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Article

Street-Level Workers and the Construction of Social Infrastructure in Suburban Neighbourhoods

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Abstract
The article examines the provision of social infrastructures in suburban neighbourhoods from the perspective of street-level workers. The concept of infrastructure is usually related to material and structural conditions but can equally apply to social infrastructures that are continuously constructed and maintained in social practices. These social infrastructures are embedded in structures and social arrangements and are related to past decisions. Our research focuses on the social infrastructures of two high-rise suburbs in Finland, built in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the 1990s, these neighbourhoods have experienced socioeconomic decline and transformation into a multicultural milieu. While suburbs have often been overlooked in urban politics and public discourses, a wide range of social infrastructures have also evolved in these districts and are continuously maintained. The main research data consists of interviews with street-level workers who participate in the production of such local social infrastructures. The article identifies and analyses the essential factors and preconditions as well as the challenges and contradictions of the provision of social infrastructure in these suburban contexts. This understanding is needed in order to foster an extensive social infrastructure and to deter counterforces from exacerbating socio-spatial inequalities and social polarisation in cities.

Keywords
Finland; Kontula; social infrastructures; street-level workers; suburbs; urban politics; Varissuo

Issue
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1. Introduction

The concept of social infrastructure has focused attention on understanding cities as inclusive and welcoming places that provide care and support and foster connections and solidarity. Social infrastructures can be important resources, especially for economically or socially marginalized or vulnerable groups and communities (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019). According to its rather loose definition, the concept refers to “the physical places and organisations that shape the way people interact” (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 5), “the underlying structures that sustain social life” (Hall, 2020, p. 82), or “the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection” (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 3). Social infrastructures are thus laden with great expectations as regards their beneficial effects. Despite this, there are relatively few context-sensitive, empirical investigations which valorise how social infrastructures actually work in suburban contexts. This article contributes to the discussion on social infrastructures by addressing the essential factors and preconditions, challenges, and contradictions of the provision of social infrastructures in two suburban neighbourhoods. The topic is examined from the perspective of street-level workers who actively and directly

participate in the production and maintenance of local social infrastructures. The street-level participants in the study worked in institutions like nursery schools, psychiatric and substance abuse centres, churches, youth clubs, and libraries. In their everyday work, they encounter challenges and contradictions while managing, maintaining, and producing social infrastructures, and therefore have had a glimpse of the formation and significance of these infrastructures for people living in suburbs.

Our study focuses on the social infrastructures of two high-rise suburbs in Finland: Kontula in the City of Helsinki and Varissuo in the City of Turku. Both neighbourhoods were built in the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate a growing urban population. Since the 1990s, they have experienced a socioeconomic decline and a rapid transformation into a multicultural milieu (Huttunen & Juntunen, 2020; Tuominen, 2020), representing the suburban type of neighbourhood found in various European cities, commonly labelled as "disadvantaged" (cf. Blokland & Nast, 2014). Since the 1960s, the environments of many Finnish suburbs have been criticised for being monotonous sites of social alienation which lack the provision of public spaces (Saarikangas, 2014). However, inhabitants' accounts often contrast with these negative representations and express a strong sense of belonging and community (Huttunen & Juntunen, 2020; Saarikangas, 2014; Tuominen, 2020). Today, many high-rise Nordic neighbourhoods are facing major regeneration plans and the re-location of public services from the suburbs to larger units. There is, therefore, an acute need for a better understanding of the need for localized social infrastructures. Through studying neighbourhoods like Kontula and Varissuo, the potential, challenges, and politics of provision can be identified.

The first part of the article introduces previous research on social infrastructures and street-level workers and defines our own starting points for analysing these structures in a suburban context. The second section discusses the methodology of the research and introduces the neighbourhoods of Kontula and Varissuo. This is followed by the analysis and reflections on various aspects of a robust social infrastructure. The last section summarises the contribution of the article and suggests aspects that still need further research.

2. Infrastructural Approach

Urban infrastructures have attained a broad interest in recent decades, including discussions on topics such as building and maintenance, failures and collapses, and everyday experiences of infrastructures (e.g., Graham, 2010; Graham & McFarlane, 2015; Klinenberg, 2018). In addition to focusing on physical and socio-technical systems, research on infrastructures also incorporates intangible "soft" (social) networks and services (Addie, 2021; Addie et al., 2020; Filion & Keil, 2017). These "soft" social infrastructures and their role in urban social lives were already acknowledged several decades ago (e.g., Naidu, 1976). While the concept recognises the role of physical spaces as being necessary for social infrastructure, we follow the scholars who argue that physical spaces must be activated and enlivened by urban politics and by diverse actors—individuals, groups, and organisations—in order to function as social infrastructures (Campbell et al., 2021; Hall, 2020).

