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Table of Contents

Entanglements of Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space
Mervyn Horgan and Saara Liinamaa 1–5

"It's a Two-Way Thing": Symbolic Boundaries and Convivial Practices in Changing Neighbourhoods in London and Tshwane
Susanne Wessendorf and Tamlyn Monson 6–16

Conviviality in Public Squares: How Affordances and Individual Factors Shape Optional Activities
Hannah Widmer 17–30

The Forks Market: Cosmopolitan Canopy, Conviviality, and Class
Sonia Bookman 31–41

The Coining of Convivial Public Space: Homelessness, Outreach Work, and Interaction Order
Robin James Smith, Jonathan Ablitt, Joe Williams, and Tom Hall 42–51

Strengthening Social Ties While Walking the Neighbourhood?
Troy D. Glover, Luke Moyer, Joe Todd, and Taryn Graham 52–62

Geographies of Encounter, Public Space, and Social Cohesion: Reviewing Knowledge at the Intersection of Social Sciences and Built Environment Disciplines
Patricia Aelbrecht and Quentin Stevens 63–76

"Hot+Noisy" Public Space: Conviviality, "Unapologetic Asianness," and the Future of Vancouver's Chinatown
Lise Mahieus and Eugene McCann 77–88

Negotiating Difference on Public Transport: How Practices and Experiences of Deviance Shape Public Space
Louise Sträuli 89–98

Visually Impaired Persons and Social Encounters in Central Melbourne
Shirin Pourafkari 99–106

The Role of the Body in Pandemic Geographies of Encounter: Anti-Restriction Protesters Between Collective Action and Political Violence
Sabine Knierbein and Richard Pfeifer 107–118

Table of Contents

Improvisation and Planning: Engaging With Unforeseen Encounters in Urban Public Space
Anne-Lene Sand, Anniken Førde, John Pløger, and Mathias Poulsen 119–131

Reading Publicness: Meaningful and Spontaneous Encounters in Beirut During a Time of Crisis
Roula El-Khoury, Rachelle Saliba, and Tamara Nasr 132–144

Built Space Hinders Lived Space: Social Encounters and Appropriation in Large Housing Estates
Katja Friedrich and Stefanie Rößler 145–161

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Editorial

Entanglements of Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space

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Abstract
The everyday life of public space is characterised by many kinds of convivial, conflictual, and improvisational encounters between people of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Because public spaces are, in principle at least, freely accessible to all, they are of central importance to everyday life and intrinsically interesting to social scientists. This thematic issue brings together a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on everyday encounters in public space. In the introduction to this thematic issue, we appeal to urban scholars of all backgrounds to take the social life of public space seriously; as essential social infrastructure, public space is key to the collective well-being of city-dwellers, and it provides a crucial bridge between urban planning and the social sciences. Here, we briefly survey research on everyday encounters and introduce each of the contributions to the issue. While the articles in this issue are organised around the three core themes of conviviality, conflict, and improvisation, we argue for the entanglements of each within the everyday life of public spaces.

Keywords
conflict; conviviality; encounter; everyday life; improvisation; public space

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space" edited by Mervyn Horgan (University of Guelph) and Saara Liinamaa (University of Guelph).

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1. Introduction

As the planet continues to urbanise, public spaces become increasingly important. Public spaces are central to political mobilisation, collective action, and the practice of democracy. That said, in the rush to understand the centrality of public space to political mobilisation and democratic practice, the more ordinary everyday life of public space is often given short shrift. Public spaces are unique settings for understanding encounters across types of social relationships and forms of social difference. From the fleeting and happenstance to the regular and routinised, everyday encounters in public space make social inclusion and exclusion manifest in myriad ways. Drawn from a wide range of disciplines, the articles in this thematic issue take up the challenge of treating public space as a domain of everyday encounters between strangers, critically examining varieties of co-existence amongst city dwellers expressed in and through encounters in urban public spaces.

By treating public space as *social* space where various social dynamics—conflictual, convivial, improvisational—are entangled, contributors to this thematic issue focus on public space as simultaneously a setting for the practice of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984) and as a site of encounter (Valentine, 2008). Rather than focusing on large-scale protests or major public events, articles in this issue treat mundane, everyday happenings in urban public spaces as essential data. Mundane certainly does not denote meaningless. Everyday life in public spaces is characterised by frequent and continuous encounters with others, whether intimates, friends, acquaintances, or strangers (Horgan et al., 2022). In principle, public spaces are freely accessible to all. Yet as the contributions to this thematic issue demonstrate, in practice a range of social and material factors enhance, attenuate, and/or compromise this freedom and accessibility.

This thematic issue offers a variety of perspectives on public spaces as sites of everyday encounter. The 13 articles centre social encounters and everyday life across three key areas: improvisation, conviviality, and conflict. An underlying premise of this thematic issue is that these must be examined together to better understand the richness and complexity of the social life of public spaces. We start with improvisation as a building block of everyday life and its creativity, adaptability, and unpredictability. With improvisation as a centrepiece, everyday entanglements (rather than polarities) of conflict and conviviality take shape according to the specific social, historical, political, and cultural contexts of urban public spaces. Almost 20 years ago Paul Gilroy (2005, p. xv) positioned conviviality as centrally concerned with "processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life." Since then, convivialities research has enhanced and expanded this premise (Germain, 2013; Radice, 2016; Vigneswaran, 2014; Wise & Velayutham, 2009, 2014). At the same time, the study of conviviality—be it directly or indirectly, through presence or absence—always nods to its opposite. In this regard, conflict becomes a way to capture how the material and social life of public space may be welcoming to some and inhospitable to others. We argue that only by positioning conflict in dialogue with both conviviality and improvisation can we continue to counterweight the "vast sociology of hopelessness to which the contemporary city is home" (Hall & Smith, 2015, p. 3).

2. Entanglements of Conviviality, Conflict, and Improvisation

2.1. Conviviality

Several articles in this issue offer significant contributions to the "convivial, everyday turn" (Neal et al., 2013, p. 315). In their pathbreaking contribution, "'It's a Two-Way Thing': Symbolic Boundaries and Convivial Practices in Changing Neighbourhoods in London and Tshwane," Susanne Wessendorf and Tamlyn Monson use ethnographic data from Newham (UK) and Mshongo (South Africa) to bring convivialities research into conversation with work on symbolic boundaries. While "perceptions of inequality, lack of civility, and lack of reciprocity shape symbolic boundaries against newcomers," Wessendorf and Monson's (2023, p. 6) analysis shows how convivial practices may temper such negative perceptions. Drawing on both behavioural mapping and survey data, in "Conviviality in Public Squares: How Affordances and Individual Factors Shape Optional Activities" Hannah Widmer carefully examines how individual factors and the affordances of public space variously impact if and how people use public squares in Zurich (Switzerland) in convivial ways. Widmer's (2023) analysis builds upon existing convivialities research focused on *cultural* difference by attending to how other kinds of differences (e.g., socio-economic, gender, age, etc.) figure in generating conviviality. Sonia Bookman's ethnographic study, "The Forks Market: Cosmopolitan Canopy, Conviviality, and Class" looks at how The Forks Market, a redesigned "branded public space" in Winnipeg (Canada) seeks to cultivate particular forms of cosmopolitanism. While "patrons co-perform a kind of cosmopolitan conviviality," Bookman (2023, p. 31) finds this is "marked by ambivalence" as the market privileges middle-class taste and consumption.

Drawing on ethnographic data from Cardiff (Wales) and New York (USA), in "The Coining of Convivial Public Space: Homelessness, Outreach Work, and Interaction Order" Robin James Smith et al. (2023, p. 42) show how the work of "frontline street-based care and outreach" teams requires "improvised conviviality." Informed by the ethnomethodological perspective in sociology, the authors treat conviviality as a "fragile interactional accomplishment" (Smith et al., 2023, p. 42), making the provocative argument that the material specifics of any locality matter less than the interactions occurring within. Taking a different line very much tied to locality, Troy D. Glover, Luke Moyer, Joe Todd, and Taryn Graham's article "Strengthening Social Ties While Walking the Neighbourhood?" examines how possibilities for frequent, sometimes happenstance, encounters enabled by neighbourhood walking facilitate the development of social ties. This kind of largely unquantifiable "incidental sociability" (Glover et al., 2023) is important for social cohesion. With similar interest in social cohesion, in "Geographies of Encounter, Public Space, and Social Cohesion: Reviewing Knowledge at the Intersection of Social Sciences and Built Environment Disciplines," Patricia Aelbrecht and Quentin Stevens provide a systematic review of literatures criss-crossing the social sciences, architecture, and urban design, focusing especially on intersections between research on social cohesion and urban design literature. Their proposed framework provides "a multi-dimensional account of how public spaces with different design approaches are connected to different experiences of social encounters, which in turn impact varied experiences of social cohesion" (Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2023, p. 63).

2.2. Conflict

While conviviality is a desirable feature of social life in public spaces, contributors are not so naïve as to treat conviviality as a panacea. Rather, conviviality emerges as a complex spatial and interactional practice characterised as much by ambivalence and conflict as by connection and playfulness. Existing research attunes us to how conviviality can be bound up with new forms of conflict and may consolidate old forms of marginalisation (Back & Sinha, 2016). Because they harbour a variety of sometimes competing uses and users, public spaces are sites of everyday conflict. In this vein, Lise Mahieus and Eugene McCann's article, "'Hot+Noisy' Public Space: Conviviality, 'Unapologetic Asianness,' and the Future of Vancouver's Chinatown," carefully examines complex debates around everyday life in a changing neighbourhood. Working with data from a series of events where the local Chinese community appropriate public spaces for Mahjong games, the authors advocate for more radical approaches to conviviality. By probing "the productive possibilities of 'political conviviality' and agonistic encounters," they show how "agonistic 'place-keeping'" (rather than "placemaking") enhances solidarity amongst members of a marginalised community under threat of gentrification (Mahieus & McCann, 2023, p. 77).

Because urban environments are unyielding to the needs of many, conflict is also connected to counter-strategies of response and resistance. To this end, Louise Sträuli's "Negotiating Difference on Public Transport: How Practices and Experiences of Deviance Shape Public Space" uses qualitative interviews to explore how individuals navigate financial, psychological, and physical barriers to using public transportation in Tallinn (Estonia) and Brussels (Belgium). Sträuli (2023, p. 90) stresses how "conceptualising publicness as a continuous process facilitates more equitable and inclusive planning." Similarly, Shirin Pourafkari's article, "Visually Impaired Persons and Social Encounters in Central Melbourne," examines via multi-method research how visually impaired persons (VIPs) perceive and experience the city's socio-spatial landscape. As Pourafkari (2023, p. 105) argues, "social equity in relation to VIPs shouldn't be reduced to questions of wayfinding and technical aids for navigation. Rather, increased focus should be devoted to questions of VIPs' participation in urban space and public life."

Conflicts in public space can also touch on difficult social knowledge. In their article, "The Role of the Body in Pandemic Geographies of Encounter: Anti-Restriction Protesters Between Collective Action and Political Violence," Sabine Knierbein and Richard Pfeifer examine protest as a complex, embodied public practice. Drawing on fieldwork in Vienna (Austria), they make a case for understanding the challenging example of public protests against Covid-19 restrictions where "the body was often perceived as simultaneously 'being threatened' by the state and 'collectively liberated' in public space" (Knierbein & Pfeifer, 2023, p. 116). For Knierbein and Pfeifer (2023, p. 116), this tension "not only mitigated potential conflicts between different types of protesters with different ideological backgrounds but also stimulated the emergence of ambivalent pandemic geographies of encounter."

2.3. Improvisation

As a form of social practice, improvisation arises in the context of uncertainty and unpredictability, and it is always required when engaging with the unanticipated. Improvisation, then, is a key feature of everyday encounters between strangers in public spaces. Work on improvisation in public spaces has tended to focus on the improvised uses of materials in modifying shared space, DIY urbanism, and grassroots initiatives. Several articles here advance a more targeted concern with improvisation in urban interaction. Anne-Lene Sand, Anniken Førde, John Pløger, and Mathias Poulsen's article, "Improvisation and Planning: Engaging With Unforeseen Encounters in Urban Public Space," explores tensions between improvisational uses and urban planning. Based on two research projects involving children and youth, the authors emphasise the important role of play and improvisation for social belonging. Their case studies demonstrate the social benefits of "flexible spaces, allowing improvisational and surprising use and multimodal encounters that created new connectivities and engagement" (Sand et al., 2023, p. 129).

Similarly, in "Reading Publicness: Meaningful and Spontaneous Encounters in Beirut During a Time of Crisis," Roula El-Khoury, Rachelle Saliba, and Tamara Nasr underscore the significance of spontaneous interactions and activities during intense urban duress. Drawing on narrative and observational data from Lebanon, the authors locate examples of creativity and improvisation where more robust and inclusive versions of publicness surface. Their framework emphasises the "particularity of the context of Beirut during times of crisis…and the potential of spontaneous social practices in overcoming challenging conditions" (El-Khoury et al., 2023, p. 142). Yet conviviality and improvisation are too often inhibited through urban planning, regulation, and politics. Katja Friedrich and Stefanie Rößler's "Built Space Hinders Lived Space: Social Encounters and Appropriation in Large Housing Estates" adds "feeling at home" to our understanding of neighbourhood conviviality and community well-being. Their in-depth study demonstrates how encounters are inhibited or potentiated by social and physical characteristics and presents a compelling case for how to make housing estates "more liveable in the long term by promoting encounters and appropriation" (Friedrich & Rößler, 2023, p. 105).

3. Conclusions

Public spaces are not only tangible, physical spaces. They are also spaces "vital for people to socialize, learn, and play…they form an infrastructure of inclusion and exclusion" (Low, 2023, p. 2). Articles in this thematic issue demonstrate the ongoing and growing importance of public spaces as sites that can intensify prevailing inequalities and potentially generate new ones, while also harbouring forms of sociability and social infrastructure vital to urban wellbeing, vivacity, and interconnectedness.

By aligning the entanglements of conviviality and conflict with the improvisational character of social life—"the jazz of human exchange" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 79)—

contributors to this thematic issue treat everyday happenings, mundane encounters, and ordinary scenes seriously. Taken together, the articles gathered here show that there is still much to be learned about and from everyday encounters in public space.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

"It's a Two-Way Thing": Symbolic Boundaries and Convivial Practices in Changing Neighbourhoods in London and Tshwane

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Abstract
While there is a considerable body of literature on symbolic boundaries that engages with long-established/newcomer configurations, work on conviviality has only rarely taken this angle, despite its general focus on contexts of immigration-related diversity. This article connects these works of literature by examining insider-outsider configurations between long-established residents and newcomers in two very different contexts of rapid demographic change, where the established population is already marginalized and feels further threatened by newcomers. Drawing on ethnographic research in Newham, UK, and Mshongo, South Africa, we advance debates on conviviality by revealing how perceptions of inequality, lack of civility, and lack of reciprocity shape symbolic boundaries against newcomers, which may, in turn, be softened by convivial practices. We also consider what the differences between the sites might reveal about the enabling conditions for conviviality in such neighbourhoods.

Keywords
conviviality; exclusion; inequality; informal settlements; marginalization; migration; reciprocity; squatters; struggle discourse; symbolic boundaries

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1. Introduction

There has been an abundance of social scientific work on conviviality since the early 2000s, emerging from a long-standing interest in the "capacity of people to live together" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 423). Gilroy (2004) was a central voice in current thinking around conviviality, applying the notion to the context of increasingly diverse 21st-century postcolonial urban societies. In broad terms, the notion of conviviality "can be used as an analytical tool to ask and explore the ways, and under what conditions, people constructively create modes of togetherness" (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p. 342). Building on Frankenberg's (1970) work, Wise and Noble (2016) highlight that the notion of conviviality is only useful if our empirical research specifically focuses on everyday practices of living together.

Many scholarships on conviviality are grounded in empirical examinations of such social practices—at the school gate, the butchers, amongst neighbours, at churches and savings clubs, etc. (Chekero & Morreira, 2020; Noble, 2009; Radice, 2016; Wessendorf, 2014; Wise, 2016). By focusing on "situated social interactions" (Radice, 2016, p. 433), the convivialities approach enables us to uncover the existence of everyday conflict, racism, and exclusion, as well as successful coexistence (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Vigneswaran, 2014; Wise & Noble, 2016).

Concerns with the question of how people live together with differences formed part of much earlier debates on solidarity in complex plural societies (Durkheim, 1964; Illich, 1973; Overing & Passes, 2000). Such debates on solidarity are closely related to those around the construction of symbolic boundaries against those deemed as "different" (Barth, 1969; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). Although rarely theorized in these terms, theories on symbolic boundaries are particularly applicable to many insider-outsider configurations, such as those between long-established and recent residents. While scholarship on conviviality pays particular attention to practice, scholarship on boundary-making highlights perceptions about "the other," and how these can play into or hinder convivial relations (Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2013).

This article brings together these works by examining insider-outsider configurations between long-established residents and newcomers in the settlement of Mshongo in the City of Tshwane (South Africa) and the London Borough of Newham (UK). Juxtaposing these contexts is interesting. Despite vast differences in history, political and socio-economic conditions, and patterns of settlement and immigration over time, they both form part of a global geography of racial capitalism (Ali & Whitham, 2021; Phiri, 2020). Both are deprived areas of concentrated inhabitation by those historically defined as racialized outsiders: from the shared experience of racism amongst generations of arrivals to London from the former British colonies and beyond, to the shared experience of squatters occupying land beyond the confines of apartheid's black labour reserves. In recent decades, both contexts have seen rapid changes related to immigration, and in both cases, the long-established population in one way or another has reacted negatively to this change. Importantly, in both sites, the long-established population is already socially and economically marginalized and feels further threatened by the arrival of newcomers perceived to have a greater social or economic advantage due to their race (London) or economic position (Mshongo). Against the backdrop of these shared perceptions amongst the established residents that newcomers would worsen their marginalization, we found evidence in the two sites of common dynamics shaping the capacity to live together.

In this article, we identify three perceptions, common to our two vastly different contexts, that have led to the creation of symbolic boundaries against newcomers: perceived inequality, perceived lack of civility, and perceived lack of reciprocity. While the article primarily focuses on perceptions about newcomers, in the second part of this piece, we link these to convivial practices and show how in both contexts, long-established residents either invested in convivial practices to cross symbolic boundaries or expressed their appreciation when newcomers engaged in such practices. We thus show how convivial practices can have the effect of softening symbolic boundaries.

Despite identifying similar underlying dynamics of symbolic boundary-making and convivial practices in both contexts, we also acknowledge important differences between Mshongo and Newham. Greater socio-economic inequality in Mshongo—exemplified amongst other things by the much more pronounced precarity of existence and the virtual absence of basic infrastructure—makes "two-way" solidarity practices much more crucial to collective survival. Nevertheless, in light of the violence that has erupted across symbolic boundaries in South Africa, we also acknowledge that the degree of reciprocity implicit in convivial practices may differ across the two cases.

In the following section, we review work on symbolic boundaries and established/newcomer relationships, identifying connections with literature on conviviality and the common relevance of principles of inequality, civility, and reciprocity. We then delve into the two research sites and their methodologies, before turning to the empirical part of the article which looks at perceptions that erode the capacity to live together, and convivial practices that might contribute to the softening of symbolic boundaries. We conclude by identifying contextual features that enable living together with differences, through a discussion of the main differences between the two sites.

2. Symbolic Boundary Making and Conviviality: Three Common Principles

There exists a long-standing body of research that has looked at societal insider-outsider configurations and processes of inclusion and exclusion amid change (Chekero & Morreira, 2020; Elias & Scotson, 1994; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Matsinhe, 2016; Nieftagodien, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Wallman, 1978; Wimmer, 2013). Much of this work draws on the notion of "symbolic boundaries," defined as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time," creating feelings of similarity and group membership (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168). Particularly relevant to this article is the literature focusing on social relations and processes of inclusion and exclusion between long-established residents and newcomers, which can be one of the most relevant types of symbolic boundaries created by residents (Elias & Scotson, 1994). Regarding our two contexts, of particular interest is work that looks at social contexts where the long-established population already feels marginalized and often threatened in their precarious position by newcomers (Hardy, 2017; Hewitt, 2005; Kerr et al., 2019; Valentine, 2008). This work has shown how the coming together of existing deprivation among the long-settled and the arrival of new groups can "antagonise the relations between long-term settled residents, both minority and majority ethnic, and new arrivals" (Hickman et al., 2008, p. 99). As we show in the empirical section, social marginalization also comes into play regarding long-term processes of racialization, with ethnic minorities in Newham feeling threatened by white newcomers who are perceived to wield more power within established hierarchies of racialization. In Mshongo, where black South African residents are living the legacy of apartheid policies of spatial marginalization, there is a privilege associated with African newcomers from countries without such recent histories of racial marginalization, whose citizens are perceived to have greater skills, buying power, or social capital. Inequality and marginalization are thus important factors underpinning the creation of symbolic boundaries in light of the arrival of newcomers.

Studies of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods have shown that symbolic boundaries do not necessarily coincide with categorical differentiations along ethnic, racial, or class lines, but "otherness" is often defined by newcomer status and adherence to local rules of order and decency, for example, community rules around trash disposal or decent behaviour in shared public spaces such as parks and street corners (Blokland, 2003; Hickman et al., 2012; Wallman, 1978; Wessendorf, 2020; Wimmer, 2013). In our data, such expectations of civility and order strongly shaped long-established residents' perceptions of newcomers and the creation of symbolic boundaries against those who were seen to flout these rules.

An additional factor that played into the creation of symbolic boundaries is related to the notion of reciprocity, which is here understood as resource exchange regarding involvement in local life, causes, and concerns. In the context of a London neighbourhood, Wallman et al. (1982) found that insiders were defined in terms of their local involvement, for example in associations, rather than by their ethnic or national origins (see also Hickman et al., 2012). In their study of Tower Hamlets (London), Dench et al. (2006) showed that a perceived lack of contribution to the welfare state, coupled with socio-economic marginalization, contributed to negative views of both Bangladeshi newcomers, who were seen as exploiting the welfare state, and white middle-class newcomers who were perceived to control resources while avoiding local engagement. Similarly, in KwaZulu-Natal, migrants' non-participation in strikes and trade unions was seen as undermining the struggle for improved working conditions (Ndinda & Ndhlovu, 2016). These examples demonstrate that forms of reciprocity (by way of recognizing and participating in local concerns) can be closely intertwined with existing social inequalities, historical processes of marginalization, and local discourses of struggle (Kerr et al., 2019).

Much of the work on symbolic boundaries focuses on representations and discourses about "the other," which is also reflected in this article: We focus mainly on long-established residents' perceptions and how they talk about newcomers. In contrast, work on conviviality specifically focuses on everyday practices of living together. It primarily focuses on how symbolic boundaries are crossed and negotiated and how people sometimes make a conscious effort to communicate, interact, and live with people of different backgrounds (Noble, 2009; Wise, 2009). As we show later, investment in convivial practices (such as gift exchange and engagement in local issues) can soften symbolic boundaries, while lack of investment in convivial practices can exacerbate them.

This article contributes to debates on conviviality by showing the huge impact of symbolic boundaries on convivial relations, and how the dynamics of inequality, civility, and reciprocity that underlie symbolic boundaries play into these processes. Furthermore, it advances debates on conviviality by identifying what might be the conditions for conviviality in contexts of rapid demographic change in which substantial proportions of the established populace already occupy a marginalized position.

3. The Research

The research for this article was undertaken in two distinct localities where established residents are marginalized and occupy a position of relative deprivation compared to the wider population.

The informal settlement of Mshongo comprises a series of informal shack settlements bordering the township of Atteridgeville in Tshwane, South Africa. Here, only 17% of households have piped water into their dwelling, as compared to 67% of the wider population in the township. Over 20% have no income, compared to 12% in wider Atteridgeville (StatsSA, 2011a, 2011b).

Mshongo was established only around thirty years ago through land invasions by black South African residents who were seeking relief from overcrowding in the township due to housing controls intended to limit the black urban population. With the fall of apartheid-era controls on black citizens' freedom of movement, new squatters arrived from a variety of ethnicity-based reserves that had previously confined black citizens in various provinces. Migrants from other African states began joining South African squatters after the first democratic elections in 1994, and arrival levels rose in the early 2000s as South Africa "rapidly evolved into one of the largest recipients of asylum seekers in the world" (UNHCR, 2009, p. 43). These numbers quadrupled between 2007 and 2008, making South Africa the main destination for new asylum seekers worldwide in that year (UNHCR, 2009). In particular, "survival migration" into South Africa, following the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2012, was described as "the largest mass influx anywhere in the world since the start of the twenty-first century" (Betts, 2013, p. 55). Shack settlements, where black South Africans already lived in concentrated poverty (Van Averbeke, 2007, p. 337), were one destination for new arrivals, and these informal areas, including Mshongo, became a common site of collective xenophobic violence (Fauvelle-Aymar & Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 2012).

Distinctive from the London case, many residents of Mshongo helped establish the settlement and participated in collective efforts to secure services or respond to crime. Residents live on the threshold of state care; the municipality provides water at specified points, but many residents dig their own pit latrines and make illegal connections to the formal power supply. There are no schools or hospitals within the settlement, and police and emergency services often cannot or will not access the unmapped streets. Public space is everywhere and nowhere: There are no parks, squares, or benches, but at the same time private space is often barely distinguishable from the street; streets, pathways, and spaces between dwellings are places people walk in, women sit, on, and children play in. Often, pit latrines and water points are shared, becoming places of encounter. Here and there, taverns, stalls, and shops, operating on public land, become extensions of the street.

In contrast, Newham in East London has existed since the late 1800s and has functioning state-provided infrastructures like water, electricity, and roads, social infrastructures like schools, libraries, and community centres, and tended public spaces like parks and squares. Nevertheless, Newham is also one of the most deprived areas in the UK (Aldridge et al., 2015). Levels of child poverty, homelessness, and premature mortality are all worse than the London average (Trust for London, n.d.), while processes of "regeneration" are making housing in the area "wholly unaffordable for the majority of its inhabitants" (James, 2016). Newham has long been a classical migrant reception area, where new arrivals find their feet, especially since World War II. In 2018, only 13.4% of the population identified as white British (London Datastore, n.d.), and in the 2021 census only 45.5% were born in England (ONS, 2023). Those identifying as ethnic minorities mainly originate from South Asia, Africa, East Asia, and the Caribbean, with a high number of people originating in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa arriving since the 2000s (Aston-Mansfield Community Involvement Unit, 2017). Importantly, when asking long-established residents about changes in Newham's population, they refer to Eastern Europeans. This is partly due to their visibility in public spaces such as squares and parks, and an increasing number of Eastern European enterprises, but also reflects a substantial increase in Eastern European migrants since EU accession in 2004, rising to 11.3% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

In Mshongo, we draw on transcriptions of 21 semi-structured interviews with key informants and residents in 2008 and 39 narrative interviews with longstanding residents in 2012, as well as notes from seven walks and two focus groups. Interviews included key informants, established residents, and migrants impacted by collective anti-foreigner attacks in the settlement. In the Newham case, we draw on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork starting in February 2018. The project engaged with both long-established residents and newcomers through participant observation in weekly community groups, observations in public and semi-public spaces, informal conversations, in-depth interviews with 22 residents, expert interviews with 10 key people, and eight focus group interviews with residents of different backgrounds and generations such as teenagers, parents, and grandparents. In both cases, interviews varied in length and were recorded where participants consented. NVivo was used for thematic analysis in both projects, although the thematic structure differed.

Whilst both research projects involved established and newcomer groups, most of the material cited draws on the views and experiences of longstanding residents, who were largely from a range of black South African ethnicities in Mshongo, and of minority ethnic background in Newham. Material from Newham comprises mainly excerpts from group conversations, which are by nature lengthy but more illuminating when cited in full. Excerpts from Mshongo, which are drawn from a larger number of interviews, are shorter and presented in a more synthetic manner.

4. Shaping the Capacity to Live Together: Inequality, Civility, Order, Reciprocity

This section discusses how perceptions of inequality, notions around civility and order, and expectations of reciprocity shape social relations on the ground. We begin with perceptions of inequality, which, in the two contexts, underpin all other aspects of who is perceived as an insider or outsider.

4.1. Perceptions of Social Inequality

Against a backdrop of experiences of racism and/or socio-economic precarity, the arrival of newcomers who appear to have distinct advantages over or to compound disadvantages for established residents can lead to fears of reduced life chances and can be perceived as a powerful threat to progress toward greater social inclusion. This was manifest in somewhat different ways in the two sites presented here. In London, long-established ethnic minorities expressed frustration about Eastern European migrants' perceived advantages in securing jobs based on their white privilege. This frustration was expressed in the context of experiences of racialization over several decades, where the now adult children and grandchildren of the first migrants continued to worry about their job prospects due to institutionalised racism.

In a focus group discussion with a group of elderly South Asian women who had been living in Newham for up to three decades, they expressed their concerns about their grandchildren's career prospects, contrasting these with the perceived better prospects of Eastern European migrants' children. While they agreed that Eastern Europeans faced difficult challenges when first arriving, especially in the context of Brexit, they still expressed resentment. When asked whether they thought it was easier for Eastern Europeans to settle than it had been for them, they acknowledged the challenges these newcomers faced, at the same time emphasising that "Muslim, Asian, and African people are targets and find it difficult," even though they had been there for a long time. They emphasised that even for their grandchildren, it continued to be difficult to find jobs because of the colour of their skin, while they believed that Eastern European children would find jobs more quickly.

This focus group was just one of many conversations with individuals of ethnic minority backgrounds who expressed their frustration with the continuities of racism and islamophobia which disadvantaged them in comparison with other (white) residents who had arrived recently but were seen to experience less social exclusion (see Wessendorf, 2020). Perceptions of inequality were exacerbated by views that newcomers were competing with long-established residents over underfunded resources such as health services and council housing.

Anxieties about newcomers stretching the capacity of the local area were also a theme in Mshongo. Both locally-born participants and international migrants with a long history in the area saw the ever-growing population as sharpening their suffering and marginalization vis-à-vis mainstream South African society. For instance, the settlement was established through land occupation and lies on dolomite, which is vulnerable to the development of sinkholes. One participant pointed out that the larger the population becomes, the more pit latrines are built, increasing the area's vulnerability to sinkholes. Another had been injured in such a case when a sinkhole opened under a latrine where she was relieving herself. She indicated the scars she bears from acid burns from her fall into the sewage, which was mixed with cleaning acid.

In addition to these very concrete experiences arising from inadequate infrastructures for an increasing population, resentment toward newcomers was exacerbated by the perception that they enjoyed socio-economic advantages. This was experienced in various ways, including through mundane encounters in public spaces. Speaking of young South African men in Mshongo, one participant said: "It becomes painful when they see boys from Zimbabwe drinking beer every weekend and eating meat on a daily basis," appearing to live lives of plenty while the unemployed South African youths must "always ask from others" to obtain these relative luxuries.

In Mshongo, black South African residents were living the legacy of apartheid policies of spatial and economic marginalization (Monson, 2015), and this was often a palpable context for conversations about newcomers. There was privilege associated with African newcomers who were perceived to have economic advantages such as holding capital, being able to make low wages stretch further for their families at home due to a favourable exchange rate, or having livelihood advantages from superior education or training because "their governments are not like our government," as one South African put it.

Direct economic competition within the settlement was also seen as a by-product of demographic change. South African entrepreneurs complained that cheaper shops by non-South Africans were reducing their customers. The prominence of large Somali-run shops was a visible marker of economic inequality between citizens of South Africa and other African countries. These stores have an advantage in that they can often sell at lower prices due in part to their access to sufficient funds to buy in bulk and secure related discounts (Gastrow & Amit, 2013). Somalis seeking refuge in South Africa are not necessarily in a weak economic position on arrival, as one Somali participant reflected:

> You see, when we leave our country, it is not because of the lack of resources or hunger but it is because of the war. Maybe Zimbabweans come here to look for money, but we are not here to look for money. Our country is rich; we are here to look for peace.

At the same time, their well-resourced businesses had out-competed some longstanding residents. One shopkeeper reflected on his own experience:

> You suffer to sell your stuff, put everything…like mielie meal. I can't sell mielie meal. They sell mielie meal there very, very, very cheap. I sell here…that mielie meal I must eat with my child [chuckles]. I can't sell.

For another South African man, the apparent inequality brought echoes of township shops under apartheid where residents had felt exploited by more privileged shopkeepers of Indian heritage, who suffered less severe discrimination. He feared that Somalis would "establish themselves here, and then they will look at us as second-class citizens."

In both Mshongo and London, then, perceptions of social inequality, rooted in long-standing processes of socio-economic and/or racial marginalization, contribute to tensions with newcomers who are seen to have better chances of socio-economic upward mobility and whose presence is perceived as a threat to services or livelihoods for the established population.

4.2. Perceptions of Civility and Order

Notions around civility and order can be powerful symbolic markers delimiting who belongs and who does not. Perceptions about "others" and what is perceived as unacceptable behaviour often arise from what people experience in public spaces such as street corners, parks, and playgrounds. In Newham, when asking long-established residents about changes to the area, the feeling that newcomers were eroding civility and order often came up. Littering in the park, drinking in public spaces, and begging were seen to symbolise a lack of care about the local environment.

The following quote from a focus group with long-established residents of mainly South Asian and Caribbean heritage who had lived in the area for most of their lives exemplifies how they acknowledge some newcomers' efforts to make a living while resenting how others behave in public spaces:

> Susanne: How about changes in terms of the population, have you noticed anything?

> Sharon: Eastern Europeans. And I do find that a lot of them, they are hard-working, they are very clean, but there are a lot of people that are not working and they are drinkers, and they are in the parks and—
>
> Meera: Yes, and she's got a dog and she goes there and sometimes they are quite abusive.
>
> Sharon: And, you know, they urinate on the trees. They don't really care, I mean, come on!
>
> Elizabeth: And they'd be sitting on a bench, next to a rubbish bin, but they drop it in front of them, and it's little things like that. Why not keep it tidy?...I've lived in Newham all my life…I've seen lots of changes. I mean I've got Chinese and Eastern European [neighbours], and we sort of mix in.
>
> Sharon: Yeah, we've got a mixture, like, I've got Italian and English [neighbours] and there's Chinese and there's Africans and Nigerians and Irish, you know, but people are polite.
>
> Elizabeth: We get on, you've got to get on.

As in other conversations with long-established residents, Eastern Europeans were mentioned as soon as asked about changes, especially in regards to drinking alcohol in public spaces and begging, often ascribed to migrants originating from Romania (Wessendorf, 2020). Elizabeth contrasts these newcomers with other residents who, earlier on, were newcomers as well, but whom she perceives as part of the larger "we" because they adhere to rules of order and civility.

Complaints relating to behavioural norms also came up in the context of Mshongo, with reference both to newcomers from rural areas of South Africa and those from other parts of Africa. Practices such as walking around drinking from a bottle and making noise at night were seen to mark newcomers as "very rude," an elderly South African asserted. In the context of limited sanitation infrastructure, certain practices in public spaces were seen to undermine the cleanliness and health of the settlement, particularly newcomers emptying urine from their buckets in the street (rather than in a pit latrine) or discarding faeces in bags outdoors.

In an informal settlement where dwellings are often close together and amenities shared, residents' private lives are more visible to neighbours, both because they can be more easily seen and heard, but also because information travels quickly by word of mouth. One participant had a negative view of outsiders after witnessing a baby's body being discovered in a pit latrine and hearing that the police had traced the mother to the province of Limpopo. Another told how a *muti* charm—a jar containing a child's hand and money—was found in the remains of a migrant's dwelling and seen as the reason why a man who tried to take over the property later "went mad." Such discoveries—bound up with perceived incivility and transgression of norms—are easily witnessed, overheard, or idly discussed in the streets, and can generate negative associations with newcomers.

In both London and Mshongo, newcomers who are seen to break local rules of civility and order stand out as different in the eyes of the long-established population. While in both places, public space was the primary arena in which such behaviour was observed, in Mshongo, where the private realm often spills into the public, a wider array of transgressions of civility and order were visible and occurred in spaces closer to home.

4.3. Expectations of Reciprocity

In Mshongo and Newham, much of the resentment against newcomers was founded in perceptions that they did not adequately contribute to practices that reproduce the ethos or valued functions of place or failed to show commitment to valued norms or aspirations of members of the longer settled population. In Newham, this was expressed in relation to the perceived lack of efforts among newcomers to speak English and the supposed reluctance to interact with long-established residents. For example, a group of mothers expressed their frustration that Eastern Europeans did not make the effort to communicate with others at the school gate and did not speak English in public spaces or at the workplace (see also Wessendorf, 2020). They were also blamed for creating separate public spaces in the form of cafes where they only spoke their languages.

The following conversation with a white British resident in a community centre shows how independent of people's origins, engaging in convivial practices is seen as a conscious choice and an important way of signalling one's belonging to a place:

> Felicity: Even people moving in who look like me, they don't say "hello." They don't speak English and don't want to mix.
>
> Susanne: But I can see quite a bit of mixing here at this coffee morning.
>
> Felicity: Yes, but they *choose* to come here, these are the people who make a choice to mix, but the newcomers don't.

Later on in the conversation, a friend of Felicity also contrasted her Caribbean and Russian neighbours with newcomers who would not talk to her. This "ethos of mixing" and the expectation that all residents should engage in everyday convivial practices such as saying "hi" at the school gate, is also present in other parts of London which have seen rapid population changes (see Wessendorf, 2014).

In Mshongo, expectations of local engagement went further and were more politicised. This was linked to the political meaning and purpose for which the squatter settlements were created. They were established through collective mobilisation to provide a foothold in "white" cities toward the end of Apartheid. The founding residents viewed them as a route to formal housing and a fuller experience of citizenship. Instead, many have languished on the housing lists, sometimes for decades, in an increasingly more dense and less habitable settlement. This led to an increasing number of collective marches and protests in the settlement, during which attacks against African migrants and their businesses sometimes ensued (Monson, 2015). Explaining the underlying tensions, established residents complained that newcomers were indifferent to the history of the settlement and the ambitions of its longstanding residents, wanting only to "have space" as one pensioner put it. Shopkeepers were easily marked as outsiders by their failure to close their stores, in line with a tradition of struggle, during protests about service delivery. Established residents will get angry, one informal leader said, when they sacrifice their time to march and fight for the rights of squatters, while migrant entrepreneurs "are keeping; they're benefiting themselves in shops." Similar sentiments were expressed over and over by different longstanding residents of Mshongo, who perceived newcomers as freeriding on their efforts or simply "not caring" about their struggle. For example, a female community worker complained about both domestic and international migrants, saying:

> Zimbabweans don't care. If we are fighting for something, they don't care because they are not here to stay, they are just here to make money. Other nations don't care. They don't care. Some people from Pietersburg [a city in South Africa's Limpopo province] stay here just to work; they've got houses at home.

Similarly, an unemployed man singled out those "foreigners" who "would ignore the call for the meetings and continue with their business….And when things are fixed, they would be first felt by those same people, yet we are the ones who attend meetings." This echoes other discussions on migrant avoidance of—and South Africans' demands for—commitment in these contexts (Kerr et al., 2019; Landau, 2014).

Investment in local social relations, be it by way of mixing with people of different backgrounds, or by way of engaging with local struggles, form part of perceptions of the broader "we" of local residents in both Mshongo and Newham. Lack of this investment, coupled with perceptions of social inequality and views that newcomers break local rules of civility, can lead to negative perceptions about newcomers more generally. However, these views are sometimes contradicted by everyday convivial practices, as we discuss in the following section.

5. Prospects and Limits of Conviviality

We have shown how resentment towards newcomers emerged in the context of long-standing experiences of marginalization resulting from racism, islamophobia, and socioeconomic marginalization, coupled with frustrations about newcomers' supposed lack of adherence to local rules of order, and their perceived unwillingness to engage with the local population or locally important political causes.

Of course, positive views coexisted with negative ones. Not only did long-term residents sometimes express empathy about newcomers' struggles to settle, but boundaries often softened where there was evidence of convivial practices. For instance, efforts to communicate across differences, offer care, friendship, or forms of recognition were seen as evidence that newcomers "are not all bad." For example, in the conversation with a group of women quoted above, the following discussion took place. Sharon was sharing her difficulty finding a Chinese New Year card for a neighbour who always gives gifts at Chinese New Year and Christmas when Meera interjected:

> Meera: Yes, you know, it's a two-way thing, sometimes you can be forward but sometimes people are standoffish and they don't want to know and don't want to mix so you just…you know.
>
> Sharon: When I lost my husband, he [her neighbour] came and said: "You can call on me for anything." And he came to visit, they were so lovely, I've got some nice neighbours.
>
> Meera: It's just individuals isn't it, they are not all bad, they are not all—yeah.
>
> Elizabeth: There's quite a few people when I take the dog for a walk, they are drinkers but they pat the dog and say "hello" and I wouldn't sort of shun them, you have to keep the respect.
>
> Susanne: So, generally, you think people get along in the area?
>
> Sue: I think so, yeah. Most people do, don't they, Mariam? Do you think [that], where you live, people get along as well?
>
> Mariam: Yeah, neighbours are, you know, quite friendly.
>
> Sue: If you make an effort with people they generally are.
>
> Mariam: And there's reciprocation as well, you know, in terms of support, just generally, like, chit chat, or, you know, small talk.

> Sue: I used to have Eastern European [neighbours]….They used to have BBQs and they'd say: "We're going to have a BBQ, do you want to take your washing in?" They'd call me and they'd give me a big plate. But, you know, things like that.

Here, seemingly small gestures, everyday interactions, and small talk, taken together, build a picture of mutual respect and reciprocity. Convivial practices thus counteract the symbolic boundaries between the long-established residents and more newly arrived residents.

Similarly, but in a very different context, a Mozambican woman observed how the everyday practice of "living well with [one's] neighbours" created relations of trust that kept some newcomers safe during collective attacks on foreigners in Mshongo:

> It's all about how you live with your neighbours. If you are not in good books with your neighbours or they hate you, they [will] call the attackers and tell them that there is a foreigner here. But if you live well with your neighbours, they [will] alert you when the attackers come and defend you from them.

Mozambican shopkeepers were positively labelled as "humble" when they agreed to employ South Africans in their businesses and register with the South African Revenue Service in order to pay taxes. Similarly, some newcomers had gained acceptance and even positions of leadership in Mshongo through a process of "learning to live with" the established residents. One local leader, originally from a neighbouring country, said that many people treat him as Zulu. This is partly due to his long stay in the area, but also because on arrival he "interacted and learnt to live with the elderly members of the community." He concluded that, as a result, nobody came near his home during the attacks of 2008.

Therefore, both research sites produced evidence that convivial practices are a common process by which newcomers and long-established residents might cross symbolic boundaries. However, we must take care not to overstate the power of such investments and their reach across complex societies. While in both Mshongo and Newham, long-established residents and newcomers engaged in convivial practices, these continued to be paralleled by mistrust, tensions, and prejudice.

Of course, the notion of convivial practices as a "two-way process" is itself a perception, which cannot be taken at face value. There appears to be scope for genuine bi-directionality in the Newham examples, where established residents seem to feel more reciprocally bound by the ethos of mixing to "keep the respect" as Elizabeth put it, even where a newcomer's behaviour does not align with norms of civility. Yet the terms of reciprocity are clearly set by the preferences and interests of the established, potentially limiting the capacity of the convivial practice to change symbolic boundaries, since "boundary change is logically unattainable without change on the side of insiders" (Klarenbeek, 2021, p. 908) too. The prospects for genuine reciprocity are slimmer in Mshongo, where there appears to be far more at stake if newcomers fail to engage in convivial practices. If the alternative to meeting the expectations of long-established residents may be violent expulsion from the community, the "two-way process" appears more coerced than freely reciprocated (see also Vigneswaran, 2014, p. 477).

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the creation of symbolic boundaries against newcomers and how convivial practices can contribute to softening these boundaries in two vastly different contexts, the South African settlement of Mshongo and the London Borough of Newham. Their histories of settlement and immigration and their socio-political and economic conditions differ. However, their long-term residents share the experience of social marginalization, coupled with rapid demographic changes resulting from the arrival of newcomers seen to be at an advantage either because of perceptions around their white privilege (in Newham) or economic advantage (in Mshongo). Against a backdrop of racism and economic disadvantage, perceptions that newcomers might reduce the prospects for housing, amenities, space, and jobs, can exacerbate already existing feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Notions around civility and order in public spaces can contribute further to negative feelings about newcomers. In both places, differences that attract attention or comment are produced through everyday observations and experiences of practices that threaten locally valued norms or historical struggles.

We have examined how these marginalized, long-established populations perceived more recent populations moving into the area by building on studies of symbolic boundaries that have shown that established/newcomer distinctions can be the most salient differences among local residents. By analysing established-newcomer configurations in such different places, we have identified how perceptions that erode the capacity to live together relate to three principles emerging from our data and literature on symbolic boundaries: inequality, expectations of civility and order, and expectations of reciprocity. While these three principles are based on perceptions about newcomers, we have also shown how residents value newcomers' efforts to engage in convivial gestures such as greetings, the sharing of food, and neighbourly support. These convivial practices can help soften symbolic boundaries.

While we have identified common principles in these two vastly different places, we also acknowledge that these issues were experienced differently in Mshongo, which differs from Newham in terms of the depth of poverty, the virtual absence of state services, the enmeshing of public and private space, and the intense politics of struggle against the legacies of institutionalised white racism. Expectations of reciprocity, for example, differed across the two sites. In East London, where practices of mixing are valued by established residents in a context of longstanding "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf, 2014), resentments can be around the preservation of pre-existing orders of convivial relations, such as the ethos of mixing that has developed between prior arrivals. While situational instances of resentment surface at times, they stand in stark contrast to Mshongo, where violent displacement has occurred at the boundary between "us" and "them." In this context, we can find a much more politicised and strongly felt ethos of solidarity and struggle that has persisted among different ethnolinguistic groups who were divided and separated into reserves under apartheid, but came together to claim space and rights on the margins of the city. Residents explicitly linked both inequality and reciprocity to the struggle to overcome an existing history of marginalization, and resentments were particularly apparent when newcomers were seen to prioritise their personal interests over participation in the collective struggle for a better life.

While our empirical material revealed how perceptions of inequality, lack of civility, and lack of reciprocity can erode convivial social relations in the two contexts, it also suggests that peaceful social relations across perceived differences are easier in better-resourced and formally governed environments, where the risk differences pose to one's political rights, economic survival, and way of life is arguably lower. It also appears that a more intense form of solidarity is required to sustain a settlement like Mshongo where residents must continually struggle for access to basic amenities and mobilise collectively for an equal place in the city. Differences of commitment will be particularly salient where the stakes are so high, and greater investment in convivial practices is likely to be required.

Whilst convivial relations involve both cohesion and conflict, collective violence against outsiders in Mshongo certainly appears as a rupture. The high incidence of xenophobic discrimination and related violence in South Africa, the role of mobilising actors and repertoires in such violence, and the particularities of Mshongo's informality and history of contentious politics (Misago, 2019; Monson, 2015) are key parts of an explanation that would take us beyond the scope of this article. However, one direction for future research would be to consider how differences in ethos across different localities—here manifested as an ethos of mixing in Newham, and an ethos of struggle in Mshongo—might shape the context for such ruptures. Kerr et al. (2019, p. 1008) have argued that the linking of insider/outsider grievances to a discourse of struggle can constitute migrants as a threat to citizens' hopes of liberation from historical marginalization. Further work along these lines might help account for contexts where the everyday flow of social relations is disrupted by the violent instantiation of symbolic boundaries.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Conviviality in Public Squares: How Affordances and Individual Factors Shape Optional Activities

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Abstract
Conviviality can briefly be defined as togetherness among strangers despite their differences. While most of the research on conviviality focuses on (inter-)cultural differences, this article argues that considering other kinds of differences (e.g., socio-economic status, gender, age, stage of the life course, etc.) may increase our understanding of conviviality. In addition, to help us measure the convivial use of public space, the article looks at participation in "optional activities" (e.g., enjoying the sun, playing), which contribute to a convivial atmosphere by encouraging people to be co-present, thus offering the potential for "thicker sociability." Based on fieldwork consisting of behavioural mapping (n = 1,448) and an intercept survey (n = 1,474), this study explores key factors that increase the likelihood of people using three small public squares in Zurich, Switzerland, in a convivial way. A logistic regression model based on survey data shows that, even when controlling for individual factors, the squares and their affordances contribute substantially to convivial use, e.g., by providing ample seating. The model furthermore suggests that gender, people's relationship to the neighbourhood, their occupation, and the time of day, are more significant factors in shaping convivial use of the squares than the cultural background, socio-economic status, age, or having children.

Keywords
affordances; conviviality; diversity; neighbourhood; public familiarity; public space; public square

Issue
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1. Introduction

Public space has long been described as a place where urban dwellers come face to face with each other and with a city's diversity (Lofland, 1973). These encounters between strangers may be fleeting but still form part of spatial practice in urban public spaces (Zieleniec, 2018). The term "conviviality" neither romanticizes nor stigmatizes these encounters but rather emphasizes the fact that they are an essential part of "a shared human condition" (Sandström, 2020, p. 180) across social differences.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly diverse, or hyper-diverse (Tasan-Kok et al., 2014) urban population, coupled with the privatization of public space and diminishing private open spaces due to densification, the capacity of public spaces to host convivial encounters is becoming an important issue of social infrastructure (Layton & Latham, 2022). Although not all "registers of sociality" (Layton & Latham, 2022) in public spaces can be termed convivial, co-presence and fleeting encounters are the preconditions for "thicker sociability" (Bodnar, 2015).

While most studies on conviviality rely on qualitative methods (mostly ethnographic research; e.g., Koch & Latham, 2012; Radice, 2016; Wessendorf, 2014), this article takes a quantitative approach. It sees "optional activities" (Gehl, 2011), i.e., activities for which there is no need or which could also take place elsewhere, as an indicator of the convivial use of public space and aims to shed light on who, from a hyper-diverse population, takes part in optional activities and thus contributes to conviviality and "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf, 2014). This research also examines the role of the "material base" (Peattie, 1998): the physical environment, its artefacts, and their respective affordances (Davis, 2020).

This approach provides new insights into the role of the environment and individual characteristics. It allows us, for example, to decouple the effect of gender from childcare duties, or to consider how conducive an environment is to optional activities regardless of the users' individual characteristics.

Drawing on a case study of three public squares in Zurich, Switzerland, I address the following questions: What is the role of a public square's affordances (Davis, 2020) in its convivial use, and who is most likely to use it convivially, i.e., to take part in optional activities? Using datasets from an intercept survey and behavioural mapping conducted on-site, this article contributes to the literature by integrating a design and behavioural perspective (Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020) to explore the key factors contributing to convivial use.

This article first outlines the theoretical concepts linking conviviality and optional activities with responsive environments (Bentley et al., 1985) and their affordances. A review of the empirical literature on the topic is followed by the case study, fieldwork, and data analysis. General trends in the use of public squares are then outlined, before exploring the factors which encourage convivial use. Finally, I discuss how the concepts of hyper-diversity and affordances add to our understanding of conviviality.

2. Conceptual Framework

Conviviality can be defined as a kind of "'rubbing along', includ[ing] not just 'happy togetherness' but negotiation, friction and sometimes conflict" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 425). This article adopts a perspective of conviviality that has been termed "convivial spaces" by Nowicka and Vertovec (2014). This is one of three main ways in which the concept of conviviality is used in scientific literature (the others being "convivial collectivities" and "convivial everydayness"). It focuses on the socio-spatial aspects of conviviality in examining the "material–practical arrangements" that enable a "collective life marked by openness and accommodation of difference" (Koch & Latham, 2012, p. 521).

Any quantitative study must inevitably define the meaning of conviviality and conceptualize it in a measurable way. I use Gehl's (2011) categorization of activities to link behaviour in public squares and conviviality. Gehl classifies activities in public space along a continuous scale from "necessary" to "optional." Necessary activities (such as passing through space to get somewhere else or waiting for a bus) take place regardless of the environment, while optional activities are characterized by a low degree of necessity. They either do not have to take place at all (e.g., sitting and enjoying the space, taking photographs) or could easily take place somewhere else (e.g., supervising children, sitting down to eat). Optional activities only take place under favourable conditions and therefore indicate a pleasant environment. They contribute to a convivial atmosphere because they tend to prolong stays, and as Gehl (2011, p. 182) states, "lengthy stays mean lively streets." Optional activities are thus a suitable, albeit limited, indicator of convivial use.

A square's affordances might attract users seeking recreation, or even encourage people who use it for necessary activities to engage in occasional optional activities. In his seminal work, Gibson (1986) states that affordances are "what [the environment] offers to the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). They are relational in that they capture the interaction between the material world and human beings (Lanng & Jensen, 2022) and "apply varying levels of pressure on socially situated subjects" (Davis, 2020, p. 8), being hence neither binary nor determinant.

Similarly, Bentley et al. (1985) are concerned with environments that are responsive to their users' needs: Responsive environments provide users with an arrangement that "enrich[es] their opportunities by maximizing the degree of choice available to them" (Bentley et al., 1985, p. 9). Responsive environments are defined by seven qualities: permeability, variety, legibility, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, and personalization. In the context of this research, robustness is of particular interest. Robust spaces offer an environment that can accommodate a wide range of activities (including unplanned activities) and thus potentially support diversity. In the case of public open spaces primarily used by pedestrians, seating is identified as a key affordance to make people "colonize the centre of the space" (Bentley et al., 1985, p. 73).

Seating opportunities, and other affordances in general, are often intentionally designed to encourage or discourage certain practices (Aelbrecht et al., 2019). However, different uses of space than those intended may also arise from creative appropriation by users. Primary seating (Gehl, 2011) such as chairs or benches afford sitting by design but may have multiple other uses: lying down, propping up one's legs, facing others in conversation, etc. Elements such as window ledges, fountains or steps offer much the same affordances and are therefore called secondary seating, despite different design objectives. The potential for personal appropriation, or personalization, further enhances an environment's responsiveness (Bentley et al., 1985).

The analysis of users is underpinned by the concept of hyper-diversity (Tasan-Kok et al., 2014). While most research on conviviality focuses on (inter-)cultural differences (Radice, 2016), Tasan-Kok et al. (2014, p. 6) draw attention to "an intense diversification of the population in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities." These differences may create just as much friction as (inter-)cultural ones and therefore merit closer inspection when studying conviviality.

3. Factors Shaping Optional Activities in Public Space: Literature Review

While there is abundant empirical literature on the use of public squares in general (e.g., Papatzani & Knappers, 2020; Ridings & Chitrakar, 2021; Rishbeth & Rogaly, 2018), little is known about the characteristics of square users who engage in optional and not only necessary activities. I, therefore, included literature on the recreational use of more broadly defined open spaces (e.g., parks, streets) that investigates which user groups are attracted to which spaces and which activities, taking into consideration gender, ethnicity, social status, age, and relationship to the neighbourhood.

Previous research has revealed gender differences: Women tend to visit parks less frequently than men due to (perceived) safety issues (Bühler et al., 2010; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020) and are more attracted to playgrounds and areas where parental duties can easily be exercised (Gilmore, 2017). They usually visit with family, whereas men are more likely to visit alone or with friends (Jay & Schraml, 2009), to engage in physical activities (Baran et al., 2014; Ostermann, 2009), and stay longer (Huang & Napawan, 2021). Numerous studies show that cultural and religious practices shape gendered recreational use (e.g., Gilmore, 2017; Huang & Napawan, 2021; Sadeghi & Jangjoo, 2022).

Studies from several countries report ethnocultural differences in recreational use: non-Western migrants tend to visit parks in larger groups and for more family- or community-oriented activities (Baran et al., 2014; Lesan & Gjerde, 2020). However, while some authors note that parks attract all cultural groups (Veal, 2006), others find that non-Western migrants are less likely to visit parks (Schipperijn et al., 2010) and that non-Whites are significantly underrepresented in some parks (Reichl, 2016).

Regarding social status and age, studies found that people with higher levels of education and higher incomes tend to visit parks or green spaces more often, and recreational use of public spaces is more common among older people (Bergefurt et al., 2019; Schipperijn et al., 2010). Others report an underrepresentation of elderly people in parks (Bühler et al., 2010). Evidence on the effect of occupational status on recreational use due to time constraints is scarce, with mixed results in those cases where it is studied (Bassand et al., 2001; Veal, 2006).

People's relationship to the neighbourhood is also found to be associated with recreational use. Residents who feel attached to their neighbourhoods use green spaces more often for recreational activities than those who don't (Bergefurt et al., 2019). Living in proximity to a green space also raises the odds of using it recreationally compared to living further away (Schipperijn et al., 2010). Blokland and Nast (2014) conceptualize the experience of belonging to a neighbourhood in terms of "public familiarity." Public familiarity is rooted in spatial practice, but it highlights that practices need not always be active attempts to build neighbourly ties. Indeed, even the thin sociality of merely observing other people contributes to public familiarity and invisible ties (Felder, 2020). The figure of the familiar stranger, a stranger whose face is nevertheless recognized, is emblematic of this type of relationship to the neighbourhood. Familiarity, as suggested by Felder (2021, p. 194), may well serve as a link between people's relationship to the neighbourhood and conviviality.

Optional activities undeniably have a temporal dimension through their daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms. They are also subject to time constraints and thus people's participation is likely to be influenced by their occupational status. It could be hypothesized that retired people, job seekers and people who work part-time are more likely to do optional activities than those working full-time. The aforementioned studies, however, suggest that the relationship is more complex. The concept of "time in-between," i.e., the time "during which people are on their way to live the rest of their lives" (Blokland & Nast, 2014, p. 1143) is an essential constituent of neighbourhood belonging. Assuming that being an active part of the labour force accounts for a big part of the time in between, being employed might foster optional activities via neighbourhood belonging.

Thus, public spaces, to varying degrees, invite recreational use or optional activities, but this invitation is not perceived equally across population groups. The studies discussed so far suggest that besides the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals, the role of the squares' affordances, people's relationships to the neighbourhood and the temporal dimension merit closer inspection.

4. Context and Research Methods

4.1. Case Study

This research was conducted in Zurich, Switzerland's largest city (436,000 residents), situated in the German-speaking part. As it studies the convivial use of public squares, a practice that is closely connected to the particularities of the local spatial context, a case study approach was chosen. To make the study and its findings more robust I opted for a multiple-case design. Three contrasting cases help explore the specificities and similarities of the environment's role in shaping convivial use.

Case selection occurred in two stages according to two sets of criteria. The use of public squares is likely to depend not only on their design but also on the urban structure and the population in the surrounding neighbourhood. Therefore, initially, three contrasting neighbourhoods were selected based on density, jobs–housing balance, income heterogeneity, percentage of family households, and percentage of people without Swiss nationality (Table 1). Then, from each neighbourhood, one square was selected that met the following criteria: feasibly sized for fieldwork (1,500–2,000 m^2), publicly owned, "open and available to all and catering for a wide variety of functions" (civic spaces; Carmona, 2010, p. 169), not dominated by one function (traffic, playground, etc.), sufficiently clear borders, district-wide or neighbourhood-wide relevance (according to categorization by Stadt Zürich, 2006).

The squares resulting from this process—Lindenplatz, Hallwylplatz, and Idaplatz, and their respective neighbourhoods—are briefly presented in the following paragraphs (see Figures 1 and 2). None of the squares has formal management, and all three are open to the public 24 hours a day.

Lindenplatz is situated in Altstetten, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Zurich. Altstetten is the least densely populated of the three neighbourhoods (250 employees and inhabitants per hectare). The jobs–housing balance is the same as for Zurich as a whole (1.4), meaning there are more jobs than inhabitants in Altstetten. Income heterogeneity, defined by the difference between the 75- and 25-percentile of income (the higher this difference, the more spread out or heterogeneous the income distribution) is below Zurich's average (42,800 CHF vs. 49,000 CHF), with incomes generally being on the lower side. Altstetten has the highest percentage of family households of the three neighbourhoods (23.5%), as well as the highest percentage of people without Swiss nationality (36.2%).

The Lindenplatz square is framed on three sides by buildings, and by a busy road with public transport stops on the fourth. It dates from the 1950s and was redeveloped in 2010. The square now features trees, a fountain, several benches facing water features on the ground, and a large open area which affords space for a biweekly farmers' market and cultural events. The surrounding buildings house several cafés and restaurants, a hotel, a kiosk, public toilets, the district administration, a pharmacy, several shops, and two supermarkets.

Hallwylplatz is located near the city centre in the Werd neighbourhood, one of Zurich's most densely populated areas (740 employees and inhabitants per hectare). The number of jobs is more than three times the number of inhabitants (3.2). Income heterogeneity is slightly above average (51,300 CHF). The share of family households in Werd is small (15.5%), a fact that may be attributed to its centrality and the correspondingly higher rents. Having significantly decreased in recent decades due to gentrification, the percentage of people without Swiss nationality in Werd is now close to the average (33.6%).

Despite several attempts, no major redevelopment of the Hallwylplatz Square has occurred since the 1990s. It is furnished with some benches and a shallow fountain affording the option to paddle and splash about. Neighbours have provided additional affordances by equipping it informally with a barbecue grill, movable chairs, picnic tables, children's slide, and table tennis equipment. Two restaurants, several takeaways, a shop, a hairdresser, and a bicycle courier company can be found in the buildings on the square.

