Article

Structural Transformations and Everyday Spatial Consequences in Austerity Ireland: An Embedded Comparative Approach

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Abstract
Urban research often focuses on aggregate characteristics of macroeconomic performances or in-depth case studies of everyday urban phenomena. However, this dichotomy risks alienating two perspectives that can constructively illuminate spatial developments together. This article extends the "political economy of everyday life" approach, borrowed from political economy, to connect the local and everyday to global structures. The aim is to make this perspective sensitive to geographic differences and develop a "spatial political economy of everyday life." To operationalise this approach, I discuss the multi-scale analysis employed in a comparative project on austerity and urban youth in Ireland that sought to ground everyday consequences in a structural context. This project combined three methods: (a) a theoretical analysis of the global structures of the 2008 financial crisis, (b) a policy analysis of the impact of Irish austerity policies on youth, and (c) a comparative qualitative analysis of the everyday consequences of crisis and austerity on youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Cork and Dublin. This embedded comparative approach identified how the global financial crisis shaped national policies and how geographic differences shaped everyday spatial and personal consequences. This embedded comparative approach conceptualises cities as places where the structural and everyday constitute each other. It illuminates how this mutual interaction creates spatial particularities and common trends. In doing so, an embedded comparative approach contributes to developing a "spatial political economy of everyday life."

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1. Introduction

Comparative urbanism often walks a tightrope between generic urban theory and the empirical uniqueness of cities. Some urban planners and geographers are interested in particular cities, while others seek to contribute to general urban theory. Some focus on cities' position within global structures, while others investigate everyday places and practices in distinct localities (Healey, 2011). Empirically, these different interests translate into using aggregate characteristics of macroeconomic performance and global connectivity or in-depth case studies of everyday urban phenomena (e.g., Maharawal, 2017; Trincado-Munoz et al., 2023). However, presenting

these interests as clear dichotomy risks alienating two perspectives that can constructively illuminate urban developments together. This article contributes to the challenge of bridging structural and everyday perspectives to understand how global and local urban issues influence, constitute, and complicate each other.

This article presents the "embedded comparative approach" as a strategy to tackle this challenge for comparative urban research. This approach employs inter-scalar and inter-place analysis to understand places within their overarching context and structural developments. To do so, I engage literature from "political economies of everyday life" (PEEL), which studies "how political economy is enacted and performed at the local

level, by non-elites and via various cultural practices" (Elias & Roberts, 2016, p. 787). This article adds a geographical sensibility to its methods and approach by bringing it into conversation with comparative urbanism to construct a spatial "political economy of everyday life". Then, the embedded comparative approach is illustrated by empirical material on everyday austerity in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods in Ireland.

This article makes two contributions and one invitation. First, it develops the embedded comparative approach as a comparative strategy that bridges the structural and the everyday. Second, it applies the embedded comparative approach to a study of austerity experiences in Ireland, illuminating that the interference between local and national rollback-rollout neoliberalisation shapes everyday austerity experiences. Finally, it invites urban scholars and planners to apply the embedded approach upwards and downwards to identify and change the constitutive relationships between everyday practices and structural dynamics.

1.1. Comparative Urbanism

Since the mid-2000s, urban scholars debated comparative urbanism's theoretical and empirical advantages and disadvantages (Dear, 2005; Jacobs, 2012; Nijman, 2007). The discussion started with the post-colonial attempt to decentre Eurocentric urbanism and embrace global differences (Robinson, 2002, 2016). Critics countered that focusing on the differences and uniqueness of cities in different regions would result in endless empirical descriptions of particular cases instead of constructing theory (Peck, 2015). These critics argued for purposeful comparison to build theory beyond the comparative cases (Jacobs, 2012; Ley & Teo, 2020). This focus on the "why" of comparison created a predominantly theoretical debate on the (im)possibility of general urban theory amidst endless geographic differences (Nijman, 2015; Peck, 2015). Therefore, two critical comparative issues received less attention: scale and methods (Gough, 2012).

Its post-colonial origins resulted in comparative urbanism's focus on international comparisons between different world regions (Schmid et al., 2018; Waley, 2012). For example, Robinson and Roy (2016) argue that comparison could illuminate the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical value of cities in the Global South and their difference from Northern cities. Although some criticised the "regionalisation of cities" (Ren & Luger, 2015; Tuvikene, 2016), where cities represent post-socialist, Asian, Latin-American, or other global regions, such classifications regularly feature in comparative urbanism debates (Follmann et al., 2023). Although some intra-national and intra-urban comparisons exist (McFarlane et al., 2017), their contributions occupy a minor position in the debate. Nonetheless, Robinson (2011) acknowledges their value in the "encompassing strategy" of comparison and similarity-based case selection. This article provides an intra-national comparative strategy—the embedded comparison—to connect urban theory to a comparative approach.