Common to many discussions is "a shared sense of infrastructure not just as a 'thing,' a 'system,' or an 'output,' but as complex social and technological *process* that enables—or disables—particular kinds of action in the city" (Graham & McFarlane, 2015, p. 1). Infrastructures facilitate activities and are closely intertwined with socioeconomic disparities (Latham & Layton, 2019; McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008). Accessibility to infrastructures varies, and some people are more affected by the breaking of infrastructure than others (Larkin, 2013; Star, 1999)—for instance, those who are tied to their own neighbourhoods due to their vulnerable position or reduced mobility resulting, for example, from age or sickness (Lo et al., 2015). For a neighbourhood, the degradation of social infrastructures might mean a decrease in the use of public spaces and civic participation in general, weakened social networks, and the isolation of people with reduced mobility (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 21).

Social infrastructures are relational and practised (e.g., Star, 1999). The agency and everyday practices of diverse actors—including residents and urban communities—are important in the creation, design, maintenance, and practice of social infrastructures (Sampson, 2012). Star (1999, pp. 381–382) describes how infrastructures are embedded into and exist within other structures and social arrangements and are always "built on an installed base." How they function and develop is affected by previous work, past decisions, and the strengths and limitations inherited from such a base (see also Latham & Layton, 2019). Thus, infrastructures are not natural and do not just appear. They are produced and embody the social relationships and contradictions that are part of their production. As with all infrastructures, social infrastructures are formed, shaped, and sustained by politics, networked systems, and governmental arrangements. The outcomes of social infrastructures depend partly on the physical spaces but also on the funding, management, regulation, and cultural norms practised around them (Layton & Latham, 2022).

There are always people whose work remains unnoticed or is not formally recognised (Star, 1999, p. 386). Such invisible work—that is encoded and embedded in infrastructures—is often neglected. The idea of people as a form of infrastructure has broadened the scope of infrastructure to include people's activities and efforts to improve their everyday lives, suggesting a focus on infrastructure as social practice (Addie, 2021; Simone, 2021; Wilson & Jonas, 2021). The role of labour has also been discussed by scholars who claim that the labour that

sustains social life worlds remains largely unrecognised, undervalued, and unsupported (e.g., see Hall, 2020; Lawson, 2007; Power & Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020). State involvement, investment, and responsibility for and within communities have sharply declined in the context of austerity, neoliberalism, and deinstitutionalisation. Therefore, this work—which has tended to be inherently gendered and racialised, for example, in the sectors of social welfare, healthcare, education, and childcare—is increasingly being undertaken by volunteers, communities, or over-stretched public sector employees (Hall, 2020; Power & Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020).

In order to understand the everyday realisation of social infrastructures in suburban neighbourhoods, we targeted our interest on street-level workers. We are partly contingent on the previous literature on street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Brodkin, 2012; Jansen et al., 2021; Lavee & Cohen, 2019; Levy, 2021; Lipsky, 1980; Proudfoot & McCann, 2008; Rice, 2012), but our usage of the term "street-level workers" illustrates that in addition to "public agencies that represent authorities" (Brodkin, 2012), our data includes resident-activists and representatives of the third sector. Characteristic to street-level bureaucrats is that they are "frontline workers who interact daily with citizens, providing…services, while enforcing and implementing dictated policies and regulations" (Lavee & Cohen, 2019, p. 476). They, thus, interpret public policy and enable communication between the government and the individual (Brodkin, 2012). Those street-level workers who are, for example, resident-activists or the representatives of associations, do not fit into the last parts of this definition as they do not directly enforce and implement state or city policies. Nevertheless, the difference is not clear-cut but rather somewhat blurred as some services that were previously the responsibility of the welfare state are nowadays carried out by volunteers (see also Brodkin, 2012).

