

This sense of loss and deprivation around secure, everyday consumption went to another level on the Warwick where food poverty is extreme (at one point in 2022 there were three food banks and a "recipe club" dispensing free meal kits in Knottingley). Whereas East Moor residents can, in theory, rely on city centre chain supermarkets, Warwick residents are dependent on estate amenities (where there are only two small shops) and on Knottingley high street where there have been recent closures of retail banks, independent grocery shops, and the post office. Wakefield council no longer has a presence in Knottingley either, meaning low-income Warwick residents must travel to the next town to attend meetings about welfare rights and social security benefits, an increasing source of mental health stress in the UK when entitlements have been gradually tightened (JRF, 2024). One Warwick participant described how ill health and bereavement had led to her isolation, intensified by a deteriorating but securitised social and environmental landscape:

> Yes, everybody that I knew that lived up here, everybody, we were all friends, neighbours. We used to go to one another's house, sit in garden, have cups of tea, kids used to play, sit on coal bunkers, have a chat…all I've got [now] is a big fence between me and next door houses. And a small fence that goes right out that council put up…it's like living in a prison camp….I went up for a walk last week up here, and it's just a dumping ground. It used to be lovely and clean. There's old fridges, mattresses, settees, cookers, washers, fridge freezers, old beds, it were just a dumping ground. And it isn't nice, it isn't nice to look at now, you know what I mean. (Barbara, 65, the Warwick)

Others on the Warwick told of how the local library and swimming pool had been recently closed by the council, something that made parents and grandparents anxious given the waterways which flow through Knottingley. This was made worse by the fact that the local secondary school had recently adopted a "three strikes" policy regarding uniform compliance. Some parents on the Warwick were unable to access or afford the 'official' uniform leading to inevitable suspensions and truancy. The community hub had plans to organise a uniform exchange in response to this specific issue. The contrast with school uniform arrangements during the pit heyday was striking:

> I mean, we had nothing, I could nae go shopping and buy all the school uniforms. But we used to go…the pit shop and order their uniforms and the shoes and they would get them for us and take the money off the men's wages….We used to go and get the kids' uniforms and their shoes and whatever else they needed. Any household stuff you wanted, an iron or a kettle. Did nae have the money to go and buy everything like that. And [name removed] used to moan it came off his wages so the more money

> I used on clothes for the kids, the less pocket money he got [laughing] you know what I mean. (Deb, 83, the Warwick)

Wakefield city has a legacy network of community centres within its council estates. Historically, the centres served a white British majority, but as the estates have diversified, they have become vital spaces for outreach to different communities. Funding for these centres is deeply uncertain but the Covid-19 crisis saw the council re-establish direct subsidies to set them up as crisis hubs, food banks, and vaccination centres. In Eastmoor, where the local school has a body of pupils speaking 31 languages, two community centre staff members are Kosovan and another is Polish and there are concerted efforts to build connections between nationalities and cultures. That said, one participant claimed that historic divisions within the estate can complicate "integration" efforts:

> It's always been an estate has this where it's 'that side of the estate' and 'this side of the estate.' Always been like that. And it's like this side of the estate has its own shops. And its pub. It ain't got a pub anymore. But that side of the estate had its own shops and its pub. And people walked into town from that side. And they walked into town from this side, you know. So it's always been that side or this side of the estate what you lived. (Carey, 79, East Moor)

Albeit Carey notes that today the issue here is more with the relative transience of households, compared to years gone by:

> You know apart from either side and a lady across the road and an odd person round the corner, I just don't know who these families are. But the families come and go so quickly, you know. Because a lot of these houses in the street were bought, you know, through the miners. And they've been rented and re-rented and it's now their children are renting the properties you know, that sort of thing. And people are just coming and going.

One community centre worker told us the scale of the challenge trying to engage these households, especially single older men, some of whom became extremely isolated during lockdowns. Over on the Warwick, three key spaces try to support the community in important ways. One is the Kellingley Club, the former miner's welfare club—which serves as a multi-purpose local amenity for the town. The National Union of Miners still holds advice surgeries there and the club has a bar, a job club, and hosts local boxing and dance clubs for children. During the pandemic, it was also repurposed as an emergency food bank. The club is run by one local man who used Facebook Live to encourage donations and publicise his food deliveries. The Club is meaningful for local people but there are concerns about its ongoing funding which this participant linked with political neglect of the local community:

> I think it should stay open. It was put there for a purpose. Okay, the pit's gone, it was miner's club, but anybody could join that club, the facilities were great, the artists they got in on an evening, brilliant. We had them coming from all over the world, you had Tom Jones, you had Gene Pitney, you know? Shirley Bassey, you had them all. It was brilliant…they had 10-pin bowling up the stairs. Then they made it into a dance area, then that fell apart so they allowed one of my ex-boxers to open a gym for boxing….I say the same thing as I say with this place, don't expect any help from your local councillors [pause] they won't help you. They may say: "I'll listen to you," [pause] but don't expect that they go any further than that. (Donald, 82, the Warwick)

On the Warwick itself, there is a community hub and "the Addy"—a children's adventure playground with origins in 1970s child welfare activism. The community hub is run on a shoestring of small grants and volunteer time and can be hired by Warwick residents for small initiatives. In the post-pandemic period, it was also distributing food parcels and meal kits to residents. The Addy mainly supports younger people, although it also provides cheap lunches and warm space for older people at lunchtimes as well as the occasional volunteer-staffed event and outing. Donald compared the support offered by these initiatives with that provided by Wakefield Council:

> If there's anything goes off in this estate, nowadays, it's because of the likes of…the Hub or the Adventure Playground. That's what happens, them people will try and organise it. You come to anybody here…you say: "I've got an idea, I want to put…" [and they will say:] "Tell us your idea." "Okay, I'll see if I can talk to people." They all say that to me, get involved, let's develop it, let's get it going. Try and ask for support off Wakefield [Council], you won't get it. (Donald, 82, the Warwick)

Where funding comes into localities, voluntary sector groups often lack the infrastructure for managing paperwork-heavy systems of bidding, delivery, and audit monitoring or the regeneration potential they bring. For example, on the Warwick, community workers at the community hub and The Addy receive funds from Big Local, a grant-giving body linked with the National Lottery Fund. However, there have been difficulties administering grants, with allegations of infighting and conflict with local authority officers. There are also ironies in what happens to national funding. Controversial government schemes, such as the anti-radicalisation "Prevent" programme and the darkly titled "Controlling Migration Fund," have been channelled into more progressive projects locally. One example is the Community Harmony project: a two-year programme funding four areas of fine-grained work in east Wakefield, including East Moor. The scheme was successful in bringing together a majority White British neighbourhood group from East Moor with a local South Asian British community organisation. These networks, who would typically work in parallel we were informed by one local stakeholder, came together to organise neighbourhood "clean up" projects to improve the physical environment of their respective areas.

In Wakefield city, churches pick up much of the needed community infrastructural work, particularly in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. City of Sanctuary volunteers support households living in East Moor, for instance. Across both estates, some older residents remain active on committees, in political campaigning and running volunteer projects where experience and long-term perspective can be important resources cutting through the promises of grants and investments that never seem to arrive. On the Warwick there were several examples of mutual aid and organising undertaken informally by residents whether it be fundraising, cooking, or looking out for neighbours. Barbara, from the Warwick, expressed a form of intergenerational (and possibly gender) solidarity when she told us:

> If I saw somebody struggling with kids…I'll give them me last bit of food and I'd do without like I used to do with me own. I've done it with a few people. I've helped them out if they've….I won't see anybody struggle at all. To me last penny I'd say, here, I'll give you that, go on, go get them some stuff as long as there's something to eat. I always have done. From growing up that's the way I was fetched up, to help, do what you can. I might struggle meself, but I wouldn't let on I was struggling. But I'd help anybody. And give them me last penny I've got rather than see them without food or kids suffering. (Barbara, 65, the Warwick)

6. Conclusion

Poverty and deprivation levels in contemporary England are high but unevenly concentrated in spatial terms (ONS, 2021). One typical location where this is playing out is in council housing estates located in ex-industrial areas. The combination of stresses on poor neighbourhoods derives from individual household poverty and wider structures of marginalisation and disinvestment. These are also historically contingent. In this article, I have explored how residents in two case study neighbourhoods have experienced and inhabited these stresses over time. I contrasted the insecure, low-wage economies, typical of post-industrial zones across the UK, with a perceived abundance of paid employment opportunities during the 1950s and 1970s period. Whilst recollections can mobilise nostalgia for a "golden age," it seems clear that in both cases paid work was plentiful in and beyond the local pits albeit these would have been shaped by gender, class, and race divisions, not to mention patterns of illness and disability which we know are pronounced in some coalfields (Bohata et al., 2020; Riva et al., 2011). I also examined how the loss of these employment structures in Wakefield and Knottingley, not least the decline of the pits, was understood by some participants to have impacted on the social stability of the estates, increasing transience among neighbours and limiting sociability. Not that the estates should be romanticised on these fronts, intra-community divisions being mentioned by participants recalling the 1950s and 1960s:

> They were all good company with one another you know what I mean [whispers] apart from the Yorkshires….We had a few problems with them, they didn't like us….They didn't like our language—"Don't know what you're saying." "You should go back to Scotland, what you doing here?" But we used to retaliate and say: "Our men's come down to show your men how to work." Being nasty like but they were nasty to us. "My husband works in the glassworks." I says: "Oh my husband works in the pits. He goes down about 3,000 feet." You know what I mean, tit for tat sort of thing. (Deb, 83, the Warwick)

Similar sentiments surfaced elsewhere about a loss of community if we consider anxieties expressed about the ascendancy of US-style retail and leisure landscapes, the hollowing out of high streets, and the apparent withdrawal of basic local services. Again, we should caution against nostalgia and note the volunteering practices mentioned by participants. Nonetheless, the readings of change noted here offer, I suggest, insights into everyday constraints and deflations regarding the possibilities of contemporary urban life for older people on low incomes. These ever-decreasing possibilities are intensifying pressure on estates as residents ageing in place, without means, struggle to travel distances, manage increasing health problems, and rely on threadbare localised amenities. The article touched on some of the ways communities are trying to support residents and build mutual esteem. The article has provided, then, a historically contingent account of contemporary spatial stress by emphasising the significance of long-term residence, introducing not only feelings of loss and nostalgia, but agency and a resilient attachment to place. The capacity to access relatively secure jobs, housing, and neighbourhoods was and is not experienced equally in England owing *inter alia* to endemic racism, patriarchy and occupational division. The estates and households discussed in this article are sediments of these structural hierarchies. The aim of this article was not to prioritise whiteness as *the* lodestar of social, economic and political marginalisation, but to critically explore how this fraction of the working class in England—ensnared in the predations of capitalist modernity and nationalist closure—interprets their unfolding socio-spatial affairs.

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Data Availability

For updates on the Northern Exposure project see: https://northernexposure.leeds.ac.uk

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ARTICLE

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Building Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods: Exploring the Potential of Youth Activism in Scotland

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Abstract

This is a time of intersecting crises for young people in Scotland. More than a decade of austerity, the Covid-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, climate emergency, and ongoing global conflict all threaten youth security and create barriers to economic and civic participation. Alongside this, youth non-participation is often framed as an individualised moral problem, diverting focus away from its structural causes. Evidence on youth activism suggests that young people are seeking new, creative spaces and modes of expression to challenge stigma, express dissent, and challenge inequalities in their communities. With support from grassroots youth and community organisations, youth activists can build trust, critical thinking skills, and solidarity. However, the extent to which youth activism can succeed in challenging structural causes of inequality, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, requires further scrutiny. We draw on Nancy Fraser's theory of participatory parity to explore how redistribution, recognition, and representation play out in the lives of young people, and how grassroots youth and community organisations support their development as activists. Based on a research study on the barriers and enablers to youth activism in Scotland, we seek to understand how neighbourhood-based efforts to challenge stigma and economic inequality build dignity and hope, how relationship-building between young people and the adults in their communities can support status recognition, and how these both contribute to emergent youth political representation.

Keywords

disadvantaged neighbourhoods; grassroots organisations; participatory parity; youth activism; youth work

1. Introduction

This article analyses the extent to which place-based youth activism can address inequalities in youth participation in Scotland. Evidence suggests that young people are seeking new spaces to address and speak out about issues of social, economic, and political inequality in their local communities, with grassroots organisations offering unique spaces in which to explore identity, build support, and take action for change (Junnilainen, 2020; McBride, 2024). However, it is important to acknowledge that grassroots youth activity may be limited in addressing the institutional barriers to social justice (Ward et al., 2022).

We seek to understand the potential for place-based youth activism to address the structural causes of inequalities experienced by youth. Youth is understood here as a stage of transition described by Furlong (2012) as "a socially constructed intermediary phase that stands between childhood and adulthood" (p. 2). By analysing the pathways within and between N. Fraser's (2008) domains of participatory parity, this article explores how redistribution, recognition, and representation play out in the everyday lives of young people and how grassroots groups support them to challenge injustice through activism. We begin by exploring the context of crisis, youth activism, and the role of grassroots youth and community groups and then turn to consider Fraser's participatory parity theory, alongside theory on place-based stigma (Wacquant, 2008). The article then outlines the study's methodology and presents findings and discussion. We conclude by reflecting on the contribution that youth work can make to youth activism.

2. Youth Activism in a Time of Crisis

Multiple, intersecting crises are disproportionately affecting young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland: 16.2% of young people are "not in employment, education, or training" (Scottish Government, 2023), barriers to adequate housing (Resolution Foundation, 2023) have left "generation rent" (Hoolachan et al., 2017) reliant on a poorly regulated private sector, and precarious, low-income employment is increasingly the norm. Mental health concerns have increased while support is difficult to navigate and involves long waiting times (Marini, 2022). Meanwhile, young people are pathologized for a lack of economic and civic participation (Bečević & Dahlstedt, 2022), while policies to "improve youth employability" frequently frame unemployment as an individualised moral problem and divert focus away from structural inequalities (McPherson, 2021). This creates opportunities for stigmatising narratives to take hold, where working-class people are blamed for the poverty that they experience (Tyler, 2013). These symbolic harms combine with material conditions to place young people in a cycle of disadvantage. Youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods also often experience territorial stigma (Wacquant, 2008) due to the negative portrayal of the places in which they live.

There are various examples of young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods speaking up against these stigmatising narratives (McBride, 2024). Youth activists are seeking new spaces for political engagement, to create stories, films, music, and visual art (Kelly & Carson, 2012); to build friendship through bonds of community (Assan, 2023); and to find hope by collectivising despair (McGregor & Christie, 2021). Activism in this context, defined as "a desire to create change, to make the world into a different and better place" (Taft, 2010, p. 26), is an ethical practice, which involves the "problematization of established social norms, the invention of alternatives to those norms, and the creative practice of these newly invented possibilities" (Dave, 2011, p. 3). Youth dissent encompasses a spectrum of "dutiful," "disruptive," and "dangerous" actions

(O'Brien et al., 2018). Community interaction enables valuable intersections between personal and public activity from which collective action can spring (Cleaver, 2004).

Grassroots organisations support collective action on everyday inequalities (Christens et al., 2021; de St. Croix, 2016). In disadvantaged communities, informal education takes a relational approach that instils dignity (Slovenko & Thompson, 2016) and fosters belonging and agency (DiGiacomo, 2020). Space to explore different subjectivities allows critical thinking and builds solidarity (Kennelly, 2009). One such approach is youth work, whose principles include a holistic, youth-led approach, an ethic of care, voluntary participation, and social justice goals (Cooper, 2018). Youth work practice acts "as a glue between young people and their communities" (Miller et al., 2015, p. 468), building cultural and social bonds (Coburn, 2011) and promoting democratic education and civic participation (Coburn & Wallace, 2011). Relationships between workers and young people are characterised by "trust, respect, sincerity and, above all, authenticity" (Fyfe & Mackie, 2024, p. 1). A strong influence for youth work is critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972; hooks, 2010), locating the learner's life experience as central to the development of social and political literacy and using collective dialogue to build solidarity towards social change.

The wider political context has led to increased pressure for youth projects to meet targets to support "at risk" young people on diminishing budgets (Davidson, 2020, p. 254), amid an agenda increasingly focused on individualised "resilience" (Davidson & Carlin, 2019, p. 479). Evidence suggests that youth work is so under-resourced and overburdened that offering appropriate support to young people in the current context has become an impossibility, leading to the urgency for resistance; indeed, "resistance" has been suggested as an additional domain to Fraser's tripartite theory (Mackie, 2019). Alongside this, young people must navigate the "epistemological fallacy" (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 114) of individualised "freedom of choice," which obscures the reality of the constraints and inequalities in their lives.

3. Parity of Participation: Drawing on Fraser's Three Domains of Social Justice

Participation parity (N. Fraser, 2008) has been widely employed to explore issues of social justice in the field of education, such as in schooling (Keddie, 2012), pedagogy (Cho, 2017), social work (Hölscher et al., 2020), and youth work (Mackie, 2019). Fraser's theory of participatory parity asks, "How fair or unfair are the terms of interaction that are institutionalised in [the] society?" (Fraser et al., 2004, p. 378). N. Fraser's (2003) theory initially responded to concerns that attention to economic inequalities was being displaced by a growing politics of identity. She highlighted a need to maintain an analytical distinction between economic and social equity (redistribution and recognition) as central conditions in the struggle for social justice. She later added a third domain of representation, which addresses the question of "who counts" in decisions on social and economic justice: "not only who can make plans on redistribution or recognition, but also how such claims are mooted and adjudicated" (N. Fraser, 2008, p. 17).

Notwithstanding critiques that it draws artificial boundaries between the dimensions of inequality (Young, 1997), we propose that participatory parity offers a useful analytical frame for three purposes: to disentangle the everyday social problems encountered by young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; to highlight the grassroots support which enables youth activism across domains; and to understand the social justice potential of activism at neighbourhood and institutional levels. Alongside this, we have found it useful to draw on literature on stigma as a helpful concept to explore the particular challenges of misrecognition, maldistribution,

and misrepresentation experienced by the young people in our study. Smets and Kusenbach (2020) argue that "stigmatisation is rooted in cultural beliefs; however, it also depends on power and social structures" (p. 2). This account helps to illuminate the structural inequalities from which stigma arises, and potential youth activist responses and resistance. Applying Fraser's theory to young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, we can see that the claim for "justice as *redistribution*" challenges the existence of economic inequality and social segregation as well as the associated "social bads" of violence, crime, and poor mental health, which affect young people. Solutions to maldistribution include the redistribution of income and "social goods" such as housing, education, and health, to improve life outcomes (N. Fraser, 1997, p. 17).

Recognition is about our ontological need, as social beings, to be recognized as equals. In Fraser et al. (2004), Fraser distinguishes between recognition as "identity" (affirmation) and recognition as "status" (transformation). Recognition as status seeks to locate responsibility for recognition with institutions and not with individuals or groups. She argues that this shifts attention to the ways that "youth" are conceptualised in status terms within different institutions (such as school, government, or welfare). Institutionalised status subordination (N. Fraser, 2003) positions some in society as inferior; solutions therefore need to focus not only on symbolic struggle but on challenge at a political level. At a neighbourhood level, experiences of territorial stigma can result in both external and internalised inequalities (Wacquant, 2008), low cultural value (Skeggs, 2004, Chapter 1), "othering," and disgust (Tyler, 2013). Stigmatising narratives may be seen as a rationale for economic inequality and exclusion of "the poor" by the privileged "non-poor" (Sayer, 2005), and as a justification for punitive approaches to "antisocial behaviour." Further, stigma may function to produce epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), where young people are discredited as "knowers" ("testimonial injustice"), or their experiences go unrepresented in society ("hermeneutic injustice").

Bourdieu's (1986, 1994) theory of economic, social, and cultural capital supports our understanding of the ways in which redistribution and recognition are intertwined. For example, it helps to explain why the actions of young people have currency in some institutional contexts and not others, which disadvantages people whose cultural capital is "fixed" due to societal stigma (Skeggs, 2004, Chapter 1). Prieur et al. (2023) suggest that given rising levels of economic inequality for younger generations, youth may emphasise "those aspects of embodied cultural capital which are more dependent on symbolic mastery and less on raw purchase power" (p. 371). Cultural/misrecognition activities are an understandable focus for young people when redistribution becomes less attainable.

A central concern of N. Fraser's theory is that conditions can also work *against* each other to create a "*redistribution-recognition dilemma*" (1997, p. 15, emphasis added). Recognition tends to call for group differentiation by valuing a group's cultural value, while redistribution aims to eradicate group specificity, such as Fraser's example of feminist calls for eradicating the social division of labour. Fraser argues that both are needed, because people need to both claim group specificity *and* deny it, therein highlighting the importance of maintaining both conditions in the struggle for justice.

Representation, N. Fraser's (2005, 2008) third dimension, draws attention to who is included and excluded from political voice and democratic life. The need to be represented, in all aspects of life including the political, can be expressed as "the right to have rights" (Arendt, 1949). The misframing of social problems can mean that the voices of the poor are excluded or disregarded, blocking their potential for protest and change. Misrepresentation manifests in democratic processes that may be organised in ways that prevent

youth activists from participating and making legitimate claims to justice. For example, adult-centric forms of democratic participation are skewed in favour of those with higher levels of social status and education (Dalton, 2017). Claims for social justice are in practice claims for "parity of participation" across all three domains (N. Fraser, 2008). In short, there can be "no redistribution or recognition without representation" (N. Fraser, 2010, p. 27).

By applying Fraser's theory to youth activism on everyday injustices in relation to the three domains, we seek to highlight the ways in which youth activists can contribute to social justice, but also to surface the institutional barriers they continue to face, and the potential next steps to fulfilling parity of participation in Scotland's disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

4. Methodology and Analysis

We draw on data from an exploratory research study to examine the barriers and enablers to youth activism in disadvantaged communities in Scotland, with young people aged 16 to 24. The study took a community-based research approach (Boyd, 2014), with the aim of co-constructing the research design with youth work practitioners. Three youth work practitioners took part in initial discussions to agree sampling and methods, with two additional youth workers later becoming involved due to their connections within two of the case study sites. The research design supported flexibility in participation, enabling pre-existing youth groups supported by a youth worker and/or in-depth interviews to take place, and three of the five youth workers who helped shape the research design were then interviewed to capture their insights and experiences. Three youth organisations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (one semi-rural and two urban) took part in the research: Dalziel Arts, Kirkhill Youth, and Newbank Youth; two individual young people involved in activism around disabilities and climate also participated. A total of two focus groups and seven individual interviews took place, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Both focus groups were based on pre-existing youth groups who work collectively on place-based youth activism. This had the benefit of offering an authentic depiction of collaborative work but meant that there was no opportunity to review whether mixed-gender focus groups would be the most effective way for all voices to be heard. In the case of Kirkhill Youth, researchers reflected that separate groups may have supported young women to have a stronger and more confident presence in dialogue; consequently, we have resolved to pay particular attention to this issue in future research.

Analysis of data was carried out collaboratively by two researchers to ensure consistency, taking an iterative, abductive approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014) that moved between the data and discussion of context, to build initial sub-themes. As the importance of the dynamic between identity and "everyday" local political representation began to emerge from the data, we considered that Fraser's theory of social justice might be a useful frame to analyse and extend the potential of youth activism. Our prior research (Ward et al., 2022) highlighted institutional barriers to collective empowerment at a neighbourhood level and we were interested to explore whether youth activists were encountering similar issues or if their autonomy over creative production enabled them to challenge institutional barriers in different ways. Researchers discussed emerging themes and sub-themes within each participant transcript. The themes were then aligned within the conceptual framework of participatory parity. The aim of an abductive and iterative approach was to ensure analysis considered data from a humanising, contextual, and subjective perspective, grounded in the lived experience of young activists. This resulted in the addition of literature on stigma, misrecognition, and

cultural capital to Fraser's framework, with the purpose of exploring the ways that youth activists were working to create change. Names of organisations and individuals who took part in the research were pseudonymised and identifiers removed to ensure participant anonymity. Organisational pseudonyms were chosen to reflect the Scottish urban/rural contexts, and to avoid the dehumanisation of place via numerical approaches to naming; participant pseudonyms were chosen based on popular first names from the year of participant birth not held by any existing participant. The study gained ethical approval from the University of Glasgow. Ethical procedures included informed consent which detailed the purpose and focus of the research study and participants' right to withdraw without detriment. We aimed to demonstrate a commitment to working alongside youth activists and youth organisations by supporting participant-led dialogue in interviews and focus groups and invited participants to be involved in follow-up research.

The three organisations and two individuals which took part in the research offer examples of youth activism across the geographical areas of Highlands, Central Belt, and Southern Scotland with an urban/rural contrast. Dalziel Arts has existed for a decade and acts as a "hub" for community projects, many of which have an arts-based focus. Though based in a town, it serves a population across a vast rural area, with a mixed socio-economic profile. The organisation provides a supportive space for young people to pursue their creative and activist interests. Kirkhill Youth, located in an area with high levels of deprivation, has operated for 20 years. The organisation offers a daily drop-in, evening youth club, and holiday activities. It recently began Kirkhill TV, a YouTube channel where young people create news and drama content. Newbank Youth, also operating in a neighbourhood with high levels of poverty, started in 2017, following local disturbances due to antisocial behaviour. It offers a youth club and an employability space, where young people can gain work skills and qualifications in beauty therapy, car valeting, and catering. Jamie and Lianne were independent youth activists involved in disability and climate activism, respectively.

Table 1. Research participants.

Dalziel Arts—Focus Group	
Youth participants (6)	Esther, Molly, Chris, Madeline, Lauren, Eleanor
Kirkhill Youth—Focus Group	
Youth participants (9) Youth workers (2)	Lyle, Alana, Shelby, Susannah, Jacob, Hadley, Sabrina, Callie, Kaia Patrick, Isaac
Newbank Youth—Interviews	
Youth participant (1) Youth workers (2)	Rory Eva, Innis
Independent—Interviews	
Youth participant (1) Youth participant (1)	Jamie Lianne

In the next section, we present findings from the research, organised thematically around the three domains of *recognition*, *redistribution*, and *representation*. In each domain we document youth experiences of injustice, their journeys towards activism, and the potential outcomes. The findings begin with the domain of *recognition*, since this domain was associated with participants' initial journeys into activism.

5. Exploring Parity of Participation Across the Youth Work Areas

5.1. Recognition

Participants raised recognition injustices in relation to social and cultural conditions, and to place. Several activists discussed the overlap between identity recognition and local representation, from visibility to political responsibility. Personal journeys into activism were often motivated by challenging non-recognition or misrecognition of race, class, gender, sexuality, or disability. Youth activism used public events and creative arts such as video, visual arts, and music to present alternative narratives and increase visibility.

The theme of stigma came through strongly across the research, either regarding stigmatised identities, including "problem youth," or negative stereotypes about neighbourhoods.

Madeline, who was employed by Dalziel Arts as well as having broader activist involvement, talked about feeling passionate about racial injustice. Activism around the visibility of race and ethnicity and safe spaces for participation was particularly important in a semi-rural area with a predominately white and homogenous population. Madeline also highlighted how this activity crossed over towards the domain of representation, by contributing to visibility of minority groups in the region:

> I think my personal agenda, like, what I want to see in the region is probably more, like, representation, you know, minority communities having safe spaces for them to feel like they are engaging with and integrating with the community in some way.

Molly also works for Dalziel Arts, but reflected on their journey into activism being driven by a commitment to LGBTQ+ rights:

> On my, like, personal level, my…a lot of my activism centres around LGBTQ+ activism….That's all, kind of….So when there was a lot of stuff around the GRA [Gender Recognition Act], I organised the demonstration of trans solidarity in the town centre. So, a lot of it is around social issues.

They reflected positively on being involved in organising a local, community-based Pride celebration which had been organised in response to a sense that Pride had become "too corporate." However, Molly's account demonstrated that the organisation of this event required a huge amount of unpaid effort from organisers, which participants referred to as "activist burnout." This was echoed by Esther, the youngest participant in the Dalziel focus group, who described herself as having an anarchist outlook and a distrust of mainstream politics. Esther emphasised that recognition claims cannot be addressed in a tokenistic manner:

> You get the occasional thing where it's like, now is the time that we're listening to queer voices…but actually that's not what needs to happen. Like, it needs to be that those voices are heard all the time. They're through everything that you do and not just that one thing.

Esther's suggestion demonstrates an understanding of the need to move beyond identity affirmation towards institutionalised status transformation for LGBTQ+ youth (Fraser et al., 2004). A social justice analysis requires an intersectional lens that considers the social, economic, and political inequalities experienced by LGBTQ+ youth (N. Fraser, 1997, Chapter 1, 2005).

Jamie, who is involved in disability activism, reflected on a sense of non-recognition experienced by many disabled people and described this as a fundamental motivation to becoming involved in awareness-raising for disability and mental health. Participants' identities as racialised minorities, disabled young people, or LGBTQ+-identifying, were often strong motivators for their involvement in activism, and activism in these areas had the potential to increase political representation through improved local visibility.

Lyle also described his journey into activism following a struggle with mental health:

> I hit a bit of a rough patch for a few years…suffering with really bad mental health. And then…last year, I decided that I was going to try to have a better life. So, I got back involved in the Kirkhill Youth and a lot of charities [health and wellbeing; community development]….I thought, if I'd been accessing these services throughout my rough patches, then I would have been doing so much better….So, I'm trying to spread awareness and make sure that more young people know that these services are here for them and whatever they need.

Lyle's experience led to a desire to support other young people facing barriers to participation. The ability to draw on lived experience as a source of credible and valuable knowledge may be viewed as a form of testimonial justice (Fricker, 2007) as well as an opportunity to recognise experiences which can be invisibilised.

Participants recounted the pressures of undertaking activism, which were increased by a lack of resources in disadvantaged communities. Individual youth agency was frequently constrained by structural inequalities related to lower levels of economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), highlighting the overlap between recognition and redistribution.

Participants in all sites explored recognition through the lens of *place*. In the semi-rural area, most participants had returned to the area after initially believing it was necessary to move away to cities to pursue careers or creative endeavours. The story of a place and the available opportunities for young people were influenced by geography, transport, and infrastructure. However, stigma also informed dominant narratives of an area as somewhere young people should leave in order to succeed. Chris, a young musician undertaking an arts-focused internship, explained this as a strong motivating factor for joining Dalziel Arts:

> There is a, sort of, stigma…you know, it's not the place where you stay to develop your creative career. People would just even move to big cities like Glasgow or Edinburgh or, you know, down south or whatever. And, yeah, like, I just wanted to be a part of that changing opinions any way that I could, and just showcasing that this town is a good place for creative types.

This potential to challenge place-based stigma (Wacquant, 2008) was also highlighted at Kirkhill Youth. Kirkhill TV provided a vehicle for young people to critique local issues and showcase their community. The channel offered a resource for the whole community and was accessed by a wide range of residents and community groups. Since culture is a key site where class-based inequalities are reproduced (Bourdieu, 1986), the development of a resource through which young people could challenge stigma and celebrate the positive aspects of local cultural life was an important form of resistance. Lyle discussed how the channel helped to challenge negative portrayals associated with the neighbourhood:

> Everybody thinks Kirkhill is just a [housing] scheme, it's just stinking, it's full of neds [a derogatory term associated with delinquency and low-level crime in Scotland]. And it's not, like, showcased: the nice parts of Kirkhill…and even just Kirkhill TV as a premise itself, shows that people from the community want to tell people about the community, and show people the good aspects of the community…it's about breaking a stigma, that's what it really comes down to.

Pejorative dominant narratives associated the neighbourhood with disgust and "othered" young people through alienating or derogatory language (Tyler, 2013). Young activists' TV programmes documented a rich cultural life, challenging misrecognition based on status subordination and positioning young people as creators of knowledge (Fricker, 2007). The presentation of a wide variety of content allowed young people to sidestep the limitations of "youth" identity affirmation by creating alternative representations of the diverse activities which constitute cultural life in Kirkhill. We suggest that this work can be considered as a contribution to status transformation (N. Fraser, 1997, Chapter 1), although to gain greater institutional traction, the TV channel would need an audience beyond Kirkhill.

Challenging negative stereotyping also shaped the approach at Newbank Youth. Rory described his early experiences as part of a group of youths:

> There was always police attention on us….That…led to us being barred from local establishments such as [fast-food outlet], [supermarket chain]….So, it was quite hard…because there was nowhere else for us to go, nothing else for us to do, apart from being on the streets or going to these places. Which then in turn…the police [got] called anyway.

Concerns that this would lead to "serious trouble" led to Rory taking a job at the fast-food outlet while still at school. When the organisation promoted him to a management role, he engaged with local groups to prevent antisocial behaviour, because "I knew how to calm certain people down….I was big on going out and talking to the community." Despite this, violence increased, and Rory contacted Newbank Youth for support:

> Staff were being assaulted and followed home; security guards were being physically attacked. We had to get security seven days a week….I contacted Eva and explained the issues that we were having…clips of CCTV, the incident logbook…the sheer amounts of issues that…that were really violent….We had a meeting. It was myself, [local authority], higher management from [supermarket chain], [fast-food outlet], the police, the Newbank Youth Club, and then [local anti-violence organisation] and the Violence Reduction Unit within Police Scotland.

Newbank Youth brokered conversations with young people to explore the reasons behind the disruptions. Youth worker Eva identified young people as feeling increasingly alienated within their own community. She described the culture surrounding youth as "harsh" and "punitive," both in school and in the justice system, with these approaches seen to be justified by the framing of youth non-compliance as "antisocial behaviour" (Sayer, 2005). Eva opened a dialogue with local staff from police, health, and education settings, with the aim of recognising that youth disruption may be trauma-related (Ko et al., 2008). Trauma-informed praxis (O'Toole, 2022) mitigates against individualising blame for behaviours, by understanding violence as a reasonable response to stress from past or ongoing trauma. This collaborative learning process reframed assumptions of youth violence in the context of trauma, offering scope for localised status transformation

(N. Fraser, 1997, Chapter 1) with key staff from local institutions. A wider institutional shift can also be seen in Scotland's policy reframing of youth disruption as a public health issue, with services such as the Violence Reduction Unit helping to change the public narrative around violence (A. Fraser & Gillon, 2023).

Across the sites, it was clear that (mis)recognition struggles shaped the lives of young people and that this was often their personal motivation towards activism. Young people enjoyed the creative autonomy afforded through collective action. Kirkhill TV presented a range of programmes including news and serious debate, gameshows, and homegrown movies; Dalziel Arts critiqued the commercial capitalism of the Pride "brand" (Conway, 2023) by creating a grassroots celebration; and Newbank Youth organised street art and music events to stimulate creative and political expression. However, youth activists also understood a progression between recognition activity and political representation. They also articulated the importance of challenging institutional status subordination through the creation of cultural products on their own terms. The findings also emphasised the central role that grassroots youth organisations play in providing resources and platforms through which youth activists can challenge misrecognition and misrepresentation. The next section presents findings in relation to redistribution.

5.2. Redistribution

Across the sites, participants raised experiences of economic inequality in access to housing, employment, transport, and community resources. Young people in Kirkhill and Newbank associated economic segregation with living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Participants in Dalziel highlighted the underfunded public transport system and geographical isolation due to the rural context. The study yielded some examples of youth activism to highlight and/or address distributive inequalities.

On Kirkhill TV, programmes addressed issues of streetlighting, housing, and finance. These issues were perceived to be caused by maldistribution of resources, such as a lack of municipal maintenance, lack of adequate education, and long-term health and employment inequalities. Lyle and Patrick discussed the latter, commenting on the framing of education towards a compliant workforce:

> Lyle: I can't believe that young people don't know about those things, like how to set up a bank account, how to deal with housing. It's things you need to survive….You can't buy food if you don't have a bank…you need to have a bank to actually have a life….And you don't get taught how to do that in school….They're just making people for the workforce…they don't teach to your strength; they teach you to what society deems acceptable.
>
> Patrick: Service jobs isn't it; it's to create service workers.

Lyle recorded a news programme to inform young people about housing and financial support, sharing his struggle to secure a tenancy and become financially independent.

Young people at Newbank Youth also highlighted maldistribution in relation to a lack of spaces to learn and barriers to employment, but in contrast to Lyle at Kirkhill, wanted local jobs because they felt uncomfortable travelling beyond their own neighbourhood due to fears of territorial violence. These priorities resulted in an employability project where young people could train and work locally in beauty therapy, car valeting, and

catering. Eva explained the shift from "hopelessness" to "Look, this is possible, you could do this." The project offered wraparound support, such as counselling and therapies, money and legal advice, and access to individual grants to support driving lessons and the purchase of equipment. Nonetheless, it is notable that the employability project focused on skills related to potentially precarious service sector employment, which perhaps demonstrates the limits of youth activism to challenge the status quo or needs to be seen as a continuum towards more sustainable employment opportunities. Furlong and Cartmel's (2007) concept of epistemological fallacy remains relevant as structural inequalities affecting youth are reproduced over generations.

Youth workers discussed the value of networks as a form of redistributive capital. Eva brought in external contacts as support: "In these young people's lives, they don't have those kinds of networks. Because sometimes, it's who you know, not what you know."

For Innes, a youth work approach helped to reframe the loyalty from youth gang membership as a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986):

> I really realised the strength of networks…the strength of numbers, and people, and having people together. Because, actually, nobody ever describes gangs as a movement, but…it's a mobilisation of young people to stand up for something that they believe in….We expect young people to stop being angry, and…outspoken, and challenging authority. And for me, that's the last thing I want young people to lose. I just want them to do it in a way that's more socially acceptable.

Innes' reflection on encouraging youth to collectively challenge injustice indicates the importance of social capital in redistribution as well as recognition struggles. He highlights that pre-existing social capital can be misrecognised through status subordination of youth behaviours and reframed positively through youth worker support.

Young people's wellbeing and opportunities were shaped by variable access to resources. In rural areas, where public transport was unreliable and expensive, Molly explained that there was an unavoidable dependence on cars which excluded many from activities:

> If you want to actually be able to go and do fun things in this region, you need to come from money or you need to have parents that have money, or you need to have your fingers in the right pies to know where to get funding.

In the same focus group, Madeline compared the experiences of two young people who were still at school and had been volunteering in a community theatre project, reflecting that only one of them who lived in the town centre was able to continue with the theatre project and to gain valuable experience:

> [He is] going to have a flourishing career and just 'cause he lives in the centre of town so he can come to the theatre every day after school. And it's just that comparison of, like, this person's equally as talented as…you know, they just don't have the same opportunities in [smaller, more geographically isolated town].

Geographical isolation was also raised by Esther as preventing involvement in activism:

> You just need to have money to get involved with activism, the way that it works now. And, like, actually maybe we should stop thinking about it from, you need to have this to get into this, and instead be like, okay, what can we just…how can we change it so that that isn't even a requirement anymore.

This suggests that young people require a particular level of economic capital or the "right" social connections (Bourdieu, 1986) to engage in activism, particularly when financial insecurity is combined with the consequences of geographical isolation.

Whilst young people in Dalziel were less likely to experience high levels of poverty due to the area's varied socio-economic profile, activities to reduce isolation and promote wellbeing were increasingly competing for resources with schemes to tackle pressing material manifestations of poverty. For example, Molly explained, "We're going up against food banks. And it's how do you…you obviously can't even argue with that because of course, like, people need to fucking eat."

Across the three youth organisations, precarity of funding and staff contracts were a continuous battle. One organisation received core state funding, but this was due to end in 2024; the other two were reliant on piecemeal grants and donations from charitable foundations. Financial insecurity placed pressure on staff to work unpaid overtime on shoestring budgets, undermining wellbeing and preventing longer-term planning. This constrained the potential of third-sector youth organisations seeking to address a vacuum left by the retreat of the state in contemporary neoliberal society.

The next section presents findings that relate to the third R, representation.

5.3. Representation

Across sites, young people perceived that real change was more likely at a grassroots level and this was the key focus for activism.

Newbank Youth advocated for youth decision-making in all aspects of the project. Eva commented:

> [Young people are] part of the solution, more than we are, because they live here, and they know what the problems are. And if we can involve them in the vision, and what we're doing, they've got the lived experience to make a difference.

Linking back to misrecognition, Innes spoke of the change brought about by this approach:

> They're…still involved in some level of antisocial behaviour….But they're now very much valued members of the community, too. And people living around…the hotspots, wherever they hang about, have reported not feeling as scared to walk out their buildings….So, it's changing the relationships within the community, which I think is huge.

By interviewing the local MP as part of his programme on housing, Lyle was able to draw political attention to the issue and highlight that schools could better equip young people by teaching life skills. While the MP

encouraged expression of his views on behalf of young people to the local authority, there was no youth political forum to which he could directly propose action: an example of the wider institutional barriers to representation faced by youth activists in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The adult-centric nature of politics was emphasised by Jamie, a disabled young person, who felt that young people's experiences and input were not equally valued with adults', leading to tokenistic, one-off consultations:

> It's, kind of, disheartening when you get involved in an opportunity and they plonk you in a room with…several adults and it's the adults that are the ones that simply know best. And that's something that I find a lot, and other young people find a lot, but also using young people as…I call it decoration.

Jamie's account illustrated that recognition means being noticed by people in positions of power and occupying those positions as elected representatives themselves, an example of the connection between Fraser's dimensions of recognition and representation. When asked what people in positions of power and influence could do to challenge the injustices experienced by disabled people, Jamie emphasised the importance of being recognised: "I would say first thing…first is notice us. Actually, come out and speak to us." Jamie went on to explain the importance of seeing disabled people *in* positions of power, giving the example of disabled members of the Scottish parliament, which helps to challenge stigma and negative stereotypes around disability.

Esther, who had joined an organisation with a climate justice focus, explained that younger members were trying to challenge the dominance of the majority older, more socially and politically conservative membership, "to actually make sure that it just doesn't continue being a bunch of old white men. Yeah. And right now, we're, kind of, trying to radicalise them a little bit [laugh] 'cause they tend to play it safe."

Molly's journey into activism started with engagement in mainstream politics but work experience in Westminster deterred them from pursuing this further. They described learning for the first time that MP's meals in Westminster were subsidised with public money:

> And that just absolutely disgusted me. I was like, how are we living in a society where kids can't get free school meals but politicians can get a…like, fucking beef Wellington for their lunch for £1.50….And it, kind of, made me realise that real change doesn't happen from that kind of government or political level. It happens from [the] community base.

Molly's account, like many other participants, recognises the importance of building activism from grassroots, lived experience at a local level. Whilst youth activists generally sought to engage with mainstream politicians to garner support, there was often a lack of institutional support for young people's vision for change.

6. Conclusion

Our findings revealed that the domains of recognition, redistribution, and representation were interlinked in the experiences of youth activists. Affirmational recognition built towards transformational recognition, and this offered a springboard to find new ways to challenge the misrepresentation of youth and their

communities. Developing a critical understanding of their political misrepresentation encouraged youth activists to challenge issues of maldistribution and disadvantage in their communities. However, this creative, exploratory work (such as TV programme production and DIY festivals) was limited to the local sphere and took place against a backdrop of increasing cuts and generational socio-economic inequality.

Activist journeys often began with misrecognition. The value of youth agency and dignity were emphasised, resonating with evidence that social recognition can have as significant an effect on wellbeing as income (Hojman & Miranda, 2018). What began as affirmational recognition in relation to class, race, disability, or sexuality, built towards young activists reframing the ways that youth in their communities were represented. The creative exploration of different identities was a strong motivator for youth activists. Expanded modes of societal participation promoted fun and "collective wellbeing" (Lamont, 2017, p. 21) and offered a counterpoint to a neoliberal focus on individual achievement. Kirkhill TV presented serious debate and created gameshows and homegrown movies; Dalziel Arts critiqued the commercial capitalism of the Pride "brand" (Conway, 2023) by creating a grassroots celebration; and Newbank Youth organised street art and music events to stimulate creative and political expression. These are important examples of promoting and making visible cultural activities and identities that are devalued and "othered" (Bourdieu, 1986). Such acts may also be considered as a "politics of becoming" (Asenbaum, 2023) which examines not only how young people are viewed from the outside, but how, from the inside, they come to understand and play their own multiplicity of identity (Sen, 2006) and as credible sources of knowledge (Fricker, 2007). This suggests the site of recognition as one of freedom and escape, as well as a forge for new forms of representation. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that this focus on culture and recognition may itself be shaped by the increasing unattainability of redistribution, particularly for this generation of youth. Findings thus largely support the theory of a generational "tip" away from redistribution, which has resulted in young people having to focus more on symbolic, cultural challenges to inequality (Prieur et al., 2023).

Grassroots organisations offered a critical space for young people to develop as activists, offering space and equipment, supportive adults, and social networks. All three grassroots organisations supported critical dialogue to explore and unpack issues of territorial stigma (Wacquant, 2008). They enabled young people to build alternative narratives, using creative, DIY approaches. The creation of alternative knowledges and participation structures challenges pre-existing power structures, suggesting these examples of activism as potentially "disruptive" and "dangerous," and more likely to be transformative in the long term (O'Brien et al., 2018).

N. Fraser's (2008) theory of participatory parity helped us to draw out the social justice achievements and further potentials of youth activism but also highlighted their partial nature. Youth activists gave examples of transformational recognition, but the transformation of status as highlighted by Fraser et al. (2004) was usually limited to local "institutions," such as local public sector staff and local audiences. Nevertheless, cultural media had potential to gain greater political traction via a wider audience and targeted campaigns, and youth autonomy over creative production offered greater freedom than had previously been possible. To draw attention to the complexity of the challenge of parity of participation for young activists in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland, we found it helpful to supplement Fraser's analytical frame with literature on stigma. The concept of stigma highlights both the complexity of the challenge and the interlinking domains as activist work builds from one domain to another. To challenge stigma, activists must work across a range of actors (Bos et al., 2013; Smets & Kusenbach, 2020), from those people who are

stigmatised, to institutional actors within their neighbourhoods, and wider public perceptions. They must also navigate different types of stigma such as stereotyping public narratives, epistemic injustice, and a lack of social and economic capital. The interlinking of domains in young activists' work is demonstrated by the movement from affirmational identity work towards status recognition, from affirmational recognition towards a critique of the structural causes via maldistribution, and from creative new presentations of selves towards emergent and disruptive political "becomings" (Asenbaum, 2023; O'Brien et al., 2018). The frame of participatory parity helps to highlight the social, cultural, and political successes of grassroots activism in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and to pinpoint where further work is required. We are keen to develop our research in this area, and to collaborate further with youth activists to understand the practical steps to gaining wider political traction.

While the evidence on activism offers hope for young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the wider context of collective civil precarity (Herranz, 2024) threatens the sustainability of such work. Youth activists spoke of burnout due to long hours and a lack of resources. Grassroots youth and community organisations were consistently found to plug gaps and address injustices created by the withdrawal of the state, supporting alienated young people while simultaneously bearing the brunt of responsibility for finding resources to do so. By documenting their work towards social justice, we aim to contribute to raising the profile of these vital, yet fragile, responses to crisis.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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ARTICLE

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The Future as a Cultural Commons: Grammars of Commonality in Crisis-Ridden Wilhelmsburg

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze how vulnerable yet resistant urban residents set out to "common" a particular phenomenon: the future. The scene in analysis is Wilhelmsburg, the southern section of the German city of Hamburg. Plagued by industrial pollution, infrastructural decay, and systemic poverty, Wilhelmsburg's residents united themselves around the 2000s in an organization called Future Wilhelmsburg. Their goal? To get out of the crisis by commoning Wilhelmsburg's future. Future Wilhelmsburg has engaged ever since in a continuous struggle—writing, blogging, researching, advocating, and protesting—to subject the neighborhood's future to the wishes of its residents rather than to the top-down projections of the urban governmental elite. The future of Wilhelmsburg is thus approached as a "cultural commons": a symbolic construct that is collectively produced yet intrinsically vulnerable to enclosure. Against this background, I set out to sociologically explain Future Wilhelmsburg's commoning of the future. How is it, precisely, that the activists united in Future Wilhelmsburg manage to turn the "not yet" into a meaningful matter of common concern? Laurent Thévenot's "pragmatic sociology," and more precisely his model of the three "grammars of commonality"—referring to the structuring principles through which social actors turn individual concerns into collective ones—allows us to answer this question. The article highlights how the "justificatory grammar" (structuring activists' public argumentations), the "liberal grammar" (structuring their pinpointing of collective paths forward), and the "affective grammar" (structuring their affinity to place) all permeate the work of Future Wilhelmsburg as it sets out to turn the future into a cultural commons.

Keywords

commonality; commoning; futures; justification; pragmatic sociology; Thévenot

1. Introduction: The Future as a Cultural Commons

The article's premise is that the future of Wilhelmsburg can be seen as a "cultural commons." Cultural commons—think of knowledges, artistic expressions, languages, recipes, traditions, public spaces—have material and symbolic value for social communities, are subject to shared production and use, yet they continue to be "common" only because of their communities' continued struggles to protect the cultural commons from privatization (Borchi, 2018; Van Heur et al., 2023; Volont et al., 2022). Ditto with the temporal dimension of Wilhelmsburg's future. The future of Wilhelmsburg, too, constitutes a symbolic construct that similarly meanders between collective production and top-down enclosure. Can the future be commoned? For the activists of Future Wilhelmsburg the answer is decidedly positive.

But how is it, precisely, that the activists united in Future Wilhelmsburg manage to turn the temporal "not yet" into a meaningful matter of common concern? I set out to sociologically explain Future Wilhelmsburg's commoning of the future. To answer this question, I find inspiration in the "pragmatic sociology" of French social theorist Laurent Thévenot (2002, 2007, 2014). More specifically, I deploy Thévenot's model of the "three grammars of commonality." Thévenot's "three grammars" refer to the structuring principles through which social actors turn individual aspirations into meaningful matters of common concern. The grammars thus constitute a conceptual heuristic that allows the analyst to explain how social actors (in this case the activists of Future Wilhelmsburg) turn aspirations (in this case aspirations for the future) into matters of collective imagination. We shall see how the "justificatory grammar" (structuring activists' public argumentations), the "liberal grammar" (structuring their pinpointing of collective paths forward) and the "affective grammar" (structuring their affinity to place) intrinsically permeate the work of Future Wilhelmsburg as it sets out to turn the future into a cultural commons.

The article is structured as follows. First, I provide a historically contextualized look at the scene of the analysis, namely the crisis-ridden "river island" of Wilhelmsburg in Hamburg, northern Germany. Subsequently, I present Thévenot's three grammars in detail, as well as the study's methodological dimension. Then follows the article's main empirical body, in which I will describe: (a) how Future Wilhelmsburg intrinsically *combines* the justificatory and the radical grammar; (b) how such combination rests on an unseen and overlooked layer of "justificatory labor" (after all, to provide moral justifications for the area's future, the members of Future Wilhelmsburg must rely on a hidden world of research, archival work and analytic argumentation); and (c) how the "affective grammar," emerging during moments of collective effervescence, "emotionally charges" the commoners of the future. In sum, commoning the future emerges as an everyday struggle that is structured by moral, teleological, and affective determinants.