Methods, too, received less sustained attention because of the theoretical nature of the comparative urbanism debate (Brill, 2022a; Harrison & Hoyler, 2018b). Methodological contributions that exist, such as from the Global and World Cities network, centre on aggregate data on economic activity and connectivity (e.g., Van Meeteren & Bassens, 2016). Recently, explicit attention to comparative urbanism, including qualitative methods focusing on everyday cities, is emerging in books and journal articles (Brill, 2022b; Harrison & Hoyler, 2018a; Robinson, 2022). The embedded comparative approach employs scholarship on PEEL to contribute to this emerging trend by providing methodological approaches to fully exploit comparative urbanism's theoretical and epistemological benefits.

1.2. Political Economy of Everyday Life

Debates in PEEL similarly stress the relationship between general theory and particular everyday experiences and practices. PEEL critiques "regular" political economy of underestimating the importance of the mundane and everyday (Elias, 2010). PEEL studies "the mutually constitutive nature of global markets and households, families, relations of social reproduction and gendered socio-cultural practices" (Elias & Roberts, 2016, p. 788). Painstakingly studying local and mundane situations helps to interrogate how people, places, and phenomena are impacted by higher-scale structural processes to create local variations (Elias & Roberts, 2016; Hall, 2019). Recently, Elias and Rai (2019) explicitly propose "space"—together with "time" and "violence"—as a critical concept for a feminist everyday political economy. Therefore, PEEL's attention to relations between scales and between the everyday and structural can inspire comparative urbanism to deal with the tensions between global universality and the local uniqueness of cities.

PEEL is not explicitly comparative but carries a comparative sensibility. Elias and Roberts (2016, p. 792) stress PEEL's focus on "commonalities between different sites of everyday gendered social change, while at the same time recognising the need to historicise these socio-economic transformations within particular political context." PEEL scholarship presents comparative contributions on export-processing zones, bingo, and debt (Bedford, 2016; Gunawardana, 2016; Vargha & Pellandini-Simányi, 2021). PEEL thus illustrates how comparison can analyse local specificity in overarching transformations like neoliberalisation and financialisation. Cities are neither autonomous from (inter)national developments nor are planners only constrained by local government. Both are entangled in a world of interconnected scales and places that shape local possibilities. Like PEEL, urban research requires "careful

place-based analyses of the connections between global markets, states, individuals, households and/or communities" (Elias & Roberts, 2016, p. 793). Taking this comparative sensitivity and expanding the call to understand the role of space, this article applies PEEL methodologies to study austerity across scales.

2. Everyday Austerity: An Embedded Comparison

The embedded comparative approach combines comparative urbanism and PEEL to bridge structural developments and everyday experiences. Comparative urbanism provides a comparative epistemology to grasp particular cases and phenomena; PEEL present an epistemology that connects everyday experiences to structural forces. This section develops the embedded comparative approach to study the particular in relation to structural transformations and applies it to the everyday consequences of austerity urbanism following the 2008 financial crisis (Peck, 2012). The neoliberalisation of space unfolds in a rollback-rollout dynamic (Peck & Tickell, 2002), where the state retreats from places (rollback), only to return by roling-out neoliberalised solutions to self-created problems. Austerity intensified this neoliberalisation of space; transforming an already-neoliberalised terrain. Peck (2012) identified three processes characterising austerity urbanism: (a) destructive creativity—amplifying neoliberalism's creative destruction; (b) deficit politics—a focus on controlling public expenditure; and (c) devolved risk—the decentralisation of responsibility to local authorities, actors, and agencies. A comparative element enables understanding everyday experiences within neoliberalism's cultural, economic, and political context (Brenner et al., 2010b), thus allowing the study of interactions between neoliberalisation and everyday experiences.

