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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

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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,

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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

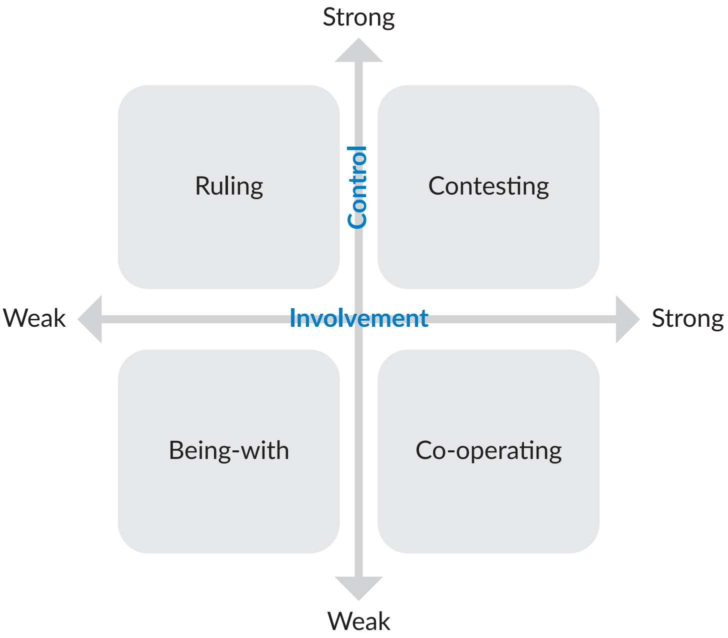

Figure 1. Involvement and control in relating with others in the neighbourhood.

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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