2. Making Matter Meaningful: Welcome to Wilhelmsburg

The river Elbe cuts horizontally through Hamburg. When the river reaches Hamburg, as can be seen in Figure 1, it splits in two. North of this split lies Hamburg's dense city center, where one finds residential functions and the service economy. The split itself entirely surrounds what lies south of Hamburg's city center, namely the "river island" of Wilhelmsburg. It is precisely this southern section, Wilhelmsburg, which constitutes this article's décor. In contrast to Hamburg's residential northern sections, the south has long been sacrificed to industrial functions and port development. As Fritz Schumacher, Hamburg's Head of Urban Planning at the dawn of the 20th century, argued: "Geest land [the higher ground of the north] is for

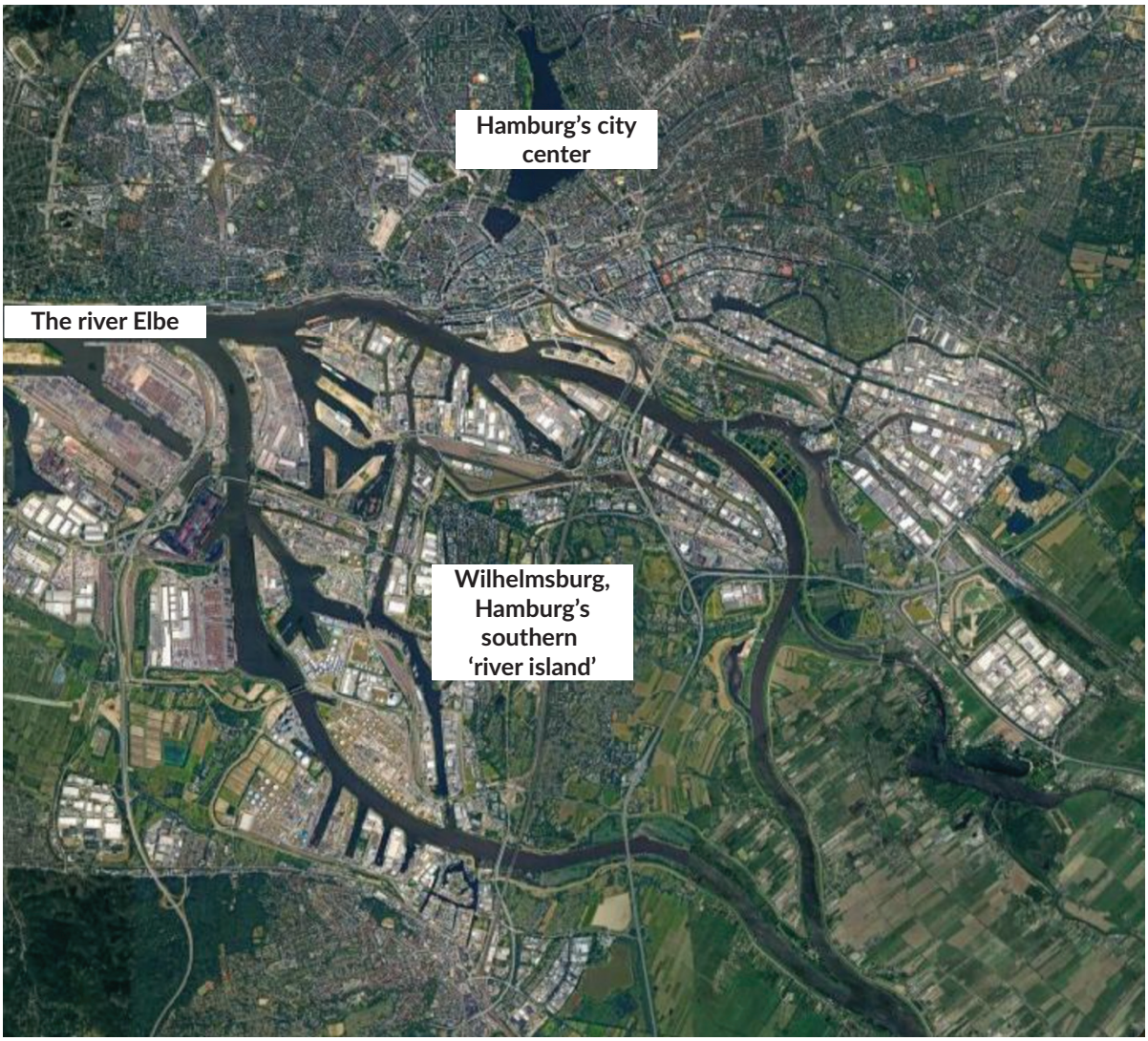

Figure 1. Map of Hamburg.

living, marshland [the south] is for working" (Future Conference Wilhelmsburg, 2002). Consequently, Hamburg's south has historically constituted an arrival place for migrant communities with no choice left than to seek employment in the dirtier and more dangerous sections of Hamburg's port industry (Birke et al., 2015; Chamberlain, 2020, 2022; Eckardt, 2017).

Wilhelmsburg constitutes one of Hamburg's poorer districts with income levels lying a quarter below the municipal average. In 2016, the level of unemployment in Wilhelmsburg was two times as high as in Hamburg as a whole, while Wilhelmsburgers yearly income was only half compared to the city's average. Also, whilst in general, 10.3% of Hamburgers would rely on social assistance to survive financially, this number doubles to 22,5% for Wilhelmsburg. A quarter of Wilhelmsburg's housing stock is furthermore designated as social housing (Chamberlain, 2020; Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2017, 2018). Waves of high unemployment are not unusual, given recurring job losses in the port. As Chamberlain (2020, p. 612) stated in one of her many seminal ethnographic studies on the river island, the place has been "a center of wealth production, but not of wealth."

Up until the 2000s, a series of key events had been pulling Wilhelmsburg into a downward socio-ecological spiral. It is a district "wounded" by the past. After the Great Flood of 1962, several hundreds of inhabitants lost their lives, thousands lost their homes. The 1984 dioxin crisis is another example: Toxins leaking from an industrial garbage dump were detected by concerned citizens, eventually paving the way for one of the largest environmental scandals in recent German history. The culmination point had yet to arrive: In the summer of 2000 a child was bitten to death by an attack dog and the streets were the scene of four consecutive murders. Such events added weight to the aforementioned collective consciousness of Wilhelmsburg as a place of decay. To this day, also, the district's soil remains cut up by supra-regional polluting traffic routes, used for coal-fired energy production and contaminated by industrial brownfields (Chamberlain, 2020, 2022; Future Conference Wilhelmsburg, 2002). Hamburgers' overall "urban imaginary" (Dunn, 2018) was relatedly predicated on a duality between north and south: prosperity above the Elbe, poverty below.

Newspaper articles reporting on the area at the time, focusing largely on local acts of violence and decay, resorted to descriptions such as "a neighborhood in crisis or "the Bronx of the North" (Brinkbäumer, 2000; Hilferuf aus der Bronx, 2000; Twickel, 2011). The district even made its way into cultural expressions such as the 2009 movie *Soul Kitchen* (Strüver, 2015). In an infamous scene, the main character informs a friend about the location of their new restaurant: Wilhelmsburg. The friend's jaw immediately drops—surprised, confused, concerned.

However, the beginning of the 2000s constituted a tipping point and a turning point. On the demand of by-now loudly protesting citizens, the Hamburg Senate brought the "Future Conference" to Wilhelmsburg. The Future Conference allowed local citizens to reflect upon metaphorical "bridges into the future": visions and ideas putting Wilhelmsburg on a path towards a fairer and more just locale (Future Conference Wilhelmsburg, 2002). In the summer of 2002, the cognitive energy assembled at the conference was consolidated in "Future Wilhelmsburg," the paper's central citizen organization which up until today has been engaging in activist labor to improve the district's social, spatial, and environmental conditions. Through advocacy work, public protest, and critical research the organization seeks to be "the driving force behind urban development" while refusing "to accept the passive role as observer" (Holm, 2012, p. 13). Hence, Future Wilhelmsburg strives on a day-to-day basis to analyze, critique and propose how Wilhelmsburg's material substrate—its mobility systems, its public spaces, and its environmental conditions—could alternatively and collectively be envisioned in the future. The activists united in Future Wilhelmsburg took hold of the future, indeed, by making matter meaningful.

The former reflections allow one to embed this contribution within the grander scheme of this thematic issue. Wilhelmsburg constitutes a low-income neighborhood, characterized by a wealth gap with Hamburg's better-off northern areas. Ecologically, too, Wilhelmsburg has been wounded, not in the least by natural disasters and industrial toxicity. As the editors of this thematic issue would have it, Wilhelmsburg constitutes an urban neighborhood in which residents experience "stress about how to survive." Such stress might indeed cause "a short-term perspective which obstructs planning for the future," but the story of Wilhelmsburg is a different one. Whilst the residents of Wilhelmsburg find themselves in vulnerable circumstances, they also join hands in order to secure their future. To this, it should be added that while the Wilhelmsburgers find themselves in vulnerable circumstances, they do not necessarily perceive themselves as inherently vulnerable. The emergence of Future Wilhelmsburg proves the inhabitants' resilience as well as their willingness to collectively curate and ameliorate the temporal dimension of the future. Hence, living

within "vulnerable circumstances" does not necessarily equate to "being vulnerable." Those gathered in Future Wilhelmsburg do not accept a vulnerable fate, precisely by commoning the temporal horizons of their spatial surroundings.

But how exactly do the activists united in Future Wilhelmsburg manage to turn the area's future into a meaningful matter of common concern? How is it that the activists turn the future into a cultural commons? The work of Thévenot, and more precisely Thévenot's model of the "three grammars of commonality," shows the way forward.

3. On Thévenot's "Three Grammars of Commonality"

Often in collaboration with Luc Boltanski, Thévenot has since the 1990s been developing what may be called a "pragmatic sociology" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2006; Thévenot, 2007, 2014). The Thévenotian project aims to differentiate the modes through which social actors relate to the socio-material world around them (Hansen, 2023). Thévenot (2007) speaks in this regard of social actors' *engagements* with the lifeworld. In the seminal book *L'Action au Pluriel* (2006), Thévenot points to four "regimes of engagement" with the surrounding world: justification, planning, exploration, and familiarity. Thévenot's sociology has in recent years been discovered by sociologists asking how social actors engage not only with the world around them, but also with the temporal dimension of the future (Blok & Meilvang, 2015; Mandich, 2020; Welch et al., 2020). This is not a surprising fact. After all, Thévenot's sociology is intrinsically focused on the "acting individual," that is: the social actor who praxeologically engages with the spatial and temporal structures of the lifeworld. Consequently, it is a sociology that carries within itself great seeds and hypotheses for those active within sociological and anthropological futures research (see also Bryant & Knight, 2019; Tutton, 2017).

This article should be situated in the latter, Thévenot-inspired tradition, albeit that the focus here is on the collective rather than the individual. The small yet growing Thévenot-inspired sociology of the future focuses mainly on individual acts but leaves untouched the question of how the future can become a collective good. I argue here that Thévenot's "newest" theoretical iteration, namely his "three grammars of commonality," allows us to solve this lacuna. The three grammars—called the justificatory grammar, the liberal grammar, and the affective grammar—will be explained below. The attentive reader may recognize resonances of the aforementioned regimes of engagement, which points to Thévenot's overall project of constantly renewing and updating his sociological models.

The model of the grammars of commonality outlines three different modes through which social actors turn individual aspirations into topics of common concern. The distinguishing variable that differentiates the three modes is the one of "communicating": In each mode, actors communicate—in textual or verbal forms—differently about the topics that they aspire to turn into a matter of shared importance. Hence the idea of "grammar," which should be understood metaphorically as a set of rules structuring communicative acts and utterances (Thévenot, 2014, p. 9).

Thévenot's calls his first grammar the "grammar of plural orders of worth." For reasons of clarity and space, I will call this grammar, more shortly, the "justificatory grammar." When actors communicate through the justificatory grammar, they effectively "argue" for the common good by pointing to what they think are the

rightful justifications for future conduct. What could those justifications be? In an attempt to specify this grammar, Thévenot takes us back to his 2006 landmark study with Luc Boltanski called *On Justification*. In the latter work, Boltanski and Thévenot define the moral value regimes deployed by actors in situations of crisis and uncertainty. Six value regimes—which Boltanski and Thévenot also call "worlds"—were outlined: "the inspired world" (including values such as creativity, originality, and stroke of genius); the "domestic world" (including values such as tradition, hierarchy, respect); the "world of fame" (including values such as recognition, attention, popularity); the "market world" (including values such as opportunity, gain, competition); the "industrial world" (including values such as efficiency, labor, preciseness); and the "civic world" (including values such as representation, democracy, and collective will). In a later theorization, a final "green world" was added, including values such as health and sustainability (Blok, 2013; Thévenot, 2002).

The second grammar, in Thévenot's words, is the "grammar of individuals choosing among diverse options in a liberal public," or: the "liberal grammar." When actors communicate through the liberal grammar, they transform personal aspirations into "options open to a public" (Thévenot, 2014, p. 18). The communicative mode in this grammar is thus one through which potential yet publicly available paths into the future are thrown into the public arena.

The third grammar, finally, is the "grammar of personal affinities to a commonplace," which will be called here the "affective grammar." Actors communicating through the affective grammar express their emotional attachment to a "commonplace." Thévenot (2014, pp. 23–25) uses the idea of the commonplace not in a derogatory sense, but rather to designate any material or immaterial entity that is affectively shared by more than one social actor: from poems loved by a scene of writers via songs having special meaning to a set of lovers to Wilhelmsburg as a locus communis that is affectively lived and loved by its inhabitants.

I will highlight how the "justificatory grammar," the "liberal grammar" and the "affective grammar" permeate Future Wilhelmsburg's struggle to open up the key topic of "the future" to collective imagination. More particularly, I will describe (a) how Future Wilhelmsburg intrinsically *combines* the justificatory and the radical grammar; (b) how such combination rests on an unseen and overlooked layer of "justificatory labor" (after all, to provide moral justifications for the area's collective future, the members of Future Wilhelmsburg must rely on a hidden world of research, archival work and analytic argumentation); and (c) how the "affective grammar," mainly emerging during moments of collective effervescence, "emotionally charges" the commoners of the future. Hence, these three grammars do not exist separately but imply and reinforce each other within the crisis-ridden circumstances of Wilhelmsburg.

4. A Note on Data and Method

Future Wilhelmsburg documents its proceedings in white papers, meeting minutes, recapitulations of public hearings, speeches, opinion pieces, analyses of policy plans as well as its own 2012 book *Ein starke Insel mitten in der Stadt*. These documents constitute the primary data for this study. Indeed: In the aforementioned accounts one finds Future Wilhelmsburg's verbal and practical ways of constituting the area's future as a cultural commons. Moreover, these documents do not only include the utterances and practices of Future Wilhelmsburg itself, but also those expressed by the organization's many con—and dissensual interlocutors (local politicians, urban planners, economic actors). The three most prominent of Future Wilhelmsburg's foci are (a) the struggle for a healthy and just mobility system (which was put on

Future Wilhelmsburg's agenda in 2005 and continues to be debated up to this day); (b) the struggle for inclusive public space (a struggle mainly unfolding in 2014); and (c) and the struggle for ecological justice (beginning in 2008 and continuing to this day).

The examples listed in the analysis below will be drawn from these three realms. It is important to note that I do not see these three areas of struggle as distinct realms having their own logic. Rather, I see them as a threefold amalgam of topics that—altogether—constitute the informational input from which and through which the mobilization of the grammars will be distilled. The data were analyzed through consecutive rounds of open and categorial coding (Rivas, 2012). During the first round of open coding—and thus deploying Thévenot's scheme as an epistemological lens—I sought to identify any kind of justification (first grammar), publicly proposed path into the future (second grammar), or affective affinity (third grammar). During the second round of categorial coding, I sought to connect the emerging codes into larger thematic patterns through which it would become visible how Thévenot's three grammars exist simultaneously and in interaction throughout the endeavors of Future Wilhelmsburg.

Future Wilhelmsburg is not the only activist group south of the river Elbe. Another set of activists could be found in the Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg (translated as the Wilhelmsburg Restructuring Working Group) and in the *Recht auf Stadt* movement (the internationally active "right to the city" movement, which played a major role in preventing the organization of the Olympic Games in Hamburg during a referendum in 2015). However, whilst these groups all fight for just and equitable futures, it is Future Wilhelmsburg that deploys the notion of the future most actively in its discourse. Given the article's explicit interest in the future and the commoning thereof, I designed this study as a "single case study" based on Future Wilhelmsburg as an "information-rich" case (Yin, 2017).

5. Grammars of Commonality in Crisis-Ridden Wilhelmsburg

5.1. Justifying the Radical Option

The crux of Future Wilhelmsburg's commoning of the future concerns, to begin with, an active combination of the liberal grammar and the justificatory grammar. Let us look first at the liberal grammar. Throughout Future Wilhelmsburg's utterances concerning mobility, public health, and public space, the organization tactically expounds the insight that "among the options open to the public" (Thévenot, 2014, p. 18) there is the possibility of *resistance*. Think of it like this. In the case of mobility, for instance, one of Future Wilhelmsburg's main projects is to oppose the A26-East, a planned highway that would cut right through Wilhelmsburg with pollution and segregation as a consequence. Taking note of Future Wilhelmsburg's reluctance vis-à-vis the A26, Hamburg's planning authorities started to propose multiple variations of the highway: "above ground," "underground," and so on. Rather than choosing, however, from such a proposed "series" of options, the activists clustered these variations together in one overarching umbrella that they intrinsically resist: a built highway per se. As Future Wilhelmsburg argued in a public statement recapitulating an information evening organized by the planning authorities to discuss the potential variations: "Anyone who expects an opportunity for pros and cons on the controversial A26-East motorway will be disappointed" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2017a). In a similar claim, it was argued that the city's planning echelons do "not want to debate whether the A26 will be implemented, but only how" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2019).

Lefebvre (1991) once pointed to the distinction between "induced" and "produced" differences. "Induced differences" are variations within the same category, like the numbers 1, 2, and 3 in a series of 10. "Produced differences" concern clashes of elements of a radically different nature, if for example "green" (a variation within a range of colors) were opposed to "2" (a variation within a range of numbers). In Wilhelmsburg one detects a similar dynamic: One finds not a defense of a series of "optional paths forward," but rather the unambiguous point that against and beyond the different options open to the public, vulnerable residents can always choose the path of overall resistance. Indeed: They can choose the path of what I like to call "the radical option." The radical option finds expression in carefully crafted linguistic constructs. Concerning the A26, a slogan that permeates Future Wilhelmsburg's communications both online (in blog posts) and offline (on protest banners) is: *A26-Ost: Nötig oder tödlich*? ("The A26-East: needed or deadly?"). The answer is clear: *Wilhelmsburgers sagen Nein!* ("Wilhelmsburg says no!"). The same appears in the realms of public health and public space: "We say NO to a power plant in Hamburg" and "The fence must come down!" are two more unambiguous "radical" options that the activists launch against a coal-fired factory and a barb-wired park respectively.

However, Future Wilhelmsburg strives to cluster individual choices of resistance into a matter of *common* concern, indeed into a collective consciousness that is bigger than the sum of its constituent parts. How does this happen? This is where the justificatory grammar comes in. Future Wilhelmsburg goes to great discursive lengths to launch into the urban public sphere the moral justifications underwriting the aforementioned radical option of resistance. If an individual choice of resistance is to be turned into a supra-individual collective consciousness, the corresponding actors need indeed a "moral glue," namely shared moral principles binding them together in saying "no" to a highway, or in saying "stop" to a power plant and in saying "come down" to a fence enclosing a public park.

We saw how Thévenot (building on his collaboration with Boltanski) designates multiple "value regimes" or "worlds" within the justificatory grammar. It shall come as no surprise the "civic" and the "green" worlds are deployed most intensively; the former being based on values such as collective will, the latter on values of sustainability and ecology. Let us zoom in on another of Future Wilhelmsburg's key endeavors: the struggle to dismantle the aforementioned fence around the area's main public park. The *raison d'être* of the fence is found in the 2013 International Garden Show, a gentrificatory event in the central park, designed to attract capital to a neighborhood in crisis. To protect the show's plants and flowers a fence was raised, yet never taken down. Echoing the aforementioned civic and green worlds, Future Wilhelmsburg argues in a blog post that "the people of Wilhelmsburg are dispossessed of the large park in the middle of their district. Instead of a fence, Hamburg and Wilhelmsburg need a park for and with the residents" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014c). And as one reads in another public statement: "The green future begins for the people of Wilhelmsburg when the fence comes down" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014a). The radical option of dismantlement—an option which goes beyond another "series" of options proposed by the planning authorities, which would all keep the fence in place—is justified by the fact that *Wilhelmsburg-as-community* is disposed of its green, public spaces.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, the world of fame—built on values such as recognition, attention, popularity—also figures in Future Wilhelmsburg's justificatory exercises. I argued earlier that at the peak of its crisis in the early 2000s, Wilhelmsburg struggled not only with social, spatial, and ecological wounds, but also suffered from being publicly perceived as the "dirty corner" of the larger Hamburgian metropolitan area. In this vein, one of the justifications to oppose the A26 is found in the argument that the autostrada would reproduce the

already-existing imaginary of Wilhelmsburg. Wilhelmsburgers refuse to become the subject, again, of what we might call a spatial disaster and its corresponding imaginary. In an open letter directed at local citizens, Future Wilhelmsburg argued that "it will harm us if word gets out that this construction project will be the most expensive motorway per kilometer ever built in Germany" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2016a). Furthermore, the construction of a polluting highway is argued to be "unimaginable north of the Elbe" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2017a), a claim that points once more to the imaginary difference between the north and the south of the city. In an online discussion forum hosted by Future Wilhelmsburg, a resident argued that if the fence would stay in place—which is justified by the municipality through its assumed protection against vandalism—the profane imaginary surrounding Wilhelmsburg would be fueled again: "then we have it again, that Bronx smell that we wanted to let behind us" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014c).

5.2. On the Unseen Dimension of Justificatory Labor

Whilst the previous reflection captured the combinatory dynamic emerging between the liberal and the justificatory grammar, I now would like to zoom in on the latter one. The impression emerging from Thévenot's justificatory grammar is that social actors would be able to justify envisioned futures *by default*. It seems as if social actors would have the aforementioned value regimes implanted in their minds, ready to be deployed at any given moment of uncertainty or crisis. Here a more nuanced picture shall be presented, and the key claim is this: actors *become* able to deploy the moral principles for a common future, and this "act of becoming" requires continued energy. Actors' justificatory capacities depend on an often-overlooked realm of what I would like to call "justificatory labor." Justificatory labor consists of quotidian, cognitive acts of study allowing social actors to take on a potent argumentative position: "Grammar"—be it linguistic grammar or Thévenot's metaphorical one—must be learned.

A first instance concerns Future Wilhelmsburg's labor to effectively "counter" the moral principles adhered to by its opponents, specifically in the case of the A26. The A26 is justified by the Hamburg planning authorities through the moral principles of the "market world." The planning authority argues that this highway is needed to keep up with the projected growth of Hamburg's harbor. Otherwise, Hamburg is expected to lose out in the grander scheme of international economic competition. The residents united in Future Wilhelmsburg asked themselves, however: "Is this future projection correct?" To answer such a question, concerned citizens started to mathematically analyze the exact number of containers handled in the port throughout time. Whilst the administration predicted that the number of containers would rise to 25 million in 2025, the "studying" residents discovered the opposite trend. The results of their "folk scientific" study were published in multiple reports by Future Wilhelmsburg. One report states that "there was no growth in container handling at all, in 2015 this was less than 9 million" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2016b). Another report argues:

> The A26 is based on outdated forecasts of constant growth in private motor vehicles. When the Hamburg parliament decided in favor of the A26 through the south of Wilhelmsburg from 2008 to 2011, they [planning authorities] assumed that the number of containers would grow unstoppably. This hasn't happened in the past 12 years. (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2020)

Consequently, a final report concludes that the A26 "can no longer be *justified* in any way against the background of decreasing demand in the port" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2021, author's emphasis).

A second instance of justificatory labor concerns the reverse dynamic: in this case, social actors' research is not aimed to annul others' arguments, but rather to make them "stay true" to their initial promises. We now return to the example of Future Wilhelmsburg's quest to dismantle the fence around the area's central public park. As I argued before, the fence was erected for and during the 2013 gentrificatory International Garden Show and was, after the event, never taken down. Struggling against the fence, and by extension against the continued enclosure of a green collective space, the activists of Future Wilhelmsburg delved deeply into the past discourse of the International Garden Show. There, they found that the organization's "public participation officer" had argued in an interview that the fence "creates an enclave and will quickly disappear after the garden show ends" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014b; Grüne Pracht mit Folgekosten, 2012). The activists also scrutinized an amalgam of municipal planning documents that made the Garden Show legally possible, for example, the Justification for Wilhelmsburg's Development Plan. This document similarly stated that "after the end of the Garden Show in 2013, the area will be converted into a public park and will therefore be available to all citizens without restrictions" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014b; Hansestadt Hamburg, 2014, p. 45). Consequently, Future Wilhelmsburg concluded in an online public statement: "If the district implements what it has decided the park will continue to exist in the future, open to everyone at all times" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2014b).

However, justificatory labor goes further than mere "desk work" and delving into documents. Material objects are also actively deployed to make justifications potent and correct. Thévenot (2007, p. 18) speaks in this regard of "intermediary objects": material carriers through which justifications for the common good can be supported. In order to oppose the expansion of a nearby coal-fired power plant, Future Wilhelmsburg deployed the aforementioned "green world" (based on values of health, ecology, and sustainability) in collaboration with the local medical community. With the latter community it was emphasized that the WHO-defined tolerable levels of exposure to CO2 "were already exceeded on more than 20 days per year in 2006 at several Hamburg measuring stations—in the city center, in Hamburg-Veddel, and in Finkenwerder [areas within Wilhelmsburg]" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2008). Indeed, the material entity of a "measuring station" constitutes a pivotal intermediary object allowing the activists to underwrite "green" justifications. A measuring station could capture, precisely, the levels of fine dust and nitrous oxide generated by the nearby power plant. Wilhelmsburg already houses such a measuring station but—as residents discovered through everyday study work—its values were not representative because it measured car emissions too. Therefore, Future Wilhelmsburg set out to lobby for a new measuring station, one "in front of the door [of the power plant] to provide further reliable arguments" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2013). Wilhelmsburg's local medical community consequently used these findings to join the struggle, arguing that "an increase in the fine dust concentration of just 10ug/m3 on an annual average leads to an increasing number of cardiovascular diseases, an increased rate of lung cancer and general mortality!" Therefore, they continued: "We say NO to a coal-fired power plant of this size, which knowingly harms the health of the Hamburg population!" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2008). We might thus conclude that "preciseness" and "correct values" are important to justify the aforementioned "radical" option—the option of "no" power plant instead of "this" or "that" kind of power plant.

5.3. The Affective Charging of Commoning Energy

The main focus has been on how Wilhelmsburg's commoners of the future deploy the liberal grammar—in the radical sense of defining one, unambiguous future projection—in conjunction with moral argumentation and

justificatory labor. Does this mean that Thévenot's third grammar, the "affective" grammar, is entirely absent from Future Wilhelmsburg's commoning endeavors? Certainly not. Whilst the activists' main focus is indeed on the first two grammars, a deeper look reveals that the affective grammar roams through Wilhelmsburg as well, namely during what we may call "moments of collective effervescence" (Durkheim, 1912/2001), namely "in situ" moments of intense meaning-making. I return to those moments below, but let us first finetune this third grammar. What distinguishes the affective grammar from the other two grammars is precisely the actors' mode of engagement with the future. Whereas actors may unambiguously adhere to a certain path forward ("we say no to the power plant!"), and whereas actors may justify that envisioned future ("we say no *because* coal-fired energy production is ecologically disastrous"), the affective grammar allows actors to express "deeply personal and emotional investments" in the future (Thévenot, 2014, p. 20). As shown before, actors communicating through this third grammar express their affective attachment to a "commonplace" without the need to "justify" or "planify" such affective attachment. Also, actors' different emotional relationships to a commonplace, argues Thévenot, can exist next to each other, without the need for supra-individual collectiveness. The affective grammar is about the utterance of feeling, affect, and emotion which can be "united in diversity." It shall be clear that the emotionally charged commonplace, in this account, is Wilhelmsburg.

Whilst the justificatory and the liberal grammar structure commoners' communication on a day-to-day basis, the affective grammar becomes palpable through short-lived "in situ," intensive moments of affective expression. Perhaps the clearest example is the activists' interruption of a public information evening concerning the A26. In 2017, Hamburg's Authority for Economic Affairs and Transport organized an information evening in Wilhelmsburg in order to present to the citizenry the planning approval documents concerning the first building phase (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2017b). This event was however interrupted by activist citizens—more particularly, musicians—who took to the stage and started playing protest songs against the planned motorway. In the corresponding newspaper article, these musicians were said to "hijack" the evening, reminiscent of student actions against institutionalized authority at the German (and certainly also French) universities in the 1960s and 1970s (Sulzyc, 2017). In the same article, a musician argues to be "annoyed" with the planning authority's ongoing "scientific" justification of the plans; an utterance that captures precisely how the affective grammar is at odds with rationalistic modes of enunciation.

Another instance can be found in the yearly Spreehafen Festival taking place in Wilhelmsburg. One of Future Wilhelmsburg's older projects was the dismantling of the fence that used to protect Hamburg's customs harbor. Historically the fence surrounding the customs harbor ran right through Wilhelmsburg. However, the customs section of the harbor was dismantled throughout time while the fence stayed in place. This meant that large pieces of Wilhelmsburgian land—despite not being used for any specific activity—were shielded off from local inhabitants. After years of struggle, Future Wilhelmsburg managed however to get the enclosure taken down. Not unlike the fall of another rather known German wall, the moment during which this fence was dismantled is still emotionally engrained in Wilhelmsburg's collective consciousness. The then-Mayor of Wilhelmsburg—and now Chancellor of Germany—Olaf Scholz stepped on a bulldozer and erased the last piece of barbed wire on Wilhelmsburg's soil. It was a symbolic victory for the commoners of the future. This moment is remembered to this day through the annual Spreehafen Festival, a "festive occupation once every summer" including music and performances (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2010). In the words of Future Wilhelmsburg, it is "a colorful and varied program, games and fun for young and old and international specialties at family-friendly prices" (Future Wilhelmsburg, 2010). No justifications for the common good; no unambiguous "radical plan"; but an overall "being together."

Such effervescent moments of affect effectively "charge" the day-to-day praxis of turning the future into a cultural commons. The idea that affective moments entail within themselves a certain potency to *ignite* the act of commoning constitutes a recurring point within extant research on cultural commoning. Lijster et al. (2022, p. 25), for example, coined the notion of "urban intimacy": collective experiences (through art, public theatre, festivals, and the like) affectively "fueling" commoning practices. However, what I detect when looking at the commoning of the future in Wilhelmsburg is that these affective moments do not constitute a sort of single "initiatory" moment, but rather a *recurring* instance, an intensification of meaning erupting transversally throughout time, and thus disrupting the temporally stretched-out justificatory and liberal grammars. We might thus argue, finally, that commoners' envisioned futures—the highway not being built, the fence coming down, the plant not being expanded—constitute supra-individual moral imaginaries which, through intense affective moments dispersed throughout time, are simultaneously expressed and reproduced via the affective grammar. The everyday praxis of justifying why the A26 should not be built was "reloaded" for example through a protest bicycle ride; through a flash mob during which activists formed a human formation which (from the sky) read "No A26"; and through the aforementioned musical interruption of the debate evening. All these emotional rather rationalistic moments constitute instances of collective effervesce through which "Wilhelmsburg-the-commonplace" was momentarily "lived" through the affective grammar.

6. Conclusion

I tried to paint a nuanced picture of how the residents of Wilhelmsburg—living in a "downward spiral" culminating at the beginning of the 2000s—reclaimed their future as a cultural commons. I deemed it necessary to look at how *the future*—a temporal dimension that cannot be directly experienced but only semiotically signified—could be commoned in times of crisis. Central to Future Wilhelmsburg's endeavors was Thévenot's "liberal grammar": the grammar through which actors launch into the public sphere a series of "optional" plans for the future. Within this grammar, Future Wilhelmsburg opposed however the idea of a "series" of options but chose the path of the "radical" one: The motorway shall *not* be built, the power plant *won't* be expanded. But the radical option could not stand on its own. The justificatory grammar provided the moral principles through continued acts of justificatory labor. Finally, we saw how emotionally charged episodes of collective effervescence fueled actors' justifications and aspirations for a common future. In all, commoning the future emerges as an everyday struggle that is structured by moral, teleological, and affective determinants.

Two final claims must be added. From my account, it can additionally be concluded that the future never fully arrives. I do not mean to say that urban residents' circumstances cannot be ameliorated. Rather, I'm pointing to the fact that the future constitutes a temporal dimension that moves with, and thus perpetually hovers over, residents' "here-and-now." Whether the Wilhelmsburgers found themselves in the disastrous summer of 2000, in the current year of 2024, or in the so-far unknowable year of 2050: They always find (and will find) themselves in the present moment and they always find (and will find) themselves facing the future's uncertainty. Consequently, as we have seen throughout the analysis, claiming the future as a cultural commons constitutes an *everyday* struggle, rather than a single moment of resistance resulting in the "final arrival" of a certain desired future. Ditto with the idea of "grammar": It is not a semiotic system which actors learn for a single occasion. Rather, it is always present, as tacit knowledge, throughout the life of the social actor.

Secondly, claiming the future as a cultural commons comes with a corresponding act of exclusion—that is: the exclusion of those seeking to marketize and financialize (thus enclose) the future. The vulnerable yet active residents engaging in the justification, planning, and affective familiarization of their future were seen to actively and deliberately exclude those actors "enclosing" the future for reasons related to power and capital (for example, planners justifying the A26 based on the assumed economic and quantifiable growth of the port). This is precisely where a commoning community differs from the idea of a *public* ("we're all citizens united in a city/region/state") and from a *market* ("we're all in competition united by an invisible hand").

It must be emphasized that the article zoomed in, exclusively, on the activist collective of Future Wilhelmsburg. As argued earlier, however, Wilhelmsburg is home to more than one activist group, all of which have certain ideas concerning Wilhelmsburg's "not yet"; and indeed, "struggling for the not yet" may be said to constitute the very essence of activism understood broadly. Nevertheless, I hope to have contributed to this thematic issue's core question of how vulnerable residents join hands within crisis-ridden circumstances. Commoning has long been thought of as a way to deal with the unequal distribution of material resources throughout society, but with this article, I aspired to open up avenues of thought on how vulnerable yet active residents turn a fascinating phenomenon—the temporal dimension of the future—into a meaningful matter of common concern.

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The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The sources of the data supporting this study are referenced in the article and are freely and publicly available.

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About the Author

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Section II.

Vulnerability

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ARTICLE

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A Systematic Review: How Is Urban Vulnerability in Fragmented European Cities Measured?

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Abstract

Urban vulnerability defines a situation of socio-spatial fragility that precedes exclusion and generates a growing social fragmentation in European cities. The psychosocial and multidimensional nature of urban vulnerability determines the interaction among complex socioeconomic, sociodemographic, residential, and subjective variables. The main objective of the article is to explore the comprehensive treatment of this concept within the European framework. A systematic review of the literature allowed for the analysis of over 190 published articles drawn from the Web of Science and Scopus databases from 2002 to 2024. The systematic review is grouped into three main areas: (a) theoretical support for the concept and official variables used for measuring these, (b) classification of the articles reviewed into thematic categories, and (c) identification of changes in the conceptualization and measurement of urban vulnerability. Finally, based on the reflection and review undertaken, this article proposes a conceptual basis and a battery of indicators of urban vulnerability, all of which refer to common areas of vulnerability within the European context. In particular, this proposal includes a new approach for conceptualizing and measuring urban vulnerability based on the results of this subjective review. The findings of this comparative effort form the basis for developing a systematic approach to measuring this concept key to the area of territorial sciences within the European context.

Keywords

European Union; social exclusion; systematic review; urban vulnerability; vulnerability indicators

1. Introduction

The concept of urban vulnerability serves as an instrument to name, raise awareness of, and report the problematic socioeconomic situation that emerges in urban spaces and provides information about the

symptoms that act as indicators of exclusion and social segregation. Moreover, the concept of urban vulnerability also functions as a diagnostic tool for research in the area of public policy that aims to identify scenarios of social fragmentation and exclusion in urban spaces. The precision and rigor with which the notion of urban vulnerability is constituted will, therefore, be fundamental in capturing the symptoms and causes of the emerging phenomenon of the fragmented city (Alves, 2017; Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021; García-Araque & García-Cuesta, 2020; Piasek et al., 2022).

This article aims to provide an in-depth study of the concept of urban vulnerability, including the criteria used in European Union countries to diagnose the phenomenon in an attempt to highlight the multiplicity of methods used to define this concept as well as any possible limitations of the current literature. The concept of vulnerability is multifaceted, which makes it extremely difficult to operationalize and evaluate (Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014; Conway & Konvitz, 2000; García-Almirall et al., 2023). The indicators in use are often employed to capture vulnerable areas, offering a simplistic image of urban reality. Consequently, it is necessary to broaden the interpretative scope and to further diversify the explanatory models as well as the subjective dimension applied in evaluating why neighborhoods deteriorate or why they remain vulnerable across all of Europe (Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014; Alves, 2017; Antón-Alonso & Cruz-Gómez, 2022; Davidson et al., 2013; Schnur, 2005; Van Dam & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Visser, 2020).

2. Method: A Systematic Review

The European Union calls for following a common path that prevents and responds to urban vulnerability (Commission of the European Communities, 1997, 2000; European Commission, 2016). The strategy employed to acquire and organize knowledge on this concept has been to develop a process for a systematic review of the literature (Kitchenham, 2004, p. 5) which fills a gap in the existing body of research on this topic, as no work along these lines has yet been published. This process involves formulating an advanced research query to guide the selection of articles. This method differs from traditional narrative reviews because it adopts a focus that is both transparent and can be replicated (Moher et al., 2009), by applying a strategy based on a systematic search using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Therefore, the aim is to synthesize existing research in order to optimize the knowledge base of the phenomenon in question and to inform future research needs. The synthesis consists of extracting the information analyzed based on the identification and grouping of the most significant approaches related to urban vulnerability.

2.1. Sample: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Two scientific literature databases, Scopus and Web of Science, were selected and filtering criteria were applied to them by formulating an advanced search query.

Urban vulnerability is shaped by the particular idiosyncrasies of the sociocultural context in which it occurs. Contextual conditions define the specific nature of the vulnerability in question. Therefore, the theoretical construct used to interpret urban vulnerability is conditioned by the situation of the countries in which it takes place (Valdés Gázquez, 2021). For this reason, it is considered that a similar pattern of influences can apply when studying European cities and the explanations for and responses to this phenomenon can follow

common criteria. The sample highlights studies that focus on a European context and leaves out more extensive international studies on urban vulnerability to simplify the analysis of the situation and allow for more cohesive research.

The European proposal for the study of urban vulnerability is limited to the specific urban area identified as a neighborhood (Conway & Konvitz, 2000; Laparra & Pérez Eransus, 2008). The structured search for the systematic review of the literature includes terms such as "vulnerable or deprived neighborhoods." Neighborhoods are, after all, the physical spaces where social vulnerability is implemented (Castel, 1995). Neighborhoods are the areas where a combination of problems related to economic deprivation and socio-spatial interactions that significantly affect the situation of vulnerability are concentrated.

According to Pérez de Armiño (2000), the origin of the concept of vulnerability derives from an interest in analyzing certain natural disasters-droughts, hurricanes, and earthquakes-and the problems related to the process of recovery. In the 1980s, the importance of natural catastrophes as drivers of disasters was recognized, but another factor was also identified as a key factor: "The socioeconomic structures and processes of inequality were the causes underlying vulnerability" (Pérez de Armiño, 2000, p. 2). This type of vulnerability is structural and is determined by how a specific social system itself is organized. This article focuses on this type of vulnerability where how human as well as material resources are distributed, existing formal and informal rules, and the ideology that legitimizes social action are fundamental factors (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, to avoid any interference of research dealing with environmental issues, vulnerability exclusion criteria were established to exclude studies on the environment or topics associated with natural catastrophes such as natural, climate, seismic, ground, or energy (see Table 1).

Given that the purpose of this research is to optimize the process of identifying the reality of urban vulnerability and the discrimination between the symptoms or effects of neighborhood deprivation and the descriptive or explanatory variables behind the phenomenon (Alves, 2017; Andersen, 2002; Antón-Alonso & Cruz-Gómez, 2022; Davidson et al., 2013; Schnur, 2005; Van Dam & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Visser, 2020), this work excludes documents that deal with aspects of vulnerability that are irrelevant in this case. For this reason, the following terms are excluded: health, school, drugs, violence, and the field of medicine. This

Table 1. Advanced search query.

		AND NOT	
OR	urban vulnerability	climate*	*environment*
		natural* disaster*	
		seismic*	
		flood*	
	vulnerable* neighborhood	energy*	
		health*	*medicine*
		school*	*others*
		crime*	
	deprived* neighborhood	violence*	
		drug*	

Note: The asterisk is a logical operator used to replace characters of a specific word when performing an advanced search.

decision is intended to avoid studies that deal exclusively with vulnerable groups, ignoring the urban aspect of the phenomenon. Urban vulnerability crosses and converges in two specific areas: sociology and urban planning. These two areas are established and delimited as the main fields of the research (see Table 1).

The sample of articles obtained from the search query includes research papers dating from 2002 to 2024. Once a first search was performed, all duplicate documents or those considered irrelevant for this study were filtered out at different stages of the process. Figure 1 shows the results of the filtering process and the number of documents in the sample that have been eliminated at different stages of the review.

The systematic review was completed with the inclusion of documents that rely on the official indicators being used to measure urban vulnerability in Europe (Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires, 2022; CATI-GE et al., 2020; Government of Denmark, 2024; Istat, 2020; Lisboa Câmara Municipal, 2020; Mandemakers et al., 2021; Mclennan et al., 2019; MITMA & Agenda Urbana, 2021; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2017; Pobal Government Supporting Communities, 2022; Scottish Government, 2024; Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, 2019; Vandermotten et al., 2015; Welsh Government, 2024; World Bank, 2014).

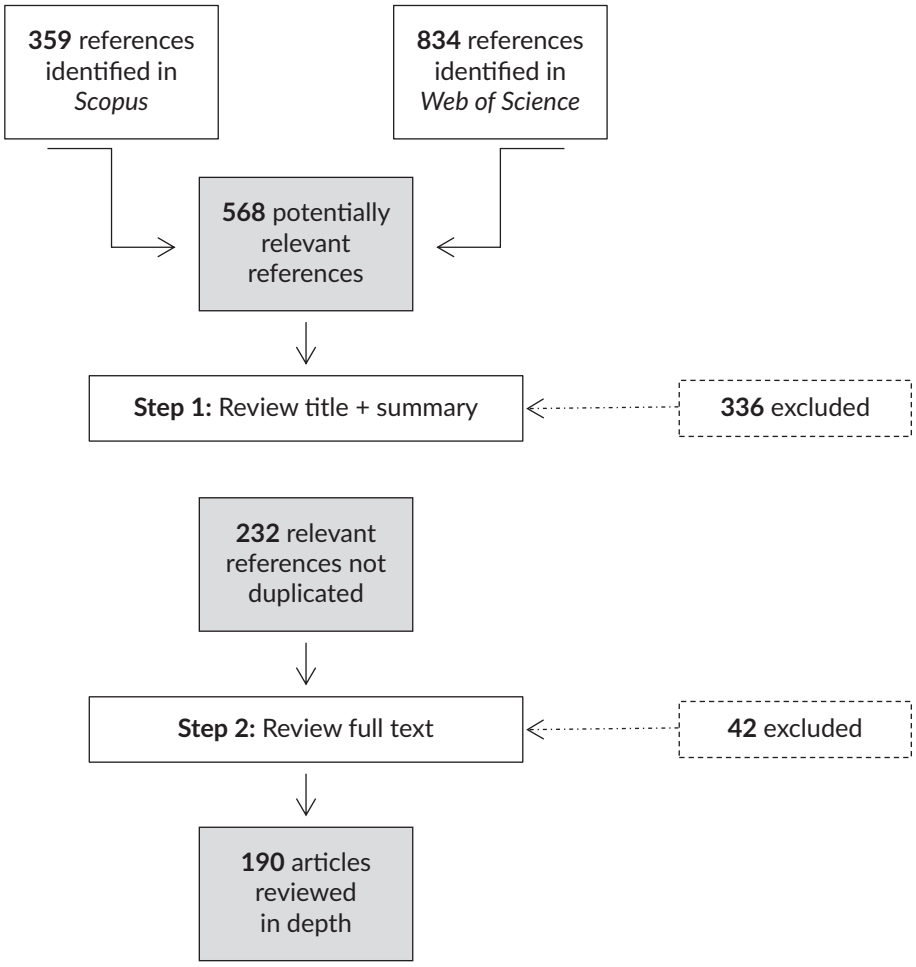

Figure 1. Stages in the systematic review process.

The information obtained from the study sample forms the basis for a conceptual definition of urban vulnerability and highlights three main approaches: snapshots, dynamics, and mechanisms of urban vulnerability.

3. The Concept of Urban Vulnerability in the European Literature

From the sociological point of view, in addition to high population density, a complex social structure, and a concentration of advanced and specialized production services, the term urban refers to the social action that arises in a physical-spatial unit in juxtaposition with a specific personality that is shaped and, at the same time, shapes interactions and social exchanges that take on a utilitarian character in this space (Park, 1915; Sassen, 2001; Wirth, 1938). From this perspective of the urban and utilitarian nature of a given urban space, a functional city that is well-organized and well-ordered is supported by the principle of equity or redistributive social justice that acts as the fundamental regulator of integration and is the main source of social cohesion (Commission of the European Communities, 1997). The city should guarantee universal accessibility to all spheres of vital action and participation, consumption, and production. To achieve full integration, the community needs to work towards building an interdependent motivational fabric that can satisfy the basic needs of the residents: relational, psychological, material, cultural, etc. It is the city's obligation to provide its members with the resources at its disposal, and at the same time, it is responsible for also providing the means of access to these resources. In short, the city must move beyond the utilitarian and offer quality of life, as well as a sense of belonging and identity (Commission of the European Communities, 1997; Council of the European Union, 2008; European Commission, 2016, 2020).

In this way, characteristics that identify what is urban are connected to the concept of urban vulnerability. When society is incapable of satisfying the needs of all its members, the idea of social justice that legitimizes social cohesion is blurred. Social interaction becomes asymmetrical, and the concept of reciprocity breaks down (Simmel, 1972). This leads to a process of production of devaluing images (Almeida, 2021) that seeks to undervalue and isolate people in conditions of vulnerability, making them responsible for their situation. This, in turn, produces isolation in terms of spatial accommodation that generates the loss of contact with the main sectors of society and a situation of social dissociation (Castel, 1995). The unemployed, in particular, suffer a process of disaffiliation from the social networks that link them to society and the dominant structures that give these meaning: identity, sense of belonging, and perception of social utility. Being outside of society does not mean a total absence of social relations but implies a specific way of relating to the environment based on subordination and the lack of emotional ties and participation in community projects, all of which are the essence of cohesion (Castel, 1995).

For Castel (1995) this is the new social and urban issue associated with a physical-spatial correlation within the context of the city. The author identifies the neighborhood as the physical space where the causes of social disintegration and disaffiliation take shape and the space that perpetuates them. It is in the neighborhood where the relationships between precarious work and social instability are determined. At the same time, Hernández Aja (2007) applies the notion of social vulnerability to the physical space the city occupies and expresses urban vulnerability in terms of discomfort and deterioration. The vulnerable neighborhood includes a socially disadvantaged population due to multiple factors: high levels of poverty, low educational achievement, low rates of labor force participation, a high number of single-parent families, higher incidence of health problems, inadequate access to services, households lacking means of

transportation, low participation in democratic and community processes, and high incidence of vandalism and crime (Conway & Konvitz, 2000). These create barriers for residents seeking employment, undermining their life opportunities and denying them the exercise of rights normally taken for granted in other parts of the city (Conway & Konvitz, 2000).

The systematic review of the articles selected reveals that urban vulnerability is understood to be a circular situation (Andersen, 2002; Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021; Miltenburg & Van de Werfhorst, 2017) arising in a physical space of the city with certain reputational characteristics (Almeida, 2021; McGuinness et al., 2012; Permentier et al., 2011) that are capable of attracting and concentrating a population group characterized by economic weakness (Madanipour, 2004). The lack of income has a parallel consequence beyond the economic dimension that translates into a polyhedral situation of social disadvantage consisting of four realities (Hernández Aja et al., 2015): economic (absence of work or precarious employment); sociodemographic (population with a low level of education); residential (housing and deteriorated living environments), and subjective (thought and behavior patterns of hopelessness, and frustration). These facets are self-powered through interactive (Bektaş & Taşan-Kok, 2020; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2015) and social status mechanisms that condition internal and external relations in the urban space (Andersen, 2002; Anguelovski et al., 2018; Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021; Hughes & Lupton, 2021; Jivraj & Alao, 2023; L'Horty et al., 2019).

To achieve a complete understanding of urban vulnerability, the next section describes the reality it shapes through snapshots, mechanisms or the causes that produce and reproduce it, and the dynamics involved including the forces that modulate the relationships generated in that particular environment.

4. Snapshots, Dynamics, and Mechanisms of Urban Vulnerability

Following the analysis of the papers cited, three approaches stand out. These make up and explain the condition of urban vulnerability from different complementary angles. While each of these has been considered and even highlighted separately by several authors, they have never been studied in connection with each other. These approaches are indicated below:

1. Snapshots: studies that focus on the knowledge of the attributes or symptoms of urban vulnerability to identify the phenomenon and its degree of intensity more effectively.
2. Dynamics: urban vulnerability is understood from multiple and changing perspectives, essentially as a dynamic circumstance (Castel, 1995). Vulnerability is understood as a timeline, and the aim is to trace the precedents and the set of trajectories taken by the vulnerable social group. The mobility and evolution of the composition of the residents and the influence of the neighborhood on the housing choices of individuals are analyzed.
3. Mechanisms: the study of urban vulnerability, which includes qualitative research of the mechanisms that trigger contraction, expansion, or perpetuation of the space of social vulnerability is considered fundamental. These studies highlight the psychosocial and subjective aspects of urban vulnerability, the perceptions that guide and anticipate behavior that promotes physical and social revitalization of vulnerable spaces or reinforces its chronification.