2.1. Cases and Methods

The embedded comparative approach is illustrated using empirical material from a project on the consequences and experiences of austerity by disadvantaged urban youth in Ireland (van Lanen, 2017). This project combined an "encompassing strategy" with a "variation-finding strategy" for comparison (Robinson, 2011). An encompassing strategy compares different cases within one overarching systemic process—in this case, two neighbourhoods under Irish austerity. The variation-finding strategy uses a "most similar selection of cases" (Robinson, 2011) to study similarities and differences between the neighbourhoods to uncover the role of space in the austerity experience. Therefore, the comparison of Knocknaheeny (Cork) and Ballymun (Dublin) aims to understand austerity and its impact on young adults in deprived urban neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood selection followed Sassen's (2014) subterranean trends argument; developments affecting urban conditions are most visible among populations most vulnerable to auster-

ity and its associated spatial transformations (Peck, 2012; Verick, 2009). The project, thus, compared austerity experiences in deprived Irish neighbourhoods to investigate everyday austerity and the role of space in that experience.

This project used a literature study, policy analysis, gatekeeper interviews, and in-depth interviews with 33 young adults. These methods investigated how the global financial crisis and Ireland's austerity policies transformed young adults' everyday places and lives in Knocknaheeny and Ballymun. Knocknaheeny is located in northern Cork—Ireland's second city—and has roughly 4,000 inhabitants. The neighbourhood predominantly contains social housing (58% in 2016) and is known for its historic concentration of unemployment and poverty, which has worsened since the crisis (Haase & Pratschke, 2017). Despite overall deprivation, a sense of place is strong in the neighbourhood, and its inhabitants feel relatively safe (Coakley, 2003). Throughout the years, multiple regeneration programmes contributed to renovation without significantly reducing the social housing share. Ballymun is located on Dublin's northern edge and houses around 80,000 persons. It is Ireland's only modernist high-rise estate, which initially delivered high-quality housing (Power, 1997). However, the lack of amenities, the flight of better-of inhabitants, and stigmatisation soon induced economic, physical, and social decline (Power, 1997). Deteriorating conditions and community-led activism triggered full-scale redevelopment plans in the 1980s (Boyle, 2005). Eventually, the tower blocks were replaced by single-family dwellings, and private rental overtook social housing as dominant tenure. However, the financial crisis interrupted the ambitious regeneration plans and many of its amenities—a metro, a new shopping mall, a swimming pool—never materialised.

The embedded comparative approach, applied to Knocknaheeny and Ballymun, neither essentialises these neighbourhoods as radically different (Jacobs, 2012) nor provides a homogenised account of austerity. The embedded comparison embeds comparative analysis in a scalar understanding of crisis and austerity. As such, it satisfies the three challenges of comparative urbanism (Peck, 2015). First, it stresses both commonalities and differences through theory-informed case studies. Second, rather than positioning austerity as exogenous, it provides a scaled analysis showing how local practices interact with national and international developments. Third, it provides a relational understanding of the local experience of austerity and neoliberalisation. The following section discusses relevant development at three scales: international, national, and the neighbourhood.

3. Austerity Experiences in Ireland

In a globalised world, any comparative study must map international developments affecting its cases.

To prevent essentialism, an embedded comparative approach traces global connections (Sayın et al., 2022). The feasibility of engagements depends on the study and whether it focuses on understanding the cases or a phenomenon (Aalbers, in press). In this article, the global perspective is the 2008 financial crisis that ultimately led to austerity (D. Harvey, 2010). This global perspective derives from an academic and professional literature study of the financial crisis, urban neoliberalisation, and financialisation (Aalbers, 2009; French et al., 2011).

In 2008, the Lehman Brothers collapse sent shockwaves through the global financial system, and states intervened to prevent a systemic economic collapse (Brenner et al., 2010a; French et al., 2009). At heart was a lingering financialisation-driven proliferation of complicated financial risk-distributing instruments (Aalbers, 2009). Once this risk materialised, the global financial relations created by neoliberalisation and financialisation started to unravel. Mortgage foreclosures in Florida and California went global; its risks trickled down to localities worldwide, such as a Norwegian municipality forced to cut elderly care budgets, reduce fire services, and close schools (Aalbers, 2009). So a global phenomenon—the 2008 financial crisis—had local, regional, and national consequences. This example illustrates the necessity of a global perspective to understand what happens locally. While a detailed description of global developments is gargantuan, it is more feasible to relate local occurrences to international developments.