In the research on local or urban communities, municipal, third-sector, and state institution workers are sometimes seen as representing bureaucracy and institutions (see Blokland, 2017, pp. 80–81) and positioned as outsiders whose relationships with local residents are hierarchical, power-laden, and tend to perpetuate urban inequalities and marginalising processes (Junnilainen, 2019, p. 40). Their relationships with clients are, then, regarded as instrumental transactions of an impersonal character, in which both parties expect the other side to conform to roles. Several studies, however, present a more multifaceted understanding of the relationships between street-level bureaucrats and clients (e.g., Blokland, 2012). These studies report, for instance, on the commitment of street-level bureaucrats and how they delve into the lives of their clients and neighbourhoods (e.g., Jansen et al., 2021; Lavee & Cohen, 2019) to the extent that the personal attributes of clients (as well as the worker) have a strong impact on everyday encounters and which tasks are prioritised (Rice, 2012). Many studies also highlight the agency of street-level workers and how, due to inadequate resources, they develop coping mechanisms, strategies, and informal practices that help them carry out their work and make a difference in neighbourhood spaces (Brodkin, 2012; Jansen et al., 2021; Proudfoot & McCann, 2008). Sometimes they are also able to influence policy design or shape societal structures (Lavee & Cohen, 2019; Levy, 2021; Rice, 2012).

By studying the experiences of street-level workers, Lipsky (1980) showed how their routines and daily encounters with customers actually become the public policies they carry out. There are conflicts between the workers' commitments, the ideal conception of the job, and organisational life. The work is characterised by a relatively high degree of discretion and autonomy from the organisational agencies but also by structural constraints and high workloads. The workers are forced to adopt a method of routinising client interactions, seeing individuals *en masse*, assigning people to categories and labels, and neglecting human responsiveness. As Lipsky (1980, p. 71) remarks:

> To deliver street level policy through bureaucracy is to embrace a contradiction. On the one hand, service is delivered by people to people, invoking a model of human interaction, caring and responsibility. On the other hand, service is delivered through a bureaucracy, invoking a model of detachment and equal treatment under conditions of resource limitations and constraints, making care and responsibility conditional.

3. Methodology and Research Areas

The research strategy was based on case study approach. As the definitions of case study approach emphasize (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Laine et al., 2007; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2014), the aim was to investigate social infrastructures in their real-life context to gain concrete, context-dependent knowledge and in-depth understanding of their provision. The study relied on multiple data sources. Interviews generated the primary research material, while planning documents, field visits, and observations on-site were used to support the analysis.

The selection of the cases was based on the expectations about their information content (see Flyvbjerg, 2006). In the Nordic countries, the term suburban usually refers to high-rise housing estates built in forestry landscapes to accommodate the growing urban population in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the old suburbs have experienced a socioeconomic decline since the 1990s. Our research areas are no exceptions. Both are included in the activities of the Finnish Ministry of the Environment's Neighbourhood Programme (2020–2022), which aims to find ways to slow down the segregation process in declining neighbourhoods. Both Kontula and Varissuo have higher unemployment rates and lower education levels compared to the average level in the city. The unemployment rate is 19.2% in Kontula (9.6 % in Helsinki)

and 28.7% in Varissuo (13.0% in Turku; Statistics Finland, 2022). The percentage of the population with only a basic level of education is 38.7% in Kontula (23.0 % in Helsinki) and 34.1% in Varissuo (22.6% in Turku; Statistics Finland, 2020). They are also multicultural neighbourhoods: In Kontula, approximately 40% and, in Varissuo, 52% of the population speak as their first language a language other than Finnish or Swedish (Greater Helsinki Open Statistical Databases, 2021; Statistics Finland, 2018, as cited in City of Turku, 2022). Both suburbs offer good recreational facilities, green areas, and transport connections to the city centre. Both have a lively shopping centre, where services are concentrated. As previous studies show (e.g., Huttunen & Juntunen, 2020; Tuominen, 2020), there is a strong sense of belonging and community spirit among the residents of both neighbourhoods.

The research material consists of interviews with street-level workers in the organisations providing social infrastructures in Kontula and Varissuo. The aim of the interviews was to understand the functioning of social infrastructures from the point of view of street-level workers and to gain an insider understanding of their provision. We first familiarised ourselves with the neighbourhoods' social infrastructures through field visits, planning documents and internet sites, then contacted the potential organisations and individuals personally and utilised a snowball technique in the recruitment of the interviewees. The sampling of the interviewees was purposive, with the aim of reaching those agents involved and knowledgeable about the production of social infrastructures in the research areas.