This conceptual triad of urban vulnerability is explained below in more detail.

4.1. Snapshot

Several papers seek to classify neighborhoods into different typologies, given the need to find similar patterns of characteristics to identify degrees or differences of vulnerability. In this sense, there are numerous studies that present snapshots and develop new indicators by making experimental proposals aimed at refining the identification of the different dimensions of urban vulnerability in neighborhoods.

These papers include data on the demographic profiles and physical characteristics of urban areas at risk, and branch out into two interrelated planes: an objective one, based on measurable factors such as unemployment and educational levels, health indicators, or immigration rates (Antón-Alonso & Cruz-Gómez, 2022; Echebarria et al., 2023; García-Almirall et al., 2023; Pobal Government Supporting Communities, 2022; Scottish Government, 2024); and a subjective one, focused on capturing qualitative information obtained through opinions and feelings expressed by citizens based on their relative perceptions of reality (Hill et al., 2014; Mandemakers et al., 2021; MITMA & Agenda Urbana, 2021; Permentier et al., 2011; Vandermotten et al., 2015). The dimensions of urban vulnerability obtained from instruments used by official sources of some European countries as well as those proposed by the sample of papers analyzed are discussed in detail below:

1. The *economic dimension* includes data on income and employment, poverty level measures, labor force participation rate, receipt of subsidies, percentage of unskilled jobs, types of employment contracts, and types of occupations (MITMA & Agenda Urbana, 2021).
2. The *educational dimension* examines information on the educational attainment and school absenteeism of residents. This takes into account the percentage distribution of educational levels of residents: primary, secondary, and university/tertiary education (Lisboa Câmara Municipal, 2020).
3. In the *sociodemographic dimension* key variables are broken down into three main factors associated with life cycle stages, household composition (single-parent families and large families) and immigration (Boje-Kovacs et al., 2021).
4. The *health dimension* deals with the incidence of health problems and disability related to drug and alcohol use (Mclennan et al., 2019; Scottish Government, 2024; Welsh Government, 2024).
5. The *living environment dimension* refers to the quality and quantity of services and public leisure space available (basic services, community spaces, green areas, and pollution), and information on geographic barriers or the level of isolation in relation to the city (access to, distance from, and travel time to resources and services; existence of public and private means of transportation; see Mclennan et al., 2019).
6. In the *housing dimension* data is collected on housing quality, typology, tenure regime, overcrowding rate, and vacancy rate (García-Almirall et al., 2023).
7. The *social cohesion/participation dimension* refers to the degree of participation of residents in community and democratic processes which involves aspects such as trust, attachment, and community and social identity. In addition, information is also collected on the degree of delinquency (incidence of vandalism and crime; see Agger & Jensen, 2015; Al Sader et al., 2019; Antón-Alonso & Cruz-Gómez, 2022; Baumont & Guillain, 2016; Bektaş & Taşan-Kok, 2020; Deas & Doyle, 2013; L'Horty et al., 2019; Schnur, 2005).
8. In the *subjective dimension*, the value, attitudes, and perceptions of the population group influence their adaptation to the environment and their expectations of social mobility. They influence the pace and

degree of conformity or act as a driving force within the social fabric of the urban space. In this case, we find indicators designed to extract information on the perception of safety and discomfort in the residential environment—noise, pollution, and scarcity of public spaces. This aspect is, in fact, the most reiterated issue in the subjective domain (Alves, 2017; Andersen, 2002; Davidson et al., 2013; Falahat & Madanipour, 2019; Hill et al., 2014; Permentier et al., 2011; Van der Land & Doff, 2010).

Table 2 shows the existence of official indicators for measuring urban vulnerability in each of the dimensions discussed above, as well as their distribution in different EU countries. The selection of the countries shown in Table 2 has been established considering that these countries show a clear political orientation in favor of the elimination of social barriers, with a strong and significant commitment to the search for knowledge and diagnosis of the phenomenon of urban vulnerability. This is evidenced by the degree of complexity and quality of the tools and indicators they have developed (for example, the development of social observatories dealing with urban vulnerability). As a special feature, the United Kingdom is included, given its significant influence as a relevant member of the EU during the period covered by this literature review.

The most studied dimensions are economic, educational, and housing. Other dimensions have received less official treatment, as in the case of the subjective dimension and social cohesion. Both dimensions are identified as the most vaguely defined and least contemplated domains at the operational level in Europe. However, despite this gap in terms of official data, they are widely considered in the literature (Falahat & Madanipour, 2019; Miltenburg & Van de Werfhorst, 2017; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017; Permentier et al., 2011; Van der Land & Doff, 2010; Visser, 2020).

An exception to the importance placed on the subjective dimension is indirectly reflected in studies by Eurostat (2013). This organization incorporates, for the first time, a combination of subjective indicators (perception of quality of life, presence of foreigners, security, etc.) together with objective indicators (educational level, occupation, state of health or family and economic situation) to measure quality of life in Europe.

Regarding social cohesion and citizen participation, Germany and the Netherlands measure this dimension using objective data such as residential stability, diversity in terms of life cycle stages, mutation rate (transfers of people within a radius of 100 meters), and population density. Another group of countries—Northern Ireland, England, Wales, and Scotland—describe this dimension using objective data on safety, crime, public disorder, and delinquency.

The habitability tool developed in the Netherlands deserves special mention for its originality and methodological richness due to its analysis of quality of life since it avoids recording data that reinforces the stigmatization of residents in these types of areas. This tool tries to estimate the development process of districts and neighborhoods on a biannual basis. The data obtained can signal potential deterioration in the quality of life.

Table 2. Dimensions of vulnerability per country in the EU and the UK along official indicators used by each (x).

EU Countries	Dimensions of Urban Vulnerability								
	Economic	Educational	Sociodemographic	Health	Housing	Living environment	Cohesion/citizen participation	Subjective	Institutions and tools
Belgium	x	x	x	—	x	—	—	x	SPP Integration Sociale *Centre de Analyse dynamique des quartiers en difficulte dans les régions urbaines belges*
Denmark	x	x	x	—	—	—	—	—	Transport-, Bygnings- og Boligministeriet *Ghettoliste*
France	x	x	x	—	x	—	—	x	Agence Nationale de la Cohesion des Territoires, INSEE *Observatoire Nationale de la Politique de la Ville*
Germany	x	—	x	—	x	x	x	—	Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen *Monitoring Soziale Stadtentwicklung*
Ireland	x	x	x	—	x	—	—	—	Irish Government *Pobal HP Deprivation Index*
Italy	x	x	x	—	x	—	—	—	Istat *Indice di vulnerabilità sociale e materiale*
Netherlands	—	—	—	—	x	x	x	x	Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties *Leefbaarometer*
Portugal	x	x	x	—	x	x	—	x	Câmara Municipal de Lisboa *Bairros e Zonas de Intervenção Prioritária de Lisboa (BIP/ZIP)*

Table 2. (Cont.) Dimensions of vulnerability per country in the EU and the UK along official indicators used by each (x).

EU Countries	Dimensions of Urban Vulnerability								
	Economic	Educational	Sociodemographic	Health	Housing	Living environment	Cohesion/citizen participation	Subjective	Institutions and tools
Romania	x	x	x	x	x	—	—	—	World Bank *The Atlas of Urban Marginalized Areas in Romania*
Spain	x	x	x	—	x	—	—	x	Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana *Atlas de la Vulnerabilidad Urbana*
Switzerland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	—	Département de la cohésion sociale (DCS) *CATI-GE*
UK: Other Countries of Europe									
England	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	—	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government *English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)*
Northern Ireland	x	x	—	x	x	x	x	—	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM)*
Scotland	x	x	—	x	x	x	x	—	Scottish Government *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)*
Wales	x	x	—	x	x	x	x	—	Welsh Government *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)*

4.2. Dynamics

Other types of studies reviewed seek to examine neighborhood dynamics by observing residential mobility i.e., household entry or exit, demographic turnover, and processes of urban densification, gentrification, and depopulation (Bailey et al., 2017; Fransham, 2019; Hughes & Lupton, 2021; Robson et al., 2008; Van Ham et al., 2013). These dynamics have a strong impact on neighborhood social networks and access to information about job opportunities.

Longitudinal studies on the social evolution of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Boje-Kovacs et al., 2021) have exposed a series of results that point to employment as a determinant of mobility and persistent vulnerability in the urban fabric (Holden & Frankal, 2012). Regarding the social composition by type of occupations, extremely vulnerable neighborhoods present a lower number of residents employed as managers and professionals, are less likely to experience a drop in the number of working-class residents, and are host to more members from outside the EU (Antón-Alonso & Porcel, 2023).

Other studies seek to understand the causes underlying neighborhood choice. These types of studies analyze the relationship between vulnerability and individual characteristics including age, gender, class, and ethnicity as well as autobiographical characteristics of the residents: original social context, and parents' socioeconomic status (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017; Permentier et al., 2011; Visser, 2020; Zuccotti, 2019). Identity construction in vulnerable neighborhoods characterized by diversity is complex and, as a result, this disengagement reinforces a sense of disadvantage. This feeling is a source of psychological stress and the perception of injustice (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). This may lead to psychosocial and behavioral problems and negative attitudes arising from feelings of inferiority and shame, loss of self-esteem, and dissatisfaction (Galster, 2012; Honneth, 2007; McCulloch, 2001; Oberwittler, 2007).

4.3. Mechanisms

This section discusses the causes or mechanisms underlying the effect neighborhoods have on residents. Following Galster (2012), these are grouped into four different categories.

4.3.1. The Social-Interactive Mechanism

According to the literature, social processes derived from social-interactive mechanisms have a negative impact on a neighborhood's capacity for degradation and the chronification of vulnerability. This situation can give rise to a ghetto culture. The social processes at work in the vulnerable urban environment discourage social aspirations and reinforce social stratification and the belief that upward social mobility is impossible or undesirable and, ultimately, inhibit the potential for innovation (Dacombe, 2013).

The variables that have a direct impact on these processes are the social composition of the neighborhood, its sociodemographic profile, and its potential to facilitate cooperative flows and solid social networks that crystallize into group efficacy. The nexus between residents is determined by social trust and place attachment (Li et al., 2005). Vulnerable neighborhoods connect residents whose economic position is weak but are socially, politically, and culturally heterogeneous (Madanipour, 2004).

Contrary to the contact hypothesis that holds that heterogeneity is beneficial in terms of opportunities and protection against stigmatization (Allport, 1954; Peters et al., 2018; Pettigrew, 1998), other studies claim that diversity does not buffer vulnerability (Clark & Drinkwater, 2002; Jivraj & Alao, 2023). In fact, in certain cases, contact may reaffirm prejudice and generate conflict (Blumer, 1958; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

Likewise, the perception of heterogeneity generates symbolic boundaries (Albeda et al., 2018) that impact everyday behavior (Deas & Doyle, 2013; Van der Land & Doff, 2010), giving rise to negative interactions that reinforce vulnerability such as social avoidance, prejudice, and rootlessness (Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021; Boldú Hernández & Domínguez-Mujica, 2018; Van Laner, 2021).

4.3.2. Environmental Mechanisms

This refers to the effects of exposure to deteriorated physical infrastructures and polluting factors, scarce or inefficient public services, scarcity and/or deterioration of public spaces and green spaces, low housing quality, environmental and noise pollution, etc. (MITMA & Agenda Urbana, 2021). These physical elements influence the perceived reputation of the vulnerable neighborhood. In this sense, a deteriorated image diminishes the possibilities of private investment and catalyzing the creation of businesses and jobs, and simultaneously favors the attraction of poor populations looking for cheap places to live (Antón-Alonso & Porcel, 2023). This deterioration coupled with a situation of neglect on the part of both private and public sectors influences the behavior of residents, who become infected by this neglect and respond through behaviors that undermine the sense of neighborhood or community attachment (Madanipour, 2004).

In the same way, the scarcity or deterioration of public spaces also hinders social participation, cohesion, and the sense of identification with one's environment, etc. Public spaces are markers of neighborhood health and vulnerability as evidence indicates they improve physical health and promote socialization, thereby strengthening place identity (Hickman, 2012).

4.3.3. Geographical-Spatial Dimensions

The location of the neighborhood with respect to the city center or to the nucleus where the main resources are located clearly conditions accessibility to employment opportunities. The spatial mismatch hypothesis states that the distance from the place of residence to the workplace reduces the chances of finding employment, and increases the risk of urban vulnerability (Gobillon et al., 2011; Hellerstein & Neumark, 2012). Distance acts as a signal of occupational reliability, indicating that residents who commute from more distant neighborhoods are associated with lower productivity, or present higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness to work (L'Horty et al., 2019; Van Ommeren & Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau, 2011).

The neighborhood's socioeconomic status is considered a geographical marker that also affects chronification of vulnerability. It generates uncertainty regarding the productive skills of residents from vulnerable neighborhoods (Bunel et al., 2016; Carlsson et al., 2018). The status of the vulnerable neighborhood is determined by three processes (Almeida, 2021): segregation, building physical and symbolic barriers, and the construction of a devaluing image. In this sense, this image along with other neighborhood problems influence residents' self-understanding (Andersen, 2010), activating a process of self-stigmatization that inhibits aspirations and lowers self-confidence (McGuinness et al., 2012). Negative

images contribute to creating an inactive social environment, a lower propensity towards active job search, and also lower residents' inclination towards participation in social life (Costa Pinho, 2000).

4.3.4. Institutional Mechanisms

This category pays particular attention to networks of participatory governance and the concept of entrepreneurial citizenship: co-production, civic enterprise, and self-organization through social entrepreneurship (Parés et al., 2012). The literature also highlights what is referred to as the bottom-up approach to collaboration which takes place in urban interventions as a result of neighborhood regeneration, in which case taking into account residents' opinions is considered essential (Jensen & Agger, 2022; Lawless & Pearson, 2012).

Other variables examined in the literature include the potential benefit of vertical networks when deployed in the institutional spheres of the market (Deas & Doyle, 2013) since this is considered to be the most appropriate context from which to contain exclusion and curb vulnerability. The lack of business density is directly related to the neighborhood's reputation of a high level of vulnerability and to processes of neighborhood degradation (Antón-Alonso & Cruz-Gómez, 2022).

Success in undertaking vertical projects that destabilize processes of vulnerability lies in overcoming three types of institutional and personal barriers: discriminatory institutional expectations; the mismatch between the capacity of vulnerable populations in terms of education, social context, self-esteem, and the skills needed to develop such projects (Charnoz, 2018); and the perceived lack of trust in institutions.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This article addresses the concept of urban vulnerability and provides an overview of the criteria used to measure and identify this reality within the EU. The method employed has been that of a systematic review of 190 articles extracted from the Web of Science and Scopus databases from 2002 to 2024. The official tools being used by European countries to understand and measure this type of vulnerability are also addressed.

Having completed the review, urban vulnerability is understood to be a circular process that begins with a situation of segregation in the metropolitan space that enters a self-perpetuating cycle (Andersen, 2002). This situation is further reinforced through a series of social and reputation mechanisms that interact (Almeida, 2021) and have a negative or discriminatory effect on the sociodemographic, economic, residential, and subjective urban fabric (Hernández Aja et al., 2015).

The study and detection of urban vulnerability at the European level have been addressed from three independent points of view. On the one hand, the need to identify the reality of urban vulnerability has led to the development of theoretical knowledge that seeks to define the concept in order to facilitate its detection. Such a need captures vulnerability in a specific space at a particular moment in time and helps to identify vulnerable areas. The data generated that catalogue urban vulnerability is classified as *Snapshots*.

However, urban vulnerability is not a static condition. There are precedents and multiple trajectories along a timeline that provide data beyond the present situation of vulnerability. The data that provides a more comprehensive view of urban vulnerability is classified as "dynamics."

Another approach to the research highlights psychosocial aspects of urban vulnerability requiring a more qualitative analysis of how this phenomenon is perceived. This research reports the failure of political intervention in dealing with the more subjective side of vulnerability. Given the complexity involved in doing so, this has either not been considered from an operational standpoint, or has been included in European indices in a way that has proved ineffective until now. The research calls for the need to identify the causal mechanisms that affect this intangible or latent factor.

According to the literature reviewed (see Table 2), policies that have tried to rectify vulnerability through an integral approach such as modifying the environment, housing, and/or population have failed since they seek to alter the symptoms of vulnerability without acting on the causes (Andersen, 2002; Bellet Sanfeliu, 2021). The scale of the problem and the complexity of the causes have complicated policy design and implementation. A multidimensional approach in response to the problem is required. The difficulties in defining the concept of urban vulnerability are directly related to the lack of a comprehensive theoretical vision that would serve as a basis for developing tools to accurately identify it and develop effective actions designed to eliminate it.

In short, to capture situations of urban vulnerability it is necessary to build a theoretical framework that connects the three approaches discussed in this study that can form the basis for in-depth research to obtain more adequate knowledge of urban vulnerability such as precedents, causes, symptoms, and observations of coping responses. Both the causal mechanisms and the factors that drive the dynamics involved need to be incorporated into official tools and procedures for measuring vulnerability to produce more effective snapshots.

Moreover, the psychosocial aspect should receive more attention, and its study reinforced through the use of qualitative methodologies to obtain more specific and complete information about the issues that neighborhoods must deal with. In this sense, it is essential that future work explores the question of causal mechanisms since there is evidence of a lack of specific indicators for measuring urban vulnerability. The findings indicate that it is essential to broaden the explanatory scope of the patterns that signal degradation or identify why high levels of urban vulnerability persist (García-Almirall et al., 2023; Visser, 2020). This approach paves the way for future research on this topic.

Finally, the literature calls for more data on the subjective dimension of urban vulnerability, yet the official information available presents the most deficient measurements. The subjective domain should be linked to causal mechanisms and dynamics of vulnerability. Capturing the social perspective of vulnerable groups is essential for a clearer understanding of the issues involved (Bektaş & Taşan-Kok, 2020; Ruiz, 2019; Van Dam & Raeymaeckers, 2017; Visser, 2020). Likewise, the study of community expectations and interpretations will also contribute important information. Once the criteria for assessing the relative status of vulnerability is established this will greatly facilitate research on the effects of neighborhood deprivation on psychosocial behavior (Alves, 2017; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). Interest in the subjective dimension has focused on objective characteristics such as the perception of physical features and feelings of safety, ignoring a wide range of factors mediated by subjectivity that influence the chronification of urban vulnerability. Social cohesion, neighborhood status, neighborhood choice, and stigmatization are all factors that influence the expectations and behavior of the most vulnerable residents (Miltenburg & Van de Werfhorst, 2017; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017; Permentier et al., 2011; Van der Land & Doff, 2010; Visser, 2020). For this reason,

there is a growing need to carry out new research on this facet of urban vulnerability within the context of the European Union.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Doing Community Amid Tension and Vulnerability: Involvement and Control in Older Adults' Accounts of Their Neighbourhood

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Abstract

Rather than fixed entities, urban communities are in a constant process of making: They are practised in and through everyday relational settings and are therefore necessarily tension-laden. Drawing from focus group interviews with older adults living in the third-largest city in Finland, we aim to further the understanding of "doing community" amid tensions and vulnerability. We analyse older people's accounts of their everyday dealings and doings in their neighbourhood with an emphasis on the intensities of involvement and control when relating with others. As a result, four types of relational settings are identified: being-with others; cooperation with others; contesting and being contested by others; and ruling and being ruled by others. Through close reading of each type, we illustrate the variety in which older adults negotiate involvement and control. To conclude, we propose that, in addition to previously identified privacy and access, involvement and control are significant dimensions of the relational settings of belonging in an urban community. We suggest that focusing on involvement and control may particularly well illuminate the position of neighbourhood residents in vulnerable circumstances. Therefore, involvement and control offer a useful extension for analyses of doing community through everyday encounters and practices.

Keywords

community; neighbourhood; older adults; urban space; vulnerability

1. Introduction

This article examines "doing community" in and through everyday encounters and relationships as described by older people living in an urban neighbourhood. Due to demographic trends and ageing-in-place policies, the share of older people living in ordinary urban neighbourhoods is increasing (OECD, 2015, p. 7). While there is great diversity in older adults' life situations and not all experience frailty, some do. Living with frailty,

however, does not necessarily imply powerlessness in relation to others (Zechner et al., 2022; see also Vasara et al., 2023). Residents, young and old, assert their spatial claims in relation to others (Carroll et al., 2019; De Backer, 2019; Pyyry, 2016; van Melik & Pijpers, 2017). To further complicate the issue, there is variation in older people's personal and neighbourhood socioeconomic resources. All this calls for an understanding of the position of neighbourhood residents living in vulnerable circumstances with an openness to the social ambivalence in urban encounters.

In this article, we contribute to such understanding through an analysis of doing community amid tension and vulnerability, based on focus group interviews with older adults about their everyday lives in a neighbourhood of the third-largest city in Finland. As a theoretical starting point for our study, we draw from theorising of urban communities which has emphasised that rather than fixed entities, communities are in a constant process of making (Blokland, 2017; Neal et al., 2019; Studdert, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016). Instead of being unchanging states that may be lost or attained, communities emerge and take shape in and through everyday actions, encounters, and practices of communing (Blokland, 2017; Studdert, 2016, p. 623). As conceptualised by Blokland (2017, p. 59), urban communities depend "on the relational settings in which our social ties are embedded." Understood in this way, urban communities are also inevitably tension laden, as tensions arise when "people rub along, or don't, in the public spaces of the city," as Watson (2006, p. 2) puts it.

Building upon this understanding, we analyse older people's accounts of encounters that are available to and meaningful for them in the neighbourhood. Our analytical focus is on the experiences and meanings of everyday encounters, as focusing on the everyday offers significant insight into the dynamics of urban relations in contemporary societies (e.g., Maununaho et al., 2023; Ostanel, 2020, p. 4). Drawing from Blokland's (2017) concept of "relational settings of belonging," we focus on the distinct relational settings reflected in older people's accounts with a specific interest in two aspects: involvement and control. The question we seek to answer concerns the ways of relating with others reflected in older people's accounts in terms of involvement and control. Through our analysis, we contribute to an understanding of doing community through everyday practice and use of space by suggesting a novel layer to the concept of relational settings of belonging (Blokland, 2017). In addition to the previously identified dimensions of privacy and access (Blokland, 2017), we suggest that involvement and control are dimensions that merit attention in analyses.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin by clarifying our theoretical starting point with a particular focus on Blokland's take on doing community through relational settings of belonging. After this, we outline involvement and control as significant dimensions of these settings. In the sections after that, we present our data and methodology and lay out four ways of relating with a neighbourhood as perceived by older adults illustrating a relational setting of belonging with varying intensities of involvement and control. To conclude, we discuss how our analysis of involvement and control adds to previous understanding of inclusion of urban neighbourhood residents in vulnerable circumstances. We suggest that involvement and control may be particularly useful for understanding the position of neighbourhood residents in vulnerable circumstances.

2. Relational Setting of Belonging in Doing Community

Community as a concept, as pointed out by Studdert (2016, p. 623), tends to evoke notions about harmonious living or an achievable, unchanging state—a state that may be lost or could be attained. It is

against this backdrop that another kind of understanding of community has been proposed according to which urban communities emerge and take shape through everyday practices and actions (Blokland, 2017; Neal et al., 2019; Studdert, 2016). Rather than a fixed state, community is understood as "a continuous act of social mutuality" (Neal et al., 2019, p. 82). This understanding steers focus away from the idea of community as a group of people sharing a place and a common purpose towards seeing a continuous process of doing community (Studdert & Walkerdine, 2016a, p. ix). Community is conceived as "action of communing" (Studdert & Walkerdine, 2016b, p. 613) in which social relations are central.

Urban social relations take place in various sites and locations within the neighbourhood. Urban space can be understood as a continuum of public, semi-public, and private spaces (Madanipour, 2003; Tonkiss, 2005, pp. 67–69; van Melik & Pijpers, 2017, p. 299). Public space is, in principle, accessible to everyone (Madanipour, 2003, p. 117). Semi-public spaces, such as shopping malls, are accessible to almost everyone but not without conditions: as privately-owned spaces, their use—by whom, when, and how—is regulated by their owners. Despite these regulations, they offer opportunities for passing time and for social gatherings, and spending time in them provides a sense of being out in public (Pyyry, 2016; Tonkiss, 2005, p. 67; van Melik & Pijpers, 2017). In contrast, private spaces, like homes, are managed by their occupants. Although access to these spaces is restricted, the occupant's sense of being part of the neighbourhood can sometimes extend beyond the confines of their home, for example, through a window (van Melik & Pijpers, 2017, p. 300).

For the social relations between neighbourhood residents, social ambivalence in everyday encounters is a highly significant issue. By social ambivalence, we are referring to the notion that everyday relationships between urban dwellers involve tensions, disputes, and conflicts (Maununaho et al., 2023; Neal et al., 2019, p. 73; Watson, 2006). In many respects, social relations in an urban neighbourhood are a source of social support, kindness, and joy to residents (e.g., Brownlie & Anderson, 2017). However, everyday encounters also involve social threats, tensions, and exclusions, as urban social relations are not devoid of social divisions, hierarchies, and inequality (Back & Sinha, 2016; Bredewold et al., 2020; Maununaho et al., 2023). Accordingly, there is a need to think about doing urban communities through everyday encounters and practices "in contexts of social harms, inequalities, tensions and strain" (Neal et al., 2019, p. 73). This ambivalence has been addressed through analyses of conviviality and convivial encounters in urban settings particularly in the context of superdiversity and multicultural cities (Maununaho et al., 2023; Neal et al., 2019) and in studying, for example, the urban inclusion of people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities (e.g., Bigby & Wiesel, 2019; Bredewold et al., 2020).

By contextualising doing communities in terms of vulnerability, we are highlighting the complex position and life situation of older adults as residents in an urban neighbourhood. Following Virokannas et al. (2020, p. 336), we conceive vulnerability in terms of both societal context and life situation of older neighbourhood residents (see also Brown, 2017, p. 668). By this we mean that older adults, firstly, as a group tend to be perceived through *assumed frailty*, and as such subjects to protection and support, such as age-friendly measures (see Brown, 2017). Secondly, while there is great variation in the life situations in old age and not all older adults live with *actual frailty*, some do. For those in need of care services, living with frailty connects to managing everyday life, such as doing the groceries and everyday mobility (Luoma-Halkola & Häikiö, 2022). Although vulnerability is often associated with powerlessness (Harrison, 2008), frailty does not imply withdrawal from tensions or a complete lack of control in relation to others (Zechner et al., 2022). Instead, older residents, even when living with frailty, like younger ones (see Carroll et al., 2019; De Backer, 2019; Pyyry, 2016), are active

users and interpreters of urban space, asserting their spatial claims in the process of community-building (Bowering, 2019; van Melik & Pijpers, 2017).

To approach doing communities more specifically, we draw from Blokland's (2017) conceptual framework of relational setting of belonging. By relational settings, she refers to the "dimensions of the urban fabric, settings for relations" that have to do with "the possibilities, constraints and specificities of practicing belonging and identification in the urban space" (Blokland, 2017, p. 60). These relational settings shift along two axes: the privacy continuum, which describes how much control people have over the sharing of information about themselves, and the access continuum, which describes how freely they can come and go as they please. Along these two axes, several configurations of different types of social ties and dynamics emerge: intimate–private; public–intimate; public–anonymous; anonymous–private (Blokland, 2017, p. 60, Figure 5.1).

In this article, we propose a new conceptual layer to the understanding of doing communities through relational settings of belonging drawing both from Blokland's concept and older people's accounts of their everyday lives in the neighbourhood. We suggest that in addition to privacy and access, two dimensions are pertinent to the variety of relational dynamics in neighbourhood encounters: involvement and control (see Figure 1). In short, by involvement we refer to a wide array of interactions between people, and people and their surroundings, which may range from a barely noticeable orientation towards others to intense and reciprocal engagement and communication (Studdert, 2016, p. 624). By control, we refer to the extent to which the element of control is part of the ways that older people are in relation to other residents (Franck & Stevens, 2007). As these dimensions have emerged through our analysis, we will describe and define these in more detail as part of the methodology section.

3. Data and Methodology

The data consists of seven focus group interviews conducted in 2017 in two community spaces in Hervanta, a neighbourhood of Tampere. Tampere is Finland's third-largest city, with 240,000 inhabitants. Hervanta was built in the 1970s; it is the largest neighbourhood in Tampere, with 25,000 residents, of whom approximately 15 percent are 65 years or older. Around the time of the interviews, approximately 25 percent of its inhabitants spoke a native language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami (Hynynen, 2020, p. 30), and of all the households, 49 percent were low-income (Hynynen, 2020, p. 27). Despite being a neighbourhood, Hervanta provides all basic services to its residents: public health and social care services, a library, grocery stores and so on. It has an active civil society with many associations and organisations.

The participants of focus groups were recruited through multiple routes; we placed an advertisement in the free local paper and left leaflets in the neighbourhood's health care centre, library, and community spaces. In addition, community centres and local organisations were asked to inform their members about the interviews. A total of 28 (19 women and 9 men) older adults participated in the groups, with some taking part in multiple sessions. The participants had varying life situations: some inhabited residential care settings, while others lived alone or with a partner in their own homes. Some were in good health, while others—including some of those who lived in their own homes—had mobility restrictions. We chose to interview older adults in a range of life situations to emphasise that older people form a heterogenous group. We also wished to avoid the dichotomy that contrasts the active and positively perceived third age with the fourth age, which is often associated with negative connotations of vulnerability, such as dependency and

passivity (see, e.g., Timonen, 2016; Vasara et al., 2023). Although our results are based on interviews with a heterogeneous group of older adults, there is one significant limitation: we were unable to recruit non-Finnish-speaking residents, despite using a variety of routes to find participants.

The interviews were arranged in two local community centres. One is directly connected to a private residential care home that provides a space for Hervanta residents of all ages, in collaboration with the municipality of Tampere. The other centre is self-organised through civil society action. The interviews were ninety minutes to two hours in duration and were facilitated by one or two researchers. Each session had a theme: living in the neighbourhood (three times), services, nature, habitation and home, and leisure and free time. One of the researchers (Luoma-Halkola; see Luoma-Halkola & Häikiö, 2022) in the project took photographs in different locales of the neighbourhood, and these photographs were loosely employed to encourage people to talk about their daily lives and spaces. The idea here was that visual prompts elicit talk about different sites and locales of the neighbourhood (see Harper, 2002). The interviews were arranged in common areas of the community centres. During the interviews, the participants were free to join and leave according to their own preferences. No personal information, such as age was asked nor collected of individual participants.

In all the phases of the study, we strictly followed the ethical guidelines provided by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019) on respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring their anonymity, and not causing harm for the participants. No ethical preview was necessary, as our study did not entail any of the specific elements defined by Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019, p. 19) as requiring ethical preview. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time. The interviewers used considerable time to go through with the participants what it meant to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. To protect the anonymity of the participants, we have changed names and other personal details for the article.

The analysis sets out to answer the following question: What kinds of ways of relating with others are there in the older people's accounts in terms of involvement and control? As a methodological approach, we employed abductive analysis, which, according to Tavory and Timmermans (2014), refers to a form of reasoning that is neither entirely theory-based nor purely data-driven. Instead, the analysis alternates between phases that are more theory-driven and those that are more inductive, allowing for an interplay between theory and empirical observations. In practice, we began by reading the data with an interest in how the interviewees talked about their daily lives and encounters with other neighbourhood residents. We observed that these accounts conveyed different ways of being with others which reflected Blokland's (2017) relational settings of belonging. However, we discerned two additional dimensions even more pertinent than privacy and access, identified previously by Blokland (2017), in our interviewees' accounts: the intensity of involvement in the encounter and whether there were attempts or wishes to control others in the encounter. Therefore, we proceeded from the initial analysis to build a framework (Figure 1) to include involvement and control as dimensions to relational settings of belonging to reflect older adults' understandings of the dynamics with the neighbourhood and its residents.

By involvement we refer to a wide array of interactions between people, and people and their surroundings, which may range from a barely noticeable orientation towards others to intense and reciprocal engagement and communication (Studdert, 2016, p. 624). By reciprocal engagement, we mean social exchange such as conversation, shared activities or mutual acknowledgement of each other's presence. In this respect, we

analyse involvement as the extent to which there is reciprocal engagement in a particular encounter as perceived and narrated by participants. The encounters take place in various sites and locales of the neighbourhood ranging from private apartments to semi-public shopping malls and to public spaces such as community spaces, libraries, and nearby nature.

By control, we refer to the extent to which the element of control is part of the ways that older people are in relation to other residents. We draw on Franck and Stevens' (2007) concepts of loose and tight spaces to think about control. According to them, looseness is a quality in an urban space that accommodates multiple social groups and uses. Conversely, the tighter the space, the more control is exerted over its use and the people within it. Although looseness may be enhanced or inhibited by urban design, it is most importantly created in and through people's activities and relations (Franck & Stevens, 2007). For the purposes of this article, control varies from mild moral disapproval to taking action through complaints or through claiming spaces. Here, older residents attempt to impose control over others, or they may be subject to other people's control. We present these dimensions in more detail in Figure 1 and throughout the empirical part of the article.

In our analysis, we focused on examining the intensity of these two dimensions within participants' accounts. These dimensions revolve around varying intensities of involvement and control in interactions with other residents and neighbourhood spaces. Our analysis focuses on, first, involvement in the extent to which participants engage in reciprocal engagements and, second, on control as the extent to which there are attempts to exert control between neighbourhood residents as narrated by the participants. In Figure 1, the horizontal axis illustrates the intensity of involvement (weak to strong), and the vertical axis illustrates the intensity of control (weak to strong) in an encounter.

After building this framework based on initial observation, we systematically applied it to the full data set. This systematic analysis confirmed our initial observations: the framework covered all the relevant parts in the data. Based on older people's accounts, we named four ways of relating with others with varied intensities of

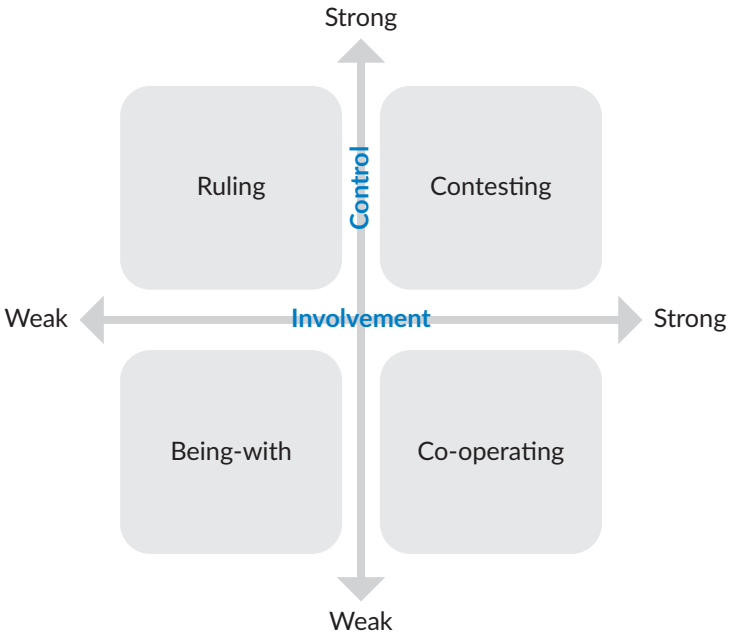

Figure 1. Involvement and control in relating with others in the neighbourhood.

involvement and control: (a) being-with others, (b) co-operating with others; (c) contesting others, and (d) ruling and being ruled by others. Below, we explore each of these more in-depth.

4. Results

4.1. Being-With Others in the Neighbourhood

When the participants talked about their daily lives in the neighbourhood, they sometimes described a way of relating to others that was very loose in intensity. By this we mean that there was no active reciprocal exchange like conversing or doing something together. Resembling fluid encounters described by Blokland (2017, pp. 48–49), this way of relating with others was often fleeting. As described by our participants, it took place as part of daily chores and routines through noticing and observing what is happening in one's immediate environment: "Sometimes it takes a long time for me to do my shopping because, well, I don't know those people, but I just like to watch them" (Focus group 4).

Observing immediate surroundings can be a pastime, but it can also serve to maintain a connection with the neighbourhood and its changes, such as Hervanta becoming increasingly multicultural. In the focus groups, this was brought up casually but with a sense of interest and curiosity: "You notice it immediately, when you walk around." The route to the mall, the mall itself, and the high-rise apartment buildings in the neighbourhood provided a possibility to observe others from a distance, even from behind a window, as conveyed by the following passage (Focus group 1):

> R1: Yesterday I listened to the students partying all day. They were close by.
>
> R2: I also saw them in their overalls [traditional student outfit in Finland]….They always have parties in springtime. You can hear the music from the school.

Even though this engagement takes place from behind a window and at a distance, involving no reciprocal interaction, it conveys a sense of being part of the neighbourhood (see also Musselwhite, 2018). By observing their immediate environment, the participants maintained an awareness of the neighbourhood's "social calendar": social events and happenings. This is reflected in the remark about how students "always party in the spring."

In addition to the looseness of the involvement, there were no apparent attempts to control. This is reflected in the interviews by the absence of moral judgements or attempts to exclude other residents from the common space. People with substance abuse problems represent a social group whose presence in urban space is often considered problematic by other residents. However, from the point of view of the kind of involvement discussed here, there were no attempts to limit who could spend time in the public space. People with problematic alcohol consumption were accepted as being part of the neighbourhood, as reflected in the next quote:

> The alcohol problem in the centre is unfortunate, but also, they must have a right to be somewhere, and it has been deemed that this is a good place for them. (Focus group 5)

The participants' matter-of-fact manner of speaking conveys that the presence of people with alcohol abuse problems is, although unfortunate, still part of the neighbourhood. The lack of asserting control is also reflected in the passive "it has been deemed" conveying the idea that it is not for the residents to decide who is allowed to dwell in the neighbourhood.

4.2. Co-Operating With Others

The participants also talked about ways of relating with others that reflected intense reciprocal engagement. This was often described in connection to organised or self-organised groups and clubs or as part of their daily activities in the neighbourhood. Characteristic to this way of relating with others was intense involvement without clear effort to establish control. Therefore, we call this way this way of relating with others cooperative.

In addition to an active civil society, churches and public institutions (such as the swimming hall, the library, community spaces and publicly maintained nature paths) are important social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018) in Hervanta. All these provided regular opportunities and structures for engagement (see Blokland, 2017, pp. 46–48: durable engagements), such as the one described here:

> Tonight, I'm going to the lovely, lovely migrant guys' evening at the street chapel again. It's just amazing. A lot of guys come there. I can't miss that; they are so well-mannered. They are so polite and friendly. Sometimes there are twenty of them, and sometimes ten. They take such good care of everything. (Focus group 5)

Some participants were highly active, acting not only as attendees but also as volunteers in local associations. For example, a group of older women had formed a choir that regularly visited local hospitals and care homes. Another participant said that she had worked with other volunteers to find kitchenware for asylum seekers who had recently moved into the neighbourhood. Activities organised around associations often had a particular purpose or goal, providing a framework that created a routine, familiarity, and continuity for the encounter. Intense engagement also took place through self-organised spontaneous groups. There was, for example, a card game club that regularly met in the library to play. There were also dog owners who had become acquaintances with other dog owners, and they walked the paths in the nearby forest daily, forming groups or networks of two or more people walking together.

A relatively intense involvement was reflected also through biographical ties that became visible when the participants discussed their history as residents. One participant, for example, had worked in the day care centre, and she noted that she still sometimes bumped into adults she had cared for when they were children. The mall, where shopping took place, was referred to in one of the interviews as the neighbourhood's "living room": there was always someone to talk to when standing in queues or resting on benches before going home. One of the participants had limited eyesight, and when she went to do her shopping, she felt she was known by others: "Even though I can't see people's faces, they talk to me like they know me. Apparently, they know me even though I don't know them" (Focus group 7). There was a sense of familiarity when moving around the neighbourhood due to biographical ties and layered history (see Felder, 2021).

4.3. Contesting Others and Claiming Spaces

We next explore a way of relating with the neighbourhood and its residents in which control becomes a more prominent theme. This way of relating with others reflects both intense involvement and attempts or wishes to control—or experiences of being subject to other people's attempts to control.

The centre of the neighbourhood and the apartment buildings, their yards, and the immediate surroundings were all locations where control emerged as an issue in the interviews. There were disputes and claims about how, and by whom, certain places and locations might be used. These claims varied from minor disapproval to engaging in an open contest over a location in the neighbourhood. For example, it was pointed out that some residents took space from others by spending excessive time sitting on the benches in the mall. There were also demands that people with substance abuse problems be removed from the centre of the neighbourhood or from one's own apartment building. One participant had made a complaint to the house manager about residents in her apartment building who, according to her, had substance abuse problems: "I don't want them here. I made a complaint because they started to hang around in the yard" (Focus group 4). This example demonstrates that residents, including older people, have varying resources, such as a position provided by status or allies to support their cause (Wallin, 2014). In this case, the participant owned her apartment and used this position to make a claim.

Contesting also emerged when participants claimed places for their own use in the neighbourhood. For example, one participant remembered with fondness how she used to be part of a group of older women who went to the nearby lake together:

> We used to have this nice group of old ladies, we used to go to the lake, and we started calling it the "old ladies' beach." We had so much fun there. We used to spend time there and, in the autumn, we had a farewell party with cake and everything, we had a picnic, and young boys were swimming at the pier, and I heard them say: "Let's go and heckle the old ladies" [laughs]. And then they yelled out profanities and were trying to provoke us, using the c-word, and I told them: "Oh, you have under your tongue the thing we have somewhere else," and then they left. (Focus group 5)

This self-organised community was attached to a particular place in the neighbourhood. Its members had made the place their own by spending time there, naming it, and even having a small ceremony to highlight how it was their place. When challenged by local youth, they engaged in a verbal contest. In this way, the participant's account reflects strong involvement and intergenerational exchange between these two groups.

There were also accounts about becoming an object of other people's attempts to control. For example, one participant had been actively volunteering in one of the local associations for years. She had been providing company for other older residents in the area and helped with organising social gatherings and events. At one point, a new coordinator stepped in and forbade her from performing her usual tasks:

> I wasn't allowed to do anything. In the cafeteria, you had to always move the tables, and one lady asked me: "Hey, let's move this table away." But then I heard: "Hey you, you are not carrying any tables!" She wouldn't let me do anything. But then I told her I would leave because I was not allowed to do anything here. (Focus group 3)

This encounter foregrounds how the participants, when they engage in contests with others, may become challenged and controlled by others due to their frailty and consequent need for protection—whether presumed or actual. In this case, the participant reflects on how after first trying to influence the situation, she ultimately left because it no longer felt meaningful to her. After initially contesting the situation, submission to the rulings of others followed. This example leads us to the last form of relating with others identified in the interviews.

4.4. Ruling and Being Ruled by Others

A fourth way of relating with others in the neighbourhood reflects a strong attempt to control but weak involvement. Here, the participants reflected on situations where there was no room for negotiation: either they were able to exert control unilaterally on others, or they were subject to others' (people or institutions) unilateral control. Instances of unilateral control were particularly pronounced in situations related to care and frailty. For example, one of the participants had recently moved into a care home, and a loss of having a choice over his own life was evident in his description of the situation:

> My experience is good in the sense that, in my situation, where I'm forced to leave my home and live somewhere else because, apparently, I can't take care of myself, this is an ideal place for me. For example, as I think I already mentioned, the staff are really nice. If there is a dance, like there usually is every week, I don't even dare to go out into the hallway because there will instantly be people yelling: "Let's go dance, come here" [chuckling]. I don't have a choice. (Focus group 3)

These remarks, although accounted humorously, illustrate multiple ways of not being able to influence one's own situation. The first concerns his placement in the care home where he has been forced to move. His remark of "apparently, I can't take care of myself" indicates that he did not agree with the decision by social care authorities; he had no choice but to submit. Secondly, as expressed by this participant, he had no choice but to participate in the social activities of the care home, such as dancing. The participants who lived in a care home remarked that there was a clear boundary between the care home and the outside world:

> We have these volunteers who just turn up with a backpack and grab someone and they have also asked me out for a walk. They are here for that because we have to be accompanied by someone to go out. (Focus group 3)

This quote illustrates that care home residents were not in control of crossing the boundary; care home management were in control. The reason for not being allowed to go out alone was resident well-being and safety: Each care home resident's ability to safely manage outdoors is assessed by care home personnel. Although this is done for resident safety, it nevertheless means, from the resident's perspective, submitting to the control of others.

The participants also described how there were situations in which they were the ones in control. The earlier example of the care home resident reveals that he had one way to have control, which was closing the door to his apartment and not venturing into the hallway. Another example was told by a participant living in her own apartment in the neighbourhood. She recalled once letting an unknown visitor into her home by accident; just as she was returning from doing her groceries, a person unknown to her suddenly came in with her. After a while he left, but he returned later:

> After two weeks my doorbell rang, and I looked through the peephole and saw that it was him. I opened the letterbox in the door and asked what he wanted. He said we had unfinished business from last time and I needed to let him in. I told him we have no unfinished business, "I'm not letting you in." (Focus group 4)

By not opening her door, she was able to keep out someone she perceived as an intruder. This example shows that the interviewed older people, at least to some degree, despite vulnerability stemming from frailty and neighbourhood safety, also have unilateral control in relation to others.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the relational settings reflected in older people's accounts of their everyday dealings and doings in their neighbourhood. Focusing on two dimensions pertinent to the accounts of the interviewed older residents, we identified four distinct ways of relating with others reflecting varying intensities of involvement and control. Through a close examination of these ways, the article provides an empirically grounded understanding of doing community amid tensions and vulnerability. To conclude, we discuss the value of our results in understanding the position of neighbourhood residents living in vulnerable circumstances.

Firstly, a close examination of the intensities of involvement and control in older people's accounts illuminates the variety of positions in the relational settings of urban neighbourhoods. These positions vary along the continuum of involvement from intensely reciprocal engagements to light encounters that are hardly noticeable if observed from the outside. Yet even the lightest of encounters exhibit meaningful ways to relate to the neighbourhood. In the continuum of control, the residents' positions varied from absence of control to unilateral control and authority, or complete lack of possibility to have an influence, depending on the situation. The interviewees' accounts reflected both being subject to other people's control as well as exerting control over others. The varying combinations of involvement and control showed that even amid frailty, control may be exerted over others as individuals or as part of peer groups, reflecting active appropriation and accommodation of neighbourhood space. Older residents exert control, for example, by withdrawing from activities or locations they do not find meaningful. Whether disputes, exclusions, and withdrawals are empowering or detrimental depends on the situational context.

As proposed in studies of communities and conviviality in the context of superdiversity and multicultural cities, ambivalence is intrinsic to everyday relations and encounters (see Blokland, 2017, p. 82; Maununaho et al., 2023; Neal et al., 2019; Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 424). Therefore, understanding how ambivalence is managed and negotiated is a highly relevant issue in current societies where different social groups live side by side in urban neighbourhoods. Although an analysis of involvement and control is relevant to all residents, we suggest that it may be especially illustrative in the case of those residents who live in vulnerable circumstances. This is because an analysis of involvement and control allows considering frailty simultaneously with tensions in urban encounters, offering one way to approach neighbourhood lives as socially ambivalent and to avoid the assumption of "happy togetherness" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 425).

Secondly, this article contributes to the conceptual understanding of doing community (Blokland, 2017; Neal et al., 2019; Studdert, 2016; Studdert & Walkerdine, 2016a, 2016b). We suggest that involvement and

control, along with the four distinct ways of relating with others presented in the article, offer a novel layer to analyses of doing urban community through relational settings of belonging. We do not suggest involvement and control to be more accurate in comparison to the privacy and access identified by Blokland (2017) as dimensions of urban relational settings. Rather, we suggest that involvement and control be considered a supplementary analytical layer alongside privacy and access, shedding light onto the dynamics of urban neighbourhoods. These may be considered relevant dimensions of the work of doing community (see Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 425).

As for the limits of our study, we stress that our results are based on interviews with older adults with a Finnish background who were still comparatively active, even when they needed care. We lack the perspective of older adults with a migrant background and/or very significant frailty in their lives, for example with significant memory impairments. Gender is also an aspect that we did not consider further in this article. Another methodological limitation is that we ground our analysis on interviews without direct access to actual encounters, negotiations, or practices through fieldwork and observation; instead, we rely on our interviewees' accounts of these. Although we agree with assertions of the possibilities of ethnographic methods and fieldwork (see Blokland, 2017; Wise & Noble, 2016, pp. 426–427), we still believe that even with these limitations, our data richly captures older residents' perspectives. However, it would be useful to apply the framework presented in this article in ethnographic explorations and the context of specific locations and sites. For example, cooperation in the various activities and clubs appears in our study rather harmonic and devoid of attempts to control; ethnographic exploration could offer deeper insight into how involvement and control are managed in different contexts, such as a community space or a club.

All in all, the article highlights that older people inhabit, accommodate, and appropriate neighbourhood spaces in a meaningful way. Through our framework and close examination of older people's accounts of involvement and control, we contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of the position of neighbourhood residents in vulnerable life situations and circumstances. We suggest that through involvement and control, it is possible to shed light on the subtle, everyday complexity of doing urban communities and encounters as sites of tension, fragility, and belonging.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data is not shared. The interviewees have not given their consent for sharing the interviews.

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ARTICLE

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Multi-Actor Housing to Address Vulnerabilities at a Personal and Local Level

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Abstract

In response to an everlasting housing crisis, cities worldwide have witnessed a surge in alternative housing initiatives (AHIs) driven by third-sector organisations. In Brussels, a network of third-sector organisations has been developing strategies with each other and local authorities, resulting in a plethora of initiatives focusing on various critical situations. Drawing on ethnographic research in a Brussels AHI, this article investigates how its complex multi-actor structure affects the daily life of its inhabitants both within their dwellings and the wider neighbourhood. By capturing the tactics employed by third-sector actors on the ground, which often deviate from their initial strategy for reclaiming the right to housing, as well as the homing practices of the inhabitants, the article focuses on tracing how and why such a housing configuration does or does not address its inhabitants' interplaying vulnerabilities related with the housing crisis as well as their relationship with the local urban fabric.