Ireland adopted a neoliberal open economy in the mid-1980s, which resulted in two decades of extraordinary economic development and an acute vulnerability to international economic shocks (Kitchin & Bartley, 2007). Four historic factors shaped Ireland's neoliberalising trajectory (Kitchin et al., 2012). First, entrenched cultural-political emphasis on home ownership and private property development facilitated intense real-estate financialisation. Second, a weak planning system provided little public power to control financialised real-estate interests. Third, political dominance by two centre-right conservative parties—Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—prevented ideological contestation. Fourth, Ireland was an early adopter of an open, liberal economy, creating an emphasis on international competitiveness through low wages and taxes. During the early 21st century, intensified financialisation amplified these neoliberal tendencies (Kelly, 2014; Ó Riain, 2012). As a result, Ireland's economic position focussed on financialised real estate investments and a competitive business environment; low tax, low wages. Various waves of rollback-rollout neoliberalisation transformed the Irish economy and its institutions (Peck & Tickell, 2002), setting the stage for a new round of austerity rollback.

In 2008, Ireland's economic prosperity dramatically ended as the deflation of its national property bubble coalesced with the global financial crisis (Kelly, 2014; Ó Riain, 2014). Afterwards, Ireland embarked on an austerity journey to rebuild competitiveness and regener-

ate its economy. This focus on competitiveness meant budget cuts, wage reductions, and labour precarity, while corporation tax and investment climate remained untouched (Fraser et al., 2013). Ireland's specific global position, and pathways of neoliberalisation and financialisation, created its vulnerability and austerity trajectory.

3.1. Spheres of Experience

Three dominant spheres emerged in the austerity experiences of young adults in Knocknaheeny and Ballymun: work and income, housing, and community and voluntary services. This section sets out the national context for these experiences.

First, austerity amplified the vulnerability of young adults in work and income (Verick, 2009); youth unemployment (ages 18 to 25) rose faster and remained higher than for the general population (van Lanen, 2020a). Public sector austerity included a hiring moratorium between 2009 and 2014, last-in-first-out redundancies, intensified competition for employment, and a one-year minimum wage reduction in 2011. Without much seniority and experience, young adults were more likely to lose jobs and least likely to secure them (Murphy & Loftus, 2015). Additionally, unemployment benefits (jobseekers allowance) were reduced specifically for persons under 25 €100/week for 18–24 and €144/week for 25. After these initial rollback dynamics—cuts to wages and social welfare—training and education programmes, which sometimes provided humble welfare top-ups, were rolled-out. However, in 2013 these top-ups were reduced in an attempt to increase their efficiency. After initial rollbacks, a "destructive creativity" rollout-rollback dynamic intended to reinvigorate a competitive economy where low-cost workfare pushed young adults into precarious jobs.

Second, austerity amplified transitions towards private housing provision, thereby amplifying the inaccessibility of suitable and affordable housing to young adults. First, austerity cut social housing budgets by 88% (Byrne & Norris, 2018), rapidly increasing waiting lists by 60% between 2008 and 2013 (O'Connor & Staunton, 2015). Second, stricter mortgage criteria required higher minimum deposits (Central Bank of Ireland, 2015). Third, private sector rents rose sharply as households excluded from social housing and owner-occupancy increased competitive pressure. At first, the rolling back of social housing investment reduced public spending and created rental investment opportunities to reinvigorate Ireland's property markets. Later, amidst an exploding affordability crisis, rolled-out housing supports consolidated investment interests; first-time buyer tax benefits drove up house prices, and the Housing Assistance Payment subsidised private rents, thereby favouring landlordism and institutional investment in Ireland's rental sector (Hearne & Murphy, 2017).

Thirdly, from 2008 to 2012, austerity reduced voluntary and community sector funding by 35% overall,

and 18% for services directed at disadvantaged youth (B. Harvey, 2012). The closure, service decline, and centralisation of community and voluntary services happened while their demand rose in the recession years. After the rolling back of funding, competitive funding mechanisms rolled out a transformation of the sector towards employability-focused services (Forde, 2020). Following an earlier rollback, rollout dynamic, where voluntary and community organisations took on welfare tasks (devolved risk), another round of destructive creativity saw their funding diminished and their role transformed.

3.2. Sphere 1: Work and Income

Youth unemployment was high in Knocknaheeny and Ballymun before, during, and after the 2008 financial crisis (van Lanen, 2020b). In these neighbourhoods, territorial stigmatisation amplified young adults' vulnerability in the labour market (Verick, 2009; Wacquant et al., 2014). During the Irish crisis and recovery, Ballymun youth unemployment rose more than the national average; 54% of 15–24-year-olds in Ballymun were unemployed in 2011, compared to 39% nationally (European Commission, 2016). For Knocknaheeny, which has comparable unemployment levels to Ballymun, such detailed data is unavailable (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2017).