Idaplatz is located in the Sihlfeld neighbourhood. Its density is above average (391 employees and inhabitants per hectare), owing more to inhabitants than employees (jobs–housing balance: 0.8). Income heterogeneity is below average (46,500 CHF), as is the percentage of family households (18.7%). As is the case for Werd, the percentage of people without Swiss nationality is close

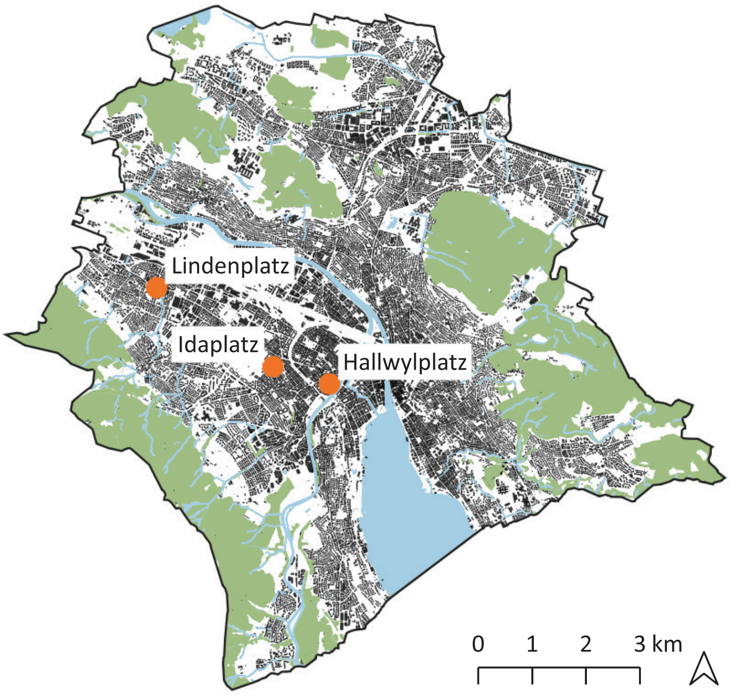


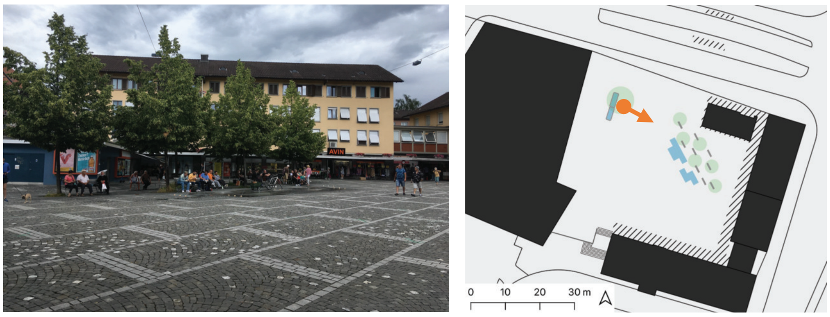
Figure 1. Location of the three squares in the city of Zurich.

Table 1. Neighbourhood characteristics.

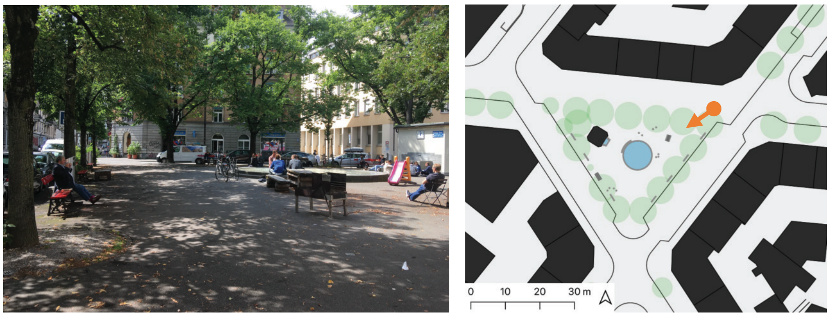
		Altstetten (Lindenplatz)	Werd (Hallwylplatz)	Sihlfeld (Idaplatz)	Zurich
Density	(Employees + inhabitants) / ha	250	740	391	312
Jobs–housing balance	Ratio between employees and inhabitants	1.4	3.2	0.8	1.4
Income heterogeneity	Difference between 75- and 25-percentile of taxable income*	42,800 CHF	51,300 CHF	46,500 CHF	49,000 CHF
Percentage of family households		23.5%	15.5%	18.7%	24.2%
Percentage of people without Swiss nationality		36.2%	33.6%	31.0%	32.2%

Notes: * Non-married tariff. Data refers to 2019 (except for income heterogeneity where data refers to 2017). Sources: Stadt Zürich (2020a, 2020b).

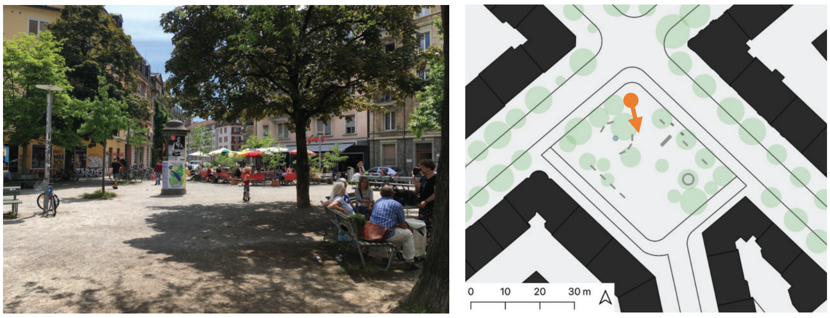
Lindenplatz



Hallwylplatz



Idaplatz



●→ Point and direction from which picture was taken

● Tree   🟦 Water features   ╲ ⁘ Benches, chairs, edges

Figure 2. Photo and map of each square.

to average (31.0%), but only because it has decreased in recent years in the process of gentrification.

Following the redesign of the square in 2006, Idaplatz has become a popular spot for going out in the warmer months, including among people from outside the neighbourhood. Several bars, restaurants, and shops are located on the surrounding streets. The square itself consists of a slightly elevated gravelled surface with ramps and flattened-out corners ensuring wheelchair accessibility. Trees of different sizes allow for both sunny and shady spots on the numerous benches, some of which are arranged around a drinking fountain.

4.2. Fieldwork Methodology

An analysis of the environmental qualities of the three squares was carried out drawing on Bentley et al. (1985). Although all seven qualities identified by these authors were covered (permeability, variety, legibility, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, and personalization), this article only reports on seating as part of an environment's robustness. Seating opportunities provide positive affordances for optional activities. A seating ratio was calculated by dividing linear seating by surface area (as a rule of thumb, Bentley et al. suggest a minimum of 30 cm of linear seating, i.e., approximately one seat per 3 m^2; Bentley et al., 1985, p. 73).

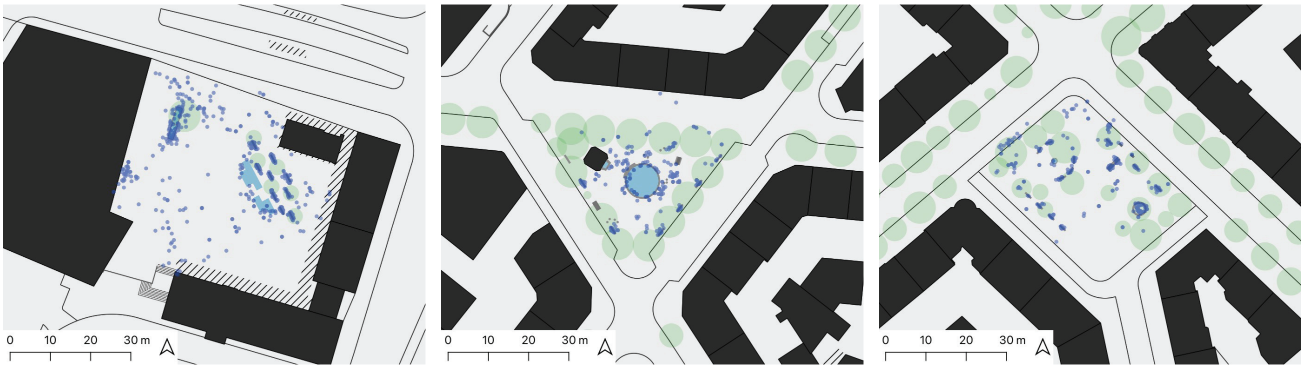
Data were gathered during the summer of 2021 in dry weather, against the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The threat of infection with coronavirus, and the protective measures taken against it by the Swiss government in 2020 and 2021, undoubtedly had an effect on public life and mobility practices. This affected both presence and behaviour in public spaces. However, at the start of the fieldwork, in late May 2021, there were no longer any restrictions in place in Switzerland regarding outdoor behaviour, and the vaccination campaign was showing positive effects. In terms of mobility, mean distances travelled and radii were comparable to pre-covid times, and the number of commuters was up to 80% of pre-Covid times (intervista AG, 2021). Nevertheless, public life was still likely to be affected by individual cautiousness. The fieldwork was divided into two waves (May/June and August/September) to account for differences in the epidemiological situations. Despite a more relaxed context during the second wave, the composition of public square users did not differ significantly between the two waves. This finding suggests that the external validity is not too strongly compromised by the pandemic, but comparison with pre-covid times is impossible.

The fieldwork on users and their activities consisted of behavioural mapping (Gehl & Svarre, 2013) and an intercept survey (Velu & Naidu, 2009). During repeated mapping sessions (12–2 pm and 4–6 pm on weekdays, and 12–2 pm on a Saturday), stationary users were coded with their location, estimated age group, gender, posture, type of activity, and duration, resulting in 1,448 observations (Figure 3).

An intercept survey administered by researchers was used to gain data on unobservable characteristics such as socio-economic status or migrant background. Besides socio-demographic information, the questionnaire (available in German, English, and French) contained questions on the use of the square (type of activities, frequency, duration) and the respondent's relationship to the neighbourhood.

Research assistants and the author tried to approach all square users who looked older than 18. In a few cases, the respondents turned out to be younger, so the minimum age in the sample is 15. Each square was surveyed twice for each timeslot (8–10 am, 12–2 pm, 4–6 pm on Tuesday/Thursday, and 12–2 pm or, due to a time clash with the farmer's market in the case of Lindenplatz, 2–4 pm on Saturday), yielding 1,474 responses (Lindenplatz: 492, Hallwylplatz: 464, Idaplatz: 518), with an average response rate of 36.4% (the number of responses divided by the total number of people approached; refusals, i.e., people who were approached but did not participate were recorded by noting their apparent gender and age group).

Response rates vary according to age and gender; the lowest response rate was for women below 25 (25.5%), and the highest was among men aged 25 to 65 (39.4%;



Lindenplatz Hallwylplatz Idaplatz

Figure 3. Maps of users recorded during behavioural mapping sessions.

see Table 4 in the Supplementary File). Nonetheless, these differences are not significant and do not account for the fact that non-German speaking people and people who were not born in Switzerland are underrepresented compared to the neighbourhood population. People with a university degree and those with average incomes are overrepresented.

It should be noted that under- or overrepresentation can stem from lower/higher use by the residents, from an influx of people from outside the neighbourhood, or from different response rates by these specific population groups. For this study, these biases are considered unproblematic because (a) the three squares show sufficiently different distributions to rule out a method-driven response pattern, and (b) the sociodemographic variables are controlled for in multivariate analyses.

4.3. Data Analysis and Variable Description

In addition to descriptive statistics, binary logistic regression was used to analyse the survey data. Optional activity was used as the dependent variable in the regression models. The dummy variable takes the value of 0 for those only engaged in transit or shopping activities, and 1 for those doing optional activities such as eating, drinking, and spending time alone, with friends, or family, etc.

The regression models aim to explore the relationship between explanatory variables and optional activities when controlling for other variables, rather than to make predictions or establish causal effects. Explanatory variables were identified based on the literature review. They include the variable square (indicating in which square an individual was surveyed), and the three groups "relationship to the neighbourhood," "temporal dimension," and "sociodemographics."

The relationship to the neighbourhood is modelled by two dummy variables. Neighbourhood indicates whether someone lives in the neighbourhood, i.e., in proximity to the square, and familiar stranger whether someone recognised a familiar face in the square by chance.

The temporal dimension is captured by the timeslot in which people were surveyed and by occupation, coded as a dummy variable indicating being/not being (self-)employed.

Sociodemographic information includes gender, age, and being accompanied by children as a proxy for life course stage, and two variables crudely indicating migrant background—born in Switzerland (yes/no) and main language: German (yes/no). Socio-economic status is captured by income (equivalized income according to the OECD modified scale; Hagenaars et al., 1994), in three categories, low/average/high, based on the median) and the highest level of education (no formal or only compulsory education/secondary, i.e., vocational education and training, general education/tertiary, i.e., university degree or equivalent).

Since people were approached on the street unprepared, the questionnaire had to be very short. Because of this, and due to the limited sample size within the squares, for some variables, it was either not possible to collect more nuanced data and/or not feasible to analyse it according to detailed categories. For example, apparent gender is coded as a binary and migrant background rests on two relatively quick questions about language and country of birth. I am aware that sorting people into statistical categories masks a substantial part of (hyper-)diversity within the categories. However, it allows us to explore relationships between the convivial use of squares and sociodemographic groups in broad terms.

It is assumed that a square's affordances and the timeslot influence the likelihood of carrying out optional activities independently of individual characteristics. To account for this random effect of square and timeslot, a mixed effects logistic regression model was performed (McNulty, 2021). Additionally, a purely fixed model was run. The fixed model is reported here as the direction and significance of the effects did not change and for ease of comparison of the three separate models by square.

The models measure the effect of each variable, all things being equal, on the propensity to participate in optional activities in terms of odds ratios. An odds ratio above one means the group in question has higher odds of taking part in optional activities in the square than the reference group.

Table 5 in the Supplementary File shows the frequency distribution of all variables used in the regression. The regression model is based on complete cases only ($n = 1{,}087$). All other analyses include the whole sample ($n = 1{,}474$).

5. Convivial Public Square Use

5.1. General Trends

First, the way in which the squares are used is defined by looking at the types of activities people carry out, the proportion of optional activities, the seating affordances, and the time people spend there.

Figure 4 displays the relative frequency of the different activities people were carrying out at the time of being surveyed. In comparison to the other two squares, Lindenplatz has a lower percentage of people passing through, presumably because it is framed by buildings on three sides. Its many shops, making it almost a commercial centre, are reflected by the high proportion of people who were shopping. Despite its utilitarian character, between 7% and 14% of the users were also engaged in spending time with friends/family or being alone in public, consuming self-brought food/drink or visiting one of the cafés/restaurants.

As for Hallwylplatz and Idaplatz, the majority of people are only crossing the square (58% and 49% respectively were passing through). Of the activities

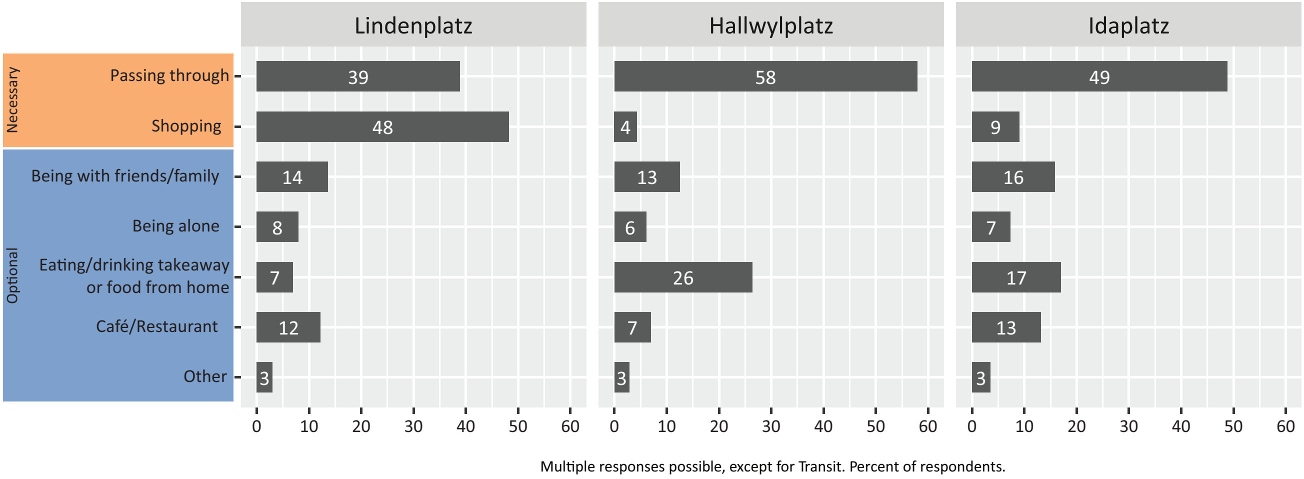


Figure 4. Current activities. Shopping is considered a necessary activity as it was most frequently grocery shopping.

which involve spending more time in the squares, being with friends or family and consuming takeaway (or food/drinks brought from home) or eating/drinking in one of the cafés/restaurants are the most frequently mentioned. Consuming takeaway or food from home is the second most common activity in Hallwylplatz, where at noon, staff from nearby offices make use of the seating affordances to eat their lunch. This use pattern generated by a relatively high proportion of jobs in the neighbourhood of Hallwylplatz is also reflected in the proportion of people carrying out optional activities (peak at lunchtime; see Figure 5).

In general, the proportion of people carrying out optional activities varies depending on the time of the day and between weekdays and weekends (Figure 5). It differs between the squares, hinting at the different affordances in the squares and the varying responsiveness of the environment: In the case of Lindenplatz, due to its numerous facilities connected to necessary uses (supermarkets, pharmacy, dentist, etc.), a comparatively low seating ratio (Table 2), limited shade and a rather noisy soundscape, a relatively small proportion of people surveyed there engage in optional activities. The square does have a busy, convivial atmosphere (particularly on market days, see Figure 6), but the everyday use as it was intentionally captured by fieldwork is characterized by a somewhat pragmatic use, mirroring the square's functional design and furnishing.

In the two other squares, there are both fewer everyday facilities and more affordances encouraging optional uses. Most notably, there is a higher seating ratio (Table 2). In Hallwylplatz, there are quite a few affordances that encourage children's play (a shallow fountain, a slide and table tennis; see Figure 6), thus prompting parents and carers to engage in optional activities, too. These affordances are not offered by Idaplatz. However, as it is located in a rather quiet residential area, it is not surprising that the proportion of people engaged in optional activities is highest in Idaplatz compared to the other squares, except for the "lunch peak" in Hallwylplatz.

As sitting is a necessary activity in only certain cases, the proportion of seated people is a simple yet telling indicator of optional activities (Table 2). Consistent with

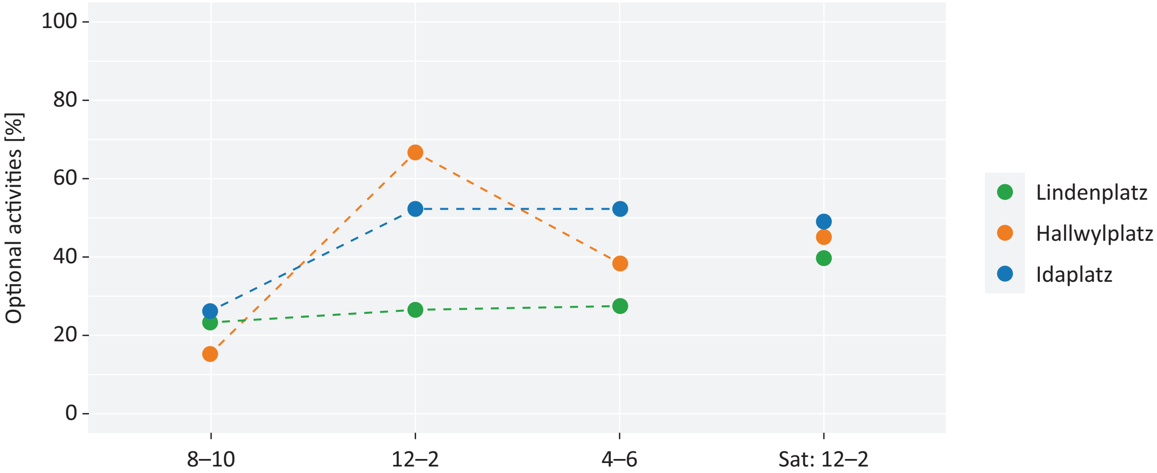


Figure 5. Proportion of people carrying out optional activities.

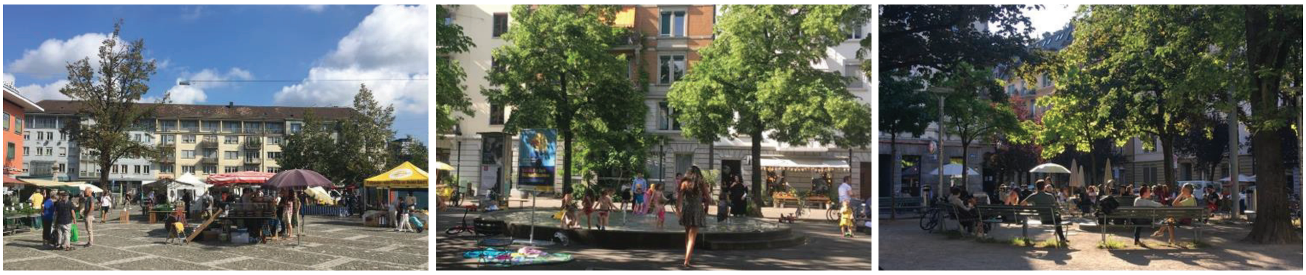

(a) (b) (c)

Figure 6. Optional activities. (a) Standing to chat on market day (Lindenplatz); (b) Splashing in the fountain (Hallwylplatz); (c) Sitting to chat and enjoy the sun (Idaplatz).

Figure 5, Hallwylplatz and Idaplatz have a much higher proportion of seated people than Lindenplatz.

This proportion of seated people is in line with the squares' affordance of seating. The seating ratio is higher in Idaplatz and Hallwylplatz than in Lindenplatz. In Idaplatz, this mainly includes benches (86% of the seating is primary seating, see Figure 6), which contributes to the square's robustness. In Hallwylplatz, primary seating consists of 39% additional furniture provided by the neighbours, and more than half of the seating opportunities are secondary seating on the edge of the shallow fountain.

The differences in affordances between the squares are also reflected in the time that people spend there. On average, people stay longest in Hallwylplatz (21 minutes) and shortest in Lindenplatz (13 minutes; Idaplatz 17 minutes). As only stationary activities are considered (i.e., excluding those who are passing through), the data is not skewed by a different percentage of passers-by.

There is a significant gender difference in the time people spend in two of the squares. In Lindenplatz, men spend 15 minutes on average, whereas women only spend 11 minutes. At Hallwylplatz, it is women who stay longer than men (24 and 19 minutes, respectively). At Idaplatz, although men tend to spend more time in the square than women, the difference is not significant.

Hallwylplatz is popular with children as a place for playing and splashing. Gendered patterns of use could therefore simply be the result of different uses of the public squares by parents and carers. Likewise, having more free time (e.g., pensioners) might also explain why some groups spend more time in the squares than others. Since univariate analysis only allows speculation about a potential connection between optional activities, affordances, and individual factors, I have also carried out a multivariate analysis of optional activities.

5.2. Which Factors Are Associated With Optional Activities?

The intercept survey dataset provides a combination of individual data on the way people use the public squares, their relationship to the neighbourhood, and sociodemographic characteristics. It is well suited for exploring which individual factors are associated with optional activities and thus a more convivial use of public squares. The first model in Table 3 reports the result of binary logistic regression assessing the effect of the variables in the four groups (square, relationship to neighbourhood, temporal dimension, and sociodemographics) on optional activities. Columns 2–4 show the same models run separately for each square. Due to the smaller sample size similar or smaller effects than in the general model may not be significant in the individual square models. Case-specific significant results are discussed wherever they deviate from the general result.

Table 2. Metrics of seating affordances (non-commercial) and the number of minutes spent by square.

	Lindenplatz	Hallwylplatz	Idaplatz
% of people seated (of all people involved in stationary activities)	56	77	72
Seating ratio (cm/3m^2) (Bentley et al., 1985: at least 30 cm/3m^2)	6.3	11.6	8.2
Primary seating (% of all seating)	49	45	86
% of which additional furniture by neighbours	—	39	—
Secondary seating (% of all seating)	51	55	14
Average time spent (minutes)	13	21	17
Women	11	24	16
Men	15	19	19

Table 3. Logistic regressions on the propensity to carry out optional activities.

	All (*n* = 1087)		Lindenplatz (*n* = 334)		Hallwylplatz (*n* = 353)		Idaplatz (*n* = 400)	
Variable	OR [1,2]	SE [2]	OR [1,2]	SE [2]	OR [1,2]	SE [2]	OR [1,2]	SE [2]
Square								
Lindenplatz	—	—						
Hallwylplatz	1.71**	0.189						
Idaplatz	2.24***	0.178						
Familiar stranger (ref: no familiar stranger)	1.79***	0.156	1.70	0.276	1.35	0.321	2.27**	0.259
Neighbourhood (ref: living outside neighbourhood)	0.47***	0.148	0.41**	0.304	0.52*	0.282	0.43***	0.235
Timeslot								
8–10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
12–2	4.71***	0.220	1.76	0.412	15.4***	0.446	4.21***	0.365
4–6	2.86***	0.224	1.55	0.428	4.01**	0.458	3.52***	0.352
Sat: 12–2	3.79***	0.219	2.44*	0.392	6.67***	0.451	3.83***	0.354
Occupation (ref: not (self-)employed)	1.86**	0.210	1.15	0.404	2.71*	0.416	1.83	0.339
Gender (ref: women)	1.36*	0.138	1.74*	0.269	2.20**	0.274	1.05	0.221
Age								
15–24 years	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
25–65 years	0.84	0.310	0.54	0.820	0.28*	0.592	1.93	0.502
older than 65	1.16	0.362	0.77	0.854	0.42	0.737	2.09	0.616
Accompanied by children (ref: no)	1.19	0.221	1.85	0.410	2.81*	0.452	0.61	0.361
Born in Switzerland (ref: yes)	0.85	0.175	0.93	0.347	1.10	0.312	0.75	0.300
Main language: German (ref: yes)	1.12	0.211	1.14	0.404	0.64	0.414	1.49	0.345
Household income								
low (less than 50% of median)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
average (50–150% of median)	1.09	0.274	3.79	0.829	0.52	0.572	1.24	0.400
high (more than 150% of median)	0.74	0.313	5.41	0.904	0.24*	0.648	0.78	0.453
Education								
None/compulsory	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Secondary	0.72	0.367	0.42	0.550	1.21	0.706	0.63	0.813
Tertiary	0.62	0.370	0.33*	0.556	0.91	0.699	0.63	0.812

Notes: [1] *$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; [2] OR = Odds Ratio, SE = Standard Error. Model fit indicator McFadden R Square: all squares: 0.108, Lindenplatz: 0.076, Hallwylplatz: 0.215, Idaplatz: 0.098.

5.2.1. Square

Consistent with Figure 5, people in Hallwylplatz and Idaplatz have a significantly higher propensity to take part in optional activities than people in Lindenplatz. It should be noted that this effect is to be understood as all things being equal. As several other variables are controlled for in the model, the possibility that it is the result of a different sociodemographic composition of the square users can be ruled out.

This result can be attributed to the squares' material base. The affordances in Hallwylplatz and Idaplatz are more accommodating of optional activities than in Lindenplatz. Having a higher seating ratio, the two squares are more robust. Additionally, in Hallwylplatz, there is plenty of opportunity for personalization, as the movable chairs enable a wide range of seating arrangements for groups of different sizes.

5.2.2. Relationship to the Neighbourhood

To model the relationship to the neighbourhood, two variables, familiar stranger and neighbourhood, are included. People who recognized familiar strangers or acquaintances were more likely to be engaged in optional activities than those who did not. The salience of the familiar stranger variable can be attributed to the public familiarity that comes with recognising strangers. As suggested by the literature, familiarity is presumed to increase the feeling of belonging to a neighbourhood that has been found to be positively associated with recreational use.

People living in the neighbourhood of the squares are less likely to participate in optional activities than people who live further away. This seemingly counter-intuitive result can be explained by the "time in-between" and the methodology. Assuming time in-between is relevant for optional activities (see below), it is plausible that the closer to home these moments of time in-between occur, the more likely they are to be spent at home and not in public space. Also, due to the frequency with which they pass the squares, the people living close to the squares are more likely to have been asked to participate in the survey while in transit than those living further away.

5.2.3. Temporal Dimension

To model the temporal dimension of optional activities, the timeslot when people were being surveyed and their occupations are used. The timeslot is the most important variable in the model. Unsurprisingly, the people surveyed at noon, in the late afternoon or on Saturday are significantly more likely to engage in optional activities than participants in the morning. This result applies to all three squares, implying that the rhythm of work drives optional activities regardless of the squares' affordances. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in Lindenplatz—where, as mentioned, there are fewer affordances for optional activities—the effect is less pronounced. Affordances supporting optional activities, such as in Hallwylplatz and Idaplatz, seem to reinforce the recreational character of lunchtime, late afternoon and weekend hours.

Although occupation is only a crude indicator of time budget, employed people (full-time, part-time or self-employed) presumably have less free time on average than people not in employment (retired, in education, unemployed or engaged in full-time home duties). Yet, unexpectedly, it is those who are employed that are more likely to be engaged in optional activities. When travelling to and from work (plus during lunch breaks) they have more "time in-between," which connects them to spaces of proximity such as the squares, making it more likely that they will use them for optional activities.

5.2.4. Sociodemographics

This last group of variables helps clarify who, from a hyper-diverse population, forms part of the "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf, 2014) of convivial public square use. Are some population groups more likely to do optional activities than others?

All things being equal, men are more likely to take part in optional activities than women. No significant relationship was found for the variables of "age" or "accompanied by children." Replacing "accompanied by children" with "living in a household with children" led to the same result. It should be noted that men are more likely to be engaged in optional activities than women, despite there being no major amenities that would suggest a gendered use, as described in the literature (e.g., sports facilities, playgrounds; Bühler et al., 2010; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020).

No evidence was found for a significant relationship between whether someone was born in Switzerland or speaks German and the propensity to carry out optional activities. It can be inferred that, from those people present, people from a migrant background feel equally entitled to spend leisure time in the squares, a precondition for "thicker" kinds of sociality thus being fulfilled.

The effect of income and education remains unclear, as the effects are not significant in the overall model and are inconsistent in the separate models.

Contrary to the other groups of variables, the sociodemographic group evidences some instances in which there are significant effects in the individual square models despite there being no significant effect in the general model: In Lindenplatz, people with a tertiary degree are significantly less likely to take part in optional activities than people with no formal or compulsory education. One potential explanation for this could be that people with higher status are more likely to perceive a social distance between them and other square users, and therefore feel less inclined to participate in optional activities.

A similar explanation could hold for the significantly lower propensity towards optional activities of people with high incomes in Hallwylplatz. The perceived social distance might not only apply to other square users but also objects (e.g., the sometimes shabby additional furniture in Hallwylplatz). In Hallwylplatz, 25- to 65-year-olds are significantly less likely than 15- to 24-year-olds to participate in optional activities. This could be explained by the relatively low share of young people in the neighbourhood, making it more likely that those who do come to the square do so specifically for optional activities. In the same square, there is a significant relationship between being accompanied by children and participation in optional activities. It could be speculated that the shallow fountain's attractiveness accounts for the positive effect of being accompanied by children on the likelihood to carry out optional activities.

In Idaplatz, there are no significant relationships in the individual model that cannot be found in the general model.

It is important to note that these findings apply to people who use the squares and not necessarily to those who do not choose to be present in the first place. As affordances structure the set of possible activities, people might fall back on alternative public places for more culturally specific activities (e.g., spaces where larger groups can be accommodated).

Overall, for those who are present, the squares seem to be equally conducive to optional activities for a diverse range of population groups, the only significant difference being that for men, the likelihood of participating in optional activities is higher than for women. Of all the other groups included in the analysis, there does not seem to be one that is particularly likely or unlikely to do optional activities in the three squares. There are indications, but no conclusive evidence, that people of higher social status are less likely to participate in optional activities.

6. Conclusion

This article defines conviviality in public squares as the co-presence of a hyper-diverse urban population, extended by optional activities. It explores the factors which encourage people to use the Lindenplatz, Hallwylplatz, and Idaplatz public squares in Zurich in a convivial way. It thus sheds light on what contributes to lively public squares and hence more robust social infrastructure (Bentley et al., 1985; Layton & Latham, 2022).

There are considerable differences in the proportion of optional activities carried out in the three squares, corroborating previous research that has found design and affordances such as seating opportunities to be important factors in shaping public space use and encouraging optional activities (Gehl, 2011; Lanng & Jensen, 2022; Rishbeth & Rogaly, 2018). This article contributes to our understanding of the role of affordances by providing evidence that more convivial use results not only from attracting a different crowd (e.g., people with more free time) but that the effect persists even when controlling for variables such as gender, cultural background, or socio-economic status which previous research has shown to have an influence on recreational use (Bergefurt et al., 2019; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020; Huang & Napawan, 2021).

Regression analysis also reveals the importance of the temporal dimension of the activities and people's relationship to the neighbourhood, suggesting self-reinforcing connections between the time in-between periods occupied by a professional activity (time may be spent in public squares on the way to and from work and during lunch breaks), the co-presence of people and the public familiarity resulting from this temporal overlap (Blokland & Nast, 2014). Living in the neighbourhood, i.e., in proximity to the square, however, seems to lower the likelihood of participating in optional activities. This link could benefit from further research.

The finding that men are more likely to carry out optional activities than women concurs with the existing literature on the gendered use of public space (Huang & Napawan, 2021), with the added benefit of clarifying that it is not (only) an effect of being attracted or not to certain spaces, nor of having childcare duties. As the survey took place during the daytime, we can also rule out the hypothesis that this result stems from women's greater or more prevalent safety concerns in the evening and at night. Besides potential safety issues during the day, the result may also be explained by a gendered appropriation and interpretation of the square's social space. Even though the actual affordances are the same for all, women might perceive their attractions and limitations differently. The finding might also reflect overarching social labour and care work structures, which are difficult to unpack through a quantitative analysis of behaviours.

The quantitative approach used here also takes a narrow view of conviviality in assuming that carrying out optional activities contributes to a convivial space. This is a crude indicator of conviviality. A different methodology would be necessary to study how a convivial "rubbing along" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 425) is practised and experienced. However, the quantitative approach allows us to explore which factors affect an individual's likelihood of participating in optional activities, and to decouple individual and environmental factors.

There are also other limitations to this study. Firstly, the data only covers limited hours of the day. No surveys were conducted in the evening/at night. Secondly, the model might be underspecified, meaning important variables are missing (e.g., time budget, preferences for certain environments). Thirdly, the data was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic. As there were no health measures in force regarding behaviour in outdoor spaces, it can be assumed that the data was not greatly affected. However, there might be certain groups whose use of public squares was modified (e.g., at-risk individuals, or people working from home).

Notwithstanding these limitations, this article shows that mobilizing the concept of hyper-diversity contributes to our understanding of conviviality. Although the way the cultural background is measured here might mask certain effects, it is interesting to note that the people who use the squares in fact tend to extend their co-presence by engaging in optional activities regardless of their cultural background, age, or socio-economic status. Instead, gender, relationship to the neighbourhood, and temporal dimensions appear to be more important factors in convivial use, in combination with the affordances the environment provides.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Article

The Forks Market: Cosmopolitan Canopy, Conviviality, and Class

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Abstract

This article contributes to scholarship on the varieties of co-existence expressed in urban public life by providing an analysis of cosmopolitan conviviality as it surfaces in the branded public space of The Forks Market in Winnipeg, Canada. Recently renovated to create an intimate food hall, the Market is framed as a "commons" to encourage sociability among patrons. It is also configured as an inclusive space where an urban multicultural clientele can gather and share in a variety of foodways. Drawing on empirical observational research, and paying attention to the Market's material affordances, I argue that Forks Market patrons co-perform a kind of cosmopolitan conviviality comprising two key components: (a) convivial sociability, and (b) cosmopolitan openness. Exploring tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity, however, I maintain that such conviviality is marked by ambivalence linked to the Market's operation as both a "cosmopolitan canopy" and a branded space with an emphasis on consumption. In particular, I consider how the "look" of the Market conveys a sense of authenticity with an "upscale" design oriented toward middle-class tastes.

Keywords

class; consumption; conviviality; cosmopolitan canopy; cosmopolitanism

Issue

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1. Introduction

A resurgence of academic interest in conviviality over the past decade has focused attention on the everyday practices of interacting with strangers and "living-with-difference" in culturally diverse settings (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p. 341). Broadly defined as "the capacity to live together," conviviality is understood as pragmatic and performative, taking shape through daily habits, routines, and social interactions in specific contexts (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 423). Situated and temporal, conviviality arises from the dynamic interplay of interpersonal interactions and social spaces, or "material environs," and their particular "*affordances* of conviviality" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 427, italics in original). Still, conviviality is not only a matter of happily "getting along," but is complicated by tensions, conflict, and social exclusions (Nowicka, 2020; Wise & Noble, 2016).

While convivialities scholarship has a much longer history rooted in studies of urban social life in public space (for example, Lofland, 1989), renewed interest, understood as the "convivial, everyday turn," has resulted in a growing number of studies that examine how people interact with strangers, negotiate diversity, and cultivate a "convivial civil togetherness" (Nowicka, 2020, p. 24) in urban public or semi-public spaces such as parks (Barker et al., 2019), skating rinks (Horgan et al., 2020), and streetscapes (Radice, 2016). These studies underscore the importance of delineating the varieties of co-existence expressed in everyday encounters and the tensions they manifest, paying attention to their underpinning by material and spatial contexts.

My project here is to contribute to this emerging scholarship by providing an analysis of cosmopolitan conviviality as it surfaces in a branded urban public space. Drawing on empirical research material from a study of The Forks Market in Winnipeg, Canada, I consider how the material environs of this public space are configured to support performances of conviviality that are also cosmopolitan in orientation. Recently renovated, The Forks Market is designed to evoke a "commons" and encourage sociability among patrons of its intimate food hall, anchored by a craft beer and wine bar aptly named The Common. It is also configured as an inclusive space where an urban multicultural clientele can gather and share in a culturally diverse foodscape with a range of authentic ethnic, fusion, and local craft outlets. Engaging the intersections between cosmopolitanism and conviviality, I argue that Forks Market patrons co-perform a kind of cosmopolitan conviviality comprised of: (a) convivial sociability characterized by commensality, spontaneous exchange, civility, and trust; as well as (b) cosmopolitan openness fostered by mundane encounters with cultural and culinary diversity. I pay particular attention to the underpinning of such conviviality by the brandscape and its material affordances; in other words, the mechanisms by which conviviality is co-produced. In addition, I consider its ambivalence given the tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity linked to the Market's operation as a "cosmopolitan canopy" (Anderson, 2004, p. 15) and a branded space of consumption. In particular, I examine how The Forks Market's renewal reflects an "upscaling" of the space with an emphasis on authenticity, oriented toward "discerning" middle-class tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). Before moving on to the research material, however, it is important to discuss the links between cosmopolitanism and conviviality, as well as cosmopolitan canopies and urban branding.

2. Cosmopolitanism, Conviviality, and Branded Spaces of Consumption

2.1. Cosmopolitanism and Conviviality

Cosmopolitanism is a complex concept with both political and cultural connotations referring to: (a) a political project and philosophy of world citizenship, and (b) an aesthetic disposition and set of practices premised on "openness towards divergent cultural experiences" (Hannerz, 1996, p. 103; see also Binnie et al., 2006). An emerging sociology of cosmopolitanism considers the ways in which cosmopolitanism is "lived" and expressed in everyday life, including how a cosmopolitan "worldliness" manifests through global migration or travel (Germann Molz, 2011), or the way cultural openness is cultivated in diverse urban centers (Latham, 2006), for example. Some writers in this vein suggest that cosmopolitanism is the reserve of elites for whom it serves as a form of cultural capital (Binnie et al., 2006; Holt, 1998). This is captured by Radice's (2002, p. 151) concept of "commodified cosmopolitanism," which refers to the co-option of cultural openness for instrumental purposes, whether to "sell commodities" or to "gain competitive advantage" through a process of distinction. While this may be the case in some contexts, others note how, alternatively, a "mundane cosmopolitanism" (Hebdige, 1990, p. 20) may be cultivated through everyday engagement with global televisual flows (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002) or the consumption of non-local fashion, for instance (Nava, 2002).

Recent convivialities scholarship has begun to explore the relationship of everyday cosmopolitanism to conviviality, signaling a resonance between these concepts (Noble, 2013; Radice, 2016). While some researchers recommend replacing cosmopolitanism with conviviality as a more effective analytic lens through which to understand "living-with-difference" (Nowicka, 2020, p. 16), others prefer to use these concepts as complimentary terms. As Radice (2016, p. 436) points out, unlike cosmopolitanism, conviviality is not necessarily concerned with cultural diversity: "[A]s a type of sociability, it can emerge within homogenous groups as well as across lines of difference." Indeed, it is Gilroy's (2004, 2006) pivotal contribution that foregrounds cultural differences in convivialities scholarship (Wise & Noble, 2016). Moreover, I would add, cosmopolitanism, even in its quotidian form, is not limited to multicultural openness. There are different types of everyday cosmopolitanism, including an aesthetic interest in and respect for social and cultural differences, but also a moral cosmopolitan "concern for humanity and the world as a whole" which can be seen in daily practices such as purchasing fairtrade coffee (Emontspool & Georgi, 2017, p. 307). Here, I use the notion of "cosmopolitan conviviality" to capture both the convivial sociability and aesthetic cosmopolitan openness that are evoked by and performed within The Forks Market.

2.2. Cosmopolitan Canopies and Branded Spaces of Cosmopolitan Consumption

The term "cosmopolitan canopy" was introduced by Anderson (2004) to describe the kinds of dense, heterogeneous, bounded public or semi-public spaces in a city where people both engage in cultural diversity and perform civil sociability. Based on his study of the Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, Anderson (2004, p. 20) argues that cosmopolitan canopies are relatively "neutral territories" where "opportunities are provided, at least situationally, to connect across ethnic and racial lines." Offering a respite from the streets and more impersonal public spaces where people are generally wary of one another, cosmopolitan canopies are places where individuals feel safe enough to interact "with common civility" (Anderson, 2004, p. 21). For Anderson (2004, p. 28), such face-to-face encounters with others afford the possibility of working toward an everyday "cosmopolitan appreciation of difference."

Taking up Anderson's notion, researchers have investigated an expanded range of spaces as cosmopolitan canopies, including public parks (Barker et al., 2019), farmer's markets (Aptekar, 2019), and even restaurants (Figueiredo et al., 2018). While much of this work shares Anderson's optimistic view of the cosmopolitan canopy as a refuge of diverse civility, others critique this image. For example, Aptekar's (2019) study of a New York farmer's market shows how the appearance of civility and tolerance co-exists with racial and ethnic conflicts and structural inequalities. Engaging in these debates, I consider the potential and limits of The Forks Market as a cosmopolitan canopy and branded urban space.

To be sure, the principles of commercial branding have been increasingly applied to a whole host of urban public or semi-public spaces, from waterfront districts to cities as a whole, in an attempt to rework the ways in which they are perceived and consumed (Harris, 2011). The idea is to cultivate an image and brand experience that will attract visitors and investment, as well as promote consumption (Greenberg, 2008). Cosmopolitan canopies are no exception. Managed by a coalition of private and public interests working together to promote a vision for a place, urban branding often draws on marketing techniques of "brandscaping" to create a coherent image that shapes an entire environment (Greenberg, 2008; Moor, 2007). This involves coordinating physical and ambient elements, a distinct "retail and leisure infrastructure," and representational work to establish the look and feel of a place, themed to convey particular qualities such as "heritage," "cosmopolitan," and so on (Julier, 2005, p. 871).

Management uses the strategy of brandscaping to guide consumer involvement, shaping meanings, experiences, and social relations that in turn co-create brand image and "value-in-use," even though outcomes are never fully determined (Arvidsson, 2006). This requires attention to the gaps between the ideal that brand management evokes and the everyday cultures (Banet-Weiser, 2012) that surface on the brand's platform. Banet-Weiser (2012) develops the concept of "brand culture" to capture the ways in which individuals live their lives, express identities, and form connections with one another within the cultural contexts of brands in this contemporary moment. While she reinforces the idea of "brand cultures as culture," indicating that there is no separation between commercial and authentic culture, she also suggests that brand cultures are characterized by their ambivalence, such that "both economic imperatives and 'authenticity' are expressed and experienced simultaneously" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, pp. 13, 15). It is precisely this ambivalence that characterizes the kind of cosmopolitan conviviality that surfaces in the branded space of The Forks Market and underpins the tensions of inclusivity and exclusivity analyzed here.

This is not to say that convivial performances in commercial spaces have previously gone unnoticed, though. Indeed, scholars have considered how practices of commercial hospitality (usually associated with instrumentality) can give rise to an "ethics of conviviality" comprising authentic forms of urban sociality (Bell, 2007, p. 8), or how markets form important sites of everyday social connection and interaction (Watson, 2009). Yet there has been little academic study of branded public spaces as settings for convivial and cosmopolitan sociability. Branding is a distinctive commercial and cultural form (Arvidsson, 2006; Moor, 2007) that warrants sustained academic attention to the ways in which it co-shapes convivial cultures.

3. Methods

This article draws on material from documentary research as well as visual and naturalistic observation in a case study of The Forks Market in Winnipeg, Canada (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Winnipeg is one of Canada's ten largest cities, with a relatively diverse population; over 25% of residents are foreign-born and 28% identify as visible minorities (City of Winnipeg, 2019). Documentary research was conducted to gain insight into the historical development of The Forks and The Forks Market redesign, using publicly available documents from The Forks website, the architectural firm involved in the renovation, as well as promotional articles and planning documents. This research aimed to develop an understanding of the overall vision for The Forks, especially The Forks Market, and how the Market's redesign manifests this.

Visual observation focused on The Forks Market space, using photography as well as drawings recorded in designated fieldwork notebooks to capture the material and spatial environment. Visual analysis was conducted using material semiotics (Emmison et al., 2012) to consider the symbolic affordances of material items, aspects of design, and their spatial assemblage in the Market. This required noting the way convivial and cosmopolitan performances are supported through, for example, spatial patterning (zones, objects), architectural design and décor, and the coordination of shops and restaurants. Such research is based on the idea that material environs play a crucial role in the co-production of convivialities (Wise & Noble, 2016).

In addition, the method of naturalistic, unobtrusive observation was employed to understand how people use and engage with the Market environment. Unobtrusive observation discerns how people perform conviviality in quotidian ways. This choice of method was inspired by recent research on skating rinks as sociable public spaces (Horgan et al., 2020), but also Anderson's (2004) more participatory research on cosmopolitan canopies. Working with two research assistants, over 100 hours of systematic observation was completed over a period of two years (2020–2022). Detailed observations were recorded in fieldwork notebooks on different days, times, and locations in and around the Market, encompassing five main areas: the main Food Hall in the atrium and two parallel side halls; an upper level of shops and lounge; and the outdoor patio connected to the Market. Observations were standardized with consistent noting of date/time/location at the beginning of each and focused on a clear set of themes. These include: (a) demographics and diversity of patrons and employees (based on estimations of age, gender, white/visible minority, professional status, and so on); (b) the activities people engage in there (eating and drinking, or meeting people, for example); (c) the types of interactions (verbal and non-verbal) that occur between strangers and familiars; and (d) the Market environment (material elements and their use by patrons). This unobtrusive research focused on observable elements of the space, following ethical guidelines for observational research conducted in public settings where there is no expectation of privacy (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018). The field notes did not record any identifying information about the individuals observed. Notably, fieldwork was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Various public health orders resulted in a range of restrictions in public and commercial places such as The Forks, requiring complete closure at times. Over half of the observations took place during periods when all restrictions were lifted, so it was possible to note whether and how pandemic measures affected performances of conviviality.

Regular meetings were held with research assistants to discuss observations underway, ensure consistency in recording data, and maintain a constant focus on the research themes. Of course, each researcher brings a particular set of understandings and skills to the field, allowing them to capture different elements and contribute more nuanced observations. Following the fieldwork, I met with the research assistants steadily as we undertook a systematic review of field notes, established a list of codes to categorize the data, and proceeded with coding to reveal the set of themes that I discuss next (Kirby et al., 2006). The themes reflect predominant patterns of social interaction, activity, and use of space, as well as demographic trends. Such patterns were observed and verified by all of the researchers. Exceptions to these patterns were quite rare (though they do exist). I report on these themes using exemplary excerpts from the field notes. Thus, the excerpts are not simply anecdotes but illustrate patterns of activity noted as part of an extensive, systematic process of naturalistic observation. While research assistants were involved in gathering, coding, and categorizing the data, the final analysis presented here is my own.

4. The Forks Market

Located at the intersection of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in the city of Winnipeg, The Forks is described as a "meeting place" (The Forks, 2022a) because of its historical role as a place for Indigenous trade, and, following colonization, European settlement, industry, and immigration. Over the past three decades, The Forks—a former railyard—has been redeveloped into a thriving heritage tourist site featuring a children's museum and playground, entertainment spaces, a riverwalk, a boutique hotel, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights designed by "starchitect" Antoine Predock. Bringing urbanites together to eat and drink, visit the shops and museums, and celebrate major events, The Forks serves as one of Winnipeg's most significant public spaces and sources of civic pride (The Forks, 2023).

This article concentrates on The Forks Market—an anchoring space within the larger site—described on The Forks website as a "vibrant" shopping and food hall destination (The Forks, 2022c). It operates as a public space in the city, with no entry fee, openly available to anyone. The Market's renewal, completed in 2016, was orchestrated by The Forks North Portage Partnership (a tri-level governmental organization governed by a ten-member board), which owns and manages The Forks as part of a broader downtown revitalization mandate (The Forks, 2022b). In collaboration with the innovative Number TEN Architectural Group, and using techniques of brandscaping, the Market underwent reinvention, drawing on its history as a site of "gathering and trade" to frame its current iteration as a space of community and commerce (Riediger, 2016; see also Number TEN Architectural Group, 2021). To this end, the former festival market, which included vendors such as fruit and vegetable stands, was replaced with a new retail and leisure infrastructure centered on an "eclectic food hall" concept with more local, yet diverse, culinary options (The Forks, 2022c). The Market Loft was restructured to showcase "local maker and retail options," fostering a craft consumption scene (The Forks, 2022c). In addition, the formerly teal-trimmed atrium was updated with industrial architectural features such as exposed brick walls, black steel signage, and natural wood elements. Themed to convey the qualities of "community," "cultural diversity," and "heritage," The Forks Market brandscape invokes a coherent image as a culturally inclusive, urban "commons," circulated via media and reinforced by marketing campaigns. It is manifest in the new Forks Logo, created by Tetro Design in 2018, which signals "a clear relationship between The Forks and The Forks Market/The Common" (The Forks Market, 2018).

In the analysis below, I explore in more detail how the Market brandscape encourages patrons to co-perform this image through cosmopolitan activity and convivial encounters, as well as the tensions it frames. Primarily, I focus on the brandscape's material affordances and their symbolic meanings, considering how these are used as resources for sociability and engagement across differences. In the following sections, I trace the key components of a "cosmopolitan conviviality" that surfaces in this process, which, while discussed separately for analytic purposes, are, in practice, closely entwined.

5. Cosmopolitan Conviviality: Key Elements

5.1. Convivial Sociability

Intentionally designed to "reinforce The Forks' reputation as a meeting place" (Number TEN Architectural Group, 2021) with the aim of "enhance[ing] the sense of community," (Riediger, 2016), the Market's material culture provides "affordances of sociability" (Horgan et al., 2020, p. 147) that encourage people to interact and to engage in an exchange of glances, if not words, to listen in on other people's conversations, or to simply observe and participate in the "spectacle of sociability, of seeing and being seen" (Radice, 2016, p. 439).

In my observations of this place, I found that patrons use such affordances to co-perform a convivial sociability consisting of commensality, spontaneous exchange, civility, and trust.

Most obviously, the food hall itself frames a shared experience of eating and drinking together. The main floor of The Forks Market is configured as a broad food hall comprised of three zones: (1) the North Hall featuring The Original Pancake House restaurant and two "ethnic" kiosks alongside several gourmet food shops (a bakery, boutique wine seller, and specialty candy store); (2) the South Hall lined by colourful murals, with a fish and chips outlet and another two food kiosks; and (3) the main Food Hall in the building's atrium with numerous kitsch, fusion, and "ethnic" eateries. These zones are anchored by The Common craft beer and wine bar featuring a rail-inspired steel canopy that arches toward and frames the dining area, evoking the notion of a "commons" in the food hall space. Enhancing this notion, the main Food Hall offers a range of seating, including bar-height counters, steel-based tables for four, and custom oak seating that forms one long table down the center for communal dining. Upholstered orange booths face inward, promoting a shared experience in view of all, while oversized black and copper drum pendants not only define the space but provide "visual warmth" to establish an intimate ambiance (Riediger, 2016).

Codified as a "commons," with a range of eateries and communal dining space, most of the people I observed come to The Forks Market to share a meal with friends or family, meet with colleagues for a drink, or read the newspaper with a pastry in the company of others. The constant hum of chatter, the sound of laughter, and the movement of people, together with lively music, the smell of coffee, and freshly made food establish a vibrant, social atmosphere. Enjoying food and drink with others in this space and even at the same table at times promotes a shared experience and sense of sociability among individuals. Bell (2007, p. 19) refers to this as "commensality," which, he maintains, "is not always a disguise for competitions over taste and status; it can also be about social identification, the sharing of not only food and drink but of world-views and patterns of living." In this case, commensality reflects a particular way of being together in urban public space, a casual convivial togetherness.

While engaging in a common experience of eating, drinking, and relaxing together, the Market further supports spontaneous social interactions between strangers and familiars. For example, the design of food service and flows, in which individuals must line up together to order food or drinks from the kiosks, enables brief encounters. Individuals were seen asking others about food options while waiting to order, providing compliments, or just engaging in small talk. In addition, many patrons were seen "people watching," or conducting what Anderson (2004, p. 21) refers to as a form of "folk ethnography." For example, from the field notes:

> An older couple next to me sit in [the] orange chair, facing the crowd—people watching while they have coffee and chat.

Indeed, the sociopetal, proxemic patterning of tables, invites a range of social interactions within the main dining hall. Some individuals carried out informal performances (a display of talent), garnering the attention of those sitting nearby. Again, from the field notes:

> A woman who sits at one of the tables…gets up from her seat and requests the attention of the people sitting [nearby]. She announces that she will be playing a traditional song for them on her flute-like traditional instrument as it is Indigenous Day. The people sitting, though not everyone, pay attention to her and give her a round of applause….A woman and young teenager walk up to her and compliment her. Opposite them sit two men; one of them initiates conversation with her friend and all of them start talking to each other.

Still others struck up brief conversations with strangers, often facilitated by and focused on, children and pets, who seem to break down barriers with a common focus. For example, from the field notes:

> A table with two young boys (toddler age) and parents is approached by an older man. The man appears to be making a comment about the kids. He looks to them and talks and smiles. A short interaction, but very friendly and out of the blue.

Such interpersonal, often intercultural, interactions occurred even when strict pandemic restrictions were in place (masking, social distancing rules), and tables were spaced apart. Nonetheless, there was more emphasis on nonverbal communication and verbal exchanges were more guarded, as people kept their distance.

A general "code of civility" (Anderson, 2004, p. 26) was evident throughout the observations, which captured numerous polite gestures, respect for people's belongings and space marked by the use of a table, as well as the provision of assistance with directions, food choices, or putting away trays. Covid-19 protocols, however, introduced another dimension of civility requiring individuals to follow public health orders at times. These were highly regulated with material markers, including signs reminding individuals to "be kind," sanitizing stations, and distancing measures. In line with Market branding, security teams upheld pandemic restrictions in a friendly, welcoming manner while checking vaccination cards and maintaining control, ensuring rules were followed when necessary. This illustrates how civility does not simply occur naturally in these spaces, but is a result of informal and formal social and moral regulation and control, which, materialized in the Market, forms part of the "conditions for conviviality," even when taken for granted (Barker et al., 2019, p. 508).

Trust among strangers was enacted in several ways. I observed individuals asking strangers to watch their belongings (including their cell phones) while they collected food orders. In addition, children were seen wandering (not too far) from their parents but watched by others around them. For example, from the field notes:

> A woman [with] her small child (a toddler) [leaves the child] alone while she throws away their garbage [and] puts their dirty tray away. Seems like a "safe space" to leave the child alone for a moment. While [the] mom is away, people look over at the girl and smile.

Leaving one's belongings or even children alone for moments of time is not common practice in other public city spaces, which are characterized by distrust. At The Forks Market, however, configured as "the city's living room" (Riediger, 2016), there is a general feeling of comfort and safety that allows children to walk around unaccompanied by adults, as captured in many observations. Parallel to Horgan et al.'s (2020, p. 149) study of skating rinks, an "atmosphere of generalized trust" circulates in this public space of sociability, wherein such trust plays an important role in the performance of conviviality, laying down the foundation for "getting along."

Still, the conviviality that I observed patrons co-perform does not meet the community ideal forwarded by The Forks Market branding; rather, it reflects a more loose-knit form of "being together" based on informal, spontaneous, mainly non-verbal exchanges of glances or gestures, but also brief, friendly conversation. This is not a form of community based on deep connection, but a casual conviviality, similar to that observed in park life, where people are "more concerned with getting along (as a social lubricant) than with togetherness (as social glue)" (Barker et al., 2019, p. 499). In addition, and perhaps more importantly, such conviviality is mediated by consumption. While it is not required, I rarely saw anyone at a table without purchased items. As reflected in the field notes:

> Of all the spaces I've been in today, this is the busiest and liveliest. I can hear several conversations and can see various groups of people engaging with one another. Music from the bar. Here, the "expectation" seems to be food or drink of some sort. Every table that is occupied is consuming food or drink.

The consumerist orientation of the Market is further reinforced by the shopping scene on the second floor, clearly visible from the main Food Hall, and the shopping bags carried by people strolling around the area. Here, community is not only cultivated but is also commodified and thus narrowly defined by the ability to consume.

5.2. Cosmopolitan Openness

The Forks Market is also configured as a culturally diverse, inclusive place for gathering. This is evident in the architectural design featuring open, accessible spaces inside and out, with multiple entryways to the Market, wide aisles, and a lift to the loft. Seating accommodates various individual and group needs, with high chairs, wheelchair spaces, and counter seating for lone individuals. The Market is moreover situated in the city center, accessible by private vehicle or public transit. On the whole, the materiality of the Forks—seating, flow, building access—is designed with inclusivity in mind, thus providing "an opportunity for diverse strangers to come together and be exposed to one another" (Anderson, 2004, p. 28).

Observational data confirms that a diversity of people inhabit the Market environment. I saw patrons representing a span of age groups, from young children to elderly folks, differently-abled individuals, with some in wheelchairs, a mix of white and visible minority visitors and employees, people speaking different languages, along with various lifestyle groups, including sports fans, joggers, and moms with strollers, to name a few. Of course, some groups maintain a greater presence at different times of the day or week; for example, more families with children were at the Market on weekends, elderly folks could be seen with coffee and crosswords during the morning hours, and young adults populated The Common bar and patio area Friday nights. Nevertheless, social and cultural diversity was constant throughout, as recorded at each observation. Still, I perceived a subtle racial hierarchy among employees, wherein lower positions of table cleaner, pandemic security staff, and food delivery were predominantly occupied by young, visible minorities. Thus, as Gilroy (2006) points out, racism can still exist alongside conviviality.

On the whole, the convivial environment enables interactions across differences that are unique to the Market compared to those on the street. For instance, on several occasions I observed members of a group speaking a language other than English initiate brief conversations in English with nearby patrons. From the field notes:

> A table of non-native English speaking friends interact with [a] nearby table (a young family with two kids) and ask what is the name of the child and [the English-speaking] child tells them how hold she is (four). As [the] table of non-native English speakers leaves, [the] four-year old child waves and says "bye" and they reciprocate.

Indeed, children could be seen leading intercultural engagement as they wandered to nearby tables in search of play. Again, from the field notes:

> [A white, middle-aged] man converses with his friends, keep[ing] an eye on his son, who roams around near his vicinity. Sitting diagonally opposite them is an interracial [visible minority] couple with their two kids. The man's son goes to their table and the mother starts playing with him; offers "high-fives." The man, in response, goes to their table and starts a conversation with the family and asks if it's okay with them, with his son playing [there]. They don't mind, and he leaves his son in their company....After ten to fifteen minutes or so, he brings his son back to the table and thanks the family.

At times, "people watching" blended into other forms of mundane exchange that cross boundaries of difference, resulting in a series of social interactions wherein cosmopolitan sociability seemed almost contagious. For example, from the field notes:

> A couple of older women, one [who is] white, one [who is] a visible minority (with blue hair) comment with the table across [from] them, a man (white, middle aged) and his son, having lunch. The women are having coffee [and] appear to be "people watching," both facing inward toward the crowd even though at a table for four....[The] woman with blue hair gets up for food and chats with the man and son. [As they conclude] he says, "Have a good day, God bless." Then, he chats with [another] man...at the table next to him about coffee and where they live in the city, say[ing], "Nice to meet you." [They continue to] discuss sports [and] food, [one mentioning he] had Argentinian ribs for lunch.

While such striking interactions occur occasionally, encounters across differences could largely be understood in terms of "rubbing along," a concept that Watson (2009) describes as:

> A form of limited encounter between social subjects where recognition of different others through a glance or gaze, seeing and being seen, sharing embodied spaces, in talk or silence, has the potential to militate against the withdrawal into the self or private realm. (Watson, 2009, p. 1581)

Reflecting this practice of "rubbing along," an "ordinary multiculture" forms part of the brand experience of The Forks Market (Gilroy, 2006). As Anderson (2004) suggests, such everyday experiences of diverse co-mingling encourage the practice of "living-with-difference" (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p. 341) as normal, cultivating an openness wherein "denizens learn to get along and deal effectively with life in this setting" (Anderson, 2004, p. 22). In this sense, The Forks Market resembles a cosmopolitan canopy.

The Market, however, extends opportunities for cultural exchange with its "gourmet foodscape," a concept that "capture[s] the cultural spaces and practices of gourmet food" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 3). Such foodscapes feature "local, organic, and sustainable foods," along with "ethnic" cuisines and specialty ingredients, with particular emphasis on qualities of "authenticity" and "exoticism" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, pp. 19–20). For example, the kiosk Habanero Sombrero uses folk art and Day of the Dead symbolism to market "authentic" Mexican tacos. Nearby, Red Ember sells pizza prepared with ethically sourced local ingredients and baked in its authentic wood-fired copper oven imported from Naples. While each kiosk in the Market presents a different vendor with unique symbolism marking its culinary culture, the kiosks themselves are relatively standardized, materially. Lined up alongside the dining areas, they feature open kitchens framed by exposed brick arches, with vendor names in black steel lettering overhead. This layout serves to materially anchor the diverse kiosks, which are linked together as a common resource in the form of culinary cultural diversity (Figueiredo et al., 2018).