We interviewed 51 persons, 31 in Kontula and 20 in Varissuo. The interviewees included 22 municipal and government street-level workers working in public institutions as nursery school teachers, elementary school teachers, librarians, youth club workers, sports instructors, social and health service workers, community workers, police officers, and maintenance workers. There were also 10 interviewees working in local third-sector organisations (foundations, associations, or parishes) that carried out social and community work, organised sports and leisure activities, and/or provided physical spaces for people to meet, assemble, and obtain social support. A further 10 interviewees were resident-activists and active members of local participatory networks or resident associations. In addition, nine city officials and policymakers working in the sectors of urban planning and development, health and social services, and education were interviewed. We use the term street-level worker to refer to those interviewees who are front-line workers and physically present in the neighbourhoods. Some of the city officials and resident-activists interviewed do not fit this characterisation, but they have an impact on the provision of social infrastructure through policymaking, planning, and regulation.

In line with previous studies reporting the gendered employee structure in the sectors of social welfare, healthcare, education, and childcare (Hall, 2020; Power & Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020), there was a strong representation of females in our research material. Of the interviewees, 38 (75%) were women, three (5.9%) had an immigrant background, and the age range was 30–70 years, with no considerable emphasis on any age group. Due to the need to limit the scope of the research, we decided not to examine any of the commercial services more closely. Nevertheless, the shopping centres of both Kontula and Varissuo were rather extensively discussed in the interviews as they are significant public spaces and concentrations of social life. Furthermore, although shared courtyards or community spaces of the housing estates can have the qualities of social infrastructure, they are not included in our research material.

The interviews were conducted during the winter and spring of 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, most of the interviews were arranged via Teams or Zoom video calls, but some were also conducted face-to-face in the interviewees' workplaces or as walking interviews in the research areas. Five of the interviews were arranged with two to four participants, all of whom represented the same organisation. This was suggested by the interviewees so that they could supplement each other's views. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and they were recorded and transcribed.

Following the principles of semi-structured thematic interviews, the themes of the interviews were relatively loosely defined, allowing interviewees to raise relevant issues and introduce their own experiences. The interviewer steered the discussion towards more targeted questions when necessary. The interview themes concerned the interviewees' understanding of (a) the role of their work as a part of the social infrastructure of the neighbourhood, (b) the resources needed to produce and maintain this service, (c) the context the suburban neighbourhood creates for (this specific) social infrastructure, and (d) the challenges related to producing and maintaining social infrastructures. The interviews with city officials and resident-activists focused more generally on the role of social infrastructures in the neighbourhood and how urban planning and policy may affect their provision. In the analysis, we also utilised the background information gained from shorter, informal discussions carried out during several field visits to the research areas. In Varissuo, some of the field visits included volunteering in the Girls' House, a multicultural meeting place for girls and women, and in a summer café organized by a local parish of the Finnish church.

Thematic analysis was used as a method of data analysis. Analysis was an iterative process and conducted as an interplay between the data and theory (Simons, 2009, pp. 116–134). Ideas were worked out in relation to data and existing theoretical ideas concerning social infrastructures in a hermeneutic process of learning (Laine et al., 2007, p. 22; Mills et al., 2010, pp. 1–3). The coding started with an inductive, detailed

reading of the data, as a result of which three broad themes were established describing those aspects that the interviewees saw as essential for the functioning of social infrastructures: physical spaces and facilities, organizational aspects (urban policy and planning), and the work of local actors, especially street-level actors. Each of these broad themes was then interpreted in an analytical framework of social infrastructures. However, both data gathering and empirical observations on the data depended on theoretically sensitised researchers and their previous knowledge of social infrastructures (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Thus, the analysis was not cleanly inductive but can be characterised as abductive (see Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Earl Rinehart, 2021; Mills et al., 2010, pp. 1–3; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

4. Essential Aspects of a Robust Social Infrastructure

In the following, we analyse the provision and construction of social infrastructure from the perspective of street-level actors: Which factors do they consider essential for a robust social infrastructure, and what kind of challenges and contradictions do they encounter in their work?