Comparative analysis of everyday austerity experience reveals that work and income featured more prominently in Knocknaheeny than in Ballymun. Knocknaheeny contained fewer activation services, educational facilities, and training programmes, which means unemployed youth were less likely "absorbed" in programmes with potential welfare top-ups:

> I came out of college, and I was, just turned 18, going to college…but there was no jobs in that sector, and I tried, ehm, applying for jobs, but nothing came back. Got a few interviews, didn't get the jobs, that was it, there was really, really nothing….So I was on a 100 euro a week, on the dole, social welfare, for four years, and I got paid on the Monday, so I never had a weekend life, never, so, I was at home all the time… (Simon, Knocknaheeny, 24)

> When you're on social welfare for five or six weeks, and then they are ringing you up, sending you letters, pushing to interviews, they want you to do something, which is good…still, though, like, it's not great… (Sean, Knocknaheeny, 18)

Simon was unemployed most of his adult life; limited income prevented him from having a weekend life, which he expected from his young adult years. Sean voices similar frustrations with life on benefits; apart from having low spending power, he was frustrated by a proactive and "pushy" welfare system associated with being inactive on benefits. Participation in training programmes,

such as YouthReach, could provide some extra income, a sense of purpose, and reduce external activation pressure by the welfare system. Like Simon and Sean, young adults from Knocknaheeny often regretted having nothing to do and lacking a sense of purpose or direction. In Knocknaheeny, interference with employment, welfare, and community sector rollback and workfare rollout made work and income a dominant austerity experience.

Better employment prospects alone—resulting from the Dublin-centred economic recovery—cannot fully explain the lesser importance of work and income in Ballymun austerity narratives. Contrary to Knocknaheeny, the presence of public, voluntary, and community services played a role here, providing purposeful activities and, sometimes, social welfare top-ups:

> I actually started as an intern, so I done a nine-month internship and that was part of the Youth Guarantee Scheme…and that finished in January, and since then they kept me on full-time… (Sophie, Ballymun, 25)

> I made CVs up in the Job Centre, the Ballymun Job Centre, and I went around shops…so I went to the Job Centre, and they helped with a mock interview and stuff, gave me tips and stuff. (Donna, Ballymun, 23)

Donna and Sophie used training and support services to get experience and find employment—opportunities more readily available to Ballymun youth through, for example, a neighbourhood-specific YouthReach facility, the Ballymun Job Centre, and the Ballymun Regional Youth Resource. These facilities could provide additional income, a sense of purpose, and a future perspective (van Lanen, 2021). Their presence follows partly from a larger population, the neighbourhood's reputation as an unemployment hotspot, and a history of community activism pushing for public interventions (Boyle, 2005).

Furthermore, the work and income experiences that emerged in Ballymun often concerned household income—rather than personal income in Knocknaheeny. One explanation might be the higher living costs, including rents, in Dublin (Private Residential Tenancies Board, 2015). In both neighbourhoods, participants often contributed to household expenses, which were often insufficient in Ballymun:

> For twelve years, I'd seen [my father] in work all the time, and now that, from then, he had no job, that was the first kinda time I saw the recession hit bad, yeah. (Josh, Ballymun, 21)

> There was times when it did get hard, like, with me mom's hours being cut, and losing her job, and a lot going on at home…it was kind of hard for my mom to…financially support three kids and a grandchild…herself, and a fiancé… (Tara, Ballymun, 18)

Josh and Tara discuss problems with household finances following employment changes for one of their parents, elsewhere describing impacts on rent and food. Josh and Tara were active in training and culture initiatives, which for Tara provided extra personal income and fulfilled a passion for Josh. Where both did encounter income restrictions was in their household. In Ballymun, the interference of a quicker employment recovery, higher prices, the earlier rollback of social housing, and the rollout of services mediated the personal work and income sphere.

In its everyday experience, austerity is more than fiscal and economic policy (Hall, 2019; Hitchen, 2016). However, a comparative analysis of Knocknaheeny and Ballymun illuminates how the interference of rollback-rollout dynamics shapes locally specific austerity experiences. While the overarching austerity measures impacted both neighbourhoods, local circumstances like the availability of services or (dis)investment in social housing shape the sensitivity in which these national dynamics "touch down" in everyday lives of young adults. Embedding a comparative analysis in global and national developments illuminates how national austerity emerges in localities and how interferences between national and local rollback-rollout dynamics shape everyday austerity experience.