Engaging in such cosmopolitan affordances, it was not uncommon to see a table of friends, each with a different ethnic or fusion food, and it was evident that people were consuming food from different cultures. From the field notes:

> A table of four to six guys, they are each enjoying a different meal—sushi, fries and burger, fancy-looking tuna tacos, a hot dog—a true "cosmopolitan" lunch table.

Patrons could be heard discussing the various food options while lined up at the kiosks, sharing their food choices (as mentioned in an excerpt above referencing Argentinian ribs), and they were often seen glancing at the food already on tables, observing the variety of culinary options being consumed.

Optimistically, Anderson (2004, p. 17) suggests that culinary diversity promotes cosmopolitan openness: "When diverse people are eating one another's food, strangers in the abstract can become somewhat more human and a social good is performed for those observing." However, critics of "culinary cosmopolitanism" submit that it may also, paradoxically, reinforce social and cultural hierarchies (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 92). In particular, it can be used instrumentally to perform cosmopolitan competence, based on the ability to know and navigate cultural differences (which are also "fixed" through commodification) as a source of symbolic distinction between cosmopolitan consumers and others, as well as between cosmopolitan consumers themselves. As Figueiredo et al. (2018, p. 128) indicate, "displays of cosmopolitan competence are more salient in cosmopolitan spaces—those densely occupied by cosmopolitan consumers—because the attempt to create symbolic distinctions from surrounding cosmopolitan fellows demands finer gradations in cosmopolitan display of competence." In this vein, the Market's gourmet foodscape circulates a "commodified cosmopolitanism" (Radice, 2002, p. 150) oriented toward elite cosmopolitan consumers who can use it as a resource to express a cosmopolitan difference (Figueiredo et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, Wise (2011, p. 107) flags the importance of the "social settings in which food is consumed cross-culturally" when considering cosmopolitan outcomes. Within The Forks Market, characterized by intercultural conviviality, the culturally "exotic" quality of gourmet food is downplayed. Cultural differences are normalized in this context, where they are encountered as mundane. Here culinary diversity underpins a "banal" cosmopolitanism, described by Noble (2013, p. 166) as a "practical orientation" in which daily practices of "engaging with people and goods from other cultures" facilitate openness to "a broader humanity."

The Market's foodscape thus reflects a commodified cosmopolitanism that includes elements of a consumer-oriented brandscape, and that exists alongside a banal cosmopolitanism that is co-performed through everyday intercultural exchange in the food hall. The presence of these contradictory cosmopolitanisms manifests the ambivalent character of the Market's brand culture, in which an authentic ordinary cosmopolitanism takes shape within a market framework that prioritizes cosmopolitan consumption, even while promoting inclusivity through accessible design.

5.3. Class-Oriented Consumption

The coordination of the material culture of the Forks Market further invokes a notion of "authenticity," which especially appeals to middle-class consumers, or those with relatively high levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). As Watson (2009) points out in her study of commercial markets in the UK, markets mediate differences such as class in part through their symbolic and material elements, which express particular class tastes: "The look of a market, its materiality and the products sold convey certain social meanings which attract some individuals while disinclining others from entering that space" (Watson, 2009, p. 1587). She explains how markets reflect Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus, which implies that tastes are a matter of class position, and especially embody cultural capital (which is not independent of other forms, such as economic capital), observing how some markets attract more middle-class shoppers than others when their aesthetic and goods align with more "discerning" tastes (Watson, 2009).

In the case of The Forks Market, the "look" of the space is shaped by the brand theme of heritage, which selectively focuses on the Market's industrial rail history. This is manifest in the use of materials, including reclaimed wood, raw steel, and hand-forged blacksmith work, the latter "referenc[ing] a traditional industrial art" linked to craft production (Riediger, 2016). The arched passageways connecting the Market's three halls carry heritage-themed names such as Trader's Lane. In addition, the North Hall features large, sepia-tinted photos of The Forks' immigrant and industrial legacy. Overall, The Forks Market brandscape is framed with industrial-inspired materiality, which conveys a sense of authenticity through its close connection to the past. At the same time, the "look" of the Market has been "upscaled" with high-end elements such as marble counters in the main food hall, where water is served from gleaming copper taps.

Johnston and Baumann (2015) explain that authenticity (always a social construct) is pursued by tourists, foodies, and other cultural consumers as a new marker of distinction in an era of growing cultural omnivorousness, where consumption is increasingly democratized and distinction is no longer sought through the snobbish consumption of "highbrow" cultural goods. In this context, they argue, new markers of high-status consumption have emerged, such as the quality of authenticity, which can be seen in a range of cultural consumption, from food and tourist experiences to home décor and clothing style. It works as a source of distinction since the ability to appreciate and consume "authentic" goods "requires an investment of time and a set of cognitive and aesthetic skills that generally accompany higher education and income levels" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 83).

The authenticity concept is further expressed by the Market's retail and leisure infrastructure. In particular, the gourmet foodscape is designed to offer an "authentic" diverse culinary repertoire, which especially appeals to middle-class foodies and agro-tourists (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Indeed, the cost of food at The Forks Market is not insignificant, where an ethically sourced hot dog, fries, and house-made drink from Wienerpeg (a kitsch hot dog vendor that replaced an ordinary hot dog stand) can cost upwards of $18 CDN. Additionally, the Market refresh cultivates a local maker retail scene where individuals in search of authentic, hand-crafted goods can shop at stores such as Coal and Canary (where one can purchase a $30 CDN candle). Altogether, the rebranding of The Forks Market may be seen to appeal to middle-class consumers, who can decipher and make use of the codes of authenticity conveyed by the space's heritage-themed material culture and authentic consumer goods to display their "good taste" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

While it is not possible to provide a definitive account of the class composition of Forks Market patrons based on observation alone, there are some discernable class signals (Emmison et al., 2012) that provide insight into which groups are represented in the space. Many of the patrons I observed appeared to be professional or middle class, according to visible markers of social status such as high-end brand name clothing (for example, Canada Goose winter coats), professional rank, and subcultural style. For example, white-collar professionals identified by office attire, such as suits and ties or jackets with corporate logos and lanyards, were frequently observed having lunch or meeting for a drink after work. To be sure, the location of The Forks is close to downtown office towers and various cultural industries where many of Winnipeg's professional classes work. Fashionable young adults comprised another group commonly observed in the evenings, including those who could be categorized as "hipsters," a largely middle-class trend, centrally concerned with authenticity in the presentation of self-identity (Maly & Varis, 2015). Unlike Anderson's (2004) observations of the Reading Terminal Market, where he encountered people from a wide range of class backgrounds, at The Forks Market there were very few occasions when I encountered street-involved persons, and even then, they appeared uncomfortable, scanning the space and moving from one table to the next.

The overall impression of The Forks' Market—its look, materiality, products, and symbolic meaning—is largely middle-class, creating an image of The Forks as a middle-class space. This can impact whether individuals feel a sense of belonging there, creating tensions of inclusion and exclusion along class lines (Watson, 2009, p. 1581). Thus, while the cosmopolitan canopy encompasses a wide range of ethnic and racial diversity, as well as differences in ability, age, and gender, there seems to be less class-based diversity inscribed in the brand environment, pointing again to the contradictions of the consumerist-oriented brandscape and the convivial cosmopolitan brand culture that surfaces in the space of the Market.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to explore how a particular kind of conviviality surfaces in and is supported by the branded public space of the Forks Market in Winnipeg, Canada. The empirical material presented here demonstrates how a specific form of cosmopolitan conviviality takes shape in the dynamic interplay of the brandscape forged at the Market and the people who frequent the site. It was argued that the brandscape forms a cultural context of consumption that provides material affordances (and their symbolic meanings) for the co-performance of a convivial sociability and cosmopolitan openness, which is as much a product of the material environs as it is the social and cultural activity of those who use and inhabit the space. It is this co-produced experience that people consume and even pay for as the brand "value-in-use" (Arvidsson, 2006). It forms the basis of a convivial brand culture in which people live out their lives and form connections across difference within the cultural spaces of brands.

Framed as a "commons," the Market supports convivial performances that encompass a sociable commensality, civility, and trust. Such conviviality resonates with the "lighter touch forms of sociality" (Thrift, 2005, p. 145) that are central to urban life, though often neglected (Bell, 2007). Inhabited by a diversity of people, patrons engage in various exchanges across difference, co-performing a mundane cosmopolitan openness in the form of "rubbing along" (Watson, 2009). Of course, this does not mean hierarchies of race and ethnicity are dissolved; rather, they co-exist alongside a conviviality that provides people with the means to address inequalities in the city (Gilroy, 2006). Such cosmopolitan conviviality is further marked by tensions, whereby authentic forms of conviviality and an ordinary multiculture exist alongside commodified versions of community and cosmopolitanism. Such tensions reflect the middle-class and consumption orientation of The Forks Market brandscape and the ambivalence of the brand culture that features in this space.

This study contributes to the debates on conviviality and cosmopolitanism in public urban spaces in a number of ways: First, by focusing on a branded public space and drawing on sociological brand theories, the study provides insight into the ways in which branded spaces, or brandscapes, underpin and support the performance of convivialities through the configuration of a cosmopolitan social infrastructure consisting of a range of material and symbolic convivial and cosmopolitan affordances. This allows an understanding of the "mechanisms" by which convivialities are co-performed, which may be of interest to urban planners concerned with the cultivation of forms of sociability in cities. As the principles of commercial branding are applied to a widening range of semi-public and public urban spaces, it will be important to consider the specific ways in which branded spaces help or hinder the possibilities for convivial activity.

Second, by engaging the intersections of cosmopolitanism and conviviality, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on ordinary cosmopolitanisms by outlining some of the ways in which an aesthetic cosmopolitan openness is expressed in the context of a convivial environment, both affirming earlier work on cosmopolitan canopies but also pointing to the tensions that arise within cosmopolitan brand spaces. In addition, detailing the components of a convivial cosmopolitanism as it surfaces on the platform of a branded public space, the study contributes to recent convivialities research, reflected in this issue, concerned with the varieties of co-existence that takes shape in particular material and spatial urban contexts.

Third, drawing on the concept of "brand culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 13), the study provides insight into the tensions and contradictions inherent in performances of convivial cosmopolitanism in a branded urban public space. Specifically, it illustrates how these are part and parcel of a brand culture, characterized by ambivalence, in which authentic forms of sociability and engagement across differences exist alongside commodified cosmopolitanism and community.

Fourth, the study draws attention to the reworking of public space as it is increasingly branded. What happens to urban public space, which is "fiercely defended as the space of encounter with strangers and as a democratic public realm" (Watson, 2009, p. 1583) when it is subject to brand visions, logos, design, and activity such as brandscaping? While the Forks Market remains a public space and is envisioned as the city's living room, its brand image, as evidenced in the latest renovation, seems to narrow the possibilities for all members of the public to participate. Thus, while aiming to "enhance the sense of community" (Riediger, 2016) in the Market, its configuration as a commercial food hall commodifies community because it is mediated through the purchase of food and drink. Can branding be done differently to support wider involvement and possibilities for exchange, as Anderson (2004) envisaged in his work on cosmopolitan canopies? This is an important question, since branding itself is not inherently exclusive nor necessarily tied to commerce, and could be used toward other ends, such as encouraging sociability, in the context of urban space (Moor, 2007).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Coining of Convivial Public Space: Homelessness, Outreach Work, and Interaction Order

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Abstract
This article engages with the "convivial turn" in writings about the city and offers a reorientation of sorts. Beginning with encounters, rather than particular spaces, we make the case that conviviality and its limits are realised in practices. Rather than starting in set piece urban spaces designed to foster conviviality we start out on the move, with frontline street-based care and outreach workers in Cardiff, Wales, and Manhattan, New York City, as they seek out and meet up with those sleeping on city streets. This provides a view of an improvised conviviality that makes the most of whatever the material affordances of a given city space happen to provide. Our research points to how these encounters necessarily take place in marginal settings and times due to the sorts of exclusions that can be built into contemporary city spaces that can at the same time be welcoming to the public, but hostile toward those most in need and vulnerably located in the centre of things. In this sense, we approach conviviality as a fragile interactional accomplishment and, in doing so, see questions of conviviality and conflict as less of a big-picture paradox of togetherness and distance, hope and hate in urban life, and more of a dynamic relation of co-presence and visibility. Public space, and indeed public life, might then be reconsidered not as a location but, rather, an active, shifting accomplishment, variously coloured by the politics of seeing and being seen.

Keywords
categories; conflict; conviviality; homelessness; outreach work; planning; practice; public space

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article considers conflict and conviviality, two ways in which urban life is commonly represented: The city as the prototypical site of variance, difficulty, and ill-will on the one hand, or a site of co-presence and shared encounter on the other. We do not look to make the case for either one of these representations unconnectedly or vis-à-vis the other, but rather to explore how they might braid together on occasion and complicate or compromise one another. Our intent is to offer an engagement with the "convivial turn" in writings about public spaces and the status of the convivial as an uncomplicatedly good or even "groovy" thing (Wise & Noble, 2016) in urban planning. We are not, of course, critical of the idea of or hope for conviviality but we do aim to contribute to discussions thereof by considering—from a perspective that emphasises interactional practices over space and materiality and design—how conviviality might get done, practically, and how the limits of conviviality are produced in situ.

Our contribution does not begin in notably convivial settings, but rather, we set out and about the city with workers whose very job it is to seek out encounters marked by a convivial spirit; to meet up with "people who are different, but without the idea to [produce] a homogenous group" (Fincher & Iveson, 2008, p. 154). We provide some ethnographic details of such encounters between street-based outreach workers and their unhoused, rough-sleeping clients to demonstrate how conviviality can be found in overlooked settings and spaces that, certainly, were not designed for such "comings together" (Goffman, 1963). Outreach encounters necessarily take place in a range of settings; the very purpose and practice of outreach work is to meet vulnerable clients wherever they are, physically and socially (Hall & Smith, 2017). As such, these homeless encounters are coloured by a kind of improvised conviviality, their participants meet on common ground, socially and materially, relying on any material affordances at hand in producing a setting in which severe need can be met with care and kindness. Before arriving at these encounters, we begin with a consideration of some of the literature on conviviality in relation to interactionist treatments of co-presence in public space. In the context of enthusiasm for the possibilities of designing convivial settings, we discuss the practical management of interactions such that provide for co-presence and for conviviality to occur. In addition to some well-known observations on interaction in public space provided by Erving Goffman, the discussion is grounded in an alternative perspective on categories and category relevancy provided by Harvey Sacks. Here we treat categories not as a fixed schema, nor a label that moves with the individual, but as practical, local, and situated *practices* for organising social scenes and participation in public space. At the same time, we consider how planned settings in which co-presence and conviviality might be found have local limitations and even inherent contradictions; welcoming and attractive on the one hand, exclusory and hostile on the other. This we suggest can be understood as both an interaction order matter, as well as something that is built into set piece convivial settings. We think that our examples of outreach workers and their clients coming together, convivially, and making do with the material resources of whatever setting in which they meet, offers further insight into this relation. Equally, our examples show that conviviality, wheresoever it is found, can be a fleeting and fragile accomplishment. More generally, our examples point to a politics of visibility in urban life that finds encounters between outreach workers and their vulnerable charges also appearing out of place, unwanted, and unwelcome, no matter how convivial they might be internally. We posit that such fleeting comings together at the margins of urban space demonstrate how convivial settings can be coined as a matter of necessity, and more broadly, that the very essence of public space (and of public life) is occasioned in and through the moments of these practices.

2. Accomplishing Conviviality and Its Limits

A body of contemporary writings on urban life have aimed to identify and describe what it is about particular social settings that can give rise to conditions of conviviality. These settings range from the mundane—encounters in a café (Jones et al., 2015; Laurier & Philo, 2006) or on public transport (Wilson, 2011)—to more spectacular planned spaces such as urban squares (Bates, 2018; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020) and public ice rinks (Horgan et al., 2020).

Much of the contemporary thinking around conviviality sets out from the work of Paul Gilroy. Gilroy (2004) encourages us to think about conviviality (along with melancholy) in such a way that moves away from troubles associated with the retention of essentialist notions of ethnicity, race, and nation in multiculturalist and communitarian thinking. Conviviality offers a means of revitalising a sense of the possibilities and modalities for a public life lived together. Gilroy's (2004) notion of conviviality overcomes the centrality of the autonomous individual as well as the constraints of the community by emphasising a connectedness of the human condition obscured by dominant categorisations of race, class, gender, and so on (Neal et al., 2019; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2013). Conviviality proper is defined by Gilroy (2004, p. 27) as:

> A social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not—as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must—add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication.

Along these same lines, much of the hope of planning for convivial urban dwelling stems from observing situations in which differences of ethnicity and race, along with other forms of categorial division, become "unremarkable" (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2013). This is not to suggest, of course, that racial identity can easily "disappear.'' Any hope for conviviality in society more generally runs up against the recognition that those who are viewed as "out of place" will continue to be treated with suspicion, discourtesy, and in far too many instances (lethal) violence (e.g., Anderson, 2022; Rawls & Duck, 2020). People do, however, routinely share space; perhaps not by communicating directly, but by acting in such a way that enables and supports co-presence and a continuity of experience as members of the setting (see Horgan, 2020, on civil inattention and strangership). It is in this sense that we suggest that pursuing urban conviviality and, indeed, a practically oriented sociology of hope (Plummer, 2013), might well begin by attending to the organisation of the scenes in which seemingly deep social divisions are made irrelevant or, at least, can be temporarily sidelined. In this sense, mundane situations are instructive as to the wider possibilities of public space. Speaking of the service line, for instance, Goffman (1983, p. 14) observes that the "first-come, first-served'' rule:

> ...produces a temporal ordering that totally blocks the influence of such differential social statuses and relationships as the candidates bring with them to the service situations—attributes which are of massive

> significance outside of the situation. (Here is the quintessential case of "local determinism" as a blocking device).

We recognise that conviviality properly relates to more than standing in line, but we also want to recognise that anything approximating conviviality cannot be achieved without the sorts of situated standing rules, commitments, and obligations identified in Goffman's writings on public space. Indeed, these practices undergird what Horgan et al. (2020, p. 147) have in mind when they discuss the "affordances of sociability" which, combined, produce what they call "soft infrastructures of sociability." Before we arrive at our empirical examples which demonstrate something of this relationship, we think there are additional insights to be gained from an engagement with the work of Harvey Sacks (1995) and insights from membership categorisation analysis (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Smith, in press).

The first and foundational observation is that any individual can be described through a near-endless array of categories (Drew, 1978). Rather than starting from the sense that people "belong" to categories, Sacks, and the work that has followed, demonstrated just how category selections are made in any actual case through what has been called the "members' categorial apparatus" (Sacks, 1995). A key point for the current discussion is that categories and their organisation are local and occasioned, are yielded by the setting, and are operationalised by members in relation to observable activities. To return to the example of the service line, turn-generated categories (next to be served, end of the line, and so on) have more relevance than population-type categories, unless, that is, there are good reasons for them to become relevant in and through the business of queuing (Watson, 2015). They also accomplish the materiality of the setting as socially salient. Population type categories (of gender, race, and social class too) are recognisable and available, of course, but the work of sharing a resource or a space reconfigures category relevancies in the course of the accomplishment of a given social setting. In a public square, categories relating to activities and spatial/mobile formations—skateboarder, cyclist, smoker, passer-through, a couple, a group, and so on (Lee & Watson, 1993; Smith, 2017)—are relevant categorisations bound up with the order of the space itself. We suggest that it is through this relationship that racial categories (or any other population type category) can be described as "unremarkable" (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2013), precisely because of a situationally reduced or side-lined practical relevancy (Coulter, 1996).

Attending to such interactional and categorisation practices can yield some insight into the production of public space, the possibilities of conviviality and its limits, and a wider interactionally-realised visibility politics of public space. Starting from matters of interaction order we now consider some of the potential contradictions and limitations of planning for conviviality.

2.1. Planning for Conviviality and the Limits of Tolerance

In terms of the planning of public spaces, the recurrent message—from Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, and their contemporaries through to the present day—is that inclusivity and even social transformation (Bredewold et al., 2020) can be achieved through a revised approach to the city's built-in equipment when that equipment is geared toward connection and openness, rather than division, privatisation, and securitisation (Jacobs, 1961; Minton, 2012; Stavrides, 2013). Across the contemporary critical urban planning literature, there is a growing recognition of the nuanced relationship between the built environment, social practices, and encounters and divisions, in an "emphasis on the spatial form and vital materiality of convivial places" (Bates, 2018, p. 985). Various spaces in which this vital materiality has fostered something of the public sense of easy togetherness found in Anderson's (2004) discussion of "cosmopolitan canopies" include settings such as cafes (Jones et al., 2015), swimming pools (Bates & Moles, 2022), and bowling alleys (Jackson, 2019). The materiality of the setting is matched by and supports a convivial sociality.

In keeping with the legacy of attention to the everyday life of public spaces, the vital materiality at the heart of many convivial spaces today is not so very grand at all, tending instead to small-scale interventions. "Edge" and "threshold" surfaces encourage and enable people to stop for a minute and engage in the pleasures of observing the activities of strangers (Bates, 2018; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020) thus establishing the sorts of temporary and shifting co-presence that can foster conviviality. Benches and other forms of seating, open landscaped areas, and sculptures and fountains produce attractive and physically comfortable spaces in which people might stay for a while to "linger, sit, eat, drink, and converse" (Shaftoe, 2008, pp. 60–61). Even though such encounters along these edges might not seem so very significant, the necessary sharing of a space that is not observably owned by anybody provides for something like the temporary blocking of the relevancy of social status and identities described above: first come, first served (Goffman, 1983). Indeed, spaces which require the sharing of an open resource are likely best set to foster diversity and conviviality. An example can be drawn from one of the authors' personal observations. A bar in a city in the UK made food—produced from goods that were otherwise set to be thrown away—freely available to anyone and everyone who entered. This was coupled with a clear sense that no one was obliged to purchase a drink to be there, sit for a while, and help themselves to that day's offering. This accessibility plus the sharing of the space, the food, and an expectation of tolerance made for an uncommon inclusiveness and diversity. No one group could "claim" the bar as theirs over any other: a group of what appeared to be homeless people shared a table next to a group of smartly dressed people on a night out. At the same time, there were rules in place, tacit and explicit; the whole scene was presided over by the landlord who would remind people of the equality of all patrons in and through the equal application of the ground rules: "Hey, everyone! No double dipping the hummus, okay?"

The sharing of resources is at the heart of the production of public space. Yet, at the same time, there is a contradiction, recognised in the literature, surrounding the accessibility of resources, designing for inclusivity, and the apparent requirement for the management of the space by agents (not unlike the landlord above) "with the special job of keeping 'order'" (Goffman, 1963, p. 210). Producing spaces which are open and necessarily shared by whomsoever is there at any one moment is one thing; producing and maintaining a shared and lived tolerance toward the wide range of activities and potential differences between the population of the setting is another. Often such tolerances rely upon the maintenance and management of the social landscape along with adjustments to its physical counterpart (Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020). Designated agents (park rangers are a case in point, see Ablitt, 2021) as well as the "eyes on the street" provided by members of the public play a part (Jacobs, 1961); as does, of course, the built-in equipment of any given setting.

Properly open, accessible, and comfortable public spaces are just that and are so for whomsoever happens to be there at any time. That openness is, surely, the very grounds of convivial public space. Yet, for all that we can celebrate the insights provided by Whyte (1980) and others in fostering comings together and conviviality in public space, it must be recognised that these recommendations were also at the heart of the "domestication" of areas of the city, such as Bryant Park, Manhattan (Zukin, 1995) that once provided a space, a sanctuary of sorts, for those whose lives were caught up in street homelessness, drug use, and the displacement caused by the de-institutionalisation moment. Indeed, Bates (2018, p. 987) writes of the same process in the regeneration of London's General Gordon Square as involving the "transmutat[ion of]…a derelict space, frequented only by street drinkers and cat-sized rodents, into a vibrant hub of multicultural life," and goes on to note that a:

> ...series of public drinking bans have been enforced in an attempt to move the street drinkers out of the square. These bans are intended to make the square a safer and more appealing place to other residents, but they also exclude those people who are already marginalised from other places and may be most in need of access to public space.

Much of this contradiction is embodied by the humble urban bench; a necessity, and valued resource. Yet the concern with the potentially disruptive spectre of unwelcome users is reflected, materially, in the form of benches, hostile to anything but constrained individualised and temporary sitting (Bates et al., 2017). There is a growing consensus that aggressive architecture is bad (Chellew, 2016; Smith & Walters, 2018) and that drinking and begging bans might be a necessary aspect of managing public spaces which, nonetheless, have an exclusory effect (Bates, 2018; Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020); but much of the discussion still finds the street homeless at the edge of things, or problematically visible, or simply not considered at all. One significant proposition in this context is found in the suggestion that a city that is excessively planned—too smooth, with all the wrinkles ironed out—lacks those spaces to which marginalised groups might otherwise go to "get on with their own lives out the way of others." (Shaftoe, 2008, pp. 26–27). Accordingly, the same argument runs that certain areas of the city should be left unplanned, allowed to run down a little, to become leftover spaces. Such "slack spaces" provide a necessary public resource to a whole range of groups who might find the open and planned city does not contain the built-in equipment suited to a whole range of needs (Ablitt, 2020; Cuyvers, 2006; Hall & Smith, 2017; Worpole & Knox, 2007). The very inclusion of this mention of "slack" locales in a text directed to the production of convivial urban spaces points directly to the relation at the heart of our argument. Slack spaces, then, provide a quintessential sort of public "free" space.

The key point we are making here is that the potential of conviviality and convivial space has its limits. Limits that are, from our view, produced in and through interaction order and specific practical resources. As there are good reasons to be hopeful and to support the push for the kind of inclusive urban realm in which different and potentially divisive identity categories might become unremarkable, it remains the case that there are invariably those who, under their activities and appearance, are liable to become treated as very much remarkable, as "out of place," ahead of any other consideration for their needs or reasons or rights to be present. Indeed, in addition to recognising the practices that sustain the possibility of co-presence, Goffman understood public spaces and social settings as sites that are policed in relation to situated rules of conduct and expectations and obligations of self-presentation: "To be awkward or unkempt, to talk or move wrongly, is to be a dangerous giant, a destroyer of worlds" (Goffman, 1961, p. 72). Individuals and groups can thus be found "out of place" by breaches—assumed and actual—of locally established norms of conduct. This sort of mundane exclusion sits at and defines the boundary of public tolerance and can itself stem from little more than appearances.

Whilst plans for convivial spaces are indicative of a move away from revanchist models of the city (see, Lawton, 2018; Smith, 2005)—in both a political and aesthetic sense—the contradictions and tensions sketched above appear to produce some continuing uncertainty as to what to *do* about those unwelcome characters whose sheer visible presence is conceptually inadmissible as a part of any conventionally imagined convivial scene. Wherever one stands concerning the production, management, and potential of convivial city space (and its contradictions), the limits of conviviality seem unavoidably bound up with the visually available relationship between observed activities and their doers and situated notions of who "belongs" in any given setting. Returning to the activities of "lingering" and "drinking" mentioned in the discussion of tolerance and slack spaces above (Shaftoe, 2008), these activities are irrevocably tied to the visually available categories of their doers. "Drinking" is a category-neutral activity in the sense that anyone can do it, yet, of course, "street drinking" is treated entirely differently depending on just who is seen to be doing it. So too with the contrast expressed in the action-categorisations "loitering" and "lingering," even though, descriptively, the activity might be the same (making use of a bench in a park, to have a drink and a chat, and maybe a bite to eat with friends). Eldridge (2010), for example, traces something of this category-action relation when considering differential treatments of and tolerances for urination in public spaces in the night-time economy, adding an important temporal dimension.

The lingering of a mix of certain groups produces a convivial setting; however, the lingering of others can generate unease and conflict relating to the right to be in the "open" setting in the first instance. The wrong type of presence can quickly become a problem that needs managing and likely threatens the success of any planned convivial space until managed (i.e., removed). In this way, the presence of "street drinkers" might, ironically enough, have a unifying effect, categorically speaking. Street drinkers are likely to be reported by multiple disapproving agents, and then discouraged or removed by another class of agents. In more extreme cases—one of which we have observed directly in Cardiff and are sure has happened in any number of cities—the benches that were providing for the sociality of street drinkers are themselves removed. This, of course, has the consequence of individuals and groups of "unwanted" urban citizens being dispersed and meeting up elsewhere. And knowing only too well that they are likely to be so—to be removed, that is—they may look to assemble elsewhere, to begin with, on their own terms and away from whatever set piece convivial spaces the city has offered up, perhaps gathering in those "slack" spaces, away from eyes on the street that might take offence. The dispersal of homeless individuals is a regular and routine occurrence that finds them in a more or less constant state of mobility (Hall & Smith, 2014). Their movements trace something of the limits of tolerance, and patterns of cruelty and kindness, in the city centre. Their movements also produce a challenge for those workers—very briefly introduced at the outset of the article—whose job it is to seek out encounters with these individuals in order to—attempt to—open up a relationship of some sort, to—attempt to—tend to some immediate and long-standing needs, and, primarily, to—attempt to—be there. We want to suggest that these sorts of contacts in these sorts of spaces point to a primal sort of public space; encounters with others, coloured by a togetherness (if only physically, for a while), the sharing of resources (even if just space or shelter), and the sort of improvised and self-managed character that is so very hard to build into city life more generally. Of course, these gatherings themselves produce a spectacle of sorts. Comings together of groups of people have that quality. That is, after all, one of the pleasures of convivial spaces. These encounters and gatherings, however, are not often celebrated. As we go on to describe below, the potential and hope for convivial urbanism that might be observed in these settings is tempered by the same politics of visibility and tolerance of difference that equally sets the tone and pace of the city as "vibrant," "diverse," "accessible,'' and so on.

3. Homeless Outreach

In this section, we turn to two brief descriptive examples drawn from ethnographic research undertaken with teams of outreach workers—municipal and charitable—tasked to seek out therapeutic and supportive encounters with individuals experiencing street homelessness wherever such encounters can be accomplished. The workers are required to be experts in encountering—attuning to, searching for, and finding—those who are "different" (Hall & Smith, 2017). Their daily business, much of it conducted well outside of a 9–5 hour shift, is accomplished across the city, *on* the move as frontline workers (Smith & Hall, 2016). These two ethnographic examples are based on fieldwork undertaken in Manhattan, New York City (Williams, 2022) and Cardiff, Wales (Hall & Smith, 2017) respectively, although we wish to minimise the importance of their geographic locations here. What is noticeable is that the methods and settings of these outreach work encounters are similar on both sides of the Atlantic, and indeed the emergent convivial practices that the occasion will be recognisable across cultures and continents.

Tracing such mobile work reveals a shifting distribution of mostly rogue locations—rear alleys, disused or neglected lots, vacant office frontages, fire-escape stairwells, or residual corners of the cityscape—at or near which outreach workers set up shop for not much more than 10 or 20 minutes, providing hot food, information and advice, health and wellness checks to known and potential clients from the back of the team's van (loaded with thermos flasks, leaflets, donated clothing, needle-exchange kits) before moving on again to continue an exploratory roving patrol. The locations of this work are, as Popovski and Young (2022, p. 2) describe, "mundane and unremarkable" locations—everyday locations that are available for adaptive use and offer the potential for "subversion" (Amin & Thrift, 2002). In the accounts that follow, the attention is not necessarily on the illegitimate or subversive use of places (as in Popovski

& Young, 2022), but on the convivial practices which happen in everyday, mundane, and unremarkable locations. Practices which do not represent the intended or designed purpose of those places, but which produce a kind of conviviality all the same.

There is much more to say here, but the relevant point is that these workers are in the business of actively seeking out encounters with difference, and in doing so they practice their own sort of conviviality, sharing in the production of a shifting and unique collection of (sometimes) convivial spaces which are themselves temporary, fleeting, and vulnerable; sometimes tolerated, and sometimes not. The two examples comprise fieldnote selections from two separate but complementary ethnographic studies of homeless outreach practices in Manhattan and Cardiff. Both studies involved the researchers becoming part of the outreach team that they were researching, and actively doing the job of outreach work in their respective city remits. The Manhattan study was carried out for one year, while the Cardiff study was an extended seven-year engagement. Both accounts that follow were jotted down in situ as shorthand "scratch notes" or prompts and later written up by the participant researchers as full fieldnote vignettes at the end of their respective shifts. They both closely attend the multimodal practical action of the outreach encounter in terms of capturing the interaction as it plays out. These examples provide a foil to a more conventionally imagined urban conviviality, and they can perhaps shed light on the convivial possibilities of such comings together.

3.1. Bobby's Radio

> An urban fly-over and the area beneath it resembling a parking lot, a wide paved space with white markings; to one side a series of construction sites, to the other buildings and a street intersection leading either into town or onto a slipway and back to the multi-lane highway. The space is inexact, lacking an obvious and intended use: taxis wait, trucks pull in and turn around, water pools on ground here and there. The outreach team park their van directly beneath the centre of the elevated highway. There are two reasons for this: one, in heavy weather cars driving along the highway spray rainwater across the barriers and down—if you were to one or other side you would be soaked through; two, there is a low wall here, separating two parts of the space which can be—and is—usefully re-purposed as a seat by those already waiting for the team to arrive.
>
> This is the first stop along an evening's longer route, begun at seven o'clock. It is not a busy stop, usually only five regular clients will gather here—two of them labourers from the nearby construction sites, the others are known to the team as homeless clients. They sit spaced out along the wall, waiting for the outreach van to arrive. The two labourers wait together and when the van arrives, they queue together. Whilst serving food and supplies, Fran (one of the volunteers) will speak to them in basic Spanish, explaining what is on offer that evening; they respond in simple English. This brief moment of practicing second languages is a staple of the interactions between the labourers and Fran. The labourers are polite and quiet, smile a lot and, once they have received a portion of food, they leave together.
>
> One of the others waiting at the stop is a man, Bobby, a long-term client of the team, who has been in and out of the homeless shelter system for years. He pulls a small shopping trolley with him, and usually waits at the back of the queue for the others to be served, allowing himself more time for conversation with the team. On occasion he will ask for particular items, things the team likely already have in the van, such as clean socks, underwear, or items of warm clothing. One evening, Fran asks if there was anything else they could get for him, to make his days a little more comfortable. Bobby asks for a battery powered radio to listen to and mount on the shopping trolley as he walks through the city. A couple of days later the team give him a radio.
>
> The radio proves to change the atmosphere at the stop. Bobby plays music and tunes in to news broadcasts and traffic updates. Whenever the team arrives, those waiting (the five regulars, at least) are sitting closely together along the wall, listening to the radio, discussing the news, the game, and sometimes singing along to a song. The team joins in whilst food is served, with everyone present involved in the conversations. "What's on the radio?" becomes a regular talking point. Before leaving, Bobby lets the team know about the traffic updates for their likely route ahead saying, "You don't want to keep anyone waiting.''
>
> For a time, the stop continues like this, the team providing fresh batteries to keep the radio going. However, Bobby's attendance at the stop becomes less regular; he finds a place (to be and sleep) further away and can't always arrive on time. He begins to find other means of getting by. Without Bobby and his radio, the playful atmosphere subsides a little. Added to which a new face appears, waiting at the stop. An ill-tempered Norwegian man who consistently complains about the food or the quality of the supplies. His negativity grates on the team's, and the other clients', patience. The clients now sit apart on the wall, the established regulars avoiding the newcomer. Fran still talks to the labourers in Spanish, and everyone present would still make small talk about events, sports, music, and the traffic. But Bobby's radio is missed, and the new arrival too often interrupts easy conversations. Things have changed.

3.2. Dylan the Vicar

> The outreach team arrives on Church Street. Vinny and crew have made this street—and, specifically, the modern church and its open porch area—a temporary home. As such, it has become a regular stop on the early morning patrol, and the team have skipped another less likely spot in getting there.
>
> As well as Vinny, Dylan and Bob are there, sleeping bags lined up together under the limited shelter of the church porch. Dylan—an imposing character, but a gentle giant, really—is in one; he opens his eyes, and, seeing Jeff, says, "Oh no, it's you, the bloody Womble." Jeff responds, deadpan: "Do you want any breakfast or not? Come on. Get up!" Getting up to his feet, and his full six foot three, Dylan stretches. He's got hold of a black round-collared shirt from somewhere. "This lot keep calling me a bloody vicar. All I need is a dog collar and I'm sorted," he says. "Bless me father for I have sinned," he adds, putting his hands together in front of him in mock prayer. "Yeah, I know *that*" says Jeff. Dylan starts moaning about the sausages. Again. Says he dropped his on the road yesterday and "it bloody bounced! Even the seagulls wouldn't touch it." There's laughter at the review. Bob is "out of bed" now and seems to be OK, if a little out of it. Unsteady on his feet. Bleary eyed. "God, I was off my head last night. Didn't even get in my sleeping bag.''
>
> Bob pipes up and says: "Show Rob that thing on your phone, Dyl." Dylan's reluctant—perhaps because of the presence of a woman, Charlie the outreach worker—but after a little encouragement, he ends up showing the group a pornographic cartoon version of the Wizard of Oz. Charlie's come over to have a look too, mockingly rolling her eyes and tutting. As they're watching, Gary turns up with a "new face." The new guy is wearing jeans, boots, and a red hiking jacket. He's probably in his early thirties although it's hard to say for sure. He leans into the group and says, about the video, "that looks like something a paedophile would watch" and laughs. Gary says, "Don't say that round here" and new face replies "Why, what's he going to do? Beat me up?" It isn't quite clear who he's referring to, but big Dylan seems the obvious recipient. The admonishment/threat is left to drop, and the team go back to sorting out the food for the gathered recipients. Gary has his usual: sausage roll with a "cocktail" of brown and red sauce. The new guy is asked what he wants. He then enters into a somewhat over-the-top monologue of thanks about how important outreach work is, how it has been a real life-saver: "Literally. You don't appreciate how much we appreciate what you do." "No problem, man," says Rob.
>
> Jeff, Charlie and Rob leave for the next stop, laughing about the encounter. They're discussing Davey's whereabouts, how he's dropped a load of weight and really hadn't been eating enough recently. Rob asks who the new guy was and is told he's just met the "infamous Chazza; a nasty piece of work, thinks he's a bit of lad. He's pulled a knife on an outreach worker in the past."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

What to make, then, of these two encounters in the context of a discussion of urban planning and conviviality and conflict? The first thing, the most obvious, is that these are loose comings together in improvised settings. These settings are not designed for this purpose. The ambiguous space under the flyover provides shelter. The low wall is repurposed as seating. The overhang of the church frontage offers a place to sleep out of the weather and, consequently, a place in which an encounter between outreach workers and their clients might take place. We have comings together in open settings. People arriving, some people already waiting, others turning up, joining in in different ways, still others getting on with things, some disrupting. Not really settings at all, but loose and temporary spaces; and yet there is assembly, organised by way of shared space and shared resource, and not only the staple outreach offer—Bobby's radio, two languages, a risqué cartoon, jokes and complaints, cigarettes on occasion, and company—at the margins.

We might also see that material features are perhaps not, in themselves, so very vital, but become enrolled in encounters. Thinking about those material features as "producing" or even "encouraging" conviviality—marginal or otherwise—misses, in a broader sense, how convivial settings are coined as a matter of necessity. If you want access to a resource that is open to whoever turns up, then you have to play the game; just as you must if you want to join a queue. People will quite often be just "making do," and it is the "making do" that makes for a convivial setting. Just ask anyone who has huddled with others in an outside smoking area on a winter's night. Conviviality only needs a very few props (Peattie, 1998, p. 248), but also, certainly, in these instances, some degree of need, whether that be simply a place to sit, or some food to eat, or a jacket to keep off the cold.

At the same time, things are never quite comfortable. This is inhabiting a threshold space (Stavrides, 2001), not simply sitting in it and watching the world go by, and conflict is not so far away. New faces can bring tensions. There is an inside and an outside. The specifics here get done through categorisations of clients, clients with names, clients without, regulars; dangerous categories too—not applied to an individual, necessarily, but of which even a mentioned can signal trouble. The point is that as much as interactional practices produce convivial spaces, they can destroy them too—in a moment. As much as conviviality is about rubbing along and making do, it requires management, and that management can play out in different ways, scales, and temporalities.

For all that we can point to the internal dynamics of conviviality and conflict in our descriptions, these encounters play out in a city where appearances do matter. Being tucked away under a flyover is one thing (the truckers and taxi drivers might not mind so very much). Sleeping in the entrance to a church might matter a little more and certainly so over time with daily outreach visits extending for several weeks—visits that came to be seen as legitimising a continued (and unwelcome) homeless occupancy. Eventually, the covered entrance was renovated out of existence. A wall-mounted camera and movement-sensitive lighting were installed, shortly followed by an encompassing glazed facade pushed flush to the street and eliminating the porch as an available space altogether. Regardless of what we might have to say about encounters and interactions between outreach workers and clients in this one location, the encounters themselves were judged in conflict with the surroundings. Convivial encounters produced in a space for which that space was not designed were designed out. It is in the event of the exclusionary redesign of the space that the "population type" category relevancies of the incumbents, and the incumbent practices, are brought to the fore and aggressively so. These people and practices are found to be *out of place* in the church porch, to the extent that the porch is redesigned entirely to exclude them. Perhaps more pertinently, the materiality of the space is made acutely enrollable by two opposing situated practices (much like the previously mentioned anti-homeless benches) equally coloured by the politics of visibility.

To finish, we draw attention back to the fact that we have not made much of either of the two cities, as cities, in which each of the above (sequence of) encounters between street-level workers and their clients took place—deliberately so; our point being that it does not matter so very much at all. New York and Cardiff are different sites and cities, markedly so. And, yes, urban planning and homeless policies can vary significantly from one city to the next. But the kinds of careful and spontaneous conviviality, the encounters themselves, that occur between workers seeking out the difference (and damage) and clients making do at the very edge of things—the edge of injustice, of acceptance, of recognition—in each of the two cities referenced are in fact markedly similar. Whatever the differences at the "grand scale," and in city-wide approaches to dealing with the "problem" of homelessness, these encounters look very much alike on either side of the Atlantic. The talk, the care, the management of touch, of information, of closeness, and distance. Of visibility. If you know how to do outreach work in one place, you already know a lot about how to do it in another. When attending to interaction, in situ, in actual existing convivial encounters, there is something stable and consistent and essentially human at the heart of these interactions.

If conviviality is an ethic of openness and care (Fincher & Iveson, 2015), as instanced and accomplished in practice, then that kind of openness and care, combined with an awareness of potential conflict, might be a better place to start than with the material design of convivial locations. This is to propose, in closing, that attending to outreach workers' practices—and to the practices of others like them operating in threshold spaces—indeed, attending to practices full stop, instead of attending to spaces, might get us a little closer to the potential of "the convivial," wherever it might be found.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Strengthening Social Ties While Walking the Neighbourhood?

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Abstract

Social connectedness among neighbours impacts health and well-being, especially during stressful life events like a pandemic. An activity such as neighbourhood walking enables urban inhabitants to engage in incidental sociability and acts of "neighbouring"—that is, authentic social interactions with neighbours—to potentially bolster the social fabric of neighbourhoods and strengthen relationships. With the potential of neighbourhood walking in mind, this article investigates how everyday encounters while engaged in routine neighbourhood walks strengthen and/or weaken social ties among neighbours. To this end, the article draws on three sources of qualitative data from neighbourhood walkers in Southwestern Ontario, Canada: (a) "walking diaries" in which participants took note of their walking routes, the people they observed on their walks, and other details of their walking experiences; (b) maps of their neighbourhoods that outlined the boundaries of their self-identified neighbourhoods, their routine walking routes, and the people they recognized during their neighbourhood walks; and (c) one-on-one interviews during which participants provided crucial context and meaning to the maps and their walking experiences. The findings provide evidence of how interactions among inhabitants, while engaged in neighbourhood walking, help generate greater social connectedness.

Keywords

belonging; imagined community; neighbourliness; qualitative research

Issue

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1. Introduction

For many inhabitants across the globe, living under public health restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic underscored the relevance and value of leisure in their lives (Glover, 2022). Long bouts of imposed self-isolation led to "pandemic fatigue," which drove many to seek refuge in activities that enabled them to enjoy a break or time away from their lockdown experience. Local, publicly accessible spaces became an important source of escape and enjoyment for people because of the restrictions placed on mobility (Mehta, 2020). Specifically, people flooded outdoors, especially during warm weather months, because of their relative safety in comparison to indoor environments (see Cevik et al., 2021), and to get much-needed fresh air, physical activity, and social interaction (Guzmán et al., 2022). While parks gained much attention during the pandemic (Hoover & Lim, 2021), the broader public realm, including so-called "hardscapes" (e.g., sidewalks and streets), emerged as spaces for physical and social activity, too (Wray et al., 2020). All of these developments converged to position neighbourhood walking as a popular activity during Covid-19 (Lotfata et al., 2022).

Neighbourhood walking, one of the few sanctioned options available to people during the early stages of the pandemic, offered its participants welcome physical activity and mental health support. It also appeared to address social isolation by enabling inhabitants to participate in what Glover (2021) regarded as a resurgence in "neighbouring"—that is, engagement (from a safe distance) in authentic social interactions with their neighbours, the people closest and most accessible to them geographically. While Glover (2021) surmised from his own personal observations at the beginning of the pandemic that people were paying increased civil attention to others while walking their neighbourhoods, his claims remain unexamined. To address this gap, this article investigates how everyday encounters while engaged in routine neighbourhood walks during the pandemic strengthened social ties among neighbours.

2. Background

Neighbourhood walking, no matter what the motivation, facilitates encounters of varying degrees of meaningfulness to their participants. As a slow-moving activity that enables walkers to absorb their surroundings as they stroll, walking attunes people to their neighbourhoods. In addition to coming to know the features of the built environment, the shared daily path of a neighbourhood walk makes other inhabitants more recognizable. Even minimal social contact (e.g., walking past one another with no acknowledgement) has the potential to increase public familiarity (Rietveld et al., 2019) and introduce openings for greater social interaction, such as an exchange of glances, smiles, and conversation. Social interaction, here, refers to "formal (e.g., active, planned) or informal (e.g., casual, unplanned) social opportunities during which two or more people attend to the quality of their relationships" (Kim & Kaplan, 2004, p. 316). When neighbours do stop to talk with one other, their exchange, no matter how brief or trivial, creates the potential to build and possibly strengthen their relationship, even if only superficially. They no longer see themselves as strangers participating in random encounters. Acknowledging and engaging with others (i.e., neighbouring), moreover, can generate "feelings of solidarity, increases in emotional energy, creation of symbols, and feelings of morality" (Campos-Castillo & Hitlin, 2013, p. 170). Welcoming a neighbourly interaction, then, even if only for a brief, albeit authentic, moment can potentially establish a bond of mutual obligation, which opens the relationship up to future engagement and potential favours (Rosenblum, 2016). What begins as "routinized relations" established during casual walks can turn into something more meaningful (Lofland, 2017).

During the pandemic, many people sought to escape their isolation by going out for routine walks in their neighbourhoods. Those who did so ostensibly became more conscious of others and their local surroundings (Glover, 2021). Evidently, events such as a pandemic reveal "social conditions that are less visible, but nonetheless present in everyday life" (Klinenberg, 1999, p. 242). The emergence of Covid-19, in other words, appeared to make people aware of their inattentiveness toward those with whom they were copresent, the sociological term used to describe when people are "physically proximate, but socially distant" (Horgan, 2012, p. 608). While public health restrictions aimed to minimize physical distance among people, neighbourhood walkers seemingly found themselves occupying the same physical space (e.g., sidewalks and paths) at the same time as others (Glover, 2021). However, instead of remaining aloof or disinterested during their encounters—as expected under normal circumstances in modern communities of propinquity characterized by individuation and the desire for quasi-anonymity—they seemed to show interest in those they encountered. As a New York City resident commented in a New York Times article at the beginning of the pandemic, "The word 'neighbour' has taken on a new meaning. We now greet each other with more than a polite hello; we've crossed a line with each other" (Ruhling, 2020). While Covid-19 undoubtedly posed a challenge to personal networks of close relations, it had an even greater impact on social connectedness by limiting incidental sociability. Neighbourhood walking represented one of the few activities that facilitated this incidental sociability during Covid-19 and therefore warrants investigation as a means to facilitate greater social connectedness.

Walking and its relationship with social connectedness have received some attention in the literature. Scholars point to walking as a social practice that enables individuals to engage in sensory and embodied experiences (Kanellopoulou, 2017), creates a sense of "rhythmicity" (Vergunst, 2010; Wunderlich, 2008), facilitates encounters and interactions with others (van den Berg et al., 2017), opens up opportunities for conversation (Shortell & Brown, 2016), and invites the possibility to form social connections and relationships (Lund, 2003). In addition, an impressive number of studies focus on perceptions and features of the walkability (i.e., design) of a neighbourhood and their association with social capital (see Hanibuchi et al., 2012; Leyden, 2003). Interestingly, however, Lund (2003) found no significant direct relationship between objective environmental variables and acts of neighbouring. Moreover, after examining the proposition that more walkable neighbourhoods encourage local social interaction, Du Toit et al. (2007) concluded influences on neighbourhood sociability extend beyond issues of urban form. While attention to the walking-exchange process and the built environment (i.e., walkability), respectively, remain important areas of research, the social outcomes of walking have received less attention (Ettema & Smajic, 2015). This study aims to address this gap.

3. Methods

Research on social tie strength typically uses quantitative measures of formal network properties (e.g., strength, direction, composition, and density) to generate numerical data on social relations and examine the structural properties of social networks through sophisticated statistical techniques (Edwards, 2010). While enormously useful, these approaches have been critiqued for their "abstract, formal, and structural mapping of social life"

(Crossley, 2010, p. 2) because they reduce complex relationships to numerical data. In contrast, qualitative approaches to studying tie strength provide a deeper understanding of the relationship "story." By focusing on the relationship depth, qualitative methods assist with the understanding of how and why different social ties in a network occupy their social position, thereby making it possible to tell a larger narrative of the underlying drivers that, in the case of this research, tie inhabitants together. Qualitative research methods, therefore, were used to achieve the goal of this project: to understand how, if at all, neighbourhood walking strengthens neighbourhood social ties.

Participants for this project were recruited via local media. Profiles of the study appeared in the local newspaper and on local radio, which provided a URL that interested participants could visit to view information about the study and sign up. Eligibility criteria included any adult resident of Kitchener and Waterloo, twin cities located 105 km southwest of Toronto. In the end, a convenience sample of forty-six participants completed all three data collection phases of the project. Methodologically, Felder (2020) argued "socializers"—those individuals who seek to develop ties with at least some of their neighbours—are considered good informants for research projects on the strength of ties because they are willing to talk, are interested in the topic of neighbouring, and can help reach more interviewees. Convenience, however, led to some homogeneity among participants. 39 participants identified as female, while only seven identified as male. 44 of the 46 participants listed themselves as Caucasian or White. Almost half the sample (n = 20) was aged 60 or older, while the remainder were 18–29 (n = 6), 30–39 (n = 6), 40–49 (n = 4), and 50–59 (n = 8). The sample was highly educated with 41 having at least some post-secondary education. The majority (n = 37) owned their own home. All but one participant were Canadian citizens. Most had lived in their neighbourhoods for a lengthy period: 36 of the participants lived there for 11 or more years; 7 for 6–10 years; 7 for 1–5 years; and 6 for less than 1 year. From a socioeconomic perspective, however, household income varied relatively evenly across the sample: $25k–$49,999 = 6; $50k–$754,999 = 9; $75k–$99,999 = 7; $100k–$124,999 = 7; $125k+ = 6; 11 did not respond).

Data collection consisted of three activities: First, participants kept "walking diaries" (i.e., electronic web-based forms completed post-walk) of at least five walks in their neighbourhoods, specifically to take note of their walking routes, the people they observed, the people with whom they interacted, and to provide other details of their walking experiences (e.g., distance, time of day, duration of experience); second, participants used an online mapping platform to outline the boundaries of their self-identified neighbourhoods, draw their routine walking routes (using different colours, if they drew more than one), and identify meaningful people they recognized during their neighbourhood walks; and third, participants engaged in individual interviews to provide crucial context and meaning to the maps and their walking experiences. Interviews were coordinated and conducted by research assistants via a video conferencing platform. The diaries and maps were used to probe participant responses and stimulate participant recall. Interviews were divided into four parts: (a) inspired by Felder (2020), participants not only considered with whom they interacted on their walks and whom they knew in their neighbourhoods (i.e., strong and weak ties), but also whom they recognized, but perhaps did not know (i.e., invisible ties or nodding relationships); (b) participants were asked what role walking in their neighbourhood played in building, maintaining, and sustaining the social ties they identified in their neighbourhoods; (c) participants were invited to describe how they became familiar with the social ties they identified on their maps and explain in what ways, if any, walking contributed to the strengthening (or worsening) of those relationships; and (d) the final set of questions sought to understand what resources (e.g., information, material, emotional support), if any, participants accessed through their neighbourhood social ties. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, with participants assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

The walking diaries, qualitative maps, and interview transcripts were imported to a cloud-based shared drive to allow for collaborative analysis. To achieve data immersion and familiarity with the entire data set (Bernard et al., 2016), initial analyses involved each member of our research team reading interview transcripts and viewing maps. More specifically, data analysis followed an iterative process that involved a conventional qualitative analysis approach that involved breaking down interview text and mapping data into idea units or common themes to explain interconnections.

4. Findings

The following section presents the findings from our research. We organized these findings into the following themes: (a) social connection as a by-product; (b) social connection as acknowledgement; and (c) social connection as social consciousness. Each theme is illustrated using direct quotes from participants.

4.1. Social Connection as a By-Product

At least initially, many participants failed to identify social interaction as an intentional purpose that drove their neighbourhood walking behaviour. For a few, like Anna, they went on walks "to get somewhere. To go to work. Or to get to the supermarket." Under these kinds of circumstances, participants found themselves focusing on their main tasks and avoiding socializing with others while doing so. The difference between leisure-oriented strolling (i.e., when participants felt they had time to socialize) and utilitarian walking (i.e., when they had to get something done) seemed to make a difference in terms of their openness to interacting with others. In Bethany's words:

> Sometimes walks are about, well, the dog needs to be walked. I have other things to do, but I've got to walk the dog and so I've left myself, you know, half an hour for this task and I don't have time to talk.

Most participants walked their neighbourhoods chiefly for physical activity, namely "to get their steps in" or to avoid being sedentary. Sometimes, this purpose meant they sought to maintain a vigorous pace not conducive to engaging with others. Other participants, especially those who worked from home and had no other reason to leave their house, welcomed the opportunity "to get outside" and "enjoy a little fresh air." Often, in these cases, walking emerged as a substitute activity for participants at a time when their activities were limited by public health restrictions (e.g., the gym closed). As Christa explained, "[walking] was a way to do something when everything was locked down." "It's kind of like, okay," said Dana, "get outside and go for your walk because there's not really much else to do." Accordingly, participants' neighbourhoods, in most cases, represented "the only place they could go" (Christa). And walking presented itself as one of the few sanctioned activities in which they could participate outside of their homes. Correspondingly, many participants began walking routinely in their neighbourhoods as a result of the isolating conditions that emerged with the pandemic.

Mental health arose as a particularly important driver for many participants' walking behaviour during Covid-19. Indeed, many described neighbourhood walking as "a clear my head kind of thing" (Evelyn). For Fern, walking was "a time when I get a lot of thinking done and think through issues and problems." For these reasons, Christa labelled her walking experiences "meditative" because of their therapeutic effects on her mental health. Whether for physical activity or mental health, a few participants underscored their desire to be alone while walking. As Kayla put it bluntly, "[socializing is] totally irrelevant for me [during my walks]." Similarly, Gertrude said, "I don't do the walks for the social." Some participants even admitted to feeling disappointed when others would ask to join them on their walks. "I actually prefer not to walk with [others]," said Evelynn.

Even so, some participants did view social interaction as a primary reason they engaged in neighbourhood walks. For those who expressed such a sentiment, they sometimes saw walking together with family or friends as a way to maintain their social bonds: "During Covid, a lot of times, [walking] was the only time you could meet up with friends and catch up on life" (Fern). In a similar way, Helen saw neighbourhood walking as "more of a family activity" during which she bonded with her husband and children. For others, interacting with people they encountered, as opposed to those who accompanied them, on their walks made the experience meaningful. When isolating at home, a neighbourhood walk could often be one of the few, if only, activities in which participants could see someone outside of their household without a mask on. Many participants expressed delight in seeing other people's faces (i.e., unmasked), whether they sought social interaction or not. Seeing and talking with people during their walks made participants feel like "other people still existed," as Ingrid explained. The isolation made Joy feel as if she were "starved for conversation." Similarly, Christa said she "craved interaction." Walking, therefore, enabled participants to satisfy their social cravings.

Interestingly, whether participants viewed social interaction as a driver of their neighbourhood walking behaviour or not, all participants acknowledged they most often valued it as a welcome by-product of their experiences. Even Kayla (mentioned above), who described social interaction as "irrelevant" to her, made time to interact with construction workers she encountered on her neighbourhood routes. She was deeply interested in the physical changes to her neighbourhood and felt the construction workers with whom she talked appreciated her interest in their work. As a result, she would stop to talk with them and admitted to enjoying the interaction. Like Kayla, Lana told us she was "happy being alone. I'll go for a walk and hope I don't meet anybody. I just want a nice quiet walk. But when I do meet somebody, and we start talking, I find I enjoy the encounter." Gertrude expressed a similar point of view:

> I don't go seeking [to socialize with others], right? Like, when I'm walking, it's mostly visual, you know? It's a physical kind of thing. But when I have conversations that are meaningful, it does enrich my life. I learn things. I feel like I'm enriching their lives a little bit, too, with what I have to say....I just feel conversations, even if they're just by chance, I usually always learn something.

Mia who was open to such interaction told us she "[doesn't] have to see people [on her walks]," but "I actually do notice that I feel good when I come back and say, 'Oh, that was nice. I met somebody' and 'those people seem friendly' or whatever." This sort of reaction led Joy to describe social interaction on a neighbourhood walk as "a bonus." Whether intentional or not, social interaction turned out to be something participants almost always valued during their neighbourhood walks.

4.2. Social Connection as Acknowledgement

Participants described a positive interaction with others as "an understanding or reciprocity." "It's a kind of sweet spot," explained Bethany:

> Like, if you're genuinely friends with these people, it would be weird to just wave and keep walking, right?

> But if you're just neighbours, then it's not weird to just wave and keep walking, sometimes. And other times, you stop and have a longer chat… That to me is really a kind of valuable balance.

That balance, evidently, meant adeptly reading the social cues of those involved in a walking encounter.

Improvisation on sidewalks characterized neighbourhood walking during much of the pandemic as walkers negotiated their neighbourhood spaces in ways that respected physical distancing. Natalie described this negotiation as "the choreography" and "dance." Ophelia called it "negotiating the sidewalk." However participants referred to it, they acknowledged the dynamics involved. As Parker described it, "Because of Covid, everyone's doing the swerve where you, like, walk on the road and you're not getting close to other people." Even so, this mutual scenario introduced shared experiences. Mia offered the following story to illustrate:

> The interactions maybe wouldn't have happened without Covid-19 only because you go out of your way to give somebody a wide berth on the sidewalk, and they kind of look at each other and say 'thanks.' Or kind of offer a weird sheepish, like, isn't this ridiculous? And we're still doing this kind of like eye roll.

Participants appreciated that they were negotiating the pandemic, not just the sidewalk, together. "It's nice that strangers have that same mentality of still, like, we're getting through [the pandemic] together," said Joy. Of course, these sorts of acknowledgements between walkers—the idea of sharing a moment—occurred outside of the context of pandemic living, too. For example, Quinn described the following interaction:

> I was walking by and [another walker] was walking by, and we both kind of smirked at this little kid who was doing a funny dance….We didn't even say a thing, but I remember thinking I can tell [the other walker is] enjoying that, too. So that wasn't a conversation, but it was just something you could tell we both were appreciating the same thing at the same. Like, build that connection for that one minute.

These shared moments when people figuratively "bump into each other" (Raina) were common among most participants.

Bad interactions, unlike positive interactions, meant the people with whom participants interacted had "bad social awareness" when they failed to "read social cues." "If someone's talking and trying to chat you up when you're, like, I don't want any of that, that's a bad interaction," explained Helen. Not surprisingly, situations in which participants' overtures were dismissed by people they encountered resulted in hurt feelings. As Parker said, "It's like rejection [when people don't wave back]. Like, yeah, just feeling kind of lonely." Sadly, Sasha felt dejected by the poor interactions she encountered in her neighbourhood: "Here, it's like nobody even cares about you. So I kind of got used to that….The lack of interaction discourages me further to even do, like, eye contact, or say 'hello'….Maybe nobody cares, so maybe I shouldn't care."

Most participants gave other walkers the benefit of the doubt, however. "They might be pressed for time or something," explained Gertrude. Other participants figured those they encountered who ignored their gestures may have been dealing with other personal issues. From Christa's perspective:

> I figure you never know what's going on in a person's life, right? Just lost their job, maybe they're having family problems. You just never know. So, I give them the benefit of the doubt….Maybe me saying 'hi' actually brightened their day. They may not have said something back, but you know what? Maybe it meant something to them.

Along these lines, positive interactions did not always have to include an exchange of words. Most participants said they welcomed non-verbal gestures, such as a smile or a nod. While many saw such gestures as a "bare minimum" (Craig), most referred to them as "pleasant" and "satisfying." Talking about social interaction while walking in her interview led Anna to appreciate "the value of connecting with people in my community in ways that are not obvious or direct." Ophelia described them as "building moments." "They're small, but they do build something," she said. These moments often gave participants the cue that "this is my opening…to get into a bigger chat" (Joy).