4.1. Physical Spaces and Facilities

Built environments and public spaces are essential for social activities and collective life. Modernistic planning principles have largely neglected public spaces and urban life between buildings (Gehl, 2010, p. 4; Jacobs, 1961), and, in Finnish suburbs, an urban streetscape with corner stores and open squares is largely missing. Instead, there are other important physical structures and sites of social infrastructures. For example, football fields, basketball courts, and playgrounds now form an important part of the social infrastructure of suburbs. Highlighting the importance of these facilities, the interviewee working with young people in Varissuo described how the closing of the basketball court for repair work during the previous summer had caused "disorder" and a "hard time" for the whole area. Public libraries, schools, and nursery schools also serve as important social infrastructures in these areas. In addition to such visible and known facilities, there is also a more hidden network of small, semi-public community spaces managed by the city or by third-sector organisations. The street-level workers in the public and third sector, working in these indoor spaces on a daily basis, note that many of the spaces—located in buildings from the 1970s—are inadequate, too small, and do not meet the requirements of present-day activities. The city officials conducting community work in the areas and perceiving themselves as advocates of a wide group of residents in the areas report the need for larger, multifunctional community spaces ("living rooms"), which would serve as open and low-threshold meeting places allowing a freer framework for interactions than the semi-public spaces managed and used by specific organisations and user-groups. Currently, the local parishes have spacious, centrally located premises which are used for larger community meetings and events, but for many people there are barriers to the usage of religious spaces due to their different religious convictions. These findings were found in both the neighbourhoods studied, and they reflect the planning history of suburban neighbourhoods in Finland.

Typically, in suburbs in Finland, the building stock of the neighbourhood is largely from the 1970s, which means that the spaces need maintenance, renovation, and adaptation to accommodate the changing uses. For example, according to the librarian who was interviewed, the functions of libraries have significantly changed, and the old buildings do not meet the requirements of functions beyond traditional library work, for example, increased remote working, studying, events, and community activities. The diverse forms of social infrastructure also have specific material and spatial needs. For example, meeting places for families need a kitchen for preparing food for the children, whereas a smoking place is essential for a drop-in centre for substance abusers, and a library needs more electrical sockets for customers working on its premises. Physical facilities also reflect the will of the city to invest in the neighbourhoods' social infrastructure and affect both its perceived position in spatial hierarchies and its image as perceived by outsiders: "I would like to see that the youth here in our neighbourhood would be given something a bit better….We have this crummy library—and a youth club building from the year 1978…that isn't any factor of success" (Worker from a youth club).

4.2. Urban Politics and Planning

Political decisions about social infrastructure play an important role in the development of these neighbourhoods. Our analysis shows how past decisions related to the policy sectors of education, culture and leisure, health and social services, and housing and urban planning are encoded in local social infrastructures and how the management of social infrastructures is embedded in a complex web of relationships.

Local street-level workers in both neighbourhoods raised how—as locally-based institutions—schools and nursery schools represent a cohesive power in these neighbourhoods; they "reach all" and provide possibilities for strengthening the pupils' and parents' inclusion in Finnish society. A nursery school teacher characterises nursery schools as a window into society, both enabling a family to become visible and offering a view of Finnish society. A key feature of Finnish multiculturalism policies—integration through education and employment (Huttunen & Juntunen, 2020)—is reflected in the discourse of those workers who stressed the role of social infrastructures as places of integration, which provide both the possibility to learn the Finnish language and "how the system works here." People from diverse

ethnic backgrounds do not mingle only in schools and nursery schools but also in youth clubs and the activities of local associations, as reported by their workers. In the fields of culture and leisure, the aims are not similarly burdened with the goals of education and integration. Thus, the workers can also adopt a freer attitude and, instead of, for instance, requiring good language skills, it is enough "if we are able to communicate" (Worker in a multicultural meeting place for adolescents).

Social infrastructures that exist and work inside other structures are affected by specific organisational aims and tasks as well as funding, resources, and practices of governance (cf. Star, 1999). In the suburbs, many nursery, primary, and secondary schools need more resources to carry out the diverse functions of social infrastructure they provide alongside their basic educational function. The interviewees working in the field of education described how the long-term effects of housing and immigration policy—such as ethnic and socioeconomic segregation or the spatial concentration of urban inequality and a disadvantaged position—can be seen in the functioning of social infrastructures. There are many children with special needs, and the personnel struggle with a heavy workload caused, for example, by language differences. Moreover, many parents have scarce material and social resources, and sometimes the families cannot afford, for example, equipment for the sports classes at school. The fatigue of the personnel leads to a considerable turnover of employees and makes it difficult to recruit competent, long-term teachers. The intergenerational transmission of social disadvantages and exclusion (e.g., Saari et al., 2020), segregation, and the differentiation of life worlds are structural phenomena which are difficult to alter by means of street-level actors whose practices are both embedded in and designed to replicate these structures.