3.3. Sphere 2: Housing

Real estate and housing were at the heart of the Celtic Tiger and the Irish economic crash. Ballymun and Knocknaheeny youth could hardly benefit from the wealth-generating opportunities of financialisation, but its disruptions did affect them. Social housing divestment, pressure-induced private rent increases, and, to a lesser degree, stricter mortgage regulation and rising house prices put affordable and suitable housing out of reach for most young adults from these neighbourhoods. Housing, therefore, played an essential role in everyday austerity experiences.

Most participants lived with their parents. Their main concern was the inability to find suitable housing to leave their parental home (van Lanen, 2022). Long public housing waiting lists and high private-sector rents frustrated their housing aspirations:

I'd prefer not to live at home, cause, like, I share a room with my sister and she is twelve, that's hard. And then the two boys are sharing like a box, and that is really small. So, like, and my brother is 18 nearly, and then the other is 13....So, I'd like to move out, but it's just, I just don't have the money. (Ciara, Knocknaheeny, 21)

But I wouldn't live with me dad, that's for sure, the house is crowded, there's about eleven people in that house, and there's only four bedrooms, it's mad, it's crazy. (Tara, Ballymun, 18)

The inability of young adults, such as Ciara and Tara, to move out of their parental house created overcrowding conditions, which reduced the homely qualities of rest or privacy. This situation was present in both Ballymun and Knocknaheeny; however, they surfaced more intensely in Ballymun.

The dominance of housing in Ballymun follows its regeneration process, where tenancy and physical transformations put the tangible and intangible aspects of housing centre stage. At the time of the crisis, both neighbourhoods underwent regeneration. The organisation of these projects partly shaped their outcome and the experience of housing under austerity. Ballymun Regeneration Limited, founded in 1997, is a private corporation responsible for regenerating the neighbourhood by reinvesting profits from land values, enterprises, and market-rate developments into physical, social, and economic improvements (Ballymun Regeneration Limited, 2005; Power, 2008). The rollback of the state, trusting regeneration to a public-private partnership model, made this regeneration vulnerable to crisis (Hearne, 2011). Private partners pulled out, and while some physical upgrades were realised, Ballymun Regeneration Limited failed to provide the promised social and economic regeneration. It did accomplish its intent to reduce social housing from 80% in 1997 to 43% by the end of regeneration. In 2016, the census recorded 33% of Ballymun households in social housing (CSO, 2017). Devolved risk to a private organisation created market vulnerabilities, resulting in youth exclusion from adequate housing.

The Knocknaheeny Regeneration Programme also launched in 1997, aiming to improve housing, infrastructure, and amenities (Mansfield, 2011). In this programme, accompanied by the 2001 Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment, and Development Programme, the state was actively present in housing and facilities. Most importantly, it committed to maintaining social housing levels, remaining at 58% in 2016 (CSO, 2017). The 2014 Cork North West Quarter Regeneration Plan kept this commitment, aiming to renew the social housing stock, the town centre, and construct a new library. Contrary to Ballymun, the Knocknaheeny regeneration depended less on market forces and could safeguard social housing; its only significant adjustment to crisis and austerity was downscaling additional retail space. Keeping control at an earlier stage protected Knocknaheeny from intensified rollback dynamics during crisis and austerity.

The organisation of regeneration in Knocknaheeny and Ballymun had two consequences for housing as a sphere of austerity experience. First, more pronounced physical transformation in Ballymun—from high-rise apartment blocks to single-family housing—while its crisis disruption meant vacant fields and unrealised facilities. In Knocknaheeny, more piecemeal and phased housing renovation disrupted the visual, and physical environment less. Second, the tenure transformation

was more pronounced in Ballymun; the share of social housing declined by over 40% points in favour of private rental and owner-occupancy. In Knocknaheeny, the decline of social housing was less pronounced, guaranteeing affordability once young adults would acquire enough time on waiting lists. Dublin City Council committed to more devolved risk and destructive creativity, creating localised vulnerabilities to housing exclusion for Ballymun youth.

The embedded comparative approach embeds experiences in both neighbourhoods within a political economy of neoliberalisation and financialisation; it compares these experiences within their local context. This approach shows the influence of local regeneration plans; Knocknaheeny succeeded in maintaining social housing's dominant tenure states, and large-scale tenure transformations in Ballymun made housing a dominant sphere of everyday austerity experience. A more entrepreneurial approach to regeneration in Ballymun reformed housing through destructive creativity and devolved risk to a market actor, all inspired by deficit politics looking for low state costs for renewal (D. Harvey, 1989; Peck, 2012). National neoliberalisation of housing interferes with local government approaches to shape how austerity is lived and felt in everyday life.