Done well, social interaction resulted in a greater sense of community for participants. Most participants told us pleasant exchanges with other people on their walks "brightened their day." While positive interactions "positively reinforced the walk" (Ulysses), they also made participants feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods. After a positive encounter with an unfamiliar neighbour, Sasha found herself saying, "'Hey, I'm acknowledged here.' And maybe I'm welcome here, you know? Because the lack of those things like eye contact, covering your face, or something, it just makes me feel, 'Okay, nobody really cares.'" Helen believed such encounters fostered a "sense of connection." She said, "I think [walking has] really built a sense of community. It's helped me realize, yeah, I do have greater interactions around the neighbourhood and that's nice." Similarly, Fern told us, "It's comforting still to recognize people in the neighbourhood, even though you don't know them. It just feels like a sense of community, even though you're not connecting with them directly." These sentiments led Natalie to surmise, "I'm not sure how anybody would establish a sense of community if they didn't walk around their neighbourhood….I can't imagine how else you would really meet people, other than the people that live right around you." In short, neighbourhood walking made participants feel acknowledged as members of the community, especially at a time when they were prone to feeling isolated (i.e., Covid-19).

4.3. Social Connection as Social Consciousness

Interacting with other inhabitants on a neighbourhood walk resulted in a growing consciousness of the presence of identifiable members of participants' neighbourhoods. To build on the theme above, acknowledgement led not only to a sense of belonging among participants but also to a process of neighbourhood inhabitants fitting into participants' imagined community. Belonging, in this sense, went both ways. Accordingly, participants spoke about it as a learning process. For example, Bethany offered the following story:

> There's one person that lives on my street, but on the next block. I've always admired her house, but I had never ever seen her. Like, never. Finally, she introduced herself during a walk. And when she introduced herself and where she lives, I thought, "Oh, my gosh! That's who lives there." I've never set eyes on her before. So I thought how interesting that this person lives, how many houses away? And I had never seen her and not even looked at her, right? She's not recognizable to me at all. And yet, I've walked by that house a few times a day for well over a decade. It just shows how you can just exist anonymously in a neighbourhood on a street and not know your neighbour.

Experiences of expanding consciousness of who belongs to their neighbourhood led both Raina and Bethany separately to describe neighbourhood walking as "serendipitous" insofar as it facilitates unexpected encounters that introduced them to new people. While Bethany characterized neighbourhood walking as having "its own kind of rhythm and purpose," she also described it as having "potential." It opened up the possibility of meeting people.

After being introduced to people on walks, relationships began to develop. For some participants, those relationships remained at "a pleasant distance" and "largely anonymous," albeit "familiar." These participants often cited encountering a recognizable "guy" who became a regular feature of their neighbourhood walks with whom they would exchange pleasantries, but not much more: "yellow coat guy," "pie guy," and "weird guy," among others. Other participants discussed people developing into acquaintances, "people that you have sort of passing conversations with," as Gertrude described them. For Helen, acquaintances were about recognition: "I know where they live and may or may not know their names. I probably know their pets' names. They're just people we have intermittent contact with. Friendly, but there's no depth to it." And for other participants, familiarity led to friendships over time. Friends were described as people with whom they socialized outside of neighbourhood walking. Bethany described these friendships as "kind of a reciprocal, kind of I-invite-you-you-invite-me. We do things together. We understand what's happening in each other's lives from, you know, week-to-week or month-to-month."

In many cases, irrespective of how they defined their relationships with others, these various social connections were perceived by participants as people on whom they felt they could depend for some level of support if the need arose. As Christa explained it, "I got a lot of support around me from those I know on my walking path." This support looked different for each participant, though it fits into various forms. One form was informational support: "[My dog's] had a couple of health issues lately," Vita informed us. "I've chatted with [my neighbour]. She's had some suggestions." Similarly, Wilma told us "We're redoing our roof, so I asked the neighbour that I never talked to before where they got the roof, and it turned into a giant thing. Now, I have their emails and everything." Dana described a similar scenario: "At one point, when we were walking past [someone's] house, we started talking about eavestroughs for some reason and that we needed help cleaning ours out. So then that turned into them coming over to help us clean them out." Talking with people while on neighbourhood walks had the potential to result in helping behaviours.

Social support emerged as another form of support. This support included serving as a social connection with whom participants could socialize. "If you see a neighbour, you know their name, you have a conversation, maybe from time to time you get together, maybe have a barbecue or things like that," said Dana. Similarly, Xavier explained, "It's really nice to be able to walk to someone's house for a little event or, like, my kids being able to run to their neighbour's house down the street to play after school. Things like that are important." Social support also took the form of emotional support. For example, Christa recounted a recent interaction she had with a friend she met on one of her walks:

> I haven't seen this particular person in probably two or three weeks because this person stayed in because of the weather….The person was actually waiting for me [while I was on my walk] and flagged me down. What happened? What the heck is she doing? She called me over because her sister had passed away, and she wanted to let me know. I knew she was close with her sister. She's a very isolated person.

By seeing and acknowledging others on their walks, participants felt a level of commitment to looking out for those individuals in their neighbourhoods. Ingrid described it as "having that community care aspect." She explained:

> If I see that [my neighbour], who's two doors down, hasn't cleaned his sidewalk [of snow] and it's been a

> day, I know that maybe he's just not feeling well. So I'll clean his sidewalk or something. Just that looking out for each other.

Similarly, Yusuf talked about his dad, whom neighbours came to know because of his presence as a regular walker in the neighbourhood:

> Folks are always asking about my dad....He has not been walking the dog very often....I've taken over that duty, but people always remember him. And they're always asking about his health. And I suspect that if and when his health goes down, there is help to be had.

This idea of knowing neighbourhood support exists for participants was a common theme. As Parker explained:

> There is a connection with neighbours like [Grace]. For example, like, if I ever saw anything amiss out of her house, I know I would say something or try to help. And if she ever needed anything, we would be there for her. And I'm sure vice versa. She's very helpful in that way. You rely on the people around you, right? Like it's nice to know and to be kind of recognized and connected in that way.

Ultimately, building social consciousness through neighbourhood walking created a greater sense of connectedness and built up participants' support networks: "That's where you can get support if you need it," explained Terrance.

5. Discussion

Not surprisingly, participants in our study engaged in neighbourhood walking for a variety of reasons that did not necessarily include social connection as the driving factor for their behaviour. Physical activity (Lee & Buchner, 2008), mental health (Doughty, 2013; Paydar & Kamani Fard, 2021), and escape (Roberson & Babic, 2009), in particular, compelled participants to get outside and walk as a means to address their isolation during the pandemic. Of course, the social connection did motivate some participants to address their "social craving" for contact with others outside of their households. Interestingly, Tomova et al. (2020) noted people often crave social interactions when forced to isolate, not unlike during the pandemic when people isolated at home as a public health measure to mitigate the transmission of Covid-19. Sometimes participant openness to an encounter stemmed from the type of walking they did, whether utilitarian or leisure-oriented. The latter proved to offer "a unique opportunity for exercising the capacity for sociability," as Ferdman (2019, p. 298) explained. Those participants who did not walk for social purposes nevertheless tended to welcome social contact during their walks, perhaps because the pandemic limited their incidental sociability in most other contexts. They almost always felt good about a positive interaction, which would often count as a highlight of their walks. This retrospective of their encounters underscores the notion that humans are fundamentally social beings who generally value positive interactions with others.

Interactions during walks took on the character of "a dance" or "choreography," as one participant described it. These descriptions conjure up Jane Jacobs' reference to the intricate interplay of people, activities, and material objects on a streetscape as "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs, 1961, pp. 50–54). Walking as "sidewalk ballet," suggested Ferdman (2019, p. 3), organizes "this intricate, ever-changing collection of discrete and prosaic acts and objects into an organized system of meaning and value." Middleton (2011, p. 2871) went so far as to describe walking as a "body ballet," in which "integrated sets of embodied gestures, behaviours, and task-oriented actions of individuals combine into dynamic wholes that become important places of interpersonal and communal exchanges, actions, and meanings." During Covid-19, participants seemingly found themselves empathizing with those they encountered on their walks because they, too, were negotiating the same restrictions and corresponding challenges of living through a pandemic. The sidewalk, thus, emerged in many cases as a community space of empathic connection during Covid-19. "Body-Ballet," a term coined originally by de Certeau (1984), also points to the way participants unconsciously choreographed their movements in their neighbourhoods during the pandemic, namely by using walking in subtle and unconscious ways as a tactical mode to adapt to, subvert, and resist dominant cultural norms established in response to public health restrictions (e.g., physical distancing, indoor mask mandates, isolating at home). Their choreography arguably involved engaging in social interaction as a tactic to cope with their everyday mundane situations.

It warrants mention that the social circumstances that emerged during Covid-19 made for a unique context in which encounters took place. The shared experience of living through a pandemic and all of its public health restrictions likely opened people up to be present with others, not just copresent. Glover's (2021) observation that people were more willing to pay civil attention—in contrast to Goffman's (1963) idea of civil inattention—to one another during the pandemic, even if at a safe distance, appeared to reflect the experience of participants in this study. As noted above, Klinenberg (1999) predicted such recognition during community emergencies.

Characterized as an understanding or reciprocity, positive interactions during walks gave participants an opportunity to showcase their emotional intelligence, even if only resulted in a nod or a smile. Along these lines, Ferdman (2019, p. 4) noted that "walking provides the opportunity to develop and exercise our social capacities in public spaces, through the development of sensitivity to social signals and the nurture of trust." In sharing a moment with others, participants created a shared world through joint attention and interpersonal synchronization (O'Mara, 2019). Overt forms of engagement with others brought participants together with those they encountered on their walks (Te Brömmelstroet et al., 2017). Where those encountered on a neighbourhood walk failed to read the social cues or responded in a seemingly rude way, negative interpretations, not surprisingly, resulted. Responses of indifference may have represented what Simmel (1971) regarded as a coping strategy for negotiating the sensory overload of the city, but perhaps more accurately in this case reflected the sensory overload associated with living through a pandemic. In at least one case, reaction to an unreciprocated overture led to feelings of insecurity and influenced future behaviour insofar as the participant lacked motivation to engage with her neighbours because of her negative interaction(s). Feeling "acknowledged" by others meant something to participants because it made them feel validated (or invalidated) as a member of the neighbourhood/community (i.e., a sense of belonging).

Where positive interactions took place, participants acknowledged the presence of the person with whom they experienced the exchange and felt a greater affinity toward them and consciousness of them. The process contributed to neighbourhood inhabitants, whom participants may not have necessarily known prior to the encounter, fitting into an imagined community—that is, a socially constructed community invented by those who perceive themselves as members of a group (Anderson, 1991). In this case, the group refers to neighbours who are believed to belong to the neighbourhood. The "cultural intimacy" of engaging in the "social poetics" of everyday neighbourhood life through the act of walking transforms the abstract idea of community into intimate expressions of felt solidarities (Herzfeld, 2014). Positive encounters during neighbourhood walks, then, act as reinforcing experiences that serve to build relationships, solidarity, and identity.

Having imagined themselves as members of the neighbourhood—either because they were acknowledged as such or because they engaged in a positive interaction that led to greater consciousness of others—participants came to trust the people with whom they experienced positive interactions, even those they did not know personally. Trust, in this sense, represented the return potential of an imagined community, with the expectation that fellow community members would come to each other's aid if needed (Glover et al., 2020). Here, the construction of an imagined community—a kind of in-group with its own boundaries of membership—appeared to engender expectations, and even demonstrated behaviours, that fellow community members could be trusted to reciprocate prosocial behaviours (Yamagishi & Mifune, 2008). Positive encounters during neighbourhood walks, in this sense, led to a strengthening of social ties among those involved and represented an investment in relationships that built social capital as a resource to each other (Lund, 2003).

6. Conclusion

This research shows how neighbourhood walking during the pandemic led participants to connect with others (often unintentionally), feel acknowledged when they engaged in positive interactions with other inhabitants they encountered, and become more conscious of people whom they came to recognize as members of their imagined neighbourhood. In this sense, neighbouring via walking reflected a humanizing process that led to positive social outcomes. These findings likely reflect the conditions through which participants lived during the pandemic, a period when they experienced public health restrictions on their mobility, thereby limiting their interactions with others and restricting the activities in which they could participate. Neighbourhood walking represented one of the few sanctioned, albeit still limited, activities in which people could engage during the early period of Covid-19. Furthermore, the isolation imposed on people during the height of public health restrictions likely led to a greater openness to engage with others, where and when possible, making the quasi-anonymity associated with pre-pandemic life less appealing. In many ways, neighbourhood walking proved to be a tactic of everyday life that enabled participants to subtly subvert physical distancing restrictions and stay-at-home orders (de Certeau, 1984).

Admittedly, the findings of this study contribute to the romanticization of walking and its relationship to social connectedness since they laud neighbourhood walking as an idealized mode of transport with the potential to engender social interactions (Middleton, 2018, p. 301). While participants did offer stories of negative interactions, their perception of neighbourhood walking remained, with few exceptions, overwhelmingly positive. As Blokland (2017, p. 14) noted, "community always implies boundary work"; how neighbourhood walking performs "un-community" (see Williams, 2016), therefore, warrants attention in future research. However, neighbourliness and perceptions of neighbours will always remain flexible and unstable, as opposed to fixed, so recognizing the dynamic nature of tie strength and its performance also deserves consideration. The relationship between social interaction and specific neighbourhood characteristics (e.g., geographic scale, urban form) remained unaddressed in this manuscript. It should go without saying, though, that neighbourhoods clearly represented the social spaces in which neighbouring occurred, and moreover, where neighbours connected with each other on their walks (whatever neighbourhood meant to them). For this reason, neighbourhoods represent crucial social infrastructure for "community doings" (Blokland, 2017). Talen (2019, p. 192), however, noted the bulk of research on neighbouring focuses "not on the effects of form but on how social relationships [are] predicted by other social variables," such as crime. Correspondingly, she argued planners should reject outright social relationship-related claims about form and refocus their attention on functionality. Research, accordingly, should follow suit.

A fair and necessary critique of this research centres on the homogeneity of the sample of participants. The vast majority of the participants were older White Euro-Canadian women who owned their own homes and lived in their neighbourhoods for a number of years. This lack of diversity among participants cannot be ignored. The experience of people of colour, Black, and Indigenous people during the pandemic suggests their experiences engaging in activities in public spaces subjected them to greater surveillance and scrutiny (Hoover & Lim, 2021), which no doubt influenced their experiences and social interactions when walking in their neighbourhoods, assuming their neighbourhoods even supported leisure strolling, to begin with. More must be done to get at these experiences. Even so, the sample in this study does offer important insights into aging-in-place insofar as it points to the importance of the social environment in supporting older adults and the ways walking can make them feel socially connected. Because this study is exploratory, it does offer initial insights into understanding the relationship between neighbourhood walking and the strengthening of social ties. Qualitative findings should never be treated as generalizable, but they do offer analytic generalization that warrants further investigation. We call on researchers to explore neighbourhood walking and its role in strengthening neighbourhood social ties with purposeful sampling that gives specific preference to the inclusion of more racially and ethnically diverse participants.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Geographies of Encounter, Public Space, and Social Cohesion: Reviewing Knowledge at the Intersection of Social Sciences and Built Environment Disciplines

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Abstract
This article seeks to address long-standing questions in academia, practice, and policymaking regarding the role public spaces might have in promoting cross-cultural encounters and experiences of social cohesion in socially and culturally diverse urban contexts, and what theories and methods researchers and practitioners might use to objectively evaluate this. To answer these questions, this article carries out a systematic literature review of theories and methods for studying person-environment relationships from a range of social science and built-environment disciplines. The review provides a basis for interdisciplinary knowledge exchange to develop an innovative theoretical and methodological framework that draws together key analyses of social cohesion with recent urban design literature, to hypothesize how key social dimensions that characterise intercultural encounter and their social experience of cohesion link to physical, management, and use attributes of public space design. The proposed framework provides a multi-dimensional account of how public spaces with different design approaches are connected to different experiences of social encounters, which in turn impact varied experiences of social cohesion, paving the way for new knowledge about the geographies of encounters.

Keywords
diversity; intercultural encounters; public space; social cohesion; urban design

Issue
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1. Introduction

At a time of increasing nationalism and heightened political debates around social integration, local, national, and supranational policies in the EU and elsewhere remain committed to ideals of social cohesion and solidarity. These policies recognise diverse claims about cultural identities and support a politics of difference and mutual tolerance. Social cohesion is considered a key indicator of a well-functioning and resilient society, but there are divergent ideas regarding its meaning, value, and how it can be achieved and measured (Fonseca et al., 2019; Friedkin, 2004). Although social engagement has become more digitally mediated (Fung et al., 2013) and has been affected in various ways by the Covid-19 pandemic, public spaces remain a crucial domain where citizens encounter social differences (Holland et al., 2007; Lownsbrough & Beunderman, 2007; Mayblin et al., 2015; Putnam, 2000). The importance of public spaces in this politics of encounter has been extensively researched by social scientists (Piekut & Valentine, 2017; Sennett, 1974; Watson, 2006). What has received far less study is what role the actual design of those public spaces can have in supporting and encouraging social encounters, acknowledgement, and interaction.

There is recognition within the urban design discipline of the need to develop more socially and culturally sensitive public space design practices and policymaking to enhance social cohesion (Carmona, 2019; Rishbeth et al., 2018). But there is as yet no framework in place to enable an assessment of the design aspects of public space in terms of their varied effects on social interaction among diverse publics (Peters et al., 2010; Rishbeth, 2004; Spierings et al., 2016). This article aims to fill that important gap. To do so, it provides a comprehensive literature review at the intersection of the social science and built environment disciplines that frame existing knowledge about the geography of encounters. The article seeks to articulate a new research pathway that links design and policy aspects of public space with an assessment of their varied effects on intercultural encounters and social cohesion in socially and culturally diverse contexts.

This article innovates by bringing together a multidisciplinary team to build new links between theories and methods from the social sciences and urban design and between research, practice, and policy. It develops a new conceptual and evidentiary base and an interdisciplinary methodology to increase our understanding of social cohesion in terms of individual and collective experiences of cultural difference within specific public spaces.

2. Geographies of Encounter at the Intersection of Social Sciences and Built Environment Disciplines

Research into the geographies of encounter is a growing, evolving, and multifaceted field, having attracted a wide range of social scientists as well as designers. However, it remains only loosely defined, because of the diversity of research interests involved. Although it has clearly been a central focus for geographical work for the past two decades, it is only a recent interest for the built environment disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, and planning and urban design. In the geographical literature, the concept of "encounter" appears most frequently in works on (post)colonialism, urban diversity, and animal geographies. These studies highlight that encounters are fundamentally about social differences and are thus central to understanding the embodied nature of social distinctions and relationships and the contingency of identity and belonging (Wilson, 2017).

Within this literature, one topic that has attained prominence is urban diversity, because of the ever-increasing social and cultural diversity of cities. While early sociological studies of urban encounters focused on the anonymity of urban life and the figure of the distanced "stranger" (Simmel, 1903; Wirth, 1938), today's studies are interested in examining the complexities of inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and cross-class encounters (Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009). These studies are driven by a concern to understand how difference is negotiated, constructed, and legitimated within contingent moments of encounter (Brown, 2012; Haldrup et al., 2006). Recent work in this area pays considerable attention to the spaces where encounters occur, whether spaces of work, leisure, and education, to understand how space shapes and is shaped by the social interactions therein (Leitner, 2012; Wilson, 2017; Wood & Landry, 2008; Worpole & Knox, 2008).

There is a lack of clarity and scholarly agreement around if and how various kinds of spaces and design approaches have succeeded in promoting intercultural encounters and developing social cohesion within and between members of specific social and cultural groups. Social cohesion has been traditionally understood as "the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society" (Manca, 2014, p. 6026), and is often considered an indicator of a well-functioning society (Stevenson & Waite, 2011). But its value is being increasingly questioned given divergent ideas regarding its meaning and how it can be achieved (Friedkin, 2004). The recent proliferation of irreconcilable definitions reflects different research and policy agendas (Jenson, 1998). We still lack clear and operational definitions and know little about how social cohesion is played out in different cultural contexts and among different cultural groups or how it can be achieved in public space. There is, however, an extensive body of knowledge about the overall role that urban design can play in framing and promoting sociability in public spaces, and the roles of different types of spaces, spatial characteristics, and activities in shaping them. This builds on the seminal urban design works of Gehl (1971), Whyte (1980), and Alexander et al. (1977) and has expanded through later studies (Franck & Stevens, 2007; Kaplan et al., 1998; Madanipour, 1996; Marcus & Francis, 1990; Mehta, 2013; Simões Aelbrecht, 2016). More recent research identifies that different design approaches to social cohesion are being proposed, implemented, and theorised, suggesting that there is no "one size fits all" solution (Nielsen, 2019; Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2022).

This article seeks to contribute to understanding in this area by reviewing existing knowledge in the field of geographies of encounter in order to develop new knowledge concerning how public spaces and their design can support social experiences of encounter and cohesion. This work challenges the stream of geographical research which suggests that public open spaces have little potential for "meaningful" contact, understood as longer-term and deeper contact (Allport, 1954/1979) because public spaces are dominated by fleeting civil encounters; those characterised as "momentary" (Lawson & Elwood, 2014), "passing" (Laurier & Philo, 2006), and "ephemeral" (Brown, 2008; Halvorsen, 2015). Geographers have increasingly recognised the significance of fleeting encounters as pillars of public life, although many still contest the value of such encounters, because of their varied temporalities and quality and their sometimes negative impacts on social behaviours and relationships over time (Wilson, 2017). Such research tends to focus on "parochial," shared, semi-public or private social settings within the public sphere (Oldenburg, 1989), such as spaces of consumption and socialisation—termed "micro-publics" (Amin, 2002; Watson, 2006). It does not examine the wider range of public spaces available for informal intercultural encounters—spaces that may be public, semi-public, or private, but remain open and accessible for use by the broad public—nor their detailed design (Mayblin et al., 2015; Piekut & Valentine, 2017).

These diverging trajectories indicate a lack of intersection between urban design and social science approaches and understandings of urban social encounters and wider social relations, which impedes progress in research, practice, and policymaking for the urban public realm and cities more generally. Urban design scholars have long been interested in how public spaces support social interactions but have not examined if social encounters are linked to the cultural complexities of people's broader, longer-term understandings, experiences and valuations of social differences and relationships, or what contribution such encounters make to social cohesion within cities (Cattell et al., 2008; Dempsey, 2009; Peters et al., 2010; Uzzell et al., 2002). Conversely, social scientists such as geographers and sociologists have a long tradition of studying social encounters, although they have only recently given attention to the material conditions of the urban settings where encounters occur (Mayblin et al., 2015; Valentine, 2008). Practising planners and designers remain ill-equipped to deal with this particularly complex design task, lacking the skills and intercultural competence to understand the diverse needs of different cultural groups (Beebeejaun, 2006; Wood, 2015), let alone to discern what constitutes good practice in public space design.

3. Research Methodology

This article's research aims were pursued through a two-part methodology. This consisted of a systematic literature review of current knowledge from social science and built environment disciplines, followed by a knowledge exchange process where the authors worked with a wider team of academic practice and policy experts from those disciplines to organise this material into a theoretical and methodological framework. The methodology was informed by the authors' emerging body of work in this area. This experience brought them an awareness of the benefits of interdisciplinary research, and knowledge exchange between research, practice, and policymaking if we want to understand where new knowledge is needed, to produce more impactful and meaningful research in this area, and enhance its prospects of application in practice and policy.

The literature review began with an extensive search for articles that study person-environment relationships. The aim was to understand the existing state of knowledge around the topic of geographies of encounter, with a particular focus on the social experience of intercultural encounters and social cohesion, and their links to public space design, management and use.

Electronic searches were conducted using two online academic search engines (Google Scholar and Proquest) using the following key English-language terms: "public space," "social encounters," "social mix," "social cohesion," "diversity," "multiculturalism," and "interculturalism." This ensured that the selected papers use the same concepts and adopt similar conceptual frameworks in their research. The search was limited to English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles from 2001 to 2022. This corpus represents the largest academic readership and the most productive period of research at the intersection of these topics. The sampling thus excludes books covering these themes, many of which build on earlier peer-reviewed analyses. We acknowledge that this sampling has a bias toward Western, and European contexts, interests and understandings of cohesion and public life. Our search yielded an initial corpus of 25,300 articles. This high volume reflects the exponential growth of studies on "public space," but not all of these studies specifically address the role that the design and management of public spaces play in shaping experiences of "intercultural encounters" and "social cohesion." Therefore, in our second search, we included three additional criteria—"urban design," "planning," and "spatial attributes"—reducing the corpus to 10,800 articles. In a third search, we reviewed the titles and abstracts of these articles for relevance to our study's aims and questions. This resulted in 600 articles, which were then analysed according to their focus, aims, context, theories, methods, and contributions, as illustrated by Table 1. To be eligible for the literature review, articles needed to address the aims and focus highlighted in bold, which we considered key themes in the field of enquiry (e.g., aim to investigate the nature of intercultural encounters in public spaces, and the role that public spaces might have in developing meaningful social encounters and relationships with a focus on the public spaces' social and spatial attributes), and address one or more methods and contributions listed in Table 1. Here meaningful encounters are understood as longer-term, deeper contacts which contribute to reducing prejudice and fostering respect between different social groups (Allport, 1954/1979; Valentine, 2008; Valentine & Sadgrove, 2014). This search identified both theoretical and empirical articles that reviewed existing theories and methods and studies that proposed new methodologies. This scoping review yielded only 20 articles meeting all these requirements—a very limited field of focused cross-disciplinary enquiry (Table 2). This narrow sampling of literature allowed focussed insights into our chosen conceptual frameworks, interdisciplinary studies that combine analysis of both social and physical attributes of public space, and rigorously peer-reviewed findings that have been published in academic journals. These articles' full contents were then further reviewed and analysed, as discussed in the following section.

The review results and analysis then fed into a second methodological phase which involved knowledge exchange within a larger multidisciplinary team of contributors. This group includes human geographers

Table 1. List of inclusion criteria that guided the selection of papers for literature review.

- Aims and objectives
  - Understand the nature of intercultural encounters and social attitudes towards migrant communities in public spaces
    - Achieve meaningful encounters among diverse communities in public spaces
  - Explore the role/meaning of urban space and interactions leading to social capital and social cohesion in neighbourhoods.
    - Problematise/ Inform current future policies and agendas
- Focus
  - Intercultural encounters in public spaces
  - Spatiality/ materiality and sociality (social and spatial attributes) of the spaces where encounters occur.
    - Everyday necessary activities
    - Social and leisure activities
    - Traditional public spaces: parks, gardens, streets, other.
    - Non-traditional public spaces
    - Migrant and ethnic/religious communities
    - Young people
    - Research-practice nexus
- Context
  - Global North
  - Global South
  - Global North & South
  - Single case study
  - Comparative study/ multiple case studies
- Theories/ context
  - Conviviality
  - Atmosphere
  - Diversity
  - Superdiversity
  - Multiculturalism
  - Interculturalism
  - Social/Intercultural encounters/ interaction
  - Social cohesion
  - Social capital
  - Social mix
  - Social segregation
  - Contact hypothesis/ zones method/theory
  - Meaningful contact/ encounters
  - Affordances
- Methods
  - Literature Review
  - Observations
  - Interview methods: focused groups, surveys, other.
  - Ethnographic methods
  - Urban design methods
- Contributions
  - Inform local policies (multicultural, intercultural, social cohesion, other)
  - Methodological: e.g., Urban design informed methodological approaches, other.
  - Improve urban design practice: intercultural competence skills/ design/management
  - Role/value/meaning of social interactions
  - Role/importance of open and accessible public space and design/spatial attributes
  - Contact hypothesis/ zones as method as well as theory

and urban designers, embracing academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The team engaged in two knowledge exchange workshops hosted at one participant's UK university, to share their knowledge and experience around the subject and to identify knowledge gaps in theory, practice, and policy. The workshops were organised by two urban designers (Aelbrecht and Stevens), who subsequently authored this article. Both authors

Table 2. List of literature reviewed.

1. Askins, K., & Pain, R. (2011). Contact zones: Participation, materiality, and the messiness of interaction. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *29*(5), 803–821.
2. Daly, J. (2020). Superkilen: Exploring the human–nonhuman relations of intercultural encounter. *Journal of Urban Design*, *25*(1), 65–85.
3. Galanakis, M. (2013). Intercultural public spaces in multicultural Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, *22*(1), 67–89.
4. Ganji, F., & Rishbeth, C. (2020). Conviviality by design: The socio-spatial qualities of spaces of intercultural urban encounters. *Urban Design International*, *25*(3), 215–234.
5. Koutrolikou, P. P. (2012). Spatialities of ethnocultural relations in multicultural East London: Discourses of interaction and social mix. *Urban Studies*, *49*(10), 2049–2066.
6. Kuruoğlu, A. P., & Woodward, I. (2021). Textures of diversity: Socio-material arrangements, atmosphere, and social inclusion in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. *Journal of Sociology*, *57*(1), 111–127.
7. Mayblin, L., Valentine, G., Kossak, F., & Schneider, T. (2015). Experimenting with spaces of encounter: Creative interventions to develop meaningful contact. *Geoforum*, *63*, 67–80.
8. Neal, S., Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., & Mohan, G. (2013). Living multiculture: Understanding the new spatial and social relations of ethnicity and multiculture in England. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, *31*(2), 308–323.
9. Peters, K. (2010). Being together in urban parks: Connecting public space, leisure, and diversity. *Leisure Sciences*, *32*(5), 418–433.
10. Peterson, M. (2017). Living with difference in hyper-diverse areas: How important are encounters in semi-public spaces? *Social & Cultural Geography*, *18*(8), 1067–1085.
11. Piekut, A., & Valentine, G. (2017). Spaces of encounter and attitudes towards difference: A comparative study of two European cities. *Social Science Research*, *62*, 175–188.
12. Rishbeth, C. (2001). Ethnic minority groups and the design of public open space: an inclusive landscape? *Landscape Research*, *26*(4), 351–366.
13. Rishbeth, C. (2004). Ethno-cultural representation in the urban landscape. *Journal of Urban Design*, *9*(3), 311–333.
14. Rishbeth, C., Ganji, F., & Vodicka, G. (2018). Ethnographic understandings of ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to inform urban design practice. *Local Environment*, *23*(1), 36–53.
15. Simoes Aelbrecht, P., Stevens, Q., & Kumar, S. (2022). European public space projects with social cohesion in mind: Symbolic, programmatic and minimalist approaches. *European Planning Studies*, 30(6), 1093–1123.
16. Spierings, B., van Melik, R., & van Aalst, I. (2016). Parallel lives on the plaza: Young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent and their feelings of comfort and control on Rotterdam's Schouwburgplein. *Space and Culture*, *19*(2), 150–163.
17. Toscani, C. (2014, November 12–14). *Public space as urban device for multicultural cities* [Paper presentation]. EURAU 2014: Composite Cities, European Symposium on Research in Architecture and Urban Design, Istanbul, Turkey.
18. Vodicka, G., & Rishbeth, C. (2022). Contextualised convivialities in superdiverse neighbourhoods – Methodological approaches informed by urban design. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *43*(2), 228–245.
19. Wessel, T. (2009). Does diversity in urban space enhance intergroup contact and tolerance? *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, *91*(1), 5–17.
20. Wiesemann, L. (2012). *Public spaces, social interaction, and the negotiation of difference* (MMG Working Paper). Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.

have professional backgrounds in architecture, planning and urban design, and experience in teaching, research and knowledge exchange between research and practice. The authors had previously tested varied formats of knowledge exchange activities and identified group workshops as the best way to facilitate two-way knowledge exchange between research and practice through a combination of activities such as informal presentations and discussions focused on applied knowledge. These workshop events produced the research framework outlined in the second part of this article.

The team included eight individuals with varied but complementary disciplinary backgrounds and expertise. They included two urban design scholars, a Southern-European female and an Australian male, with expertise in public space design and environment-behaviour relations in European, North American, and Asian contexts, two British human geographers both male with expertise in inter-ethnic and cross-class social relations in the UK and the wider European continent, two British urban design practitioners, a female and male, working for a British professional practice (Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design) and for a peak professional organisation (Urban Design Group, the urban design professional organisation in the UK), and two policymakers, a British female and North-European male, working on public realm policy in local government (Greater London Authority). The team is all white and Western, and this could result in potential biases, but at least has a good gender balance (five males and three females), different cultural backgrounds, and working experience across a varied range of multicultural environments.

4. Literature Review Results

The 20 reviewed papers were all found to be driven by a common aim: To understand the nature of intercultural, inter-ethnic interactions and encounters among diverse communities, engagement, and social attitudes towards difference, and how these are played out in public spaces, with a focus on their planning, design and/or management. However, their research objectives vary substantially, reflecting a disciplinary divide. Four papers from sociological and geographical perspectives tend to be more geared towards understanding how meaningful encounters are achieved, and in doing so how these can build social capital and cohesion. The 16 papers of more interdisciplinary scope are more interested in examining the role of urban public spaces and their design in these processes, highlighting this as a key knowledge gap in the field. Nine of those papers, with a stronger planning focus, also have a key aim to inform urban policy and design practice so that they better reflect social and cultural diversity. However only three papers, those with a more sociological focus, problematise current policy debates and agendas on segregation (Neal et al., 2013), social cohesion (Peters, 2010), diversity and multiculturalism, and the strategies towards dominant migrant communities that particular societies wish to integrate or assimilate (Toscani, 2014). The research studies in the Netherlands and Belgium focus on Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, while research in the UK focuses on Pakistanis, Africans, and former British colonies.

Although all 20 papers focus on analysing the dynamics of intercultural encounters, only 11 of them focus on the spatiality and materiality of intercultural encounters. These are generally the most recent literature identified, spanning between 2015 and 2022, except for two earlier papers by Rishbeth (2001, 2004), a key author in the field. These papers also tend to be more interdisciplinary, drawing together social sciences disciplines such as geography and sociology, and design disciplines such as landscape architecture and urban design. This attests to the spatial turn in research on encounters in recent years (Kuruoğlu & Woodward, 2021; Wilson, 2017). These papers address a diversity of aspects including: the symbolism of the design of public gardens, and their potential to respond to the diverse needs of different ethnic groups (Rishbeth, 2004), the atmospheric affordances of the social-material arrangements of the spaces of encounter to understand people's multisensorial engagements with the spaces and objects therein (Kuruoğlu & Woodward, 2021); the role of leisure activities in the spaces analysed (Peters, 2010); and the impacts of both temporary spatial experiments and permanent interventions (Mayblin et al., 2015; Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2022). Most of the 11 "spatial" papers focused on traditional public spaces and everyday spaces of encounter, including parks, markets, workplaces, and other places of leisure and association where everyday interaction and negotiation are compulsory or habitual. This focus suggests that these may be the only spaces that can bring different cultural groups together (Amin, 2002; Wood & Landry, 2008). But five of the most recent papers demonstrate an expansion of attention to a wider range of public space types, many of which are more exclusive and/or private in nature, including railway stations, libraries, and shopping malls.

In terms of context, 18 of the 20 papers are focused on the Global North, with a particular emphasis on the UK and the Netherlands (10 and three papers respectively). These are the two contexts that have experienced the most dramatic changes in the politics of multiculturalism, from denial in the 1970s/1980s to integration in the 1990s and more recently adopting social cohesion agendas in the 2000s (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Most papers focus on a single region or a single case study, including various cities in the UK (Mayblin et al., 2015); London (Rishbeth, 2004); the UK's East Midlands and Southwest (Rishbeth, 2001) and Northeast England (Askins & Pain, 2011), and the Netherlands (Peters, 2010). Eleven papers provide comparative studies, mostly involving European cities. Only one study provides brief comparisons between the Global North and Global South (Peterson, 2017).

A range of concepts and theories are drawn on within this body of work. Nine papers use "social cohesion" or "social integration" as a frame of analysis of intercultural encounters. These examine the extent, nature, value and use of such concepts as policy measures to evaluate the benefits and meaning of social relations. In most papers, the concepts of "cohesion" and "integration" are used interchangeably. "Cohesion" is recognised as a social goal all societies aspire to, while "integration" is seen as a more problematic term, assuming a greater degree of assimilation into a hosting society. The literature defines them both as outcomes of socially and culturally diverse societies and things that can be measured both through social-economic characteristics and, more importantly, through the perceptions and experiences they generate (Peters, 2010). This is a key theoretical advance in recent research. "Cohesion" is seen as multidimensional and multi-scalar, experienced across various dimensions or spheres of social life (belonging, recognition, inclusion, participation, and legitimacy) and various scales (nation, city, and neighbourhood), but most effectively empirically examined at the micro-scale of lived experiences in everyday spaces of encounter. Seven papers use the concepts of "diversity" and "super-diversity" to understand how these conditions impact intergroup contact, understanding and cohesion. They assume "diversity" to be a source of mutual understanding, tolerance, and integration, though recognising that it can result in either passive or active engagement and can result in meaningful cooperation. This challenges earlier work that emphasised diversity's negative effects: prejudice and discrimination (Putnam, 2007). More recent work has shown that the effects of ethnic diversity are highly varied: it can either support or undermine social cohesion (Meer & Tolsma, 2014; Portes & Vickstrom, 2011). In five papers, Allport's (1954/1979) "contact hypothesis" theory is used to understand the extent to which contact across social and ethnic divides can promote social cohesion or social capital. They see "contact spaces" as having a meaningful role in orienting people's actions and interactions, and in shaping intercultural encounters. They call for more research to examine differences in types of contact (e.g., casual or regular, interpersonal or inter-group), their effects and mechanisms, and the spaces and conditions under which they occur (Peters, 2010; Wessel, 2009). Other papers use other concepts that offer new perspectives to understand and address increasingly complex and heterogeneous social contexts. These concepts include "conviviality," a broader range of socialities and relationships, and "atmospheres" and "affordances," which both help understand the spatial and perceptual attributes of public spaces where encounters occur. These papers highlight the need for more interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical inputs that can help understand and address the increasing complexity of intergroup dynamics in multicultural settings.

Methodologically, 17 of the 20 examined papers are empirical. Many demonstrate the possibility and value of combining multiple methods to pursue rich, triangulated data collection and analysis that can improve studies' insights and reliability (Peters, 2010). These methods however generally remain limited to the kinds of field observation and interviews traditionally associated with sociological and geographical research. Observations typically examine different types of individuals and groups and their patterns of behaviour in public spaces. Interviews commonly explore individuals' understandings of their lived experiences, attitudes, and prejudices regarding their uses in public spaces and interactions with differences.

Nine recent, interdisciplinary papers use varied and innovative combinations of methods. Mayblin et al. (2015) combine surveys with life story interviews, audio diaries, ethnographic observations, and architectural experiments that involve building temporary spaces of encounter with a university and recreation spaces. This draws on the multidisciplinary backgrounds of that team of geographers and architects to develop a well-rounded understanding of experiences of spaces of encounter. Kuruoğlu and Woodward (2021) take a multisensorial and multi-scalar approach. They combine methods from visual and material ethnography, exploring both visual and non-visual sensations and analysing and comparing the micro-scale social, material, and spatial arrangements of spaces and the objects, textures, and surfaces that constitute them, as well as the neighbourhoods where they are located, to provide contextualization of their observations.

The papers' findings and contributions are wide-ranging, despite their similar research scope and agendas. The more sociological papers suggest that both fleeting and deeper forms of encounters have the potential to challenge and break down prejudices and stereotypes about "the other" (Valentine, 2008), and thus improve social cohesion. They challenge previous work that claimed that fleeting encounters are not relevant for social cohesion, by finding that both fleeting and longer-lasting encounters can be effective, depending on the context and places where they occur, and on their frequency (Peterson, 2017).

The 11 papers that explore both social and spatial dimensions of encounters illustrate the varied roles of public spaces and their material conditions in promoting positive encounters (Mayblin et al., 2015). Those papers indicate that a range of types of urban spaces can help catalyse tolerance toward difference and build trust. They suggest the need for purposefully-created sites of interpersonal and intercultural encounter, for more research and policy attention to how fleeting and meaningful encounters and prejudices arise (Koutrolikou, 2012; Wiesemann, 2012), and further exploration of the significance of sites of chance encounters in helping people live and engage with difference (Peterson, 2017).

The eight predominantly design-focused papers argue that the spatial, material, and sensorial attributes of a place can structure intercultural encounters (Kuruoğlu & Woodward, 2021). They have divergent views regarding the relative importance of the design and management aspects of spaces. Some work emphasizes the need to provide different design approaches to facilitate encounters (open, closed or open-and-closed designs for user appropriations) and/or represent different cultural groups (symbolism, programming of activities; Daly, 2020; Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2022). Others suggest that the management and maintenance of public spaces have more weight and impact on people's use and experience (Rishbeth, 2004). However, because of the limited range of cultural contexts and types of public spaces studied, they do not provide enough evidence to substantiate these different findings.

The nine policy-focused papers generally point to failures of social and urban open space policies to address social-cultural diversity and the needs of different user groups, and to recognise the roles of both fleeting and deeper interactions to increase tolerance and build trust (Koutrolikou, 2012), and the role of public spaces as key contact spaces for interaction that can build social cohesion. Several papers suggest a lack of intercultural competence among policymakers and practitioners, and their failure to provide different types of public spaces that accommodate different users' needs and allow chance encounters with differences (Spierings et al., 2016), or to acknowledge new types of spaces and innovative actions and intercultural initiatives (Toscani, 2014).

5. Developing a New Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The literature review revealed several theoretical and methodological insights. It also identified significant knowledge gaps, which are key to developing an agenda for future research and debate. One significant knowledge gap is the limited knowledge of the design aspects of public space in terms of their varied effects on social interaction and cohesion, which could inform design practice and policy. The review also highlighted a need to better understand how urban spaces and their social, spatial, and material properties might support meaningful, convivial, both fleeting and durable engagements and encounters, and ultimately build cohesion. Furthermore, it indicates an opportunity to embed social science theories and methods into urban design, and for distinctive research questions and methods about intercultural encounters to subsequently be developed and shaped within the built environment disciplines. These gaps call for more interdisciplinary research in the field of geographies of encounter. It was with this in mind that we formed a multidisciplinary team of academics, practitioners, and policymakers, to develop an innovative and robust theoretical and methodological framework which builds on established theories and methods from built environment disciplines (particularly planning and urban design) and integrates them with sociological and geographical knowledge for studying social relationships, to link the materiality of public spaces with the observed varieties of sociality.

5.1. Theories

Drawing on the two knowledge workshops and subsequent work, the team developed and refined a theoretical framework that aimed to address the gap identified in the literature review, by building new links between the social sciences and built environment disciplines in terms of where and how social cohesion develops in public spaces.

The developed framework was built on two key ideas identified during the workshops. The first was the need to adopt theories and methodological approaches from urban design that focus on the spatiality and materiality of social encounters in traditional public open spaces (e.g., parks; Peters et al., 2010) as well as those examining other common-use public spaces, many of which are semi-public or privately owned or managed but available for broad public use (e.g., railway stations; Simões Aelbrecht, 2016), and optimal public settings and socio-spatial conditions for social interaction that can build social relationships and values. The second was the benefit of complementing these design approaches with innovative measures of non-verbal communication and interaction (Goffman, 1971; Lofland, 1998), measures of contact (Allport, 1954/1979) and meaningful and durable contact (Valentine, 2008) and linking them to established measures of social cohesion (Fonseca et al., 2019; Jenson, 1998; Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Putnam, 2000).

The team identified that non-verbal communication studies could provide a range of behavioural indicators and measures of the degree of social interaction and involvement, which are easily recognized behavioural and social cues and considered largely invariant across a variety of European contexts (Scherer & Ekman, 2005; Simões Aelbrecht et al., 2022). These include body orientation; for instance, 60/90-degree stances between individuals within groups indicate to the public (and to observing researchers) an individual's openness to engage with strangers. "Tie-signs" such as greeting behaviours and "withs," i.e., groups of two or more people signal the form and extent of people's affiliation or cooperation (Goffman, 1971). In terms of "social distance," 1.2 m to 3.6 m is the most comfortable distance for engaging with strangers in most Northern European cultures. Adjustments can be made for different cultural norms (Hall, 1969; Scheflen, 1972; Simões Aelbrecht, 2019; Sommer, 1969). These measures can then be linked to other non-spatial emotional and behavioural indicators of the type and level of social contacts, such as "meaning" and "durability" (Allport, 1954/1979; Valentine, 2008).

Through this knowledge exchange work, the research team developed a theoretical framework that draws together key analyses of social cohesion by Jenson (1998) and Kearns and Forrest (2000) to identify four key social dimensions that characterise the social experience of cohesion and to hypothesize how these dimensions link to physical, management, and use attributes of public space design, as identified from recent urban design literature. This framework is presented in Table 3.

5.2. Research Methods

The urban designers in the team have identified a range of methods from planning and urban design that can be useful to research the role of public space and urban design in supporting social interactions (Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2019). They highlighted the importance of including a context and site analysis and design reviews (Carmona et al., 2003; Roberts & Greed, 2001), to gather and analyse background information on the context and public space in analysis that frames the social encounters

Table 3. Theoretical framework: Linking social experiences of social cohesion with physical, management, and use attributes of public space design.

Belonging and Identity: e.g., cultural representation of cultural groups and symbolism in spaces/objects/uses that represents the diverse community of users, their identities, and histories (Low et al., 2005; Ristic, 2019); spaces and elements that are focused on activities of making, collaboration, and exchange (Lien & Hou, 2019); appropriations of space through daily use and physical transformations of space on specific occasions (Uzzell et al., 2002).

Inclusion: e.g., physical, and visual accessibility into and within a space (Ristic, 2019); good connectivity of public spaces at the city-wide scale (Lien & Hou, 2019); Accommodating the different social and cultural uses and values (Low et al., 2005); expression of hybrid identities in built form (Sezer, 2019).

Participation: e.g., participation in the spaces' design, use and management; integration of under-programmed, temporary, and loose design elements and characteristics that support collaborative action (Lien & Hou 2019); associations between spaces and objects and supportive exchanges and tie-signs (Goffman, 1971), contacts of acknowledgement, greeting and helping (Henning & Lieberg, 1996); meaningful contact (Mayblin et al., 2016); existence of local social networks for different demographic groups (Henning & Lieberg, 1996).

Recognition: e.g., visibility to/from the spaces, visibility of the various users they represent (Ristic, 2019; Sezer, 2019) associations between spaces and objects and expressions of civic culture, through cooperation, restrained helpfulness, civility towards diversity; expressions of recognition and acknowledgment of difference (Young, 2000).

in analysis. The context and site analysis typically include analysis of the public spaces' social, physical, economic, and policy contexts, based on local government policy reports, Census data, and media reporting. But further research is also needed to examine in more detail the public spaces' design aims, process, and outcomes, to identify how social differences and encounters were or were not addressed in the projects' design briefs, and to identify specific assumptions, material design attributes, sub-spaces, and contextual factors for further detailed study and analysis. Design reviews are commonly used methods to research these aspects because they can help to assess a space's design and process against a set of established urban design review criteria—e.g., Quality Reviewer (Cowan et al., 2010), England's National Design Guide (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019), and UN Sustainable Development Goal #11 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). They require gathering information from various sources: design briefs and plans, site visits, site and spatial analysis, and interviews with key stakeholders of each project (client, developer, design team, planning officers, community representatives, and site managers).

After gathering all this contextual information about the design of the public spaces being analysed, it is necessary to understand how they are used and by whom. The most relevant method in this regard is post-occupancy evaluation (POE), a common technique in the built environment disciplines to assess buildings' quality and performance in use (Preiser et al., 2015; Zeisel, 1981/2006; Zimring & Reizenstein, 1980), which can also be used to specifically evaluate the successes and shortcomings of the design in fostering social interaction. POEs can include a range of visual and spatial data: on-site observations recorded through behavioural mapping, field notes, photo-documentation, and video recording, to capture the dynamics and the spatiality of social behaviours and encounters and identify the key spatial characteristics that support and constrain the identified uses and behaviours. We suggest these POE data can be further analysed using non-verbal communication techniques (also known as body language methods), to examine the spatial and performative properties of individual social encounters within these public spaces. This can draw on unobtrusive direct observations using, for example, video cameras to enable later re-examination of behaviour (Hall, 1969; Scheflen, 1972; Whyte, 1980). The behavioural and spatial dynamics of social encounters can be analysed using three key indicators of the degree of social involvement between individuals outlined above: "body orientation," "tie-signs," and "social distance." We hypothesize that these can be correlated to social perceptions of different levels of engagement, to spatially define different experiences of cohesion, but further empirical corroboration is needed.

From a human geography perspective, research on the experience of social encounters with difference requires in-depth insights into people's collective and individual experiences of the social interactions observed and how these places and behaviours connect to individuals' enduring social practices, networks and values, and wider patterns of engagement with social difference. Ethnographic methods are popular methods among geographers because they enable a deeper socio-cultural understanding of public space users' own experiences of the spatial settings and social encounters that have been objectively observed and analysed. Furthermore, they can be used to explore the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of such encounters. Two particularly insightful methods in this respect are ethnographic interviews, such as "go-along" interviews, either with individuals or in groups, where respondents describe the social affordances and meanings of urban spaces while walking through them (Evans & Jones, 2011) and photo-elicitation, based around photographs of other users' social encounters and their spatial settings (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Biographical methods are another set of methods that geographers use to integrate the individual, personal dimension into the study of social encounters and urban spaces. This can involve collecting in-depth qualitative accounts of individuals' lived experiences of the activities and spaces being analysed. The methods generally include individual in-depth interviews, personal diaries of people's social and spatial practices (Latham, 2008), and participatory mapping of people's social networks (Emmel, 2008; Emmel & Clark, 2009). This biographical data can be closely integrated into the other ethnographic data elicited earlier, allowing an exploration of individual users' different perspectives on how and why they interact with social differences in public spaces, what gives these encounters meaning and durability, and how these experiences relate to individuals' wider patterns of engagement with social difference.

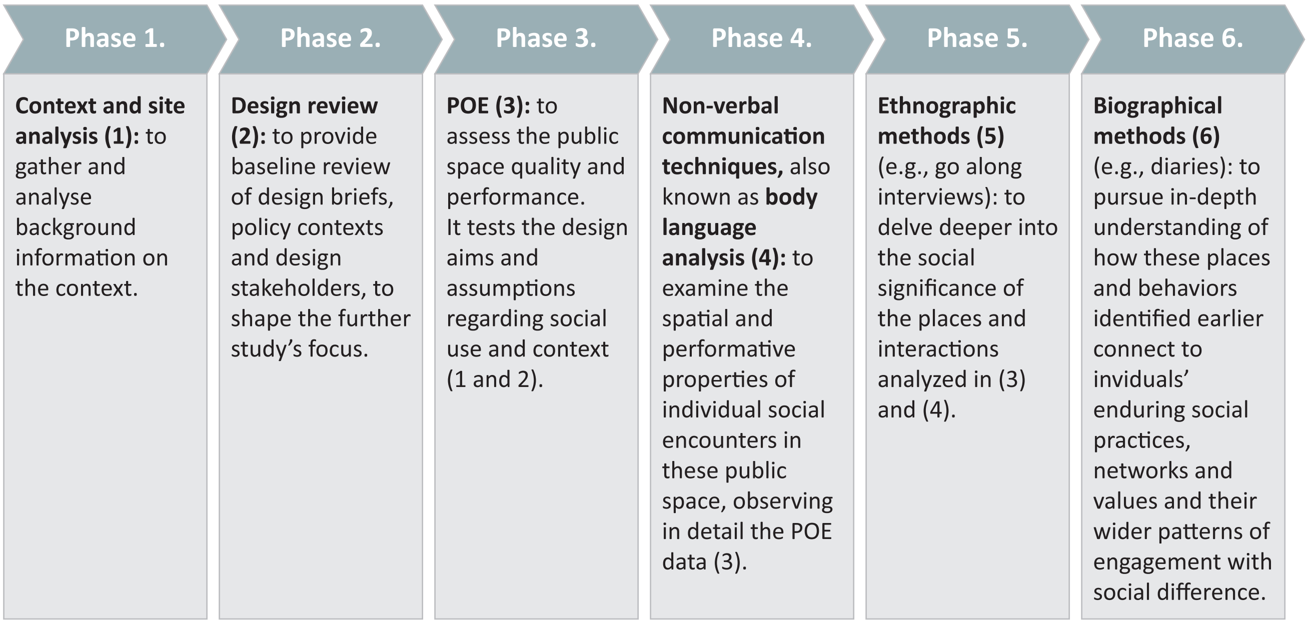
This knowledge exchange helped the team recognise that it would be useful to combine these six types of methods. These are all established methods in their respective disciplines, and they capture and analyse different types of robust data that this field requires. Therefore, a mixed-method approach, combining six methods of data collection and analysis for studying person-environment relationships, promises to be an effective way to address the methodological gaps that our literature review highlighted. More importantly, it could develop a composite methodological framework which could simultaneously focus on the materiality of public space settings, their social affordances, and varied cultural, social, and biographical perspectives and roles. The strength of this approach is that it can collate six key kinds of data that can be triangulated to provide a multi-dimensional analysis of how different case study sites with different types of public spaces and design approaches are connected to different experiences of social encounters and wider consequences for social cohesion.

The team discussed several ways to link these six methods. While there is no definitive answer, we suggest several benefits in following a sequentially nested approach to collect, analyse, and triangulate the data and findings. Figure 1 suggests a suitable sequence. But a research design need not define a strictly linear and fixed process; data collection and analysis can also happen in parallel and in iterative cycles. The research team's experience using these varied methods indicates that the interdisciplinary nature of the research provides a form of triangulation, allowing critical comparison across the data through the different phases of the research.

This methodology promises to develop a pathway for new knowledge by building logical, productive links between specific data types and data collection and analysis methods that are familiar to researchers in the geographical and built environment disciplines respectively. This combination of methods is a key innovation. The team's review of existing literature found no evidence of previous use of this combination of methods in the field of geographies of encounter.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This article introduced a focus on public space design and urban design in the analysis of social cohesion and geographies of encounter, a perspective largely missing in current research. It did so by reviewing knowledge from social sciences and built environment disciplines and providing the basis for knowledge exchange among



Phase 1.	Phase 2.	Phase 3.	Phase 4.	Phase 5.	Phase 6.
Context and site analysis (1): to gather and analyse background information on the context.	**Design review (2):** to provide baseline review of design briefs, policy contexts and design stakeholders, to shape the further study's focus.	**POE (3):** to assess the public space quality and performance. It tests the design aims and assumptions regarding social use and context (1 and 2).	**Non-verbal communication techniques,** also known as **body language analysis (4):** to examine the spatial and performative properties of individual social encounters in these public space, observing in detail the POE data (3).	**Ethnographic methods (5)** (e.g., go along interviews): to delve deeper into the social significance of the places and interactions analyzed in (3) and (4).	**Biographical methods (6)** (e.g., diaries): to pursue in-depth understanding of how these places and behaviors identified earlier connect to invividuals' enduring social practices, networks and values and their wider patterns of engagement with social difference.

Figure 1. Proposed mixed-methods methodology.

a multidisciplinary team of academics, practitioners, and policymakers. These activities enabled the development of an innovative theoretical and methodological framework that draws together key analyses of social cohesion with recent urban design literature, to hypothesize how key social dimensions that characterise the social experience of cohesion link to physical, management, and use attributes of public space design.

This framework can contribute to further theoretical, methodological, and empirical innovation and discovery in the social sciences and built environment disciplines, particularly human geography, planning and urban design. It builds new links between these disciplinary fields, theories, and methods, demonstrating the benefit of interdisciplinary research in the field of geography of encounters. It points the way toward a multi-dimensional and multi-scalar understanding of the increasing complexities of intercultural encounters and people's experiences of living together in cities. It can develop a pathway for new knowledge by building productive links between specific theories, data types, and methods of data collection, analysis, and triangulation, and by enabling simultaneous focused attention on the materiality of public space settings, their social affordances, and people's varied cultural, social, and biographical perspectives and roles.

The framework builds on the general premise that public spaces and their varied design attributes and approaches are increasingly important media and tools that create opportunities for people's intercultural interactions and experiences of living together. This challenges a dominant social perspective of previous geographical and sociological work (Amin, 2002; Worpole & Knox, 2008) which tends to focus more on the social and cultural dynamics involved in such encounters than the material conditions of the spaces where they occur. This framework can enable researchers to further explore the social, spatial, and material attributes of public spaces, to better understand their role in shaping social experiences of encounter, and to examine emerging types of public spaces that may provide new and effective means of bridging socio-cultural divides.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

“Hot+Noisy” Public Space: Conviviality, “Unapologetic Asianness,” and the Future of Vancouver’s Chinatown

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Abstract

Questions of change and the future have become increasingly salient in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the last decade, as gentrification proceeds apace. Various actors have used the neighbourhood’s public spaces to express their visions of Chinatown’s future. These claims are articulated through attempts to demonstrate and strengthen the vitality of Chinatown in the face of growing narratives of its putative decline and death. By engaging with the contemporary sociological literature on conviviality, where relatively “thin” versus more radical conceptualizations of conviviality are being debated, and putting it into conversation with both the geographical literature on the politics of public space and political theory discussions of agonism, we argue that the uses of public space must be analyzed without romanticizing conviviality or consensus in order to understand the productive possibilities of “political conviviality” and agonistic encounters. Our focus is the “Hot+Noisy Mahjong Socials” held in recent summers in an iconic plaza in Chinatown. These are organized by a community group that builds connections between mostly Chinese Canadian youth and largely Cantonese-speaking seniors. These groups espouse a goal of “place-keeping” in the context of planning trends toward “placemaking.” Through this case, we consider how activists from marginalized communities build solidarities through agonistic “place-keeping” in the face of gentrification and threats of cultural erasure.

Keywords

Chinatown; gentrification; place-keeping; placemaking; public space

Issue

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1. Introduction

In October 2019, the Chinatown Transformation Team, a group of City of Vancouver planning staff, organized a presentation of four newly-commissioned murals that had been painted across the neighbourhood as part of the City’s Chinatown Mural Artist Call of 2018–2019. The showcase included a panel discussion with the artists and a subsequent walking tour to the locations of the artworks. The program aimed to help preserve Chinatown’s culture and heritage by funding public art that represented themes meaningful to the local community. It also hoped to contribute to the sensitive revitalization of the neighborhood, rather than foster its destruction in the face of looming gentrification. During the tour, as the artists and their audience, including the authors of this article, stood in a public alleyway discussing a new mural, the Bagua Artist Association’s “Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea” (City of Vancouver, 2019), a white middle-aged male resident of an adjacent expensive condo, objected to people gathering in front of his building’s garage door. He made sure that everyone involved was aware of his displeasure, demanded to see a permit for blocking the right-of-way, called upon a private security guard for assistance, and attempted to phone the city planning department, even though it was a Sunday.

The tour organisers and participants seemed taken aback by the vociferousness of his reaction. He punctured the group's assumption that they were involved in a convivial encounter with each other and the neighbourhood. Suddenly, they were in a somewhat tense standoff. Braving the conflictual atmosphere, the mural artists continued to explain their artwork, which evokes a traditional Chinese folk tale. Ironically, given the circumstances, the artists' statement expressed hope that their "depiction of a classic legend can spark conversations between generations, and provide an opportunity to bridge cultures" (City of Vancouver, 2019). In the alley, they seemed to rush their presentation. The glowering presence of the condo owner—phone pressed to his ear—reconfigured the encounter markedly. He seemed uninterested in building bridges.

The next day, the Twitter account of the Youth Collaborative for Chinatown (YCC) reacted to the confrontation. In two tweets, accompanied by photographs, YCC said:

> Tweet 1. Thoughtful #ChinatownYVR panel ytd on #publicart celebrating comm achievement+pride of new #murals ended in artists+organizers being challenged in public space while out on tours. "You are not allowed to be here" says condo dweller.
>
> Tweet 2. Bullying, harassment, intimidation, entitlement against proper street use permit, legit comm event & 2 @CityofVancouver staff present. Standing ground w/@paulwongproject & Eight Immortals in #ChinatownYVR. NOT what we wanted to showcase but it's still here (racism). (YCC, 2019)

YCC was well-positioned to comment on the incident and its connections to white supremacy, public culture, and claims to space in the neighbourhood. YCC "practices, shares and celebrates the living culture and heritage of Vancouver's Chinatown" through "experiential programs connecting place and people across generations" and is dedicated to "growing a critical mass of young and old who care about the neighbourhood and its future" (YCC, n.d.).

Since 2015, YCC had been organizing summertime social events in a plaza three minutes' walk from the alley where the Eight Immortals mural is located (Figures 1 and 2). These events, the "Hot+Noisy Mahjong Socials," use the tile-based strategy game of Chinese origin, along with food, karaoke, ping-pong, crafts, and other activities to "focus on learning and sharing cultural encounters with the area's Chinese seniors" (YCC, n.d.). Like the mural art, the Socials position culture at the heart of discussions about and strategies intended to shape change in Vancouver's Chinatown. They both take public space for representation and community-building. As we will suggest below, they are intended, among other things, to promote and use conviviality in public spaces to build a community and a political public.

The warmness of the Socials is evident when approaching the plaza from the surrounding streets. Chatter, laughter, amplified karaoke singing, bouncing ping-pong balls, and the distinctive clacking of acrylic Mahjong tiles being scattered, shuffled, gathered, and stacked on four-sided wooden tables are distinctive sounds echoing from the plaza on summer evenings. These sounds are soon accompanied by wafting smells of food and candles, burning in glass jars that children have decorated. Arriving at the plaza reveals an unusual sight for those familiar with the neighbourhood. The triangular Chinatown Memorial Plaza, formed by Keefer St. to the south, Columbia St. to the west, and an undeveloped lot to the north, is frequently empty. The eponymous memorial, which commemorates the sacrifices of Chinese Canadian railroad workers and war veterans, rises in light grey concrete from the ochre and dark grey concrete plaza, flanked by a flag pole with a Canadian flag. The memorial's central pillar, a stylized version of the Chinese character *Zhong*, meaning "centre" and connoting harmony and moderation, is flanked by black statues representing the two groups of ancestors (Government of Canada, 2023). Eight spindly urban trees dot the plaza and three underused benches line its northern edge. Yet, on a Hot+Noisy evening, the plaza is lively and vibrant. One hundred and fifty people attended the first of the events in 2015, bringing colour to the plaza—blue plastic stools and yellow folding chairs surrounding the Mahjong tables, a bright orange, green, and blue YCC banner strung from the trees, coloured chalk brightening the ochre pavers, while the leaves of the trees catch the setting summer sun, revealing various shades of green and casting pleasant, dappled light on the proceedings. Elders, dressed in eclectic, often vivid, clothing (recently captured in the book *Chinatown Pretty*; Lo & Luu, 2020) further brighten the scene as they skillfully manipulate the lilac, pink, green, and white Mahjong tiles. After sunset, lanterns and the screen of the karaoke machine illuminate the scene and allow the Socials to continue into the night.