Keywords

alternative housing initiatives; homing; multi-actor housing; right to housing; tactics

1. Introduction

Nowadays, many cities across the world have experienced a rise of housing initiatives driven by third-sector organisations (Czischke et al., 2012) that attempt to guarantee the right to housing in response to an everlasting housing crisis fuelled by an increasingly commodified housing market (Madden & Marcuse, 2016) and a stagnation in the social rental sector (Priemus, 1997). In this article, we refer to this emerging field of

collaborative housing as "alternative housing initiatives" (AHIs) as opposed to traditional welfare regimes of public housing provision, given that their primal reliance is on multiple partnerships between third-sector actors along with a collaboration with local authorities for the provision of housing to vulnerable groups.

Nonetheless, in many cases, AHIs are more than just an alternative solution to social housing and therefore to the housing crisis. The multi-actor hybrid systems driven by the third sector have been captured as having the potential to address different expectations at a time by including and cultivating several dimensions (Evers, 2005). Housing projects driven by the non-profit sphere are often noted for providing housing for vulnerable groups with a will to encompass other aims linked to their vulnerabilities, such as "hybrid products and services (combining housing with social and neighbourhood support services)" (Mullins et al., 2012, p. 407). Moreover, as products of negotiations and a patchwork of actors offering different resources, they are frequently associated with the inclusion of further alternate living dimensions such as the adoption of a certain collective-living form (Czischke, 2018), a transit-temporary tenure, or multilevel management (Smith, 2010).

The relationship between these dimensions and a complex multi-actor set-up, or with the residents' experiences within such housing forms is increasingly being explored in the field of housing studies, particularly concerning collaborative housing (Bresson & Labit, 2020; Czischke, 2018; Thompson, 2020; Mullins & Moore, 2018). Nonetheless, the effect of these complex partnerships on each actor (Czischke, 2018) and on the domestic experience they produce in everyday life remains relatively under-researched. This article aims to contribute to the knowledge gap by focusing specifically on third-sector-initiated forms of collaborative housing through an in-depth analysis of an AHI in Brussels, Belgium. In particular, the article aims to study if and how this AHI configuration addresses various vulnerabilities of inhabitants related to the housing crisis. More specifically, by documenting the tactical processes of third-sector actors on the ground as well as the homing tactics of the inhabitants within their dwellings and in their surroundings, we will shed light on and identify the extent to which such AHI supports inhabitants individually and their ties to the local urban fabric.

We begin this article with a literature review of de Certeau's model of "tactics" and strategies and their interpretation in the third-sector world as well as Boccagni's notion of "homing," which are used as lenses for the analytical part of this article. Then, we discuss our methodology for studying the AHI and describe the strategic setting guiding it. The core of the article is about the tactical practices guiding such initiative, along with their interplay. Finally, we conclude by discussing certain dimensions of the project concerning their relevance to the right to housing.

2. Tactics as a Negotiation

In his work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1980) introduces the concept of tactics as a way to interpret and make sense of everyday life. In his conceptualisation, the dominating *strategies* of authoritative powers that represent the dominant order's standpoint (Dey & Teasdale, 2016) are met with opposition from the *tactics* or "ploys" (Gálvez et al., 2021) and actions used by people in their everyday lives to resist them. Although highly insightful, many scholars argue that de Certeau's conceptualisation of tactics remains broad and its operationalisation ambiguous (Andres et al., 2020; Buchanan, 2000; Dey & Teasdale, 2016). Such ambiguity in de Certeau's work allows liberty over its interpretation leading to "the potential for tactics and strategies to be seen as a continuum rather than opposites" (Andres et al., 2020, p. 2444).

Expanding that ambiguity into the realm of the third sector, Dey and Teasdale (2016) use the concept of "tactical mimicry" to interpret tactics more as a negotiation in the everyday processes of organisations. This interpretation refers to actions that are nonconfrontational forms of resistance that exploit the opportunities provided by the strategies (Dey & Teasdale, 2016). For instance, in the case of a third-sector organisation in their study, it was parasitically manoeuvring under certain circumstances while still adhering to the imposed government requirements, maintaining the existing balance of power (Dey & Teasdale, 2016). This interpretation is particularly valuable in the context of AHIs, where third-sector organisations occupy an oftentimes difficult-to-classify in-between position manoeuvring their collaboration with local authorities or other non-profit organisations (NPOs) and institutions (Mullins et al., 2012) to set up and maintain them.

Research on the experience of the home underlines that inhabitants of such initiatives are likely to develop tactics too, both in response to the actors responsible for their living situation, as well as their everyday living environment. For instance, Gálvez et al. (2021) argued that principal tactics could even be detected in the everyday life of individuals in unintentional ordinary processes like complaining, criticising, or explaining minor details.

Some authors build further on this, linking tactics to the space of the home. Many scholars attribute tactics to how the sense of home is negotiated to reproduce one's perception of home. Such tactics of "homing" are being developed to adapt the home to make it more "personal, private, protected, and predictable" (Boccagni, 2022, p. 593); or to provide "security, familiarity and control" (Kim & Smets, 2020, p. 610). Even so, tactics also include forms of "unhoming"; the choice to not engage with the home environment as a way of negotiation, "particularly if this is sub-standard, unchosen, or provisional" (Boccagni, 2022, p. 597). Finally, both the living environment and cohabitation play a role in negotiating one's home. On the one hand, it is acknowledged by Bianchi and Costa (2024) that shared housing can encourage civic participation through the development of bottom-up solidarity. Nonetheless, shared arrangements are often created out of necessity to cope with an unaffordable housing market, thus taking the form of non-homes (Boccagni & Miranda Nieto, 2022).

Our interest here is to explore the concept of tactics, which is present in both third-sector and home studies research, by examining a third-sector housing project as the setting where these interrelated disciplines materialise.

3. Contextualisation and Methodology

The Brussels Capital Region (BCR) is encountering an everlasting housing crisis as access to both owner-occupied and rental housing is becoming increasingly difficult for a substantial part of the city's population in recent years (Mosseray et al., 2020). The homelessness count of 2022 registered more than 2,404 homeless people and 7,134 people living in precarious conditions, illustrating an increase of 18.9% over 2 years (Bruss'help, 2022). In direct correlation, the region's social housing stock represents less than 8% of its total housing stock (Mosseray et al., 2020) and has faced severe stagnation since 1989 (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2015). The number of households officially inscribed on the waiting list for accessing it represents almost 10.5% of the city's population, with many of them remaining there for over 10 years (Bernard & Traversa, 2022).

Social rental agencies that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s (Verstraete & De Decker, 2018) have since been institutionalised and structurally funded as an additional offer of affordable housing alongside social housing. The recognition of the Community Land Trust in the Brussels Housing Code (Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie, 2013) and its permanent partnership with the BCR has equally contributed to the increase of the affordable housing stock. Moreover, linking to the fact that the BCR is characterised as having one of the "largest non-profit sectors in the world" (Salamon et al., 2003, as cited in Deleu et al., 2022, p. 104), a plethora of AHIs initiated by the third sector have been emerging. Nonetheless, their institutionalisation occurs in a more fragmentary way, with only specific forms being recognised in the Brussels housing code. While this recognition makes them eligible for governmental support (Bernard & Sohier, 2015, as cited in Lenel et al., 2020), they have not yet received permanent funding. These initiatives currently lack uniform regulations in terms of admission criteria, temporality of stay, or accommodated target groups. As a result, the initiatives' characteristics greatly vary and are often dependent on the vision and decisions of the initiating third-sector organisation. As this overview of the housing landscape shows, the plethora of relatively weakly institutionalised AHI projects in the BCR presents unique opportunities for conducting in-depth fieldwork.

Data collection took place in 2022 and 2023 for a project providing temporary accommodation to five women in need and their children, in a neighbourhood characterised by poor housing quality. The selected project was initiated by a synergy of actors guided by an organization against homelessness (further OAH).

Data gathering by the first author relied on qualitative research methods. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews with actors and inhabitants of the project were conducted. More concretely, interviews were conducted with a coordinator of the OAH (initial discussion in September 2022 and follow-up discussion in October 2023 [Interview 1]), a worker of the Social Rental Agency (SRA) managing the project (November 2023 [Interview 2]), a worker of the Municipality-architect linked to the project (November 2023 [Interview 3]), two workers of the OAH (initial discussion October 2022 and follow-up discussion in November 2023 [Interview 4]; October 2023 [Interview 5]), and five (adult) inhabitants of the project (March 2023 [Interviews 6 and 7]; September 2023 [Interview 8]; October 2023 [Interviews 9 and 10]). Secondly, two co-creation workshop sessions were conducted with the inhabitants over the use of the project's collective spaces. Third and lastly, during an in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, the first author recorded lived experiences by participating and assisting in an activity dedicated to the inhabitants. Such action enabled a regular engagement with them to capture everyday life occurrences related to the AHIs, to conduct short everyday discussions, and to discuss and become familiar with the organisations involved. These actions were all captured as field notes in a notebook, as audio notes, or photographs on the first author's mobile phone.

As far as the processing of data is concerned, a thematic analysis considering spatial and institutional characteristics is presented in Sections 4 and 5 of this article. First of all, given the particular research focus on housing and its everyday experience we aimed to analyse the living environment characteristics that inherently are related to the personal space of individuals. While the fieldwork allowed to gather very rich data in this respect, it also necessitated great care in terms of protecting the inhabitants' privacy. Living environment data is therefore presented by combining textual descriptions and drawings rather than photos. Drawings in particular were selected for their analytical significance, given that everyday sketches are tools that enable understanding and articulating the homemaking practices of inhabitants (Beeckmans et al.,

2022), bringing to the fore their spatial agency (Awan et al., 2011). Specific parts of photos or conceptual, abstract handmade sketches were digitally redrawn and overlapped with textual notes or quotes of participants, delineating a clearer view of the living environment setting in relation to the everyday practice.

Secondly, in Sections 4 and 5, diagramming is used to visualise the connection between the actors unravelled during the data-collection process. This allows one to capture the actors' relations and identify their magnitude (Yaneva, 2022) more systematically.

Finally, the analytical part presented in Section 5 on the tactics of actors and inhabitants in everyday life was based on a thematic classification of the research data in a lexicon comprising of "feelings, settings, and practices" inspired by the "research matrix on home" of Boccagni (2017). There he provides these three interdependent dimensions as levels of analysis of a house in its everyday quotidian emergence. This subsequently led to the thematic coding of each category. These code-themes afterwards enabled intersectional insights which were crossed with the main theoretical lenses (tactics as a negotiation of a strategy and everyday life) discussed in the previous section.

4. Setting the Scene: Developing the Strategy

The project investigated in this article was initiated through a multi-actor agreement with various drivers, who united around a shared strategy centred on the provision of housing. The non-profit OAH initiated, guided, and orchestrated the strategy, given that the NPO general mission is "to promote infrastructures useful to their public" (Interview 1, 2023). The OAH, established a partnership with a non-profit women's organisation (further WO) to initiate the process and the forthcoming everyday management and to ensure knowledge, expertise, and guidance for the support of the specific target group (Interview 3, 2023; Interview 4, 2022).

According to the actors' interviews, to develop the project, the OAH entered further into a partnership with the local municipality to use one of their buildings. In exchange, it would develop an affordable housing project and be responsible for its management as well as offer social support to its inhabitants. As stated by a municipal worker closely involved in the project, the municipality found the proposal appealing as it owns many single buildings that cannot be offered to their social housing company, since the latter considers them too time-consuming to manage efficiently and profitably (Interview 3, 2023).

The creation of a housing "infrastructure" rather than just a "project" was demanded by the municipality, leading to an opting for a temporary lease model (Interview 1, 2023). Under these conditions, the OAH reached out to the BCR and obtained a subsidy for the project, specifically destined for municipalities to renovate their building stock (Interviews 1 and 3, 2023). In order to develop the agreed tenure model, the OAH collaborated further with an SRA in the same municipality (Interview 2, 2023). They would act as administrators for the logistical support of the rental contracts and rent collection of such temporary housing project with a foreseen maximum occupancy of 18 months (Interview 2, 2023). Their role was described as "natural" given the close collaboration with the OAH in other projects managed by the latter (Interview 2, 2023).

Finally, these negotiations were formalised and agreed upon with the formal partners in a written convention (Interviews 1, 2, and 3, 2023). The project was designed to house women in need and their

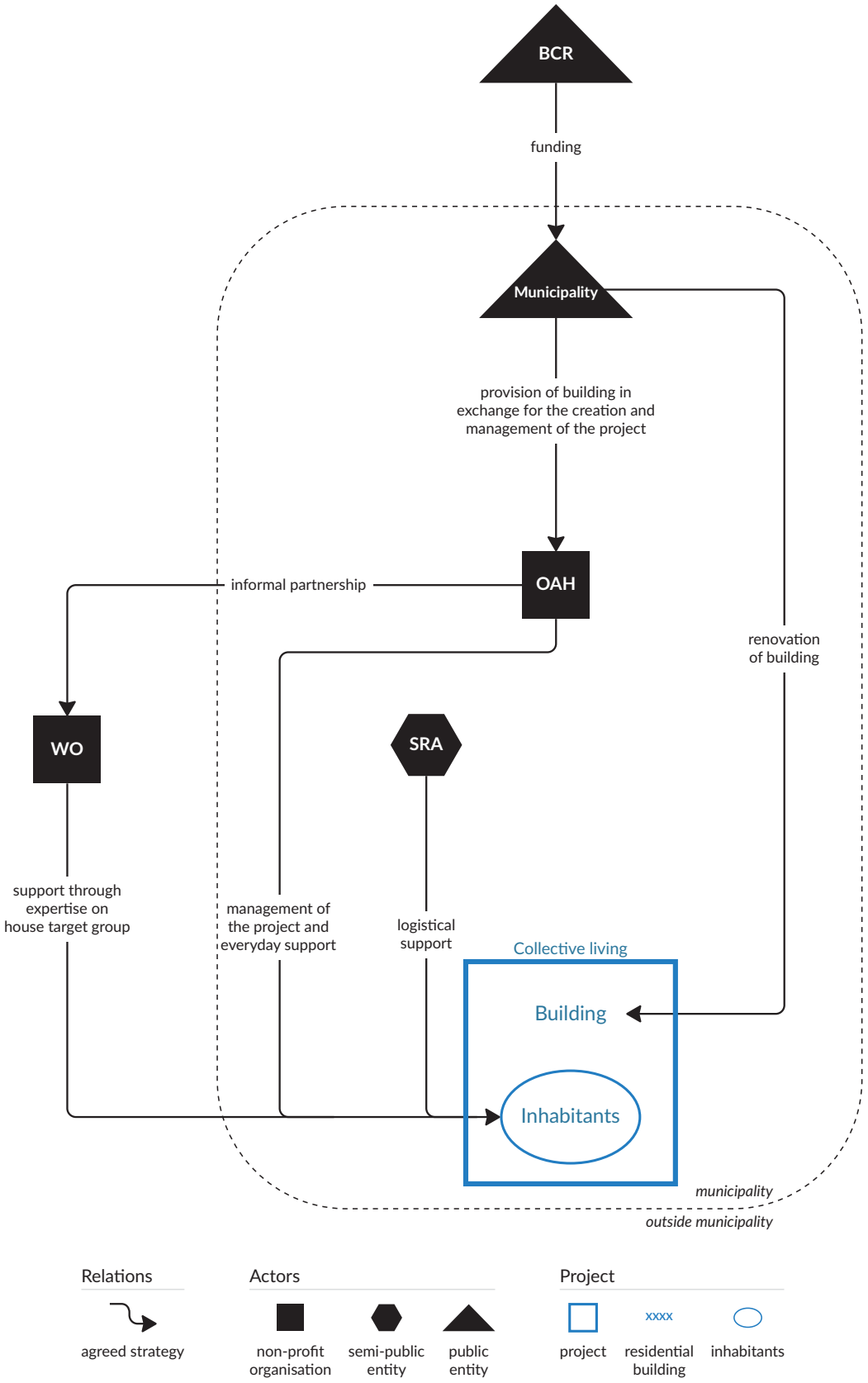

Figure 1. The agreed multi-actor strategy for the elaboration of the project.

children (Interviews 1 and 3, 2023; Interview 3; Interview 4, 2022) and it has collective living areas (kitchen, dining room, living room) and individual units, accommodating five households (notes from January and February 2023). The NPOs opted for a collective housing project given that such a building would "function better with a communal space on the ground floor" (Interview 3, 2023). In addition, it was also essential for the administrations involved given that "politicians are very responsive to this kind of proposals, so when the OAH said 'collective house,' they agreed to fund it" (Interview 1, 2023).

All in all, by juxtaposing and grouping the perspectives of the different parties involved in how the AHI was brought together, and considering the partnerships, their hierarchies, and drivers forming this strategy at the institutional level (see Figure 1), we identify three prevalent features. First of all, the initiative enacts a collective living strategy, which was a necessary and central element for the project's realisation, given it was desired by both the municipal and regional administrations but also due to the specific spatial possibilities the acquired building offered. Secondly, the initiative can also be seen as an urban strategy for the renovation of the municipal building stock and the creation of urban infrastructure since local actors detected the building as an opportunity to fight homelessness. Thirdly, as each partner plays a different role in getting access to different resources (building, funding) and expertise (target group, housing issues, logistical administration), it is a distinct-missions strategy that governs the AHI. Different goals are therefore encompassed within the same project, not necessarily considering each other, thus validating what some scholars engaging with de Certeau hint at; strategies can be polyvocal by possessing different levels of authority, and following different temporalities (Andres et al., 2020). This results in a fragmented management lacking a conscious and strongly co-developed vision.

To conclude, it is important to note that these features encompass the AHI's strategy following de Certeau's definitions and theories. As such, the term is not used to delineate literally "quotidian" and "therefore the tactical" (Andres et al., 2020, p. 2441) perspective but reflect rather the perspective of stakeholders as institutions, and thus the "dominant order" (Dey & Teasdale, 2016, p. 489). This section therefore breaks down the strategy, its hierarchies, and basic features, and is considered a valuable, necessary part of our subsequent analysis of the AHI's everyday tactics. It helps draw conclusions on the support offered to inhabitants, considering how a better understanding of the strategy's polyvocal nature brings essential knowledge to how the tactics are being played out (Andres et al., 2020).

5. Operationalising the Strategy on the Ground

5.1. Understanding the Actor Tactics

While the housing strategy described above integrates explicit missions in a contract, the operational implementation on the ground through direct everyday support by the OAH, the WO, and the SRA led to the provision of additional services and the modification of certain missions (see Figure 2).

Three main sets of tactics were identified in the practices of the workers on the ground. The first two are considered to act as indirect everyday negotiations and interpretations of the strategy, and the latter is viewed as in confrontation with the initial strategy.

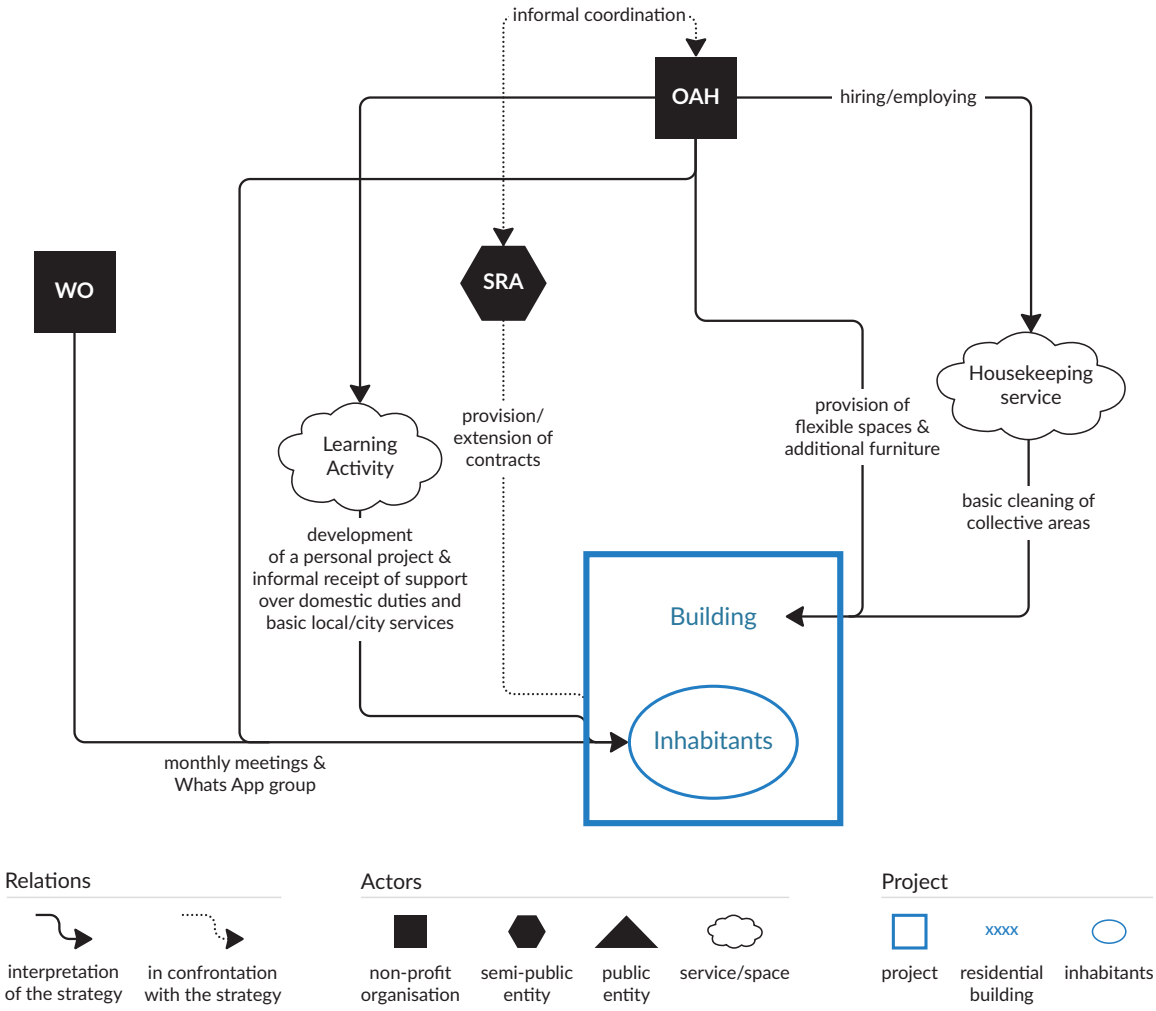

Figure 2. The actors' grounded tactics for the support of the project.

5.1.1. Tactics of Presence

The OAH developed grounded practices such as setting up a learning activity, organising monthly collective meetings with inhabitants, guiding inhabitants to local and city services, and creating a WhatsApp group.

More concretely, the learning activity set up by the OAH for inhabitants of the house was to realise a project mostly linked to their personal development in a space within the same municipality (notes from January and February 2023; workshop notes from May; Interview 5, 2023). Such activity, besides serving as "a useful workshop adapted to the inhabitants' needs and wishes" (Interview 5, 2023), allowed inhabitants to interact directly with the OAH workers, thus avoiding waiting several weeks to address these problems (Interview 5, 2023; notes from March and April 2023). For example, during the activity, inhabitants are informally assisted with issues that go beyond its scope, like translating official letters or problems concerning the management of the shared infrastructure, such as the presence of cockroaches in the kitchen or the non-respect of house rules (notes from March and October 2023). In addition, it is a place that acts as a reference point for inhabitants to acquire information on navigating the city and the areas in the vicinity (Interview 5, 2023). For instance, during the observations of the first author in the activity, inhabitants have guidance over the presence of

certain services like community medical centres (notes from March 2023). This frequent casual contact enables inhabitants to express their needs in an everyday, spontaneous, and less structural way, and goes hand in hand with the objective of the workers to "prevent inhabitants feeling isolated but instead surrounded by assistance when needed" (Interview 4, 2023).

In addition, the OAH together with the WO provide social support to inhabitants through monthly collective meetings specifically aimed at the "organisation of the project collectively" (Interview 4, 2023). Here, again, formally and collectively, issues related to the shared property are discussed, such as the possibility of placing a personal indoor exercise bike in the living room and the rules over its individual or collective use (notes from April 2023). In addition, the workers attempt to forge connections with the urban fabric by informing inhabitants of organisations, places, and activities in the city and the direct surroundings (Interview 4, 2022). Besides the monthly meetings, one final practice involves a WhatsApp group created by the social workers, which serves as a direct communication channel. As explained, such a group "is for all information [among inhabitants and the social workers] but is also set up for internal coordination among them" (Interview 4, 2023). During the observations, the WhatsApp app group was used on multiple occasions, such as when inviting external guests to the project, organising collective dinners, deciding on who would take out the garbage, or even identifying a collective available moment for meeting with the social workers (notes from March and April 2023).

To conclude, these practices, delineated as tactics of presence, enable "entering" into the project's life in informal everyday ways rather than relying solely on formal procedures. They allow the OAH and its workers to avoid a controlling role. Furthermore, the intentions behind these tactics suggest a detected need for the project to ensure security beyond the basic human entitlement to housing, including a lawful tenure and a safe environment (Carver, 2011). This is evident considering that actions were taken to explore the full potential of this multi-actor project and its shared resources, attempting to cultivate autonomy, agency, and collective security. This was either achieved by setting up structures for in-house collective decision-making or by cultivating linkages with the wider area and the city. Using the locality of the involved actors (i.e., knowledge of other local actors) expands the urban strategy from urban renovation towards a more inclusive urban strategy by making the municipality and the city infrastructure more accessible. As such, this provides the inhabitants with tools to "accommodate [themselves] according to [their] ability and art" and, in essence, brings them closer to performing their act of dwelling (Illich,1984).

5.1.2. Tactics of Adaptivity

We note another set of practices of the OAH workers in the assistance they provided when certain inhabitants wanted to transform the housing project into a more individualised one. This was for instance by foreseeing in the initial design certain "flexible" spaces like "a corner…with a bench" that are left to be creatively used by each inhabitant (Interview 3, 2023). Furthermore, it was also detected when the OAH mobilised a housekeeping service for the maintenance of the collective spaces of the project once a week, as a means "to avoid and calm down conflicts between the inhabitants" (Interview 1, 2023). As observed, and during short conversations in the workshop, cleaners were initially hired to clean the surfaces and floor but eventually did much more, such as an in-depth cleaning of the collective areas (workshop notes from October 2023). In short, these practices that we identify as tactics of adaptivity aim to be reflexive of everyday struggles by balancing out the collective and private equilibrium of the initial strategy through manoeuvring and creatively interpreting

the notion of collective living. They further suggest that beyond adequate habitability through sufficient and structurally sound space (Carver, 2011), the project calls for an open-end "dwelling" that is not "completed before occupancy" (Illich, 1984) but instead open to adaptations and explored in its full potential.

5.1.3. Tactics of Familiarity

Lastly, we note the coordination and informal negotiations of workers of OAH with those of the local SRA due to pre-existing collaborations and their specific locality. For instance, workers engage in ad hoc informal discussions on practical matters due to the physical proximity (i.e., same municipality) of the OAH and the SRA (Notes—Apr & Nov 2023; Interview 2, 2023). Interactions involve the coordination of practitioners on communication with the inhabitants such as agreeing to not give notice when a contract is ending, and engaging in informal negotiations to extend contracts beyond the agreed timeframe of 18 months in cases where inhabitants are unable to find stable housing (Interview 2, 2023). As such, we outline these practices as tactics of familiarity between the workers. Similar observations were made by Felder et al. (2023), who argue that long-term interactions create a familiar sentiment through invisible ties of mutual recognition due to social or spatial proximity. In our case, this results in an informal overturning of the project's initial strategy by blurring and integrating the features of the distinct missions, ultimately leading to a more coherent strategy.

5.2. Understanding the Tactics of Inhabitants in Their Everyday

In everyday life, inhabitants also engage in tactics negotiating their sense of home, either by choosing not to engage with it and just getting by (un-homing) or by appropriating and adapting it (homing; see Figure 3).

In the cases of un-homing, we deem that the inhabitants' tactics simply persist as ways to negotiate their everyday living. In the cases of homing, we deem that residents enter a confrontation and co-creation process with the actors' strategies and tactics described in the previous section, in a direct continuum.

5.2.1. Tactics of Un-Homing

On the one hand, most inhabitants are relatively indifferent about participating in collective dinners in the dining room (notes from April 2023). Moreover, the internal communication between them and in support of collective spaces relies only on the basics, such as taking out the garbage (notes from March and April 2023), while "there's no specific system of organisation" (Interview 10, 2023). On many occasions also, things over the collective areas are left unfixed (notes from October 2023); "armchairs are left broken" (Interview 7, 2023). Such practices relate to feelings of fear and a sense of futility inhabitants have due to the temporal-transitional nature of the project. As some inhabitant interviewees said, this temporality is experienced in terms of changing resident composition every few months, which in turn requires a new adaptation of the atmosphere of the project every time. Nonetheless, the short temporality also concerns the actual stay. Although the latter can be extended beyond the short timeframe, such a possibility is not clearly communicated from inception, but only later and informally (notes from January and October 2023). It entails that some inhabitants, as interviewee 9 (2023) eloquently described it, are "always under stress" and it plays a key role in preventing residents from investing in the organisation. We therefore note a strong link between inhabitants' low commitment to and participation in the collective management of the project,

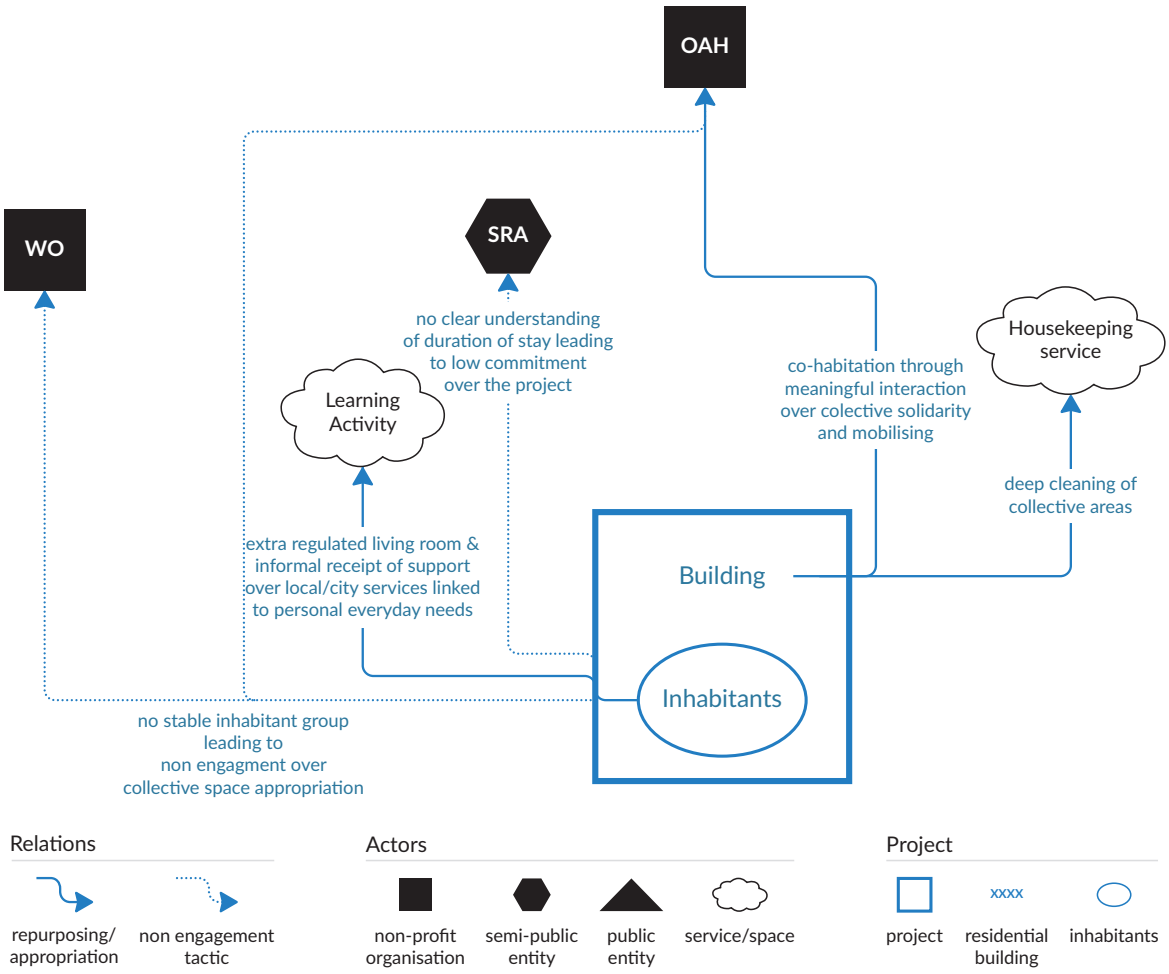

Figure 3. The tactics of inhabitants in the everyday living of the project.

and the actors' distinct-missions strategy, which results in a non-coherent collective aim. This is further complicated by the informal ways in which the duration of residence is extended (actors' tactics of "familiarity"), yet not formally expressed, disconcerting inhabitants even more. In response to such circumstances, residents then choose to refrain from getting involved to gain control of their everyday lives.

Similarly, while some inhabitants put candles or flowers on the collective stairs and corridors next to their individual rooms (notes from February 2023; see Figure 4a), they make relatively minor adjustments in the shared areas of the project, such as changing the orientation of a computer screen in the living room to ensure more privacy (notes from February 2023; see Figure 4b). Most inhabitants attribute such small gestures to past incidents when former residents had taken personal items from the collective spaces (workshop notes from May 2023). As one inhabitant explains, she was not eager to "leave things in the living room, there are too many people, and they'll take them" (Interview 6, 2023). As a result, residents care for and claim only their private spaces as well as the liminal spaces of the project that are under their influence. As opposed to this, collective spaces are only claimed through punctual actions. These past practices continue to influence the behaviour of newer inhabitants by reinforcing perceptions of mistrust and uncertainty about how to behave in the shared spaces (workshop notes from May 2023). Therefore, while most interviewed inhabitants feel attached to and care for their personal home spaces, some express

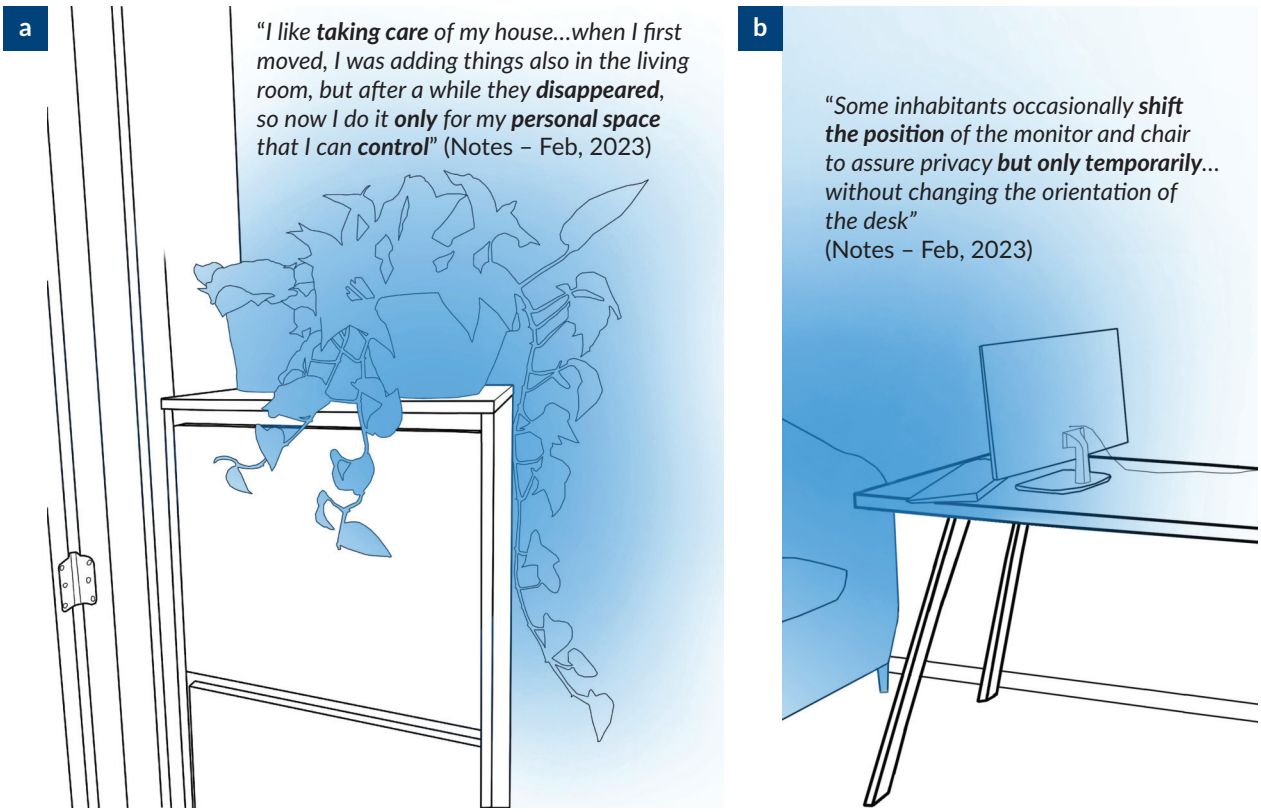

Figure 4. Snapshots of everyday life across the project.

feelings of insecurity and discomfort regarding the collective spaces. In this context, the inhabitants' micro-appropriation and punctual changes to collective spaces are once again linked to the actors' distinct-missions strategy, resulting in a temporary collective living arrangement that does not allow sufficient time for community bonding. This is partially mitigated through the tactics of adaptivity that allow the rearrangement of the project's space. However, this flexibility mainly applies to individual spaces. Moreover, as concluded during the workshop with the inhabitants, this flexibility is only casually enabled. There is a lack of systematic approach to re-adapt the collective areas by integrating more individually and personally defined spaces within its design (workshop notes from May 2023). As a result, this compromise results in relatively autonomous individual spaces and a project that does not reach its full potential, as inhabitants tend to bypass the collective space and use them only temporarily, to navigate the tensions that come with cohabitation.

Regarding attachment to the wider neighbourhood, the majority of inhabitants expressed feelings of disorder and neglect over the municipality. Reasons cited include people often "spending the evenings drinking" outside the house (Interview 9, 2023), concerns about "the dirt" (Interview 8, 2023), and frustration with the "administration that takes so long that it's impossible" to receive financial aid and social benefits they depend on (Interview 10, 2023). As a result, most interviewed residents indicate that they have only spent limited time in the area's public space, even though they perceive the project very positively, as highlighted by one; "this house is really nice but if we put it elsewhere, I would never want to leave it" (Interview 10, 2023). This behaviour is thus linked to the projects' proposed urban strategy, of renovating buildings in areas of the BCR to increase the housing stock. This strategy mainly focuses on quantitatively

increasing housing without enhancing the overall liveability of the area's public spaces, thereby not providing homing opportunities for the inhabitants close to the project. Consequently, due to their limited ability to influence the challenging external environment, most inhabitants refrain from engaging with the public spaces in the area, often preferring to relocate to a different municipality after their stay in the project.

All in all, while certain characteristics of the project succeed in providing secure legal tenure safeguarding against evictions (Carver, 2011) and offering access to a plethora of spaces, the project lacks the necessary time considerations, which is essential for fostering a sense of home in a collective living arrangement (Aernouts & Ryckewaert, 2019). Moreover, it fails to ensure long-term reassurance regarding tenancy security, negatively affecting the inhabitants' ability to connect with the immediate surroundings where inhabitants reside (Grønseth & Thorshaug, 2022).

5.2.2. Tactics of Homing

On the other hand, some inhabitants choose to spend time in certain interior places located in the municipality and, more specifically, in the space of the learning activity (Interview 5, 2023; notes from February and March 2023). During the hour of the activity, and next to engaging in the development of their personal project, these residents adapt and transform this place into a kind of living room. First of all, these participants clearly care for this space, decorating it with flowers (notes from April, 2023). Second, the activity occurring there creates opportunities for more informal interactions. It creates an opportunity to informally, and individually confide their problems of cohabitation to the workers (Interview 5, 2023; notes from April 2023). While working in parallel on their project, inhabitants sometimes interact, engage in dialogue, and casually bond over common issues (notes from December 2022). One revealing example is their conversation about personal administrative problems, about which they have different opinions on how to face them, fostering better mutual understanding (notes from December 2022). This place is viewed by many interviewed inhabitants as a positive space outside the project, with one of them noting "I really appreciate it, it's the best activity I can get" (Interview 8, 2023). It "provides a positive distance for thinking about problems; an emotional distance" (Interview 5, 2023). As such, this can be seen as an extension of the collective living strategy, where inhabitants use and further repurpose the tactics of "adaptivity" and "presence" developed by the actors to their terms, turning such space into an extra place of homing. By diverging from the dominant dynamics, this intermediate or negotiating stage facilitates the development of networks and skills, a mechanism also acknowledged by Wallin-Ruschman and Patka (2016). In essence, the physical as well as emotional "distance" from the project leads to less forced interactions, balancing the aims of the collective living & sharing strategy that was put forward in the project.

Furthermore, inhabitants use such activity as a reference point to navigate to vicinity areas and the city, not only through casually receiving some elemental information during the time of the activity on services in the city offering support, as first envisioned by the workers, but also based on their own everyday needs. For instance, residents ask for information about language courses offered, as well as places offering second-hand furniture in the city (notes from April and October 2023). Such actions are influenced by the regular interaction (notes from April 2023) as well as the environment described in the previous paragraph given that it is "a space…a warm environment where there is trust…not a top-down relationship" (Interview 5, 2023). This generates the necessary conditions for inhabitants to claim a connectivity that is more spontaneous and linked to personal everyday infrastructures. This is yet another way in which inhabitants

repurpose the designed urban strategy and related tactics of rendering the municipality and city infrastructure more accessible (tactics of presence).

Finally, the shared spatial configuration of the project enables access to extra spacious new places such as a big living room, dining room, and kitchen, where most inhabitants ascertain that they have freedom over them, given that internal everyday management is defined among them (workshop notes from May 2023). Despite the minor tensions surrounding these places that most of the residents remark, they enable them to relax by making them feel at home and allowing them to concentrate when pursuing their personal (and professional) goals. Interviewee 10 (2023) explains:

> Since I was born, I never lived alone[independently], in my own house. The living room makes it a home….It has allowed me to relax the fact that there are no rules…the fact that it is a house and not a small corner.

Inhabitants cultivate agency by consciously making decisions about how to use the house in ways beyond its original design. This is done by demanding changes to the intended use of these spaces, or by deliberately refusing the intended use, mainly by exploiting the tactics of presence and adaptivity set by the workers on the ground. For instance, they refuse to clean collective areas and pass on the need for an in-depth cleaning from the housekeeping service during the time of the learning activity (Notes from October 2023), or half of the residents admitted in the interviews requesting extra furniture to rearrange their individual spaces to more autonomous ones. As one inhabitant notes: "We've turned it [inhabitant's private space] into a small living room with a table, a place where we can share meals" (Interview 7, 2023; see Figure 5). These

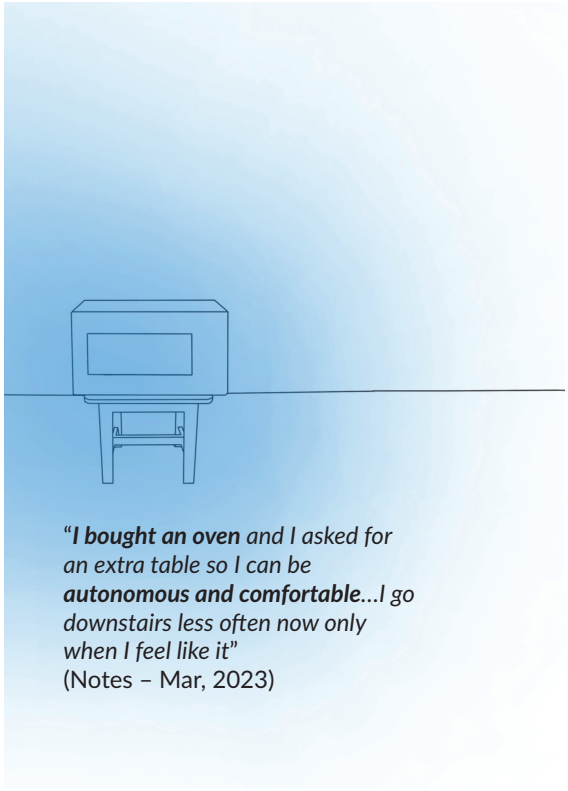

Figure 5. Snapshot of everyday life across the project.

conditions set the basis for repurposing the collective living strategy from communal living through sharing infrastructures towards other ways of cohabitation. Rather than spending time as a group, this is guided by meaningful interaction over collective solidarity and by mobilising as inhabitants. Examples are discussing common problems such as finding a house or exchanging practical details (notes from May 2023) such as "registering to the municipal housing lists [and] making lots of contacts" (Interview 9, 2023). Other instances of everyday solidarity and friendship (notes from May 2023) include sharing time spontaneously, like interviewee 10 (2023) recalls: "We stayed downstairs with the kids [babysitting them]….I went to [Interviewee 7] room and the kids played [together]….It was really nice."

To conclude, the project offers inhabitants the ability to dwell through "generat[ing] the axioms of the spaces they inhabit" (Illich, 1984), as illustrated in the various open-ended tactics that take place in their domestic space. By regaining the sense of control over the way they inhabit in a material but also organisational manner, the project at the level of the home as well as at the urban level creates processes at the "intersection of interlocking scales and at the nexus of the private and public sphere" (Nagi et al., 2023, p. 83).

6. Conclusion

This study examined how the daily operations of a multi-actor AHI in the BCR influenced the dynamics among the involved actors and the domestic experiences of its inhabitants. It did so by interpreting the grounded actions of the workers and inhabitants of the project through the lens of tactics. We believe this contribution is relevant, as it proposes a theoretical framework for analysing and interpreting third-sector AHIs, contributing to a broader research interest in understanding the vast diversity of "collaborative housing" forms emerging worldwide (Czischke, 2018). We further assert that conclusions can be drawn to empirically discern these initiatives' societal contribution, as well as the nature of the right to housing they encompass.

In more detail, the findings show that this multi-actor initiative generates a project where the strategy of the stakeholders, together with the grounded tactics of the workers and inhabitants, act in a cooperating continuum. In this interpretation, this project is a successful mechanism of support for the inhabitants' vulnerabilities linked to the housing crisis. First of all, the multi-actor collaboration enables the intelligent mobilisation of resources, such as giving access to building stock and funding. Second, the project's organisational and spatial configuration also fulfils the inhabitants' right to housing by providing new, affordable, qualitative housing with extra spaces that inhabitants alone would have found difficult to access (i.e., a spacious living room, dining room, and kitchen). It is further satisfied by enabling qualities of the right to dwelling in the sense of living and being in the world through shaping and participating in its environment (Illich,1984).

Inhabitants can shape their home and daily lives according to their needs, as the organisational system of the project reduces the distance needed for accessing the decision-making order of such housing (through the actor's tactics that enable on-the-ground adaptations or further missions based on everyday challenges). It even allows for direct participation by repurposing or appropriating various tactics and producing further missions. As such, the project succeeds in cultivating mechanisms that go beyond housing, such as enabling inhabitants' agency (through solidarity, mobilising, and expressing a new housing model), security (providing rest and focus) and inclusion (connection with the local and city services). Nonetheless, the multitude of actors involved in the project occasionally results in a fragmented top-down strategy and operationalisation. This

leads to contradictions and compromises between the aims of the different actors that negatively impact the everyday lives of the inhabitants. This is evident in the conflicting aims of creating, on the one hand, a temporary housing project, and on the other hand, one that relies on collective living. The challenges and perplexities these conflicting dimensions create in the everyday life of inhabitants infringe on achieving the full realisation of the right to housing, as the project mainly succeeds in providing a right to shelter.

Furthermore, by interpreting the strategies and tactics within this third-sector multi-actor housing project as a continuum of interplaying processes, the research contributed to the theoretical discourse over the interpretation of de Certeau's notions. In particular, by tracing in detail how this continuum unfolds in a multi-actor housing project, it highlighted the role of NPOs and the third sector as a representative example where such theorisation applies. This article suggests that the tactics of non-profit actors are an essential negotiating stage for dialoguing and redistributing control between the housing authorities and inhabitants, especially the ones excluded from the existing commodified housing market. As such, they occupy an intermediary position between the residents and the institutions that embodies and allows one to understand the continuum between strategy (of institutions) and tactics (of residents).

Additionally, the actions of the actors involved provide further insights into viewing such third-sector housing as a valuable tool for the urban fabric, as an urban strategy, and in everyday life. First, it is a successful strategy for repairing and protecting the local building stock by constructing a more qualitative environment. Second, the project hints at a model in which housing and supporting services can be integrated into the household, while also informing and building connections to create a cohesive system with the other external local and city services.

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Conflict of Interests

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Displacement and Everyday Resistance: Seeking Spatial Justice in Urban Renewal Processes

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Abstract

This study focuses on four housing displacement cases in which residents were forced to move from their homes and neighbourhoods. The data contain interviews with 39 displaced residents. We ask how the residents sought spatial urban justice in resisting their displacement. In analysing the data, we apply the concept of "everyday resistance" complemented with an understanding of resistance as discursive counter-speech to various injustices experienced in the displacement processes. The results demonstrate that even if resistance is not collective or publicly visible, this does not mean that it does not exist. We located four repertoires of resistance in the interviews: reflective, emotional, rejective, and face-to-face. Through them, the residents questioned the processes of displacement and their consequences, identified power relations related to their displacement in the urban renewal processes and reacted to them, and, by doing so, tried to seek spatial justice for themselves.

Keywords

displacement; home; neighbourhood; resistance; spatial justice; urban renewal

1. Introduction

Having a safe and stable place to live and one's own home is central to most people's well-being. However, there are differences among people in this regard. Following Soja (2010), we approach these differences as issues of spatial justice and injustice. Spatial injustices related to the lack of safety and unstableness of living places can occur in many contexts, from extensive catastrophes, such as in situations of wars and earthquakes, to smaller cases, such as domestic abuse. The context of this study is four urban renewal

processes in growing Finnish cities in 2021–2022 that caused large-scale terminations of tenancies and forced residents in vulnerable situations to move from their homes and neighbourhoods. This starting point connects our article to the literature on gentrification and especially on related discussions of displacement (Baeten et al., 2021; Helbrecht, 2018; Soederberg, 2021). Gentrification creates differences and spatial injustices among a city's residents by displacing less-well-off people away from valuable land and property (Glass, 1964; Lees et al., 2008; Marcuse, 1985).