3.4. Sphere 3: Community and Voluntary Sector

The third sphere of austerity experience was the community and voluntary sector. Both Knocknaheeny and Ballymun contained several community and voluntary organisations, such as the Ballymun Job Centre, Plough Youth Club, and Poppintree Youth Project in Ballymun, and the Canteen and the Youth Justice Project in Knocknaheeny. As mentioned above, Ballymun had more, and more varied public, community, and voluntary organisations. This initial position influenced their role in everyday austerity experience, although organisations in both neighbourhoods dealt with increasingly competitive and conditional funding (Forde, 2020; B. Harvey, 2012).

As a sphere of austerity experience, the voluntary and community sector was more present in Ballymun. Partly, this follows the more prominent institutional presence and, thus, exposure of such organisations in Ballymun. This presence is explained by Ballymun's larger population and recent history of community activism (Boyle, 2005). These services were not uncontested; the feature-length documentary "4th Act" shows service rollout and replacement leading to the closure and centralisation of community organisations under stricter municipal control during Ballymun's regeneration. Nonetheless, many Ballymun participants appreciated what the community and voluntary sector used to offer, including leisure, training, and general support:

> POBAL…decided to cut their funding, because they couldn't afford to have the Ballymun partnership, so

now they've given their funding…to the Finglas Tolka Area Partnership, and now they have to take over Ballymun as well, which is not fair to them, they have to take more strain on because their area is widened, but it's not fair to this community either, there were so many opportunities for young people. (Hannah, Ballymun, 19)

> I know what good work this building does, like, but it's only so much it can take in, like, and as I said with budget cuts and stuff like that…this building could offer a lot more but it wouldn't, it would be working out of his means then…that's kinda about the results of the cuts… (Michael, Ballymun, 24)

Despite positive experiences with, in this case, the Ballymun Partnership (Hannah) and the Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (Michael), these and other services closed, centralised, or diminished their services in response to austerity. After earlier local rollout, the rollback under austerity reduced the capacities of these and other organisations, which rippled through everyday austerity experiences, expressing a sense of loss, limitation and missed opportunities—both for participants themselves and the community to which they feel they belong.

In Knocknaheeny, available services were always lower or concentrated on the city's north side rather than the neighbourhood. As a result, the closure, centralisation, and limitation of such services were less acutely felt. This did not mean there were no issues. Still, these were expressed as a continuous experience of nothing to do, particularly for young adults. Impacts on voluntary and community organisations fitted into a narrative of slow abandonment, the long-term rollback of services that preceded austerity. However, budget cuts might have intensified it for some time:

> Cause like the clubs now only go on throughout the school year. They need them during the summer as well, like. They need more things happening during the summer. (Ciara, Knocknaheeny, 21)

> There is not enough for young people around here, like, we have a football pitch around here, but it's a stride. Over drinking and fires and stuff, like, people starting fires….More places, like, for young people to go out by day, like, something for them to do… (Billy, Knocknaheeny, 18)

Ciara and Billy both claim that there is not enough for people their age in Knocknaheeny, especially not at the times this is most needed—weekends and evenings. However, these concerns are less directly linked to austerity compared to Ballymun. Instead, the relative absence of facilities is narrated as a lack of attention and opportunities for and in the neighbourhood. These experiences feed into the work and income sphere, as young

adults from Knocknaheeny sense a structural disadvantage that makes it hard to gain an adequate income to support themselves or their households.

The voluntary and community sector experienced a rollout-rollback dynamic. During the Celtic Tiger period, these organisations took over welfare state functions. First, after the crisis, competitive and conditional funding devolved the risk of implementing these functions to these organisations, downloading failure of service provisions in the shadow of a retracting welfare state. Second, in destructive creativity, austerity targeted and reformed previously outsourced welfare functions, shaping the everyday austerity experiences of disadvantaged urban youth. As such, the voluntary and community sector became, at times, an actor in guiding unemployed youth into precarious work. The comparative analysis shows that the everyday experience of these dynamics emerges in interference with local rhythms of rollback-rollout neoliberalisation. Local rollout in Ballymun amplified the disappearance of community services in everyday austerity experiences. Simultaneously long-term rollback in Knocknaheeny resulted in a more continuous experience of decline. The embedded comparative approach can explain differences in everyday austerity experiences due to these neoliberalisation interferences.