The neighbourhoods are also affected by recent political decisions to concentrate health and social services into larger units located further away from the residents. Many third-sector organisations have adopted the tasks of the public sector in order to cover the lack of local services. The interviewees working in social infrastructures that provide support for people in vulnerable positions highlighted that the closing of local services directly affects their accessibility and decreases face-to-face transactions as well as the possibilities for cooperation between actors providing social support in the area. Thus, this policy decision has affected the networked functioning of the local social infrastructure.

Kontula provides an especially interesting example of how social infrastructure is entangled with urban planning and housing policy. Past decisions and current politics have created a quite contradictory context for the development of social infrastructures. The city of Helsinki currently promotes the area's gentrification by means of regeneration plans and complementary building. According to the planning documents and interviewees working on the development project, the aim of the project is to attract middle-class people to move into the area and to increase the share of owner-occupied housing in the area's building stock. The shopping centre—which accommodates, for example, grocery shops, ethnic retailers, a flea market, restaurants, bars, a library, a swimming pool, a youth club, and services for substance abusers—has become the focal point of the development plans.

According to the local interviewees (and verified by documents prepared during the conducted participatory process), the redevelopment plans have divided the residents, some of whom support the demolition and renewal, while others argue for preserving the old centre. The contradiction is partly a result of the urban politics in former years, which neglected the area, and has therefore created pressure for redevelopment but, at the same time, created a rather unique setting for the residents' social life. Hewidy and Lilius (2022) called the shopping centre "abandoned," referring to the physical condition of many premises and quite a drastic loss of mainstream operators. At the same time, affordable rents have enabled the spontaneous development of a cluster of small-scale entrepreneurs and cultural activities, forming an important aspect of the shopping centre's social infrastructure. Renewal plans are expected to diminish the diversity of entrepreneurs and small-scale actors dependent on the lower rents. Thus, the redevelopment will alter not only the physical appearance of the shopping centre but also its diverse social life, illustrating the difficulties of planning social infrastructures in suburbs.

While the interviewees reported disagreement regarding the redevelopment process among the Kontula residents, there was no such controversy among the street-level workers. This like-mindedness may stem from the numerous discussions on the topic in a local network in which many of the interviewees had participated. The interviewees supported the physical renovations and redevelopment of the shopping centre, but they also hoped that its open and tolerant atmosphere would be protected during the major redevelopment. At the same time, the shortcomings in the shopping centre were also widely identified, i.e., the disorderly nature of the shopping centre and the feeling of unsafety and discomfort created by intoxicated individuals. Many interviewees noted that these problems also restricted children's and young people's access to public spaces. The abundance of bars was criticised, as well as the city's policy of concentrating services and drop-in-centres for substance abusers in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Eastern Helsinki. This was discussed by the workers in these services, other street-level workers, and city officials, and they mostly held very similar views of the problem. Providing a social infrastructure for marginal and vulnerable groups may create contradictions in commercial and residential areas (cf. Klinenberg, 2018, p. 124). This was also seen to increase the stigmatisation of the neighbourhoods and their symbolic differentiation from the

rest of the city. While most interviewees sympathised with the marginalised groups' need for shelter and support, they emphasised the need to carefully consider the facilities of social infrastructures in the planning process of the shopping centre—especially regarding spaces for drug abusers and people suffering from mental illness:

> We need these services, but we should carefully design people's routes to them….This way, we can also prevent the threat that our services are evicted. Through careful planning, dialogue, and design, we can diminish the problems. The opening hours also affect [the possible controversies]. If the services close at the same time as schools end, I understand that the children can be scared of walking home through the shopping centre when the whole clientele is there on the premises. (Street-level worker in health and social services)

Many interviewees, both street-level actors and city officials, also raised an example of the city's unsuccessful attempt to regulate spaces. Interviewees mentioned how a park next to the shopping centre was renewed with exercise equipment in order to create a very welcoming training park for the residents. The initiative, however, was unsuccessful as the park eventually became a site for drug use and distribution. This example illustrates how changes in the physical environment do not necessarily change the social life of public spaces but requires that a change also occurs in everyday practices.