The qualitative data of this study contain interviews with 39 displaced residents and bring the spatial injustices they expressed to the foreground of the analysis. In analysing the data our focus is not, however, only on the descriptions of injustices but rather on how the residents resisted these injustices. More precisely, we ask how the residents sought spatial urban justice in resisting their displacement.

Resistance can be organised in the form of collective social movements, and this kind of public resistance could have also been anticipated in the context of large-scale terminations of tenancies. However, the interviewed residents did not describe much such resistance taking place. Instead, their talk was replete with rich and nuanced disagreement and critical expressions about the displacement processes and the consequences for their lives, which we conceptualise and analyse as everyday resistance complemented with the concept of discursive resistance, which relies on the idea that the use of language is a central means of power and is also a means of challenging established power relations, practices, and interpretations (Fairclough, 1992; Juhila, 2004).

In the following sections, we first review the previous literature on spatial injustice, displacement, and resistance and, in this manner, pave the way for our own analysis of resistance. After this, we present the research sites, interview data, and the process of analysing everyday resistance. The analysis focuses on the residents' repertoires of everyday resistance to spatial injustices involved in the displacement. We interpret these repertoires as the residents' way to voice that they did not accept the displacement as well as bring to the fore their views of more just urban renewal processes.

The article contributes to previous research first by looking at the multi-faceted consequences and dimensions of displacement in the lives of the residents. Second, the focus on everyday resistance enables the investigation of the injustice and power relations involved in the displacement processes in the context of the everyday lives of the displaced residents and the identification of forms of everyday resistance to be considered for future research. Third, on a theoretical level, the article aims to demonstrate the fruitfulness of combining housing displacement studies with the concept of spatial justice.

2. Spatial (In)Justice and Displacement

Spatial justice is the concept used in the field of critical geography to reflect how justice is related to spaces and spatiality and how different forms of injustices are created and maintained in processes of spatialisation (Dikeç, 2001, p. 1785). Dikeç (2001, pp. 1786–1787) considers Harvey's (1973) book *Social Justice and the City* and Young's idea of an "unoppressive city" accessible to everyone (Young, 1990; see also Tsavdaroglou, 2020, p. 232) to be fundamental resources in studying spatial (in)justice. However, Soja (2010, p. 26) notes that "spatial justice" as a specific term was rarely used before the turn of the millennium and that Dikeç's (2001) article on justice and spatial imagination was an important contribution in the field to end this silence.

Later, Soja's (2010) influential book *Seeking Spatial Justice*, along with various other publications, developed this research further.

Research on spatial (in)justice understands space as an integral and constituent part of social life and interaction as well as an element of justice (Cresswell, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 2010). As Soja (2010) writes, "[justice] has a *consequential geography*, a spatial expression that is more than just a background reflection or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped" (p. 1, emphasis in original). In other words, space is not a passive stage where social life and interaction occur but something that people conceive, interpret, and construct and, thus, live by in their everyday lives (Purcell, 2002, p. 102). Soja (2010) underlines that as spatial (in)justice is always connected to other forms of (in)justice (for example, related to global, legislative, or economic questions or class, gender, and ethnic issues), the aim is not to substitute other perspectives or to introduce spatial determinism (see also Marcuse, 2009, pp. 4, 18). However, as an "integral and formative component of justice itself," it forms an important, less studied, and marginalised aspect of justice (Soja, 2010, pp. 1, 17).

Spatial (in)justice can be studied at many levels and in various contexts, starting with justice related to the human body and ending with questions related to the entire globe and covering, for example, issues such as sexual harassment, nationalism, and environmental pollution (see Soja, 2010, p. 31). Research literature concentrating on spatial (in)justice in urban spaces (i.e., the context of this study) is often inspired by Lefebvre's (1996) formulation of "the right to the city." In a much-cited quote (e.g., Dikeç, 2001, p. 1790; Purcell, 2002, p. 102), Lefebvre writes:

> The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the "marginal" and even for the "privileged"). (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 34; the quote in its original French can be found in Lefebvre, 1986, p. 170)

Purcell (2002) interprets Lefebvre's formulation as meaning that membership of the city is not based on nationality, ethnicity, or birth but "is earned by living out the routines of everyday life in the space of the city" (p. 102). Muñoz (2018, p. 372) adds an important point to the discussion by arguing that participation in everyday routines is difficult without stable housing and homes, which serve as personal safe places and enable social and spatial mobility to other urban spaces. Furthermore, having one's own home in an area that feels like a homely neighbourhood creates well-being. Gentrification that produces home displacement can be seen as a crucial source of injustice in this sense (e.g., Atkinson, 2015; Davidson, 2009; Watt, 2021). As Pull et al. (2021) put it: "It is in the act of displacement that housing injustice finds its prime expression. Therefore, displacement needs to take a much more central place in our understanding of urban injustice" (p. 1).

In previous studies, displacement has been shown to create uncertainty and instability in housing pathways (Desmond & Hollberger, 2015; Helbrecht, 2018; Perälä et al., 2023; Pull, 2020). Displacement has also been seen as reflecting societal power structures, specifically affecting population groups that are unable to resist

the processes (Valli, 2021). An extreme manifestation of urban injustice is homelessness, as it means living in a city in a state of continuous displacement (Preece et al., 2020) and without one's own stable place from which to participate in city life and access urban spaces (Muñoz, 2018).

3. Seeking Spatial Justice and Strategies of Resistance

As the title of Soja's (2010) book *Seeking Spatial Justice* indicates, he suggests that as oppressive and unjust geographies are socially constructed, they can also be resisted by creating and seeking room for more enabling, emancipatory, and equal spatial spaces (Soja, 2010, pp. 37, 48). In urban contexts, seeking spatial justice means struggling for everyone's right to the city.

In previous research, resistance to spatial injustices in urban contexts has been linked to the gentrification of traditional working-class neighbourhoods and the related displacement pressure of low-income population groups (Dekel, 2020; Helbrecht, 2018; Lees, 2014; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Valli, 2021), as well as rights to housing and urban space in general (DeVerteuil, 2011). In addition, various strategies of resistance have been analysed, as described below.

Newman and Wyly (2006) identify public and private strategies of resistance in their analysis of gentrification in New York City (see also Polanska & Richard, 2021). These include arrangements at the household level to resist displacement, such as sharing housing with others or settling for poorer-quality housing. Such tactics of "staying put" have also been identified in other studies, and they consist of a variety of legal and extra-legal means by which residents, residents' associations, and other local actors seek to maintain homes and fight against housing inequalities (DeVerteuil, 2011; Gustafsson et al., 2019). Public strategies include rent regulation, which Newman and Wyly's (2006) interviewees recognised as the single most important form of public intervention that had helped them to secure their apartments and resist displacement.

Resistance has also taken the form of open protests and social movements. In the 2000s, capital areas throughout the world witnessed the rise of anti-eviction and anti-gentrification movements organised by residents, which have aimed at letting residents stay in properties (Helbrecht, 2018; Lees et al., 2018). This mobilisation has been used to shift the power relations that shape who has the right to stay put or to be mobile and on what terms, as Maeckelbergh (2012) summarises (see also Audycka, 2021). Sometimes, resistance is the only option at hand if households lack alternatives of somewhere else to move to (Marcuse, 1985). In some instances, people may be able to resist direct displacement but suffer from indirect displacement (Marcuse, 1985), emotional displacement (Valli, 2021), or symbolic displacement (Atkinson, 2015), resulting from changes in their gentrifying neighbourhoods.

In our data, public and collective resistance were almost completely absent. Only two interviewees mentioned attempts to bring the issue to public attention. Hence, to answer our research question of how the residents sought spatial urban justice in resisting their displacement, we chose as our starting point the theory of everyday resistance outlined by Johansson and Vinthagen (2016, 2020; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). The theory highlights the often covert and unpolitical manifestations of resistance. Everyday resistance is, first of all, rarely public or collective, and seldom has a clear, intentional agenda (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 18). Rather, it takes place on an individual level and in different forms that vary

according to the context and situation. Furthermore, acts of everyday resistance do not necessarily have to have any effects or outcomes. It is enough that they have the potential to subvert existing power relations.

One important contribution of the concept of everyday resistance is its emphasis on the possibility of agency despite the lack of open protest and political power. As Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) write, "everyday resistance is a type of act available to all subaltern subjects, all the time, in some form or another" (p. 36). They also claim that social sciences have too often focused on public, direct, and overt forms of resistance, leaving everyday resistance outside the scientific discourse of power and resistance (p. 38). Their theory emphasises Foucault's (1982, 1990) idea of the interconnectedness of power and resistance (see also Fairclough, 1992). Therefore, the analysis of resistance is also an analysis of power, and vice versa; each of these dimensions can create the other (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p. 34). In our research, these starting points were critical. Although our interviewees did not have visible or collective forms of resistance at their disposal, we found that their comments in the interview setting were an important form of resistance that allowed them to discuss and bring wider attention to otherwise invisible issues. Some of the participants openly stated that the interview was their way of making the injustices they and the other residents had experienced known to others. This led us to approach the interviews discursively, as counter-speech or "talking back" to various injustices experienced in the displacement processes (Juhila, 2004).

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Research Sites, Data, and Ethics

The sites for the study are four housing displacement processes that took place in Finnish growth centres between 2020 and 2022, forcing the residents of social or supportive housing to move out of their rental homes. The first site concerned around 200 residents who were displaced from an old municipal rental housing area near a city centre. It had been decided that the houses were either to be renovated or demolished to increase the housing capacity of the valuable land. The second and third sites covered one block of flats each, with 60 and 17 residents, respectively, managed by non-governmental organisations offering supportive housing based on permanent tenancies for people with a homelessness background. These houses were sold for more profitable purposes. The fourth site was a suburban block of flats with around 70 residents. These residents were displaced due to a large renovation project concerning the building and the flats. All four processes can be conceptualised as structural evictions or "renovictions" (Pull, 2020) related to urban development, which are increasingly common causes of displacement. Furthermore, all four sites had a somewhat bad reputation, suffering from a territorial stigma (Smets & Kusenbach, 2020), and the processes were partly motivated by the desire to stop the degradation of the sites and their immediate neighbourhoods.

The principle that was applied in all four processes was that the displaced residents would be relocated to new homes. This was also the case for most of them, leading to a general view among public officials of the processes being quite successful. However, some individuals were left homeless (Mäki et al., 2023). Residents also had varying degrees of influence over the type and location of the housing into which they could move. Furthermore, the process significantly worsened the health and well-being of many (Perälä et al., 2023). Regarding the background of the residents, a large proportion of them had a history that included homelessness, substance abuse, and/or mental health problems and required or had required

support in their housing. However, many had been living in their current location or area for a long time, having exited a state of homelessness.

The total number of displaced people in all sites was approximately 345. Of these, we were able to arrange qualitative face-to-face interviews with 39 individuals (20 in site 1, 14 in site 2, 3 in site 3, and 2 in site 4). The interviewees were contacted through the staff involved in the displacement processes at the different sites or by approaching them directly. As the process of displacement had happened two years earlier in site 4, we reached fewer interviewees concerning that process. Informed consent to participate in the study was secured. The participants were given information about the research and ethics and were told that they could withdraw from participating at any stage of the study. A formal ethical review of the study was carried out before collecting the data.

Of the interviewees, 32 were men and 7 were women. All were ethnic Finns. The estimated age of the interviewees ranged from 30 to 75 years. The interviewees were representative of all the displaced residents in terms of gender and age. However, those who were left homeless during the process could not be reached for interview. Also, the interviewees of site 1 represented mostly long-term residents, who probably produced more resistance talk towards evictions than shorter-term residents would have expressed. With regard to gender and age, we did not identify any differences in displaying resistance.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Apart from one group interview, the interviews were individual interviews. The interviews were conducted by three different researchers following a jointly designed semi-structured interview format. The interviews covered four themes: (a) life and living in the displacement area/site, (b) the displacement process, (c) settling into a new home, and (d) thoughts on support in general and specifically during the process. The interviewees were also able to discuss topics of interest to them.

Resistance was not initially one of the interview themes but emerged as a key topic during the interviews. Whilst responding to the pre-structured interview themes, the interviewees expressed in many ways disagreement with the official justifications for renovations and the terminations of their rental agreements as well as urban renewal processes in general. They thus created resistance as an important interview topic that we wanted to respect by making it an object of research in its own right.

4.2. Analysis

The analysis proceeded as a combination of data-driven and theory-driven methods. After identifying resistance as one of the key themes of the interviews, we started locating segments of talk from our transcribed interviews that we interpreted as including some type of oppositional talk towards the displacement processes and their injustices. We used the Atlas.ti software for this process. The amount and shape of this talk varied among the interviewees; some were very critical, while others were more concerned with the small details of the process. There was also oppositional talk in the data that was not related to displacement, such as the interviewees' treatment by societal institutions. We did not include these segments in the analysis unless they were linked to displacement in some way. In total, we identified 88 segments of interviews that included resistance talk towards the displacement processes. At this stage, we also looked at the target or object of resistance as expressed in the interviews.

In the second phase, we applied Johansson and Vinthagen's (2016) analytical framework to our data. This consists of four dimensions of everyday resistance: repertoires, agents, spatialisation, and temporalisation. Of these dimensions, spatialisation was the starting point of the analysis, as resistance was self-evidently spatialised in our data, given the underlying displacement and urban renewal processes that we were investigating. In addition, temporalisation was another given dimension in the analysis; the interviewees talked about the time before displacement, the phase of the actual evictions, and the time afterwards when they were settling into new homes. With respect to agents, we asked who was resisting and who and/or what was being resisted. The focus in our analysis was on the fourth dimension—in other words, on the repertoires the interviewees used in their everyday resistance. The concept of repertoire is borrowed from political scientist Tilly (1995) to describe the different forms that resistance takes (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016).

We constructed the repertoires using a data-driven approach. First, we looked more closely at the 88 segments to see what forms resistance took in them. From this, we identified four different repertoires of resistance: reflective, emotional, rejective, and face-to-face. This crystallised how resistance appeared in our data. We understood that all these repertoires were discursively constructed in the interview talk.

In the following section, we first present an overview of the results of our analysis. We then proceed to demonstrate in more detail how the interviewees applied various resistance repertoires in resisting the injustices of displacement in its different phases and thus sought spatial urban justice. We refer to interviewees by a code showing the site where the interview was collected and the interviewee's order number as an interviewee in that site.

5. Results

5.1. Who Resisted, What Was Resisted, and How?

In most of the interviews, the agents of resistance were the interviewed residents themselves. In some cases, the interviews also included descriptions of resistance by other displaced residents. A notable feature in the data was the absence of resistance from other actors, such as local politicians or community workers. The residents described themselves as standing individually or even being alone in their criticism of the displacement. As one of the interviewees described: "Someone high up makes a decision that the buildings will be demolished, and no one says a thing but behaves like sheep….It feels like we don't matter at all."

The spatial injustices experienced in the displacement process and resisted by the interviewees included the following:

1. Stigmatisation of housing and the displaced residents;
2. Unsatisfactory political and managerial preparation of decisions leading to displacement, including poor information delivery to residents, a lack of communication or listening to residents, and an avoidance of responsibilities;
3. The selling and renoviction of homes to more well-off people (gentrification);
4. Suggesting new accommodations and places to live that were unsuitable and undesirable;
5. Leaving some residents without homes, resulting in homelessness;

6. Local city planning and housing policy that cared mostly for the interests of businesses and the more well-off residents.

The first experienced spatial injustice can be seen as fundamental, forming a basis for other ones. The interviewees described how their neighbourhoods and houses had been stigmatised by the city, thereby justifying the displacements. This experience resonates well with the concept of territorial stigmatisation (Smets & Kusenbach, 2020). The place-based stigma had also been attached to the residents themselves, making them "second-class citizens," as one of the interviewees described it.

As mentioned earlier, the interviewees' repertoires of resistance almost never included public or collective resistance. Resistance was private and not public (Newman & Wyly, 2006). Nevertheless, the interviews contained a rich collection of the repertoires of everyday resistance that we categorised into four groups:

1. Reflective resistance (39 segments): reflecting and critically analysing the displacement process, its origins, reasons, motivations, implementation, and consequences;
2. Emotional resistance (21 segments): expressing negative feelings, such as sadness and anger, towards injustices in the displacement process;
3. Rejective resistance (22 segments): refusing to accept an offered flat after eviction, feeling that it is not suitable;
4. Face-to-face resistance (17 segments): directly verbalising disagreement to someone concerning certain unfair practices in the displacement.

Reflective and emotional repertoires can be described as passive resistance, including "only" a critical analysis of displacement processes (reflective resistance) or descriptions of emotional reactions towards spatial injustices (emotional resistance). Rejective and face-to-face repertoires were more active and were often used simultaneously, comprising specific speech and other acts that residents had used in their resistance. Repertoires were not specific to certain interviewees but were expressed in a range of interviews, and two or even three repertoires were often combined when talking about injustices.

Next, we look at the repertoires more closely to answer our research question of how the interviewed residents sought spatial justice in different phases of the displacement processes. To support our analysis, we present examples from the data that were representative of the different repertoires present in the data and cover all of the research sites (considering their size).

5.2. Seeking Spatial Justice in Displacement: Resistance Repertoires in Interview Talk

5.2.1. Reflective Resistance: Disputing the Justifications of Renewals

The residents' reflective resistance most often targeted the overall justifications for demolishing or selling the houses and how the residents were treated during the renewal processes. What made this resistance reflective in our interpretation was that it was based on some kind of analysis of the causes and consequences of the displacement process, which was then used as a means of questioning and criticising the displacement. In the interview quote below, one of the displaced residents, Alex (pseudonyms are used to refer to all the interviewees in this research), responds to the interviewer's question on whether he agrees

or disagrees with the decision to demolish the houses. Alex's reflective resistance is based on a comparison with the processes in two other nearby neighbourhoods, leading to criticism against the process faced by him and the other residents:

> As there were options, renovating or demolishing, I think they could have done renovations in here as they did in Kaukola and Mattila [anonymised neighbourhoods nearby]. They did renovations there, and they gave temporary accommodations [for residents] so that they could move back. So, that is [why] this creates lots of thoughts as well. Kind of conflicting thoughts about why these should be demolished; and where we all will end up, as there were, I think, a bit over 200 flats there. Where can we all be housed? Of course, it created this kind of thought. (Interview 1, Site 1)

At a different displacement site, Erik questions the justification of the renewal in a similar manner. When asked what he would have done differently, he provided the following response:

> I wouldn't have sold the building at all [with a laughing voice]. Simply. Because it is not known, although a new shopping centre was built there, it is not known how much it would have affected its surroundings. Some, of course, but how much? Kumpula [name of the house] had been there anyway, already over 10 years. The relationships with neighbours had been settled down, and everything worked. (Interview 1, Site 2)

Erik's answer is very straightforward in protesting the decision to sell a building containing homes of over 50 previously homeless residents. He grounds his opinion by suggesting that it was a false cultural assumption that a new shopping centre and the residents living in the sold building would not have been compatible in the same area. In fact, in Erik's opinion, there was more evidence that it would have worked well because the building and its residents had a long history in the area and the residents' relations with their other neighbours had already "settled down," to use Erik's description.

Another form of reflective resistance included talk about unjustified and unequal urban planning. The interviewees critically asked why their houses, buildings, and flats were not renovated earlier, although this had been talked about a great deal during the past few years. Some of the residents had also proposed renovations, but according to the interviewees, nothing had been done. The residents claimed that this was partly purposeful so that more well-off people could move to new or renovated houses. Elmo describes this as follows (Interview 9, Site 2):

> Elmo — The entire 10 years [when the resident was living there], there was talk about renovation.
>
> Interviewer — But there wasn't any, was there?
>
> Elmo — No. Now loft apartments should come there, money talks, money talks. It's in a good location, after all.

Finally, a very common criticism of urban planning was related to a lack of transparency. As Jan describes: "These kinds of cases that are societally [significant] and touch people should be conducted and played out

much more openly" (Interview 5, Site 1). Another interviewee described the undemocratic and non-transparent nature of the process with a story about an eviction notice she had unexpectedly found on her doorstep and the shock that had accompanied it.

5.2.2. Emotional Resistance: Reacting Affectively to the Injustice of Displacement

Whereas the reflective resistance contains mostly retrospective and evaluative talk on injustices related to displacement, the residents' emotional resistance includes remembering unpleasant feelings associated with the displacement. These feelings are usually presented as both personal and shared among the residents, as can be seen from the following description provided by Anton (Interview 1, Site 3):

Anton	Some reacted in a really shocked way and found it really hard. Others seemed to not care at all what happened to them. But I wonder if it was a kind of protective cover or effect that they didn't want to think about it. People can behave like that as well; if they don't want to think about difficult matters, they close them out of their minds.
Interviewer	Did you also react a bit like that? You said that you became a bit depressed?
Anton	Yes, in a way. I focused on substance use during that time, so I didn't have to think.

According to Valli (2015, p. 1206), these kinds of "emotional components of displacement" are essential to study as they open a perspective on the power relations involved in the processes. In the description given by Anton, the power is present as a force that comes unexpectedly and deprives residents of the opportunity to react with anything other than shock or escaping the situation, in Anton's case by escaping to substance use. Sometimes, the residents commented on the futility of emotional resistance. As one interviewee described, the process "was mourned" and "raged about," but this was done only within the displacement sites with no connections or encounters with the decision-makers (Interview 2, Site 2). In other words, this kind of resistance stayed among the residents and was not heard by those who had made the displacement decisions or who had the power to possibly change them.

Not all residents reacted emotionally, but some nevertheless displayed an understanding of others' emotional reactions, as illustrated by Otto in the following (Interview 7, Site 2):

Otto	Well, many people there were really pissed off. They had been living there for some years, but I don't fucking want years.
Interviewer	Yeah, [the place] was not for you…that kind of place [where one wants to] stay?
Otto	No.
Interviewer	Yeah, but for those to whom it possibly was like that [a good place to stay], it was a bit more tough?
Otto	Yes. There were certainly those as well. One [resident] didn't want to leave at all.

Above, Otto thinks back on how those residents who had been living long-term in their homes were angry about the evictions. Otto himself did not feel the need to resist the eviction, as his plan was not to stay in the house for very long. However, his comments can be interpreted as including emotional resistance towards the system, which may have not given him other options than staying in the house in the first place despite his own wishes and plans.

Finally, emotional resistance was present in the descriptions of what had happened and would happen to the residents' own homes and houses after their departures. A central feeling was frustration, as two of the displacement sites were still empty and without any use almost a year after the displacement processes. As one of the interviewees noted: "As far as I have noticed, nothing else has happened other than washing machines and dryers disappearing from the washing room in January…but nothing else has happened in that house for almost half a year" (Interview 1, Site 2). This raised the question among the interviewees of why they were forced to move out of their homes in the first place and in such a quick time frame. Another recurring feeling was sorrow over a lost place soon to be inhabited by other people, discussed for instance in the group interview: "It annoys, irritates a bit, somehow, that they are now there in our places…it was our garden…we played on this sand field" (Interview 9, Site 1).

5.3. Rejective and Face-to-Face Resistance: Refusing and Criticising Offered Accommodations

Among the resistance repertoires, rejective and face-to-face resistance are the most active. These repertoires are connected to the times when the residents were searching for new neighbourhoods and flats after the termination of their tenancies. The repertoires were used mostly in specific situations, especially in discussions concerning certain housing options with landlords or social workers, and could be compared with private resistance strategies described by Newman and Wyly (2006). The following quote is from Matias, who refused to take the first apartment offered to him because of its supposed bad condition (Interview 1, Site 4):

Matias	I rejected the first one [flat] in Backstreet. I said, "I'm not coming to look at this; I know what kind of flats those are."
Interviewer	Why did you reject it?
Matias	Because I knew what kind of flats they were.
Interviewer	What were those like?
Matias	Well, I wouldn't go to any hovel as I already lived in a hovel.

Matias describes the episode of rejection by reporting his own determined face-to-face speech in the situation: "I'm not coming to look at this; I know what kind of flats those are." He explains to the interviewer the reason for his rejection, which is the knowledge that the offered flat was a "hovel," similar to the one from which he had just been evicted. Using the term "hovel" for the flats indicates that, in Matias's opinion, they were both in bad condition and not fulfilling the criteria of proper homes. In this way, Matias is also showing his agency in the face of public officials not understanding the situation.

Similarly, Oiva narrates how he was first planned to be housed in a place that he found unsuitable. He did not reject his first option as clearly as Matias, but it can be implied from his description of it in the interview that he considered it less than suitable and his next option was much better:

> Then in the beginning they would have thrown me to that Yellow House [name of a supported housing unit]; I kind of didn't like it, as it was full of old and disabled people. Luckily, I then had Silja [social care worker] inform me that I would get a flat from here. (Interview 4, Site 2)

Rejections were not only tied to individual housing preferences. Sometimes, the residents refused offered flats and neighbourhoods because they wanted to live near some old neighbours and far away from certain other people. Anna describes this in the following, voicing also the dissatisfaction felt by others:

> It annoys many people here, including me, that the people were housed in different places. It was a bit difficult that [we] were in there, in Marjala, in Mustikkala, in Puolukkala [names of housing areas] and in here…that the community was broken up. It felt somehow bad….It was for many like, "I don't want to go there, as they also live there." It was difficult for many to go to where a flat was offered. They didn't necessarily accept it right away. For example, Maija, who now lives upstairs in the same house where Antti lives downstairs, would have got a flat in Mustikkala [name of a neighbourhood]: "I won't move to Mustikkala." Then, she was asked how about Lakkala [name of a neighbourhood]? "Yes, I can move there, as Lina and Kalle live there, too." (Interview 7, Site 1)

In the quote, Anna explains rejective resistance by people's wishes to have familiar people and old mates living nearby, which helps with settling down in a new living area. Also, in this description, the agency of the residents is highlighted as well as their ability to negotiate better housing for themselves.

Overall, rejective and face-to-face resistance seemed to be rather successful as a private resistance strategy of not accepting non-preferred housing options after evictions. It also clearly emancipated the residents and increased their satisfaction with the otherwise unfair displacement process. However, as a private strategy (cf. Newman & Wyly, 2006), it can also be fragile, as was seen in the story told by several residents about their neighbour in one displacement site, a big apartment block of flats. The resident had refused to move out of his apartment and lived there for some time without electricity or heating, also vulnerable to robbing and violence as the building was sometimes broken into. As the interviewees described, with the severe frosts, the workers had had to almost force the resident into his new home. They also wondered what would have happened to the resident if the workers had not been patient enough to watch him resist for such a long time. Would he have become homeless again?

6. Conclusion

Our analysis shows that even if resistance is not collective or publicly visible, this does not mean that it does not exist. The framework of everyday resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020), complemented with the ideas of discursive resistance constructed in language use, revealed different types of resistance repertoires in our data. Through these repertoires, the interviewed residents questioned the processes of displacement and its consequences in various ways, making them active agents in the process despite the lack of open contestation. By doing so, they sought spatial justice for themselves (Soja, 2010).

Most of the resistance was reflective, which shows that the residents had the ability to see and reflect on the different aspects of the displacement processes. They clearly pointed out the injustices regarding the unstableness of their housing pathways, losing their homes, and becoming territorially stigmatised due to their living conditions, and presented their own descriptions of fairer alternatives to the processes. Overall, they had good abilities in perceiving and criticising the prevailing power relations in urban planning from the margins and thus disputed the justifications of renewals producing displacement. The question is how to better use these reflection abilities in the future by involving the residents in the design of urban renewal processes.

Emotional resistance—in other words, reacting affectively to the experienced injustice of displacement—came to the fore as an important form of resistance. Not only did it highlight power relations involved in the displacement process (cf. Valli, 2021) but it also showed the negative consequences of the use of power, both for the targeted individuals and communities and for society at large. If left unaddressed, emotional resistance can generate bitterness towards decision-making and planning processes and, in this way, increase marginalisation. This was visible in the text segments in which the residents described their own and their neighbours' reactions to the shock of displacement, which included the loss of their homes and communities and their helplessness in the processes. This resonates well with Soja's (2010) ideas of how the geographies of people's everyday lives can construct injustices. Many were still angry or sad about their past treatment at the time of the interview, even though some time had already passed. This illustrates the importance of identifying and dealing with emotions in urban renewal processes and of designing and implementing these processes in ways that do not put people in situations that generate bitterness or other emotions related to feelings of unfairness.

As stated above, descriptions of public and collective resistance were almost absent from the interview data. However, as well as invisible reflective and emotional resistance, interviewees also described moments of more open resistance when the tenancies were terminated and they were finding new places to live. This resistance, consisting of rejective and face-to-face repertoires criticising offered accommodations and refusing them, occurred only at the individual level, leaving the residents quite alone in their acts of resistance. Despite this, some residents achieved some degree of success in resisting and making things work in their favour in the form of slightly better flats and nicer neighbourhoods. This should not be underestimated, as successful resistance clearly had a positive impact on some of the interviewees' assessments of the displacement process. This raises questions of how and under what conditions this kind of successful individual-level rejective and face-to-face resistance could have been expanded to more collective resistance, for example by jointly rejecting certain offered housing options in certain neighbourhoods.

With regards to discussions on "the right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1996), the results of this study demonstrate how far this right was from our interviewees' experiences in their everyday lives. On the contrary, they reported on their lack of rights as city residents; for example, their voices were not heard in the city planning concerning their own homes and neighbourhoods. Still, their repertoires of resistance evidence profound and rich analyses of spatial injustices that should be considered in addressing similar issues while striving to create fair cities in the future that value all residents.

This study was based on 39 interviews with displaced residents from four different processes of relocation. The number of interviews was rather large but inevitably still somewhat selective. We assume that those who volunteered for interviews wanted to talk and reflect upon their experiences of the processes, typically from a

critical point of view, and believed that providing an interview was one way to be heard and made visible. This may have caused more "resistance-rich" talk than would have been the case if we had been able to interview all the concerned residents. However, the variety of repertoires of resistance could also have increased with more interviewees. If we had reached more displaced residents, we could have found, for example, a repertoire of withdrawal—an extreme form of passive resistance in a situation interpreted as hopelessness regarding future housing pathways based on previous experiences of spatial injustices. This was already visible in some of our interviews, where the interviewees described their heavy substance abuse as a way of escaping the reality of displacement and its consequences.

With respect to future research, our results underline the importance of listening to the people and their concerns in the implementation of urban renewal processes. The use of participatory methods, where residents' resistance would be made known and discussed during the processes, would also be highly recommended. This would not only prevent spatial injustice in urban reform processes but could also make the processes more socially sustainable. In our cases, two out of four sites were still awaiting renovation a year after the evictions of the residents, and cost estimates for the processes had increased. There was also vandalism on the sites, making them even more stigmatised. Part of the reason was poor preparation of processes, which could have benefitted from the incorporation of research in the earlier stages of the processes. For instance, residents' options for smaller renovations, enabling them to stay in the sites instead of displacement, might have been implemented or at least considered.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data of this study are not publicly available due to the sensitive nature of the information and the need to protect participant privacy.

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Section III.

Crisis, Stress, and Coping Mechanisms

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ARTICLE

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Managing Refugees' Housing Risks Through Responsibilisation Practices

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Abstract

This article examines the concepts of "housing risk" and "responsibilisation," and their impact on housing inclusion for refugees in a northern Swedish municipality. The interviews reveal that local policies often fail to recognize the welfare state's responsibility to ensure housing for refugees, instead shifting this burden to social workers, individuals, and informal networks. Social workers face ethical dilemmas in balancing their roles as defenders of housing rights and extensions of the welfare state. The findings suggest that the discursive framing of refugees as "risky objects" reflects an ideology that discourages their long-term settlement and silences housing inequality. Consequently, managing refugees' housing risks through responsibilisation practices, rather than addressing systemic inequalities and national political failures, risks backfiring. The study calls for a reevaluation of housing policies by acknowledging housing inequalities and incorporating social workers' insights and local conditions outside metropolitan areas.

Keywords

homelessness; housing risk; refugees; responsibilisation; Sweden

1. Introduction

Case studies from all over the world suggest that the groups who have the greatest difficulty attaining a safe position in the housing market are growing in number, and that their weak position is becoming grimmer (e.g., Christophers, 2022; Listerborn, 2018; López-Morales et al., 2019). Similar developments can be seen elsewhere in Europe, with considerable challenges to refugees' housing inclusion as they encounter developments involving a shortage of affordable housing and a marketization of housing building and

supplies. In this context, while struggling to gain labour market and housing integration, refugees are also likely to face ethnic discrimination and exclusionary practices (JPE Urban Europe, 2021; Zill et al., 2020). In Sweden, the housing arrangements for refugees differ substantially between municipalities (Sahlin, 2020), with municipalities often failing to create sustainable housing and living conditions (Holmqvist et al., 2022). The right to adequate housing among non-citizen residents, including refugees, has been hindered by the frequently unstable conditions of the Swedish housing market (Borevi & Bengtsson, 2015; Hellgren, 2016). Moreover, the growing volatility in migration regulations and the precarious legal positions associated with short-term residence permits adversely impact access to citizenship entitlements to welfare benefits and impede the attainment of stable employment and housing (Hellgren, 2016). Both Swedish and international research has demonstrated that measures of integration do not stand alone—adequate housing is crucial for refugees' ability to feel at home and create a future in the new country (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kim & Smets, 2020; Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). It is evident that the temporary housing solutions and the housing insecurity they create extend the experience of being put to flight and, more importantly, impede the process of making a place to live into a *home* (e.g., Duyvendak, 2011; Smets & Sneep, 2017). As underlined by Kim and Smets (2020), it is necessary to distinguish between the material dimensions of having a place to live—a house—and living in a home, the latter including emotional and psychological dimensions. Moreover, refugees respond to fear in their original homes by leaving and look for a *sense of home* in their host societies (Kim & Smets, 2020, p. 608). In this text we mostly address the concept of housing, meaning the material prerequisites for a home, focusing on the stability of the housing provision and risks associated with it as housing is the first step towards a place where one can belong and continue to create a sense of feeling at home.

The focus here is on the interrelated processes of local housing provision for refugees and the neoliberalisation of integration strategies in a municipality in northern Sweden. It is a great paradox that Sweden adheres to an increasingly more restrictive migration regime as new inhabitants are needed in all segments of society. However, the policies and planning strategies for attracting new inhabitants to the expansive cities in the north, as well as to the rest of Sweden, stand in contrast to the shortage of affordable housing. Hence, it is essential that there be some degree of welfare-state efforts to build affordable housing and to enhance "job readiness" among the newly arrived; housing integration must be placed at centre stage as one of the important facilitators of the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008). Swedish integration policy involves institutional and legal goals which emphasise economic self-sufficiency through various instruments in welfare policies to promote incentives for a faster integration (J. K. Larsson, 2015). All the same, the difficulties refugees experience when it comes to attaining affordable housing throw a spanner in the works of achieving this fast integration.

Conceptually, we take as our point of departure the framework of "housing risk." In so doing, we analyse whether the perceptions and management of housing risk in policy practices enhance housing inclusion for refugees. Our application of the concept of risk involves an understanding that risks are socially constructed and vary depending on social, political, cultural, and historical contexts (Douglas, 1992; Hilgartner, 1992; Latour, 1996). A contrasting view emphasises the individual her/himself as a carrier of risks, i.e., a risk object, which entails a focus on identifying and treating the various characteristics that are deemed to place an individual more at risk (e.g., Parsell & Marston, 2016). In this article we employ a relational understanding of risks, as it is shaped by collective and individual understandings that risks are produced and reproduced, and that the policy context is part of not only risk management but also risk construction (see also Boholm &

Corvellec, 2010). Unlike other housing and integration research, which often focuses on cases in metropolitan areas, we analyse the reasonably typical case of Swedish local housing provision practices in a mid-sized city in northern Sweden. Our aim is to focus on the foundational assumptions embedded in the narratives of local officials regarding homelessness among refugees. We analyse what is left unproblematised or silenced in the problem representations of the housing support that is provided, and what the effects of this are (Bacchi, 1999). This approach broadens current perspectives on housing risks and inequalities by prioritising the narratives of local policy-makers and social workers in a municipality far from the metropolitan areas that are considered in the national discourse on houselessness, addressing the intrinsic perceptions of risks and problems associated with housing solutions for refugees.

2. Methodology

To showcase the problem of local housing provision for refugees, we build on a total of 19 semi-structured interviews with politicians (5), social workers and integration officers (9), and people involved in civic society (5) in a northern Swedish mid-sized city during 2019–2020. In addition, we also interviewed refugees (11). The analyses here are based largely on the interviews with the officials and politicians, with the added inclusion of a quote from one of the refugees, later in the text. The interviewees were selected because they were all considered to contribute to the articulation of the local "problem" as well as the political "solution." The sample of politicians reflects the variation of political parties represented in local government. Although their differing views on housing strategies are to some extent based on their political beliefs, we do not seek to analytically explain various expressions anchored in political representation. All interviews were semi-structured, with thematic questions covering the interviewees' work with integration and housing in general. The questions also revolved around moral and ideological issues relating to their work, conflicting issues in the relationships between actors and authorities, and the sometimes-contradictory solutions emanating from various problem representations and conceptions of housing risk. Thematically, questions revolved around their respective tasks and experiences of problematising and solving housing and integration (Patton, 2002). Because this article is focused on assumptions about problems and risks associated with refugees' housing and what ought to be done about it, we took an inductively inspired approach to the gathered material. We coded the data and constructed themes based on the gathered material following the research project's overarching aim: strategies for refugees' housing integration. We categorized the themes and predominant images (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), and early on, introduced "problem views" and "risks" as sensitizing theoretical concepts that we found useful in seeing and organizing the data (e.g., Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). In the second round of analysis, theoretical perspectives were introduced in the analysis process, in which housing risks and responsibilisation emerged as guiding concepts that provided a deeper understanding of how local housing policy for refugees is legitimised and practised.

In our analytical approach, we were inspired by the "what's the problem represented to be" (WPR) approach introduced and formulated by Bacchi (1999, 2009). In this approach, policy-making is a field in which there are struggles over meanings, while the guiding premise of WPR problematisation is that "every policy proposal contains within it an explicit or implicit diagnosis of the 'problem'" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 1). The term "problematisation" refers to a mode of approaching data that involves questioning "accepted truths." How problems are represented matters because the way they are articulated or thought about affects what should be done about them. We regard officials' narratives as an arena for political practices, in this case, narratives about refugees' housing integration. Based on Bacchi's critical policy analysis, we have examined

how officials and policy-makers responsible for housing and integration have represented the problems and the underlying assumptions of the problem descriptions, as well as what is not prioritised or said, or is even obscured. As one of our thematical findings was "risks," we apply a relational understanding of housing risks which involves a theoretical analysis of risk definitions and how they function as a semantic frame in the problem representations that we have encountered.

2.1. The Case

Sweden as a whole needs an influx of migrants and competencies, but the regions in northern Sweden are even more so characterised by a slow population increase and an elderly population, particularly in the inland areas (Sandow & Lundholm, 2023). Several large "green" infrastructural projects have been launched in these regions, and it is estimated that the two northernmost regions must grow by 100,000 people (approx. 20 percent) over the next decade and make vast investments in housing and infrastructure in order to meet the growing demand for labour (P. Larsson, 2022).

The municipality under study has a population of 130,000, predominantly residing in the mid-sized university town of 90,000 that is renowned for its progressive stance on political leadership and citizen welfare. The municipality and city are pseudonymised in the article as the identification of the municipality in focus is not of analytical importance. Instead, we focus on the context around the planning and refugee reception which is taking place on both municipal and regional as well as national levels. The municipality maintains a relatively ample public housing stock and low homelessness rates, in both national and international comparisons. However, similar to the national trend, new housing construction rates have stagnated since the 1970s, and in 1980 we see an increase in owner-occupied housing due to beneficial loans, rents, and subsidies, at the same time as some of the affordable public housing stock is sold to international real estate companies; hence, the housing market has been the main cause of increased inequality in Sweden (Christophers, 2022).

In 2024 the municipality declared a goal of building 2,000 houses per year for the next few years to create "a more well-functioning housing market" (Umeå kommun, 2022, p. 5) as well as facilitate the ambitious population goal of 200,000 by 2050. Although the city is the largest in the region, it faces challenges in global competitiveness and is often perceived as peripheral in the national discourse. Furthermore, despite the need for population growth, the municipality has opted to host relatively few refugees (Swedish Migration Agency, 2022).

3. Residualisation in Swedish Housing Policies

The Swedish housing regime distinguishes itself by being centred around a universal housing policy aimed at all citizens, without a stock of social housing directed at vulnerable groups. The validity of this universal approach is debatable, however, and it is claimed that the Swedish housing policy is undergoing a process of residualisation in which needs-tested selective elements are increasingly being applied (Borg, 2019; Grander, 2019, 2023). Housing construction, in previous decades characterised by government subsidies and support, is dependent on private actors today. Researchers have argued that urban planning strategies are more concerned with projects aimed at attracting tourists and mobile elites outside the immediate area than with improving the quality of life of the region's most vulnerable citizens (Harvey, 1989; Hertting et al., 2022). From this perspective,

it needs to be recognised that the lack of housing for marginalised groups is related to a lack of *affordable* housing, rather than viewing it through the lens of a general housing shortage (Listerborn, 2018).

The Swedish housing regime's universal traits of "housing for all" were heavily tested during the Syrian crisis of 2015–2016 (Borg, 2019; Holmqvist et al., 2022; Wikström & Eriksson, 2023), which led to the introduction of the Settlement Act (SFS 2016:38; The Riksdag, 2016). This Act made it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for a period of at least two years for those who had had their asylum application accepted and had been "assigned" to a particular municipality. Importantly, it did not comprise *all* refugee migrants who had had their asylum application accepted but only a portion of them, who had previously been staying in accommodation supplied by the Migration Agency (or selected by UNHCR as convention refugees). This meant that the municipalities were not obliged by law to provide housing for refugees who had organized their own temporary accommodation during the asylum process. The uneven practices of housing supply for refugees (Grange & Björling, 2020; Zill et al., 2020) have created concerns about possible "integration paradoxes" as the regulation might direct refugee settlement to local contexts with housing vacancies but no job opportunities, and vice versa. In local responses to refugees' housing needs, municipalities are legally obligated to provide housing for settled refugees for a minimum of two years but have no legal obligation to provide a firsthand contract or to prolong the housing contract beyond these two years. Taken together, these steering mechanisms create a division of housing entitlements that includes some and excludes others, and that involves a subcategorisation of entitlements (Sahlin, 2020).

4. Housing Risks, Problems, and Solutions

A gradual shift has occurred in welfare-state policy areas in the use of measures emphasising individual responsibility for improving one's life situation and for demonstrating an ability to live up to desirable norms of acceptable behaviours and lifestyles (Garland, 2001; Mik-Meyer & Villardsen, 2012; Rose, 1996).

Lorenz (2017) argues that neoliberal policies have promoted the privatization of public services, the retrenchment of public welfare, and restrictive measures such as workfare, constructing welfare as a burden. Increased ambiguity in local welfare-state practices has made social work practices inevitable to create "certainty" under the decline of the welfare state. Lorenz (2017) suggests that managerialism and its focus on quantitative targets, along with the use of regulations for interventions, often lead to a situation in which rationing services becomes a key concern in local welfare practices. In this context, social workers often end up playing the (unintended) role of risk reducers. This influences their often-ambiguous position between clients and the state, trying to balance individual needs, state regulations, and limited resources. They often act as representatives of local authorities, even though they lack the mandate to alter regulations (Lorenz, 2017).

From this perspective, housing risk is a useful concept for analysing the housing support for refugees whom the government regards as requiring intervention for their needs on the housing market to be adequately met (Stonehouse et al., 2015). In our analysis, we view risk as the product of processes that establish a relationship between a risk object and an object at risk (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010). It is an understanding of risk as resulting from situated cognition that establishes a relationship of risk linking two objects in a causal and contingent way so that the risk object is considered, in some way and under certain circumstances, to threaten the valued object at risk. Rather than being assigned an identity of danger and threat, *objects at risk* are constituted around

traits such as value, loss, vulnerability, and need for protection (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010, p. 180). Boholm and Corvellec (2010), draw on examples of relational risks: Children (*objects at risk*) should be protected from the risk of being assaulted, hurt, or killed by dangerous dogs (*risk objects*), and governance, in turn, should strive to develop adequate risk management. There is sometimes agreement in a group or in society as to what is valued, and consequently, what objects should be at risk and how they should be protected. But, since risk is defined through cognition, from another point of view a dog can also be defined as an object at risk that needs to be protected from its careless owner (Boholm, 2009). Hence, risk is not intrinsically a risk unless something or someone is perceived as a risk. Perceptions of risk are shaped by individual and collective understandings, and this within a certain historical, cultural, and political context (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010). What is a risk object for some can be an object at risk for others; likewise, the risk objects of today may easily become objects at risk tomorrow (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010, p. 182).

Neoliberal influence on risk management and governance gives rise to divisions between those who are considered active citizens, capable of managing their own risks within the free market, and those who are identified as belonging to particular "targeted populations" who require intervention in order to be enabled to take responsibility for their own risks (Rose, 1999; Stonehouse et al., 2015). Associated with this view on risk management is the concept of responsibilisation, which signifies a key strategy within neoliberal rationalities (Brown, 2015) that reconceptualises social problems into individual problems. In contemporary modes of governance, responsibilisation is often entangled with the creation of autonomy or independence; that is, making people responsible for what the welfare state used to be responsible for (Phoenix & Kelly, 2013; Rose & Lentzos, 2017). The underpinning idea is that "the strategy of rendering individual subjects' 'responsible' entails shifting the responsibility for *social* risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty etc. into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of 'self-care' or self-governance" (Phoenix & Kelly, 2013, p. 425). While tenant responsibility strategies are not new, it is claimed that they are "broadened and deepened" (Flint, 2004, p. 893) by making residents responsible for applying for housing rather than having it assigned to them by housing officers (Flint, 2004). The planning for affordable housing for groups on the margins of the housing market has declined in tandem with the normalisation of private housing consumption, leading to increased regulation and active attempts to responsibilise tenants and communities (Bachour, 2023; Listerborn, 2018).

5. Analysis

5.1. Local Municipalities' Problematisation of Refugees' Houselessness

In exploring the local case, we came across local politicians' and officials' arguments concerning the boundaries of the problem of a municipal obligation to provide refugees with housing; how long they were obliged to provide housing; and what kinds of housing provisions were realizable and realistic. The city has chosen to use a restrictive application of the Settlement Act to solve the housing needs of those refugees it does receive. The housing provision involved a stocktaking of 350 apartments owned by the public housing company. These apartments were rented by the municipality (social services), which in turn subleased them using temporary "special contracts," which involved a requirement that the tenant (the refugee) relinquish his/her right to possession. In the following sections we present a sample of the most crucial and salient solutions for housing and, following Bacchi (2009), "backtrack" the presuppositions or assumptions underpinning the support.

5.2. Problematising the "Refugee and Housing Crises"

In justifications for the restrictive housing solutions, there was a problematisation of *crises* which accordingly obscured what might have been a more generous refugee housing policy. The dedication to this crisis narrative also seems to have functioned as a justification for a municipal objection to increasing the number of refugees accepted there, and to have been used as a defence for a temporary approach to housing provision. This may also correspond to policy approaches common in other European nations during the "refugee crises," which entailed a top-down approach in response to the sudden influx of migrants (e.g., Rast et al., 2020). Locally, the situation in 2015–2016 was perceived as extraordinary, which at first allowed for housing primarily concerning shelter. The interviewees described the situation in terms of a refugee crisis that had "landed in their lap." In Swedish politics the crisis narrative was associated with the pressure that an influx of refugees would have on the welfare services and, not least, the pressure it was expected to place on an already strained housing market (e.g., Gustafsson & Johansson, 2018). The debate involved how far-reaching the municipal responsibility for the refugees was expected to be, and the degree to which an obligatory responsibility for refugees' housing fitted with the principle of municipal autonomy and self-governance (Dekker et al., 2015; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008).

In the municipal consideration of housing support for refugees, there was a recognition of refugees as a group that is at risk and in need of protection from the risk object, a heated housing market (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010). But at the same time, there was a drift over to a perception of the housing market as being *at risk* of becoming overloaded. Accompanied by the problematisation of a *refugee crisis*, a parallel problematisation concerned the *housing shortage*, put forward as a substantial part of this so-called refugee crisis. The main justification for the time-limited, secondary leases entailed a perception of housing risks associated with the high competition for available housing, long queues for rental contracts (8–12 years), and an increase in housing needs that might obstruct the desirable mobility on the local housing market. The perception of the heated housing market was offered as an argument for maintaining a modest level of refugee reception as well as a "slim line" for housing support. Thus, a central guiding principle for the municipality in order to avoid an expansion of housing risks was to treat all citizens applying for public housing the same, based on the notion of "fair treatment":

> The benefits of this [restrictive, time-limited] solution, in the eyes of the public—they cannot accuse us of prioritising refugees over other groups who are also in need of housing. We cannot risk coming under fire in the public debate—no one can accuse us of creating a VIP lane for the refugees. (Politician)

Hence, municipal leaders were concerned that what might be viewed as a "generous" housing provision for refugees, for instance providing them with a firsthand contract to begin with, would not only risk causing so-called "displacement effects" (*undanträngningseffekter*), pushing aside other inhabitants in need of housing, but would also carry a risk of political opposition and cause them to be accused of creating a "VIP lane" for refugees. Striving to reduce "social risks" such as political discontent, and public debates about "deservingness" and "belonging," local politicians chose what they saw as fair housing support, referring to the "municipal requirement to treat all citizens equally." Here the politicians made an implicit diagnosis of the "problem" (Bacchi, 2009), whereby the management of risk suddenly appeared to be of another paramount consideration: maintaining political balance and legitimacy. We can observe a shifting focus in risk perception here, with a downplaying of the recognition of refugees at risk in defence of a slim line for housing support.

5.3. Responsibilisation of Housing Inclusion

The municipal housing solutions contained underlying assumptions about refugees as well as all other citizens on the margins of housing market, involving the expectation that they would take responsibility for establishing themselves and would compete for housing on the same terms. It was claimed that in providing support, no distinctions would be made in the municipal provision of rights or in expectations for self-governance among either (Swedish-born) residents or newly arrived refugees:

> It's a regular secondary lease contract, and no selective measures and such….Our [the city's] policy concerns self-sufficiency, to look for housing, apply for housing, and be an independent signatory on a housing contract. (Senior official at the integration office)

Two social workers employed fulltime by the municipality were engaged in the whole accommodation chain: from arrival through furnishing the apartments, information and support during accommodation, and finally to preparing for termination of the two-year (maximum four-year) subleases and the process of moving out. The support partly involved preparing the individual for looking for permanent housing on the local private housing market, or elsewhere, for instance in another Swedish municipality with more housing vacancies.