While the Socials were welcoming, they were clearly intended to be primarily by and for the Chinatown and Chinese Canadian community itself. During a conference entitled "Whose Chinatown?," Doris Chow (2021), a co-organizer of YCC, explained why they created the events as a "cultural practice and expression as resistance'':

> It's really about being unapologetically and publicly Asian, as opposed to a tourist-driven kind of neighbourhood….I guess for me when we're talking about catering to tourists it's really about being "palatable." And so what does it mean when we're centering ourselves as a community and doing what we want to do? It looks like this: Mahjong taking up space, Karaoke, loud singing—very loudly to the wee hours. You know, when it's dark and literally everyone's still trying to huddle around a little screen to try and sing,

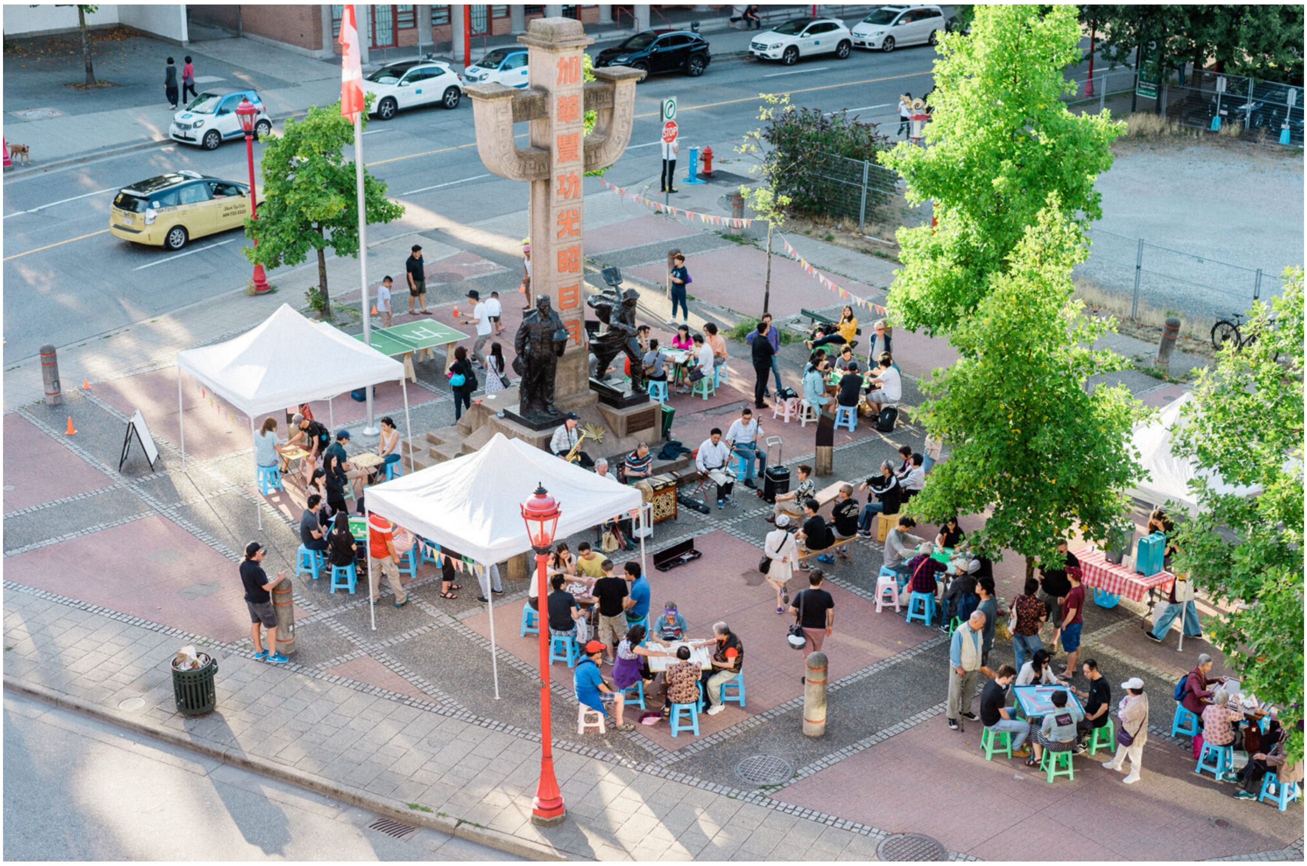

Figure 1. A Mahjong Social on the Chinatown Memorial Plaza. Courtesy of Jonathan Desmond Photography and YCC.

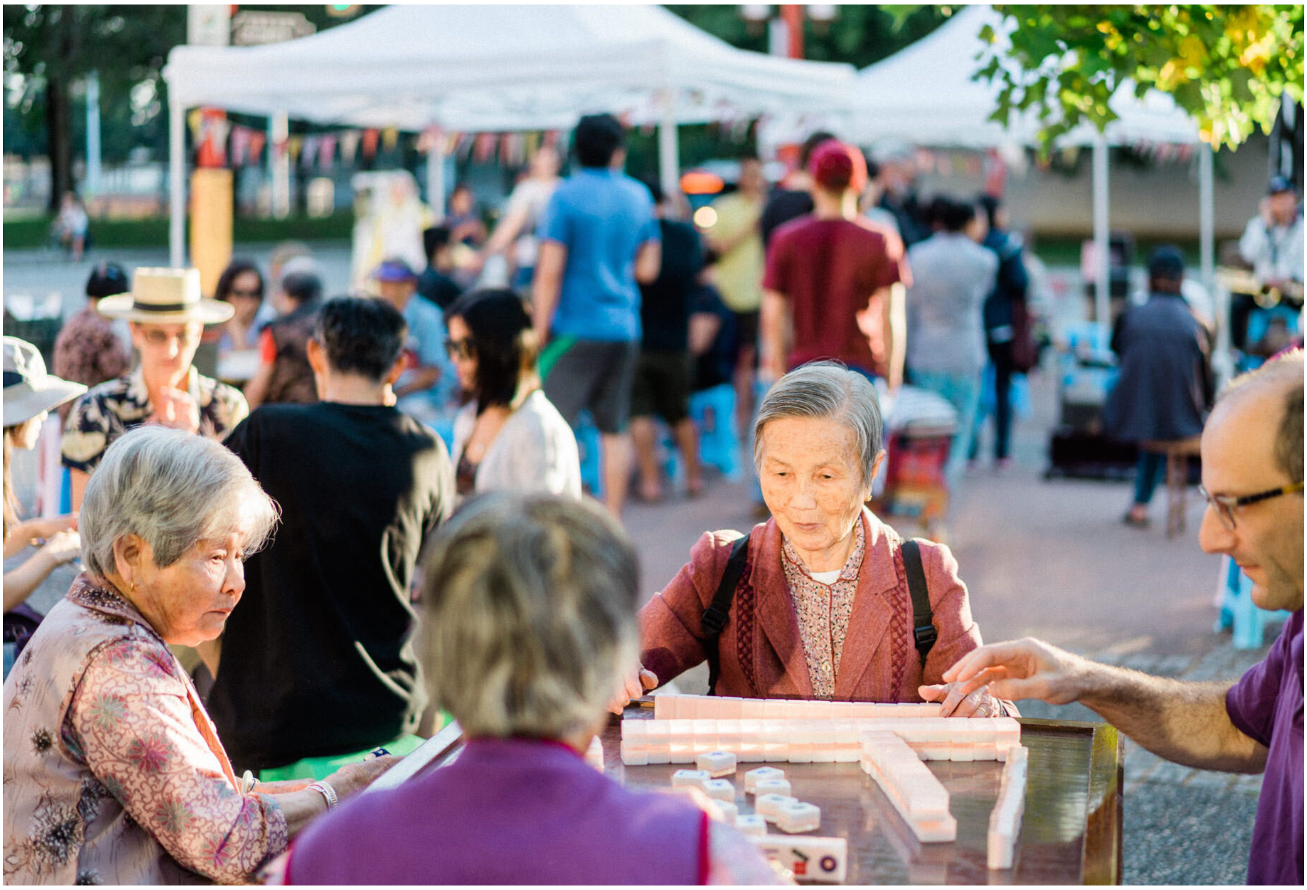

Figure 2. Playing Mahjong at a Social. Courtesy of Jonathan Desmond Photography and YCC.

> sitting on the statue and playing ping-pong, eating “strange’’ foods.

The Socials represent “unapologetic Asianness” in a neighbourhood threatened by gentrification and the loss of its culture and community (in a similar way to many other Chinatowns in North America; e.g., Lou, 2010), within the wider context of anti-Asian racism which became more public during the pandemic. This is an acknowledgement of the need to sometimes close out other actors and identities when forming a group identity or public (Mansbridge, 1996; Parker, 2020). “Everyone and anyone” is invited to participate—posters announcing the event, circulated on social media and posted in the plaza, sometimes explicitly saying “everyone welcome.” The posters and other hand-written signs are written in Chinese and in English, but this is not necessarily a compromise or dilution of the events’ central cultural focus since, as we will discuss after, many Chinese Canadians do not read Chinese or speak Cantonese or Mandarin. But YCC, with its focus on the traditionally Cantonese neighbourhood, are intent on drawing in Chinese Canadian youth to engage with elders in the latter’s primary language and, in turn, to learn Cantonese for themselves. Everyone is indeed welcome, but crucially, on YCC and its community’s terms.

The Eight Immortals standoff and the Mahjong Socials are examples of what might be thought of as the politics of conviviality in cities. They suggest that conviviality is both an object and a practice of struggle over public space. While the Mahjong Socials organizers are clear that everyone is welcome to participate in the events, their insistence on “unapologetic Asianness” is an assertion of power whereby everyone is welcome to participate but not to define the character of the events or to demand that they be modified or banished, as the alleyway condo-resident tried to do. YCC and its community are in control. As Chow (2021) put it, “we are the centre and we’re doing what the hell we want, which is a very very powerful thing.”

In the context of this thematic issue on conviviality, it is worth noting that the Socials foster conviviality with a political as well a social purpose. Thus, they contrast with the liberal “thin” conviviality—one characterized by the suppression or “bracketing” of difference, conflict, and injustice in favour of consensus and cordiality. Thin conviviality is produced by and is the foundation for a hegemonic social order in which some social groups, their concerns, and their visions are marginalized in favour of others (e.g., Nowicka, 2020; Valentine, 2008). The Socials, on the other hand, assert the agency of a community has been frequently marginalized and stigmatized, most recently during the pandemic. Building on the case of the Socials, we make two related arguments: (a) The Socials and the politics they project highlight the limits of “thin” conviviality as the prevalent ideal of how people should interact in public space and (b) the Socials emphasize the possibilities of agonistic politics (Mouffe, 2000, 2005) and the creation of “political conviviality” as an alternative to “thin” conviviality and liberal “placemaking” in cities (see Barry & Agyeman, 2020).

The article’s next section describes our methods and addresses questions of positionality. Section 3 outlines a conceptual framework, which brings works of literature on conviviality, public space, and agonism into conversation. Section 4 contextualizes the politics of change in Chinatown in terms of gentrification, violence, and public space. This sets the scene for Section 5’s discussion of the Hot+Noisy Mahjong Socials and Section 6’s account of the complex politics of planning, “place-keeping,” and agonism in the neighbourhood. The article concludes with a discussion of planning politics, conviviality, and the future of Chinatown.

2. Methods and Positionality

This article is based on a larger project (2020–2021) on the geographies of intangible heritage, public art, and gentrification in Chinatown (Mahieus, 2021). As the timeframe would suggest, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the project, as it did the neighbourhood in more profound ways. Lise Mahieus was the lead researcher and, initially, when she arrived in Vancouver in the Fall of 2019 she had intended to engage in a community-based research project, ideally with YCC. By the time the project was ready to move forward, the pandemic had begun. An initial conversation with YCC co-organizers confirmed that the Socials were on hold (the last one held was in 2019 and, at the time of writing, they have yet to resume). It was unfeasible to proceed with a partnership model of research. At that point, the research was reshaped as a more conventional interview-based project. It draws on 10 semi-structured interviews with activists, planners, artists, and one journalist, variously conducted by Lise, Eugene McCann, and our colleague Friederike Landau-Donnelly, now of Radboud University, the Netherlands. Interviews were augmented by attendance at 11 public meetings—in person and online, including the “Whose Chinatown?” virtual conference at which Chow spoke. Extensive consultations of print resources, from media articles to books, on Chinatown’s past, present, and proposed futures were also central to the research and have continued to the present. These materials were analyzed to identify and categorize expected and emergent themes that, in turn, framed our analysis.

A discussion of methods must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of positionality. Neither of us is a resident of Chinatown or a member of the communities most affected by the processes we discuss. While race is a main factor in this instance, as we are both white people studying a community of colour, other positionalities, such as gender, age, language (neither of us speaks Cantonese or reads Chinese and Lise is a native French speaker), and education and class should also be considered in an account of research positionality

(Fisher, 2015). While the project was initially intended to build from community engagement, in-person engagement proved impossible, except in the case of the 10 interviews and a few early meetings, so online engagements were more prominent but, given that most of the activism in the neighbourhood had pivoted from organizing events to organizing food deliveries and health care for suddenly home-bound seniors, they had no capacity for engaging in the proposed research. Our ability to continue with this form of research as an alternative is, of course, conditioned by the privileges we hold, not simply as white middle-class people, but because of our roles in our university—the type of institutional structure that encourages and rewards more conventional forms of research through the timelines it imposes on students like Lise. Therefore, we have endeavoured to be sensitive to issues of representation and exploitative research as we have written this article. For example, we acknowledge that our interviews centre actors who have public personas, as advocates, artists, or planners. The focus of the project, on political activism and planning, broadly defined, and the pandemic meant that conducting interviews with the other members of the community was not an option.

3. Conviviality, Public Space, and Agonistic Politics

Urban public spaces are complex and contested places where everyday encounters are political, both in the sense that they are always saturated with power (Low & Smith, 2013) and because they are objects of governance, through their management by state institutions, including urban planning. Indeed, the regulation of public spaces and what people and activities are permitted in them becomes particularly political when the spaces in question are iconic ones that receive significant public attention at certain times (Catungal & McCann, 2010). Massey (2005, p. 151) notes that these "[p]laces pose…the question of our living together. And this question…is the central question of the political"—a concern that she names "throwntogetherness." Thus, an analysis of the politics of planning regarding public space demands attention to the everyday, the micro-political, and the cultural (Horgan et al., 2020; Koch & Latham, 2013), as well as the physical. In turn, this focus resonates with what Neal et al. (2013, p. 315) call a "convivial turn" in multicultural studies. Reflecting the contemporary usage of the term "conviviality," which has a long history (e.g., Gilroy, 2005; Illich, 1973), Neal et al. (2013, p. 316) understand it as "a possible frame not only for describing interaction across cultural difference but also for transcending it."

Yet, the contemporary conviviality literature has been criticized for being too celebratory, by focusing on fleeting encounters that are not often meaningful in the context of countering entrenched power relations or for building solidarities that empower marginalized groups. Valentine (2008) argues that while coexistence in urban spaces creates moments of contact, different groups tend to mix very little and have a preference for self-segregation—a point also made by the gentrification literature as a counter-argument to the naive narrative of "social mix" (see Vigneswaran, 2014).

Recognizing this limit, van Leeuwen (2015, pp. 802–804) calls for a "side-by-side civility," derived from "civic inattention" in which people can be together in urban spaces and ignore differences. For him, this is the best practical option when trying to achieve not the ideal "good city" (Amin, 2006) but the "good-enough city." Nowicka (2020), on the other hand, sees this kind of "thin conviviality" as simply courtesy, which maintains social order by creating the expectation that people should suppress differences in their interactions. She suggests that courtesy simply reinforces "the fantasy of equality" (Nowicka, 2020, p. 32) that obscures identities and injustices, rather than correcting them. Instead, as Valentine and Sadgrove (2012, p. 2061) argue, urban life is improved through efforts to transcend a thin "tolerance or understanding of 'difference' " in favour of relations of " 'closeness' or intimacy." This point about solidarities built from collective self-knowledge is one to which we will return below.

If we are to conceptualize conviviality as something more than civility, courtesy, or tolerance (the "tepid tolerance"—we are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this phrase—of those who promote the "creative class" thesis and who, by extension, provide a justification for gentrification; McCann, 2008), our definition of convivial interactions would include those that foreground, negotiate, and contest injustice. As Mouffe (2000, 2005) argues, contest or conflict is ineradicable in politics and social life. Therefore, aiming for consensus, or striving to make all interactions comfortable and all differences generally "palatable," can obscure and reinforce injustices and tensions instead of giving them a place to be addressed through agonistic, rather than antagonistic, engagement. Indeed, several authors debating conviviality list theories of agonism as inspirations, although they do not systematically explain the connection between the concepts (Amin, 2008; Hinchliffe & Whatmore, 2006; Nowicka, 2020). This leads us to ask how we might think about the political geography of urban conviviality and the role that urban planning (broadly defined) might play in it or work against it.

4. Gentrification, Anti-Asian Hate Crimes, and Taking Space for the Future of Vancouver's Chinatown

Recent decades have seen a decline in the social and economic vibrancy of Vancouver's Chinatown and increasing worries about its role as the home for a community of low-income, Cantonese-speaking residents. This change has led to claims, mostly by outsiders, that the neighbourhood is "dead," or nearly so. In this discourse, gentrification and associated "revitalization" strategies are hailed by some as panaceas. For example, the editor of the *Daily Hive*, a local news website, in one of his opinion pieces, argues that "Revitalizing Chinatown depends on…bringing in new residents to support its businesses" (Chan, 2017). Yet, Chinese seniors are still vital and very much alive, even if their numbers are dwindling. They are some of the longest-term residents of the neighbourhood and they hold much knowledge and experience of its intangible cultural heritage. They are also one of the groups most threatened by gentrification. Through interviews with the elderly and low-income population of Chinatown, Fung (2012) shines a light on their exclusion from new businesses on the bases of language and affordability, and on how the displacement of significant numbers of residents negatively impacts social life and the ability to organize as a community. The Mahjong Socials and other public space activations indicate a concern among community activists and urban planners about the exclusion of senior residents in decision-making, events, and the neighbourhood's public spaces—exclusions that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In 2021, community activist and co-organizer of the Mahjong Socials, Chow, highlighted traditional urban planning as a problematic force in the neighbourhood's tribulations and the similar decline or destruction of Chinatowns elsewhere. This ineffective planning-as-usual, she argued, includes, "conventional interventions [like] neighborhood meetings, plans, visions for Chinatown, Chinatown strategies, scoping projects, guiding principles maps. In Vancouver we're undertaking a process [intended to achieve] UNESCO heritage status" (Chow, 2021). Referring to a screenshot of a City of Vancouver webpage listing 29 plans, strategies, reports, resources, and decisions pertaining to Chinatown from 2012–2018 (City of Vancouver, n.d.), Chow continued:

> And here is just a snapshot…[of] the many investments that the City of Vancouver and community have put in. And there's a joke in Chinatown, in Vancouver's Chinatown, that this is where neighbourhood plans go to die. And honestly, all these plans say the same thing. I'm sure everyone…if you search up your own cities' Chinatown plans, they all kind of say the same thing: that they want a vibrant, thriving, inclusive, intergenerational neighbourhood, with lots of cultural activities that honour the history. I'm sure those, at least a combination of some of those exact words, are in your plans. But these are just words. What do they actually mean, what do they look like, what does it feel like? (Chow, 2021)

The scepticism toward standard planning approaches for "revitalization" expressed here stems from and is exacerbated by evidence of the City of Vancouver, local developers, and some neighbourhood business interests' longstanding agenda to redevelop the neighbourhood.

In 2004, for example, the then co-director of the Vancouver Planning Department, Larry Beasley, in a speech to the Urban Development Institute, the association representing the interests of the local development industry, noted developers' worries about reduced opportunities for building lucrative residential condo towers in the central and western sectors of the downtown core. He laid out the City's vision for facilitating similar development in adjacent lower-income historic neighbourhoods. "In simple terms, we're looking to the east," he proclaimed:

> We're beginning to identify a different development potential….The areas of focus include: Gastown, Chinatown, even the Downtown Eastside, the False Creek Flats, and, of course, Southeast False Creek….Right now, we're in the middle of framing a new Chinatown Plan….We've hired architects to generate different kinds of infill models in an historic setting—and this we will translate into new zoning and further incentives. We like to say we're targeting 10,000 new people to live in a revitalized but well preserved Chinatown—including both market and non-market housing. (Beasley, 2004, pp. 7–9)

As the planner most closely associated with the much-vaunted and locally-dominant "Vancouverism" model of urban development, that encourages dense downtown in high-rise residential developments, framed in terms of sustainability and livability (McCann, 2013), Beasley's pronouncement was more than idle talk. His speech defined the agenda for future plans and rezonings which led to a developer's application, in 2014, to build a condo development on a lot adjacent to the Chinatown Memorial Plaza, across the road from the neighbourhood's traditional Chinese garden and Chinese Cultural Centre Museum. This development proposal—commonly known by its address, 105 Keefer—became a lightning rod for debates over planning, gentrification, and the future of the neighbourhood. While proponents argued that it would "revitalize" a dying neighbourhood (Howell, 2021a), opponents asserted that it would add fuel to ongoing gentrification and displacement and proposed instead that the site should be used for social housing and social spaces for existing low-income Chinatown residents (Howell, 2023a).

While gentrification is a profound concern, seniors and their allies also point to another way that they feel increasingly excluded from their neighbourhood: many fear that they will be targets of violence in Chinatown's streets and alleyways. They have reported aggressions and insecurity in public spaces for many years, but their fears have been exacerbated by the pandemic, which encouraged a dramatic rise in anti-Asian hate crimes. According to Vancouver's police department, the city experienced a 717% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes from 2019 to 2020, with almost 100 acts of aggression reported and many more that have likely happened but have gone unreported. This figure was shared in the local and mainstream media, each article highlighting different aggressions, many of which were experienced by seniors from Chinatown (see Baylon & Cecco, 2021; Chau, 2021; Howell, 2021b). For instance, Chau (2021) interviewed a senior woman living in Chinatown, who is a Cantonese speaker, and explained that: "Diep, like many other Chinese-speaking seniors in Vancouver's Chinatown, has been wary of leaving home in recent months, fearful of the hatred that exists beyond her front door." If this worsening of the situation is dramatic, the systemic racism and feelings of insecurity experienced by these residents are far from new, either in Vancouver's history or in North America, more generally. Particularly telling parallels can be drawn to late 1800s San Francisco, in which Asian Americans were targeted by white locals and city officials based on false narratives accusing them of responsibility for epidemics of smallpox and syphilis (Craddock, 1999). A similar historic pattern in Vancouver has been documented by Tsang's (2023) recent book *White Riot*.

Yet, despite these threats and traumas, YCC, Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice, and Youth for Chinese Seniors have argued that seniors cannot simply be regarded as helpless recipients of protection from the state or be left out of discussions around what the neighbourhood should be like in the future. For Chow (2021), these groups' activism, including when they "go out into Chinatown and take up space very publicly," is partly:

> About portraying our seniors in a different light….They're also very dynamic and very strong people. They have lived a very long life of resilience and beauty…as opposed to them constantly being portrayed as and defined as being vulnerable and at risk. (Chow, 2021)

5. The Hot+Noisy Mahjong Socials: Strengthening Community and Defining Public Space

YCC, who organized the Hot+Noisy Chinatown Mahjong Socials, and other groups were created during a time when opposition to the proposed 105 Keefer condo complex roiled Chinatown. Opponents argued that the new development would be unaffordable for the seniors of the neighbourhood, that it threatened to have gentrifying ripple effects on surrounding property prices, and that its design was disrespectful to the community and heritage of Chinatown by dwarfing existing landmarks, such as the Chinatown Memorial on the adjacent Memorial Plaza (Mackie et al., 2017) and the Classical Chinese Garden, across Columbia St. to the west. These concerns were evident among numerous Vancouverites with connections to Chinatown. Helen Lee (2021), chair of the Vancouver Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee, noted in a tweet:

> I can't recount how many times I've heard this from the media—'#ChinatownYVR is [declining, dying, or dead].' This narrative has been around for so long, but the fact is….IT'S STILL HERE!!! Chinatown may be 'dead' to some, but it's a way of living for many.

Local planner and academic Andy Yan put it this way: "The reports of the death of Chinatown have been greatly exaggerated. Let's begin with that initial acknowledgment…to understand that Chinatown has a future only if you want it" (Yan, as cited in Galloway, 2020).

YCC started to hold its Hot+Noisy Mahjong Socials on the Memorial Plaza in 2015, in opposition to 105 Keefer and to demonstrate that Chinatown is alive, that the plaza is meaningful to the residents, and to validate the neighbourhood's intangible culture (rather than simply the physical heritage represented in the neighbourhood's built environment). In this way, they engage in what Koch and Latham (2013) and Horgan et al. (2020) note is the important political work of "domesticating" the plaza through "public sociability." As the YCC website explains:

> "Hot+noisy" is a literal translation of the Chinese phrase 熱鬧 [Canto[nese]: *yeet naau*; Mando[rin]: *re nao*] used to describe the liveliness of an atmosphere. We continue to host the Chinatown Mahjong Social to bring the "hot+noisy" back to the area's streets and public spaces. (YCC, n.d., emphases in original)

The fact that people in Chinatown need to prove that their neighbourhood is not a dying place and that their cultural practices and usages of public space are vital, points to the underlying racial logics in narratives associated with gentrification (Kern, 2022) and attempts by activists to resist and reframe what Roy (2017, p. A3) calls "racial banishment."

Through hosting "Unapologetically Asian" public events by and for the Chinatown community, YCC was using public space to express its idea of who has control over the neighbourhood, who is represented in it, and who has a right to use it. Chow (2021) explains the importance of being able to celebrate community identity in such a highly visible way through food and ceremony. "Every year," she remembered as she reflected back on the series of summer Socials from 2015 until 2019:

> We would bring out a full roast pig. We've been told all their lives, "Oh, you Asian[s] eat weird animals," or, like, "There's heads and tails and stuff!" Well, we're going to be unapologetically Asian and bring out the whole roast pig and we're going to celebrate and practice our culture of Qingming [the annual festival honouring ancestors] at the memorial statue and we're going to do it with anyone and everyone who wants to come and we're going to [be] cutting up the roast pig and sharing it with different generations. (Chow, 2021)

Hence, by bringing this practice to public space during the Mahjong Socials, YCC reshaped the perception of the space in a way that made it friendlier for those sharing culture and community in ways that are not necessarily accessible or accommodating to others living in, or visiting, Vancouver. Appealing to tourists (both from far afield and from other parts of metro Vancouver) is something that other groups such as the Chinatown Business Improvement Association are more interested in and this kind of use of public activity might not be one they would favour, since it can be seen as driving a wider diversity of people (customers) away. Indeed, a planner for the city of Vancouver stated that "we've gotten complaints about people saying, 'It's too Chinese,' or, 'I don't feel welcome as a white person in this space during this time'" (interview, 2020).

Instead of tourists, YCC puts the emphasis on making public space accessible for the senior residents of the neighbourhood as well as those who do not speak English or do not speak it fluently. By building the Socials around them and their interactions with Chinese Canadian youth, YCC focuses on strengthening both relationships within the community as well as the community's relationship with the space. Activists in Chinatown argue that seniors are usually excluded from the sorts of public space "activations" associated with the increasingly popular notions of "placemaking" that define discussions in planning and design professions. As community activist Kevin Huang (interview, 2020) explains:

> We don't talk…in Chinatown, or in North America, [about]…the racialization of everything, and the racism of that, and discrimination that does exist. So, when we think about activation of public spaces, there was quite a lot of effort put in by the city to activate public spaces, but are these spaces comfortable for the Chinese seniors? Are they centring what *they* want to see and what *they* want to do? Because if you think about a well-meaning new entrant to the neighbourhood, they might bring in activities or programming that are completely out of reach language-wise, or physically, or whatever, for a lot of Chinese seniors.

Facing this lack of appropriate activation from city initiatives in Chinatown, YCC started their Socials without asking for a permit (Chinatown Today, 2017). The Mahjong Socials were therefore held technically illegally for the first two years (the overbearing alley-policing condo resident would not have been impressed). In this instance, YCC's strategy is to enact its vision for the neighbourhood before planners and other stakeholders can enact theirs. In advance of the Socials' third iteration, in 2017, YCC was contacted by VIVA Vancouver, the city's planning department team in charge of public space activation. VIVA offered to sponsor the Mahjong Socials, to cover YCC's expenses, and, according to a planner on the VIVA team, they required no modifications of the event in exchange for the funding.

6. Planning, "Place-Keeping," and Agonistic Public Space

Earlier in our discussion, we highlighted how, in 2004, the city of Vancouver's planning department encouraged developers to turn their attention to "revitalizing" Chinatown with as many as "10,000 new people" (Beasley, 2004). Planning departments, as institutions of neoliberal states, are never neutral in questions of development and gentrification. Yet, there are various positionalities and outlooks among planners themselves. Many subscribe to the ideals of planning for the public good and designing "places for people" (Gehl, 2010; McCann & Mahieus, 2021). Certainly, as the city's VIVA team's approach to the Socials suggests, planning as an institution of the local state, is never monolithic, particularly in the actions of its "frontline" or "street level" agents (Lipsky, 1980/2010). As a member of the VIVA team put it:

> Our mandate is funding community organisations who want to do stuff in public space. We give them funds because we identify that their activity has a public benefit….And in this case [the Socials], we funded very Chinese work. I'd say ethno-specific activities with a conscientious effort to make sure that these things aren't Anglicised. We don't ask people to do things in English. We don't ask them to try to make sure every white person walking by feels welcome. It's been a conscientious effort to make sure that these things celebrate being Chinese….To me that's an ethical debate. Like who gets to influence the future of Chinatown? (interview, 2020)

Echoing YCC's community-first ethos, the planner, who is not Chinese Canadian, also noted that:

> Until about a year ago no one on the VIVA team was of Chinese descent. We were in no position to judge whether the activities being requested funding for were…how Chinese were they? How culturally significant were they amongst Chinese culture? That wasn't our right to say that. (interview, 2020)

YCC's positionality was crucial, therefore, in securing funding: "I think a group saying, 'This is our mandate,' and having a proven track record of doing Mahjong gave them credibility" (interview, 2020). This credibility also resonated with the city's Chinatown Transformation Team. One of that group's planners, who is Chinese Canadian, argued, "It's about equity….Obviously, righting historical wrongs that we've had, the historical discrimination, the parts that we know. The impact that discriminatory policies have had" (interview, 2020).

The organisers of the Socials have a complex relationship with the state, then. They oppose the gentrification of Chinatown in the face of a general City mandate for "revitalization" and development, including mounting numerous challenges in the city's planning permit approval process that have stalled 105 Keefer for several years (although at the time of writing, in July 2023, the condo has been approved by the city's Development Permit Board, after its developers appealed to the BC Supreme Court courts to overturn a previous city decision that stopped building and over 100 community-members and supporters spoke to the board during a two-day hearing opposing the decision; see Howell, 2023b). Yet, groups like YCC are also willing to work with other planners to fund the Socials, as long as there are no strings attached. Planners "talk a lot about placemaking," Chow says:

> But really [for us], it's about *place-keeping*. There is already something here in Chinatown, and there's a real desire to keep alive the place our community created over generations. We wanted to show people that this is our neighbourhood, and we're not going anywhere. (Chow, as cited in Wiebe, 2020, emphasis added)

Her definition resonates with Dempsey and Burton's (2012, p. 13) definition of place-keeping as "long-term management which ensures that the social, environmental and economic quality and benefits the place brings can be enjoyed by future generations," although "enjoyment" would need to be defined politically for the Mahjong Socials' organizers. Place-keeping nonetheless resonated strongly with the VIVA planner, for example:

> So much of public space literature is about activations and vibrancy, which is kind of coded like place brand, marketing, and hipsters….And they [YCC]…push back on the whole framing of public space as a venue to gentrify a neighbourhood and to brand a neighbourhood as sexy or hip. They push back on it whilst [taking] money from the programme that ostensibly should fund those awful activities….They even chafe at the word place-making because they like the word place-keeping, saying that Chinatown is already perfect the way it is so do not try to remake a space which is super cool now. "It's perfect. Our cute old seniors are perfect the way they are. Don't try to make it hipster." I love it, it's super surreptitious. (interview, 2020)

To some extent, the collaboration between YCC and VIVA can be seen as an attempt to coproduce a new form of placemaking that, as Barry and Agyeman (2020, p. 34) argue, transcends "simply…pursuing…outcomes for those that are not well represented in mainstream planning processes" (a type of "thin inclusion") in favour of more profound changes in planning thought and in the power relations that define planning practice. Another term, as well as coproduction, that is relevant here is agonism—connoting an alternative to liberal "thin consensus." Given that they acknowledge differences instead of silencing them, the Mahjong Socials could be considered to be an agonistic use of public space (Mouffe, 2000, 2005). As the planner suggests, the "placemaking" language of public space "activation" is often associated with gentrification (see Caramaschi, 2020), yet in this instance, activation is intended to push back against Chinatown's gentrification by creating convivial encounters. However, as the confrontation with the condo resident and the complaints about noise and strange food suggest, physical proximity does not always lead to social closeness. The fleeting encounters that are sometimes generated by proximity and "social mix" might therefore be attributed to urban etiquette and civility, rather than a deeper conviviality. In turn, urban etiquette can lead people to repress their prejudice in public yet maintain and express it in private (Valentine, 2008). This analysis matches the argument that the hegemonic liberal notion of convivial public space "implies…a place is supposed to be trouble-free, a quiet area where people go peacefully to have a good time" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 56).

On the other hand, an attention to agonism defines public space as a political "battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted" (Mouffe, 2007, p. 3). Reading Valentine's (2008) discussion of encounters in the light of the divergence between a liberal consensual ideal of public space and Mouffe's critical agonistic approach suggests that meaningful contact is encouraged and enhanced through urban politics. For Valentine (2008, p. 325), meaningful contact "actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for—rather than merely tolerance of—others." According to Valentine (2008), policies and practices through which marginalized people confront and address inequalities help realize meaningful encounters rather than a fantasy of equality. The Socials further confirm Valentine and Sadgrove's (2012, p. 2060, emphasis added) argument that deep change in values is more likely to be built on closeness, "by which we mean relations that make something or someone *known*." These are solidarities constructed within communities and among their allies, through encounters that strengthen their knowledge of each other and of what Chinatown's activists call intangible culture. Therefore, it can be argued that "internally convivial activations" (ones held in public spaces but with the purpose of primarily encouraging intra-group—rather than inter-group encounters) are more effective in strengthening closeness, a sense of community, and a political public than events catering to a general audience.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Murals and other artworks, complaining phone calls, protests against gentrifying condos, and summer Hot+Noisy social events all seek to define the public spaces of a neighbourhood and its future. "Place-keeping" events are opportunities to shift mainstream perceptions of a place like Chinatown, but, importantly, they also strengthen community networks as they enable people to come together and become known to each other as people with common interests—they offer the opportunity for publics to form. As such, they play a role in dissipating feelings of helplessness regarding the idea that Chinatown is decaying. They enact care for the neighbourhood and its people, and they form the grounds for political claims to be made about the future of the place.

Given planning's general adherence to consensual, rather than agonistic, models of community engagement, the institution may not be well-equipped to deal with dissensus, even though many individual planners are well aware of the complexities and power relations that define the field and use their discretion to support "insurgent" forms of urban interventions, as we have shown above (Bayat, 2000; Miraftab, 2009). Certainly, a lot of dissatisfaction remains regarding how the city is handling Chinatown, while planners and activists continue to search for new practices that will help mobilize or preserve Chinatown's tangible and intangible characteristics and will also improve how community involvement in policy-making is conducted.

It is too early to judge how effective planning and activist initiatives have been in the neighbourhood. What appears clear, however, is that the pandemic will leave a profound mark. Several interviewees were rather pessimistic about the future of Chinatown, despite their efforts to keep the community afloat. After all, they had recently witnessed many key businesses, which were beloved meeting places and locations for low-income residents to purchase cheap and culturally appropriate goods, close their doors. They also suggest that community networks were damaged by the lockdown and their inability to gather and organize events. Moreover, many activists are feeling fatigued after having to take care of the many issues that arose during the pandemic, such as getting food to seniors or fighting for translation services in the case of vaccination appointments. Many also feel that they have been let down by the city once more as they received very little financial help. All of this is shadowed by accelerating gentrification, represented by the recent approval of the 105 Keefer proposal.

Yet, none of this necessarily signals the death of Chinatown. Many activists are still organizing and fighting for their community (it took an immense amount of work, and new alliances, especially with the burgeoning Vancouver Tenants Union, to organize the 100+ speakers who yet again opposed 105 Keefer in 2023, for example). Many point to the liveliness of the arts in the neighbourhood as a possibility to bring people together and show their care for Chinatown. New planning initiatives have undergone consultation with the community, such as a proposed redesign of the Memorial Plaza, which we can assume will be central to shaping the direction that Chinatown's public spaces take in the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Negotiating Difference on Public Transport: How Practices and Experiences of Deviance Shape Public Space

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Abstract

Given the diversity of passengers, public transport has hitherto been described as a public space of encounters, conviviality, or conflict. However, other dimensions of publicness, such as codes of conduct, deviance, visibility, or resistance, have received less attention. Based on qualitative interviews with transport users whose physical or financial abilities, or mobility needs differ from default passengers, this article outlines daily experiences and practices of negotiating differences through situational and societal deviance. In particular, I examine the daily struggles of passengers travelling in Brussels during the Covid-19 pandemic or without a valid ticket, along with people who rely on public transport in Tallinn due to care responsibilities. By describing quotidian practices and experiences of deviance, I argue that understanding publicness as a process of ongoing negotiation and appropriation promotes more equitable and inclusive planning practices.

Keywords

care mobilities; Covid-19 pandemic; deviance; fare evasion; public space; public transport

Issue

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1. Introduction

Travelling through cities, we may encounter “people standing like herrings to one another” (interview with a care mobilities [CM] study respondent, 23 February 2022) in buses, trams, or metros, and crowding through narrow corridors and stations. As a “mobile agora” (Jensen, 2009), public transport enables encounters with strangers and exposure to the unexpected. This diversity of people in temporarily enclosed spaces, or, as one passenger puts it, the fact that “there’s not really a filter on who gets on the tram” (interview with Covid-19 [C19] study respondent, 26 February 2021), is echoed by scholars who conceptualise public space as open to all, publicly owned, and enabling conviviality (Neal, 2010). Many urban dwellers rely on public transport to cope with the diverse tasks of urban life—be it care, education, work, or leisure. Although claiming “no one uses public transport for pleasure” (C19, interview, 13 April 2021) may be exaggerated, many passengers actually find using public transport a waste of time or stressful, possibly even triggering anxiety or fear (Bissell, 2018). One reason for this may be that technocratic transport planning and provision, focused on increasing speed, network efficiency, and channelling passenger flows, is geared towards standardised—often working, abled-bodied—users, and disregards diverse passengers’ capabilities, traits, or mobility needs. As a result, many users encounter physical, mental, or financial barriers to using public transport and find that their abilities or practices deviate from societal or situational norms (Aritenang, 2022).

Such forms of deviance in public and the negotiation of differences are the subject of this article. On the example of public transport in Brussels (Belgium) and Tallinn (Estonia), I explore how the forced proximity between diverse users causes encounters shaped by rules of conduct and deviance. While previous research has considered public space as a site of converging diversity, such a perspective has been less applied to public transport. This article, thus, contributes to current urban and mobilities scholarship framing public transport as a public space, where users from various backgrounds and diverse capabilities meet (Bovo et al., 2022; Kemmer et al., 2022; Sträuli & Kębłowski, 2022). In particular, it complements research on users' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and as fare evaders and brings new insights to public transport research by exploring care mobilities. I argue that beyond temporary interactions and a "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005) of strangers, it is the negotiation of differences as well as the tactics users adopt to use and access shared spaces, particularly those perceived as deviant, that constitute the publicness of public transport. In contrast to the prevailing notion of deviance as anti-social or criminal in transport research (Smith & Clarke, 2000), I draw on social psychology and critical urban theory to understand deviance as an everyday form of resistance that is not just an individual trait or behaviour but is situational or societal in terms of its perception and eventual condemnation (Goode, 2015).

To explore the relationship between diversity and deviance in public spaces, I draw on three qualitative studies. All three studies focus on public transport-dependent users who experience their daily mobility practices as deviating from societal or situational norms, giving light to passengers' practices not anticipated by transport planners, authorities, or operators during the Covid-19 pandemic or as regular fare evaders in Brussels and carers in Tallinn. The article opens with an introduction to the existing literature and theory on public transport as a public space characterised by diversity, encounters, deviance, and resistance, followed by an introduction to the case studies and methodology. I then outline how users perceive the publicness of public transport and describe the experience of deviance and the negotiation of difference using insights from each case study. In the conclusion, I discuss how conceptualising publicness as a continuous process facilitates more equitable and inclusive planning of public transportation and public space more broadly.

2. Conceptualising the Publicness of Public Transport

In attempts to define public space, scholars have asked how a space is legally defined, who pays for it or maintains it, who has access to it, or what role it plays in democracy (Neal, 2010). Accordingly, public transport may be framed as a public good, a public space, under public ownership or of public concern (Paget-Seekins & Tironi, 2016). However, I argue that the study of public transport as a public space, which has received little attention so far (exceptions are, e.g., Bovo et al., 2022; Rink, 2022; Weicker, 2022), reveals that publicness is not a static feature, but rather a continuous process of negotiating differences resulting from the confluence of diversity, deviance, and everyday resistance. To substantiate this argument, in the next subsection, I combine existing approaches to public space with concepts from social psychology and critical urban theory.

2.1. Public Transport as a Public Space of Diversity and Encounters

Mobility scholars analysing the coexistence and continuous flows of anonymous and diverse passengers often adopt a communal perspective on public space (Ocejo & Tonnelat, 2014). Such a perspective, prevalent in urban planning and policy, views public space "as an arena for people to meet and encounter one another" (Listerborn, 2016, p. 261). Accordingly, social justice scholars point out that public spaces provide situations where multiple trajectories of individuals converge, i.e., a "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005), and the potential to negotiate politics of difference that allows for the formation of diverse publics (Young, 1990). Similarly, scholars adopting "everyday multiculturalism" assume the recognition of differences and, beyond earlier policy-oriented and top-down approaches to multiculturalism, examine how processes of coexistence between individuals or groups differing in their values and normative frames of reference are "experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations" (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, p. 3). For instance, everyday multiculturalism on a bus in Milan (Italy) is played out between economically, culturally, and socially diverse passengers encountering each other in enforced proximity, and affects passengers' bodily practices and experiences of solidarity, friction, or attitudes (Bovo et al., 2022). Thus, "mobile encounters" (Koefoed et al., 2017) on public transport force users to negotiate interactions and relationships beyond familiar social circles, and shed light on the multiple and complex strategies of balancing physical and ethical engagement (Kokkola et al., 2022; Porter et al., 2023).

While the importance of human interactions in public space—from ensuring safety to shaping cultural life (Jacobs, 1961; Low, 2000)—has been recognised by scholars across disciplines, opinions differ about the effect of encounters. Following psychological contact theory, many scholars assume that positive and relatively prolonged interpersonal contact between individuals, especially in the case of interracial or interethnic contact, would reduce prejudice or anxiety and contribute to the development of multicultural competences (Neal & Vincent, 2013). Koefoed et al. (2017) find that by transcending class, race, or ethnic boundaries, a bus in Copenhagen (Denmark) may provide a cross-cultural meeting place enabling multicultural practices. Yet, scholars also caution against idealising fleeting interactions and diversity as the basis for "meaningful encounters" and sociability (Valentine, 2008). Amin (2012) argues that while coexistence among strangers may result from physical proximity, a collective life or civic culture only emerges if contact aligns with a common purpose. Moreover, encounters in public spaces can be conflictual and representative of broader systemic inequalities. Accordingly, studying Muslim-looking passengers on public transport in various cities, Shaker et al. (2022) find that the experiences of "Othering" become an integral part of their daily journeys, manifesting itself through stares, name-calling, or physical aggression.

2.2. Publicness Through Deviance and Resistance

Beyond diversity of users, public spaces differ from private spaces in terms of user behaviour. They embody an ethos of public sociability that is relevant for shaping solidarity and social interactions (Horgan et al., 2020). A public order, i.e., an "endogenous interactional organisation of collective life" (Horgan, 2020, p. 117), is formed through rules of conduct which regulate "face-to-face interaction between members of a community who do not know each other well" (Goffman, 1963, p. 9). According to Goffman (1963), any interaction that assumes physical proximity and mutual recognition among individuals involved can be attentive or inattentive as well as socially acceptable, i.e., civil, or inappropriate, i.e., uncivil. Passengers respectfully acknowledging others without interaction are committing to a minimal form of recognition, thus practising civil inattention. Small gestures of politeness, such as offering seats, are civil attention. Upon breaking the ritual of civil (in)attention, rude, or uncivil encounters ensue (Horgan, 2020). This "social practice" (Lefebvre, 1991), i.e., an ensemble of gestural systems, endowed with meaning and codes expressed in passengers' habits, norms, or knowledge, enables smooth interactions in public space. Since belonging "to a given society is to know and use its codes for politeness, courtesy, affection [as well as] for the declaration of hostilities" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 215), public life is based on a consensus about "normal appearances" and rules of conduct in a given socio-cultural context. Hence, every society or collective creates and maintains a set of norms that allow members to be judged by the degree of conformity. Members' efforts to ensure group conformity, i.e., social control, may involve positive or negative sanctions, exercised formally through a criminal justice system or informally through personal pressure (Goode, 2015). In public transport literature, a breach of such norms is usually considered a public order offence that is detrimental to conviviality, if not criminal (Smith & Clarke, 2000). However, drawing on social psychology and critical urban theory, I propose a more nuanced understanding of deviance as an inherent component of public space and everyday resistance.

In contrast to conformity, i.e., a socially acceptable course of action or trait, deviance is defined as acts, beliefs, or characteristics that violate social norms and attract repression in the form of stigma, condemnation, isolation, or censure. Increasingly popular in social psychology and sociology since the 1960s, deviance research has assumed a moral relativism that assesses deviance not as absolute, but as resulting from clashing ideologies and social, cultural, economic, or political interests (Goode, 2015). Deviance can occur at the individual but also the institutional level (Harvey, 2015), e.g., an economic system that is unable to create enough jobs or a fare system without concessionary tickets stigmatises unemployed or poor people and affects individuals' ability to participate in public life. Deviance is thus always defined in relation to hegemonic norms and the degree of likelihood of condemnation, ranging from mild, e.g., a negative comment, to extreme, e.g., a hostile attitude or social isolation (Goode, 2015). While societal or hierarchical deviance stigmatises a person's condition not conforming to the prevailing societal or legal norm, situational deviance refers to a person's action or behaviour violating a norm within a specific social or physical setting (Falk, 2001). Accordingly, travelling on public transport without a valid ticket is a hierarchical deviance, as the hegemonic view of transport authorities classifies it as such and predicts legal consequences. Travelling without pants, on the other hand, is a situational deviance, as the behaviour may be appropriate in a different context, e.g., a public swimming pool. Existing research on passenger-related disruptions focuses on crime and anti-social behaviour facilitated by overcrowding, lack of supervision, or passengers' irresponsibility (Smith & Clarke, 2000). Since deviant behaviour—often experienced by users in the form of harassment or bad manners—can cause emotional discomfort and discourage the use of public transport, operators have introduced measures of surveillance and access control, or customer service, e.g., posters encouraging passengers' contribution to a more pleasant transport environment (Schimkowsky, 2021). Similarly, practices such as fare evasion—widely perceived to harm fare revenues and encourage petty crime—call for increased controls, surveillance, or fines (Barabino et al., 2020). However, recent studies reframe evasion as a socially innovative practice that strengthens the public character of transport by challenging prevailing norms and inequalities in the fare system and creating encounters or solidarity between passengers (Assaf & Van den Broeck, 2022; Sträuli & Kębłowski, 2022).

Following such an approach, I propose to draw on theories of political public space to reframe deviance beyond its pejorative connotation towards its potential for publicness. As a world of artefacts in which "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by all" (Arendt, 1998, p. 50), public space involves exposure and visibility. Accordingly, public space is an "arena of political deliberation and participation" (Harvey, 2006) where marginalised citizens, such as homeless people, are recognised and where people participate in public affairs, e.g., protests, social debates, or struggles (Mitchell, 1995). Yet, urban scholars criticise current neoliberal visions of public space for suppressing diversity and openness of public spaces through exclusionary politics, privatisation, and commercialisation (Mitchell, 1995). Consequently, public spaces are regulated through governance, policing, design, and surveillance that—depending on an individual's gender, race, ethnicity, age, or ability—significantly affect users' experiences of and opportunities to access urban spaces and facilities (Listerborn, 2016). For minority groups, visibility and potential stigmatisation through (non-existent) infrastructure or hegemonic value systems in public transport space can cause physical stress, anxiety, discomfort, and, especially in car-oriented cities, transport poverty and related social exclusion (Lobo, 2014; Mattioli, 2014). As an alternative to a single, all-encompassing public sphere, Fraser (1990) argues that a multiplicity of publics with arrangements to allow contestation between them would better promote the ideal of participatory parity. Accordingly, publicness emerges from subaltern counterpublics, i.e., parallel discursive arenas in which members of marginalised social groups such as women, workers, or people of colour invent and disseminate counterdiscourses that express alternative interpretations of needs, interests, and identities. Similarly, De Certeau (1984/2011) identifies everyday forms of resistance that oppose institutionalised "strategies" of exercising power and surveillance by exploiting opportunities, blind spots, or quiet zones as "tactics." While counterpublics may function collectively or strive for visibility, I argue in this article that they can also function through everyday resistances in practised or experienced deviance. Public space, thus, is a liminal space between governance strategies and resistance from below, i.e., power struggles between citizens, owners or operators, commercial interests, and political authorities (Gibert-Flutre, 2021; Rink, 2022).

3. Case Studies and Methodology

This research sought to investigate how regular users experience public transport as public space, what hurdles they face in their daily mobility, and how they negotiate shared spaces. For this, I conducted three case studies in the cities of Brussels and Tallinn. These cities differ significantly in terms of population size and density, spatial and political order, and transport network. Since 2013, the city of Tallinn has operated a renowned policy of fare-free public transport, which allows registered residents to use all city buses, trolleybuses, trams, and trains, free of charge (Kębłowski et al., 2019). In Brussels, various operators run buses, trams, and trains under public service contracts. Fares, set by the main operating company in agreement with local authorities, include concessionary tickets for some population groups, but are high for most residents and are contested by rising fare evasion (Sträuli & Kębłowski, 2022). Despite such differences, both cities face common mobility challenges, such as high levels of motorisation due to decades of car-oriented urban planning and urban sprawl. Increasingly, the discourse at the political and planning level is shifting from the social relevance to the environmental sustainability of public transport, calling for a reduction in car traffic, clean energy vehicles, and alternative mobility solutions. Yet, such discussions often disregard the diverse needs, experiences, concerns, or fears of (potential) public transport users (Tuvikene et al., 2020). Thus, without claiming a comparative or quantitatively generalisable perspective on lived realities within or between different cities, I conducted this research to offer an alternative insight into individuals' ability to get around the city, meet daily needs, and engage with life opportunities. To this end, a cross-city study offers both an insight into place-specific mobility challenges and an overarching conceptual perspective.

The research presented was conducted between March 2020 and April 2022 with three groups of transport-dependent users who experience different forms of deviance in their daily mobility. First, I draw on the findings of a study conducted by the PUTSPACE project, for which I conducted 18 interviews in Brussels to understand how the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic affected mobility behaviour. The passengers interviewed, 10 men and eight women, all of working age and with no stated disability, shed light on conforming or deviating behaviour concerning new and therefore little established codes of conduct. Secondly, I interviewed 27 passengers who reported regularly travelling on the Brussels metro without purchasing or validating a ticket. Following existing research on fare evasion, respondents were predominantly young (all between 18 and 39 years old) and male (two-thirds of respondents; Barabino et al., 2020). Additionally, most reported evading for financial reasons, as they have a low or medium income (two-thirds of respondents) or are not eligible for discounted tickets as students over 25, trainees, part-time employees, or self-employed. Thirdly, I interviewed Tallinn residents who rely on public transport for care tasks, including accompanying children, household or administrative errands, and grocery shopping and experience social and situational deviance by perceiving their appearance and practices as discordant with social norms and transport infrastructure. As previous research on care mobility (Sánchez de Madariaga, 2013) has found that these tasks are predominantly undertaken by women, 16 of the 21 respondents in this study are female.

For all studies, respondents were recruited through social media channels, mailing lists, community organisations, and snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted by the author and research assistants in person or via video telephony in English or the local language according to respondents' preference. The semi-structured interviews included case study-specific questions, e.g., on fare evasion and care mobilities, as well as general questions on changes in mobility behaviour, perceptions of the atmosphere, encounters and interactions in public transport, and respondents' views on public transport as a public space. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed in NVivo using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Key findings from the interviews are presented in the following section according to the established themes, i.e., publicness, negotiating difference, and experiencing or practising deviance in public space. For clarity, I cite interview excerpts throughout the article by respondent group, i.e., for the Covid-19 study (C19), for fare evaders (FE), for care mobility respondents (CM), and by date.

4. Three Case Studies on Publicness, Negotiating Differences, and Deviance on Public Transport

When asked about the perception of public transport as a public space, many respondents echo a liberal perspective, framing it as theoretically open and accessible to all (Neal, 2010) since "everyone can use it. There can't be restrictions…for the disabled or for mothers with children or for the president" (CM, interview, 11 March 2022). Due to public ownership, "no one can say…'This is my bus, you're not going to pass'" (FE, interview, 13 April 2021). Additionally, many reflect a communal view that assumes publicness to be a result of users' diversity and the coexistence of strangers. Accordingly, public transport is a space "occupied by all sorts of people who come from all sorts of places" (C19, interview, 3 March 2021). Respondents observe that although passengers are "in their bubble in transport" (C19, interview, 13 April 2021) and disconnect from their immediate environment by watching videos, listening to music, or reading, many still spend time observing others. Such glances or looks between passengers not engaged in purposeful interaction can serve as social control of inappropriate behaviour in public, or as initial acts of encounter, i.e., "face engagement" (Goffman, 1963), where two or more participants communicate and maintain a single focus of visual or cognitive attention under the public order. Thus, such interactions are guided by codes of behaviour that distinguish public from private spaces. Accordingly, a respondent explains that because public transport is "a closed space with a lot of people crammed together…there must be rules of behaviour" (CM, interview, 14 December 2021).

In the literature on public space and its planning, public transport usually receives less attention than parks, streets, or squares. Yet, features such as a predominantly (semi-)public ownership and management structure, a constant flow of strangers, temporarily enclosed vehicles, and physically delineated stations can illuminate our concept of publicness. Similarly, the characteristics mentioned by interviewees—openness to all, diversity of users, and prevailing rules of conduct—provide an initial delineation of public space. However, users' daily experiences and practices reveal that public space does not have a static, one-dimensional quality, but is constituted by a multitude of interactions and negotiations of differences, also marked by deviations. To support this argument, in the following subsections, I present three case studies, which trace different dimensions of situational or societal deviance and their impact on interactions and encounters with diversity in public transport.

4.1. Negotiating Encounters on Public Transport in Brussels During the Covid-19 Pandemic Outbreak

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as witnessed in Europe in March 2020, has changed residents' mobility behaviour and experiences of public spaces, seemingly with contradictory positive and negative impressions (Kokkola et al., 2022). Particularly in the first weeks of the pandemic, public transport ridership declined as many users stayed at home or engaged in "compensatory mobility" like walking or cycling, which was found to increase connectedness within neighbourhoods (Nikolaeva et al., 2023). Yet, regular transport users in Brussels lament their immobility and lack of encounters in public. While direct or prolonged interactions "with other passengers on public transport [were] rather rare" (C19, interview, 14 May 2022) before the pandemic, they have decreased even more since. One respondent is concerned about how the pandemic has affected both the frequency and nature of such interactions:

> When I took the bus…conversations would happen quite easily…but now…it feels like you're doing something wrong and you're in a social space that is much more regulated….An old lady on the bus…was very eager to talk and…if she had started talking to me in a park, I would have been more likely to engage in conversation…but in public transport, you also feel a bit judged or you feel observed at least….So, people noticed that she took off her mask. What would they think? That I am inciting her into this reckless behaviour? (C19, interview, 26 February 2021)

For this interviewee, the changed situational context raises novel questions about the norms of interacting with strangers and sharing enclosed spaces. What previously may have passed for civil attention—a conversation with an elderly person—has become a situational deviance, replaced by avoidance behaviour. The reduced presence of other passengers and avoidance of interactions additionally affects the sense of safety and well-being in public. In line with studies indicating an increase of gender-based violence "perpetrated in a continuum of mobile spaces" (Murray et al., 2022, p. 2) during the pandemic, female respondents in Brussels report discomfort with the emptiness of transport and the potential of harassment.

Although decreased ridership reduces the possibility of "people watching"—a civil inattention acting as a social control mechanism (Goffman, 1963)—mutual monitoring of passengers does not seem to be absent, but rather focused on new conspicuousness such as coughing or non-compliance with safety measures. The introduced measures to contain the virus also affected interactions on public transport and users' engagement with the material environment, as they tried not to sit down or touch handrails, surfaces, or buttons. Particularly mask-wearing regulations stirred debates about behavioural norms in public; for some, wearing "a mask is a must. You can feel the social stigma immediately. Walking into a tram without a mask makes you feel naked" (CM, interview, 30 March 2022). This stigma is expressed through uncivil attention when passengers berate each other for not wearing their masks (properly). Mask-wearing, then, becomes central to disputes between passengers and a cause of concern for users trying to balance public exposure with private safety (Porter et al., 2023). Yet, such regulations were also reported to increase instances of civil attention, when "people send signals to each other non-verbally and then people realise 'Oh, I have to put on my mouth mask'" (C19, interview, 9 April 2021) or when a respondent recalls that she "was searching for the mask [and] the lady who was sitting in front…took the whole package of masks from her bag and offered [it to her]" (CM, interview, 30 March 2022).

Thus, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated discussions about norms, social control, and interactions on public transport. Situational deviance, e.g., passengers not wearing masks despite the regulations, can have a fundamental impact on users' well-being and decision to use public transport (Schimkowsky, 2021). Recalling sentiments of mistrust, respondents reflect on how changes in daily habits and ways of interacting with others have shaped their understanding of publicness. While for many, public transport before the pandemic "wasn't an Agora where everyone talked to each other" (C19, interview, 5 March 2021) or "a place for solidarity" (C19, interview, 7 April 2021); the pandemic has reduced transport to a "place of passage [to] go to school or to work" (FE, interview, 2 March 2021).

4.2. Contesting Fares and Control Infrastructures in Brussels

One particular practice deemed deviant—if not criminal—by transport operators and authorities is fare evasion. Defined as the "non-violent act of travelling in public in disregard of the law…having deliberately not purchased, not validated or not correctly adopted the required travel ticket" (Barabino et al., 2020, p. 34), fare evasion is often seen as an opportunistic or rational-calculative practice that can—and should—be countered with increased surveillance, fines, or controls (Dauby & Kovacs, 2007). However, interviews with regular evaders reveal diverse motives to evade, ranging from financial, administrative, and opportunistic to ideological reasons, and practices to avoid ticket purchases, controls, or fines. In Brussels, a trust-based system deployed on surface networks allows evaders not to validate tickets while keeping an eye on upcoming inspections. In the metro, in contrast, evading the automated fare gates, so-called *portiques*, requires physical engagement with the infrastructure and exposure. Installed with the aim of controlling tickets, regulating passenger flows, and collecting data, the contested *portiques* are for seasoned evaders merely "a band-aid on a wooden leg, [because] there are plenty of techniques to get in anyway" (FE, interview, 2 March 2021).

As a form of everyday resistance, evaders adopt tactics to challenge structural injustices within the fare system and in the distribution of transport access. That these tactics can evolve into collective strategies is demonstrated by fare evaders through knowledge sharing and mutual support. In Brussels, transport users share information about current ticket inspections, network updates, or lost and found objects, and exchange humorous posts on various social media channels. Similarly, knowledge is passed on in the physical environment of metro entrances. For example, one interviewee reports regularly "giving advice, like 'hold the door like this' or 'press this button and it will open'" (FE, interview, 8 April 2021). With the help and knowledge of others, evaders' practices to circumvent control mechanisms have developed manifold: Climbing or jumping over barriers, pressing emergency buttons, or leaving stations before ticket inspection. Instances of civil attention at the *portiques* include paying passengers allowing evaders to pass, users lending each other tickets for validation, or helping others stuck behind or between barriers. The most common circumvention practice of bumping, i.e., squeezing through the gates with paying passengers (Reddy et al., 2011) facilitates interactions between strangers.