4.3. Labour of Local Actors

There is also a considerable amount of micro-level programming and daily, often invisible, work involved in constructing and maintaining social infrastructures. The public libraries of the neighbourhoods provide an illustrative example of micro-level arrangements. While the libraries generally represent open public spaces, the interviews with the library employees illustrate how the openness and inclusivity of the library are not automatic but need to be constructed and maintained. In Kontula, diverse materials (the multilingual collection of books, sewing machines, computer games) and activities invite a mix of people and a variety of uses; in addition to this, the library also provides a possibility for homeless people to have a rest and take a shower. This open and inclusive atmosphere, however, also creates contradictions and conflicts that the library staff needs to negotiate and manage as a part of their everyday work. Furthermore, other local interviewees mentioned the role of the librarians' work in the social infrastructures of the neighbourhood. For example, an interviewee said, "it's insane how many hats they have to wear," referring to the multiple roles of the librarians, for example, taking care of the children and adolescents in the neighbourhood and occasionally carrying out the tasks of social workers:

> It's quite terrific. I don't believe there is any guidance to this in their education or any manual for librarians concerning how their work has changed and how they need to react to the surrounding society. (Resident-activist).

The agency and labour of street-level workers in producing and maintaining social infrastructures were highlighted throughout our interview data. Many interviewees expressed a caring, dedicated interest in the well-being of their clients and the users of social infrastructures. They typically did not position themselves as outsiders or "only workers" in the neighbourhoods but strongly identified with the area (some also being long-term residents). For example, in the third sector organisations, one worker describes his work as "interacting with people, living here with these people," and another one has been given the name "the official Mrs Vakke" (a nickname for Varissuo). Many interviewees working with residents both in the public sector and third-sector organisations found their work meaningful and important for society. They do not draw the borders of their job description strictly: For instance, library workers may need to work with issues related to substance abuse, mental health, and social work, and the working day of a school principal sometimes included delivering food to quarantined students during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many actors think their organisation and work do not only contribute to the welfare of individuals but also to the social and collective life of the area.

However, the workers also have to negotiate between their own personal commitments and the organisational regulations—especially in the public sector's street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980). The interviewees, especially those working in the field of education, described care and social support as an invisible and under-resourced part of their work. Furthermore, the workers in the public and third sectors are in a different position from the more independent actors. An independent actor described this:

> Our group has become like a family for me, we are very close….The workers of the city are not allowed to make friends with their clients….They need to keep a hierarchy as those are essential structures that enable them to work in the way they need to. (Independent artist and community activist)

Some street-level workers (both municipal and third sector) describe, in turn, how the organisational practices—such as the use of professional language, organisational rules, or siloed governance—decrease the accessibility of social infrastructures or prevent people from being helped in an optimal manner. Some interviewees mentioned that interactions are affected by how the residents perceived them as a part of the (untrusted) bureaucracy. Many street-level actors working with children and

adolescents have faced difficulties in engaging the parents in their activities because of language barriers, cultural differences, the lack of parents' interest or trust in the institutions, and the institutional and organisational practices which do not encourage participation.

The actors also emphasised the potential for creating trust between the organisation and residents. According to the interviewees, from the perspective of trust building, having long-term and competent workers and face-to-face interactions are of the utmost importance. Many actors criticised the short-term projects coming to the area with the latest development goals and new workers and then leaving and being replaced again with the next project. The Girls' House valorises the essential role of street-level workers and their everyday practices in creating trust. In the multicultural neighbourhood, many interviewees observed that girls often have restricted possibilities as regards using public spaces and participating in hobbies. As an exception, the Girls' House has gained a trusted position among many immigrant parents due to its gender-sensitive operating principles, transparency, open-door events, and face-to-face meetings with girls and their families. While volunteering at the Girls' House, we witnessed small examples of how trust, an informal atmosphere, and personal relationships were built and maintained. The girls were provided with an arena for an emancipatory talk with each other or with a trusted adult, in addition to which trust was created with material, embodied, and spatial practices such as making sandwiches for hungry girls after school, providing physical and emotional comfort through massaging and hugging, or letting the girls freely occupy the spaces for relaxing.