Overall, the housing social support was summed up and referred to as "preventive housing support." It was designed to prepare the refugees for a tough housing market, through measures such as courses held by municipal housing companies and support and information provided by the social services in order to ensure that they quickly registered in housing queues and actively searched for accommodation on the secondary market. The content focused on refugees "learning" about how the Swedish and local housing market worked, thus aiming to strengthen them as competitors in the market. Similarly, as the general Swedish integration narrative contains an expectation that refugees "become integrated" into the economy and the labour markets within two years, there was an emphasis on individuals' own responsibility to independently enter the housing market within two years. At the same time, doubts were expressed regarding whether the two—or four-year subleases were likely to assist the group in entering the primary housing market:

> I suspect that many of them will stay for the full four years. But we [won't wait for four years] before we begin discussing how it's going for them in the housing queue; otherwise, they won't start [looking for housing] until then. I believe that it will go well for the majority, but, of course, a certain percentage will not be job-ready. (Head of the integration office)

Underlying the forms of housing social support is a problematisation of refugees' homelessness based on an assumption that they lack appropriate strategies for navigating the housing market, rather than concerning the market's thresholds, such as shortages of affordable housing as well as discrimination and other exclusionary practices. Moreover, it is also a problematisation of housing risks that is reconceptualised from being socially generated into the domain of individual responsibility. Encouraging refugees to become active applicants on the housing market also entails placing on them a responsibility for their "homelessness," whereby the individual's prospects for success lie in their own capacity for risk management and self-governance (e.g., Brown, 2015). Thus, the solution involving "housing school" suggests a problematisation in which those who are considered "active citizens," capable of managing their own risks on the free housing market, will be able to attain housing (see also Rose, 1999).

In the activities focusing on increasing the refugees' know-how regarding tenancy, there were informational and educational elements that were thematically organised around heating, rental costs, fire protection, waste sorting, neighbourhood sharing projects, cultivation projects, and, not least, issues involving the rights of tenancy. About a hundred of the refugees were accommodated in a newly built complex with small single-person apartments (about 45 m^2). This was considered a prestigious low-cost building project, intended to fit well with the local marketing of the municipality as a forerunner in environmental sustainability in local planning strategies. The import of ready-made modules and cheap building materials from China would keep rental costs low, which would enable the housing inclusion of refugees and students. While the rental costs were lower than average, the rent excluded heating expenses, which was a surprise to the refugees when the first electric bill arrived in their letterboxes. In the interviews and participant observations, we learned that there had been upset reactions from the refugees about the unexpected high living expenses due to the construction of their apartments, which were draughty and poorly insulated:

> Complaints keep popping up, especially when there's been exceptionally cold weather;…a month ago…many people got in touch and said they had expensive electricity bills, and that they were freezing…because once they experienced an expensive bill, they avoided turning on the heater, running the washing machine or even cooking and showering. (Social worker)

The refugee tenants addressed what they experienced as unfair rental costs, for which they requested reimbursement. This response exemplifies a bottom-up response to the unjust rental situation and an effort to create a communicative platform with the housing company and integration office (e.g., Rast et al., 2020). While their protest did not result in financial compensation, it did give rise to several meetings with officials from various municipal departments. The social workers arranged meetings to discuss the issues around heating costs, with two representatives from the municipal department of energy and building being appointed to inform them about how the ventilation and heating worked and the fact that this was to be properly managed by the tenants themselves. The essence of the response from the local government was an individualization of the expensive rental costs, asserting that this was an effect of poor energy management by the refugees—they were not aware of how to manage electricity, water consumption, etc.—rather than being an effect of bad planning or miscalculation regarding the suitability of the buildings' construction for a northern climate. However, the initiative by the refugee inhabitants was an important step in coming together as a group in order to express the inadequacy of their housing situation, hence creating a personalised communication that contested a situation that needed to be changed (e.g., Smets et al., 2021).

5.4. Negotiating the Representations of and Solutions to the Problem in Social Work Practices

As the secondary leases began to run out for a significant number of the refugees who had arrived in 2016–2017, the social services were expected to prepare them for the imminent termination of their leases and the need to seek alternative accommodation. Interviews with social workers demonstrate that this was no easy task. Despite their efforts to prepare the refugees for a "tough housing market," in many cases they were met with ill-prepared and worried tenants, refugees who were shocked to discover that they could not remain in their homes:

> Social worker: What happened on 1 September, once the four years were up, was that we started to send out three-month notices of termination in the usual way.

> Interviewer: But what was the reaction of those who were given notice?
>
> Social worker: Anxiety and, well, I would say desperation.

There was concern among the social workers regarding what would happen once the secondary leases ended. At the time the data was collected, those working directly with housing support concluded that, for many refugees, the expiry of the secondary lease would lead to homelessness:

> The four years will begin to expire in September 2020, so should the tenants move out after four years? I'm not sure whether the politicians understand the scale of the problem; many people will have to move, many of them families with children, many sick, disabled people who will be without an apartment. (Social worker)

In the social workers' reflections on terminating the leases, they understood just how the refugees' impending homelessness could easily impede or even derail their ongoing establishment process. As the social workers were brought directly face to face with the futility of a housing search on a heated market, and with the limitations involved with refugees competing on the same terms as other inhabitants, they acknowledged the housing inequality that blocked the refugees' housing inclusion. The social workers recognised that the housing queue is no assurance of equity in the distribution of housing. Inhabitants who were born in Sweden can queue for housing from a young age, more often have the financial means which are required to be approved as a tenant, and are seldom at risk of racial discrimination when applying for vacancies:

> Many of them [refugees] do everything they can, many of them are in the queue with every property owner in town; they go in and check every day and it's stressful…it's also a source of disappointment for those who register their interest in ten apartments and end up number 125 or 340 on the waiting list. (Social worker)

The perception of housing risk by social workers differs from that of politicians. Social workers recognize that refugees are at risk of exclusion from the housing market (Boholm & Corvellec, 2010). However, the unequal terms for housing inclusion laid bare the emotional quagmire of instability and insecurity in which the refugees found themselves struggling, and into which many might be drawn deeper by their frantic search for housing. Aside from the stress, the search would also consume a great deal of time that might be better utilised for studies and other activities of importance to their integration. The emphasis in the housing support on empowering refugees to seek their own accommodation was undeniably ambivalent, in that it could just as easily leave them powerless in the face of a futile search for housing. It did not matter how skilled a housing applicant one was if there were no affordable vacancies. This is clearly an example of how individual efforts come into conflict with the structural circumstances of housing inequality and a general welfare-state retrenchment. Such a retrenchment leaves the responsibility for inclusion to the individual (Garland, 2001; Listerborn, 2018):

> When they say [they're] so worried about future accommodation, [they] can't concentrate on studying, and so on…I usually say: "Try to focus on the moment—yes, there is a housing shortage in [municipality], but keep applying." Some of them visit us several times a day to ask if "there are any vacancies." (Social worker)

The time the housing support facilitated for the refugees in the housing queue was insufficient, leaving those who newly arrived to seek housing on the sublease market, with private landlords, and as lodgers with private homeowners. Without employment or a stable income, it is difficult to qualify as a tenant with private landlords on a market that is largely unregulated, in terms of both rent-setting and the selection of tenants. The fact that refugees face racial discrimination in the secondary housing market was confirmed in our interviews with both the refugees themselves and the social workers. In one of the refugees' statements there is clearly frustration at discovering that there is a probable deselection of him and his peers when they apply for vacancies:

> I've written to various groups and responded to [advertisements for] apartments and rooms. I've written that I am studying and receiving CSN [student financing], that I'm happy to live with others, that I'm conscientious—but I don't receive any replies! They don't answer me—but I see those who were born here get a reply on the same day. I feel genuinely disappointed: Are they afraid of us [newly arrived migrants], that we're not well-behaved? (Refugee)

Following responses to the risk management of becoming homeless, common acts of resilience among the refugees included using social media to advertise for housing (e.g., Smets et al., 2021). The responses to this act of resilience were ambivalent: On the one hand leading to the emergence of informal social networks organising housing solutions in private homes and thus preventing homelessness for several of them, but on the other hand opening for frivolous actors who saw the opportunity to exploit young refugees for domestic labour while offering shelter. In national migration regimes (like Sweden) that rely on state-provided support with limited community initiatives and few NGOs engaging in refugee support, the institutional gaps that occur when state-led refugee reception undergoes neoliberal changes may open up for new mobilizing initiatives, but may likewise place a heavy load on the front-line workers supporting individuals' "crisis management" and self-care (e.g., Bachour, 2023; Lorenz, 2017).

6. Conclusion

A lack of housing has always been an approved reason for a Swedish municipality to be restrictive in its refugee reception. As the availability of affordable homes is also decreasing in smaller places outside prosperous metropolitan areas, more and more people are falling subject to housing risks. To handle this, policy-makers, rather than protesting the removal of state subsidies for affordable housing or the privatisation of public housing stock, are reproducing the representations of the housing problem as an individual problem. This short-term perspective on refugees' housing jeopardises our humanitarian obligation to people seeking refuge and risks backfiring, as Sweden—and particularly northern Sweden—is desperately in need of new citizens. In response to our main research question about the problem representations of and solutions to refugees' houselessness, we conclude that the underlying—unspoken or silenced—assumption, is manifested in a policy practice that avoids a recognition of the local welfare state's responsibility to uphold refugees' housing rights. With a narrow interpretation of the welfare state's responsibility for housing, we find that the municipality has failed to recognise the refugees at risk for housing exclusion, "silently passing on the responsibility" of housing inclusion (and risk management) to the domains of the social worker practice, individuals, and informal networks (Bachour, 2023). Importantly, we find that the politicians' conceptions and communication of risk and risk management vary depending on their political interests and considerations (e.g., Boholm & Cervelllec, 2010). In their suggestions for policy solutions, the identities of *risk objects* and *objects at risk* are reframed and redefined in accordance with

political priorities. It is our suggestion that these political priorities and strive for legitimacy are in line with the overall national tightened immigration policy and the rise of an immigration-hostile political climate. We conclude that the semantic framework around the policy practices and definitions of refugees as *risky objects* reveals an unspoken ideology that refugees are not welcome to stay in this municipality and that, when their right to housing ends, rather than being "lulled into security" they will be prepared for moving on.

The social workers who put the local policy into practice made visible the dilemma of acting within a framework of being defenders of individuals' housing rights and simultaneously serving as an extension of the local welfare state (e.g., Lorenz, 2017). To reduce refugees' housing risks the local housing support that is provided is justified through an ideology of independence and everyone's equal capability to attain housing. Meanwhile, newly arrived migrants cannot queue for housing on the same terms as other residents; they are disadvantaged in a housing market that generally requires several years spent in the housing queue, a social network, and a wage or savings. Although the social workers were aware of the refugees' unfavourable position and grappled with the ethical implications of implementing national and local policies, they lacked the structural presuppositions to alter risk perceptions and address the systemic inequalities.

Although the results of this study are not directly applicable to other local contexts, its insights could potentially be generalized on an analytical level to other situations and contexts (Yin, 1994, p. 10). Common to all of Sweden is a neoliberalisation of the housing market that has resulted in planning that has long prioritised groups with strong purchasing power. Homes have become a commodity that cannot be given away and a problem for the individual, rather than society, to solve. Our case shows how housing inequality is locally silenced or left unproblematised; in this sense, our local case is probably not an exceptional one. Results from comparative studies in other countries in Europe demonstrate that, similar to Sweden, in the policy development since the "summer of migration 2015" there has been a change in mindset, with several national migration regimes having become more restrictive in their rules and more selective in granting residency (JPE Urban Europe, 2021). Fewer groups are recognized as refugees and included in various support for integration, and more demand is placed on refugees' performance in the economy and on the labour market, which is used as proof of one's right to attain residency as well as for housing rights (JPE Urban Europe, 2021, p. 13).

Given the failures of a globalized housing market, local policymakers must take back the initiative of building affordable housing by putting pressure on national governments to reinstate, or invent and invest in, progressive housing policies. Moreover, it is necessary to include social workers' competence and perspectives in social planning to safeguard housing inclusion for the most vulnerable groups, who may well become valuable citizens and workers.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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ARTICLE

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Domesticating Property: Moral Economies of Post-Socialist Homeownership Through Rental and Neighbour Relations

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Abstract

This article analyses property relations in post-socialism through the analytical lens of housing studies and moral economy, specifically in the context of rental and neighbour relations in urban apartment buildings. It draws on 50 in-depth residential biographies of residents of St. Petersburg, Russia, collected between 2017 and 2021. The interviews represent a diversity of tenures, as well as direct and indirect voices of homeowners and non-owners. The article begins by introducing the socio-historical context of the privatisation and commodification of housing in post-socialist Russia. Then, based on the stories of the origin of property and the intensity of attachment to it, I analyse owners' homemaking through daily interactions with other owners and non-owners who act as their tenants and neighbours. Focusing on privatised, mortgaged, and inherited residential property, I identify three trajectories of complex relationships between owners and non-owners in urban buildings and modes of homemaking, at the intersection of monetary and non-monetary relations and imaginaries of counterparts. I argue that despite everyday interactions in the housing market and in apartment blocks, both the owners of privatised Soviet property and new owner-occupiers tend to avoid the total commercialisation of the home and to challenge the dominance of homeownership as the only socially sanctioned tenure.

Keywords

homeowners; housing property; landlord–tenant relations; moral economy; mortgage; neighbour relations; owner-occupied housing; post-socialist Russia; privatised and purchased apartments

1. Introduction

On the contemporary global map of housing financialisation, Russia belongs to the segment of "homeownership societies" in which owner-occupation dominates private and social renting, and property

values are rising (Hulse et al., 2018, pp. 167–168). In 2015, the proportion of the total housing stock owned by residents was 89.0% (Holm-Hansen & Sadykov, 2023, p. 991). However, this impressively high rate of owner-occupation has its roots not so much in current housing development as in the mass transfer of state-owned flats, which remain the largest housing stock in Russia, into private hands. After the collapse of the USSR, most of the Russian population became homeowners by bypassing market mechanisms and privatising the flats they had occupied for free. Similar processes took place in many other countries of the former Eastern bloc, endangering the specific contextual model of property relations, in which one tenure sector accommodates homeownership of pre-capitalist and capitalist origin (Humphrey & Verdery, 2004; Shi, 2021; Smith, 2008; Weiss, 2016; Zavisca, 2012).

Privatisation and the subsequent neoliberalisation of housing policy have led to a high degree of fragmentation of ownership or tenure mix, with privatised and purchased dwellings, and rented and social housing, combined as smaller segments (Johnson, 2018, p. 162; Korableva et al., 2021, p. 89). At different stages of life, the citizens may either privatise the Soviet flat or inherit it from their relatives, then sell it and buy a room in a shabby communal apartment in the historic city centre or a newly built three-room apartment in the high-rise buildings on the outskirts as an investment or a place to live. Such trajectories are non-linear, deferred, and reversible; they do not take the form of direct "housing careers," and they may not lead to homeownership at all, or they may coexist with renting.

The ethnographic data that inspired me to write this article was collected between 2017 and 2021, across several projects, among St. Petersburg residents with a range of residential biographies and tenure statuses. The aim was to analyse what different forms of ownership mean to people, how they are enacted and lived through daily interactions with other owners and non-owners, and how economic and non-monetary aspects of homeownership intersect in the residents' experiences and identities. I applied a conceptual framework developed within the interdisciplinary field of home and housing studies, which focuses primarily on the multiple ways of entanglement of the materiality of housing and the meaning of home in the residents' daily lives (Blunt & Dowling, 2022; Kim & Smets, 2020; Pauli, 2023; Riukulehto & Rinne-Koski, 2016; Smith, 2008; Wagner, 2023). I addressed the idea of the plurality of home, particularly, its multidimensional and multicalar understanding, and used a moral economy lens to look more closely at non-monetary aspects of homeownership constituted as economic value.

The article begins with the socio-historical context of the privatisation and commodification of housing in Russia. In the next two sections, I present the conceptual approach to home as a multidimensional and multiscalar phenomenon charged with both market and moral value, and then my fieldwork and data. This is followed by a section presenting research findings that show how material housebuilding and social and symbolic homemaking intersect in different tenure relationships. Finally, I argue that through the everyday interactions in the housing market and in apartment blocks, both owners of privatised Soviet property and new owner-occupiers tend to avoid the total formatting of the home as an asset and emphasise non-monetary aspects of homemaking as crucial to meaningful living.

2. Russia's Housing: From Socialist Allocation to Capitalist Acquisition

Under the Soviet command economy, the state owned almost all housing in the country and controlled its investment, construction, maintenance, and allocation to residents (Khmelnitskaya, 2015, p. 39). "Socialist

distribution" of housing and other services to citizens through the state and the workplace was practised as a reward for productive labour (Johnson, 2018; Shi, 2021). In late socialist industrial enterprises, social benefits functioned as an important management tool and as an integral part of the system of labour relations known as paternalism (Burawoy et al., 1993). Since most of the benefits, including housing, could not be obtained in any other way, workers migrated in search of housing offered by employers and became attached to the workplace, to increase their chances of having their own apartment in the housing blocks. The waiting period to obtain it was 10–15 years, although the right job in priority sectors, such as heavy or military industry, and social connections could shorten the wait (Halawa, 2015; Khmelnitskaya, 2015; Trudolyubov, 2018; Zavisca, 2012). Networking was crucial for gaining access to housing and other material possessions under the centrally planned economy. In turn, material objects and spaces structured people's daily activities, defined their relationships with family, friends, and neighbours, and formed communities. Housing "given" by factories became the home of co-workers who also lived side by side in the same neighbourhood for decades as a safety net or frenemy, but still formed familiar social environments as an integral aspect of dwelling (Golubev, 2020; Halawa, 2015; Zaporozhets & Brednikova, 2022). As scholars of Soviet housing have pointed out, the permanent nature of housing fostered a sense of "pseudo-ownership"—it was almost impossible to evict residents, and they were able to bequeath their occupancy to children and grandchildren registered in their apartments (Reid, 2006; Vihavainen, 2009).

The adoption of the 1991 Law on Housing Privatisation gave residents the right to privatise their socially-owned apartments at no cost, and later, to form housing associations (Khmelnitskaya, 2015; Vihavainen, 2009). By 2015, after several waves and extended deadlines, about 90% of the housing stock in Russia had been privatised, starting from 0.2% in 1990 (Holm-Hansen & Sadykov, 2023, p. 991; Korableva et al., 2021, p. 89; Shomina & Heywood, 2013, p. 4). Zavisca (2012, pp. 6, 11, 57) aptly defined this housing regime as "property without markets," whereby housing is privately owned but not fully commodified, and housing opportunities depend on privatised wealth rather than wages.

As early as 1997, with the creation of the Agency for Home Mortgage Lending, Russia became the first post-Soviet country to have a secondary mortgage market, although it remained unaffordable for most families. Since the early 2000s, the scale and pace of mass housing construction in Russia's major cities has increased, transforming urban landscapes that had been dominated for decades by housing built between the 1960s and 1980s. To stimulate the purchase of new property, in 2006–2007 the government launched the Affordable Housing national project and introduced mortgage subsidies for young families (Zavisca, 2012, pp. 51–62). Although the capitalist turn in housing policy aimed to normalise living on credit, taking out and paying mortgages as the "civilised way of development" for the new middle classes, it did not solve the general "housing problem." Mortgages remained affordable for only 10% of Russians in the first decade of the 2000s, and the state did not offer any ways to improve housing other than loans (Zavisca, 2012, pp. 1–2). In addition to regional poverty, uncertain and changing legislation, widespread consumer debt, unreliable banking, political pressure on construction companies, possible unfinished construction, and real estate speculation, still lead to high levels of risk when buying property in Russia (Humphrey, 2020).

Timid collective attempts in the late 2010s to develop the subsidised rental market, or social housing, by empowering local authorities to diversify the tenure structure and ease the burden on low-income individuals and families unable to afford to buy an apartment, have not yielded results (Shomina & Heywood, 2013). The rental market in Russia remains underdeveloped and under-regulated. It operates mainly as a semi-formal

or informal segment of the housing market, based on unwritten agreements or weak contracts with the risk of fraud. Neither rental contracts nor the responsibilities of the parties, including taxation, are standardised and protected by law, making tenancy relations rather precarious and unpredictable.

The lack of structural flexibility and investment in diversifying the housing market for different groups of consumers, on the one hand, and the Soviet cultural legacy and memory of generations who suffered from "homelessness" in the Stalinist era and the housing deficit of late socialism, on the other, have kept "the apartment as the central object of desire" (Halawa, 2015, p. 711), and homeownership as the dominant and preferred form of tenure:

> This dream of private accommodation and a private life has been crucial to how Russia developed, in both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras….[F]or most people the longing to have their own home, and the privacy essential to a sense of their own human dignity, built up for years and burst out immediately the USSR collapsed in 1991. Even now that yearning for privacy has not been fully satisfied. (Trudolyubov, 2018, pp. 10, 42–43)

The scholarship on consumption and housing in the late USSR points to the extreme moral and political volatility of the post-socialist environment. The value of state-sponsored homeownership created in the socialist era is still difficult to translate into the market value of homeownership, particularly as it is enacted in real estate and radical class divisions between the propertyless and the propertied (Halawa, 2015; Humphrey, 2020; Humphrey & Verdery, 2004). Post-Soviet generations are still learning the rules of capitalism, in which the old model of homeownership coexists with a new value of housing as a financial asset. I argue that this intersection of pre-capitalist historical, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as current social inequalities and diverse origins and values of property, is crucial for understanding the complexity of contemporary homeownership and homemaking, accompanied by the remaking of identities and agency. The next section takes a step forward by offering a possible analytical lens.

3. Moral Economies of House Building and Homemaking: Conceptualisation

The conceptual framework is informed by home and housing studies, the extensively developing interdisciplinary field that includes accounts of research on mobile and settled societies, the financialisation of housing, and the associated transformation of people's practices and values. I have extracted three conceptual lines from this vast debate as the key to my analysis. First, based on a multidimensional understanding of home, I distinguish analytically between the house as an asset and the social, affective, and symbolic experience of home. In everyday life, house-as-home is dynamically created, and the home-house interplay—the materialisation of home into housing and the appropriation of housing for home—takes place in a variety of ways (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 92; Smith, 2008, p. 520). Housing is one of the more expensive assets that most people on the planet can own in their lifetime. Its materiality and economics shape social relations, social networks, and family life, and generate power relations and social inequalities (Golubev, 2020, pp. 90–112; McCabe & Rosen, 2023, p. 3). However, the home is a specific object in which multiple processes of homemaking and home-unmaking are embedded. Therefore, the lens of "the home" is crucial for understanding the social value of property. Home is always an interactive and imaginary process, and its meaning is negotiable and reinterpretable. This is also true of homeownership, which is a hybrid of money, materials, and meanings, or an interrelationship of material elements and socio-emotional aspects

such as residents' feelings, belonging, identity, security, and selfhood (Kim & Smets, 2020, p. 609; Smith, 2008, p. 521). An answer to the question of what makes a house a home (Riukulehto & Rinne-Koski, 2016) should be sought in the connections and conflicts between material and immaterial aspects of housing, or house building and homemaking.

The next point that is important in my analysis is the multiscalarity of home, which means that it can extend beyond houses. Thus, a sense of home transcends the boundaries of the private dwelling, and can encompass an apartment building, a neighbourhood, as well a city and even a nation, while homemaking extends to extra-domestic spaces, social groups, and attachments (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 92; Kim & Smets, 2020, p. 609). The dwellings I studied in my research belong to the mass segment of apartment blocks, in which close and dense neighbouring with fellow residents has been an essential aspect of a sense of home, privacy, comfort, and security, or the lack thereof, for decades. Houses are located within larger communities with characteristics that can influence the value of a house as a home. The social environment can be a critical element in making a house into a home (Wagner, 2023, p. 331). The materiality of the house, domesticity as well as feelings and experiences shared with neighbours and daily activities around the house, are included in the phenomenon of home (Kim & Smets, 2020, p. 609; Riukulehto & Rinne-Koski, 2016, pp. 1–3). Furthermore, housing is not just a building but is a neighbour in the social infrastructure of a neighbourhood, which can increase the tension between the value of housing as an asset, and its value in creating a community (Wagner, 2023, p. 330).

Finally, to understand the intersection of meanings of ownership better, I applied the moral economy perspective, which has recently been adopted in housing studies and anthropology (Alexander et al., 2018; Johnson, 2018; Langegger, 2015; Palomera & Vetta, 2016; Shi, 2021; Susser, 2018). The common understanding of moral economy refers to the dynamic combinations of extra-economic cultural and social norms, meanings, non-instrumental values, and practices that constitute markets/economic phenomena. These inform social interactions and regulate social formations in a world increasingly dominated by the principles of capital accumulation (see Palomera & Vetta, 2016, pp. 414–428). Since "home" is essentially relational and intersubjective, the concept of moral economy allows us to study how and why the social meaning of property is produced through interactions based on shared social norms, obligations, and responsibilities. Palomera and Vetta (2016, pp. 415, 422) see the strength of this perspective in its ability to highlight the ambiguous logics and values that guide and sustain livelihood practices.

Pauli (2023) distinguishes between house building and homemaking as inseparable acts of emplacement that represent material and immaterial aspects of home in complex relationships. Wagner (2023, pp. 328–329) also highlighted that the time, efforts, and money that individuals put into building, buying, owing, and maintaining these houses represent devoting limited resources, both financial and non-financial, in an attempt to realise potential benefits. Owner-occupied properties act as houses while also being homes, and housing and home can be valued in different ways, and these different values can be in sync and conflict with each other. As if to sum up this discussion, Hann (2018, pp. 250–251) also asserts that in any everyday human economy, even of people who do not themselves recognise an economy as such, the material and the moral are equally fundamental, so that researchers should be concerned with both. These accounts inspire the analysis of the mosaic of housing tenure in Russia, which is still undergoing a transition from its socialist to capitalist type, and the coexistence of the two. The heuristic power of the moral economy approach lies in its ability to analyse how people deal with this complexity and to reinterpret the economic significance of housing in terms of social and moral value.

4. Fieldwork and Data

St. Petersburg, my research site, is Russia's second-largest city and is a magnet for internal migrants attracted from across the country by its universities, its relatively dynamic labour market, and its developing housing sector. Today, more than five million residents of St. Petersburg live in a variety of housing types, including low-rise historical buildings inherited from the 18th to early 20th centuries, mid-rise housing built in the 1950s-1980s in the Soviet Union outside the city centre, and mega-scale large housing estates growing mainly on the periphery of the city, and on the edge of the adjacent Leningrad Oblast (Tkach, 2024). On the one hand, St. Petersburg is identified as a unique urban case, with its symbolic image as the cultural and European capital of Russia and the UNESCO World Heritage Site in the city's historic core, which attracts tourists but also inspires aggressive and corruptive redevelopment projects (Trumbull, 2013). On the other hand, its housing construction and real estate market generally represent processes that are similar to those in the large old Russian cities with populations over one million.

Of the 50 in-depth interviews that make up my fieldwork data, only 10% were given by residents of local origin, the rest having come to St. Petersburg for education or work. The geography of their relocation ranges from the nearby Leningrad Oblast in the northwest, to the European parts of Russia, as well as from Siberia and the Far East. The prevalence of migrants in the sample gave it a migratory bias, but also opened the door to rich housing biographies with diverse and non-linear tenure experiences in different cities and a wide range of housing backgrounds, including rooms in communal flats, Soviet-era blocks of flats, and the large housing estates built since around the mid-2000s. One-tenth of all respondents are men. All respondents moved at least twice within St. Petersburg, so that they could compare their experiences in several buildings and neighbourhoods.

I met my interviewees in their different living and tenure situations. The sample is roughly divided into those who were renters at the time of the study (n = 28) and those who were mortgage holders and owners (n = 22). The tenants came to St. Petersburg for higher education, their age varied from 19 to 22 years old (average 22.2), and their length of stay in the city ranged from two to three years. They rented one or two-bedroom flats in Soviet-built housing or large housing estates, alone or with a flatmate. Owner-occupiers were aged between 22 and 41 (average 33) and worked in a variety of sectors, including oil and gas, IT, cultural industries, real estate, medicine, management and administration, research, NGOs, and universities. They lived alone or with their partners and larger families in studios, one or two-bedroom flats in the low- and middle-price neighbourhoods to which they had moved between six months and ten years before our meeting (Tkach, 2024).

The in-depth interview was designed as a "residential biography," from the first remembered place of residence to the current one. Almost all interviews took place at the dwelling places and included the detailed stories of renting and owning, neighbour relations, and interactions with other actors involved in property relations. About a fifth of the sample were interviewed twice, to update information on their housing trajectories in the city after one or two years. The interviews lasted for between one and three hours and were all audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. However, the rich data collected in the various projects is still biased by the lack of direct narrators representing post-socialist privatisation, homeownership, and renting. As these stories were mainly provided by younger tenants or new homebuyers, their experiences can be interpreted through possible conflicting interests or an incomplete

understanding of the interactions. However, the thick and detailed descriptions obtained were enough to verify possible misunderstandings. My contextual knowledge and previous extensive research on Russian society also helped to address this bias critically. Overall, the data collected are full of indirect witnesses representing a variety of experiences, such as the voices of parents born in the Soviet era who are now persuading their children to buy a mortgaged apartment. Considering housing biographies as non-linear and avoiding methodological groupism, I analysed all interview narratives as metadata representing direct and indirect voices of different types of owners and non-owners. I applied the six-phase approach to thematic analysis offered by Braun and Clarke (2022), which includes: data familiarisation; data coding; initial theme generation; theme development and review; theme refining, defining and naming; and writing up. For example, the data extracts, such as "nodding to neighbours" and "watching the neighbours" were coded as "positive connection with neighbours" and "suspicious attitude towards neighbours," which then cover the theme of neighbour interactions. Along with the theme of homeownership, this led me to analyse and write about different ways of homemaking through neighbouring.

5. House-As-Home, Created by the Relationships Between Owners and Non-Owners

5.1. Lifelong (Post-)Soviet Homeownership

Stories of relationships with elderly homeowners, former Soviet workers who are now retired, were told by their current and former tenants and neighbours. These elderly residents had lived all their lives in their flats or rooms in shared flats, which they privatised when the USSR collapsed. When, for whatever reason, they enter the housing market as landlords, they tend to avoid signing a lease, rely on verbal agreements, and feel entitled to control their tenants personally. Elderly landlords were portrayed as making hectic and unpredictable demands, nagging and forbidding tenants to do things. Disrespect for the tenant's privacy and sporadic, sometimes unannounced interventions are perceived by interviewees as harassment. Tamara, a 21-year-old student, recalled one such case in her rental story:

> Once, the landlady came over when I was at work and decorated the flat with the New Year garlands. It was pretty cute, but she didn't notify me about it. I came home and saw the decorations, so it wasn't that nice. I live here and somebody just drops in. After all, I pay for this flat.

Tamara refers to the economic aspect of the contract, which does not make sense to the owner, who is not selling a service, but simply "letting in" (a stranger) to her former home. When it is occupied by someone else, she feels alienated from her beloved home as a life-constituting domain. I assume that Zavisca (2012, p. 5) was referring to this very tenure when she noted that "for Russians, long-term and inalienable usage rights are intrinsic to ownership." She added that this disposition has socialist origins, when citizens derived a sense of de facto ownership from their long-term usage rights, which could be transferred to descendants or swapped with other families. A common fear of landlords like Tamara's is that one day a tenant will occupy their flat forever, and they will not be able to evict them.

Because they see homeownership as something that is acquired and maintained through social relationships, the owners of privatised flats as landlords also establish market value by keeping an eye on the house and its occupants, rather than drawing up a formal contract and moving on to impersonal transactions. Some students dare to suggest to their elderly landlords that they adopt more digitalised and distant forms of interaction,

teaching them how to use online banking and other apps, thus gaining their privacy and right to manage their homes at their own pace and according to their own tastes. They then be able to negotiate minor interior changes and small repairs. However, such tenants still do not feel that they have proper rights as housing consumers, as the rules of interaction are blurred, and they are almost always threatened with a personal visit from the owner. So many of them end up taking risks and cheating, secretly making extra keys, having friends over, and even getting a pet (a cat or a rabbit) to try to domesticate a rented flat. The interviewees accepted such moral inconveniences as the price of paying a below-average rent for a shabby Soviet-style apartment.

Settled owners can be similarly defensive and even aggressive towards potential or new buyers in the building. When Natalia, a 37-year-old manager who now owns her own flat, tried to invest her savings in a room in the communal apartment, she had to go through an introductory meeting with the other residents. Years later, she is still shocked by this interview in an authoritarian community:

> This 60-year-old woman was the head of everything there, and she said: "I was born here, and I will die here." Then she explained: "Well, young lady, here we close the door at ten o'clock in the evening with a lock on the inside, with a latch. I said: "But wait, what if I'm late, when I come from the theatre, how will I get in?" And they said: "You know, we've seen whores like that, and we don't need any more." So, I realised it was a nightmare and I don't know how I would have survived there, with neighbours like that. So, this is goodbye.

Another homebuyer, Anna, a 32-year-old master's student, who recently moved into a historical building in the city centre with her 3-year-old daughter, was bullied by the old-timers. First, they boycotted her, then they gave her a probationary period as a newcomer, saying: "You came to our house and we have our own rules, this house has its own rules, so learn them." This community protected its world from commodification, seeing any market-based residents as threatening outsiders. So, some tenants remain invisible and voiceless in such neighbourhoods:

> We greeted our neighbours, but only when we bumped into each other somewhere on the stairs. In the elevator, of course, it's hard to tell if it's your neighbour or not, and where they live. When they say hello, you sort of respond. Well, because it feels like you're renting a flat, and you don't belong here, you're a stranger. It seemed like I couldn't take the initiative here to say hello first. But now I feel that as the owner I can say hello first. (Ilia, 29, university lecturer)

Unlike Ilia, other tenants try to be proactive in their neighbourhood and initiate some improvements. In the end, however, they see no reason to invest energy in the hostile environment and move on to buying their own property. They realise that it is beyond their power to beat the length of residence of old-timers and be seen and recognised in the neighbourhood.

5.2. Mortgaged Ownership Combined With the Soviet Inheritance

Another account of homeownership is provided by the stories of flat buyers and mortgage holders, mainly young couples and families with children, who have recently moved into the newly built large housing estates. Buying a home is an extraordinary event in their lives, achieved by pooling the resources of several generations, including personal savings, financial support from relatives (especially parents), mortgage loans, as well as

mortgage subsidies and other social benefits. But social welfare programmes provided only the bare minimum, and the rest of the financial burden fell on the shoulders of families. I was told stories of how their parents and other relatives sold cars, garages, and privatised apartments in the Russian periphery to raise enough money for adult children to buy a flat in St. Petersburg. And yet most of my interviewees had to take out mortgages for 25–30 years (with interest rates varying from 10–20% in different years), and some of them were still in the process of paying them off when we met. To save a little, they try to buy an apartment while it is still under construction, so they literally build their houses themselves, paying the construction companies directly as investors and acting as financialised homeowners or consumers from the beginning (cf. Halawa, 2015, p. 724).

They move into very diverse, dense, and vibrant neighbourhoods with an active turnover of tenants and even owners, where neighbours are rather anonymous (Tkach, 2024). As they settle in, they make contacts with homeowners' associations to act on behalf of and for the community. In 2018, after the devastating shopping mall fire in Kemerovo, the above-mentioned Ilia, now a homebuyer who paid for his right to be an active resident, forced the managers to check the fire hoses on all floors of the 25-storey building on the outskirts of St. Petersburg to ensure their safety. New owners also tend to securitise their homes through power relations with non-owners:

> We chased the [disturbing] neighbours downstairs and finally kicked them out, but it was a rented flat. Everyone here is practically a mortgage holder, you have to understand that. We took out a 20-year mortgage. It was about 30 thousand [RRUB] a month. Now it's less, because we sold my mum's flat, we had to, but we still have some payments to make. (Marina, 40, on maternity leave)

Marina, who owns a new apartment with her husband and baby daughter on the top floor overlooking a stunted forest, an industrial area, and a construction site, introduces herself and her fellow residents as "we mortgagees" (*ipotechniki*), referring to the enormous price they had to pay to buy a property and put down roots in St. Petersburg. They already feel like heroes after raising money for the first payment and taking out a scheduled mortgage, going through a marathon of construction, always with the possibility of being cheated, but they still have years of mortgage payments ahead of them and a painful transition from building a house to living in it. Building should be translated into living, and this process is impossible without social interaction with co-residents who do not belong to the household (cf. Pauli, 2023). This means fighting for a comfortable and secure life with others in the same building. Open hostility towards tenants as troublemakers is more common, although rentiers who open the door to the community for them and benefit from it are also blamed:

> The problem is more with the way people deal with cigarette butts, but again, not the permanent residents, but the renters and especially the workers. They throw cigarette butts out of the windows and these butts fly into prams. (Elena, 37, university administrator)

> We did not really have any conflicts with the neighbours, but with the tenants. They would take out the rubbish and just leave it outside by the door. They were those…as I call them, "our little brothers" [racist term for people of Central Asian origin]. And I said that now the Migration Service would be here, and I called the Homeowners' Association, and told them to find the owner of this apartment, otherwise I would find her. She has bought two flats—one on our floor, one downstairs, and she is renting them

> out for sure. I said that if I see any more of them here, then, in principle, we as neighbours will just sign a complaint either to the tax office or…it's probably rented illegally. (Svetlana, 38, dermatologist)

I argue that owner-occupiers describe tenants through classist and racist lenses to veil their own vulnerable position as new middle-class mortgage holders with no firm guarantees that their long-term housing project will succeed. So, they tend to replace the following clear formal rules with moral battles. As Zavisca (2012, pp. 6–10) notes, most Russians do not equate a mortgage with ownership, because the risk of foreclosure makes long-term usage rights uncertain. The primary metaphor for a mortgage and its long duration in Russia is "debt bondage," so even those who are deeply committed to paying their debts find it difficult to predict their personal financial flows under the current systemic instability in Russia. Mortgage payers see themselves as hard workers who sacrifice pleasure and have a moral claim on those who seem brave or lucky enough to avoid capitalist competition, remain propertyless, and pick up different housing trajectories (see Halawa, 2015; Palomera & Vetta, 2016; Shi, 2021; Weiss, 2019). They cannot secure their tomorrows, but they can fight for their today by arguing with their co-residents who do not carry the burden of a mortgage.

In terms of the morally charged connections between house and home, it is important for the new owner-occupiers that a home is not only bought and invested in but also lived in, side by side with other residents. They see themselves as both investors/builders and residents, responsible users of housing as an active resource, putting the "materials of housing into the flow of daily life" (Smith, 2008, pp. 529–530). In turn, other homebuyers who do not live in the building and act as landlords are blamed as "people who buy property to let, purely as an investment vehicle" (Smith, 2008, p. 527). While tenants came to the newly built house to live there and use the shared infrastructure and housing services, they did not invest in the common good of the built environment. I follow Smith (2008, p. 525) in her argument that owners do not want to distance themselves from tenants as people, but from the status of tenants—from the very practical, material, raw financial deal. The research participants therefore construct an identity as moral subjects who domesticate marketised property by living in it and investing their families' resources in it.

5.3. Mortgaged, Sponsored, or Inherited Property

This type of tenure is voiced by the youngest interviewees—recent and transient property buyers, inheritors and receivers, and their tenants. An apartment received in a will or as a gift is not lived in, so the owners do not feel at home there. As landlords, they limit their interaction with tenants almost entirely to receiving the rent wirelessly:

> The owner of the first flat I rented was my age, and he didn't care. His parents had just bought him the flat, and he had no idea what to do with it, so he decided to rent it out. He lived in Finland himself. So, he only visited me once, no, twice a year. (David, 21, student tenant)

Lacking personal ties to a neighbourhood, such landlords do not establish solidarity with other neighbours to control and punish their tenants. By prioritising a purely commercial contract, they strengthen the tenants' right to a home and to organise their life in the building independently.

Transient owners of studio/one-room apartments who are strategically saving up to move to a bigger one soon do not get on well with their neighbours either. They find mortgage payers and neighbourhood

activists to be too enthusiastic and overzealous to invest time and effort in solving neighbourhood issues. They will probably turn into a settled owner later in their next home and make connections with their neighbours in another building as a sign of belonging, but for now they tend to ignore them and avoid putting down roots. The same goes for the "forced homeowners"—mostly young unmarried women—who have changed their tenure under pressure from their pre-retired parents, who are willing to build a house for them and not leave them propertyless, or in the Soviet people's view, "homeless." This unexpected parental decision can be quite distressing for those who had not planned to settle down at least until they started their own families:

> And then my mum said that she was going to buy a flat. This was at the end of my master's degree. I was very much against it. It was some kind of expression like "don't put down roots, because then you won't be able to move." For me, an apartment was such a hard connection, like it's all over. Well, I argued: "I'll owe you, think of yourself, I'm already grown up." Mum said: "No!" My mother raised me all her life, she worked as a nurse all her life. I think it's unlikely that she feels that she has achieved anything in life, and for her to buy a flat for me was important for her self-esteem. (Julia, 27, cartographer)

Julia's mother and many other parents with a Soviet background mentioned in the interviews realise that unlike them, their children will never get anything from the state "for free." So, they opt for the market mechanisms and take on a mortgage to protect their children from it, and to patronise them as the Soviet state did to them in their time. However, their children do not perceive such an apartment as a "gift," and clearly assess its current financial burden and the consequent social impact on their lives. To please their parents, Julia and other young owners patiently live in the areas where they see no future, helping their parents pay off the mortgage so that they can rent an apartment later and move on. Coming home only to sleep and not to look after it, they distance themselves from it, keeping it uninhabited and unlived in. Beyond the private household, in the neighbourhood and surrounding area, they do not feel a sense of belonging either. Ultimately, the lack of a personal sense of home in all its dimensions makes a house worthless.

Unlike their Soviet-born ancestors who still believe that "investment in material property is a last-ditch reach for a better life and security" (Weiss, 2019, p. 65), their children born in the late 1980s and early 1990s accept it as an undeniable burden that drains resources and limits mobility. They remain deaf to "the new mantra of an asset-holding society" (Smith, 2008, p. 528), refuse to understand adulthood and responsible maturity through the mortgage (see Halawa, 2015), and glorify freedom from ownership as a value. They see renting and changing residences as a convenient way to explore the city, the country, and even the world, and adjust their life plans accordingly. The sagacity of my young interviewees was empirically confirmed when Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, among other things, led to an exodus from Russia. Obviously, for many, homeownership, and especially an unpaid mortgage, becomes a serious reason to stay in the country unwillingly, to fulfil their financial and moral obligations, and not to delegate them to someone else. Leaving a home that has consumed many resources and required the sacrifices of generations, years of savings and deferred dreams, seems very difficult and practically impossible. Paying mortgages, bills, and taking care of the property left behind would also mean additional effort due to blocked bank cards, cancelled postal services, and other sanctions imposed on Russian citizens, at least in Europe. In such an upheaval, property turns out to be a burden, an anchor, a trap, while its absence allows tenants to pack a backpack and flee.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Although the capitalist market has been permeating homes in Russia for more than three decades, the residents' experiences and housing stories vividly demonstrate the socialist-post-socialist continuity of housing, as both still coexist and intertwine in the lives of generations (cf. Johnson, 2018, p. 169). On the one hand, the Soviet legacy seems to be slowly dissolving in the market economy. Residential neighbourhoods are becoming more mixed, fluid, and anonymous, while ownership and tenancy relations are becoming more depersonalised and formalised. On the other hand, social value based on the amount of productive labour and other resources invested in its acquisition over generations, as well as the length and prospects of living in that housing, is embedded in property relations. The research has shown that the house as a materialised asset, even if it arrives in different ways, still needs to be dematerialised to become a home. Otherwise, it is difficult to make and receive it as a home. The decommodification or domestification of property can therefore be traced in a spectrum of monetary and non-monetary interactions between homeowners and non-owners.

Privatised property, based on the pre-market history of the Soviet Union, is being commercialised with difficulties. These difficulties stem from the past, when housing was a social good, as well as from a lack of knowledge about the market mechanisms of housing management and market ethics of interaction. Tenants and new owners are seen as over-marketed counterparts to lifelong owners and residents, and as a potential threat to their home. Even when rented out, such a house is personally controlled to protect it from possible damage caused by transient residents. The rent does not seem to compensate for the use of the highly valuable personal space. Therefore, personal presence in the house seems to be the only way to update their attachment to the house and keep it homely. Their message to the newcomers in the neighbourhood is also that the home cannot be bought with money, but should be experienced side by side with the neighbours.

Owners of newly purchased dwellings are mostly mortgage holders. Mortgaged housing is seen as a family/household achievement and a sacrifice, especially when the payments consume the entire salary of one of the partners, or if the home that was bought is paid off in full, if or before the marriage breaks up. Aware of their basic property rights and responsibilities, new homebuyers actively engage with housing associations, monitor tenants and disruptive neighbours, and control the activities of investors in the building. They extend the boundaries of their private homes and feel responsible for maintaining the quality and condition of the stock, expecting to share equally in these financial and social responsibilities. Balancing monetary and non-monetary understandings of property, they see investors and tenants in the building as adversaries who ignore the interests of the building. While investors are accused of using their homes simply as assets to rent out and profit personally, tenants who dare to avoid exploitative relationships with banks and moral debts to relatives are seen as users of the built infrastructure and community. Neither are recognised as homebuilders, since property should be cared for, for it to become a home. To paraphrase Wagner (2023, p. 330), the investor's apartment that not only remains abandoned but even causes damage by leaking and flooding several other floors, is an extreme case of the careless neighbour, owner, and homeowner.

Less personal but less anxious interactions with neighbours and tenants have been built by inheritors, transients, or imposed owners who are not tied to the property by bank loans or housing plans. They question homeownership and lifelong residence as a norm inherited from previous generations born in the Soviet Union and boldly turn to other tenure experiences to postpone being limited to living in one place.

They are also willing to grant the same rights to tenants who rent their apartments, as they can commodify their dwelling and imagine it as someone else's present and future home. Therefore, they disrupt a mainstream housing ladder or pyramid with a homeowner at the top (Savage et al., 2015, pp. 76–77; Weiss, 2016, p. 291) and elevate the status of renting to normal or equal tenure. For them, an owned home is not a sacred cow, so it can be rented out and borrowed, shared, or adapted to different needs. While such views and practices do not fully reflect counter-capitalist imaginaries of home (see Hester & Srnicek, 2023), they still lean towards them, downplaying the power asymmetries between different forms of tenure (Juvenius, 2024; Keenan, 2010; Mandič & Filipovič Hrast, 2019) and emphasising flexible agreements, negotiations, and conviviality beyond the dominant discriminatory top-down rules of property relations.

Thus, several years of research have shown that the dominance of homeownership as the cultural norm and almost the only institutionalised tenure renders vulnerable both those who take on heavy financial responsibilities to conform to it and those who long to avoid it and opt for more flexible housing trajectories. The data are full of tiny examples, embedded in everyday practices, of actors involved in the orbit of property relations, who create and maintain the personal non-monetary value of housing through positive and negative interactions. They show that in different economic epochs and within diverse residential biographies, home desperately resists its full moulding into an asset, its commercialisation, and alienation. At the level of everyday interactions, the sense of home always seeks foundations other than legal and financial definitions of "property," such as a title deed, mortgage approval, or lease.

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The Mediating Role of Neighborhood Networks on Long-Term Trajectories of Subjective Well-Being After Covid-19

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Abstract

We investigate the trajectories of people's subjective well-being, measured as their overall life satisfaction at five points in time before, during, and after Covid-19 in Switzerland. Using sequence analysis and hierarchical clustering, we identify three groups of typical trajectories. About half of all respondents experienced a decline in well-being right after the first lockdown and subsequent recovery to high, pre-pandemic levels. A quarter consistently reports very high satisfaction throughout all five waves, and another quarter experienced declining well-being since the outbreak of the pandemic. As a second contribution, we then demonstrate how improving relations with neighbors increases the likelihood of recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic on subjective well-being. This effect is largely constant across social groups. Conceptualizing vulnerability as the extent to which social groups with different endowments (e.g., financial situation or individual social networks) cope differently with (exogenous) stressors, we further find slightly more pronounced positive effects of improving neighborly relations during the pandemic for more vulnerable people in terms of household finances and education. Moreover, being able to count on emotional support from neighbors and friends prior to the pandemic generally guarded against experiencing declining well-being. Meanwhile, people with less financial means, poorer health, and less support from friends and neighbors are also more likely to be in the trajectory cluster of declining well-being.

Keywords

Covid-19; life satisfaction; neighborhood networks; sequence analysis; subjective well-being

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures to combat its spread, namely social distancing and stay-at-home orders, considerably impacted people's subjective well-being (SWB), that is, their overall satisfaction with life as well as their psychological affect and emotional state (Martinez et al., 2021; Möhring et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2024). With limited possibilities for meeting friends and family, local surroundings and the immediate neighborhood became a focal point for people's social encounters and identities (Ungson et al., 2023). Likewise, sparked by the necessities arising from these restrictions, we witnessed an increase in neighborhood-based help initiatives to support members of the local community (Laurence & Kim, 2021; Terbeck et al., 2023; Zetterberg et al., 2021).

In line with evidence from previous crises (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; LaLone, 2012; Schobert et al., 2023), localized social capital has been shown to mitigate the short-term negative impact of the pandemic on SWB (Laurence & Kim, 2021; Zangger, 2023). Meanwhile, little is known about the long-term impact of localized social capital on people's well-being and its role in post-crisis recovery. Moreover, disposable resources and networks before the pandemic, such as people's financial situation or their involvement in neighborhood, family, and friendship networks, influenced not only people's vulnerability to adverse effects but also the amount of localized social capital and support (Schobert et al., 2023; Zangger, 2023).

This article uses panel data from Switzerland to investigate the long-term trajectories of people's SWB before, during, and after Covid-19. SWB is generally conceptualized as comprising both positive and negative affect, as well as an overall assessment of people's life satisfaction (Diener, 2009). This study focuses on the role of changes in people's neighborhood networks and their effect on different trajectories of life satisfaction. What is more, we also investigate subgroup differences in both the overall trajectories and the buffering effect of localized social capital, focusing on vulnerable groups in terms of socio-economic position and health. In this regard, vulnerability is understood as both a condition as well as a process (Zarowsky et al., 2013), encompassing initial well-being, risk exposure, and how this risk is managed. Consequently, in the present context, vulnerability addresses how different social groups—concerning their resources (time, money) and social networks—cope with exogenous stressors of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The contribution of this article is thus twofold. First, we provide a unique assessment of the long-term effects of localized social capital on the trajectories of SWB in the wake of a global crisis. To this end, we apply sequence analysis and hierarchical clustering to five waves of panel data, including four yearly assessments at the end of each year from 2019 to 2022, as well as an additional wave of data collection right after the end of the first lockdown in Switzerland. Second, we evaluate the extent to which more vulnerable groups in terms of socio-economic resources and individual risk factors saw not only their well-being impacted more severely by the pandemic but also whether these effects persist.