Nevertheless, paying passengers may perceive bumping as uncivil attention and warn: "You always have to be careful behind you if there's nobody there. There are people who are clear and who ask…but there are people who push you and say 'move over'" (C19, interview, 5 March 2021). As fare evasion is often seen as unfair behaviour towards paying passengers, as a threat to fare revenues or as an incentive for further petty offences, and constitutes a violation of the applicable transport laws punishable by fines, there is a broad consensus that it is an act of deviance. However, echoing recent studies from Brussels examining evasion as a social innovation (Assaf & Van den Broeck, 2022), it can be seen not only as a practice challenging prevailing legal norms and power hierarchies but also as raising questions about the sharing of public spaces and the provision of mobility. Accordingly, a respondent reflects on the reciprocity between transgression and controls:

> I imagine that [the *portiques*] brought…quite a lot of money…since it is rather effective against fraud….From an ethical and moral point of view….I think that it raises questions about the way we fight against fraud as it is public transport….But at the same time…these doors are there for people like me who cheat. So I'm sure that there are many more now than before and I find that a bit of a dystopian vision. (FE, interview, 15 March 2021)

Hence, fare evaders in the Brussels metro contest systemic inequalities, infrastructural barriers, and social control. Evasion practices disrupt the public order by exposing the financial and physical inaccessibility of public space and by introducing new rules of conduct, such as asking other evaders to bump only with consent and be respectful towards others by not "just push[ing] people to pass" (FE, interview, 7 April 2021). While fare evasion thus becomes an alternative way of navigating a discriminatory system and reshaping publicness, most evaders still feel limited in their movement:

> From the moment you decide not to pay your ticket, the gates are a constraint because you have to know how to pass them. And there's the permanent stress of being checked....I don't feel totally free when I use transport. (FE, interview, 12 April 2021)

4.3. Negotiating Differences and Access for Care Mobilities in Tallinn

Similar to fare evaders in Brussels, passengers interviewed in Tallinn travelling with prams, shopping bags or wheelchairs, or accompanied by children are exposed to infrastructures and social control restricting daily mobility. Although not unlawful and therefore less conspicuous, these passengers experience situational or societal deviance, as their mobility needs are not met by commuter-oriented transport planning. By acquiring network-specific knowledge, e.g., by studying timetables indicating low-floor vehicles, researching accessible routes, modes or stations, or planning their journeys in due time, they appropriate public spaces for their own needs. Many find inaccessibility to cause "a lot of stress" (CM, interview, 3 December 2021) and to result in longer travel and waiting times. A respondent reports:

> [If a bus has] three or four steps and the handle in the middle [and] you don't have to get to the doctor at the time [you] wait for the next bus. [However,] if you have a child in the pram and it's winter and the next bus [comes in] 20 minutes, that's not an option. (CM, interview, 16 November 2021)

Additionally, many rely daily on the support of others to access public transport: "Sometimes you're like the only person on the bus stops…and there are three big steps with a pram. And even if you don't have any bags or something, you can't really do it on your own" (CM, interview, 29 March 2022). By asking acquaintances to practice with them, including them in daily mobility routines or asking strangers for help, passengers practice "doing accessibility," i.e., reframing accessibility into a relational practice involving users and materiality (Muñoz, 2021). While some respondents indicate having "always been offered help whenever it looks like I might need it" (CM, interview, 9 December 2021), others have not experienced "too much of this enthusiasm. Usually, the ones who are willing or offering help are older ladies or mothers themselves…because we know what we're in for" (CM, interview, 3 December 2021). One respondent criticises that "the social category you belong to is a criterion whether we are going to help you or not" (C19, interview, 7 April 2021). While letting "pregnant people or elderly…sit [seems] basic civility" (CM, interview, 21 December 2021), other respondents complain that when carrying a "big [shopping] bag, nobody is interested in [helping]" (CM, interview, 11 November 2021). Civil attention thus seems to depend on the assessment of others' conforming or deviating abilities.

Upon boarding a bus or tram, passengers are exposed to each other. Confronted with the uncivil inattention of strangers, a wheelchair user reports appropriating the space by having "to shout at [other passengers] or say please make room" (CM, interview, 11 March 2022). Similarly, travelling with a pram means having "to ask few times [for passengers to make space, otherwise] I'm blocking people getting on and off" (CM, interview, 8 December 2021). A mother explains how she employs looks as a means of communication in such situations: "[When others occupy] the place reserved for wheelchairs and prams, I either say something or give them a look, which makes them…give me the space I need" (CM, interview, 10 November 2021). As a form of uncivil attention (Horgan, 2020), however, gazes are also particularly directed at people who, because of their age, gender, or ethnicity, are perceived by others as not belonging or conforming, i.e., as deviating from a societal norm, which leads to demarcation and Othering (Shaker et al., 2022). That deviance can be multi-faceted is illustrated by the experience of a father who explains that when his daughter "sings some Estonian songs [and because] she doesn't look…typically Estonian…people look" (CM Interview, 12.11.2021). This family, thus, experiences judgemental looks due to both societal deviance, i.e., the foreign appearance within an Estonian context, and situational deviance, i.e., singing seems less appropriate on a bus than elsewhere. That such encounters become confrontational or unsettling can affect feelings of safety, well-being and travel behaviour, explains one respondent:

> [Having an African husband has irked people to ask] why my mum hasn't taught me how to carry on the Estonian gene....One time I had my husband with me and the fight was very close to getting physical....I…know the general time when a certain unpleasant man…is travelling, so I usually just try to avoid this area....Either I wait a little longer with my kids and go to the playground or I change my route and take a different bus. (CM, interview, 9 December 2021)

In such cases, subtle lines of deviance are revealed. While the harassed person is labelled as not belonging and affected in their safety and mobility behaviour, the deviant person is ultimately the one harassing others based on their appearance and restricting their visibility and freedom of movement in public spaces. Nevertheless, most passengers report experiencing public transport encounters as predominantly convivial. Particularly when accompanying children, respondents receive positive and playful attention from strangers "making cute faces at the children…chatting…waving and playing" (CM, interview, 16 November 2021). Most parents recognise that "children talking loudly or complaining…can be annoying" (CM, interview, 14 December 2021) and therefore negotiate for themselves whether the behaviour is appropriate and monitor their child's situational deviance, accepting that "children love to talk and [if] someone doesn't like it, it's their problem…people have to understand that it's *public* transportation" (CM, interview, 14 December 2021).

5. Conclusions

This article explores public transport as a public space beyond diversity and conviviality. Previous studies recognise public transport as a space that allows for multiple exposures to the human and material environment, encounters across differences, and a "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005) of strangers with the potential for conviviality or conflict. Adding to this, I argue that publicness emerges—rather than as a static feature of space—from the negotiation of differences expressed through daily experiences and practices of deviance, and struggles for visibility and participation. I illustrate this argument with the experiences and practices of passengers who rely on public transport in car-dominated European cities, namely during the Covid-19 pandemic or while fare evading in Brussels and due to care responsibilities in Tallinn. The users' insights shed light on what it means to use and experience public space when one's physical or financial capabilities or mobility needs do not match the standard passengers or situations envisaged by technocratic transport planning. Respondents report instances of civil inattention acknowledging the presence of diversity, civil attention to mutual aid or support, uncivil inattention in disregarding people's different access needs, and uncivil attention to conflictual encounters, and experience public transport as a space of converging difference where social control—formally through legal regulation and informally through mutual observation—is pervasive. Moreover, the interviewed transport users describe a variety of practices they adopt to access, use, and appropriate shared spaces. This includes sharing knowledge and creating care networks, assisting fare evaders or passengers with prams, wheelchairs or shopping bags, or showing consideration towards other passengers during a global pandemic. Transport spaces thus provide a platform for collective action and networks of solidarity. As navigating such spaces often requires overcoming physical, infrastructural, financial, or social barriers, everyday mobility practices become tactics of daily resistance against hegemonic social norms, unequal fare systems, or infrastructures of control. Publicness, thus, emerges through the negotiation of shared space and the contestation of social norms.

Although this study's findings are based on individual, diverse experiences, and case-specific examples, they provide a foundation for further research that explores different sociocultural and political frameworks or notions of ideal publics from a planning and policy perspective. First, since publicness is a process, focusing on everyday forms of resistance and experiences of deviance highlights the importance of human interactions and the negotiation of diversity in public space and promotes a social justice perspective on the politics of difference. This sheds light on the potential for convivial or conflictual encounters, as well as subtle variations of (un)civil encounters between strangers that have yet to be sufficiently researched (Horgan, 2020). Moreover, exploring varying experiences and negotiating differences through a micro-level qualitative perspective promotes a better understanding of broader, systemic inequalities at the city level and the planning practices that prioritise the needs of certain citizens over others. Second, recognising the communal and political function of public transport offers insights into potential functions of public space beyond conviviality or multicultural coexistence. As public transport is a public space offering marginalised populations visibility and opportunities to engage in political publicness, addressing the needs of vulnerable, overlooked, or criminalised users could create a safer, more inclusive, and sociable urban environment. Third, recognising that the materiality of built environments, control and surveillance infrastructures, combined with social control, significantly influence users' sense of safety and comfort, encourages the planning of public spaces that meet different abilities and daily needs and facilitates the provision of social and physical infrastructures that allow people to move, stay, and interact freely. To provide access to mobility services to a wide range of users and to promote sustainable cities, it seems essential to broaden the perspective of urban planning beyond the movement function of public transport.

Hence, this research advances the study of public space by highlighting its processual nature and expanding scholarship on public transportation to include previously understudied perspectives on care work and public space. By combining insights from the daily experiences of transportation users with concepts from critical urban theory, e.g., everyday resistance, and social psychology, e.g., social control and deviance, I offer a nuanced understanding of the micro-practices and bodily experiences of citizens in urban space. By redefining the concept of deviance beyond a criminalising gaze, I recognise it as a malleable and relevant concept that offers a way to delineate the fine lines of (in)appropriate behaviour in public space and highlight where certain hegemonic value systems undermine the (mobility) needs of diverse citizens. As such, this research offers a potential perspective for more equitable and inclusive planning of public spaces.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Visually Impaired Persons and Social Encounters in Central Melbourne

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Abstract
Urban spaces are areas where routes, activities, and people, including visually impaired persons (VIPs), intersect. Most urban research on VIPs focuses on wayfinding. However, the experience of urban spaces is not limited to utilitarian functions and also includes people's lived experiences and random social encounters. To understand how a broader range of activities, experiences, and encounters may be better enabled, VIPs have participated in multi-method research including interviews, word games, walking interviews, and diary recordings in central Melbourne. Results not only indicate a broad range of unmediated conflicts between VIPs' mobility needs and key aspects of intense street life but also reveal opportunities that are potentially hidden in random encounters in public spaces.

Keywords
Melbourne; social encounter; urban space; visually impaired persons

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space" edited by Mervyn Horgan (University of Guelph) and Saara Liinamaa (University of Guelph).

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1. Introduction

Urban is derived from the Latin *urbanus*, which means "courteous," and being urban or urbane is about respecting "differences" between people (Dovey, 2016, p. 9). These differences can be seen in the different abilities that people may have; for instance, visually impaired persons (VIPs) can interpret the environment differently from people with vision. As the literature review shows, many studies have focused on wayfinding, access, and technologies to aid VIPs with navigation. However, urban space is a social space, and social encounters are a substantial part of experiencing urban space. Encounters between people can occur in many ways, from a glare to a conversation (Carr et al., 1992). However, how do social encounters occur when someone does not possess usable vision? Vision is considered the main source of acquiring information in the environment. VIPs, due to lack of vision, may not be able to acquire information on their environment as readily as people with vision do. Perceiving the socio-spatial elements of urban spaces can be demanding and social interactions can be reduced or shaped differently due to a lack of non-verbal connection between VIPs and non-VIPs.

This research explored the social interaction of VIPs in urban spaces in central Melbourne to answer the question: How do VIPs experience and perceive the socio-spatial aspects of urban spaces? For these purposes, VIPs participated in interviews, word games, walking interviews, and diary recordings—each research method having its distinct strength. The findings reveal a broad range of interactions between VIPs and people with vision in urban spaces, but also the presence of unmediated conflicts. The research also identifies some factors through which public space can either hinder or create opportunities for VIP participation. This article summarises the literature on social encounters in public spaces and more specifically on VIPs in urban spaces. The methodology is then explained and the findings are presented. In conclusion, the experiences of VIPs in public spaces are discussed with a focus on the nature of their social encounters.

2. Social Encounters in Public Spaces

Urban space creates the opportunity for people of different cultures, ages, and genders to intermingle (Madanipour, 1996). It is where we are co-present with strangers; as Sennett (1977, p. 39) wrote, a city is "a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet." There are different forms of communication in urban spaces and the dominant form in dense urban environments is non-verbal (Rapoport, 1990). The role of urban space is beyond the physical presence of individuals. It is a place where people gather for various reasons including gossiping, exchanging ideas, and marketing, and this kind of social life is essential to the city (Whyte, 1988). One pattern of intense social encounters in public spaces is "triangulation," which is defined by Whyte (1980) as direct communication between strangers enabled by a third factor such as an object or an event; for example, a performance that happens in an urban space that attracts audiences and leads to social interactions.

A broad theoretical framework for analysing the relationship between built form and social behaviour is provided by Gibson's (1977) affordance theory, which highlights capacities that emerge from the design of public space and the people using it. Affordance is strongly related to the ability of humans and their senses including the visual, olfactory, and auditory senses. It should be measured "relative to the animal," considering their "posture" and "behaviour" as "different layouts afford different behaviour for different animals and different mechanical encounters" (Gibson, 1977, p. 120). Osmond (1957) refers to public space design that enables social encounters as "socio-petal" and public space design that hinders social encounters as "socio-fugal." Socio-petal public space is where people tend to come together and socio-fugal space is where they tend to avoid one another. Horgan et al. (2020, p. 147) have also introduced and defined "affordances of sociability…broadly as any elements of a social setting that facilitate positive interactions between strangers."

A pre-condition to social encounters in public spaces is walkable access. Broadly, walkability refers to the capacity of the built environment to enable walking, which then promotes random face-to-face encounters between strangers. Walkability is a complex concept with implications for health, productivity, and social equity. Research in various fields, including health and transport, have converged to identify three urban form factors that are central to walkability: density (leading to the concentration of people within a walkable distance), functional mix (creating more destinations), and access (enabling pedestrian flow; see Dovey & Pafka, 2020).

Successful urban spaces enable a diversity of activities. Gehl (1987) classifies these activities into three categories. The first is necessary activities, which happen by walking to different destinations despite strong deterrents. Walking to work, school, or grocery shopping are among these types of activities, which occur even in poorly designed and hostile environments. The second category is optional activities that occur when there is time and desire to be in the place. These activities are related to the quality of the environment including physical aspects. Third are those activities that occur when people engage in optional social activities. There may be considerable overlap between these categories, such as when random encounters occur while walking from home to work, or when an optional walk leads to a social activity.

3. Visually Impaired Persons in Urban Spaces

Vision impairment or vision loss is a sensory disability that cannot be corrected with lenses or glasses. Globally, according to the World Health Organization (2017), around 253 million people live with visual impairment, of which 36 million are blind. Vision Australia (2017) estimates there are currently 384,000 blind and visually impaired people in Australia, and this number is expected to increase. Vision impairment can have various causes with a broad spectrum of symptoms ranging from the legally blind, who cannot see at 6 metres what a person with typical vision can see at 60 metres, to people with peripheral field loss, general field loss, and central field loss (Harkey et al., 2007).

Visually impaired people generally use navigation aids such as a white cane, guide dog, or navigation apps that accompany their body while negotiating the environment. The "stick," as Descartes named it, has been interpreted in different ways. He argued "that one might almost say that they see with their hands" (Descartes, 1637/1985, p. 153), referring to VIPs who use canes. Others describe the cane as an extension of the arm (cane as a sense of touch; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Characterising the cane as a tool for seeing—a sensory organ or extension of the body—indicates its importance to VIPs and cannot be discarded because it functions as part of the body.

In urban studies, wayfinding is one of the most extensively researched topics concerning VIPs (Folska, 2012; Golledge, 1993, 1999; Koutsoklenis & Papadopoulos, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Passini & Proulx, 1988). Wayfinding is defined "as the process of determining and following a path or route between a point of origin and a destination, which is a purposeful, directed, and motivated activity" (Golledge, 1999, p. 6). A quantitative study on orientation by mobility professionals emphasised the importance of physical elements in VIPs' navigation of urban spaces. That study's questionnaire, which asked participants to rank 34 physical elements such as tactile ground indicators or audible signals, suggested their importance could be different for people with various vision statuses (Bredmose et al., 2023).

While Lynch's (1960) seminal work identified five elements that contribute to urban legibility—pathways, edges, nodes, landmarks, and districts—a focus on visual aspects of urban space is a key limitation of these. In contrast, VIPs, including blind people, use other senses such as haptic, audio, motion, and flow to perceive and orient themselves in the environment (Jacobson, 1998). More recently, Folska (2012) expanded Lynch's theory by considering other senses that VIPs use to navigate. Folska's research into blind people's mental maps of designated urban spaces found that planners and urban designers should consider places that are unknown or unremarked by blind people. Other studies have focused on different aspects of the experience of urban space. One study in Singapore, which involved a mixed group of VIPs and non-VIPS, used interviews and participant observation to "illumine the intricate relationship between our non-visual senses and social sensibility" (Pow, 2000, p. 166). Another study in Reading and Leeds, England, which involved in-depth interviews with VIPs, highlighted that social definitions of "normality" have strongly influenced the self-image of visually impaired respondents. This study concluded that most participants were "highly self-conscious and self-critical about their appearance and behaviour in public" (Butler & Bowlby, 1997, p. 423).

Studies of technical devices such as smartphone apps, tactile maps, different types of canes, and beacon technologies for VIP navigation is another common and useful line of research, but has been critiqued for reducing the problems facing VIPs "to technical issues which can be solved by utilising technical solutions" (Imrie, 1996, p. 401). Such props can have mixed effects, such as white canes being linked to stigmatisation but also to increased security (Lid & Solvang, 2016). VIP experiences also vary broadly from those who are reluctant to use canes to those who enjoy using them. Findings from studies about guide dogs also vary, showing they can open up a conversation or hinder navigation when people interfere without an invitation (Worth, 2013).

4. Methodology

This research used Melbourne as a case study. Metropolitan Melbourne has nearly 5 million residents and sprawls over a vast area with a radius of over 50 km around the central city. The central city has a daytime population of over 1 million and has a high concentration of businesses, services, and visitor attractions. Key VIP services such as Women With Disabilities Victoria and Blind Citizens Australia are located in the central city. Multiple public transport modes including trains, trams, and buses link the metropolitan area to the central city. The city of Melbourne is a local government that includes the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD) and surrounding inner-urban suburbs. The city has been transformed since the mid-1980s into a mixed-use urban area with high levels of walking and social encounters (Dovey et al., 2018). Melbourne CBD has a distinct grid morphology of 200 x 100-metre blocks, cut through by narrow laneways and shopping arcades. The initial findings of this research indicated that VIPs visit central Melbourne mainly for work, appointments, and in some cases voluntary activities, and they typically use the train as a means of transportation to reach the CBD.

In seeking to advance understanding of VIPs' experiences, a qualitative multi-methods approach was chosen to foreground "meaning rather than frequencies" in the analysis (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 5). Each visually impaired participant was invited to take part in four activities based on their availability. The first activity was an interview conducted via phone or an online platform due to Covid-19 restrictions imposed in Melbourne in 2020–2021. The interview themes focused on the participant's experiences and perceptions of public spaces in central Melbourne to investigate physical environment issues and socio-spatial relations. The length of the interviews was approximately one hour each, and a semi-structured format was chosen to provide an opportunity for follow-up questions (Adams, 2015).

The second activity involved a words game that was adapted from research conducted by Dischinger (2000) to obtain information—in a playful way—about the meaning and value of socio-spatial features of urban spaces and the image of the city centre for VIPs. Eighty-four words including street names, laneways, squares, parks, arcades, people, and common street furniture were listed. The list did not follow a specific order in terms of topical clusters, but words were grouped based on urban space elements/subjects to assist each participant to focus on one element or subject at a time. This activity was approximately 90 minutes long and conversations with the participants were audio recorded. This was conducted after the interview because the participants had already been acquainted with the theme of the research alongside the provided initial information, and had already gained a deeper understanding of the context of the research.

The third activity was a walking interview. This provided opportunities for the researcher to observe participants in their environment. Walking interviews can give insights into a participant's lived experience that otherwise may not be reported, such as the sense of isolation or alienation (Butler & Derrett, 2014). It is a well-established method used to explore the relationship between a participant, the built environment, and other people (Evans & Jones, 2011). The route was planned to include a diversity of urban spaces with different activity levels and uses, such as a riverside promenade, urban square, laneways, arcades, parks, and streets. Participants in walking interviews were asked to walk as they usually do. The researcher was cautious not to distract the participants but warned them if there was a potential hazard, such as tripping or traffic. The researcher took note of her observations about the socio-spatial aspects of the VIP walk. Five people participated in this method. The conversations were recorded, and some elements were photographed. The duration of the interviews ranged between one and a half hours to two hours based on the speed of walking and foot traffic.

In the final activity, participants were invited to record their experiences of the city in a diary. This is an established method of collecting primary data from VIPs (Milligan, 2005; Papadopoulos & Scanlon, 2002). In this study, the diaries supplied valuable insights into the perceptions, feelings, and interactions of VIPs as they went about their daily lives in public spaces. General instruction was given to participants based on a socio-spatial and temporal approach, which focused data collection on people, routes, and speeds. All diaries were transcribed for thematic analysis. Generally, the participants preferred to record their diaries in quieter places—not while walking on the street—and one participant chose to record the diary by typing.

The participants were recruited through organisations that deal with disability and VIPs issues such as Blind Citizens Australia and Vision Australia. The participants were provided with plain language statements and participant consent forms and, overall, eight VIPs participated in this research. All participants lived outside of the CBD and commute to the city for work or to meet other basic needs. Table 1 lists the participants, including their vision status, mobility assistance, and participation in different research activities.

VIPs who consented to participate in the research did so under the condition of anonymity. Therefore, a VIP number is used when referring to individual participants in the research, and all primary source data collected were de-identified to safeguard their identity.

5. Findings

5.1. Intersecting Flows

Interviewing VIPs revealed that their primary reasons for being in the city is paid work, appointments—such as medical or accountant appointments—and, in some cases, voluntary work. Generally, they do not spend time in the city doing unplanned walks or visiting places without an important reason.

Additionally, for VIPs who work in the city, it is demanding to leave their workplace to go for a short walk due to wayfinding issues, tripping hazards, and time management. Negotiating public spaces is highly demanding for VIPs. For example, VIP-2 mentioned that it was difficult to enjoy the city because, although she did not physically tire from walking, concentrating for a long time made her feel mentally tired. Changes in the built environment or its use increase the challenges. Changing regulations that are not directly related to VIPs can create issues that impact their experience of the city. For instance, VIP-6 mentioned that after smoking became illegal in indoor settings in 2007, gathering outside for smoking at building entrances became an obstruction and a potential hazard for VIPs. In addition to this, in some cases, people tend to stop in the middle of a walkway to have a conversation, which can also become an obstruction to VIPs.

Some people might sit on the street rather than using a street bench, creating tripping hazards. Rough sleepers sitting on the ground could also be expected to be a tripping hazard for VIPs. That being said, results show that this wasn't a very strong concern, as VIPs reported that rough sleepers often notify them and sometimes engage in conversation, though VIP-6 mentioned that, from a broader perspective, the lack of housing for rough sleepers is problematic for both parties. Having no safe accommodation, living on a hard and cold surface, and the responsibility of negotiating around them for other pedestrians can be problematic for all. VIP-1 also mentioned that "sometimes I try to be aware of where they are likely to be….I do not want to hurt them."

Tripping is a risk when bicycle users, couriers, and people who deliver packages leave their vehicles on footpaths. For example, bikes left lying on the street contribute to a more complex and unpredictable streetscape. This is more problematic in narrow laneways with limited

Table 1. Summary of participants and their participation (M1–M4).

ID	Gender	Age	Visually impaired status	Visually impaired development age	Navigation aid	Method 1: Interview (ca. 60 min)	Method 2: Words game (ca. 90 min)	Method 3: Walking interview (ca. 120 min)	Method 4: Diary recording (ca. 30 min)
VIP-1	Female	50s	Severe	Since birth	Cane	✓	✓	✕	✕
VIP-2	Female	20s	Severe	Since birth	Cane	✓	✓	✓	✕
VIP-3	Male	20s	Severe	Early age	Cane	✓	✓	✓	✓
VIP-4	Male	50s	Severe	Adult	Cane	✓	✓	✕	✕
VIP-5	Male	50s	Blind	Since birth	Guide dog/cane	✓	✓	✕	✕
VIP-6	Female	40s	Blind	Since birth	Cane	✓	✕	✕	✕
VIP-7	Female	50s	Moderate	Since birth	Cane/none	✓	✓	✓	✓
VIP-8	Male	50s	Legally blind	Since birth	Cane	✕	✕	✓	✓

space for passing people. VIP-4 explained that he rarely uses his cane outside the CBD despite having a limited vision. However, he needs to use the cane in the city due to the flow of pedestrian traffic and unexpected items such as chairs and tables for dining.

Street music is another activity that can hinder effective navigation because buskers occupy streets with equipment that VIPs are not aware of. Furthermore, the sounds of street music can be disorienting for VIPs, especially when they decide to cross the street because they cannot hear the audible signals or recognise when public transport vehicles such as buses or trams arrive. This is an important factor as they rely on auditory perception.

For VIPs, busy environments are mostly unfavourable. They often described their experience and perceptions of central Melbourne as a busy and noisy environment. Evidence that indicates how the city has become more crowded in past years—which prevents people from walking unhindered—can be found in the VIPs' experiences. As VIP-6 mentioned, she was obliged to buy a new cane at least once a year as her cane often breaks. The participant's interpretation is that in busier environments, with the proliferation of smartphones, perhaps people are less attentive to their environment and crash into other people and objects more easily.

However, observations during the walking interviews were that people (individually or in groups) were attentive when a VIP was walking on the street. They were patient and gave way to make it easier for them to navigate. In one case, in Federation Square, which is one of the main public spaces in central Melbourne, the participants were exploring the area and there were a few small gatherings of families and children, as it was close to Christmas. Children were playing around and when the participant approached them, the guardians warned them to "give way" to "people." In another example, at an intersection where a large group of people were waiting for the pedestrian lights to turn green, they warned each other to move out of the way when they saw that a VIP with a white cane was approaching. In one case, a non-VIP was even giving directions to assist the participant. When the participants were asked about their feelings about people giving way, they responded that people are trying to do what is right and it is appreciated. Even in open areas such as Flinders Street Railway Station, directly opposite Federation Square, where there is adequate space to move around, people gave way to VIPs.

It was understood from VIPs' diaries that they do not only focus on their own navigation but also others around them. For instance, VIP-3 explained that he prefers wider footpaths as they allow him to move more freely. When he is getting close to his destination, he needs to reduce his walking speed to find the entrance, and on wide footpaths, he does not need to think about people behind him, as he may interrupt their walking.

Though a barrier-free environment is important to VIPs for smooth walking, the participants reported that sometimes they prefer to walk in busy main streets rather than quiet laneways because the former street type is more legible for them; unless they are very familiar with the alternative route. Their perception of the physical environment was therefore different based on the volume of pedestrians and noise; there was no agreement that all quiet routes are favourable though, or that all main streets should be avoided. In other words, the social aspects were a key consideration.

5.2. Wayfinding

Wayfinding was one of the main concerns for VIPs, aligning with the dominant focus of research to date. The wayfinding experience of VIPs was best explained in the diary recordings. There were circumstances when people around them had a positive role in assisting with navigation. For example, in one diary recording it was stated: "I remember someone was pushing a trolley, [making] some noise, so I was able to follow them. It was quite a useful thing, someone just walking in front of you'' (VIP-3).

During the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, the presence or absence of people in urban spaces affected VIPs' experiences. VIP-5 recalled an experience travelling to a medical appointment in the city where he could not find the address the few people he was able to ask for assistance were unfamiliar with the area. By contrast, traffic congestion eased during the pandemic, making it easier and safer for VIPs to navigate the city on their own.

VIPs have many difficulties engaging with people around them. As VIP-8 explained, it is hard for them to understand whether the person sitting next to them is interested in having a conversation or not. In the walking interviews, it was noticeable that in open areas such as Federation Square, people were not gazing at a person with a white cane. However, while walking on sidewalks, people were staring and noticing them immediately. During the walking interviews, the lack of communication between VIPs and non-VIPs was visible. For instance, some were smiling and politely apologising to the researcher (who was mostly walking behind or within a distance from the participant to reduce the bias of the method) in case they thought they were in the VIP's way. Only one person directly mentioned it to the VIP. One participant noted this issue in a diary recording:

> I just perceive people as going about their day-to-day business. I generally do not interact with strangers unless I am asking for assistance or directions, or by chance I may have a conversation with somebody. Being vision impaired, I am also conscious of my own safety and security. (VIP-8)

5.3. Socio-Fugal and Socio-Petal Props

It is very common for VIPs to use mobility devices to navigate the urban environment. When they were asked how they feel about them, different views emerged.

A participant stated that despite having some vision, she uses her white cane to notify people around her and to indicate that she is visually impaired in case she bumps into someone or is not able to detect something. She also explained that white canes can change people's directions of movement:

> I know somebody who calls their cane Moses because of the story from the Bible where Moses was known to part the sea and the ocean when he commanded, and the ocean went to both sides and opened up a clear part in the middle and this person says whenever she is down in the street it seems to make people move to each side and then she gets a clear pass. (VIP-7)

The experience of one participant who uses a white cane and a guide dog presented another aspect of social relations. Based on his experiences, the guide dog attracts people from different groups such as students, parents, and their children which creates a positive interaction; however, while using the white cane he mostly feels "hapless or useless" (VIP-5). Consequently, he generally prefers to use the guide dog over the white cane when he can.

6. Conclusions

This article aimed to advance understanding of the social encounters of VIPs in public spaces, using Melbourne as a case study. VIPs do not have the perception of being excluded from public spaces, however. In some settings, they are less likely to experience some of the social aspects of urban spaces.

The findings indicate that VIPs use public spaces almost exclusively for necessary activities. They rarely engage in unplanned walks or mingle because of tripping hazards, exchange ideas because it is not easy to make contact, fully enjoy the public space because of barriers and distractions, and feel a sense of belonging in the environment because there are fewer opportunities for sensory stimulation. As a result, they are less likely to be in public spaces alone or for unnecessary purposes.

The question arises of how urban space can be upgraded to increase VIP participation, beyond a limited set of highly necessary activities. Beyond standards for the design of accessible facilities, what can be done to promote VIP participation in the public life of cities? What public space design strategies would create a more favourable environment for social exchange and encourage them to spend more unstructured time in public spaces? As Fitzsimons (2017, p. 93) writes: "There are no regulations to manage whether designers convey beauty or surprise factors in their designs. It is limited to indicators to facilitate cane users." Moreover, Lefebvre (1996, p. 195) argues:

> The right to the city…stipulates the right to meetings and gatherings…the need for social life and a centre, the need and the function of play, and the symbolic functions of space (close to what exists over and above what is classified) because it…gives rise to rhetoric, which only poets can call by its name: desire.

In some interviews it was indicated that people with vision are less attentive to VIPs because they tend to rush to their destinations, focusing on their mobile phones. Observations taken during the walking interviews captured a different scenario, as many passers-by were offering help, notifying each other, or clearing the way for VIPs. Here, another issue may arise because giving way to VIPs and separating them more than usual in public space had a negative impact. On the one hand, it provides an easier walking experience for VIPs, but, on the other hand, VIPs may interpret the greater separation as them being regarded as "others" in urban space. Another question it raises is whether white canes hinder the kinds of "triangulations" that bring people together. In contrast, guide dogs act as a third element that mostly attracts people and facilitates conversations between VIPs and people around them. Therefore, the cane seems largely socio-fugal while the guide dog is mostly socio-petal.

This article presented an approach to understanding barriers to the participation of VIPs in the city that differed from a conventional access point of view. It found that a desirable space is more than one that is just free from physical barriers. For instance, some participants preferred main streets—though busier—over quieter lanes. Having people around—walking or sitting—is not always a problem for VIPs on busy streets. Though busy streets create difficulties in terms of navigation, there are more people to assist VIPs with wayfinding issues, increasing their sense of security when reaching out for assistance. Meanwhile, places such as arcades—when quiet—are suitable for conversations because VIPs find it easier to hear due to fewer noise distractions.

The findings illuminated unmediated conflicts between VIPs and various aspects of urbanity: from intense pedestrian flows to street music, from fixed urban furniture to informally parked bicycles and scooters. Consequently, VIPs perceive urban spaces as hostile and tend to avoid them beyond what's required for necessary activities. VIPs' desires for simplicity of navigation are in strong contrast with the dynamic diversity of central Melbourne's street life. However, random urban encounters inevitably emerge and can be enabled through the "soft" triangulation facilitated by fluffy guide dogs, or the mutual empathy between VIPs and rough sleepers. These key social factors have a distinct spatiality. Dogs need green spaces (Carter, 2016) while rough sleepers typically appropriate underutilised small setbacks.

Designing public places that capture the desires of VIPs and non-VIPs may be challenging because VIPs' perception of their environment is so different to non-VIPs. Built form and the social environment both have crucial roles to play if we are to design urban spaces that are inclusive of VIPs. Designing for more socio-petal spaces remains a challenge. This will certainly require non-VIPs to be attentive to the specific ways that VIPs live in the city.

To create a more user-friendly environment for VIPs it is important to understand what factors encourage their participation in the city beyond necessary activities; what elements and environments would entice them to spend more time? Though creating a barrier-free environment can facilitate smooth navigation, focusing on their abilities to perceive the environment with non-visual senses could enrich experience their experience of the environment. A considered approach to design that supports VIPs' use of urban space could produce a more dynamic yet more inclusive city by increasing opportunities for social encounters.

Social equity in relation to VIPs shouldn't be reduced to questions of wayfinding and technical aids for navigation. Rather, increased focus should be devoted to questions of VIPs' participation in urban space and public life. This research has focused on urban form aspects of VIPs' experiences in central Melbourne and revealed a set of design aspects that afford—often indirectly—more random social encounters between VIPs and others.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Role of the Body in Pandemic Geographies of Encounter: Anti-Restriction Protesters Between Collective Action and Political Violence

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Abstract
This article looks at public anti-restriction protests by framing public space as a vital component of urban life. It argues that the body is rarely introduced as a scale of spatial analysis and usually plays a more prominent role in the subfields of social movement or public space studies, which often tend to focus on the transformative and emancipatory side of urban encounters. By integrating a corporeal perspective, the article aims at understanding how the body transforms political passions into individual agency and collective action. Focusing on the Covid-19-crisis-related protests, particularly the anti-restriction protests, the study examines from different angles how a socially heterogeneous group consisting of both radicals and sceptics joined together, in anger, in an atypical coalition concerning state interventions in their very personal spaces. Based on a literature review of secondary sources on anti-restriction protests and an empirical analysis of media coverage of a key event in Vienna, the study identifies a gap in the theorisation of ambivalent geographies of encounter whose impacts range between collective action and political violence. To frame our key hypothesis, considering the body as a scale in spatial analysis is needed for future socio-spatial research to grasp new and pressing urban phenomena of social change. By bridging empirical observation, methodological considerations and conceptual reflection, this article contributes to an understanding of social change through less romanticised modes of analysis of geographies of encounter with a particular take on embodied space.

Keywords
anti-restriction protests; Covid-19; embodied space; libertarian authoritarianism; political violence; public space

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article takes a perspective into the role of the body in public space and embodied experience in urban life. Public space is understood and theorised as a geography of encounter and, as such, concerns a vital ingredient of urban life. The urban studies perspective chosen is based on theorising everyday life, which also includes the study of, for example, public life and social movements. Also, public space research has been a vital part of theorising endeavours in planning, as it has usually allowed connecting planning goals to a deeper understanding of new and emerging patterns of social change. While public space researchers have rendered social encounters in the public realm as meaningful or emancipatory, or as conflictive and politicising, the role of the body in transforming inner political passions into outward-bound individual agency or collective action towards social change has remained somewhat undertheorised in wider fields of planning theory.

During the first pandemic years (2020–2022), public space protests took place despite or even because of quarantine measures. Here, the practice of democracy usually entailed participants exercising their civil rights; for instance, their alleged rights to freedom of speech and of assembly (see Butler, 2015, p. 8). Some protest claims did not relate to the Covid-19 crisis while others were staged explicitly in response to the pandemic crisis, and related restrictive regulatory state measures. We focus on the latter as we are interested in "anti-restriction protests" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023). We take them as an empirical example to showcase that the integration of embodied perspectives informing approaches to further generate knowledge around ambivalent geographies of encounter may help to grasp new social phenomena in public space.

Research on conviviality has related to ideas about the emancipatory and joyful aspects of everyday life that often lie hidden. The affective power created between gathering bodies therefore is not to be underestimated when it comes to research on how internal sensations might be translated to mobilise collective affects that may (dis)connect people. Affects are defined as aspects arising from encounters that are not always conceivable in language, but sensed bodily—their nature is spatial (cf. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2011). However, while these qualities remain an essential part of urban analysis, researchers seldom address the dark sides of embodied interaction and affective engagement in protest (Knierbein & Gabauer, 2017). Similarly, Back and Sinha (2016, p. 522) identify similar dilemmas for the debate on conviviality when stating that "the notion of conviviality [is left] under explicated [as] it acts like a fugitive hinterland in the context of racism and melancholic nationalism."

This article starts from the reflection that in times of enhanced disruption and unsettling of urban routines (Viderman et al., 2023), an integration of spatial aspects of social change is a much-needed effort to master the transitions and multifarious challenges that planners are confronted with. By learning about new compositions of social groups protesting with various artistic means and driven by spatial rationales of algorithms and artificial intelligence, the study of anti-restriction protests may allow combining methodological insights on how to consolidate repertoires of spatial analysis and add new ones.

The pandemic era has seen a restructuring of protest groups in public space where a new, controversial heterogeneity of insurgents joined together: far-right wing figures, conspiracists, ecologically interested groups and families, esoteric thinkers, anti-science groups, organic farmers and therapists of different professions, alongside uncategorised people, just to name a few. We are empirically interested in the role that the body plays in interweaving these diverse and often contradictory voices of protesters towards temporary forms of seemingly unified collective action. Empirically exploring this with a conceptual interest helps to identify a gap in theorising space in planning, thereby understanding the deeper patterns, dynamics, and tendencies of social change, not as we desire it, but as it is happening day-to-day. To support our argument, we will first outline the methodological approach, present the empirical phenomenon informing our conceptual reflection, and then revisit how (public) space can be theorised in planning through a renewed focus on the body.

To carry out the case study, first, a qualitative content analysis of secondary sources has been realised. Those articles dealing with collective action against pandemic restriction measures have been analysed with a range of cities under scrutiny. As we reorganise knowledge collected from differentiated disciplinary perspectives, this research is by nature cross-disciplinary. Our key goal, first, is to qualify the phenomenon by creating a comprehensive conceptual depiction from different disciplinary angles and to gather the state of the art of research into studying this phenomenon in its socio-spatial aspects. This is further consolidated, secondly, by empirical analysis of media coverage of street protests as they occurred in Vienna. This empirical part will then be embedded in the conceptual reflection regarding how far planning theorists, in their attempts to theorise space, have considered the role of the body as a mode of spatial analysis.

2. Anti-Restriction Protests and the Perceived Fear of the Loss of Body Sovereignty

2.1. Conceptual and Empirical Advances When Studying Anti-Restriction Protests

The quick spread of the Covid-19 pandemic led several governments worldwide to take socio-spatial prevention measures, sometimes impeding citizen's civil rights to state their opinion freely in public space and, at other times, imposing access restrictions to those places that were normally used for exerting inhabitants' rights to public assembly. During pandemic lockdowns, people were forced to live in reduced private spaces for a short time. Home then became the main locus of (re)production for wider, albeit not all, parts of the urban population, which produced a range of tensions: inner tensions among individuals, tensions to negotiate private space that was suddenly being used for multiple purposes, yet also tensions between individuals, groups and public authorities, and the state, as part of a wider and more abstract set of social relations. These tensions can be grasped at different spatial scales: the body, the neighbourhood, the city, and the state's abstract or concrete territory (Madanipour, 2003). While planners often locate their analysis between neighbourhood space and more abstract state territories, conceiving the body as a scale of spatial analysis has rarely been their focus. An exception can be found in planning research leaning more toward the social sciences:

> We start from the private, interior space of the mind and move outwards to the extensions of the body in space, the personal space. Then we visit the home, the domains of privacy, intimacy and property, followed by inter-personal spaces of sociability

> among strangers, communal spaces of the neighbourhood, the material and institutional public sphere and the impersonal spaces of the city. (Madanipour, 2003, p. 3)

Facing a situation of repeated lockdowns during a pandemic period with prolonged governmental restrictions (e.g., Austria), while the risk of infection temporarily decreased, led to an ambivalent inward orientation among residents, resulting in increasing psychological tension, frustration, and hyperarousal, but also more cases of domestic violence (Piquero et al., 2021, 5). And while the focus on the role of the body in navigating different social relationships between an individual's personal place and the spaces of other individuals, groups, and the state, had already been central during times of lockdown (Bou Kheir et al., 2020), it continued to matter after the lockdown as well (e.g., in anti-restriction protests), and thus remained central even as residents returned to the streets. Concerning political mobilisation, the recent pandemic severely constrained the possibilities for "collective action: by shutting down public life" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 742). In this situation, collective action at first seldom occurred as regards the mobilisation and intensification of protest events (Kriesi & Oana, 2023). However, as the pandemic situation temporarily eased "towards summer 2020, the stringency of lockdown measures became less credible," while "the constraints imposed on mobilisation persisted" (Neumayer et al., 2021, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 743). This context prevailed in different national and urban contexts, albeit differently, where it "provided a powerful incentive for mobilising against such measures, although not for other types of protest" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 743).

The so-called "corona protesters," which we frame alongside Kriesi and Oana's (2023) analytical choice as anti-restriction protesters, have been sociologically characterised by different authors and along different social aspects: For anti-restriction protests in a German state province, Frei and Nachtwey (2022, p. 31) first confirm that the socio-political background of protesters is heterogeneous. Secondly, they evidence that some social groups, for instance, those following an esoteric lifestyle inspired by "anthroposophy" or so-called "diagonal thinkers" (*Querdenker*) were more influential in issuing their grievances than others (e.g., Christian evangelicals, pacifists, or members of neighbourhood initiatives). Anschauer and Heinz (2023, pp. 90–91) have noted, as shown in Table 1, that the political position of protesters can be distinguished along two lines: those who reject scientific evidence and liberal democratic institutions and those who criticise them without rejecting them. Among the former are diagonal movements, a broader trend of political polarisation that can no longer be subsumed under the term populism alone (Slobodian & Callision, 2021). For these protesters, being "anti-mainstream" or "anti-elite" is rooted in a digitalised political culture that is closely linked to a new "entrepreneurship" of influencers who agitate in order to assemble followers for protests.

Anti-mainstream positions are shared by both populist figures and so-called "diagonalist" movements (Amlinger & Nachtwey, 2022, pp. 21–23): The latter are framed as libertarian authoritarianism which refers to subjects characterised by a postmodern personality structure constituted by an authoritarianism that is libertarian in that all forms of social constraint on individual agency are opposed. The identification of libertarian authoritarians is not with a leader but with themselves, with their autonomy. Such a political culture would secure the space of atomized individuals identifying with each other by rejecting what intrigues the realm

Table 1. Differences in dynamics between sceptical and radicalised respondents.

	Sceptics	Radicalised
Attitudes towards Covid-19 infection risk	Take disease seriously	Radical denial of the existence of the virus
Attitudes towards science	Recognise the achievements of science	Denial of scientific evidence
Attitudes towards politics	Massive loss of trust and disillusionment with politics	Disengagement from politics
Science and politics	Political staging of scientific findings increases scepticism	Politics and science in complicity
Motives against vaccination	Uncertainty (e.g., due to previous illnesses, side-effects in the social environment, lack of information)	See vaccination as a genetic injection
Other features	Criticism of capitalism	Cynicism/civil war fantasies
Emotions	Insecurity/fear	Aggression
Effects on the work situation	Perception of exclusion	Threat of job loss

Source: Authors' work based on Anschauer and Heinz (2023, p. 93).

of personal choice, allowing the individual protester to reaffirm his or her own authority while delegitimizing the policies of public bodies. Liao's (2022, p. 2) analysis of 150 leitmotifs of anti-vaccination protests, for instance, revealed three main threats: first, support for individual freedom and rights; secondly, opposition to government control; and third, anti-science arguments, including evidence of misinformation and disinformation.

In terms of protesters' involvement with digital information and social media platforms, the socio-demographics of the so-called middle class were quite pronounced (Nachtwey et al., 2020, p. 51), and the majority politically identified themselves with the political centre, meaning they do not consider themselves radicals (cf. Grande et al., 2021, p. 3). Anti-restriction protesters were found to be relatively weakly politicised, as they seemed rather "alienated" from traditional institutions and suspicious of the state (Grande et al., 2021). Since planning is often considered a state activity, such protest cultures might also enhance people's scepticism towards planning interventions. Such scepticism might mobilise against planning processes altogether, or the discipline as such, and thereby may eventually decrease the societal acceptance and political legitimisation of planning quite quickly, and in the long run make broad public participation even more difficult.

Regarding gender, Brunner et al. (2021, p. 1) identified more cis-women than cis-men among the protesters. Cisgender refers to those persons whose sexual identity relates to that gender which they nominally received by birth (Kühne, 2016). This information can be interpreted also from a feminist perspective including the role of the (female) body in politicising both public and private spaces of the city as political places of everyday life, yet also following the idea that bodily experience has been a key issue in women's lives, and therefore has become prominent in feminist theorising across disciplines and cultures: As Federici (2004, p. 16) has it, the body has been "the primary ground of [women's] exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labour." As communication studies research from the US reveals (Liao, 2022, p. 2), protest slogans issued between the dates of two governmental decisions of the Biden US government imposing vaccination measures on the population show that "body" was among the most cited terms in protest marches (see Figure 1). Yet, besides information displaced in face-to-face politics taking place in urban public spaces around the world, different researchers have also included research into digital and virtual dimensions of these protests.

As political counter spaces gained momentum, Wahidie et al. (2021) identified that many of these quite diverse anti-restriction protesters share a strong orientation towards information distributed via digital media technologies such as messengers (e.g., Signal, WhatsApp, among others) or platforms (e.g., Youtube, etc.) often used in combination. Much of this new type of political resistance has become intertwined with highly selective social media channels in which the quality of information can often not be publicly monitored. In this respect, "an important feature of such anti-vaccine…protests across the globe is a surge of [d]isinformation" (Liao, 2022, p. 1, referring to Ahinkorah et al., 2020) that is "strategically manipulated and circulated with a clear purpose to cause socio-political unrest and disruption" (Das & Ahmed, 2022, as cited in Liao, 2022, p. 1). The expansion of artificial intelligence and certain algorithms has eroded and distorted the public realm as that sphere where public opinion is ideally formed through open dispute and debate (Fraser, 2008). Instead, Eberl et al. (2021, p. 6) have stressed the role played by the unfiltered dissemination of false information on secured

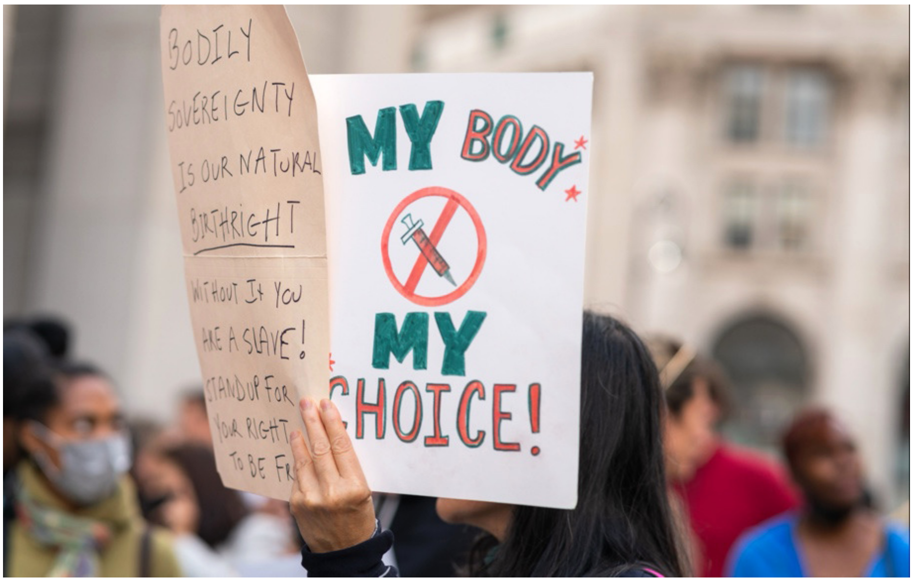
BODILY SOVEREIGNTY IS OUR NATURAL BIRTHRIGHT
WITHOUT IT YOU ARE A SLAVE! STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHT TO BE FR
MY BODY
MY CHOICE!

Figure 1. "My body, my choice": Feminist slogans in anti-restriction protests. Source: Sanchez (2021).

social media channels. Such realities echo earlier urban studies debates about the lack of understanding of how public opinion is actually formed (Low & Smith, 2006). Using the analytical scale of the body would certainly contribute to an understanding of how such opinions are informed by protest practices that operate across the private/public divide, increasingly digitally mediated in hybrid environments.

Research into the political dimensions of the anti-restriction protests ranges across authoritarianism studies (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023), political radicalisation research (Kemmesies et al., 2022), social psychology studies on conspiracy beliefs or mentalities (Imhoff et al., 2021), and political science research on populist movements (Eberl et al., 2021). Due to the self-selective sampling implied by the open calls for participation in messenger groups on Telegram, or to the well-known mistrust of scientists, earlier research into Covid-19-protest publics admittedly suffered from certain biases (Brunner et al., 2021; Nachtwey et al., 2020). Another group of research approaches then emphasised the need for representative samples and referred to existing longitudinal studies, for example, on authoritarianism, conspiracy beliefs, or social movements (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023; Eichhorn et al., 2022).

An embodied space perspective in this context allows for the integration of political theory and radical anthropological perspectives on bodily action in urban space: By exploring the embodied dimension of protest, Moore (2013) asks whether protesters use their bodies to interfere in political discourse or to disrupt institutional politics. Butler (2015, p. 9), in her analyses of the always provisionary political assembly, asserts that "acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political."

In planning theory, there is hardly any analysis of the spatial repertoire of anti-restriction protesters. From such a perspective, social science researchers more genuinely contribute knowledge to the sociology of public space use, yet they often have their limits as regards taking space seriously as an analytical modus operandi. While spatial analysis is the key concern of urban studies, particularly urban planners have hardly used their spatial analytical repertoire to scientifically understand social change through their prisms of analysis, that is, space. These repertoires can be enhanced by including "other" approaches to spatial analysis, for example, from the social sciences and humanities, to gather results from thinking space materially, culturally, politically, and socially. Studies on anti-restriction protests could benefit by interrogating how space is appropriated or contested, and how an analysis that embraces the concept of embodied space helps to overcome blind spots in understanding the social change underlying these ambivalent geographies of encounters.

In this respect, Valentine (2008, p. 329) has stated that some of her informants in empirical research "argued that encounters in contemporary public space are regulated by codes of so-called 'political correctness' to such an extent that they feel obliged to curb the public expression of their personal prejudices and negative feelings." With the legitimacy of public health policy severely challenged during the pandemic, and with new digital media technologies for sharing and producing anti-restrictive audiences in digital space as presumably valid alternatives to the regulated public sphere, opinions and calls to action may well escape the safe intimacy of the private setting (cf. Valentine, 2008) and become mutually affirmed interventions in public discourse and space. The significance of the body and how it appropriates cultural codes and its material environment through action makes it an indeterminate element in theoretical analysis: The body is "the wild card in the theorist's deck" (Shields, 1999, p. 123).

This part was meant to introduce the urban phenomenon of anti-restriction protests which so far have shown potential to trigger much, albeit ambivalent, social change. By outlining the state of the art of interdisciplinary research on the subject matter, we have incrementally introduced conceptual considerations as regards public space, the public sphere, everyday life and ambivalent geographies of encounter, all with a focus on the role of bodies and embodied space. In the next section, we will now turn to specific protests in a specific city, that is, Vienna, the capital of Austria.

2.2. Anti-Restriction Protests in Vienna in November 2021

Pandemic media coverage dealt with a rise in anti-restriction protests across Europe and beyond, as well as an increase in both individual and institutional violence in these protests (Kriesi & Oana, 2023): Around November 2021, thousands of protesters marched the streets of cities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, and Croatia. In some places, police used tear gas and gunshots to tame the increasingly anxious protesters. In these and other places, crowds have frequently been chased away, for example, with riot police using horses, dogs, water cannons, and batons, whereas anti-restriction protesters behaved more violently as well, attacking police officers and vehicles while reiterating an anti-system rhetoric ("Covid: Huge protests across Europe over new restrictions," 2021). In Austria, police reported that on one weekend tens of thousands of people rallied against pandemic restriction measures as Austria became the first European country to reimpose a third lockdown for those who were vaccinated whereas restrictions were already in place for unvaccinated people ("Covid in Austria: Mass protest in Vienna against measures," 2021).

There is no universalist idea of a diverse range of anti-Covid-19 protests across cities, regional, national or continental borders as "political protest is 'highly unequally distributed across time and space'"

(Koopmans, 2004, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 740). However, there are already some comparative studies across EU urban contexts as regards protest mobilisation and intensification during the pandemic, aiming at documenting the variation and possible causes of protests in European countries. Kriesi and Oana (2023, p. 751) have studied "the extent and intensity of protest across 31 European countries in the Covid-19 crisis" and asked to what extent protest motivation became focused on the crisis itself, what kind of actors were mobilised throughout the crisis and in what types of formats. Like their study, our conceptual reflection is informed by a limited empirical phenomenon, that is, "protest mobilisation that occurs mainly in the streets and that is reported in the media" (cf. Kriesi & Oana, 2023). One of their findings was that "not only opportunities but also structural threats, like the threat posed by Covid-19, may stimulate collective action" (Almeida, 2019, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 742). The spread of populism and the political entrepreneurs associated with it not only benefited from the wave of protest but to some degree prepared the ground for it (Eberl et al., 2021; Eichhorn et al., 2022, p. 11). Initially, the lack of representation of anti-restriction protests within the political landscape of party politics, which tended to support governmental decisions, moved the political space of debate away from established politics (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 744). While digital media technology played its part before social presence on the streets, the debate moved to the streets, where politics was embodied and realised in personal encounters.

As follows, the case of one specific anti-restriction protest in Vienna which took place on November 20, 2021, will be debated: Shortly before, the Austrian government had decided for mandatory vaccination from the age of 14 years onwards (Pollak et al., 2021), as more than 13,000 deaths had been reported since the start of the pandemic and only 64% of Austria's population (approximately 8.9 million) were fully vaccinated at that point ("Booster-Impfung für alle," 2021). This dynamic moment featured approx. 40,000 protesters (Pollak et al., 2021) and marked a turning point in which Austria's far-right party redefined its role from supporting to organising these protests. This happened in the aftermath of the leading conservative party losing its then-chancellor in a series of corruption scandals and after he had declared the pandemic defeated. While protest crowds expressed their anger in the streets, the situation in hospitals entered a critical phase as the first medical triage measures were reported in some Austrian hospitals (Pollak et al., 2021).

We explored this event by looking at social media content shared on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and related press releases of the actors and institutions involved. These documents were analysed deductively using codes related to what we address as precarious body sovereignty. Body sovereignty transports libertarian ideas about state–citizen relations and aims at defending the realm of personal choice in all bodily matters. We argue that as regards the pandemic protest publics, the active mobilisation of what overall makes up about 15–17% of the Austrian population (Eberl & Lebernegg, 2021), composed of socially heterogeneous groups (Brunner et al., 2021, p. 52), find a common threat in resisting against state interference into their personal space of the body. These codes touch on ideas of alternative ways of curing physical ailments, i.e., esoteric ideas about the body, but also derivatives of social Darwinist or xenophobic discourse. Body sovereignty slogans were also inspired by slogans of feminist movements (see Figure 1), which we found in the photo documentation of many manifestations in Vienna but also, for example, in Freiburg. The rejection of the face mask at protest rallies and the reaffirmation of strong bodily expressions and the perceived loss of control over the protesters' own bodies and those of their children was equally coded in that way. It is clear from our research that the manifestation itself is only one dynamic moment within a transitional field that operates and communicates extensively through digital media technologies and can thus not be isolated. Rather, it is the variegated instantiation of the transnational anti-restriction protests in a particular space-time, intensified by national and urban political choices.

Figure 2 illustrates how conformity to restriction measures can become dangerous in case it is frequently performed without contestation. This type of performance was equally part of the anti-restriction protest culture in other cities, for instance in Karlsruhe, Augsburg, or Zürich. While this performance stages a critique of the perils of submission to a presumed dictatorship, it can also be read as a loss of individuality, social proximity, and bodily expression. The slogans say: "Vaccination is altruism," "lifelong face mask," or "thinking for yourself is a public danger" (see Figure 2). In addition, videos, which are not shared due to research ethical considerations, showed women perceiving forced vaccination as a physical threat and a potential source of (individual and collective) bodily trauma. Following also slogans such as "My body, my choice," female anti-restriction protesters reported that they were initially not interested in changing their electoral choices, but that governmental decisions to enforce vaccination on the overall population particularly triggered their protest against state interference in their personal space. Another argument relates to individual freedom to decide whether to get the jab: This argument is mentioned by protesters in Figure 3 alongside a reference to their constitutional right instead of solidarity with those in need of protection against the pandemic's severe risks to health. The female protester in Figure 4 explicitly resists the state interfering in her embodied personal space when stating that "it is my own body, and no government needs to intervene here."

The capacity to mobilise lies in addressing affective ideas among sceptics that deepen anxieties through a

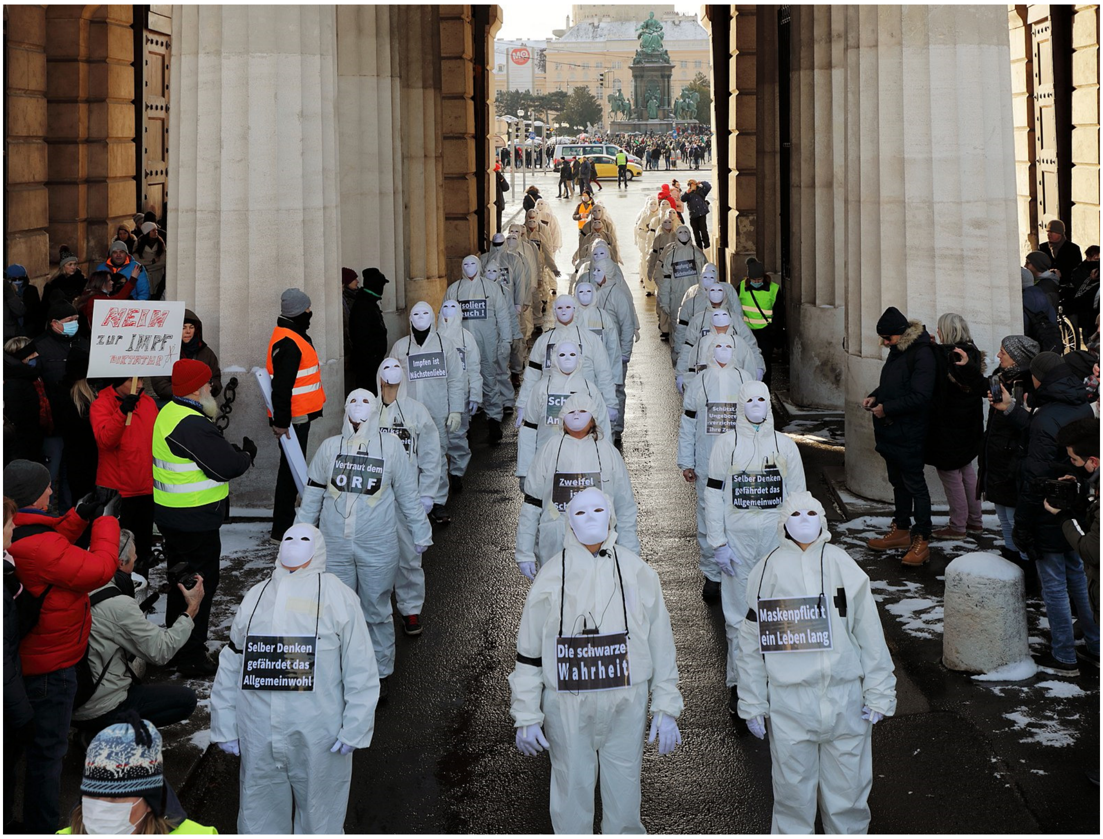
NEIN zur IMPF DIKTATUR
Vertraut dem ORF
Impfen ist Nächstenliebe
Zweifel
Selber Denken gefährdet das Allgemeinwohl
Die schwarze Wahrheit
Maskenpflicht ein Leben lang

Figure 2. Vienna: Anti-corona demo, performance group with protective suits. Source: Stadler (2021).

perceived loss of bodily sovereignty (see Brunner et al., 2021, p. 42). This was intensified in the ongoing debates around compulsory vaccination, which in turn provoked deliberations on the relationship between the self and the body, producing protest as a (self-)defensive and bodily empowering stance against that perceived threat. Since there is no natural need for such discomfort and protest to turn towards the populist right-wing over time (Brunner et al., 2021, p. 54), the workings of neoliberal subjectivity might be added for interpretation. By this

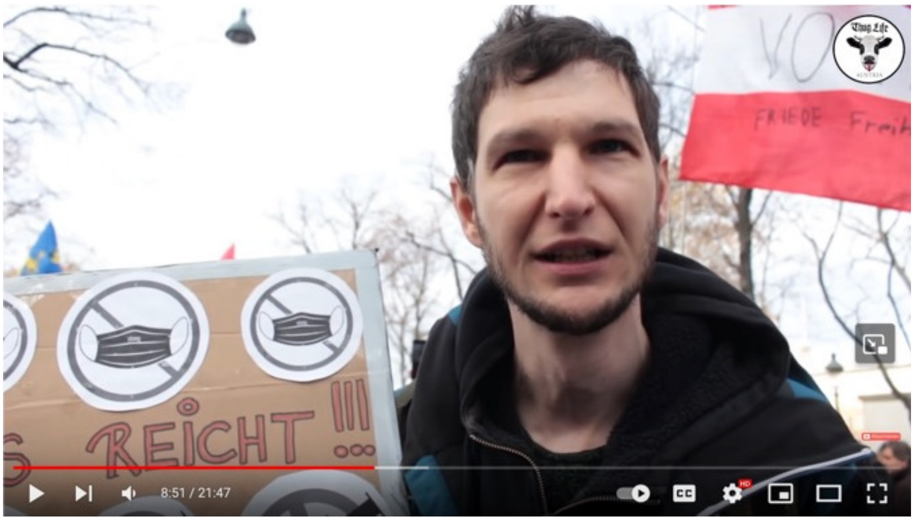
Thug Life
FRIEDE Freih
REICHT !!!
8:51 / 21:47

Figure 3. Original quote in German: "Die Impfpflicht...das ist mein Körper und ich möchte selbst entscheiden, was ich mit meinem Körper mache...dieses Argument mit der Solidarität...ich kann das nicht nachvollziehen, wie gesagt, es ist mein Körper es ist mein Grundrecht selbst zu entscheiden was ich mit mir oder mit meinem Körper mache" ("The mandatory vaccination...it's my body and I want to decide myself what I do with my body...this argument with solidarity...I can't grasp that, as I said, it's my body it's my fundamental right to decide myself what I do with myself or with my body"). Source: Thug Life Austria (2021, 08:30).