4. Discussion

The analysis of everyday austerity experiences in Knocknaheeny and Ballymun explores the embedded comparative approach. This approach consciously connects developments at different scales, such as the global financial crisis, the Irish austerity regime, and local austerity experiences. The analysis shows that local differentiation in the experience of national austerity results from the interference between national and local rollback-rollout mechanisms (Peck, 2012; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Irish austerity policies in the three dominant spheres of austerity experience—work and income, housing, and the community and voluntary sector—display moments of rollback, the cuts, and rollout neoliberalisation, reforms in partial response to austerity-induced policy failures. In the everyday austerity experiences of young adults from Knocknaheeny and Ballymun, however, local developments with their own rollback-rollout mechanisms intensify or soothe the experienced impacts of national policy.

The interference of neoliberalisation processes results from local history and geographies interacting with processes operating at a higher scalar level—such as national austerity or the international financial crisis. In the case of Knocknaheeny and Ballymun, two elements were of particular importance. First, the entrepreneurial or managerial organisation of neighbourhood regeneration (D. Harvey, 1989). The entrepreneurial, public-private regeneration model of Ballymun amplified the housing vulnerability of young adults. In contrast, the more managerial social-housing-oriented regeneration

of Knocknaheeny soothed but did not prevent housing from emerging as a vital sphere of austerity experience. Second, the presence and disappearance of public, voluntary, and community services. In Ballymun, local community organisations created a more profound presence of public, voluntary, and community services in the neighbourhood. Local political history thus amplified a national rollout dynamic of financing such organisations to provide certain welfare functions. This interferential high of rollout presence provided a sharper contrast with the austerity rollback of funding compared to Knocknaheeny, thereby launching these services as a dominant sphere of austerity experience in Ballymun.

The embedded comparative approach enabled documenting rollback-rollout mechanisms at different scalar levels (embedded) and in different places (comparative). Embedding the everyday experiences within overarching developments, inspired by PEEL scholarship, structurally connects these experiences to global and national events (Elias, 2010). Comparing everyday experiences between two distinct neighbourhoods, inspired by comparative urbanism, prevents simplistic generalisation beyond cases (Peck, 2015). Together, an embedded comparative approach embeds everyday experiences both in local context and overarching development, thus presenting a structured approach to understanding places, in this case, Ballymun and Knocknaheeny, and phenomena, here austerity and neoliberalisation.

5. Conclusion

The embedded comparative approach is a strategy to compare everyday phenomena and experiences in two (or more) specific case studies while remaining attentive to the structural transformations that drive them. The embedded approach employs PEEL to contribute to debates about methodology and scale in comparative urbanism (Brill, 2022b; Sayın et al., 2022; Tuvikene, 2016). Using everyday austerity experiences in Ireland, this article illustrated a comparative analysis sensitive to different scalar levels and places. In this way, this article presents two contributions and one invitation to comparative urban studies.

First, the embedded comparative approach provides a template to analyse the relations between structural developments, mundane practices, and everyday experiences in comparative urban studies. The presented analysis links a global phenomenon, a national response, and a local experience; an inter-scalar analysis documenting common origins and local geographies that explain austerity experiences in different places. This approach balances structural theory and analysis with specific manifestations (Nijman, 2015; Peck, 2015), illuminating interferences between national and local neoliberalising processes to understand localised austerity experiences and the overarching origin of these experiences. This integration of place and scale in the analysis initiates a "spatial PEEL."

Second, empirically applying the embedded comparative approach to austerity experiences in Ireland shows that national austerity accentuates existing spatial inequalities. Austerity in Ireland impacted young adults in three dominant areas: work and income, housing, and community and voluntary services. These areas were significant in both Knocknaheeny and Ballymun. Nonetheless, the relative intensity of these areas was given by the interference of national and local rollback-rollout neoliberalisation, embedded within local governance and institutional geographies. The "topologies and topographies of Ireland's neoliberal crisis" (O'Callaghan et al., 2015, p. 31) are shaped by these interferences from above and below, which forge the manifestation of structural austerity in everyday experience.

Finally, this article invites urban scholars to apply the embedded comparative approach "upwards and downwards." The downward application, presented here, works from global and structural developments "down" to local experiences. Future research could apply embedded comparisons upwards, taking further inspiration from PEEL. Starting with local, everyday practices and tracing their impacts to national and global structural transformations. It also invites urban planners to use an embedded comparative approach as a tool to understand how local interventions amplify or soothe larger-scale developments. As the above examples show, the institutional design of urban renewal or planning for public services can shape the intensity of everyday political and economic change. In the future, upward application could exemplify how local interventions can influence national or global developments. In this way, the embedded comparative approach can be a tool for both analysis and change.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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