2. Background

2.1. Vulnerability, Localized Social Capital, and Well-Being

Meta-analyses show that individual personality is one of the strongest predictors of SWB, explaining up to 39% of SWB variance (Steel et al., 2008). Meanwhile, this still leaves enough room for other individual and

contextual factors to play a role. Existing research on the determinants of SWB has focused on individual socio-economic resources on the one hand, and network and contextual influences on the other. Starting with the former, the individual economic situation has been shown to be positively related to SWB in a variety of contexts (Deeming, 2013; Salameh et al., 2022; Simona-Moussa, 2020). In addition, existing evidence also points to the importance of social comparison processes in terms of relative income. Noy and Sin (2021), for example, show how the ordinal income rank positively affects SWB: People who are rich in comparison to their coworkers are found to be happier.

Beyond income, other measures of people's socio-economic position are associated with SWB. People with higher education and in higher occupational positions generally report higher levels of SWB (Deeming, 2013; Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Salameh et al., 2022). This has been attributed to the availability of more cultural capital and cognitive know-how to satisfy needs and pursue well-being. However, such general associations do not always hold for specific subgroups (Venetoklis, 2019). Concerning one's migration background, first-generation migrants are disadvantaged in terms of SWB (Hadjar & Backes, 2013). Meanwhile, the magnitude of this effect differs among host countries, the duration of stay in that country, and the amount of available social capital (Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Tegegne & Glanville, 2019).

Various studies have found differences in SWB regarding age, gender, health, and geographic context. For age, many studies find a U-shaped relationship between age and SWB (Gonza & Burger, 2017; Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Tegegne & Glanville, 2019): As people grow older, they report lower levels of SWB, which increases again for the eldest age groups. Meanwhile, for gender, no consistent pattern has been observed. Some studies find higher SWB for women (Venetoklis, 2019), while others report no gender differences (Deeming, 2013). Most common, however, is the finding that men—and especially boys and young male adults—report higher levels of SWB (Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Marquez & Long, 2021). The association between SWB and health, on the other hand, is less contested. People who report (very) poor health are found to be more anxious, less happy, and report lower levels of SWB (Deeming, 2013; Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Salameh et al., 2022). Finally, regional characteristics also play a role, for example, through local institutions of the welfare state or the access to services and facilities that increase SWB (Deeming, 2013; Lee, 2021; Zangger, 2023).

A second line of evidence points to the importance of social networks and (localized) social capital. People mobilize resources, exchange information, and organize support through social networks (Lin, 1999). In this respect, close kin and family are an especially relevant source of SBW for young and old (Katz, 2009; Li & Cheng, 2015; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Generally, contact and support from family members are positively related to SWB, stressing the importance of the quality of social encounters over their quantity (Katz, 2009; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). However, negative interactions with family members reduce SWB (Li & Cheng, 2015; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008).

Friends and neighbors matter as well. Again, rather than mere structural aspects of friendship networks, such as the frequency of contact, qualitative aspects of social ties are especially relevant (Bian et al., 2018; Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2017; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Friends provide instrumental and emotional support and positive experiences, and they can buffer the negative impact of crises and stress (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2017). This also holds true for neighbors. People who interact frequently with their neighbors, who trust their neighbors, and who exchange more support are found to be more satisfied with life (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Yang et al., 2022; Zangger, 2023). Additionally, Noy and Sin (2021) find a positive social comparison effect on SWB:

People with a higher ordinal income rank within neighborhoods report higher levels of life satisfaction. Finally, summarizing existing work on the impact of using online social networks on SWB, Verduyn et al. (2017) show that actively using social media enhances SWB, while passive use is associated with lower levels of SWB.

2.2. Trajectories of SWB in the Wake of Crises

Economic, political, and natural crises drastically affect individual well-being in the short as well as in the long term. In this regard, the impact of the 2008 economic crisis is a well-studied case. Rising unemployment and economic insecurity led to a significant drop in people's SWB, followed by a post-crisis recovery (Ballas & Thanis, 2022; Sarracino & Piekałkiewicz, 2021; Welsch & Kühling, 2016). During this crisis, the importance of some correlates of SWB changed. Income gained importance during and right after the economic crisis, while the importance of people's social capital remained stable in many countries (Sarracino & Piekałkiewicz, 2021; Siposne Nandori, 2016). Studies looking at the impact of other crises, however, point to the particular importance of (localized) social capital in response to a crisis, alleviating the negative impact on people's SWB (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; LaLone, 2012; Schobert et al., 2023).

The trajectories of SWB in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic follow a similar pattern. Around the world, local and national lockdowns as well as social distancing orders led to a decrease in people's SWB (Martinez et al., 2021; Möhring et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2024). Again, this decline in SWB was often followed by a recovery to pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, this general pattern does not hold for everyone. Zacher and Rudolph (2024), for example, find differences according to people's stress appraisal and coping strategies. Focusing on demographic factors, Möhring et al. (2021) show that women's satisfaction—especially in those without children—was more negatively affected. For young adults, Preetz et al. (2021) further demonstrate that financial strain, returning to the parental home, and limited peer contact were risk factors associated with negative changes in SWB during the pandemic. Meanwhile, studies also report buffering or even silver-lining effects of neighborhood networks and communal satisfaction on SWB (Guan et al., 2023; Zangger, 2023). Consequently, the impact of the pandemic on well-being seems to be alleviated by people's integration into (local) networks and community social capital.

2.3. The Present Study

The present study aims to combine the two perspectives outlined before by focusing on how changes in local social networks influence trajectories of SWB and how this effect varies according to individual risk factors. To this end, we identify typical patterns of SWB in the wake of Covid-19 in Switzerland. Since the quality of social ties is especially relevant for SWB (Bian et al., 2018; Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2017), we focus on changes in people's relations with neighbors. In times of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, neighbors became the prime resource many people counted on. While friends, family, and online networks generally matter for SWB as well, the restrictions put on people's daily lives during the pandemic confined their interactions to the local neighborhood environment (Miao et al., 2021). Based on existing literature (Zangger, 2023; Zetterberg et al., 2021), we expect that improving relations with neighbors is associated with a "recovering pattern" of SWB after the pandemic, while already having strong ties to friends and neighbors prior to the pandemic should more generally protect people against a decline in SWB. Given that individual resources and risk factors have been identified as crucial determinants of SWB (e.g., Hadjar & Backes, 2013), we further investigate how the effect of changing neighborly relations varies with individuals'

finances, education, health, gender, and migration background. Since people with less financial means, lower education, poorer health, and those who more recently migrated to Switzerland are expected to experience more severe declines in SWB, we hypothesize that they, in turn, more strongly benefit from improving relations with neighbors for recovering to pre-pandemic levels of SWB. To a lesser extent, this could also be the case for women whose SWB has been found to be more adversely affected by crises (Möhring et al., 2021). Having enough individual resources to cope with a crisis, people in more advantageous positions likely did not see their SWB affected that much and should in turn be more likely to depict a pattern of high and stable SWB in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Data & Methods

3.1. Data

This study uses five waves of data from the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), a yearly panel study comprising more than 5,000 households, and information on more than 10,000 individuals (Tillmann et al., 2022). The five waves included in this study comprise four regular waves of data collection (household and individual data), collected at the end of each year between 2019 and 2022, and a supplementary data collection during the early Covid-19 crisis. Data for the Covid-19 supplemental study were collected during May and June 2020, about one month after the end of the first lockdown in Switzerland (which lasted from March 16th until April 26th, 2020). During the first lockdown, several social distancing measures were taken. Schools and non-essential institutions such as restaurants were closed, and any social gathering exceeding five persons was prohibited. In contrast to the neighboring countries (France, Germany, and Italy), no curfews were introduced. Thereafter, restrictions were gradually eased, such as the re-opening of schools, shops, and restaurants by May 11th. By May 31st, 2021, public events with up to 300 people were allowed, while private social gatherings were restricted to a maximum of 50 people. Due to these restrictions, the supplementary data collection differed from regular waves in both scope and mode of collection. While the annual waves are collected by either computer-assisted telephone or personal interviewing, this Covid-19 study was conducted through a self-administered online and paper questionnaire (see also Tillmann et al., 2022). This resulted in a lower response rate of only 67%, in which men, young people, and foreigners were slightly less likely to participate.

Only respondents from the 2019 wave were invited to take part in the supplementary Covid-19 data collection. The 67% that returned the self-administered questionnaires correspond to 5,843 observations from 4,053 different households. Combining these data with data from the regular waves (2020 to 2022), we have a total of 4,699 observations with information on their SWB in all five waves. This drop in cases primarily represents panel attrition and only to a very minor degree item non-response (186 cases). The number of observations in the multivariate analyses further drops to 3,820 due to item non-response. Of the 879 cases with item non-response, 437 are attributable to people who do not know the number of contacts in their online social networks. An additional 385 cases have missing information on either housing type or duration of residence in Switzerland. The remaining 58 cases of item non-response are equally distributed over the other predictor variables.

3.2. Measures

To measure trajectories of SWB, this study uses people's assessment of their life satisfaction, measured on an 11-point scale (Schimmack et al., 2008). The single-item life satisfaction measure is broadly used in population-based surveys such as the German SOEP, the British Household Panel, and the Gallup World Poll, allowing for international comparability. It has proved to be a valid and reliable instrument yielding similar results as the five-item satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985) while keeping the participant burden low (Cheung & Lucas, 2014). Since we use sequence analysis to find typical trajectories, the original measure is reduced to a four-level scale, differentiating between people who are *very dissatisfied with life* (original value 0–3), *rather dissatisfied* (4–6), *rather satisfied* (7–8), and *very satisfied* (9–10). The unequal width is chosen to account for the heavily left-skewed original distribution. While grouping the measure makes it easier to visualize and analyze the different trajectories, it also makes it harder to detect small changes in people's SWB in the observed time window.

Our key independent variable is people's relationship with their neighbors. Every three years, the SHP collects data on people's friendships, relatives, online and neighborhood networks. In our case, this happened in 2019 and 2022. For both the neighborhood and friendship networks, the data comprise information on the number of neighbors and friends one has contact with, the contact frequency, and mobilized help through the network, respectively. We use the two items on the amount of emotional support from neighbors and friends in 2019 to account for baseline differences in people's neighborhood and friendship networks, ranging from 0 (*none at all*) to 10 (*a great deal*). Additionally, in the supplementary Covid-19 questionnaire, respondents were asked to what extent their relations with neighbors changed after the outbreak of the pandemic. This originally 11-point scale, ranging from 0, indicating that the relation deteriorated a lot, to 10, reflecting strongly improved neighborly relations, was recoded to a variable with three values: −1 if respondents reported deteriorating relations (original values 0–4), 0 if they assessed their relations with neighbors to be the same as prior to the pandemic (original value 5), and 1 if their relationship with neighbors improved (original values 6–10). The reason for recoding the original variable is attributable to the fact that about 70% of all respondents reported no change in relations with neighbors. Apart from the outlined neighborhood and friendship network items, the data also contain information on respondents' family and online networks. While friendships might have suffered from restricted contact possibilities and online networks became a more important source, the restrictions affected family networks less, particularly regarding family members in the same household. Moreover, including support from family members would significantly reduce the sample size due to item non-response. Consequently, we do not explicitly account for respondents' extended family network. Concerning people's online networks before the pandemic, we include the logarithm of people's reported size of their online social network, which is the only measure available for this type of network.

We assess people's socio-economic risk factors using three different measures. First, we use their subjective assessment of household finances prior to the pandemic as a measure of economic vulnerability. This measure differentiates between households that can save money, those that spend all they earn, and those who are living off their assets or getting into debt. Second, people's highest educational degree is used to capture people's access to different resources and networks. In this regard, our measure differentiates between people with at most compulsory schooling (nine years of schooling plus an additional two years of mandatory kindergarten), those with upper secondary education (having completed either a

post-compulsory vocational or general education), and people with tertiary education (graduates from universities and higher vocational education institutions). Third, we assess people's vulnerability to an immigration history based on their duration of residence in Switzerland, differentiating between people born in Switzerland, those residing in the country for 10 or more years, and people who have lived in the country for less than 10 years. Additionally, we also look at gender differences on the impact of changes in neighborly relations on SWB.

Finally, we account for people's subjective health using a five-point scale, Covid-infection during the pandemic, their age (both linearly as well as a squared term), occupational status, as well as housing type (differentiating between people living in an apartment building, a detached house, or another type of housing), residential mobility, and the community type according to the Swiss municipality typology (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2017). Descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analyses can be found in Table A1 in the Supplementary File.

3.3. Methods

We use sequence analysis and hierarchical clustering to identify typical trajectories of SWB in the wake of Covid-19 (Raab & Struffolino, 2022; Ritschard & Studer, 2018). In the context of studying people's SWB, sequence analysis allows us to explore how individuals' well-being evolves over time, uncovering recurring sequences of states, as well as transitions between them. The individual sequences are then grouped into typical trajectories using cluster analysis that tries to minimize within-cluster and maximize between-cluster variance (Hennig et al., 2015). To do so, we need a measure to assess the similarity, or rather, dissimilarity of sequences. Different dissimilarity measures can be considered, for example, hamming distance, LCS, or optimal matching (Studer & Ritschard, 2016). In the present case, we opted for optimal matching with constant substitution costs and an indel parameter (time shift penalty) set at 1. Alternative distance measures and parameters yielded similar results. The computed distances are then taken as the basis for a hierarchical clustering approach with Ward's method to find compact clusters. To find the most suitable clustering solution, we compare the different clustering results using a wide range of quality measures (e.g., Point Biserial Correlation, Hubert's C, Pseudo R^2) that are included in the R library "WeightedCluster" (Studer, 2013).

Once we have obtained a statistically and theoretically valid cluster solution, we investigate differences in the trajectories of SWB by predicting the individual propensity of belonging to each typical group of well-being sequences (cluster of trajectories). To do so, we use a multinomial logistic regression model with the assigned cluster from the previous analytical step as the dependent variable and the measures described above as independent variables (Agresti, 2013). For easier interpretation, we calculate average marginal effects for all independent variables (Long, 1997). To investigate moderating effects, we plot the predicted probabilities for typical trajectories of SWB when interacting individual risk factors with changes in people's neighborhood social network. Doing so informs us on how the long-term effect of localized social capital on SWB differs among social groups.

4. Results

4.1. Trajectories of SWB in the Wake of Covid-19

We start our examination of people's SWB trajectories prior to, during, and "after" Covid-19 by examining the overall picture. In this regard, Figure 1 depicts the aggregated sequence states at each of the five points in time. While people's life satisfaction remains quite stable on the aggregated level, we note an increase of people who were (rather) not satisfied right after the first lockdown (green and purple segments in Figure 1). Meanwhile, the share of people who report being very satisfied (scoring 9 or 10 on the original scale) also increases during this time. That is, rather than a general decline in SWB, we find a heterogeneous, polarizing response to the pandemic.

In the next step, we build a typology of sequences that are as homogenous as possible while being as different as possible from each other. To this end, we use optimal matching to compute the dissimilarity between trajectories. This is followed by a hierarchical cluster analysis of the sequences using the previously calculated dissimilarities. Using Ward's D to minimize residual variance, we examined different clustering solutions, summarized by the corresponding quality criteria in Table A2 in the Supplementary File. Considering both quality measures (e.g., maximizing the point biserial correlation or minimizing Hubert's C) as well as theoretical considerations (i.e., the clusters should be interpretable), we opted for a solution with three clusters. While a solution with four clusters would be a slightly better fit to the data, it differs from the three-cluster solution only by adding an additional, very heterogeneous cluster with mixed sequences.

The solution with three clusters is depicted in Figure 2. The three clusters comprise distinct trajectories of people's SWB. The first cluster, consisting of 2,232 individuals, is characterized by people who were rather satisfied prior to the pandemic (2019 measurement), and who then reported a decline in SWB right after the first lockdown. However, their SWB gradually recovered after the pandemic. The second cluster of trajectories,

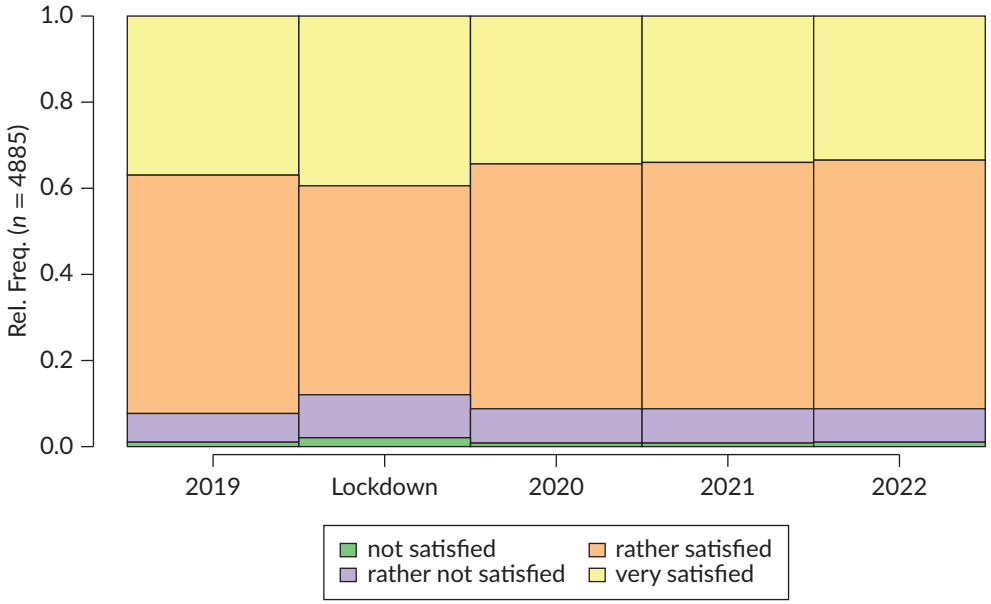

Figure 1. Overall state distribution of SWB over the five points in time under analysis.

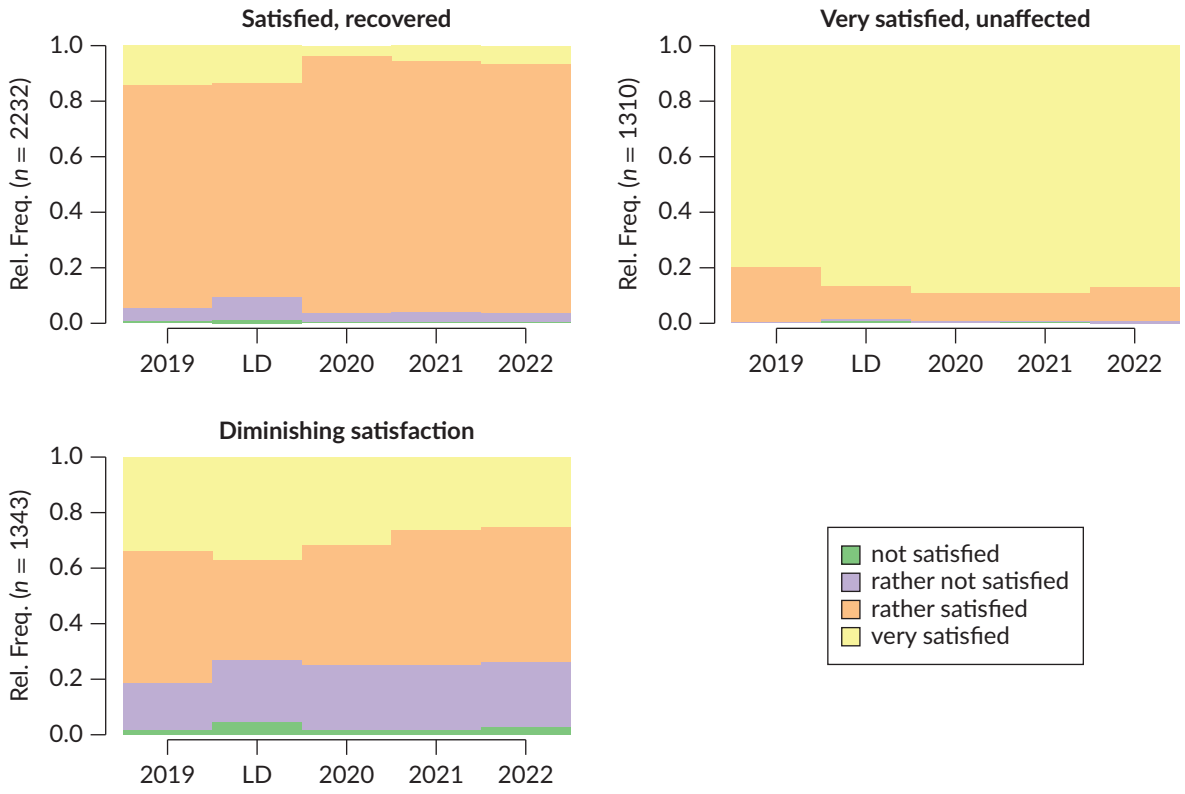

Figure 2. State distribution plot of the three-cluster solution after optimal matching and hierarchical clustering.

comprising 1,310 people, is characterized by very high levels of life satisfaction throughout the time window. These people did not see their SWB affected by the pandemic. Rather, they tend to report an increase in life satisfaction right after the first lockdown as well as in subsequent periods. The third cluster, on the other hand, is more heterogeneous. Since the share of people who are very satisfied continuously decreases in this cluster, it can thus best be described as comprising people whose SWB has been decreasing since the pandemic. This cluster comprises 1,343 people, slightly more than a quarter of all observations in the data.

4.2. Correlates of SWB Trajectories & Individual Vulnerabilities

In the next step, we predict cluster membership, that is, the grouping of typical SWB trajectories. In this respect, Table 1 depicts the result from a multinomial logistic regression model with cluster membership as the dependent variable. Coefficients represent average marginal effects, that is, the average change in the probability of belonging to the respective cluster for an increase in the covariate (Long, 1997). The first column comprises the average marginal effects for belonging to the group of trajectories with recovering SWB after the pandemic. The second column of Table 1 depicts the effects for belonging to the second cluster of trajectories, that is, people who constantly report high levels of well-being. Finally, the last column depicts the average marginal effects for reporting declining levels of SWB.

First, we note that improving relations with neighbors increases the probability of belonging to the cluster of recovery trajectories by about 3 percentage points. Likewise, it decreases the likelihood of belonging to the cluster with people whose SWB did not change during the pandemic by about the same amount. People who received a lot of emotional support from their neighbors and friends prior to the pandemic are more likely

Table 1. Predicting cluster membership of SWB trajectories (average marginal effects).

	Satisfied, recovered		Very satisfied, unaffected		Diminishing satisfaction	
Change relationship with neighbors	0.032*	(0.016)	−0.031*	(0.014)	−0.001	(0.015)
Emotional support from neighbors	0.001	(0.002)	0.006**	(0.002)	−0.007**	(0.002)
Emotional support from friends	−0.010**	(0.004)	0.018***	(0.003)	−0.008*	(0.003)
log(online network size)	0.002	(0.001)	−0.004***	(0.001)	0.002	(0.001)
Health	−0.128***	(0.012)	0.195***	(0.011)	−0.067***	(0.010)
Respondent's age	0.006*	(0.003)	−0.004	(0.002)	−0.002	(0.002)
Respondent's age^2	−0.000***	(0.000)	0.000***	(0.000)	0.000	(0.000)
Household finances						
HH spends what it earns	0.024	(0.018)	−0.042**	(0.016)	0.018	(0.016)
HH eats its assets or gets into dept	0.016	(0.028)	−0.089***	(0.022)	0.073**	(0.026)
Education						
Upper secondary education	0.033	(0.028)	−0.025	(0.025)	−0.008	(0.025)
Tertiary education	0.046	(0.030)	−0.052	(0.028)	0.006	(0.027)
Gender	−0.020	(0.016)	−0.014	(0.014)	0.033*	(0.015)
Years living in Switzerland						
Up to 10 years	−0.176*	(0.076)	0.073	(0.084)	0.103	(0.085)
More than 10 years	0.019	(0.019)	−0.038*	(0.016)	0.019	(0.017)
Housing type						
in a detached, semi-detached, or terraced house	−0.001	(0.017)	0.032*	(0.014)	−0.031*	(0.015)
in another type of house/apartment	−0.007	(0.042)	0.019	(0.036)	−0.012	(0.038)
Pseudo R^2	0.073					
Observations	3820					

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; respondent's age^2 is included to account for nonlinear age effects; additionally controlled for household relocation, occupational status, community typology, Covid infection; reference levels: HH can save money, at most compulsory schooling, man, since birth, apartment in housing block; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

to report stable and very high levels of life satisfaction, increasing the likelihood of belonging to that cluster by 0.6 and 1.8 percentage points for each increase in the reported emotional support from neighbors and friends, respectively. Importantly, we found that the emotional support received from neighbors prior to the pandemic has no rebound effect on people's SWB (satisfied, recovered column): People who received more emotional support from neighbors prior to the pandemic are not more likely to belong to the cluster in which people's SWB dropped in the first phase of the pandemic, returning afterwards to pre-pandemic levels. Yet,

more emotional support from neighbors prior to the pandemic seems to generally protect against worsening trajectories of SWB (diminishing satisfaction column). Meanwhile, the number of contacts in online social networks has no clear discriminatory effect in the present case.

When it comes to individual risk factors, we note that—unsurprisingly—people's health is crucial: For each increase in subjective health on the 5-point scale, the likelihood of belonging to the group of highly satisfied people between 2019 and 2022 increases by about 19 percentage points. Note, however, that only 1% of all respondents describe their health as not well or worse. Age has a nonlinear effect: While the probability of belonging to the cluster of recovering SWB increases with age, the negative quadratic term (respondent's age^2) implies that this effect is attenuated with increasing age. Socio-economic resources also make a difference. Compared to people whose households can save money, those who spend what they earn or even get into debt are 4.2 and 8.9 percentage points less likely to show trajectories of high SWB over the observed time window. Conversely, people whose households tend to get into debt are 7.3 percentage points more likely to belong to the cluster of individuals who tend to see a decrease in their SWB. Gender also has a marginal impact: The probability of showing worsening trajectories of SWB is slightly higher for women than men. Duration of residence in Switzerland, however, is more clearly associated with diverging trajectories of SWB. Compared to people born in Switzerland, those who have been living in Switzerland for less than 10 years are 17.6 percentage points less likely to belong to the cluster of people whose life satisfaction recovered to high levels after the end of the pandemic. Finally, living in a (semi-)detached house is associated with a 3.2 percentage point increase in the probability of constantly showing very high levels of life satisfaction and a 3.1 percentage point decrease in the chance of belonging to the cluster of people experiencing diminishing satisfaction since the outbreak of the pandemic. The additional covariates controlled but not reported in Table 1 (namely, Covid-19 infection, occupational status, household relocation, and community typology) have no or no consistent effect on cluster membership. This also holds if we account for people's possibility for remote work rather than just their occupational status.

Having seen that improving relations with neighbors seems to mitigate the long-term negative impact of the pandemic on SWB and the importance of emotional support from neighbors and friends for stable trajectories of high levels of well-being more generally, the question remains to which extent this association also holds for more vulnerable groups. To this end, we interact the change in one's neighborhood network with respondents' financial situation, education, health, gender, and duration of residence in Switzerland. Based on each of these interaction terms, we then predict the probability of belonging to the first cluster of recovery trajectories. Figure 3 summarizes the interaction effects on these predicted probabilities.

Overall, the positive impact of improving relations with neighbors on the likelihood of belonging to the cluster of recovery trajectories of SWB is mostly constant. Nonetheless, the results in Figure 3 indicate that the most vulnerable in terms of socio-economic resources seem to have benefited slightly more from improving relations with neighbors during the pandemic: For people whose households tend to get into debt and for people with at most compulsory education, improving relations with neighbors seems to increase their chances of showing a recovering trajectory. Meanwhile, for those who can save money or have completed tertiary education, changes in their neighborhood network do not affect their likelihood of belonging to said cluster. This is contrasted by an opposite trend for people who more recently migrated to Switzerland (living less than 10 years in the country). This effect could reflect that this (small) group of people is more likely to experience overall declining levels of SWB (Table 1). Meanwhile, people in good

health are less likely to belong to the recovery cluster since they are much more likely to be found in the second cluster of people who never experienced a drop in life satisfaction but rather show very high levels

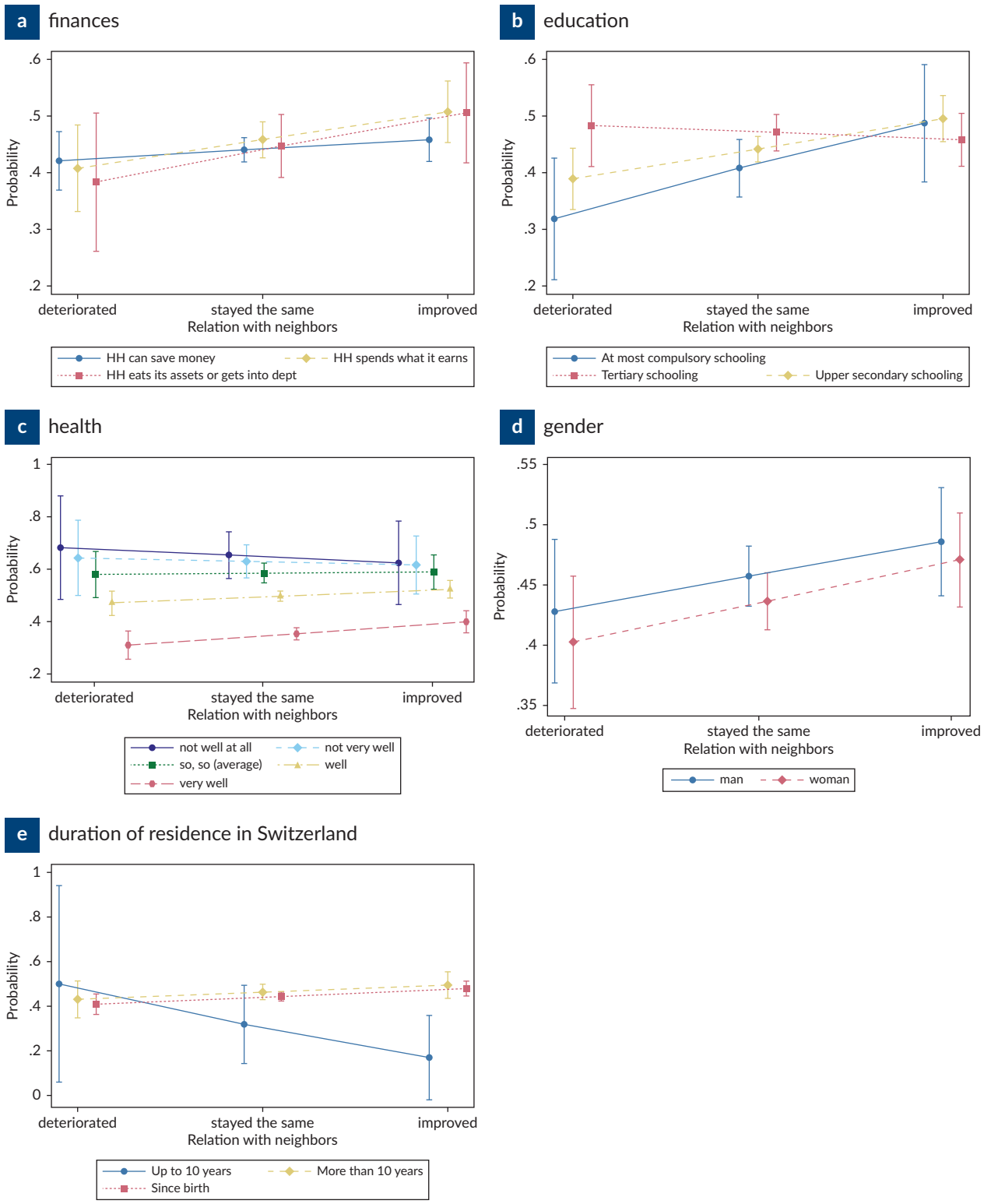

Figure 3. Interaction effects of vulnerability factors with change in relationship with neighbors on people's SWB.

of SWB all along. Finally, from Figure 3, we also conclude that—at least in the present study—there is no gendered effect of changes in people's neighborhood network on their SWB.

5. Conclusion

This article investigated the long-term trajectories of SWB, assessed by people's overall satisfaction with life, using five waves of panel data from Switzerland between 2019 and 2022. Using sequence analysis, we identified three distinct clusters of typical trajectories of SWB. The first cluster comprises people who were satisfied prior to the pandemic, who then saw a decline in SWB right after the first lockdown and a subsequent recovery to pre-pandemic levels. This cluster makes up almost half of all respondents. The second and third clusters, each consisting of about one-quarter of all respondents, comprise people who report very high levels of life satisfaction throughout the whole observation period, or who show declining levels of SWB since the end of the first lockdown in Switzerland, respectively.

Predicting cluster membership in a second step, we demonstrate that people who improved their relations with neighbors during the pandemic are more likely to show recovering trajectories of SWB. Moreover, this effect seems to be more pronounced among people with less financial means and lower education. This, in turn, is particularly beneficial since people with less financial means also tend to be more negatively affected by crises (Sarracino & Piekałkiewicz, 2021), and less educated individuals report lower levels of SWB in general (Deeming, 2013; Salameh et al., 2022). Further, a possible explanation could be that the Covid-19 pandemic also led to economic uncertainty regarding the job market. Hence, people with lower education and financial means might worry more about losing their jobs, and having more social contacts can help them cope with it. In contrast, people who more recently migrated to Switzerland (less than 10 years ago) do not benefit from improving neighborly relations in terms of belonging to the recovery-trajectory cluster. Also, people who mobilized more emotional support from friends and neighbors prior to the pandemic were more likely to show stable trajectories of SWB and report very high levels of satisfaction throughout the whole time window. While in line with previous findings on the importance of localized social capital (Guan et al., 2023; Zangger, 2023), our results extend the literature by means of examining long-term trajectories and studying group-level heterogeneous responses to changing neighborhood networks.

Our study has several limitations to keep in mind. First, even though we use five waves of panel data to assess SWB trajectories, our approach does not reveal causal effects. Particularly, the analyses in this study do not account for further factors such as significant changes in individuals' lives (such as loss of loved ones, job loss, etc.) or major events, such as increasing cost of living and the inflation crisis, that likely also affected SWB trajectories. Instead, this article identifies (risk) factors associated with distinct SWB trajectories, focusing on the role of localized social capital and neighborhood networks. As long as these additional factors are not distinctively associated with changes in neighborly relations (e.g., if neighborhood relations were to change as a result of losing a family member during the pandemic), failing to account for them only introduces additional noise but no bias into the estimates. Nevertheless, these additional factors could also explain some of the heterogeneity in our clusters, especially for the third one that is characterized by people who report declining levels of SWB in the observed time window, or for more recent migrants that seem—at least in our analyses—not to benefit from improving neighborly relations. Second, one key measure, the change in people's relations with neighbors, is subjectively assessed by respondents and does not necessarily reflect actual change. However, since qualitative aspects of social networks and perceived

change therein have been shown to particularly influence people's well-being (Bian et al., 2018; Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2017), we are confident that our results reveal meaningful patterns. Finally, although representative of all of Switzerland, the results do not straightforwardly generalize to other contexts. Compared to other countries, Switzerland is characterized by high levels of SWB. Moreover, compared to other European countries, policy responses to the pandemic were relatively modest: The first lockdown, ending right before the interim Covid-19 data collection that was crucial for this study, lasted only six weeks, and no curfews were in place. After this period, shops reopened, and social distancing measures were gradually lifted except for the short second, less impactful lockdown in January–February 2021.

The findings of this study have several implications. First, confirming the experience from other contexts and crises (LaLone, 2012; Schobert et al., 2023), local support networks facilitate recovery after crises. Fostering local social capital and networks thus benefits residents not only in their everyday lives but also in terms of community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). In line with results from other contexts (Zetterberg et al., 2021), this is especially true if people already can count on support from neighbors, friends, and family prior to the crisis, highlighting thus a social gradient in crisis response that works through people's social networks, within as well as outside neighborhoods. In this respect, combining our network-based approach with studies focusing on the impact of socio-economic segregation on people's well-being could be especially promising for future research. Second, our results suggest that these positive effects are more pronounced among vulnerable groups (in terms of income and education), enabling targeted interventions to enhance their living conditions. That is, people with less financial means might benefit most from interventions that increase community resilience at the neighborhood level by, for example, promoting neighborhood networks and contacts. Third, there is, however, a considerable group of people whose SWB does not recover in the years following the onset of the pandemic. While our analyses only revealed a few (and rather obvious) predictors, such as one's financial situation, health, and less support from friends and neighbors, more research into this particular group is needed to identify additional risk factors, especially concerning the multiplicity of crises during the last years, such as rising inflation and cost of living. In this respect, qualitative inquiries into people's everyday experiences might complement our and others' quantitative approaches.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

This study has been realized using the data collected by the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), which is based at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences FORS. The project is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Data can be accessed via https://www.swissubase.ch.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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ARTICLE

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A "Promise" of Proximity in Pandemic Times: Governing Urban Marginality in the Netherlands and France

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Abstract

In early 2020, the world went into lockdown. New norms of social distancing and remote work were implemented in response to the Covid-19 crisis. These appeared to challenge a key aspect of the current governance of urban marginality: proximity. This article asks how proximity, involving physical presence in the neighborhood and direct contact with urban residents, changed and remained the same during the pandemic and what that means for the governance of urban marginality beyond pandemic times. To answer this question, I draw on ethnographic research in marginalized neighborhoods in the Netherlands and France. Studying how local actors practiced proximity and responded to the pandemic, I found that Covid-19 did not simply challenge proximate governance. While physical presence decreased, the pandemic instigated direct daily contact and community response and relief, albeit at a distance. Yet, the pandemic also exposed and aggravated existing difficulties in working "close by," particularly integrated approaches and civic engagement. The analysis, first, highlights the importance of daily contact beyond mere physical presence in the neighborhood, deepening current understanding of proximity in practice. Second, it demonstrates that local actors continuously negotiate community involvement, advancing understanding of civic engagement in proximate governance and the assumed inherent qualities and fixed nature of "the local." Third, it challenges the centrality of "the local" in urban governance, revealing the impact of a "far-away" state on local actors' ability to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods, in and beyond pandemic times.

Keywords

Covid-19; marginalized neighborhoods; pandemic; proximity; urban marginality

1. Introduction

In early 2020, the world went into lockdown. At first, some described the Covid-19 crisis as a "great equalizer," as it similarly affected "rich and poor, Black and White, urban and rural" (Zakaria, 2020). Soon, however, it became clear that the pandemic intensified existing inequalities and marginalization (Florida et al., 2021; Goldin, 2021; Haase, 2020). In the Netherlands and France, mayors expressed alarm at the state of marginalized neighborhoods in their cities (Couvelaire, 2021; "Vijftien burgemeesters," 2021). They called for additional government aid to support assistance programs for these neighborhoods, which they assumed to be particularly challenged by the pandemic and associated measures of social distancing and remote working.

Local neighborhood approaches in both countries had hitherto worked from an ambition of "proximity" involving the physical presence of public service delivery in the neighborhood and direct contact with urban residents (Bacqué & Sintomer, 2001; Bredewold et al., 2018). This notion of proximity emerged in the governance of marginalized neighborhoods as a promise to bridge an understood distance between the state and urban residents (Tonkens & Kampen, 2018).

Proximate governance can be seen as a promising and key aspect of "the local" as a focus of urban governance, for which there is increasing attention in current scholarship (Blanco et al., 2014; Cochrane, 2020; Groenleer & Bertram, 2021; Hertting & Kugelberg, 2018). However, scholars also raise questions about whether the promise of proximity is in fact fulfilled in neighborhood governance (Vollebergh et al., 2021). Some argue against what they call "the local trap": "the tendency to assume that the local scale is preferable to other scales" (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921). Moreover, in the specific context of urban marginality, research points to potentially harmful effects of a state that may be, or experienced as, simultaneously proximate and far away—or proximate in different ways than promised (Dikeç, 2007; Uitermark, 2014; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). It thus remains unclear what proximity entails in the governance of marginalized neighborhoods. Proximity may not only be a promise; it may be a pitfall as well.

In this article, I examine the promise of proximity. What does it entail? How did proximity change and remain the same during Covid-19, and what does that mean for the governance of urban marginality more generally? For this, I draw on an ethnographic study of how urban professionals and residents practiced proximity in marginalized neighborhoods in the Netherlands and France, before and during the pandemic. I found that the pandemic did not simply challenge proximate governance. While physical presence indeed decreased, the pandemic instigated more direct daily contact and community response and relief, albeit at a distance. Yet, the pandemic also exposed and aggravated existing difficulties in working "close by," particularly lack of an integrated approach to address neighborhood marginalization and variety in communities and community practices perceived, by some, as difficult or even dangerous.

With this in mind, this article contributes to scholarship on the governance of urban marginality in three ways. First, it deepens understanding of the three "promises of proximity" identified by Vollebergh et al. (2021), building on Tonkens and Kampen (2018). In particular, it points to the importance of day-to-day contact as a mode of proximity forming a valuable complement to proximity as physical presence. Second, it demonstrates how local actors continuously negotiate community involvement, advancing understanding of civic engagement in proximate governance (Vollebergh et al., 2021) and the inherent qualities and fixed

nature attributed to "the local" (Purcell, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2004). Third, the article challenges the centrality of "the local" in urban governance, revealing the impact of a "far-away" state that challenges local actors' ability to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods, in and beyond pandemic times.

2. The Promise of Proximity

2.1. Proximate Governance

"Proximity" is a key aspect of urban governance, particularly in marginalized neighborhoods. While labelled in various ways, scholars have studied "governing in community" (Vollebergh et al., 2021, p. 742) or "governing at close range" (Carter, 2018) by looking at, respectively, "proximate" governance and governance based on "proximal relationships" (p. 19). Building on existing scholarship regarding proximity in urban governance and so-called "deprived neighborhoods" (Bacqué & Sintomer, 2001; Vollebergh et al., 2021), I define proximate governance as the delivery of public services through a physical presence in the neighborhood and direct contact with urban residents.

Vollebergh et al. (2021, p. 7) identified and questioned three promises of proximity, as they critically examined attempts to "govern through community" as a "proximate form of governance" in Amsterdam, Milan, and Paris. This was built on the work of Tonkens and Kampen (2018), who listed nine such promises in discussing the changing welfare landscape in the Netherlands. The first of Vollebergh and colleagues' three promises of proximity is physical presence as a precondition for responsiveness. Thus, being knowledgeable about the neighborhood and everyday life there is considered "a precondition for efficient governance that is directly responsive to people's self-identified needs and local problems" (Vollebergh et al., 2021, p. 744). Through a physical presence, the state is seen to develop an embeddedness within the neighborhood and thereby an ability to respond to its needs.

The second promise of proximity positions the neighborhood as the appropriate scale for an integrated approach, in which professionals from different governance services and with different professions work closely together in networks. Operating in proximity to the neighborhood enables public service providers to work integrally rather than with sectored-off approaches. Such an integrated approach leads them to see and approach the different problems of the neighborhood and its residents in relation to one another, rather than in a fragmented way (Tonkens & Kampen, 2018, p. 29).

Finally, the third promise presents the local as "a natural locus of community, sociality, and civic engagement" (Vollebergh et al., 2021, p. 744). In the context of diverse and multi-ethnic marginalized neighborhoods, community and sociality are understood in a specific way, according to Vollebergh and colleagues. This entails a move away from the "self-enclosure" of various ethnic groups, towards forms of civic engagement that represent a "wholesome" and diverse community in which a variety of citizens live together (Vollebergh et al., 2021).

Proximity thus brings the promise of better service delivery. More specifically, it is a response to the classical bureaucratic Weberian state, based on values like reliability, expertise, and predictability, that has been criticized as too far away and ineffective (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013, p. 46). Proximity encompasses a different set of values, such as trust, familiarity, and customization. The proximate state stands as an

alternative to a 'far-away' state, with local (state) actors close to and in touch with urban residents and their lived world at the neighborhood level to respond more adequately to their needs.

2.2. A Promise in Dispute

The promise of proximity cannot be seen separately from a wider revaluation of "the local" as a key scale of governance (Barnett, 2020; Blanco et al., 2014; Cochrane, 2020; Denters & Rose, 2005; Pike et al., 2007; Pill & Guarneros-Meza, 2020). The governance of marginalized urban neighborhoods, where crime, unemployment, and poverty are often concentrated, has long been highly spatialized at the local level (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Uitermark, 2014). Currently, a shift towards a local focus in urban governance more generally is evident, marked by state restructuring from centralized, hierarchical models to decentralized, networked state-society governance relations (Hertting & Kugelberg, 2018; Vollebergh et al., 2021).

While proximity can be seen as a key aim and fundamental principle of this "local turn," its "promise" is not undisputed. Some scholars contest warm appraisals of "the local," or what they call "the local trap" (Barnett, 2020): "the tendency to assume that the local scale is preferable to other scales" (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921). In their criticism, they dispute the attribution of specific, inherent benefits to the local as a governance scale, arguing "there is nothing inherent about any scale" (Purcell, 2006, p. 1927). Rather, they view scale as the result of social and political arrangements, which are outcomes of actors' political struggles. As such, scale is a social construction: dynamic, fluid and constantly made and remade, rather than fixed and given (Swyngedouw, 2004). Governance arrangements at the local scale (or any scale), therefore, cannot be inherently more likely to have certain effects than those at other scales (Brown & Purcell, 2005, p. 608). This necessitates the rejection of the analytical assumption that any scale has certain inherent characteristics and the ensuing idea that the local scale holds certain promises for urban democracy and the welfare state (Brown & Purcell, 2005; Purcell, 2006).

Moreover, previous research on the specific context of urban marginality suggests that governments have not simply moved closer to citizens. Rather, what can be viewed as a "local turn" is also theorized as a "move away": a retreat of the neoliberal state, which cuts budgets and closes public services in marginalized neighborhoods while increasingly relying on citizens and civil society in a decentralized, local governance of "active citizenship" (Hoekstra, 2018; Uitermark, 2014; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). In this context, the presence of the state does not manifest itself in proximate relations of trust. Rather, the state enacts a punitive and penalizing presence, being "close by" through surveillance of marginalized neighborhoods (Dikeç, 2007; Uitermark, 2014). Thus, within proximate neighborhood governance, the state may be, or experienced as, simultaneously far away and proximate in different ways than promised.

3. Studying Proximity in Pandemic Times

3.1. The Pandemic as a "Forced Experiment" on Proximate Governance in the Netherlands and France

The Netherlands and France have different welfare systems, historical paths, and national cultures (Musterd, 2005), but in both countries a shift from a "distant" to a more "proximate" state unfolded starting in the early 1990s, extending well into the new millennium. In the Netherlands, a "move of the welfare state" has been one of the most profound institutional changes in this regard. In 2015, the social domain was decentralized and

many tasks and responsibilities of the welfare state that had been carried out at the national level were placed within the purview of local governments (Bredewold et al., 2018; Groenleer & Hendriks, 2020). In France, the national state continues to play a central role; but here, too, processes of decentralization and localization have impacted urban governance (Bertrand & Moquay, 2004).

Particularly, urban governance programs aimed at "deprived" or "priority" neighborhoods have had and still retain a local and territorial focus. This applies to both the previous *Vogelaarwijken* and current "focus areas" in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022; Musterd, 2009) and the *quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville* and their predecessors in France (Cupers, 2014; Tissot, 2007). In France, this has translated into an increased focus on participatory democracy (Bacqué & Sintomer, 2001), local governance (Bacqué & Mechmache, 2013; Bertrand & Moquay, 2004), citizen empowerment (Bacqué & Biewener, 2013), and "outreach" to marginalized populations (Baillergeau & Grymonprez, 2020). In the Netherlands, proximity is found in neighborhood governance approaches involving "working with a presence" (*present werken*; see Baart, 2003), active citizenship and participation (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013), domesticity (Bredewold et al., 2018), and working close to "the lived world" of citizens (Veldboer et al., 2022). As such, the Netherlands and France provide particularly interesting settings to study how, in different institutional and national contexts, a similar ambition took shape and was possibly challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic as an "intervention" or "forced experiment" (Aarts et al., 2021; Florida et al., 2021) provides an intriguing research context to study proximity in practice, as it impacted life in *and* proximate governance of marginalized neighborhoods (Haase, 2020). While a pandemic may be seen as a "great equalizer," it actually "operates selectively," with consequences unevenly distributed (Aarts et al., 2021, p. 6; Goldin, 2021). As such, the Covid-19 crisis exposed and aggravated existing inequalities (Aguirre, 2020; Goldin, 2021; Haase, 2020; Zhenga & Walshamb, 2021), specifically in the Netherlands (De Jonge et al., 2020) and France (Bouchet & Duvoux, 2022).

The impact of the pandemic, both the health crisis itself and the policy measures taken in response to it, was foreseen to be most severe for deprived populations and in marginalized neighborhoods (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Florida et al., 2021; Haase, 2020). The intersection of low socioeconomic status and territorially unequal distribution of public services made the residents of marginalized neighborhoods more vulnerable, as poverty, poor housing, and living conditions, as well as low access to health services, all increased the risk of becoming infected (Haase, 2020). Moreover, the capacity to obey government-imposed measures of social distancing was unevenly distributed (Dodds et al., 2020), as many residents of marginalized neighborhoods lived in small homes, had limited access to green spaces, and had jobs in sectors where working from home was not possible. It soon became evident that government-initiated social distancing measures, working from home, quarantines, and lockdowns profoundly changed urban residents' lives and the governance of their neighborhoods (Aarts et al., 2021; Dymanus et al., 2021).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

I studied how this change came about through ethnographic research concerning local and participatory governance approaches in marginalized neighborhoods in the Netherlands and France from 2019 until 2021. In the Netherlands, I followed an approach initiated by a Dutch municipality and implemented in three

neighborhoods. My study included over a year of participant observation of neighborhood and municipal meetings and events and 19 in-depth interviews with citizens and urban professionals involved in the approach. In France, I studied the *politique de la ville*: the national government's urban policy program for "priority neighborhoods." That study included 16 explorative conversations, several participant and non-participant observations, and 19 in-depth interviews with citizens, professionals, and civil servants involved in priority neighborhoods in the Île-de-France region. In both the Netherlands and France, interviews focused on urban professionals' and residents' experiences with participatory governance approaches, their strategies to make urban change, and—for the interviews done during the pandemic—the impact of Covid-19 on these approaches.