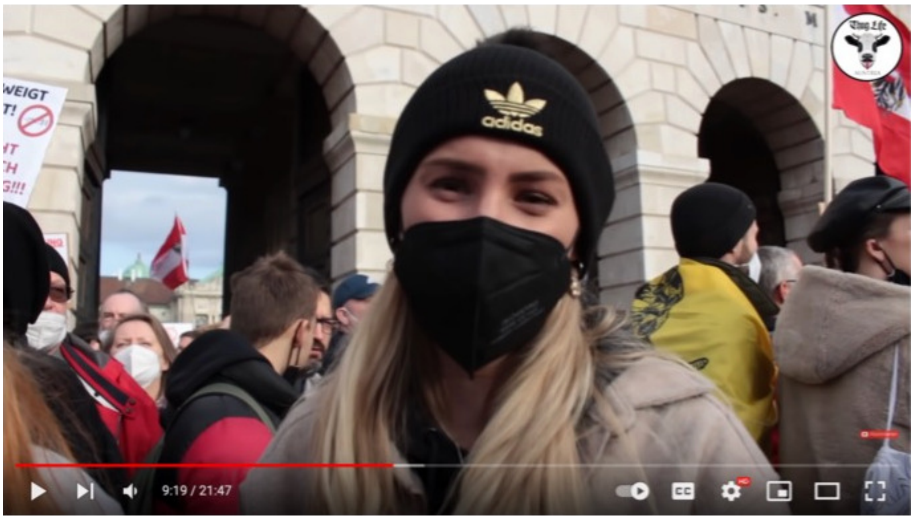

Figure 4. Original quote in German: "Es ist mein eigener Körper, da braucht keine Regierung irgendetwas sagen" ("It is my own body, no government needs to say anything about it"). Source: Thug Life Austria (2021, 09:17).

we mean social norms that emphasise the need to solve social crises individually, and thus embrace individual responsibility and corporeality, which implies an emphasis on the need to operate within the parameters of individual decision-making and personal space (see Anschauer & Heinz, 2023, p. 81). Combining these different interpretative frames is useful when attempting to understand why a range of different protester backgrounds, for example, neo-fascist protesters and those going along with discourses, effectively imply de-solidarisation with vulnerable groups (see Brunner et al., 2021). This individualistic "everyone as she/he pleases" approach also avoids the assumption of a uniform and radical conspiracy mentality, which, according to studies, only accounts for a larger number, though still a minority, of radicals (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023).

These considerations allow us to focus on two further aspects of pandemic protest: political violence and pandemic crisis management: As Bartusevičius et al. (2021) have analysed, the psychological burden of the Covid-19 pandemic is associated with anti-system attitudes and an increase in political violence: hostility towards governments and their representatives, engagement with neo-fascist ideas, verbal but also corporeal acts of discriminatory violence, and a need to produce chaos resulting from felt social exclusion and a lack of control over life, among others (cf. Bartusevičius et al., 2021, pp. 1392–1394). They analyse political activism as participation in collective action for political causes and coin protests against stringent anti-Covid-19 policies as examples of political activism (Bartusevičius et al., 2021). When political activism involves violence, this is addressed as *political violence* (cf. Bartusevičius et al., 2021, p. 1393). These authors detect an increase in public space demonstrations between 2019 and 2020 of 7% globally. Many of these demonstrations had been staged as protests of new groups of insurgents expressing "anger over restricted rights and freedoms, as well as economic hardship," aspects which "are often cited among the causes of unrest" (Henley, 2020, as cited in Bartusevičius et al., 2021, p. 1392). Anti-restriction protests share an implicit rationale to de-centre power and reposition the political subject vis-a-vis the state.

Other authors have raised concerns about the impact of authoritarian forms of pandemic crisis management, noting that "Covid-19 measures are necessary to save the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in society, but at the same time they produce a range of negative everyday effects for already marginalised people" (Branicki, 2020, p. 872). Most responses to the pandemic were dominated by national "one-size-fits-all" policies characterised by the logic of large state bureaucracies rather than by more nuanced and spatially sensitive strategies that would address the specific needs and risks of particular groups (cf. Branicki, 2020). Consequences of such crisis management involve high levels of carelessness such as elevated risk for workers in low-paid, precarious, and care-based employment; overrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in case numbers and fatalities; and gendered barriers to work (Branicki, 2020). Yet these case studies hardly stressed the role of the (perception of the own) body and the state's potential interferences with different bodies as a joint source of protest and political violence. Although protest groups might not share the same self-perception of the role of their own body in addressing political freedom, they might be able to agree across diverging values, beliefs, and world views on the fact that they disagree with felt interventions into their privacy, intimacy, and vulnerability, that is, into the personal space of their body, fearing a loss of own body sovereignty. Since the body, as understood by Hardt (2007, p. ix), functions as a facilitator between internal passions and external actions, it can also function as a link between individual anxieties and the politics of fear in the context of collective threats that, while primarily discursive, are bodily experienced.

The role of the body in anti-restriction protests during the pandemic has been of interest. In demonstrations, bodies have been both used as a practical resource for issuing political disagreement and dissent, as a vehicle of exerting (political) violence against "the other," and as a reference in protest rhetoric, in weaving together quite disparate groups of protesters. Bodies were also exposed to political or state violence, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the discursive role of the body in resistance-based discourses against the status quo ("politics") and the body's spatially disruptive function within protest and the resulting political impact ("the political"). Moore (2013) here identifies what bodies do to move people from being involved in reform to resistance, or from anti- to alter-politics: enabling political dynamics through the disruption of established routines, affective relations, and by bodily using space. Nachtwey et al. (2020, p. 55) differentiate between the value of authentic bodily experience and its narration within the "community of resistance." Such a narrative expresses one's anxieties, provides a shared framework that allows heterogeneous protest publics, ranging from sceptics to radicals (cf. Nachtwey et al., 2020; see also Anschauer & Heinz, 2023, pp. 77–78), to employ their body as a resource to enact "the political" (Moore, 2013). Similar to Anschauer and Heinz (2023), Slobodian and Callision (2021) have also found that such a community of resistance framing defines politics among "diagonalists."

3. Conclusion

This research emphasised a body-centered scale in spatial analysis, using the empirical example of anti-restriction protests in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without moralising about the behaviour of the protesters, we wanted to excavate the required analytical concepts of how to study the hidden dimensions of everyday life through the body. This research aimed at further deepening our interest in space and its role in understanding social change, especially the anti-restriction protests during the Covid-19 pandemic. Taking a specific perspective into the role of the body and embodied experience in new forms of protest publics has facilitated the re-theorising of public space as an ambivalent geography of encounter for anti-restriction protesters. An attempt has been made to de-romanticise analytical procedures for social movements to also facilitate and trigger analytical spectra for analysing the dark sides of public space, for example, ephemeral encounters of people seeking to cope with the psychological burdens of the Covid-19 pandemic by turning to anti-restriction protests involving both collective action and alter politics, alongside increasingly destructive, aggressive, and disruptive acts of political violence and anti-systemic behaviour. In navigating between individual and internal psychological pressures and external and more vocal collective political expressions, the body has been introduced as a central analytical vehicle, manoeuvring between the scales of internal incivility and radicalisation and external moments of solidarisation with seemingly disparate individuals and groups producing political bodies of all kinds.

Whereas the focus on conviviality has been debated in the context of cosmopolitan lives, multiculturalism, and superdiversity, tensions in research on cultures of conviviality are related to both conceptual and analytical biases and dilemmas: Everyday life research on public space tended to overemphasise progressive aspects of temporary geographies of encounter experienced around protests and protesting bodies, whereas analytical perspectives were based on emancipatory forms of social encounter in public space. Valentine's (2008) approach to geographies of encounter addresses the question of how we can forge a civic culture out of difference by narrowing the analytical focus of these debates to the idea of meaningful contact. Valentine (2008, p. 325) identifies a paradoxical gap emerging between values discursively attached to encounters between strangers in public space and embodied practices of encountering others when going beyond a "worrying romanticism of urban encounter" which "implicitly reproduce[s] a potentially naïve assumption that contact with 'others' necessarily translates into respect for difference." While the role of the affective body in transforming internal political passions into external action has been under-theorised, especially in disembodied theories of planning, this is less true for public space research which has consistently used the body as a scale of spatial analysis.

Shields's (1999) reflections on Lefebvre's (2014, p. 80) fourth form of capitalist alienation, alienation from the body, seem equally worthwhile to be addressed here. We may ask if the (capitalist) colonisation of everyday life and its connected fourth form of alienation from the body has increased at such a pace that theorists need to envision new analytical categories to come to terms with the massive pressures that affect bodies. It is not inconceivable that the fierce defence of an individualist freedom of choice (cf. Amlinger & Nachtwey, 2022, p. 16), which is to be found among many demonstrators, is equally the result of an instrumental view of the body, its potential for further commodification and economic growth, and the imperative of neoliberal self-optimisation which tends to enlarge precarious and unequal social conditions (see Butler, 2015, p. 14).

What kind of conviviality can exist within classificatory struggles induced by neoliberal urban development regimes (Tyler, 2015), as well as in attitudes expressing welfare chauvinism? Such anti-democratic aspects of urban public life can also spark anti-systemic attitudes or even political violence. Studying the structural aspects that bring people out of peaceful political protest into aggressive aspects of political violence is essential to understanding both the democratic burden of the Covid-19 pandemic and the role of planners, architects, and urban designers. They often translate neoliberal urban policies into the physical layout of public squares and streets. However, this translation can unintentionally interfere with lived space, and with the task of transferring state pressures into their intimate, personal, and embodied space.

We suggest that a qualitative understanding of the temporality of public protest spaces as ambivalent geographies of encounter is necessary. These can be both meaningful contacts that generate respect for "the other" and tolerance, and meaningless contacts that tend to foreground discriminatory practices in the scope between disrespectful, anti-pluralist, anti-democratic, or even anti-constitutional actions, both individual and collective. This new plurality of anti-restriction protesters complicates the mission of traditional social movement studies and public space researchers and is part of a more recent tradition seeking to explore "the dark sides of public space" (Knierbein & Gabauer, 2017, p. 217) as they relate, for example, to anti-pluralist, neo-fascist, and racist tendencies in public protests. Valentine (2008) emphasises that aggression is even articulated by individuals who themselves benefit from a respectful public encounter (Phillips & Smith, 2006, as cited in Valentine, 2008, p. 326). Even within accounts of conviviality and cosmopolitanism, posing the question of whose conviviality and cosmopolitanism might analytically point to inclusions and exclusions, presence and absence in new social movements. "Spatial proximity" in this respect "can actually breed defensiveness and the bounding of identities and communities" (Valentine, 2008, p. 326).

From our research into Viennese anti-restriction protests, we understood that the protesters produced not only public unrest, but also among themselves a social space that allowed for bodily expression of all kinds, from expressing anger to bodily performances and self-defensive rhetoric about the body, be it joyful shouts or angry chants: The body was often perceived as simultaneously "being threatened" by the state and "collectively liberated" in public space, and it is this productive tension that we believe not only mitigated potential conflicts between different types of protesters with different ideological backgrounds but also stimulated the emergence of ambivalent pandemic geographies of encounter. The body has been treated as an aspect that seems to bring all these very different people together despite their assumingly quite diverging value systems, political beliefs, and everyday experiences.

Incorporating the body as a scale of spatial analysis in deciphering social change, both in public space and other types of planning research can be considered a promising analytical route to further develop adequate research questions and methodological considerations, and to bring to the fore new sorts of empirical results. Enhancing methodological approaches that support exploring new paths of contemporary social change in forms of knowledge production that include embodied space epistemologies is a first step before more sustained empirical insights can come to the fore. Empirically, many studies on urban protests and social movements have tried to come to terms with democratising, progressive, or even liberatory accounts of urban collective life, while those bodily encounters that promote discriminatory aspects, or actively help to socially and culturally separate or discriminate people in public space have often been disregarded. Also, forms of aggressive or violent encounters have been underrated in urban and planning research, although particularly participation processes increasingly suffer from political polarisation, verbal violence, and aggressive discrimination of participants. That is why this article takes the study of anti-restriction protests as a form of bodily encounter and the enactment of the political in public space seriously.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Improvisation and Planning: Engaging With Unforeseen Encounters in Urban Public Space

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Abstract

Despite the significant emphasis in Scandinavian cities on vital urban spaces and creative unfolding in urban development, there is a tendency towards designing for “finished” urban spaces with a pre-defined conclusion. The result is often standardised design and staged play, ignoring the diversity of lived experiences taking place in the here and now. How can urban spaces be generated to accommodate unforeseen encounters fostering moments of intensity, affect, and disorder? In this article, we explore the potential of improvisation in urban spaces by examining how urban public spaces facilitate improvisation in interactions between places, senses, materials, and participants. Improvisation is understood as a productive force in urban development that gives space to what occurs in urban encounters. The article draws on Richard Sennett’s concept of “disorder” and Jennifer Mason’s concept of “affinity.” By using design experiments and sensory and visual methods inspired by ethnographic methodology the article analyses two improvisational practices occurring in public spaces in Norway and Denmark, which emphasise the performative, affective, and sensory elements of urban life. The analysis brings forth a discussion of how improvisation unfolds in multimodal urban encounters, between order and disorder, and sensory and emotional connections. The authors argue for a more place-sensitive form of city-making and more improvisatorial urban designs that stimulate varied, spontaneous, and changeable use.

Keywords

affect; affinities; diversity; encounter; improvisation; play; public space; Scandinavia

Issue

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1. Introduction

Although many Scandinavian cities over the last two or three decades have focused on using temporary spaces to revitalise de-industrialised and derelict areas, the result is often a staged space that fails to grasp the diversity of lived experience and the encounters that unfold in the here and now. Through often standardised designed installations, based on a growing discourse of attractiveness, what were meant to be explorative spaces end up as passive urban places. Such designed places are not seen as part of having a local public space representing the socio-cultural diversity and conviviality in the area. Standardised designs ignore the atmospheres of improvisation, difference, and change (Ingold & Hallam, 2007; Sumartojo & Pink, 2019), that is, the forces of presence, playful, and sudden encounters (Franck & Stevens, 2006; Stevens, 2007) and the use of “disorder” (Sendra & Sennett, 2022; Sennett, 1970). This article is about generating urban spaces which accommodate unforeseen and unfinished encounters.

Within urban studies, we may say improvisation has been part of radical urban movements like the Situationist (Pinder, 2005) and “Non-Plan” planning

(Hughes & Sadler, 2007). Some planning processes have used different kinds of co-creation and co-working like charrette and themed workshops, but often these attempts lack experiments and improvisation, which for example is seen in "re-making urban planning on foot" (Pinder, 2021) and jamming with urban rhythms (Sand, 2017). Jacques (2021) argues that there is a binary opposition within and between improvisation and urban planning, where improvisation in planning is not acknowledged as a practice of value in itself since it collides with the tendency to operate with "a moment of stop, a conclusion for the construction" (Jacques, 2021, p. 24). Regarding improvisation, we argue that we must discuss another form of urban planning—one that is associated with chance and unfinishedness (see Jencks & Silver, 2013; Rudofsky, 1964).

The idea of doing improvisational planning meets its opposition in city planning, spatial planning, and functional designs. The design of urban spaces is not a design for allowing improvisation, exploring plays of fantasy, agonistic meetings, or elaborating and changing the conviviality of public space. Within the article, we answer the following question: How can improvisational urban practices generate encounters, which foster moments of intensity, affect, and disorder?

We choose these characteristics since we argue that they are difficult to grasp, analyse, and integrate into urban planning. This was also an essential argument within the newly published anthology titled *Improvisation*. *Urban Life Between Plan and Planlessness* (Pløger et al., 2021). This article analyses two cases which foster unforeseen encounters. The analysis brings forth a discussion of how improvisation unfolds in multimodal urban encounters, between order and disorder, and sensory and emotional connections.

The first case explores voluntary citizens and PhD-fellow Mathias Poulsens' attempt to make design experiments, which to a high extent maintain unforeseen elements and improvisational use of materials, as a common effort to build a temporary playground for children in a suburban town in Denmark. The second case is from a medium-sized city in Norway and Førde studies a museum that was temporarily turned into a space for theatre performance by migrant youths who got the opportunity to improvise in a museum exhibition.

The improvisational perspective within this article nuances how children and young people improvise from the sensorial, social, and spatial connections made by the encounters with others (materials, spatial surroundings, co-workers, and spectators) creating moments of intensity, affect, and disorder. Based on the analysis of children and young people's improvisational practices in an outdoor and indoor public space, we interrogate how the two forms of interventions generate improvisational encounters. Both the children and young people get to know a place within the city and see themselves as part of it, by entering various public spaces with their performances.

2. Improvisation

In Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold's book on creativity and cultural improvisation, they argue: "There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In other words, they have to improvise" (Hallam & Ingold, 2007, p. 1). Hallam and Ingold (2007) define improvisation as being generative, social, temporal and the way we work in everyday life. Improvisation is often understood as taken by surprise and pure spontaneity. But practitioners who work in the field of music, theatre, and dance acknowledge that improvisation is more than just being confronted with a sudden incident (see Bigé, 2019; De Spain, 2014). Improvisation entails rules and techniques, but it also fosters the unforeseen through creative disruptions and encounters. Improvisation is "the creation of something new, yet which doesn't exclude the pre-written framework that makes it possible" (Derrida, 2004, p. 322). This double side of improvisation is challenging because it affects a co-existence amongst strangers expressing their difference also through everyday encounters. Improvisation is a key feature of cities, in a permanent tension between the fixed and rigid on the one hand and sites of the surprising and unexpected on the other.

Müller and Trubina (2020) argue that improvisation should be understood as a practice of inhabiting the in-between of pre-given structures at one end and multiple fluidities at the other. Improvisation unfolds at the encounter of rigidities and unexpected flux, where structures and material articulations meet unanticipated events that disrupt constraining structures. They see improvisation as:

> The precarious bringing-into-being of the city multiple: the actualisation of the potentialities immanent in urban life and its material spaces. It is omnipresent as a creative practice that allows not just navigating but, more crucially, tapping the potentialities of the urban as an always unfinished, open project inhabits the in-between spaces. (Müller & Trubina, 2020, p. 666)

The attempt to create new openings and possibilities through improvisation can never escape existing structures of power. But as the pre-written and pre-planned and the creative and spontaneous come together, a new space might be created.

The work *Noise Orders, Jazz, Improvisation and Architecture* by David P. Brown (2005) uses improvisation and jazz theory to analyse architecture and city planning and argues that city planning should contribute to the emerging environment rather than predetermined spaces. An ambiguity in Brown's work with improvisation is that he has a primary focus on architecture, which overlooks how improvisation relates in-between encounters, which is the focal point of this thematic issue.

Improvising does not just mean being able to move outside the pattern, but to be critical of it. Provocative competence through improvisation is a skill that means challenging conventional forms of practice, searching for unfamiliar terrain and experimenting on the breadth of the unknown (Steinsholt & Sommerro, 2006, p. 18). Improvisation is often experienced from a sudden incident, challenging our body and mind to react. Incidents may also, and most likely, happen when one is part of a staged action such as creating a physical installation or being part of a theatre play that wants to challenge people socially, mentally, and bodily. Thus, improvisation is not only about maneuvering in unexpected situations but also about the capacity to perform and experiment in situ.

Before presenting the cases, we will expand our theoretical approach to improvisation, understood through performativity, affinity, and encounter. In our analysis, we show how flexible spaces—where children build their playgrounds and youths perform theatre activities—relate to a multitude of connections that force them to improvise. We conclude by advocating for a more unforeseen and place-sensitive form of city-making and more life-enhancing urban space designs that stimulate varied, spontaneous, and changeable use.

3. Performativity, Affinity, and Unforeseen Encounters

A city is “a complex of things and activities connected in space and time, formed and managed by many different actors” (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 14). We see urban planning as the production of socio-spatial relationships through form, function, and spatial design. Planning sees urbanity as being about “physical surroundings” and “the intensity in urban life and the use of the city as it follows from density and multi-functionality” (Plan- og bygningsetaten, 2019, p. 7). On what some see as cities “third places,” informal gathering places, Henri Lefebvre says: “As a place of encounters, focus of communication and information, the urban becomes what it always was: place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and the unpredictable” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 129).

Art practices and the micro-urbanism of co-creative or unforeseen encounters are crucial forces in creating the informal third spaces not only as processes of community making but also to make a temporary agonistic space (Bosman & Dolley, 2022).

City planners are aware of this micro-urbanism and encourage citizens and artists to make performative and forming engagements in cities’ third spaces. They do, however, have difficulties in accepting the spontaneous and improvisational appropriation of these spaces. Cities want discipline, control, and predictability, while social encounters rather are “the production and negotiation of difference” (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020, p. 48).

Seeing third-place encounters through children’s improvising performativity (case 1) and using an art space to make affinity to cultural otherness (case 2), we explore temporary appropriations of space by turning fixed spaces into an encounter with improvisation. Improvisation in third spaces provides an optic to see how encounters happen and take place perhaps constitutive to an emplacement (case 1) or how a performing theatre project temporarily fosters a cultural convention by inviting people to take part in a play (case 2).

The sudden incident or experience is expected to be met by an adaptation to the experience based on embodied experience, but it is still also a presence reaction. The improvised performativity effect is experienced in a presence situation either by sensing or a signifying sensation and both create energies, flows, sparks, trembling, or other reactions. A sudden improvisation is an experience that is difficult to grasp or recognize by individuals themselves or from participatory analysis.

A way to understand the forces of both adaptation and sudden improvisation is to draw on Mason’s (2018) concept of affinities. Mason describes sensations as interactions that are full of sensory information and kinesthetics. Within sensations, affinities are generated as:

> Energies, forces and flows that can take shape in an ineffable kinship as well as in ecologies and the socio-atmospheric of life, and they articulate and resonate with time and with their times. Their potency can come from the frictions, charges, alluring discordances and poetics that animate and enliven everyday personal lives. (Mason, 2018, p. 200)

According to Mason, affinities should not be interpreted as relational or symbolic, but viewed as sparks that set loose an energy or force that might limit or push an encounter in a particular direction. Thus, affinities can have characteristics such as feelings, appearances, smells, voice, gestures, physicality, habits, rhythms, etc. (Mason, 2018, p. 51).

The use of affinities as an entry point to understand improvisational encounters enables us to explore how encounters happen not only through encountering materiality and objects but also by how sensations spark or intensify by enchanting, provoking’s or hindering the ordinary use of place.

4. Methodological Approaches

The empirical cases discussed hereafter consist of ethnographic methods such as participatory observation (Spradley, 1980) and sensory participation (Pink, 2011). The first case provides insight into local citizens’ effort to make a children’s playground in a local gravel pit in a small Danish town. The second case illustrates how a group of young people from multicultural backgrounds entered public spaces with theatre performances in Tromsø, Norway.

In the first case, local citizens were invited to participate in imagining and exploring new possibilities within a local gravel pit. The gravel pit was used as such in 1960, and since then a city has developed around the pit. Today the gravel has 10-meter-high slopes covered with trees (Figure 1). Since 1990 the gravel pit has been a place for play and since 2020 local citizens have organized social and playful events there. Poulsen and Sand made three design experiments with local children and their parents. The first experiment gathered around 50 participants and the second and third between 15 and 30 participants. Each experiment lasted for four to five hours. As illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4, the participants could use different kinds of discarded materials and tools for their exploration of the place. The experiments generated multimodal research documentation created by the researchers and participants, for example, GoPro camera recordings and observations. During the three experiments nine children used the GoPro and so did one of the authors. The cameras produced 12 hours of video footage, which the authors transcribed and analysed. The GoPro cameras allowed the authors to "trace of the route that was taken through the world and the immediate environment" (Sumartojo & Pink, 2019, p. 41). The experiment was a part of Mathias Poulsen's PhD project based on constructive design research (Koskinen et al., 2011) and artistic research (Hannula et al., 2014). The authors designed a framework for a series of experiments inspired by the Danish tradition of "junk playgrounds'" (de Coninck-Smith, 2022), and they used the "junk playground as agora" and a space for bodily-material inquiries into possible futures for the gravel pit. Poulsen and Sand did not seek to produce permanent constructions, but rather to encourage and study the dynamics of improvisational and material participation in urban spaces. The authors were active participants, arguing that it is "acceptable, desirable and required to be embodied and affected" (Østern et al., 2021, p. 14), both in terms of creating conditions for the experiments and for deploying a sensory ethnography (Calvey, 2021). GoPro videos, photographs and observations were transcribed and analysed through individual open codings and joint codings, readings, and selection of the empirical material (Charmaz, 2006).

In the case of the performing art youth project in Tromsø, Førde has followed Here I Am! since 2018, as part of the research project Cit-egration where this creative art company was a partner. Førde has assisted in rehearsals, preparations, and theatre performances. Participant observation was combined with qualitative interviews with some of the young participants, and reflection dialogues between artists, instructors, and researchers, where we throughout our collaboration sat down for two-three hours sharing experiences, reflecting on the interventions and methodologies. The approach was based on mutual collaboration, where artists and young migrant participants contributed to the research, and researchers contributed to the art interventions (see Aure et al., 2020). Together we have explored the activities as here-and-now interventions in urban spaces, how they are planned and organised, and how they transfer into participation in other public arenas in the city. Such participatory arts interventions constitute vulnerable spaces of improvisation in our knowledge co-production, where perspectives and categories are constantly challenged in the multiple encounters among artists, researchers, and participants (Aure et al., 2020). The analyses of the specific case presented in this article is written by the researcher, but the theatre instructor, the museum curator, and the young participants in Cora and I have all read and commented on the text. This kind of dialogic exchange (Nunn, 2010) is crucial to collaborative research and contributes to expanding the understanding of the improvisations taking place and how they are conditioned.

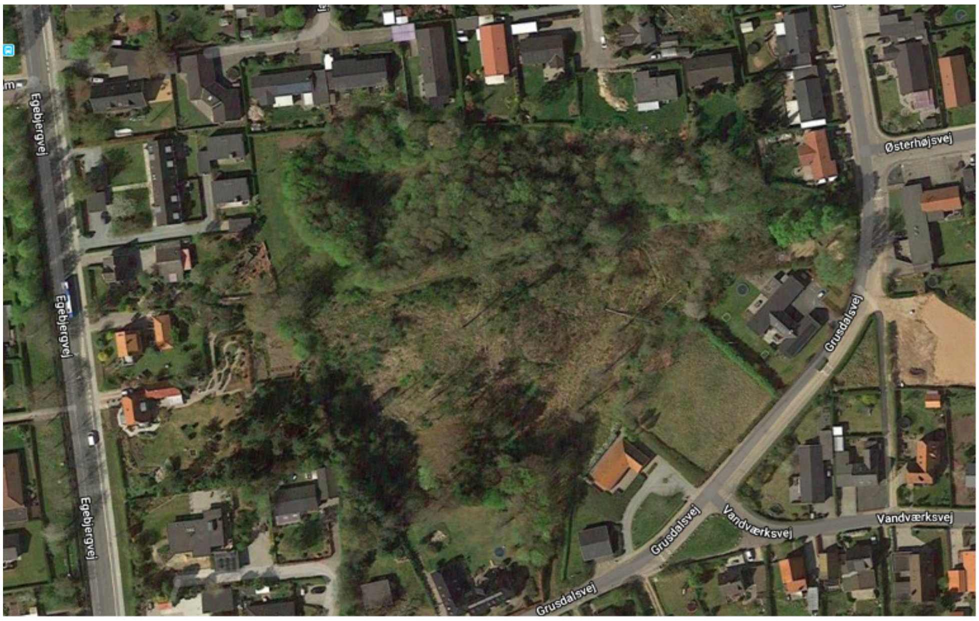

Figure 1. The old gravel pit located in the middle of the city and its potential to bring citizens together.

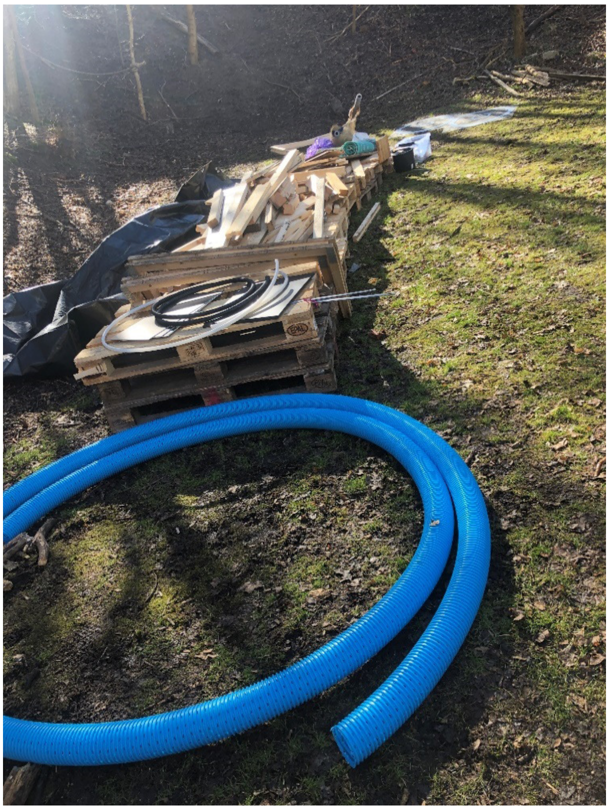

Figure 2. Different materials and tools used to build and play.

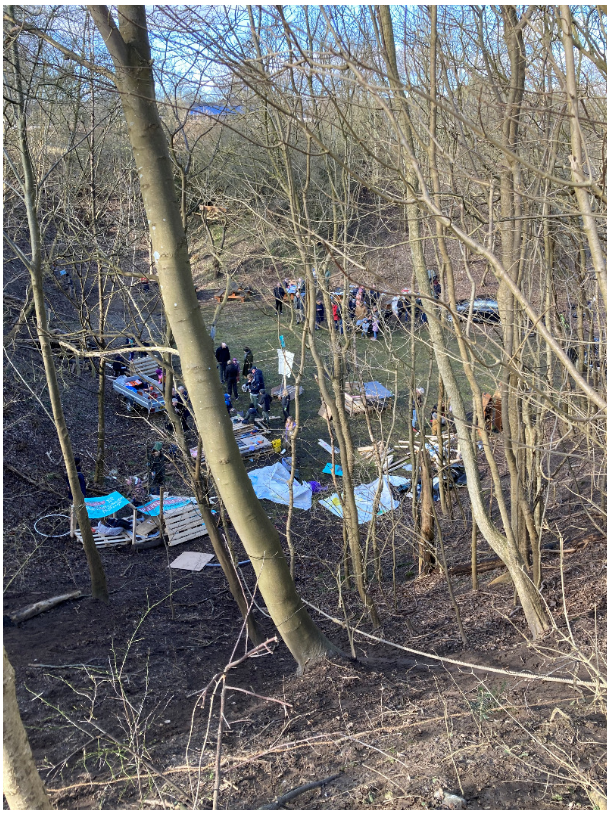

Figure 3. Several building projects being shaped by children and adults.

5. Improvisational Practices: Case Analyses

5.1. The Gravel Pit: Playful Materials and Encounters

In 2021, citizens of a small Danish city received public funding to develop a green area into a space for the purposes of play and gathering together. In the 1960s, the place functioned as a gravel pit but has been left unused for years. Due to dissatisfaction with the limited involvement of citizens in the process, the local council decided to work with PhD fellow Mathias Poulsen to engage the local community in a different way.

In his doctoral research, Poulsen developed the speculative concept of "the junk playground as agora" as his research program, which he was substantiating through a series of empirical design experiments. With this program, he built upon the longstanding traditions of public deliberation in public space but then suggested that these traditions could be reconfigured in a shift from rational deliberation towards affective experiments, from the traditional talk-centric notions of democratic participation towards participation through materialist assemblages and improvisational practices. Rather than inviting local citizens for a more formal meeting to deliberate on the future of the gravel pit, they were invited to use the junk playground as a means of experimental, open-ended inquiry. Three workshops were designed as a laboratory for exploring new possibilities in the gravel pit. The workshops were inspired by the concept of "loose parts" (Nicholson, 1971), which is often used in adventure playgrounds to stress the importance of "variables"—objects and materials that can be moved, modified, and combined in new ways. The place itself was considered one such "variable," along with several discarded materials, such as wood, fabrics, tarps, tubes, old tires, and rope, available for everyone to use in combination with relevant tools. On the first day, the participants were told that the purpose was to use the materials to explore the space and that there were no limitations as to how these materials could be used. There was no shared beginning or introduction as the participants arrived at different times and immediately started building and playing. Children and adults were encouraged to figure out and decide what they wanted to do and build, where, and with whom.

A boy (Figure 4) found a yellow knitted material, which he hammered into the roots of a tree. The other children wanted to borrow the hammer, but he insisted on finishing what he had started. He found a small wooden stick and expressed, "Wuhuu, we can use this stick as a nail," which he hammered onto the knitted material. It took a long time, and the other children became impatient; but to the boy, this was important and required time. Poulsen and Sand made these observations as they participated in the building process and noticed several examples of how children and adults picked up materials without any intention and explored the potential material uses. These encounters

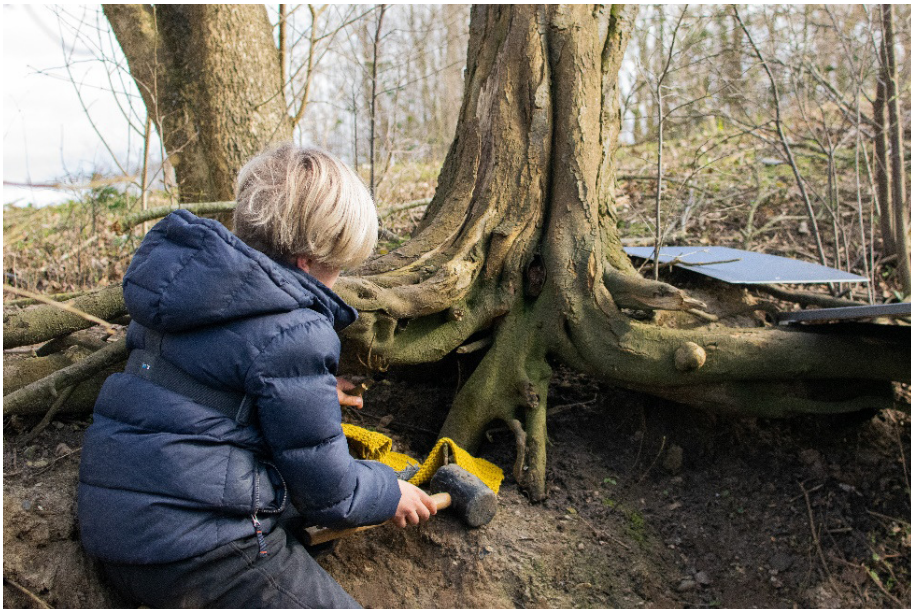

Figure 4. A boy seen making and combining materials that he finds.

between people and material were followed by expressions such as: “Can we use this for something?” “Can we borrow something?” “What is it that you are building?” “Could we use this as a flag?” “I am just considering what we shall build now” (Fieldnotes, 05.04.2022). The statements indicate that the children explored materials, potentials, and functionalities as they traversed the gravel pit and touched and picked up junk materials. Mason (2018) argues that, within sensations, connections can be triggered or evoked, which makes them potent—that is, power, energy, or sparks that bring forth strong emotions. In other words, they constitute “affinities” (Mason, 2018, pp. 47–48), potent connections that arise and matter (Mason, 2018, p. 1). The children’s expressions when they found and touched the materials had the character of an energy that allowed for improvisation, exploring the potential of materials, and bringing new materials together. The children’s actions were not spoken of as deliberate practices but as having been generated within the specific socio-material encounter. Within improvisation, this is called retrospective sensemaking (Barrett, 1998) and constitutes a part of a process where people explore combinations and later discover the meaning of what is going on.

Another empirical example from the gravel pit illustrates how the open-ended design of the experience allowed for sensory encounters leading to heightened intensities (Figure 5). One child was dragging the blue drain tube up the hill, while another was sitting further down with the other end of the tube. “I’m ready,” the boy at the top said as he held the end of the tube up to one ear and stuck a finger in the other. He made a concentrated attempt to hear something, while the other kid shouted into the tube. It seemed that the shouting travelled better outside the tube than inside, and the boy dropped his end of the tube, which slid down the hill. Here, five children gathered in the middle of the steep slope in a space circumscribed by the long blue tube. In the vivid imagination of the playing children, the tube was transformed into a wild ocean with dangers lurking everywhere:

> “There are bombs and missiles and lava underneath the bombs, and there is fire and COMBATMISSILES!”
>
> “Save yourself. Don’t save other people. Just save yourself. THE SHIP IS SINKING!’’
>
> “We must hurry to the helicopter.’’
>
> “The rescue helicopter will take us away from this sinking ship.” (Transcripts of the GoPro video, 05.04.2022)

The intensity of the situation continued to increase as they all ran up the hill to what used to be a fort and is now—conveniently—a helicopter that quickly takes them away from danger. This went on for a while, with the group scattering and reassembling, using the “helicopter” as a rallying point and a narrative device. The children seemed to be improvising based on their collective repertoire of physical and digital materialities, including experiences with ships sinking in the digital game Roblox Titanic, the available materials, their own bodies, and the specific qualities of the site. The gravel pit had a wild topography, with steep slopes that required great effort to climb. The observations provided insights into how the wild nature of the gravel pit triggered the children’s improvisational use of the surroundings. Between the intense outbursts of euphoric play energy, the children kept returning to the collection of materials. They occasionally went through the piles, seemingly looking for specific items and materials, but more often, they were

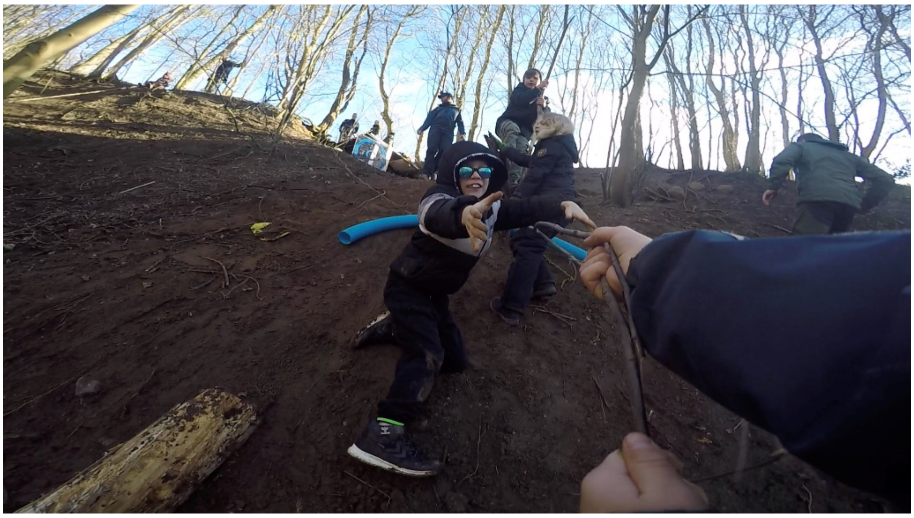

Figure 5. A group of children playing on the steep slope, trying to get to the "helicopter" on the plateau.

simply "browsing," randomly letting their hands assess whether or not a particular artefact could be used for "something"—as if the materials became a catalyst for imagination and play, something with which to improvise new play situations (Figure 6).

In analysing these play situations, it seems that the children were using the available materials, the site, and their bodies to create "precarious circumstances" (Henricks, 2015, p. 214) whereby they could oscillate between order and disorder, between having and losing control. Andersen et al. (2022) suggest that players chase surprising situations because they can then observe their own capacity to resolve the surprise. When the children were playing in the gravel pit, they were not merely looking for existing opportunities for surprises; they were also altering the environment to make new surprises possible, followed by an improvised reaction to those surprises. To use Mason's (2018) terms, the children sought to generate sparks that could destabilise them and push them towards a new play experience. The materials in the gravel pit played an important role in the way in which the children figured out what was going to happen, a characteristic of improvisation working within minimal but clear structures, allowing for maximal flexibility (Barrett, 1998, p. 611). The gravel pit was structured by a range of deliberately chosen materials as well as by the topography, which in itself generated a physically defined space.

5.2. A Performing Art Youth Project: Improvisational and Scripted Plays

In Tromsø, a city in Northern Norway, a theatre project for youth called Here I am! (Hær e Æ!) often intervened in the city's public spaces with theatre events. The project, run by Rebekka Brox Liabø's creative art company, gathers youth recruited through introductory school classes for non-native Norwegians once a week for theatre workshops. They use art expressions such as theatre plays, texts, film, music, and dance to address themes depicting

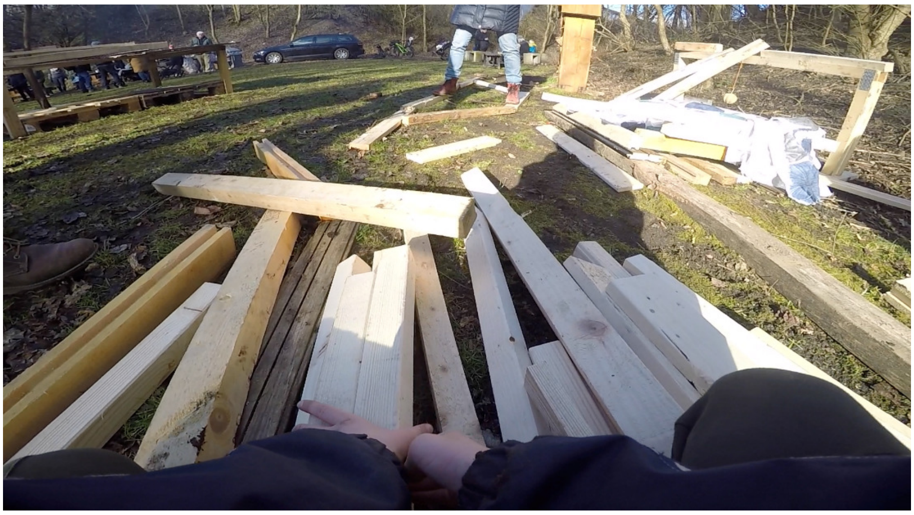

Figure 6. Screenshot of GoPro video. A child's hands "browsing" through materials laying on the ground of the gravel pit.

their concerns. Like most Scandinavian cities, Tromsø is becoming increasingly multicultural. Here I am! was established as a response to reports of low participation rates among migrant youths in leisure activities and public spaces in the city (Liabø et al., 2022). An important part of the project, Liabø explains, is thus to actively make use of the city streets, public squares, shopping malls, art museums, and cultural scenes. By improvising in place through multimodal encounters, the youths are given the possibility to create their own rhythms and compositions in both outdoor and indoor public spaces (Figure 7).

One of the public space interventions of Here I am! is their performance Cora and I in collaboration with Perspektivet Museum. The performance is based on the museum's exhibitions on the life of the famous Norwegian writer and artist Cora Sandel (pseudonym for Sara Fabricius, 1880–1974). The museum gave them an introduction to the exhibition, focusing on Sandel's fight to become an artist and writer. The youths then wrote texts connecting Sandel's story with their own life experiences. In figure 7 a girl is reading her story to the others. Over two weekends in the spring of 2022, people in Tromsø were invited to join a guided tour through the museum, where the young actors' stories and bodily performances weaved together multiple life stories. The project is an interesting case of improvisation across time and space, bringing together the past, present, and future. It also emphasises how public space such as a museum can be turned into a space of improvisational performance.

As the audience entered the museum, we were met by 11 youths welcoming us in many languages: Kurdish, Russian, Tigrinya, Filipino, Tongo, Spanish, Syrian, Turkish, and Norwegian. "We come from all over the world, but we live here, in Tromsø." Mohammad explained that they had spent time getting to know the museum and the life of Cora Sandel and how they had written their own texts based on their encounters with Cora's life and art. As they walked us through the exposition, they told stories, sang, played music, and danced (see Figure 8). One story was inspired by a parrot made visible in a photo of the Sandel family. Mohammad told how the parrot continuously tried to escape the cage—it wanted to be free. "Cora also wanted to be free," he continued, and Farida asked the audience whether we were free as a bird. They were allowed not only to interpret the art and objects of the exposition but also to intervene in the physical rooms. Thin curtains hung between Sandel's paintings. As we walked around, between the curtains and looking at the artworks, we also looked at and sometimes touched each other through the textiles. This way of playing with materials and bodies created a special atmosphere of intense sensory presence and engagement and is characteristic of how Perspektivet Museum works. "Look at these birds, they have flown out of this picture….The birds are landing in your hands," said Farida, as the audience was all given a paper bird in their hands.

Cora Sandel's right to become an artist was used as a base for the youths to express their own fights and dreams for the future. Violetta reflected on what we could learn from Cora's life, ending with "we can learn

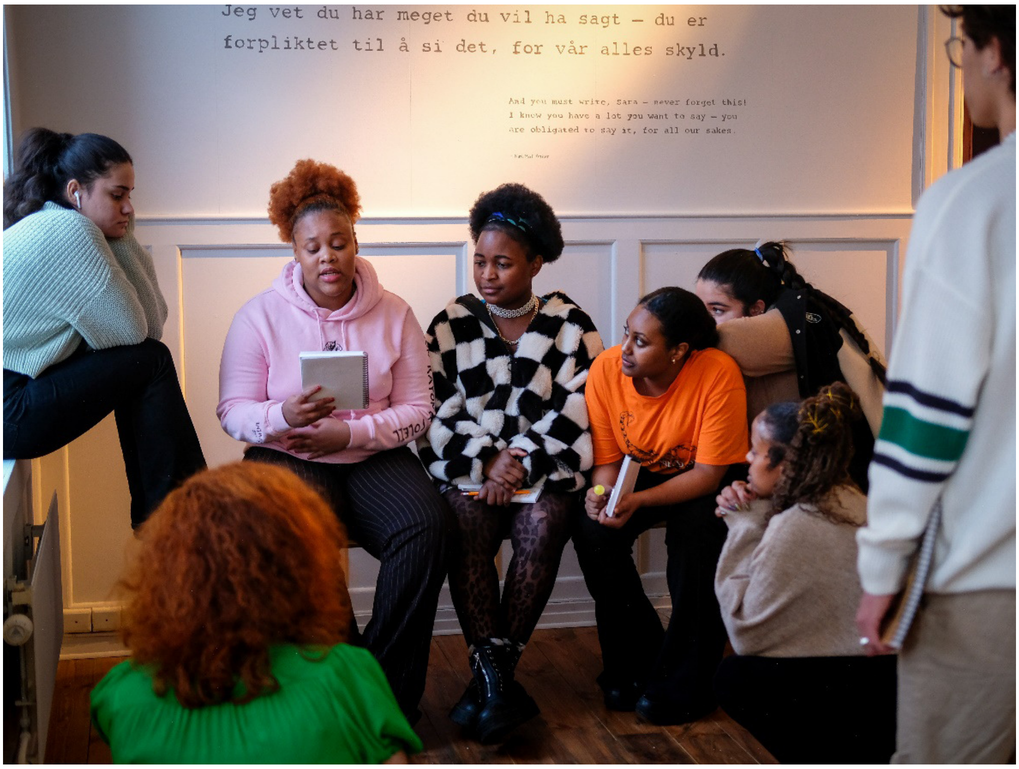
Jeg vet du har meget du vil ha sagt – du er
forpliktet til å si det, for vår alles skyld.
And you must write, Sara – never forget this!
I know you have a lot you want to say – you
are obligated to say it, for all our sakes.

Figure 7. Preparing for the performance, Liomary reads a text about being a free girl. Photo by Camilla Erenius.

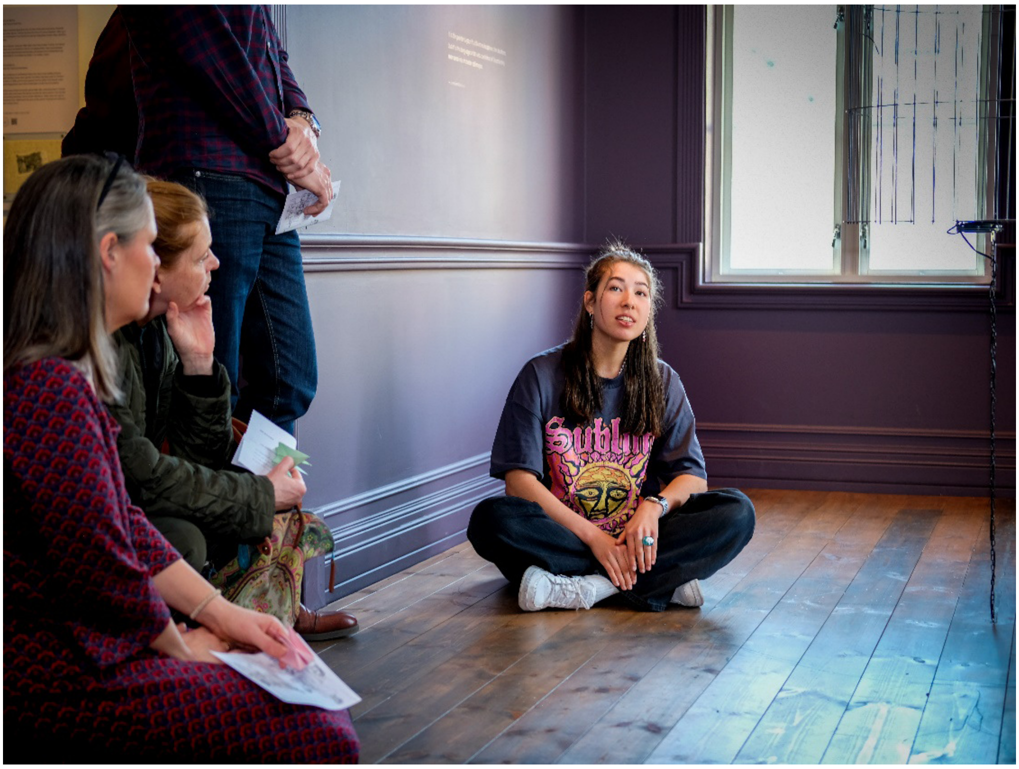

Figure 8. Under the empty birdcage, Violetta shares reflections on what we can learn from Cora Sandel's life. Photo by Camilla Erenius.

that we must fight. Fight despite what the society and people around us says." Adiam read a poetic text about her dreams, of how steep a mountain she must climb to reach her goal, of being afraid of failing: "I have started to climb. A life, a chance. At the top lies what I dream of, and I need to get there." Encountering the artworks and objects of the expositions, along with the youths' interpretations and performances, life stories across time and place were connected, and the audience became strongly engaged in the stories of this diverse group of immigrant youths.

A series of objects were displayed in the last room. "In this room are some of Cora's things. Things from her childhood that tell us something about who she was," Christine explained. "I don't have anything from my childhood. I don't have any pictures. I don't even know what I looked like when I was a child, but I think I was very pretty," she exclaimed, making us all laugh as we struggled with tears. She went on to explain how she had moved around plenty of times since she was a child, and how difficult it was to make new friends, and learn new languages: "I see Cora's life in mine when she moved to Tromsø. I also moved to Tromsø. In sandals and a jacket. It was cold here. I was freezing. Who was I now?" Christine ended by inviting us all to dance with her: "My grandmother in Zambia was a strong woman, and she wanted me to be happy and free here in Norway. Dance….So, listen to my grandmother and dance." Bob Marley's Three Little Birds was turned on. We all danced around the big desk with objects from Cora Sandel's life (Figure 9). As we left, Adiam reminded us to take good care of our (paper) bird and remember to let it go.

The story of Cora's life and encounter with the city of Tromsø resonated with these youths' participation, their memories and experiences of migration and being new in the city, some of them painful. Through the many objects and lyrics, the life of Cora Sandel and their own lives were weaved together. "Sensations," Mason (2018) argues, flow through and are generated in encounters. They emanate and flow in things that happen and things coming into contact (Mason, 2018, p. 9). The encounters at the museum allowed both the young participants and the audience to activate their own memories, affection, and experiences. Sharing this affective experience connected everyone present for a short while as we laughed, struggled with tears and danced together. Like in the case of the gravel pit, these encounters involved potent connections that came to matter, where we could identify sparks as intensified and enchanting. We certainly left the event somewhat changed.

Through working with the performance, the museum changed for the youths. One of the girls told of how she used to find the museum a dark and dull place. Perspektivet Museum's way of working to create spaces for creative unfolding allowed the youths to write themselves into the place and the exhibitions. Such interventions where youths are invited to enter and play with various public spaces in the city changed not only their perceptions of the specific place; as public spaces

Figure 9. Christine urging the audience to dance with her. Photo by Camilla Erenius.

became familiar places, their perceptions of and ways of moving about in the city also changed. Many of the youths are now active users of the city's cultural institutions and other public spaces. They have made the city their own and become active participants in the urban fabric of Tromsø.

The audience encountered a scripted play, and the youths prepared well and followed a set structure. However, there was a great deal of improvisation involved in the process of creating the performance. While the exhibition served as a frame, the youths were allowed the freedom to play with it, interpret it, and use it as materials for their own stories. Liabø explained that this is how they work. All the activities of Here I am! are based on improvising in place and then making new scripts. Working with the ongoing unknown is part of the art and culture actors' everyday practice and working methods. Whenever they begin a project, they only have vague ideas of what it will become. This was a scripted event, but it still sought to include the multitude of experiences played out in the here and now.

Here I am! aims at offering the youths tools to claim a voice in the city—and a space of their own. Through entering various public spaces with their performances, the young immigrants get to know the city and see themselves as part of it. Strengthening their presence in the urban space in ways relevant to them, participation in these events also facilitates broader participation in the city. Performances like this one in the museum voices experiences rarely heard, and often missing in urban planning. Although diversity is given priority in municipal plans, the immigrant population to a little extent participates in municipal initiatives to engage the citizens in participatory planning processes. Municipal planners express the need for new methods to involve a broader spectrum of the population (Førde, 2019). We argue that this way of working with active engagement with place, with the ongoing unknown as a crucial element, can inspire and inform planning in diverse cities.

6. Discussion

Because urban planning uses spatial planning to stay in control of urban development, it has difficulties in "embracing the idea of improvisation" in planning (Jacques, 2021, p. 659). Temporary or improvised use of space is not seen as experimental or inspirational to urban politics and planning. Cities do not favour contexts of "agonistic urbanism," that is, "the capacity to bring people together for cultural and emotional exchange" (Mostafavi, 2017, p. 13).

Now, urban politics and planning claim they pay attention to cultural diversity and socio-spatial intensity and atmospheres. They also claim the democratisation of the use of space is vital to them and they plan for places for cultural exchange or informal meetings between strangers (Plan- og bygningsetaten, 2019, p. 7). Still, the places the city calls informal (in Norway *allmenning*, in Denmark *torvet*) are ordered through spatial design guidelines that make passive spaces rather than enhancing improvisation. There is no place for an "agonistic urbanism"; the strife about values, understandings, politics, gender, racism, and so on by using performative action, dialogues, or theatre.

The analysed cases exemplify two aspects of this problem: A community appropriating a local space by letting children experiment and improvising on how to make a children's playground an informal meeting place. The other case exemplifies how a youth theatre project uses a city museum, to acclaim its presence by reworking the public formality of the museum into a more informal space.

The analysis sees both events as performative experiments. They were experiments that placed participants into an empty space (children) and a high spatial and value-ordered space (youth). The nature of the gravel pit and loose materials forces children to improvise to make it their place and museum guests were faced with an embodiment of the young people's narratives and their use of words, aesthetics, and affinities. The young people wanted to make an affective, reflexive effect on participants by demonstrating the relationship between Cora Sandell's life story and their own multiple experiences. Hereby, they claim a voice in a public space within the city. The young people get to know the city and see themselves as part of it, by entering various public spaces with their performances.

Rihcard Sennett (1970) has long called for planning and cities that consider "the uses of disorder." "Unzoned urban places" (Sennett, 1970, p. 142), like the children's playground gives a place experimenting with disorder, and the museum ruptured, and hence expanded, the order of their exhibition by inviting the youths to improvise within it. An enabling space is a space allowing performativity, experiments, and improvisation. The cases show how disorder can be something positive, but if a city should make experimentation possible, it has to allow for spatial planning and urban design that is "incorporating principles of porosity of territory, incomplete form, and non-linear development" (Sendra & Sennett, 2022, p. 35).

This is to think of space and places as a process and to have both contrasts and irreducible differences surface. An open space of disorder—improvising a temporary building or use of place or confronting the public with differences—provokes "negotiation, agreements" (Sendra & Sennett, 2022, p. 103). Experimental disorder and improvisation, however, imply uncertainty and indeterminacy that is so difficult to accept within planning and politics. The improvisation we have focused on here may stimulate both uneasiness, an affective attachment to place, or further politically uncontrollable activism. Our analysis insists on demonstrating that improvisation is: (a) an effect of sensing places and imaginary doings (children) and (b) that the "embodied dynamism and embodied communication" from playing and facing performative strengths "are the most important sources of situations" (Schmitz, 2019, p. 73). Or to use Sendra and Sennett (2022), to experience disorder as an eye-opener. Both cases show the potential if cities encourage more informality and have spaces for improvised informality.

7. Conclusion

The play design experiment in the gravel pit and the theatre performance in the museum showed how improvisation can be enhanced in urban encounters in outdoor and indoor public spaces. As the museum curator emphasised, the intervention required facilitation and time as well as the courage to "let go." Both events were framed as open-ended, encouraging the exploration of new possibilities by playing with what lay at hand in specific places and situations. The results were flexible spaces, allowing improvisational and surprising use and multimodal encounters that created new connectivities and engagement.

Despite an increased commitment to affective urbanism and diversity in urban development, the atmospheres of place and the choreography of bodies described in these cases are often absent in the understanding of urban public space (Amin, 2015). In line with Sendra and Sennett (2022), we believe that it is possible to design urban spaces that accommodate disorder as a form of power and at the same time stimulate openness, tolerance, and curiosity. By emphasising the performative, affective, and sensory elements of urban life, our analyses showed how a gravel pit and a museum could become charged as public spaces as people were pulled into the same affective space, forming a public of shared concern (see Amin, 2015). These are temporary events, but such occasions where differences are crossed do not end without a trace. Such temporary navigations can promote the city's transformative potential as a result of our capacity to give urban spaces new meaning and, thus, change our actions within them.

What if any informal public space was seen, as Sennett (2018) suggests, as a *Pnyx* (a theatre, an amphitheatre) and any spatial design could consider space as "a semicolon" (a half-stop of movement implying the stimulation of curiosity; Sennett, 2018, p. 214), "a membrane" (a place to be permeated by movements, permeable, porous and yet interweaving relations, practices, movements, relations; Sennett, 2018, p. 222), and "incomplete" (unfinished and unfinishable; Sennett, 2018, p. 230)? The cases presented here show that cities need to have spaces for "seed-planning," spaces that have an openness to improvisation and events rather than using a spatial design that works as a passivating choreography (Sennett, 2018, pp. 234–241). The rupture is an accretion to the experience of place, which we have tried to exemplify with two expressions of co-creation: building by imagination and having reflexive memorization between cultural differences through art and art space.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Reading Publicness: Meaningful and Spontaneous Encounters in Beirut During a Time of Crisis

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Abstract
This article explores a series of narratives collected during the Covid-19 pandemic and after the port explosion in Beirut. The selected narratives cover "meaningful encounters" defined by the authors as acts of urban engagement that are able to challenge dominant or prejudiced perceptions in the city. These spontaneous and sometimes prolonged interactions seem to strengthen collective engagement and foster new opportunities to be together during strenuous and challenging times for all. The importance of this study stems from the fact that most of the designated public spaces are rather exclusive and fall short in bringing together the different factions of the community. In a context of increasing socio-spatial polarization, reading everyday practices, activities, and meaningful encounters in Beirut reveals a more comprehensive and inclusive notion of publicness and challenges the popular and sometimes biased perception of a fragmented city. This research draws from a combination of qualitative approaches that include both observation and collection of narratives. The final selection of narratives was based on their potential to illustrate what we considered to be typical cases addressing three different types of engagements with the urban context. The article seeks to better understand influences exercised by individuals over one another and the subsequent emergence of new places of encounters in the city. Finally, the article argues that the sites of encounters are rather fluid and spread beyond the footprint of traditional and designated public spaces, thus contributing to the reshaping of the public sphere in the city.

Keywords
encounters; engagement; improvisation; negotiation; publicness; social contract

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space" edited by Mervyn Horgan (University of Guelph) and Saara Liinamaa (University of Guelph).

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1. Defining the Notion of "Publicness"

The prolonged scholarly interest in defining and visualizing the notion of "publicness" namely stems from an effort to understand the characteristics of the built environment, with its semiotic and cultural embodied meanings, which affect the patterns of social encounters (and nonencounters) of its users. The first attempt at mapping such publicness is thought to be Giambattista Nolli's survey of Rome, known as the Nolli map (1736–1748). The cartographer posed a straightforward, convenient, yet revolutionary abstraction of the urban fabric by contrasting public (blank) and private (hatched) spaces. What demarcated the two realms was the factor of physical accessibility by common people; the interior of churches was thus considered to be included in the public realm (Bosselmann, 1998; Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008).

While the Nolli map proposes a useful pictorial language for representing urban space, still echoed in today's cadastral maps which demarcate land ownership and control, its simple rendition of the public/private dichotomy has been widely dismissed in the academia of recent decades. In the late 1960s, notably, Michel Foucault introduced the concept of heterotopic spaces, defined as spaces of various forms, and uses that fall at a blurry interstice between private and public. In his essay “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault describes those gray spaces mainly in light of their function, rather than specific formal characteristics. Accordingly, he labeled various programs such as prisons, cemeteries, theaters, museums, and libraries “heterotopic,” in light of particular temporal qualities, socio-cultural practices, and sacred rituals that they frame (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). As such, emphasis is placed on the meanings and actions users layer onto these places, which make them escape clear “private” or “public” categorizations.