Trust is also constructed through local networks that the interviewees across all of our four categories characterise as close and active in both neighbourhoods (see also Huttunen & Juntunen, 2020; Tuominen, 2020). There are professional networks, informal networks of actors, participatory local democracy networks, and networks that have evolved around common interests or target groups. The networks serve to share knowledge, resources, spaces, and mutual support and encouragement. Thus, the actors constructing social infrastructures build on existing networks and on the work of previous actors (see Star, 1999). Trust can also be advanced by creating connections with the key actors of communities whose approval affects the attitudes of the wider group of residents. Trusted and well-known actors—whose efforts are needed for the functioning of the networks—may use their existing connections and position to help others to contact and join the networks. However, as previous studies have shown, the "spokespersons" of the resident communities provide only a restricted view of suburban realities. Although they may be trusted individuals, accentuating their role may pose a threat to suburban democracy as the "spokespersons" do not have any official mandate to speak on behalf of others (e.g., Rannila & Loivaranta, 2015). Furthermore, whereas the networks were widely praised by the interviewees in both neighbourhoods, especially in Kontula, the interviewees also raised the problem of participatory networks weakly representing the multicultural community of a neighbourhood.

5. Conclusions

We have identified the essential factors and preconditions as well as the challenges of the provision of social infrastructure in two Finnish high-rise suburbs. The findings of the analysis of the interview data were considered in relation to the recent conceptual discussion on the social infrastructures in urban studies. Accordingly, we organised our results around the three main categories. First, the physical spaces and material facilities form the essential basis of any social infrastructure, as many kinds of physical (semi-)public spaces form a background for active social life. The network of this social infrastructure is rather fragmented, consisting of small spaces often in need of renovation and refurbishment. What is lacking are larger public spaces that are religiously and culturally neutral and not allocated to certain groups or activities.

Second, many examples from the fields of education, culture and leisure, health and social services, and urban planning show that the functioning of social infrastructures is firmly entangled with urban politics. Social infrastructures respond to the challenges and needs created by past political decisions, and the infrastructures are important resources and counterforces to socio-spatial inequalities and social polarisation. Schools, nursery schools, libraries, and social and health services have many extra functions beyond their primary tasks that facilitate social connections and well-being with scarce resources. The role of urban planning is also significant when designing urban spaces as it can implement policies sensitive to the social and collective life of the suburbs.

Third, social infrastructures do not occur naturally, they require regular effort and work, as well as maintenance, careful engineering, and management to meet human needs (Klinenberg, 2018, p. 20). We argue that the relationships between the users of suburban spaces and street-level workers are significant in the construction of social infrastructures. We found a group of dedicated employees whose everyday work consists of "living with residents." This challenges the understanding of workers as outsiders whose relationships with local residents are hierarchical, power-laden, instrumental, and impersonal (see Blokland, 2017; Junnilainen, 2019; Lipsky, 1980). The finding is in line with the previous research reporting the commitment and agency of street-level workers—or bureaucrats—who genuinely aim at making a difference in these neighbourhoods (e.g., Jansen et al., 2021; Lavee & Cohen, 2019; Levy, 2021; Proudfoot & McCann, 2008; Rice, 2012).

In order to understand the social infrastructures in the suburbs, it is useful to examine micro-level provision and maintenance and how they are connected to

macro-level processes and structures. We conceptualise infrastructure as being continuously constructed and maintained through everyday social practices. The role of micro-level practices and labour is acknowledged, for instance, in the literature on spaces and geographies of care, which could be more broadly integrated into examinations of urban social infrastructures in future research (e.g., see Hall, 2020; Lawson, 2007; Power & Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020). Care operates through state welfare, social policy, and allied sectors, but it is also present in urban spaces (Power & Williams, 2020). The agency and labour of long-term, competent, experienced, and (personally) committed street-level actors are essential for robust social infrastructures.

Social infrastructures in suburbs are important, especially for the vulnerable sector of the population who are tied to their own neighbourhoods for one reason or another. Some residents may suffer from reduced mobility because of age or sickness, or—as our data showed—because of being a young female who is supposed to stay in places trusted by the family. An important issue, and a topic for further investigation, is the agency of the vulnerable people themselves in the suburbs. Our data provided information on the agency of the street-level workers—whether they were representatives of public institutions, third-sector organisations, or resident-activists—but did not show how individuals themselves or together with others make a difference or cause things to happen in the neighbourhoods. The previous research has shown how even "broken" urban infrastructures—whether physical, social or any other—are "full of agency and meaning" (Amin, 2014, p. 156) and how there is "collective orientation through joint effort in securing everyday infrastructure" (Amin, 2014, p. 157). What forms does such an agency have? How do people themselves produce, live with, and contest infrastructures (see also Graham & McFarlane, 2015, p. 2)? How is this signified in a Nordic suburban context? These are intriguing questions to be explored by future research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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