My ethnographic research in these two locales provided a multi-sited and comparative exploration of how a global phenomenon, participatory governance in marginalized neighborhoods, manifested locally in different national settings. The aim of this multi-sited, comparative ethnography was not to generalize across cases, but to contrast and mirror insights from different contexts, to better understand the phenomenon as it manifested in different settings (Falzon, 2009; Simmons & Smith, 2019).

While my research started pre-pandemic, most of the fieldwork took place during the Covid-19 crisis. This limited opportunities for participant observation and "being there." At the same time, it provided a perfect opportunity to study proximity and how it was, presumably, challenged by the distance mandated by governments worldwide in response to the pandemic. In the Netherlands, my data collection started prior to the pandemic and in a "traditional" way of ethnographic research: with my participation in weekly meetings and events, visiting city hall, strolling through the neighborhood, having informal conversations and unplanned interactions. Starting in March 2020, meetings were suspended and later resumed online and in hybrid formats.

In France, the fieldwork was built on prior research in 2014–2015, but the present work started during the pandemic, during a lockdown. Here, my focus was more on planned interviews than on unplanned informal interactions. Rather than being "immersed in the field" for an extensive period (Schatz, 2009), the fieldwork in France consisted of an explorative field visit in January 2021 and two additional field visits, including two rounds of interviewing in the spring and fall of that same year. The practices as discussed in interviews were followed with (participant) observations of these practices, like visiting a neighborhood council meeting after interviewing the municipal employee responsible for organizing these. In both the Netherlands and France, some meetings were online, but most conversations and interviews were in person, often one-on-one, wearing face masks, in offices separated by plastic screens provisionally attached to desks and at times outside.

The collected data, documents, fieldnotes, and interview transcripts, were analyzed using several coding rounds (Emerson et al., 2011). First, I inductively identified thematic patterns in the data. This resulted in a focus on proximity. Second, I used focused coding to develop an understanding of the ways respondents made sense of proximity in neighborhood governance, for instance, by explaining municipal strategies, like *aller vers* (literally "going towards" or "reaching out"), and in relation to the pandemic, for instance, by explaining how professionals maintained contact with urban residents. Finally, I analyzed the data in line with the three promises of proximity. Going back and forth between data and theory, using an abductive approach, I reexamined existing theoretical ideas about proximity and potentially challenged them with the empirical material (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). The analytical process of moving between the Netherlands

and France enabled me to develop comparative insights based on rich and varied contexts—about how proximity was part of neighborhood governance and how it was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Proximity in Practice

4.1. The Netherlands

4.1.1. Proximity in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, urban professionals and residents stressed the need to bridge a distance and build trust between residents and institutions. Working close to residents was viewed as a way to do that. By working in the neighborhood, urban professionals sought to restore and strengthen the trust of urban residents, in a casual and informal way (Fieldnotes NL, May and August 2020).

Urban professionals in the Netherlands often spoke about the importance of working with a presence (*present werken*). This meant being physically available in the neighborhood. According to one urban professional:

> [It means] being present in the neighborhood as much as possible. So, not too much working at your computer, but mainly walking around, and also, for instance, when someone says, "well, my neighbor this and that," you also ring the door of that neighbor's house. (Interview NL, November 2020)

Often, this "presence" materialized in a physical location, like a "neighborhood home": a place in the neighborhood where residents could come together and activities were organized by residents and urban professionals. In fact, as part of the participatory approach, such a place was developed in all three neighborhoods that were part of the program (Fieldnotes NL, May 2020). According to one urban professional, "that is the most important thing: having something physical" (Fieldnotes NL, May 2020).

Being present was also about developing personal relationships. As one urban professional explained:

> People asked: "What are you doing here?" And I answered: "Well, I am making coffee." I never said I was the director. That's also why on my LinkedIn page it says "neighbor." [When I open the door] I say: "Hello neighbor, come on in." (Interview NL, October 2020)

According to this professional, it was about getting to know these "neighbors," developing longstanding relationships with them, and connecting them to other urban professionals when needed (Interview NL, November 2020).

In that sense, being present, and working in proximity, was about "people acting in community together," which was the name of the participatory neighborhood approach. "Community" referred to professionals working together with residents and with one another, acting from within the neighborhood and in response to it. As one professional explained: "No matter how complicated, we have to do this together" (Fieldnotes NL, December 2019).

4.1.2. How Proximity Changed and Remained the Same in the Netherlands

How, then, did the pandemic impact this way of working? During the pandemic, physical presence as the first "promise of proximity" was challenged. Real-life encounters were suspended to a significant extent. Urban professionals working in the neighborhoods agreed that this was very problematic. Illustrative of this view was the difficult start of a "neighborhood home" that was about to open in a Dutch neighborhood when the pandemic hit. The goal of the Home was to provide a physical space for activities organized by and in service to neighborhood residents. The pandemic complicated getting this off the ground. In the words of one urban professional involved: "What is missing is sincere contact with people. Developing that, nourishing that….You have to meet people to do something together" (Interview NL, May 2021). With neighborhood residents who were already isolated from and distrusted state institutions, "sincere contact" was, according to this and other professionals, crucial to build trust and respond to real needs. They therefore found ways to remain in contact with residents, drawing on existing personal relationships, for example, organizing neighborhood breakfasts and creating a community pantry for diapers and clothing (Interview NL, May 2021).

Second, the pandemic challenged the "integral" or integrated approach promised as a result of proximity among urban professionals and between professionals and residents. Different programs and projects of various services and associations were paused: "Because of corona, there were cancellations [in the program]. When we started an effort [to come together], we had to stop again because of the pandemic" (Interview NL, December 2020). Moreover, the pandemic increased the urgency and prioritization of specific "vulnerable groups," thereby challenging a comprehensive approach, as attention and resources were directed to those most in need (Fieldnotes NL, April 2020). Urban professionals warned against focusing only on the most urgent issues, advocating all-encompassing solutions rather than quick fixes: "We see the urgency…but we have to avoid the reflex of just quick investments of money…to prevent 'Covid bandages'" (Interview NL, May 2021).

Third, "acting in community together" remained a key and crucial aspect of neighborhood governance, including during the pandemic. This was demonstrated by the above-mentioned neighborhood breakfast and community pantry as forms of first response and relief. Moreover, both urban professionals and residents stressed that the local community had to care for one another—a principle as true during the Covid-19 crisis as it had been before. One neighborhood resident said: "When I wasn't doing well, at least I knew somebody in the neighborhood I could go to" (Interview NL, December 2020).

4.2. France

4.2.1. Proximity in France

In France, almost all professionals described their way of working in terms of proximity and underscored its importance. One professional, employed by the municipality, explained that this was a new way of working for the municipality. Proximity, he said, was key to bridging the rupture in marginalized neighborhoods, and in France more generally, between state institutions and citizens: "The state is very far away. These services are here for proximity" (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). He described the municipality's youth services as a public service of proximity, referring to himself and his colleagues as "first-line actors." This proximity was translated into different principles in their work, among them, working outside the walls of city hall (*hors les murs*) and reaching out to the public rather than waiting for residents to come to institutions (*aller vers*).

To realize this way of working, they used "mobile structures," like a camper that served as an office, to go into the neighborhood. The work of department-level professionals was also described as being in the heart of the neighborhood, in proximity to both residents and local associations (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). Most professionals brought up "proximity" themselves as a discussion topic when I asked them to tell me about their day-to-day work. One professional described proximity as a key element of the *politique de la ville*: working at a decentralized, local level, with trust, physical presence, and encounters between professionals and residents who know one another (Interview FR, June 2021). Another professional commented that just the evening before he had been out knocking on doors to start conversations with residents. He described proximity as "I'm coming to see you" (Interview FR, May 2021).

Others responded affirmatively when I asked whether working in proximity was important in their jobs. They described proximity as part of their daily tasks (Interview FR, November 2021) and as being present in the neighborhood (Interview FR, May 2021). One urban professional responded "of course" proximity was how he would describe his job, explaining it as "placing yourself physically close to a person and looking [at their issues] with [their] eyes" and "being there for many years" (Interview FR, October 2021). Another urban professional, however, laughed when I asked about proximity, saying: "I don't care about those terms. But if someone had to translate what I'm doing, in effect, they'd say, he's working the *politique de la ville* way, because he's really close to all the people. He is working with proximity" (Interview FR, September 2021). Overall, professionals talked about 'proximity' as an obvious part of their job. Residents, too, agreed on the importance of proximity as *aller vers*, or reaching out: "You have to go to people to understand their problems, because these are not people who come to you" (Interview FR, May 2021).

4.2.2. How Proximity Changed and Remained the Same in France

In France, like in the Netherlands, the pandemic impacted proximate urban governance. First, physical presence in the neighborhood was challenged. One French professional said that, due to the pandemic, it was no longer possible to go out into the neighborhood, though that was still very much needed (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). Yet, this keen awareness of the presumed value of proximity as physical presence meant it did not entirely disappear. Although frequencies were drastically reduced, neighborhood residents and urban professionals still met: wearing face masks, separated by plastic screens, outside and at a distance.

Moreover, urban professionals practiced different modes of proximity to respond to residents' needs. This included daily contact, particularly via telephone, drawing on interpersonal relations. This responsiveness was not new. Interpersonal relations and daily contact often existed pre-pandemic, and this continued when the health measures were put in place: "The basis remains. We are close by, living in the neighborhood. We have regular contact" (Interview FR, June 2021). That contact intensified, however, during the pandemic, becoming crucial for first response and crisis relief. For instance, grocery and food delivery services were provided for the elderly, and laptops were distributed to enable homeschooling (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021).

Second, the pandemic complicated integrated service delivery. Discontinuities were reflected in a divide between associations: Some were capable of continuing their work during the pandemic, while others came to a halt (Fieldnotes FR, February and September 2021). Additionally, the pandemic forced new prioritizations within the already prioritized neighborhoods. Neighborhood social centers, for example, were sometimes open only for children and sometimes entirely closed (Fieldnotes FR, January 2021). This

contradicted the normal function of these centers, which aimed to provide an accessible contact point for all (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). The priority given to children's activities brought an end to the integrated family approach that had been taken pre-pandemic, since including parents in work with children was now no longer possible (Fieldnotes FR, January and February 2021).

Regarding the third promise, a dynamic local community came into action during the pandemic. Local actors, like residents and neighborhood (welfare) associations, played a crucial role in responding to the daily needs of residents, often coming into action before the national government (Fieldnotes FR, February and October 2021). According to one French urban professional, "these services [local services from the municipality and associations] have taken the role of the state in cushioning the shock of the lockdown" (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). Urban professionals stressed that the grocery and food distribution services signaled "strong solidarity," and "nowhere was solidarity in response to the pandemic as visible as in the banlieue" (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021).

4.3. Comparison and Synthesis

4.3.1. How Proximity Changed and Remained the Same in the Netherlands and France

In the Netherlands and France, the Covid-19 crisis similarly impacted the three promises of proximity identified by Vollebergh et al. (2021). Some aspects of proximity changed due to the pandemic and the imposed health measures. First, the physical presence of professionals and their direct, face-to-face contact with residents decreased. This instigated a shift in modes of daily contact and crisis response and relief. Specifically, day-to-day contact via telephone and video calls became more dominant. Second, and related to the promise of proximity as civic engagement, community involvement at a distance increased, as evidenced by the emergence of grocery services and the "community pantry." Yet, many neighborhood activities were canceled and some associations and services were unable to switch to alternative programming, online or otherwise. Combined with new prioritizations of particularly vulnerable groups, the pandemic thus, thirdly, limited an integrated and all-encompassing approach. However, some aspects of proximate governance remained the same. Urban professionals and residents in both the Netherlands and France said that reaching out to residents and developing interpersonal relations with them continued to be at the core of the urban professionals' work during Covid-19.

The pandemic also exposed existing difficulties with proximate neighborhood governance. While these were aggravated by the Covid-19 context, urban professionals and residents described them as a continuation of ongoing issues rather than as something new or connected to the pandemic specifically. First, Dutch and French urban professionals indicated that, even before the pandemic, they struggled to prioritize urgent issues while avoiding fragmented responses, aiming for an all-encompassing approach. One professional working in a French priority neighborhood described his work with neighborhood youths as follows: "We receive money to put out fires, instead of making structural change" (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). Another urban professional, working in a different French priority neighborhood, shared frustration at the structural effects of the work: "We carry out activities, but that's not enough" (Fieldnotes FR, February 2021). Yet another, describing the physical renovation of a neighborhood, commented: "It changes the neighborhood, but not their lives" (Fieldnotes FR, June 2021). While in both countries the ambition was to work "across domains" and with an "integrated approach," in reality, fragmented prioritizations and urgency

remained forefront in resource allocations, within the already prioritized and "urgent" areas. The difficulty of an integrated approach was not described as pandemic-specific, but as a limitation of proximate governance in general, though it became increasingly evident during the pandemic.

Second, while in both the Netherlands and France the local community was emphasized as highly valuable, its role in the neighborhood was controversial, in pandemic times and before. Both Dutch and French residents and urban professionals described the solidarity and value of the neighborhood community, not only during the pandemic but also in discussing the neighborhood more generally. This was presented as a counternarrative to the negative and stigmatizing stories about the neighborhoods that, they explained, were more dominant (Interviews NL, November and December 2020).

Yet, there were also comments about "who belonged" to the neighborhood community and what types of community life were appropriate. In the Netherlands, for instance, urban professionals and residents talked about activities focused on "migrants," where no Dutch was spoken, remarking that these alienated some residents, making them feel no longer at home in the neighborhood (Fieldnotes NL, February 2020). In France, such discussions took a more prominent role and were centered on the idea, or danger, of *communautarisme*, or divisions among and retreat into separate community groups. One urban professional explained: "The communities really stay to themselves. There's an Arab community, a Malian community, etc. And, well, the idea of [our association] is to try and mix them….People stay among themselves and in their community, and at times that's safe for them, but at times, well, it closes [them] off. It prevents them a bit from discovering the other, encountering the other, and opening up to others" (Interview FR, May 2021).

4.3.2. Governing Urban Marginality in Proximity, in and Beyond Pandemic Times

During the pandemic, proximity changed and remained the same. This tells us three key things about the methods of urban professionals and residents to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods, in and beyond pandemic times.

First, day-to-day contact and interpersonal relationships of trust are as important, if not more important, than physical presence in responding to local needs. As suggested by others (Barnett, 2020; Brown & Purcell, 2005; Purcell, 2006), the local scale did not seem to have inherent qualities supportive of responsive service delivery. Although urban professionals and residents stressed the importance of being physically present in the neighborhood, they also underscored the need to complement physical presence with daily contact between urban professionals and residents. In both countries, daily phone calls and conversations via WhatsApp brought about closer connections between residents and urban professionals and were described as highly valuable for responding to the neighborhoods' needs. When physical presence decreased, this contact on a daily basis enabled proximity to remain a key element of their way of working. Proximity for responsiveness (Vollebergh et al., 2021), thus, appears to be about daily contact and interpersonal relations, beyond proximity as merely physical presence.

Second, the involvement of the local community is not a given, but rather the outcome of a political struggle by local actors and is highly dependent on the specific context (Swyngedouw, 2004). Who belongs to a community is a dynamic and fluid social construction, constantly negotiated by local actors. The neighborhood did appear to be "a locus of community, sociality and civic engagement" (Vollebergh et al.,

2021, p. 744), during the pandemic and before. However, community engagement also had a shadow side. While the solidarity that emerged during the pandemic was presented as "the right kind" of community, other forms of community in marginalized neighborhoods were perceived, by some, as difficult or even dangerous. Negotiating these different communities and community practices also appeared to be part of the governance of urban marginality. This was the case before and during the pandemic period and was especially evident in France, with its national context of *communautarisme* and *laïcité*.

Third, a simultaneous proximity and far-awayness of the state may challenge local actors' ability to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods. Proximate governance approaches have not simply meant that governments have moved closer to citizens (Dikeç, 2007; Uitermark, 2014; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013). As demonstrated by the local responses to the pandemic in France, neighborhood residents continued to experience the national government as far away or even absent; the local community had to step in to provide crisis relief. At the same time, in both the Netherlands and France, the state's presence was evident in local actors' dependence on the limited budgets provided by the national government. The more diffuse role of the state manifested in relationships of trust, but also of dependence and abandonment, challenging the centrality of "the local" in urban governance (Barnett, 2020; Brown & Purcell, 2005; Purcell, 2006). Here, too, national context mattered. With France's more hierarchical state structure—compared to the rather decentralized state structure in the Netherlands—the state was experienced as even more "far away" in France than in the Netherlands.

5. Conclusion

This article examined the impact of Covid-19 on urban governance in neighborhoods expected to be particularly severely impacted by the pandemic. I asked what the "promise of proximity" entailed, as a core aspect of local governance in marginalized neighborhoods in the Netherlands and France. Additionally, I asked how that promise changed and remained the same during the pandemic, and what that means for the way urban residents and professionals work together to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods, in and beyond pandemic times.

Drawing on ethnographic research in marginalized neighborhoods in the Netherlands and France, I demonstrated that proximity was, indeed, challenged by the pandemic. Physical presence decreased and neighborhood activities were suspended. However, the pandemic did not simply challenge proximate governance. The pandemic also instigated new modes of proximity through direct day-to-day contact and community response and relief, albeit at a distance, for instance, via grocery deliveries to vulnerable residents. Even more, however, the pandemic exposed and aggravated existing difficulties of proximate governance in marginalized neighborhoods. First, urban professionals stressed the difficulty of working "integrally" and questioned the structural effects of their work. Second, while solidarity and civic engagement during the pandemic were celebrated, managing different communities and community practices perceived, by some, as difficult or even dangerous appeared to be part of the governance of urban marginality. Both these difficulties existed prior to the pandemic, but came much more to the fore in pandemic times.

With these insights, this article, first, extends existing scholarship on the "promise of proximity" (Vollebergh et al., 2021), particularly highlighting the importance of day-to-day contact between urban professionals and

residents, beyond mere physical presence, to respond to local needs. Second, the analysis deepens existing understandings of civic engagement in proximate governance by revealing that what happens on the local scale is not fixed. Rather, it is the result of a political struggle within the neighborhood (Swyngedouw, 2004), as demonstrated by local actors' continual negotiation of what appropriate community involvement entails, especially in France. Finally, the article demonstrates that in the context of urban marginality, the state may be simultaneously proximate and far away, manifesting in relationships of trust as well as in abandonment and dependence. As such, I join other scholars in challenging the assumption that "the local" inherently possesses qualities beneficial to urban governance (Barnett, 2020; Brown & Purcell, 2005; Purcell, 2006) and contribute to existing knowledge by demonstrating that the persisting presence of a "far-way" state complicates local actors' ability to improve living conditions in marginalized neighborhoods, in and beyond pandemic times.

For those whose everyday life or work centers on proximity, involving physical presence in marginalized neighborhoods and direct contact between urban professionals and residents, comparative insights from the Netherlands and France showed that proximity was not simply a promise, but a possible pitfall as well. The pandemic exposed and aggravated strengths and weaknesses of proximate governance, and these should be considered in shaping local neighborhood approaches beyond pandemic times. This calls for further research on how different government levels can interact to address national (or even global) issues that manifest locally. For the French case, moreover, it underlines (Dikeç, 2007; Slooter, 2019) the need to unpack and develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between the state and its banlieues and the communities living there.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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ARTICLE

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Regeneration in Vulnerable Communities: Resident and Stakeholder Perspectives

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Abstract

This article assesses the implementation of a regeneration programme in a disadvantaged area in the south of Ireland, with particular focus on how residents in vulnerable circumstances have been supported in the face of multiple crises including economic recession and austerity, service reductions and cutbacks, risk of poverty and social exclusion, and neighbourhood change. The article draws on longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data generated over the time frame of a decade through research with residents, community organisations, and the municipal authority. Drawing on the principles of sustainable regeneration, i.e., physical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions, the article explores the effectiveness and outcomes of regeneration strategies on improving estate liveability and the quality of life of residents across multiple themes and indicators. The key themes explored include supports across the life course, community safety and public realm, education and opportunity, and well-being and resilience. Through this analysis, the article aims to better understand the experiences of residents in vulnerable circumstances and the impacts, both positive and negative, of a major regeneration programme on their lives.

Keywords

community-based research; estate liveability; regeneration; social impact; vulnerable communities

1. Introduction

1.1. Urban Regeneration and Liveability

In recent decades, concurrent with the declining availability of social housing across Europe (Dewilde, 2022), policymakers, social housing providers, and communities in many European countries have been concerned about the deterioration of social housing estates. Concerns include the standard of housing stock, layout of estates and quality of the public realm, social problems and deprivation, and the strength of the local economy. These features can impact the "liveability" of estates, the quality of life of residents, and whether an area can attract and retain residents. Liveability has been connected to notions of the "desirable city," as areas that are "fit to live in" or "inhabitable" (Ruth & Franklin, 2014, p. 18). For van Gent (2009, p. 77), "livability is a subjective notion among residents that refers to place-based elements which are related to the daily living environment." Ruth and Franklin (2014) propose that liveability comprises two aspects: the characteristics of the population (their needs and wants) and the city's environment (i.e., the physical and biological characteristics). However, given that people's wants, needs, and perceptions can change depending on their stage in the life course, Ruth and Franklin (2014) also state that liveability may be defined differently at different points of people's lives.

Van Gent (2009, p. 77) details a number of features that can influence the liveability of estates, which "may include the quality of the housing stock, urban design, physical appearances, cleanliness, quality of public space, safety and perhaps some degree of social interaction between neighbours." Fahey et al. (2014, p. 4) find that social factors are of more significance than physical factors in determining liveability, in particular social order, criminality, and antisocial behaviour by "disruptive minorities." When these physical, environmental, and social order aspects are combined with socio-economic problems such as long-term unemployment, lack of economic activity and investment, higher than average reliance on social welfare payments, early school leaving and low levels of educational qualification, and low income and high risk of poverty among residents, extensive interventions may be required.

While high levels of deprivation do not necessarily lead to poor liveability as research by Norris and O'Connell (2013) has shown, estate regeneration programmes have been implemented in many jurisdictions as a strategy that can address issues of poor housing and deprivation through a variety of interventions to improve the lives of residents. Regeneration has been defined by Roberts et al. (2017, p. 18) as a holistic and multi-stranded set of interventions:

> A comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social, and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.

Along with physical interventions, regeneration is also concerned with social cohesion and "the community development and amenity needs of the population that are life-long and life-wide" (O'Connell et al., 2024, p. 326). Thus, regeneration can include initiatives in community health, education, employment, child and family support, and arts and culture. Leary and McCarthy (2013, p. 9) define regeneration as an "area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature."

However, research also draws attention to potential negative impacts of regeneration. This includes the risk that a focus on large-scale capital infrastructure may result in the neglect of social investment to tackle the needs of the community. Hence, "over time the depth of social problems can undermine the progress arising from capital investment" (O'Connell et al., 2024, p. 326). Regeneration programmes have furthermore been critiqued for contributing to both neoliberal urban restructuring and state-led gentrification, which generate new socio-spatial inequalities and insecurities through displacement and exclusion processes, for their role in compounding the stigmatisation of estates, and for disruptive effects that can break up neighbourhoods (Bissett, 2009; Imbroscio, 2016; Paton, 2018; Slater, 2018; Wacquant, 2008; Watt & Smets, 2017). Also of concern is the extent of resident participation in regeneration planning and implementation. Consultation with residents can be limited, narrow in scope, and subject to power inequalities (Bissett, 2009), resulting in top-down regeneration that follows the functional logics of institutions (Parés et al., 2012) rather than the empowerment of the local community (Hearne, 2013).

This article focuses on the effectiveness and outcomes of regeneration strategies on improving estate liveability and the quality of life of residents in vulnerable circumstances from the perspectives of residents and stakeholders through a case study of the Knocknaheeny estate in the south of Ireland.

1.2. Regeneration and the Knocknaheeny Estate, Cork City, Ireland

The Knocknaheeny social housing estate, comprising approximately 600 housing units, is located in the northwest of Cork City, Ireland. It was built using a pre-fabricated method in the late 1960s and 1970s in response to the industrial expansion of the city economy and the demand for affordable housing from workers employed in industries such as motor car assembly, tyre making, textile manufacturing, dockyards, and food processing. In 2011 the estate was designated by the local authority, Cork City Council, for a major regeneration masterplan of five phases, over a 10-year implementation period (Housing Agency, 2011).

According to national deprivation indicators, it is one of the most deprived areas within the city. Since the 1980s, with the closure of many industries, rising numbers of households in the area became reliant on long-term social welfare payments. Falling state investment in social housing from the late 1980s onwards also resulted in a changing household profile emerging in the area, with greater propensity to house more marginalised households. The residualisation of the social housing sector has been occurring in many other countries, leading to an increase in "the spatial concentration of disadvantaged population groups" (van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020, p. 168). The economic crisis of 2008/2009, which became known as the Great Recession, also caused significant unemployment in the estate with 24 percent of the population unemployed according to Census 2011 figures, due in particular to the collapse of employment in building and construction, and significant declines in employment in commerce and trade and manufacturing industries. Over time, the reputation of the estate declined and increases in anti-social behaviour and crime have been ongoing concerns of residents, along with the deteriorating quality of housing and the local environment. This resulted in a decline in liveability for tenants and challenges to attracting and retaining owner-occupiers, tenants, and businesses.

Knocknaheeny also has an extensive network of non-governmental, community-based, and statutory organisations that provide a wide range of citizen, community development, youth, and family services. It is a resilient community with high levels of reciprocity (neighbours helping neighbours) that are similar to

national levels (75 percent and 74 percent; Barnardos, 2010). However, the experience of the Knocknaheeny estate is also reminiscent of Wacquant's concept of "advanced marginality" (Wacquant, 2008), with many residents living in vulnerable circumstances. According to Census 2022, the estate continues to be characterised by higher rates of long-term unemployment with nine percent of the estate population unemployed. Although this is much lower than the rates during the Great Recession and Covid-19, it remains almost double the city and national averages. There are also significantly lower levels of education, with only eight percent of the estate population holding a higher education degree compared to 38 percent of the city population. The estate also has much higher numbers of lone parent households (23 percent of households, more than double city and national rates), as well as a higher proportion of Irish Travellers than other areas, and a greater than average risk of poverty among households. In recent years, the age profile of the estate has matured, and now the proportion of residents aged 65 and over matches the city and the state at 15 percent. However, in the regeneration phases, 22 percent of residents are aged 65 and over, and the old age dependency ratio (36 percent) has surpassed the national average (23 percent). In contrast, some areas within the estate continue to have particularly high levels of children and young people with one neighbourhood recording over double the proportion of 0–14-year-olds (35 percent) compared to Cork City as a whole (16 percent).

1.2.1. The Regeneration Masterplan

For more than a decade, Knocknaheeny has been undergoing a multi-million-euro regeneration programme led by the local authority, Cork City Council, which involves the demolition of 450 houses and their replacement with 656 new energy-efficient homes (including houses and apartments) on a phased basis. Guided by a masterplan prepared by the National Housing Agency, and approved by the Cork City Council in 2011, the vision is to "create better homes…enhance social and economic opportunities…improve transport links…and create better and safer streets, squares, and parks" (Housing Agency, 2011, p. 24). The masterplan also proposes tenure mixing to expand private ownership and the management of homes by voluntary (non-state) housing associations. This phased approach can be seen as a form of balanced incremental development, which is defined by Rudlin and Falk (2009, pp. 241–242) as "a fine grain of development with large numbers of small sites being developed over time by different developers." The regeneration programme has not been characterised by high levels of displacement, which is characteristic of gentrification processes, as residents are offered the opportunity to return to the estate once their new homes are built and this has occurred in most cases. Furthermore, gentrification has not taken hold as the new dwellings are predominately social homes and mixed tenure schemes have not developed in the area. Community consultation by the architects, engineers, and planners in Cork City Council occurs on a periodic basis in each phase regarding the design of homes and the public realm.

Reflecting a broad understanding of regeneration as a multi-stranded concept, Cork City Council also makes annual submissions to the central government for investment and delivery of social and community support. These submissions are based on a Social, Economic and Environmental Plan (SEEP) that arose from consultation with community organisations, statutory bodies, service providers, and residents in Knocknaheeny. The original SEEP included 10 themes across family support and early childhood development; community safety; education, training, and lifelong learning; health; youth and sports; environment; balancing communities; social cohesion and capacity building; economic development; and transport and connectivity. Funds are disbursed to community and voluntary groups in the area through an

application process with projects and initiatives linked to the 10 SEEP thematic areas, mainly through large grants as well as through a small grants scheme, the "Community Chest," for community events and activities. In the initial years of the masterplan implementation, annual SEEP funding of just €65,000 was allocated and it took up to five years for meaningful resources to be committed. This low allocation occurred during the period of austerity following the 2008 economic crisis. The fiscal consolidation programme that was implemented between 2009 and 2015 resulted in reductions in state expenditure across health, education, and other sectors, as well as cuts in pay and levels of staffing in the public and community sector (Hardiman & MacCarthaigh, 2013; Kickert et al., 2015). This represented an anomaly in national regeneration policy, whereby millions of euros were directed into large-scale capital-spending projects at the same time as the frontline services needed by deprived communities were cut under austerity policies. Central government support increased to €320,000 in 2018, after research demonstrated the significant community impact of SEEP initiatives, and funding has continued to rise since then.

2. Methods

The School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, was engaged by the Cork City Council in 2014 to undertake research to enable the regeneration implementation to be informed by up-to-date data and on-going evaluation. The research involves a mixed-methods approach that incorporates quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methodologies. In terms of quantitative research, three socio-demographic reports have been conducted based on analysis of the small area population statistics of the national census across a number of indicators. This component of the research began with a baseline report on Census 2011 and two follow-up reports to ascertain social and demographic change in the estate based on Census 2016 and Census 2022.

The research was also committed to hearing the voices of residents in vulnerable circumstances. Two door-to-door surveys of residents living in the estate were conducted in 2015 and 2019. The first survey involved all residents of the estate at the time (482 households, targeted at those aged 18 and over) and aimed to ascertain resident aspirations and experiences of regeneration. Through a community-based participatory research approach, the survey was co-designed with 15 residents who were enrolled on a locally based Women's Studies Diploma run by the Adult Continuing Education Centre at University College Cork in collaboration with the Cork Education and Training Board, and the Cork City Partnership (a community development organisation). Community-based participatory research is "a collaborative, partnership approach that recognises the strengths of partners and engages their distinctive voice and ability in the research process" (O'Sullivan et al., 2023, p. 159). It is based on the perspective that research ought to involve people as "active participants or co-researchers and not simply construct them as sources of information" (Hugman et al., 2011, p. 1276) and that involving community members in research yields significant benefits including better understanding of issues. The 15 co-researchers worked with three academic researchers through a specially devised five-ECTS module on "Research in the Community" held in the local community hub. Over 10 weeks, the co-researchers co-designed the questionnaire and became field researchers whereby they conducted the door-to-door surveys. In recognition of their work, along with the academic credits they gained, they also received a small stipend. The academic research team analysed the survey data as the co-researchers declined the invitation to participate in the analysis due to the substantial time commitments they had already made to the project. The co-researchers later took part in a meeting with the Cork City Council regeneration team to collectively explore the survey findings.

A subsequent evaluation highlighted the benefits of the collaborative approach for the co-researchers, including the development of new skills, knowledge, and confidence (Cullinane & O'Sullivan, 2020).

Survey questions were mainly closed and used Likert scales (e.g., *strongly satisfied* to *strongly dissatisfied*; *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). Questions focused on satisfaction with the design and quality of people's home; liveability in terms of sense of community and satisfaction with the local environment, safety, amenities and infrastructure; and satisfaction with regeneration. The questionnaire also included two open questions, with one focused on general feedback on regeneration, and one focused on residents' priorities for regeneration. Specific questions were also asked to a subset of residents in an area of the estate that was affected by the closure of a lane, and about the demolition and moving process to those who had moved in the first two phases of the regeneration. The participatory process resulted in a very high response rate of 72 percent with 325 households participating.

A second smaller survey was undertaken in 2019 with 29 households who were recent movers to ascertain their experiences of moving under the regeneration programme. The questionnaire's design drew from the first survey and was also subject to input from the Cork City Council and feedback from the community researchers involved in the first survey. Twenty-one households participated in the second survey, reflecting an overall response rate of 75 percent of eligible households. A participatory project is also underway in 2024 with young people aged 18–30 in the estate regarding their education, training, and employment needs.

The research has also involved three reviews of the SEEP in 2018, 2021, and 2023, through consultation with community and statutory organisations in the area. Drawing on quantitative data from Cork City Council, and qualitative focus groups and interviews, the first two reviews assessed the alignment of funded projects with the SEEP priorities, and the outcomes and impacts of the projects. The first report involved a focus group with members of the group that formulated the original SEEP, a survey with 10 grant recipient organisations, and an in-depth interview with the manager of a major early-years programme in the area (Let's Grow Together) that had received seed funding through the SEEP. The second report was impacted by the Covid-19 public health restrictions, which necessitated primary research to be undertaken remotely by phone and online. Five focus groups were held for the second report involving 15 participants, who represented 14 discrete projects in local recipient community organisations. Following the significant increase in SEEP funding from 2018 onwards, the third report sought to determine the continuing relevance of the original SEEP themes, identify gaps, and capture other emerging specific community needs to inform future SEEP funding applications. Twenty-eight people participated in the third review in five qualitative focus group interviews and two one-to-one interviews. This included staff from voluntary and community groups, the Cork City Council regeneration office, and Cork City Council elected officials for the Cork City North West local electoral area.

3. Findings

3.1. Physical Factors in Liveability: Experiences, Perspectives, and Impacts of Physical Regeneration

The research identifies a number of positive resident and stakeholder perspectives arising from the regeneration programme and its constituent elements of infrastructural developments and SEEP initiatives. In terms of physical impacts, the quality of housing and the condition of the wider neighbourhood

environment and public realm have been enhanced. New houses are built to a building energy rating of A2 or A3. The 2015 household survey highlighted the poor condition of existing homes. Forty-three percent of respondents in Phases 2 to 5 stated that the condition of their homes was poor or very poor with a multiplicity of problems including poor insulation, window problems, dampness, poor ventilation, mildew, and cracks in walls and floors. Just under half of respondents (48 percent) said that housing problems contributed to ill health for them or their family members, in particular respiratory problems such as asthma. Respondents who had moved expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of their new homes with 95 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that the quality is better. Due to the phasing of the regeneration programme, many of the respondents who had moved at that point were now living outside Knocknaheeny in a nearby neighbourhood, and 78 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied to live in their new area.

Like the 2015 survey, the 2019 survey also found high levels of satisfaction with new homes (all within Knocknaheeny by this phase) with 95 percent of respondents satisfied or very satisfied. For many respondents, the benefits of the move extended to health improvements for them or members of their household. Sixty-five percent of respondents to the 2019 survey reported that the health and well-being of them and their family had improved as a result of the move (with 45 percent strongly agreeing). Respondents overwhelmingly reported agreement (84 percent) with the statement that moving had been a positive experience overall.

In relation to the public realm, the closure of an alley where anti-social behaviour had been high (and its reintegration into residents' gardens) was widely praised in the 2015 survey, with 76 percent of affected respondents expressing satisfaction with its closure and 79 percent expressing satisfaction with the process of closing it by the municipality. However, previous research with children and young people found dissatisfaction with the closure of the alley as it was a much-used shortcut and they had not been consulted about it (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

Despite these positive aspects, residents identified significant problems in the area in relation to the environment and public realm. In both the 2015 and 2019 surveys, dumping, litter, vacant and boarded-up houses, and dog dirt were identified as big problems. There were especially low ratings of park amenities in the 2015 survey, with just 31 percent of respondents rating parks, playgrounds, and open spaces as good or very good. Interviews as part of the 2023 SEEP Review highlighted the importance of the local environment, which a city councillor stressed can have wide-ranging impacts on the well-being of individuals and the community:

> I'm always of the belief that if community looks well, you feel well yourself, if it looks down and dour and bad, then you'll feel, if you get up in the morning, you look out and your community looks, it's full of litter and it's, you know, there's no trees, there's no green, well you don't feel well, you immediately, your own mental health is affected by that.

The 2023 SEEP Review also documented concerns by a City Council staff member about the impact of fencing some areas for security and safety: "A number of people have come to me and said what about all the fencing, it's horrendous. People think that they're in a prison. It's constantly people being told to basically keep out of their own community."

Adult residents also felt that consultation and the provision of timely information were limited in the regeneration. Although there were high levels of satisfaction with the new houses and the social facilities delivered under regeneration, respondents would like to see a greater level of communication and consultation by the Council. Just 14 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey agreed that regeneration authorities listen to residents in their decision-making, compared to 45 percent in the 2019 survey, which is likely to reflect the phased delivery of the regeneration.

There was also a perception amongst respondents that there is a dearth of opportunities for participation in regeneration, despite the findings of the 2015 survey which reported a clear interest in resident involvement. Over one-third of respondents (35 percent) were interested in getting involved in the regeneration of their estate, including in resident associations and estate management committees, youth and community projects, a regeneration newsletter, environmental projects, and arts and cultural activities. To address this need, a commitment on the part of statutory and non-statutory organisations to develop and promote participation opportunities, and support capacity building for residents, is required.

3.2. Social Factors in Liveability: Experiences, Perspectives, and Impacts of Social Regeneration and the SEEPs

The multi-annual SEEPs provided evident benefits to residents from the regeneration. The purpose of the SEEPs was to provide scope for support and investment in what are essential strands of regeneration beyond the traditional "bricks and mortar" elements. While there are tangible benefits from new homes and hard infrastructure that in turn give rise to better health, reduced overcrowding, energy efficiency, and improved public amenities, the investment in social, economic, and environmental elements is often the glue that ensures the liveability of neighbourhoods, especially where households do not have the resources to access private market-based provision. The formulation of the SEEPs followed an inclusive, consensus-based process that asked residents and community organisations about their priorities based on a number of high-level themes. As well as supporting a range of local community projects, SEEP-funded infrastructure projects included the design and construction of a community garden, the refurbishment of the sports hall of the local community school, and the refurbishment of a cottage as a Scout Hall.

Evaluations of the successive SEEPs revealed significant, often exponential, value added and impact generated from modest schemes and initiatives. For instance, under the initial SEEP, seed funding was provided for a local health group to form a multi-agency consortium for an early intervention programme. According to the group, "we had everybody, schools, pre-schools, family support, health, community development, all working together, and the [SEEP] money was part of consolidating that pre-development process." The SEEP funding ultimately supported a successful bid for a multi-million-euro early-years area-based childhood programme (Let's Grow Together) which had measurable impacts over time (Buckley & Curtin, 2018).

Illustrating the thematic foci of projects across the SEEPs, many projects centred on initiatives in the areas of youth and sports and education, and training and lifelong learning. These included an area-wide, school-based sports participation initiative; a scheme to supply books to young children in the locality; the provision of music production workshops for local youth and young adults; educational supports for young Travellers and their families; and an environmentally focused social enterprise. Respondents reported that their projects had delivered substantial impacts to immediate beneficiaries and the wider community,

ranging from creative expression and enhanced literacy and numeracy skills to reductions in recidivism from employment opportunities and greater environmental awareness and household waste reductions. Regarding the Imagination Library, an initiative by Let's Grow Together, the SEEP funding played a pivotal role as a "launchpad" in getting the initiative off the ground. A staff member affirmed its impact, with 400 children registered at the time of interview:

> It's supporting family members who may not have literacy skills themselves, it's supporting them to share and explore books together, without having to read the words, but really using books to build that early relationship, for children to have that ownership of their own books with their name on it, coming through the door to them, and really inspiring that love of reading, that love of books, from as early as possible.

The positive perspectives reported of the impacts of the SEEP built upon and enhanced the strong sense of community already in existence in Knocknaheeny, thereby validating the aims of the SEEP and the strategies to strengthen engagement with the local authority, state and third sector agencies and service providers operating in the neighbourhood. However, despite their obvious necessity, interventions to tackle deprivation and address community needs were highly curtailed in the early years of the SEEP arising from the deep-seated impacts of the austerity programme implemented during the Great Recession. This resulted in a severe diminution of services and supports which the community relied on. Research undertaken by the evaluation team on the effects of austerity in the regeneration area showed that essential frontline staff had their hours cut, were laid off, or not replaced. Educational and training workshops and projects were curtailed or closed down, and operational budgets were reduced. In relative terms, despite their comparatively modest cost to public funds, the community and voluntary sector experienced disproportionate reductions in funding during austerity (Harvey, 2012). Many of these provided services for marginalised and vulnerable young people and families and there is clear evidence that they ultimately amounted to false economies as the support infrastructure which had been built up over many years deteriorated with severely negative consequences for those who relied on them. In addition to the material impacts, there also ensued a loss of trust in relationships between the community and services.

Post-austerity, SEEP funding was increased significantly and the evaluations, which confirmed the cumulative gains, contributed to these funding increases over successive SEEPs. In 2022, central government funding increased to almost €433,000, while in 2024 it increased to €870,000. This has enabled the SEEPs to be more agile in adapting to identified and emerging needs within the community. While the 2022 SEEP placed a focus on children and youth, in 2023 the emphasis, based on consultation with community groups, had shifted to the need to include older persons given the changing demographics of the area, the unique nature of their needs, and the desire for many older residents to age in place in accordance with national healthy ageing policies. The consultations and data also revealed a strong view that arts, culture, and creativity be added to the SEEP themes since the arts and creative expression have become an integral part of the life of the community, contributing to social cohesion, a place where young people can feel safe, and increasing the positive perception of the regeneration area.

While it is only in recent years that there has been sustained investment in the SEEP, a continuing issue respondents highlighted in the 2021 SEEP Review is the limitations on groups and projects imposed by single-year funding commitments. One interviewee spoke about how "every year it's a struggle to ensure

that their project could resume annually." Several outlined what they saw as an urgent need for the introduction of multi-annual funding packages to guarantee continuity and greater value from ongoing investment. One participant noted that for many projects "unless you can plan for the next two years then it's really hard because you almost lose the gains you achieve." This annualised funding model has meant that the evidence of long-term outcomes in terms of whether the SEEP has generated momentum around social inclusion—defined as participation in education, training, employment opportunities, and community development participation—is less clear-cut. The Census data shows that the area continues to have much higher unemployment and much lower educational attainment, although these indicators are improving. This affirms Fahey's observation:

> Public funding agencies are often more willing to provide one-off capital grants (which may be quite large) rather than commit to long-term annual services expenditure even where the latter is what is required to address key problems in disadvantaged areas. (Fahey et al., 2011, p. 100)

3.3. A Liveable Area? Resident Satisfaction With Living in the Area and With Regeneration as a Whole

Both the 2015 and 2019 surveys found high levels of satisfaction with living in the area and a strong sense of community in Knocknaheeny. Many services and amenities were rated highly; concurrent with the regeneration programme, there has also been a re-development of the neighbourhood library and learning campus, and a new health campus serving the northwest of the city, ensuring better accessibility to services locally. Sixty-three percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 75 percent in the 2019 survey agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud to live in the area, while 65 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 75 percent in the 2019 survey expressed satisfaction with living in the area, as detailed in Table 1. A respondent in the 2015 survey said: "I'm proud to live in Knocknaheeny. The houses completed are a dream." Both surveys also found positive attributions of community solidarity. Sixty-seven percent of respondents in the 2015 survey and 80 percent in the 2019 survey agreed or strongly agreed that people in the area look out for each other.

However, despite these positive aspects, residents identified significant concerns about security and public order with the extent of drug use, drug dealing, drinking in public, and anti-social behaviour highlighted as big problems in the area. In the 2015 survey, 56 percent of respondents stated that they do not feel safe walking alone after dark and 66 percent stated that they avoid parts of the area because of concerns about crime. In the 2019 survey, many respondents expressed concern about persistent anti-social behaviour in the immediate vicinity of their houses involving public drinking, burning of fires, and threatening behaviours. While respondents agreed that, overall, regeneration is making the area a better place to live, just 20 percent of respondents in the 2015 survey agreed or strongly agreed that safety and security have improved under

Table 1. Satisfaction, pride, and community solidarity.

	2015 Survey	2019 Survey
I am proud to live in the area (proportion who agree or strongly agree)	63%	75%
I am satisfied to live in the area (proportion who are satisfied or very satisfied)	65%	75%
People in the area look out for each other (proportion who agree or strongly agree)	67%	80%

regeneration. Residents said they would like to see greater responsiveness of the local authority and the Garda Síochána to tackling anti-social behaviour and crime as well as preventative measures to be put in place. Arising from these experiences are far-reaching reputational consequences for the community, which impact on sense of identity, self-confidence, and opportunities due to stigmatisation. Although most people are proud to live in the area, there is concern that the area has a bad name externally; 60 percent of respondents in 2015 and 42 percent in 2019 said that this was a big or a very big problem.

On the whole, respondents' views on regeneration suggest a broadly positive evaluation of its impact to date. While, in the 2015 survey, just over half of respondents (51 percent) would like to be living in the area in more than 10 years, almost three-quarters of respondents (74 percent) in the 2019 survey reported that they wanted to be living in the area in more than 10 years. A higher proportion of respondents in the 2019 survey took the view that, over the long-term, regeneration was improving the area compared to the 2015 survey (71 percent compared to 50 percent who agreed or strongly agreed). A respondent in the 2015 survey who held a positive view said: "I think it's fantastic the work they're doing. It's going to make the area better." In overall terms, in the period between the two surveys, resident perspectives on the liveability arising from the regeneration of the area had improved.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the regeneration programme has contributed to improvements in liveability for residents in vulnerable circumstances through the provision of new housing, enhancements to the public realm and estate design, and retaining the integrity of community and neighbourhood networks. The SEEP initiatives have resulted in tangible impacts on the lived experiences of residents. The growth in the annual budgets over successive years illustrates the value contributed by the SEEPs. However, liveability continues to be impacted by negative experiences relating to community safety and social order, environmental degradation in the estate, and limited opportunities for resident participation. As identified by Fahey (1999) and Norris (2014), and shown in the findings, social order problems can be major drivers of estate decline and one of the principal factors which separate liveable estates from declining ones. The complexity of this challenge cannot be underestimated and requires extensive interagency coordination and cooperation from multiple service providers including the local authority, policing and probation, education, and family and youth support. Furthermore, it is essential that regeneration programmes support, sustain, and draw on community strengths and capacity to facilitate meaningful participation. This requires recognising power imbalances, developing appropriate mechanisms and structures for community engagement, and hearing and acting on residents' voices. As Hearne (2013, p. 176) outlines:

> Best practice social regeneration requires the adequate participation of local authority tenants and residents for the negotiating process inherent in any development of the built environment…. A well-planned and effective regeneration project should create and support sustainable community development.

If a primary objective of tackling the deterioration of social housing estates is to ensure liveability, then a multi-stranded commitment to regeneration is essential. This includes not only housing where existing stock has met the end of its lifespan or no longer meets basic standards in terms of space, heating, insulation, public realm, and capital investment, but also sustained investment in socio-economic and community measures

which benefit the population in the estate. In addition to community safety, services for families and young people, accessible education, training and employment opportunities, and affordable and flexible childcare are essential elements of successful regeneration and ensuring liveability, as asserted by Fahey et al. (2011, p. 100), who concluded:

> [The concept of estate regeneration needs to be redefined] so that it gives central place to the development and provision of appropriate services for acutely disadvantaged families and individuals. Plans for the delivery and long-term funding of these services should be placed at the centre of regeneration schemes and should not be left as additions to be tacked on as regeneration schemes get under way.

However, such services in Ireland are the responsibility of a myriad of agencies which makes the project of regeneration for the local authority complex and challenging. The distinctive model of local government structures and public policy formulation and implementation in Ireland has particular significance in achieving sustainable regeneration. In the first instance, there is a highly centralised governance system for resource allocation and the local government sector lacks autonomy and independence, especially in relation to revenue-raising powers and decision-making (O'Malley & MacCarthaigh, 2012). Secondly, there is fragmentation in the delivery of services and local government in Ireland does not have responsibility for key services including health, education, and social services. The impact of economic policy can also influence the effectiveness of regeneration. A key learning of the Knocknaheeny experience has been the necessity for regeneration areas to have the security of ring-fenced, multi-annual funding commitments to ensure essential projects and services continue to operate, especially in counter-cyclical environments—when economic decline occurs is when holistic regeneration strategies are most needed. A long-term lesson for public policy formation is that austerity invariably leads to false economies, especially when applied to disadvantaged neighbourhoods such as regeneration areas.

It must also be recognized that regeneration is not a panacea for structural factors (whether regional, national, or international) that can drive social exclusion and socio-economic inequality. While there can be substantial benefits from regeneration that ensure better liveability, areas can remain disadvantaged in comparison to their wider city and nation-state, highlighting the need to address social justice, deprivation, and poverty (McCarthy, 2010). A realistic understanding of what regeneration can achieve as a locally based response within the context of deeper structural factors is warranted, while recognizing that "area-based approaches may form a valuable component of more broadly-based regeneration policy, since such approaches can address problems of decline in spatially located phenomena such as housing, infrastructure and services" (McCarthy, 2010, p. 252). Hence, regeneration cannot be a "one size fits all" strategy and needs to be nuanced to local circumstances and devised accordingly.

The contributions to liveability of the regeneration case study explored in this article, although qualified by the limitations explored above, can be attributed to a number of factors inherent to its original design and its ongoing development. These include a protected capital budget, an implementation masterplan, an inclusive and responsive SEEP, and an independent evaluation programme to inform policy and practice. For broader applicability, regeneration must be understood as a holistic concept with multiple strands that must be pursued on an integrated basis to tackle the problems faced by communities. As van Bortel (2009, pp. 49–50) states:

> [Sustainable regeneration should] deliver long term solutions on a wide range of issues. This does not only include housing, but also the participation and empowerment of residents in urban regeneration, increased trust between the actors involved in this process, better neighbourhood services, more social cohesion between resident groups, increased quality of the public realm and a confidence among residents in the future of the neighbourhood and the wish to remain living in the area.

If any of these essential strands are lacking, there is a risk that the challenges regeneration schemes set out to address will remain unresolved.

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Conflict of Interests

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Census of Ireland 2011, 2016, 2022.

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