Subsequent scholarship recognized that “in practice, public and private spaces are a continuum, where many semi-public or semi-private spaces can be identified, as the two realms meet through shades of privacy and publicity rather than clearly cut separation” (Madanipour, 2003, p. 210). From then on, several researchers attempted to instate tools and criteria to measure and contrast the “degree of publicness” of different spaces (Madanipour, 2010). While the studies recognize that the models proposed do not account for the intangible factor of subjective experience, they still provide a helpful starting point to understand the various shades of gray spaces, lying between private and public, tinting the urban fabric. For instance, the “Star Model of Publicness” (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010) proposes five “meta-dimensions” for analyzing publicness: ownership, physical configuration, animation, civility, and control. This kind of representational tool allows us to move away from the idyllic, agora-esque notions of publicness and into a more pragmatic understanding of some key factors that can make spaces feel more or less public. By accounting for the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion, this line of research moves us toward a more accurate understanding of the complexity of social patterns within the urban fabric. However, by being too detached from the encounters, conflicts, and experiences continuously being acted out in any given place, such abstracted notions and classifications may give a false notion of the reality of day-to-day urban life. It seems that these models used alone, pose the risk of falling into deterministic and alienating visions for public spaces in postmodern contexts while mitigating the vital role of people in creating or destroying places through their actions, interactions, and non-interactions on the ground.

The scope of our research thus directs us away from “conventional” conceptions of public space as authored by public authorities and preconceived by urban designers. Rather, we shift our attention toward the way spaces are continuously re-appropriated by their users in order to acquire an alternate dimension of publicness. In doing so, this study aims to help sensitize policy-makers to the importance of fostering meaningful encounters when acting upon the public realm. Indeed, the notion of urban encounters as well as the themes of sociability and conviviality in the city, have been widely discussed in recent social science literature to better understand the complex interplay of improvisations, conflicts, resolutions, and negotiations that could arise in urban landscapes (Neal et al., 2019; Radice, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016). Much of this literature has centered on the description of case studies illustrating how encounters can contribute to a more positive sense of coexistence in the city (Darling & Wilson, 2016; Wessendorf, 2014). Conventional policy-making relies on the public or private sectors for the provision of public spaces in the city, often with successful outcomes. However, in light of the shortcomings and failures of many of these initiatives in particular contexts, one can observe an impromptu rise of what may be described as community-initiated placemaking. These manifestations, which tend to fall beyond architecturally delineated and typologically understood “spaces for gathering,” are an illustration of the vision that “lived experience should be more important than physical form in defining the city” (Chase et al., 2008, p. 18).

2. Urban Encounters Instating a New Publicness

To gain a sensitive reading of contemporary urbanity, one cannot overlook the layer of city-dwellers as political subjects consciously or unconsciously acting upon the urban fabric. We are here reminded of Lefebvre’s concept of the right to the city, which “reframes the arena of decision-making in cities” towards a radical form of enfranchisement based on nothing more than the inhabitance of the city (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158). Picking up on Lefebvre’s comment that the right to the city is designed to further the interests “of the whole society and firstly of all those who inhabit” the city (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158), Purcell (2002, p. 102) argues:

> Whereas conventional enfranchisement empowers national citizens, the right to the city empowers urban inhabitants. Under the right to the city, membership in the community of enfranchised people is not an accident of nationality or ethnicity or birth; rather it is earned by living out the routines of everyday life in the spaces of the city.

This idea of understanding urban spaces through the lens of the everyday actions of inhabitants led many thinkers to discuss unintended uses of urban public space. For example, Franck and Stevens (2006, p. 4) argue that unintended uses “have the ability to loosen up the dominant meanings of specific sites that give rise to new perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.” They define loose space as “a space apart from the aesthetically and behaviorally controlled and homogenous ‘theme’ environment of leisure and consumption where nothing unpredictable must occur” (Franck & Stevens, 2006, p. 5). In the introduction to *Everyday Urbanism: Expanded*, Margaret Crawford presents a similar concept. She writes: “Everyday space stands in contrast to the carefully planned, officially designated and often underused public space that can be found in most American cities" (Chase et al., 2008, p. 9). It represents "a zone of social transition and possibility in the potential for new social arrangement and forms of imagination" (Chase et al., 2008, p. 9). Other scholars, such as Carmona et al. (2010, p. 133), assert that, just as space may influence human behavior, social processes have the potential to influence the urban landscape. Accordingly, the social dimension of the city is to be understood as an active force impacting the public realm both functionally and morphologically. Similarly, the work of Knierbein and Tornaghi (2015, p. 5) advocates for the adoption of a "relational" lens in urban planning discourse—a lens that understands the public realm as "an outcome of contextual and on-going dynamics between social actors, their cultures and power relations."

Such publications ushered a new line of research investigating how people construct meaning from encounters in the city and how they negotiate spaces with each other in a game falling between and beyond the lines of private and public. While these occurrences vary in nature and context, notably ranging from authored to anonymous, collective to individual, legal to illegal, unmediated to mediated actions in the city (Iveson, 2013), they seem to manifest a shared politic in asserting inhabitance as the principle that should underpin the exercise of authority in the city. Academics have been grappling with ways to talk about and refer to these phenomena, with various definitions and terminologies being put on the table. Indeed, these practices have been recorded and categorized under names such as "insurgent," "do-it-yourself", "guerrilla" (Hou, 2010), "everyday" (Chase et al., 2008), "spontaneous" (Crawford, 2012), "participatory," and/or "grassroots" urbanism (Iveson, 2013). Regardless of the nomenclature adopted, according to Hou (2010, p. 2), what gives these various experiments some kind of unity is that they explore, and potentially reveal, the alternative cities within the existing city, occupying urban spaces and "injecting them with new functions and meanings." The city is thus read temporally and idiosyncratically in light of its circumstances, everyday usage, and livelihood, rather than through universalized formal metrics for publicness. Moreover, it should be noted that the act of discussing and recording instances of spontaneous urbanism helps to substantiate collective memory. For instance, the political act of Filipina workers turning the ground floor of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation building in Hong Kong into a community gathering place on Sundays gained relevance and reach when it was recounted in *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* (Hou, 2010). By shedding light on localized case studies around the world, most often stemming from marginalized groups, the literature on everyday urbanism is cultivating a space for scholarly debate which encourages an alternative reading and enactment of publicness whereby the prime actor becomes the user of the space itself.

3. Publicness in Beirut: A History of Instability, Conflict, and Contestation

While most of the literature tackling everyday urbanism has observed urban encounters in seemingly "normal" or "routinized" urban contexts, from what may be considered as a "first world" standpoint, we believe that the case of Beirut offers a unique illustration of the potential for interaction between people during times of crisis. While Lebanon's capital has been subject to intense turmoil on several instances throughout its history, affecting the inhabitants' interaction with the public realm, the impact of the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the port explosion of August 4th, 2020 on Beirut's publicness is a dimension left unexplored by urban planning scholarship to this day. So, after briefly recounting the evolution of Beirut's public realm through the multi-faceted crises the country has gone through, the article will focus on the way the pandemic and port explosion triggered new occurrences of urban engagement between citizens beyond the boundaries of the city's historically defined public spaces.

During the decades preceding the First World War, the transformation of Beirut followed a spontaneous process mostly driven by necessity and function. The urban form evolved freely without subscribing to any overall scheme emanating from a political or military authority (Davie, 2001). Public spaces did not look like what we see today—formal geometric spaces that are clearly recognized within the urban fabric. Instead, they were often confused with the labyrinth of narrow streets that ran through the old town. Enlargements of a few meters accommodating a particular function or daily activity and usually covered by stretched fabric were referred to as *al-sahat* (squares). These particular configurations often represented an extension of a cafe or a boutique or were occupied by a refreshing water fountain. Picture shows (*Sandouq al-firje*), shadow-theatres (*Khayal al-zhil*) led by a *Karakoz*, and most notably storytellers also known as *Hakawatis*, were famous for their dramatic street performances and were paid by owners of coffee houses to attract kids and customers in the afternoons (Davie, 1999; De Nerval, 1851). There were no clear physical demarcations for these places; they were continually negotiated, fought over, and resolved through challenging demarcations along socio-economic divides (Khalaf, 2006). Historically, then, urban spatiality in Beirut was highly complex and dynamic, with fluid rather than rigid demarcations between private and public realms.

In 1925, the French colonial mandate in Syria and Lebanon embarked on a challenging mission to develop comprehensive cadastral systems in the area. As a result, self-policed and locally maintained semi-public alleyways were classified as *domaine public*. While this normative process emerged as a tool to bring all spaces of the city under the watchful eye of the state, it also instated the post-colonial construct of the public as a planned, delineated urban space imbued with aesthetic and symbolic values. The city underwent a massive reconstruction project which involved the demolition of old neighborhoods with their small squares and the creation of new public spaces, such as the Place de l'Étoile, based on European planning models (Davie, 2003; Hindi, 2020). Despite the efforts to codify land properties and bestow a Westernized, post-colonial understanding of public spaces on Beirut's communities, local populations rejected such demarcations and their resulting urban forms and continued to encroach on semi-public spaces and alleyways in the city with considerable social tolerance and support (Marcus, 1989). The streets, rather than the newly manicured squares, continued to be the generally preferred loci for encounters, exchanges, discussions, and protests despite the transformation of the urban fabric and the Westernization of the lifestyle in the city. As such, the formally designed public spaces of the city failed to provide a suitable frame to the locals' social patterns and notions of communal gathering.

The Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975 as a consequence of the deterioration of the state and the rise of armed militias in the country. The war lasted for 15 years during which urban warfare and street fights disturbed urban life in Beirut and other Lebanese cities. Physical and mental boundaries emerged along the urban landscape, imposing a new geography of fear on the ground and alienating people from their streets, with different neighborhoods controlled by different militias and factions (Davie, 1993). Public spaces such as parks, streets, and squares became contested areas, with rival groups fighting for control. Many public spaces were also targeted by bombings and other acts of violence, leading to their destruction or abandonment (Mady, 2022). The Green Line, which divided the city into East and West Beirut, was a physical manifestation of the city's division—a no man's land that separated communities. Many public spaces, such as the Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut, which was located near the Green Line were thus left heavily impacted and abandoned (Mady, 2012, 2015). However, despite the war transforming people's daily rituals and relationship with the city streets, negotiations, and time-sensitive deals continued to occur among the people as a necessary means to survive the dire circumstances (Salamon, 2004). These events revealed how the city and its residents gradually adapted to new conditions during long periods of crisis.

At the end of the war in 1990, the Lebanese were looking forward to the opening of the country to all of its citizens and to seeing the heart of the country revived. To reconstruct and modernize the city center of Beirut, the Solidere (Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction de Beyrouth) project was established by a private company overseen by the prime minister at the time, Rafic Hariri. The Solidere project aimed to transform the war-torn city center into a modern and vibrant commercial and residential district that would attract local and international investment—at the expense of the urban fabric which predated the war (Kastrissianakis, 2015). The area of the old markets was razed and then leveled overnight under the excuse that it could not be repaired. Numerous vestiges from the past were demolished. Solidere tailored a historical narrative that suited its commercial objectives, resulting in a pastiche of iconic representations limiting historical associations to the oriental-esque aesthetics of the façades and reducing the old city center to a commodified realm for the privileged few (El-Khoury & Ardizzola, 2021; Mady, 2022). Furthermore, a massive infrastructure of high-speed roads around the newly proposed Beirut Central District effectively amputated the heart of the city from the surrounding urban fabric—leaving it almost void of pedestrian activity in comparison to other vibrant and populous neighborhoods in Beirut. As the imported typologies of public spaces were left underused and neglected by the general population, public life in Beirut often tended to spill onto random sites around the city such as empty lots under speculation. These "vague terrains" witnessed years of unplanned appropriation for various activities such as kids' recreation, temporary markets, or art exhibitions, highlighting Beirut's non-conventional and fluid conception of publicness instated by complex social dynamics (Mady, 2014).

In subsequent decades, Beirut continued to experience political instabilities, which were characterized by a complex interplay of sectarianism, regional geopolitics, and economic challenges. The assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 marked a significant turning point in these instabilities, triggering a wave of protests, political mobilization, and international intervention. In the aftermath of Hariri's assassination, protesters gathered in public spaces such as Martyrs' Square and Riad al-Solh Square, which became sites of intense political contestation, with different sectarian and political groups vying for control and influence (Khalaf, 2006; Mady, 2022). In 2016, the garbage waste crisis in Beirut further developed the citizens' relationship with the public space of their city. In response to the crisis, young citizens organized protests and rallies mainly concentrated in downtown's public squares, demanding that the government take action to address the waste problem. These protests often took the form of sit-ins and blockades, with the emergence of grassroots initiatives and community-led projects aimed at addressing the waste problem and cleaning up public spaces, thus empowering citizens as active agents in the improvement of their urban reality (Harb, 2016). In parallel, natural heterogeneous public spaces in the city, notably Horsh Beirut (the pine forest) and the Daliyeh waterfront area, had been subject to years of nibbling, fencing, and real estate speculation by the well-connected upper class. Revolts and campaigns by activists and NGOs were necessary to keep these spaces open for people, albeit partially (Karizat, 2019; Stephan & Chbat, 2019).

In October 2019, the city that was once divided along religious and political demarcation lines, and continues today to be characterized by discrepancies and inequalities between its inhabitants, suddenly came together as a result of an unprecedented economic collapse. During what came to be known as the October Revolution, public spaces such as Martyrs' Square, Riad al-Solh Square, and Horsh Beirut were transformed into gathering places for protestors, who used these spaces to express their dissent and demand political change. Protesters created makeshift camps in these spaces, organizing sit-ins, cultural events, and other activities that brought people together and fostered a sense of community and solidarity. The revolution also led to the emergence of novel forms of urban activism and engagement, with grassroots movements and civil society organizations using previously abandoned public spaces to promote social and political causes. A new type of public space, defined by social contracts and self-governance principles emerged. These spaces appear to be very diverse, yet they are clearly characterized by their social and temporal nature while being completely freed from any form of a spatial or legal framework. The urban landscape of Beirut was subject to spontaneous acts of reappropriation and placemaking in unexpected spaces. For instance, the "Egg," an abandoned cinema structure, was used for political debates (Barrington, 2019). Major highways were blocked by protestors and furnished as outdoor living rooms. Likewise, various nodes and roundabouts in the city were flocked by chanting citizens (Sinno, 2020). Overall, the October 2019 Revolution in Beirut reinvigorated the city's *domaine public* as a site of political and social engagement, highlighting the potential for urban spaces to serve as platforms for civic action, community building, and public discourse.

4. "Exceptional Everyday" Practices in Times of Crisis

As the historical context of Beirut suggests, the crisis is neither a transient occurrence nor an exceptional circumstance in the collective memory of both old and young generations inhabiting the city. Indeed, the unpredictable political and economic circumstances which have now spanned decades impose a paradigm of the "exceptional everyday," whereby the population exists within a seemingly normalized state of unrest. Accordingly, Beirut presents a pertinent example of a city that simply cannot be codified according to rigid private-public dichotomies or modernist planning conceptions. So, as the country was plunged yet again into a grave state of emergency in 2019 up until today, the capital witnessed a renewed emergence of unique spatial practices and multiplied urban encounters which are worth highlighting in urban planning scholarship as examples of community-enacted publicness.

In March 2020, the city was subject to a nationwide lockdown due to Covid-19 persisting until August 2021 approximately. As the country was already falling into a grave and unprecedented economic crisis, the governmental measures put in place to slow the spread of the disease further exacerbated turmoil and insecurity in the city. To add to this unrest, the port explosion of August 4th, 2020 gravely shook Beirut's urban and social fabric. In light of the government's absenteeism in all efforts of reconstruction and compensation, the city witnessed a strong movement from the people to spontaneously volunteer and react to the event helping those in need and putting themselves back on their feet. Indeed, Fawaz (2023) recognizes that:

> The recovery of the neighborhoods affected by the port blast brought a flow of financing and experiences that were channeled towards the recovery of public spaces in shapes and forms that Beirut's most progressive planners had not been able to implement in decades of plenty.

So, once again, disastrous circumstances in the country provoked impetuous reactions and micro-interventions in Beirut's urban fabric—dispersed acts of public solidarity bridging sectarian divides and safeguarding communities' livelihoods in light of the stark absence of a welfare state.

In such a context, everyday urbanism cannot be reduced to random, non-specific occurrences, or meditated political misbehavior manifested in the built environment, as recounted in existing international scholarship. Instead, everyday urbanism manifests itself as the disjointed acts of ordinary people finding ever-more unique solutions to merely pursue their day-to-day existence in a highly particular environment. To the extent that the city acts as a "stage on which social processes are played out" (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008, p. 314), Beirut's "perpetual panic" state has historically been linked to the creation of meaningful places breaking from the dominant and traditional typologies of public spaces. These sites stand as cases of community action, stemming from spontaneous reactions to dire circumstances, managing to challenge physical or systemic boundaries in the city within a specific spatio-temporal frame. In a context of unprecedented socio-political havoc, our article serves to bring to the surface apparently mundane urban occurrences and emphasize their importance as illustrations of communal solidarity. We will thus seek to untangle ephemeral or routinized urban encounters and localized practices empirically observed in Beirut during the Covid-19 pandemic and after the port explosion which influenced a new pattern of collective engagement between the city's inhabitants. These case studies highlight the existence of an under-recognized dimension of publicness that breaks conventional public/private, socio-spatial, and temporal boundaries. Accordingly, our research contributes to the existing literature on everyday urbanism by exploring the way in which difficult socio-economic and political circumstances seem to create a particularly fertile ground for such alternative practices to occur.

5. Documenting "Meaningful Encounters" in the Exceptional Everyday

This study stems from the observation of an overall positive attitude and respect for others during the Covid-19 pandemic and after the port explosion in Beirut. The tendency for people to overcome their differences and come together was validated through our firsthand experience on-site and through information circulating on social media platforms, news agencies, and word-of-mouth. This general attitude, equally attributed to familiar residents and strangers passing by, clearly contradicted the dominant depiction of Beirut as polarized and fragmented. We have adopted a subjective research approach in order to further examine this urban phenomenon. Our personal impressions throughout the research are embedded in the process as we mostly examine human processes manifested through brief and sometimes prolonged social encounters.

We started by compiling narratives depicting "meaningful encounters" that took place in Beirut roughly between March and December 2020. We defined "meaningful encounters" as acts of urban engagement that challenge the dominant perception of Beirut as a fragmented city. The narratives were both collected by all three authors through semi-structured interviews with individuals affected by the two events and compiled based on our observations in the city. We collected a total of 28 narratives during the three months of July, August, and September 2022, out of which we retained 10 narratives for this study. The criteria for this selection were based on the potential of the narratives to illustrate what we considered typical cases covering three different types of engagements within their urban context. We defined the typical cases as: (a) Encounters that worked with/along existing conditions and contributed to exposing or enhancing the initial state of the sites; (b) encounters that challenged and contested material or invisible barriers that were considered repressive and exclusionary in nature; and (c) encounters that redefined or altered the prevailing conditions on site, giving rise to new possibilities, perceptions, and behaviors. This compilation of narratives was an attempt to read influences exercised by individuals over one another as positive and meaningful instances of solidarity. Through this reading, our article aims to portray a more comprehensive and inclusive notion of publicness in the city.

6. Reading Publicness in Beirut Through a Selection of Micro-Narratives

Since 2020, Lebanon has been facing multiple crises including the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 Beirut Port Explosion, and a devastating economic crisis that had started to transpire long before. Within this context, unprecedented measures were implemented, in response to which, and in order to adapt, behavioral shifts among the citizens were observed. One major policy that emerged during the lockdown was the closure of all public green spaces such as parks and gardens. The closure of these outdoor spaces was questionable as they are shared places with low health risks: Low-density/open-air spaces compensate for overcrowded neighborhoods with substandard living units and limited access to public space. Despite this policy, the need to seek relief from the pressures of the epidemic, confinement, and economic collapse prompted more people to resort to these outdoor parks and to recall their value, even if it entailed defying governmental measures.

One relevant case study of such a shared place is the Karantina Public Park, which, like many other public spaces in the city, was ordered to close during the nationwide lockdown. In reaction to this decision, children in the area collectively conspired to challenge these restrictions as a means of accessing a space to play. Children trespassed the garden fences, violating safety measures, and creating new accesses to the park. They also negotiated deals with the guard who would turn a blind eye to their infractions or take longer cigarette breaks. Alternative play areas and playtimes thus emerged and questioned both the physical boundaries of the park and the role of the guard:

> While some of the kids turned the guard into an accomplice and were able to persuade him to let them in for a limited period, others learned how to find ways around the park. The sites thus completely transformed into arenas of continuous quests, adventures, and violations. (El-Khoury, 2021, p. 74)

The observed play patterns expanded beyond and/or transformed the areas originally designated for children to play such as playgrounds equipped with toys, gardens, and other protected and fenced spaces in the city. Children's spontaneous ways of engaging with the park contradicted the previous deterministic and alienating visions of publicness. Indeed, their actions demonstrated that the act of claiming urban space goes beyond seeking permission from an established order. Instead, it is a declaration made and verified by the children through their practical engagement with the site, a notion discussed by Ivenson (2013) in "Cities Within the City: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City."

Besides the case of Karantina Park, similar patterns of subverted engagement were spotted on privately owned sites throughout the city and for similar reasons. Children found spontaneous ways to access play despite a prohibition against it. This was the case in the Hamra area, where refugee kids were able to instate their right to play in a private school playground. Indeed, the National Protestant School was closed due to the crisis, while its play equipment could still be seen behind its closed fences. Children found different ways to break into the playground at different times of the day, risking injuries from falling and causing disturbance to the neighbors.

They were finally able to negotiate a time slot for play during which the school principal would provide them with a ladder to access the space while keeping the gates closed (see Figure 1). Once again, the children's right to access the play space was not officially recognized, rather, an agreement with the caretaker was sought to enable the use of the space.

Evidently, the children's defying acts in all these instances succeeded in breaking physical boundaries, but the case of public parks in Lebanon is more complex and multi-layered. In fact, the different examples observed in this research also reveal how other invisible barriers were challenged. It is commonly known that for many years authorities have consolidated different forms of marginalization through public spaces and gardens. This phenomenon became more visible during the pandemic when the different policies that were implemented exposed the authorities' attitudes and discriminatory practices. In fact, fieldwork research conducted by Public Works Studio in 2022 suggested that the closure of public spaces from the start of the lockdown until now has been inconsistent, following some questionable patterns. For example, in the case of Horsh Beirut, people suspected of being refugees were asked to show a local ID card at the gate and were refused entry upon failure to do so. At the Sanayeh Garden refugees were only allowed in for two hours a day in the middle of the week thus, requiring visitors to provide identification and a signed permit upon entry. These exceptions cast doubt on the argument that the closure of public parks was a safety precaution and instead seem to reinforce the exclusiveness of public spaces in Lebanon. Within this context, children trespassing the physical barriers of the parks were also challenging discriminatory and exclusionary measures and policies.

The different cases recorded in this research reveal that other paradigms of collective social contracts, negotiations, and improvisations can break the hold of dominant boundaries and ideologies. As such, children have managed to create unusual and unique opportunities to access places for play despite opposing hostile attitudes. Our article does not intend to idealize these practices nor portray them as fostering a healthy recreational environment, rather, it highlights people's role as active agents in the creation of their own public places.

Besides recreation, other more pressing needs came to be threatened during the nationwide lockdown. Indeed, the governmental measures put in place during the pandemic to mitigate the spread of the virus by temporarily halting commercial activities significantly affected the livelihood of families that were dependent on small businesses and daily income. Consequently, unique and particular arrangements were carried out by shop owners as a way to bypass the imposed closures of small convenience stores and delis. On the outside, one particular shop, Al-Haitham on Sidani Street, was covered with fabric curtains (see Figure 2), yet a small lamp was kept lit inside to signal the ongoing business.

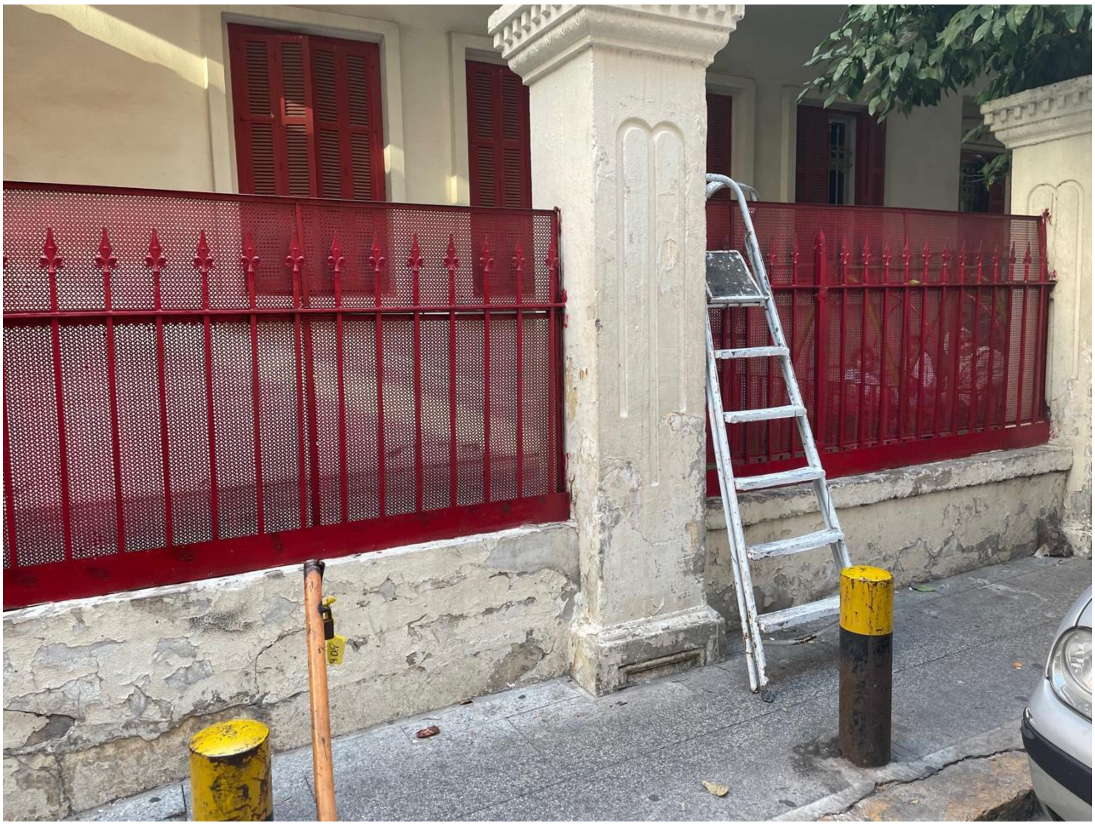

Figure 1. Picture of the ladder placed along the fence of the National Protestant School in the Hamra neighborhood.

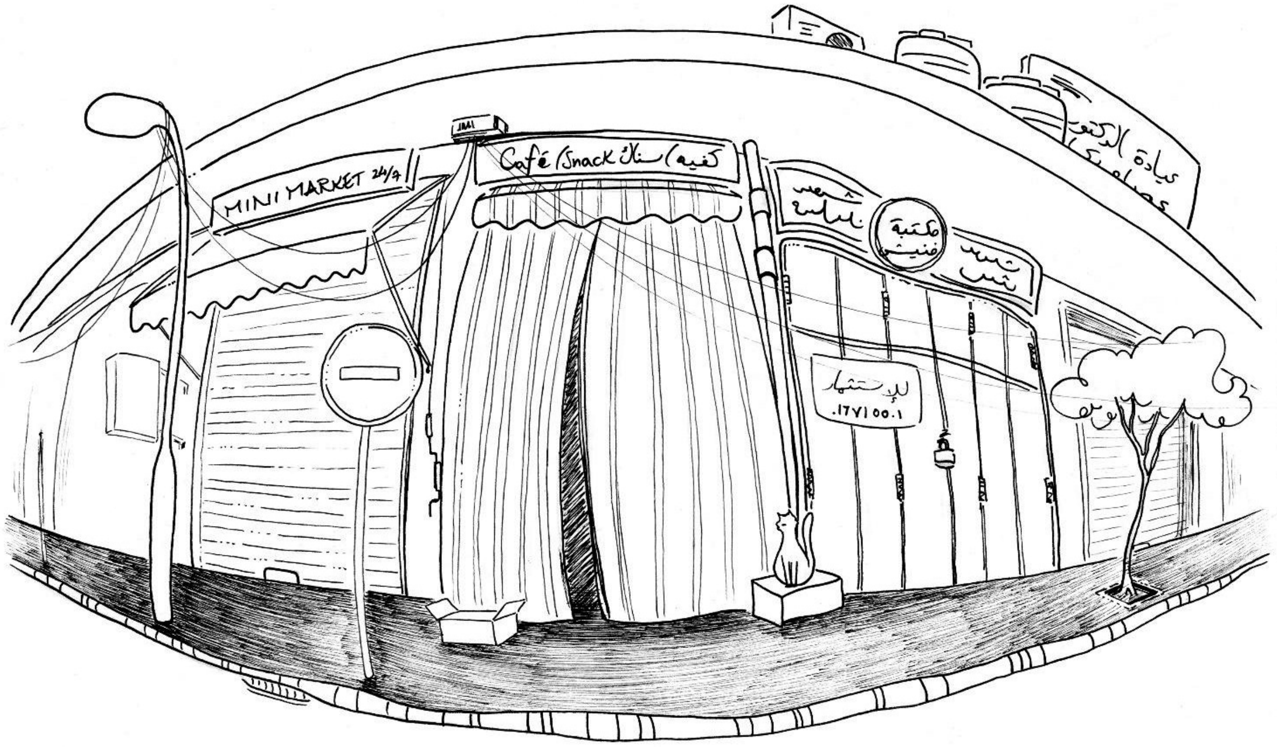

Figure 2. Al-Haitham shop façade on Sidani Street.

Sometimes clients would pretend to be casually passing by the shop when police cars or officers were present in the streets. They would then enter the shop once there was no longer the threat of being caught by the police. We also observed how locals would discreetly inform worried passersby about the open covert shop. Eventually, the regulars and the locals who kept turning to the shop for daily needs became accomplices and established a pattern of punctual infractions along the deserted city sidewalks. While these interactions mainly occurred among familiar strangers of the same neighborhood, who might have already known the shopkeeper prior to the pandemic, they indicate solidarity and conviviality in a context of nationwide social disjunction. As such, this urban occurrence suggests the potential of spontaneous individual actions in fostering public familiarity in insecure and uncertain contexts.

During the pandemic, Lebanon was also impacted by a massive explosion on August 4th, 2020, which completely devastated the city of Beirut. This exceptional event required an immediate reaction from people on the ground to contribute toward relief efforts. Besides the dramatic toll of human casualties and trauma, the material damages to the urban fabric were inconceivable. Usually, basic architectural elements—walls, doors, and roofs—define the enclosure of a house. They are employed in order to divide and then selectively re-unite inhabited space. Yet, they often cannot describe clear demarcations between the inside and outside, the unshared and the collective, and the house and the city. Instead, the combination of these elements along with the social practices that develop around them draws new boundaries that shift and keep redefining the realm of the private and public. This described phenomenon was exacerbated after the Beirut Port explosion, the latter provoking a severe conflation between the realms of the private and the public (see Figure 3). In fact, the Beirut blast destroyed, fragmented, and exposed the buildings in the area. It erased the physical elements that demarcated the inside from the outside, turning the ground floors of the residential buildings and the streets of the city into one homogeneous and uninterrupted entity. This permeability of domestic spaces was sometimes necessary, as bedrooms, kitchens, and living areas became spaces where strangers gathered to share their grief and offer their support. What was described by Toufoul Abou-Hodeib (2017, p. 121) in the context of modern life in Beirut thus acquired new relevance in a totally unexpected circumstance: “Rather than being the realm of the private as opposed to the public, the…home became the place where the two met.”

However, as the private life of the home was carried out into the public sphere, the dangers of public life (theft, intrusion, vandalism, etc.) were brought back into the home. Strangers gained authority over private spaces, walking through them and inhabiting them freely as though they were natural extensions of the streets. Consequently, homeowners had to transfer the role of sheltering to a custodian (a doorman) or otherwise rely on thin envelopes of plastic bags to guard their belongings. The inanimate boundaries (e.g., walls, doors, and roof) were replaced by a human agency, the space was

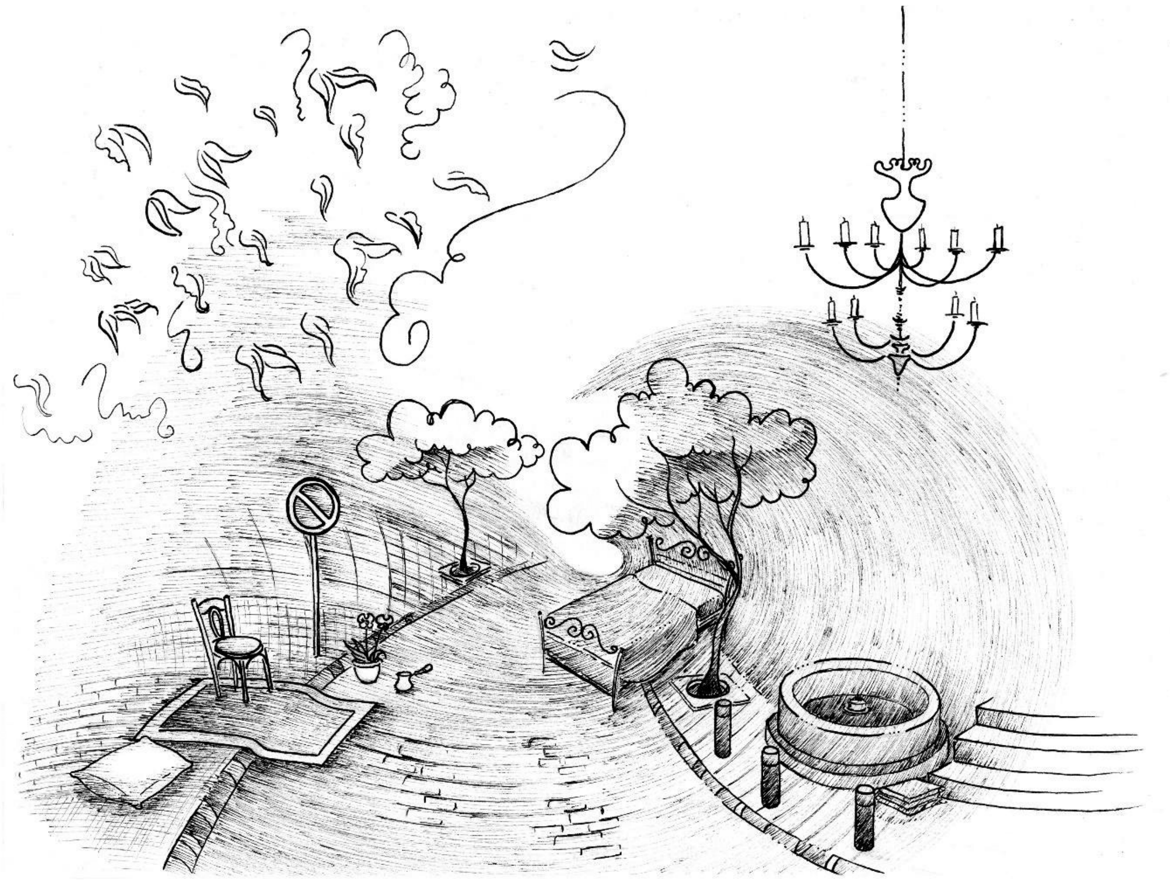

Figure 3. Representation of scattered spaces in Beirut after the port explosion.

no longer being defined by physical elements but by the extent of the eyesight. Thus, the task of ensuring safety was assigned to those with their eyes upon the street and public peace was "kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves" (Jacobs, 1961. p. 108). Following these events, the inhabitants of the city left and were replaced by strangers who formed a collective of custodians aimed at bringing back peace and safety to the city. Doorkeepers, construction workers, medical staff, and volunteers temporarily upheld the negotiations on behalf of a distressed population. The network that emerged to reconstruct the city was intangible, carried through spontaneous activities, and far from any formal or governmental intervention, physical demarcations, or formal policies.

Another grave consequence of the August 4th, 2020 explosion was the displacement of over 300,000 people (Sewell, 2020). Facing the absence of institutional support, individuals took it upon themselves to offer their homes as shelters, facilitated by the use of social media platforms. Initiatives such as the Instagram pages Open Houses Lebanon and Thawra Map were established to connect those in need with available accommodations. The hashtag #OurHomesAreOpen emerged as a symbol of people's willingness to provide not only housing but also transportation for those in need. In addition to private homes, hotels also extended their spare rooms to those affected. Closed restaurants and shops opened their doors to provide spaces for people to work, study, and recharge their phones. These acts of generosity and resource-sharing in everyday spaces not only provided practical assistance but also fostered collaborations, conviviality, and tolerance among diverse groups in Beirut. During this time of crisis, those originally designated private spaces gained a new dimension of publicness that served a community in dire need of support.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port explosion both provoked a temporary halt of activities and circulation leaving streets and crowded neighborhoods empty. The restriction on movement beyond a certain radius encouraged people to remain in their homes and to rediscover the places in their proximity. Indeed, people sought shelter in their own private gardens, courtyards, stairwells, and rooftops. While these private spaces had originally been designated as communal spaces, they were primarily treated as utilitarian spaces (e.g., storage units). This tendency was prevalent until the pandemic forced building residents to recall the potential of these shared spaces to bring people together. The rooftop was one of the first spaces to be revisited as a social place rather than solely a depository of water tanks and satellite dishes. Residents extended their activities to the

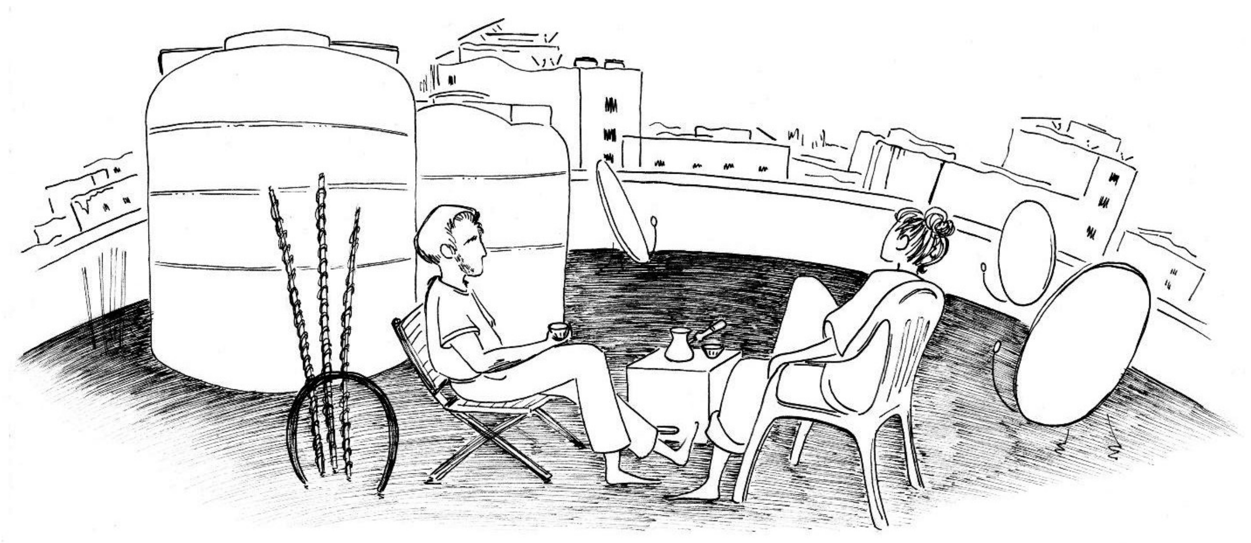

Figure 4. Rooftop in Beirut during the pandemic.

roof, sharing a morning coffee with a neighbor or hosting dinners and small gatherings among family members (see Figure 4). Others even ventured into roof gardening or farming, growing a small selection of their fruits and vegetables locally. Sharing time and space on the roof required new social contracts to take place between neighbors to actively define a public space they could collectively inhabit, thus instating a new social dynamic beyond the boundaries of the private apartment. This spontaneous return to appropriating the roof as a social space instilled a newfound sense of conviviality in a previously inhospitable and neglected place, emphasizing "togetherness as a lived negotiation, belonging as practice" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 425).

Finally, a specific instance of reappropriating subsidiary spaces was observed in an alleyway near a residential block in Beirut. Before the pandemic, the use of this street subscribed to the typical practices that privilege vehicular functions over human activities. In fact, the neighbors of this block had devised agreements among each other to allocate the space along this alleyway to park their cars and access their houses. However, with the confinement making remote destinations inaccessible, people had to seek alternative spaces for leisure and gathering, ones closer to where they resided. In light of this new need, the residents of this block voluntarily let go of their acquired right for a parking spot and they re-negotiated new agreements that would allow for the creation of new social spaces. The cars were thus relocated to free up the alleyway, allowing for the extension of living spaces to the outside. This emergent public outdoor space was fluid and flexible, as opposed to its previous fixed character. This way, the call for isolation, or "solidarity in solitude," in some cases, created stronger social ties between neighbors, and reinforced their connection to the places they live in. The global observation of people returning to the in-between spaces surrounding their homes, such as balconies, stoops, and front yards, during the Covid-19 period is supported by various literature that emerged in the aftermath, like Koichiro Tamura's (2020) "Porch Placemaking: Exploring the Functionality of In-Between Spaces During and After the Covid-19 Pandemic."

7. Conclusion

During times of crisis and in the absence of any institutional support, casual encounters in everyday spaces in Beirut have increased and enhanced collaborations, conviviality, and tolerance among different groups in the city. Shedding light on these encounters highlights the vital role of people in creating or destroying places through their actions, interactions, and non-interactions on the ground. We argue that these encounters are "meaningful" because they are able to challenge dominant and prejudiced perceptions of the city and promote a more positive attitude towards others. The article also argues that the notion of publicness in Beirut goes beyond physical boundaries and designated spaces for public activities. This more comprehensive and inclusive notion of publicness can only be reflected through narratives documenting social interactions and encounters across the city.

Through our reading of meaningful encounters, we recognize that understanding the public in straight opposition to the private is problematic and does not address the complexity of social behavior. We also underline the organic and spontaneous nature of encounters that cannot be captured or codified through formal policies and regulations, nor be recognized as social norms. Collected narratives direct us away from the formal and "conventional" conceptions of public spaces, and rather shift our attention toward an alternate dimension of publicness—one that has a softer character and is defined through a social lens. As such, the observed patterns of collective engagement in this study highlight a communal ambiance reflected through spontaneous human interactions, new social contracts, negotiations, and improvisations capable of mitigating physical boundaries and dominant policies, producing new places, enhancing existing ones, and rendering them more valuable to their users. The scope of this research primarily reiterates theories and principles put forward by scholars such as Franck and Stevens, Crawford, Hou, and others who celebrate loose spaces, unplanned and spontaneous practices, and mundane activities in the city as a manifestation of its vitality and publicness. The article also sheds light on the particularity of the context of Beirut during times of crisis as a crucial element to showcase the validity of these stated theories and the potential of spontaneous social practices in overcoming challenging conditions.

While publicness is often theorized as a notion aspiring for inclusion in ideal types of spaces with a fixed location and open access, this article argues that social encounters in the city—a central component to understanding the notion of publicness—cannot be mapped on a static plan. The fluid territory of encounters spread way beyond the footprint of designated and planned public spaces through emergent networks and topos often defined through ongoing, ambiguous, and contested dimensions. Hence, the systematic and highly codified cadastral plan can no longer be treated as an end-state map of public spaces in a city, nor can we use conventional representations and systems of projections to document publicness in the city. The narratives selected in this study explore and potentially reveal a fluid nature of publicness that cannot be grasped easily in one moment or on a single graphic document. We believe that traditional modes of representation of public spaces and particularly those adopted by architects and planners are too focused on over-determined built forms and could be dismissive of the organic nature of the public realm. While contributions to the discourse of publicness in the city come from a wide range of disciplines related to both design and social studies, it is high time to re-examine and re-consider conventional representation tools and methods, as some researchers have already suggested (Pérez-Gómez & Pelletier, 1992; Stoppani, 2018). It is worth mentioning that during the last few decades, more importance has been given to subjective and more inclusive readings of the city through the production of mental maps, documentation of oral histories, and collection of significant narratives about the city (Ameel, 2023; Darling & Wilson, 2016; Lynch, 1960; Mager & Matthey, 2015). In fact, the city of Beirut has been depicted through different lenses, media, and tools of representation in an attempt to highlight the life on the streets and reveal an identity that cannot be easily deciphered on cadastral maps (Lefort, 2020; Schwerter, 2022). While our article focuses on written narratives or text-based representation, photographs and personalized drawings can depict the complexity of social encounters. This article does not intend to promote or suggest any particular method or tool of representation; however, it proposes to further investigate this area of research and challenge conventional media that are often dismissive of the social dimension and the fluid nature of the notion of publicness.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Built Space Hinders Lived Space: Social Encounters and Appropriation in Large Housing Estates

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Abstract
The fundamental structural, demographic, and socio-economic changes afflicting large housing estates in Eastern German cities raise questions about how these neighborhoods could be maintained and developed into attractive residential locations where people want to live and settle down. Besides personal, social, economic, and even administrative factors, individual location decisions are influenced by the physical conditions of space and how they affect a sense of "home"—a crucial precondition for long-term habitation. In terms of urban planning and regeneration activities, we ask: To what extent do the current physical and infrastructural conditions ("built space") of large housing estates encourage residents to "feel at home"? We understand home as an atmosphere of well-being and belonging that is based on the individual and communal appropriation of spaces, which in turn presupposes the possibility of contact and social exchanges among neighbors. The concept of "home" we present here is grounded in philosophical anthropology, new phenomenology, and architectural theory. It provides a specific spatial approach to housing from which we develop indicators to evaluate space. In particular, we apply the concept of "lived space" to evaluate infrastructural amenities, open and green spaces, as well as built structures in three case studies of large housing estates in East German cities. We aim to uncover local potentials for and obstacles to spatial appropriation and encounters in these settings. This allows us to draw conclusions on how urban regeneration policies and measures can make large housing estates more liveable in the long term by promoting encounters and appropriation.

Keywords
home; large housing estates; migration; public space; social encounters; urban planning; urban regeneration

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Improvisation, Conviviality, and Conflict in Everyday Encounters in Public Space" edited by Mervyn Horgan (University of Guelph) and Saara Liinamaa (University of Guelph).

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1. Introduction

In the years after the Second World War, large housing estates, designed to provide affordable housing for the masses, were created across Europe (Wiest, 2011). Following the guiding principles of modernist planning, these estates featured high-rise residential buildings and functional buildings for the centralized provision of services such as education, shopping, health, and leisure facilities, ideally arranged in a well-designed neighborhood center (Wassenberg, 2018). In East Germany, about two million such dwellings were built between 1960 and 1990 (Grunze, 2017). Since 1990, over the course of the political turn and Germany's reunification, large housing estates in Eastern German cities have been subject to radical processes of change with socio-demographic, socio-economic, and spatial impacts (Kabisch & Pössneck, 2022).

So, what are the urban development prospects for these areas, given their specific physical and socio-economic conditions? In particular, are old and new residents likely to stay and might the former shrinking neighborhoods stabilize in the near future? The answer to these questions will depend on whether people feel at home in their local areas (Hahn, 2008; Hanhoerster, 2015). A prerequisite for feeling at home, which is experienced in the private space of the residence as well as in the public space of the neighborhood, are opportunities for individual and communal appropriation (literally, making something one's own; Friedrich, 2011). The nucleus of individual appropriation is the residence. In public space, there are many more opportunities for encounters, which may be fleeting or take the form of observing as well as getting to know new residents or deliberately spending time with neighbors and friends. These encompass both random as well as desired and undesired situations with others. We approach this issue from a spatial perspective, addressing the research question: To what extent do current physical and infrastructural conditions of large housing estates encourage residents to "feel at home"?

While large housing estates were popular neighborhoods in the socialist era, they came to be regarded as unattractive in the 1990s (Hess et al., 2018). Additionally, almost all cities in Eastern Germany saw a demographic shift caused by economically driven outmigration, low birth rates, and migration to more attractive inner-city areas or new suburban sites. These processes drove down the demand for housing, commercial space, and social infrastructure, especially in large housing estates.

In order to protect housing companies from bankruptcy and preserve the steady parts of neighborhoods, a government program to subsidize the demolition of vacant buildings and unused infrastructure was set up in 2002 and continues to the present day. The original aim was to reduce the total area of settlements and to demolish buildings on the fringe. In many neighborhoods, however, this strategy failed due to a lack of oversight, insufficient attention to market mechanisms and owner interests, as well as the problem of diverse ownership (Leetmaa & Bernt, 2022). Additionally, functional buildings housing small youth clubs, restaurants, kindergartens, and schools were also demolished.

The demolition often left gaps and derelict sites that became green but were devoid of any special function or design (Rößler, 2008). A lack of adequate refurbishment measures worsened the housing supply. In the following years, the neighborhoods suffered increased segregation and marginalization. The areas were increasingly characterized by high unemployment rates, low incomes and dependency on government handouts, high rates of child poverty, and youth unemployment (Helbig & Jähnen, 2019). In recent years, the longstanding population loss has been partly reversed by dynamic immigration, especially by the large number of refugees who arrived in Germany around 2015 (Wiegand & Pilz, 2023). Consequently, demand is rising for housing as well as for related infrastructure and social services. At the same time, socioeconomic inequalities are worsening, especially compared to other urban areas (El-Kayed et al., 2020).

Recently, conviviality has been discussed as a crucial approach to understanding everyday encounters in urban public spaces (Horgan et al., 2022). Here we would like to add the perspective of "feeling at home" as a basic precondition for the appropriation of spaces and therefore opportunities for encounter. In this context, we start from the basic notion of habitation, which encompasses the conduct of life (Plessner, 1928) and the importance of the home as a refuge from where individuals can lead purposeful lives (Hahn, 2008). People's everyday lives bind them to a particular place and time, so people have to respond meaningfully in a context-specific way (Rothacker, 1982). Besides socioeconomic aspects, the decision to stay in a specific location depends on the favorability of conditions to create a "home" (a term which here implies not just a physical but also an emotional attachment; Hahn, 2008). A home stabilizes people by giving them a place where they feel they belong (Bollnow, 2011; Plessner, 1928). However, a true home is above all a feeling (Richardson, 2021; Schmitz, 2007), engendered through the individual and communal appropriation of space (Friedrich, 2011). Although feelings cannot be planned, we use "feeling at home" as a conceptual lens to analyze the specific conditions required for the appropriation of space. Using three case studies, conducted in large housing estates in East German cities, we evaluate space and show its potentials and obstacles for encounter and appropriation. Space here covers (a) the infrastructure facilities, (b) the open and green spaces, and (c) the built structure and residential buildings.

Section 2 outlines our analytical approach drawing on the concept of "lived" and "built space" and the theoretical strands of "sense of being at home" with regard to the appropriation of space and social encounter. The underpinning indicators to analyze these aspects and the case studies are presented in Section 3. In Section 4, the findings of the evaluation of the three case studies are presented. In Section 5, we name key conclusions for the urban planning and regeneration measures in large housing estates. Finally, in Section 6, we consider the interaction of built and lived space in the context of "home."

2. Analytical Framework and Theoretical Foundations

In order to examine the potentials and obstacles of large housing estates becoming a "home" for people from different backgrounds, we apply concepts from philosophical anthropology (Plessner, 1928; Rothacker, 1982), new phenomenology (Schmitz, 1998), and architectural theory (Friedrich, 2011; Hahn, 2008).

2.1. Lived and Built Space

Lived space describes people's everyday life which is composed of action space and mood space. Action space is related to active and engaged corporeality, where observation and action intertwine (Waldenfels, 1984). Mood space reveals itself through being perceived and affected as a communication of the space and the *Leib* (the "felt" body), which addresses or communicates itself to the experiencing individual (Ströker, 1977). A human mood in this context is also called "feeling space" or "atmosphere."

Built space encompasses physical structures and services and is mathematically and geometrically measurable (Bollnow, 2011; Neufert et al., 2012). Built space facilitates the work of design and construction which culminate in buildings and open spaces that are a prerequisite for residential and communal space and activities.

Lived space, however, can only be experienced directly. Those designing and building spaces are limited in their anticipation of how such spaces will be used and experienced in the future. Buildings and their functions are only revealed when inhabited. The desired effect as in sacred buildings (Whyte, 2017) becomes perceptible as a mood only when humans are physically present. That is, without the presence of people, there is no mood, although architects should by no means neglect atmospheres in the design of buildings (Böhme, 2017).

Built spaces, such as in dwellings, grocery stores, or gardens, form our environment, but only individuals experience and feel such space. The human interpretation of built space in the form of everyday life, history, experience, and feeling awakens the lived space and creates a home or community.

2.2. The Sense of Home

A home is not built but rather emerges through individual and communal appropriations of various spaces by its residents. A *sense of home* thus describes an atmosphere of the self and feelings such as belonging and trust. The sense of home has no clear spatial boundaries but extends from the apartment into the stairwell and to the neighborhood, from where it has an effect back again (Friedrich, 2015; Sampson et al., 2002). Family and good neighborly relations as well as local basic services convey a feeling of safety and security (Bollnow, 2011).

To uncover the specific factors behind this sense of home, we turn to new phenomenology, which places corporeality at the center of its philosophy to explicate the phenomenon of feeling. For Schmitz, the *Leib* or "felt body" is our reference point of perception and thus the mediator between our relations to the self and the world. This ineluctable corporeality enables us to be present in the elemental and infuses us with a sense of our own significance. We are aware of this experience of presence, which forms the basis of our own identity (Schmitz, 1998, 2007). For Schmitz (1998), feelings are "spatial atmospheres" that can also be perceived intersubjectively, that is, shared with others. Feelings are liberated from the niche of purely subjective inner life, revealing their potential to create a sense of physical belonging or atmospheres in private and public spaces.

Feelings linked to the home, such as a sense of place and cohesion among people, are based on first, a sense of belonging; second, trust and close social relations; and third, joint action. Neighborhood cohesion and individual attachment to the neighborhood are mutually reinforcing (Sampson et al., 2002).

The sense of home as an atmosphere of one's own, where well-being and security are intertwined is especially useful if we wish to understand and ultimately design attractive homes. Richardson (2021) points out that a home goes far beyond the built "bricks and mortar" to include complex sensed references to history, culture, and the identities of places and people.

2.3. Appropriation of Space and Social Encounter

In the context of habitation, appropriation encompasses the meaning we give to all things and spaces (Bachelard, 1957; Baudrillard, 1996; Loos, 2008) through our use, habits, history (Schapp, 2004), experiences (Hahn, 2008), and atmospheres (Schmitz, 1998). In this context, the appropriation of space is seen as an incomplete process that has to be reoriented according to changes in one's life (family, financial, etc.) or changes in residential conditions (e.g., new landlords). The home reaches into private and public spaces in diffuse ways, encompassing the situational binding of the felt body together with all the entanglements of atmospheric, biographical, and practical aspects that occur within the processes of space appropriation. The successful appropriation of space engenders a feeling of well-being, which can only be created by the individual (together with their family; Friedrich, 2011). Within the home, private appropriations dominate and the primary focus in private space is on self-determination (Seel, 2002; Taylor, 1992). Proficient self-determined daily inhabitation, along with the design of private spaces which facilitates this, expresses each person's way of life, their "style," so to speak. This visible expression of one's own life through self-determined appropriation fosters a sense of self-awareness (Friedrich, 2011).

Appropriation includes the daily use of local infrastructures and services, such as walking on certain footpaths that lead to individual habits or exploring new paths that create greater orientation. These often trivial aspects of everyday life may rarely seem worth noticing, but they do in fact change us. We start to know our way around and become familiar with how things and places work (Lewis & Weigert, 2012). Sitting on the bench with a neighbor and watching children play together can be both meaning-giving and bond-generating. In the process, people develop relationships to each other as well as to the bench, to the playground, and to the neighborhood.

Community appropriations and possible encounters with acquaintances and strangers come to the fore in semi-public areas (e.g., within residential buildings) and public areas such as footpaths, playgrounds, parks, gardens, or shops. This requires coordination between residents to accommodate different interests (Karimnia & Haas, 2020). At the same time, shared appropriation and encounters go hand in hand with expressions of community and collective efficacy. Public infrastructures and communal appropriation in neighborhoods enable the formation of intersubjective feelings such as a sense of home, belonging, identification, as well as of trust and community (Farwick et al., 2019; Richardson, 2021; Sampson et al., 2002; Schmitz, 2007). Private, semi-public, and public spaces have a different significance in regard to appropriation: In the former, the focus is placed on the atmosphere of the self, while in the latter two the spotlight turns to meeting and communing with others. Inhabitants' sense of home arises through the interplay of these two aspects.

Accordingly, we derived two key criteria for assessing the potentials and limitations of residential locations or settlements with respect to establishing a home: (a) opportunities for spatial appropriation and (b) opportunities for encounter.

3. Methodology

After deriving indicators for the two criteria (a) opportunities for spatial appropriation and (b) opportunities for encounter, we applied these to case studies of large housing estates in Eastern Germany. This allowed us to describe and evaluate preconditions for residents to develop a "sense of home" in the study areas while pinpointing potential areas where action is required.

3.1. Indicators for Evaluation

The first step was to investigate the main structural elements of large housing estates, considered manifestations of "built space." For each of the three fields of analysis—infrastructure, open and green spaces, and built structure and residential buildings—we devised indicators to describe concrete spatial features ("Elements of built space" column, Tables 1–3), based on fundamental knowledge of architecture and urban design (Gutting et al., 2021; Neufert et al., 2012).

The second step was to evaluate the residents' perspective of use, i.e., how they "inhabit" space in terms of the "lived space." In this way, the existing spatial conditions could be analyzed for their suitability (or lack thereof) for appropriation and encounter in everyday life ("Characteristics of lived space" column, Tables 1–3). For the three fields of analysis, we developed corresponding indicators that extend beyond the structural conditions to capture intersubjective atmospheres. These acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of perception and the situational moods of our respondents but are nonetheless relevant for behavior in urban space. These indicators were based on general criteria that focus on people as social beings. Furthermore, diverse principles of urban design were incorporated into the indicators along with theoretical concepts relating to a sense of home (Alexander, 1977; Bollnow, 2011; Gehl, 1987; Jacobs, 1961; Lefebvre, 2009; Lynch, 1960). We focused our investigation primarily on those conditions outside the apartments that facilitate a sense of home through appropriation and encounter.

3.2. Case Studies

The study is based on analyses of three large housing estates in eastern German cities, each representing the typical challenges of this settlement type, described in the introduction. The neighborhoods of (a) Schwerin Neu Zippendorf/Mueßer Holz, (b) Halle Südliche Neustadt, and (c) Cottbus Sandow were selected as case studies in a research project dealing with the developmental

Table 1. Indicators to evaluate infrastructure for appropriation and encounter.

Elements of built space	Characteristics of lived space
Basic services (e.g., supermarkets, small grocery stores, bakeries), small businesses, health-related services	Urban location (connection to public paths, parking spaces, public transport, visibility)
Neighborhood and cultural centers, community centers	Ease of access, visibility, and location within the building (floor, barrier-free access)
Services for children and young people (e.g., schools, daycare centers, sports facilities, playgrounds, youth centers)	Street furniture suitable for use (e.g., outdoor seating)
	Accessibility of services (costs, target groups, opening hours)
Leisure and cultural facilities (e.g., cafés, restaurants, clubs, public sports facilities, parks, religious buildings)	Diversity of infrastructure (selection, range of services, number of local businesses)
Healthcare facilities and retirement homes	Type of business (e.g., privately-run stores)
	Designed for multiple uses (equipment, state of maintenance)
	Group-specific services (e.g., women or migrants)
	Services independent of target groups

Table 2. Indicators to evaluate the provision of open and green space for appropriation and encounter.

Elements of built space	Characteristics of lived space
Forest and dense greenery, trees, green spaces, parks, gardens Urban plazas, pedestrian zones, sealed parking lots, paved zones Fenced special facilities (e.g., schools, daycare centers, nursing homes) Sport areas and playgrounds Ownership of open and green spaces	Environmental conditions (shade, noise) Street furniture suitable for use (e.g., seating, skating) Perception of safety (e.g., underground walkways) Negative use (e.g., places for drug consumption) Fencing of plots Open and green spaces for community appropriation (e.g., educational projects in natural areas) Variety of functionally assigned open spaces (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields) as well as functionally unassigned designs Gardens (e.g., neighborhood/community gardens, tenant gardens, private gardens, allotment gardens) General condition as well as attractive or unattractive appearance (e.g., wastebaskets, state of renovation, flowers, or trash) Needs and functionality (e.g., playgrounds, skate parks) Infrastructural, cultural, and commercial services that complement open space (e.g., bus stops, kiosks, cafés)

perspectives of large housing estates in Eastern Germany whose contraction was being reversed through an influx of immigrants (StadtumMig, 2023). The selection criteria were as follows: (a) The areas have been suffering massive population loss for many years (currently 15.000–16.000 inhabitants); (b) considerable demolition work has been carried out to remove vacant building stock and underutilized infrastructure; (c) the areas have experienced a massive influx of refugees in recent years (Wiegand & Pilz, 2023); (d) the municipalities must determine how the estates will develop over the next decades and examine the feasibility of long-term investments in infrastructure and services.

3.3. Data and Methods

The cities' basic geodata and open-source geodata were used to create maps showing the structure and physical elements. In addition, we relied on aerial photographs and other spatial databases, for example, those providing information on infrastructure locations or ownership.

Via extensive site visits, we mapped additional spatial information (e.g., forms of use and the condition of green spaces, the provision of local infrastructure and services) and recorded usage patterns and special features as well as our own perceptions of the local situation. Here we applied our skills as landscape architects

Table 3. Indicators for the evaluation of built structure and residential buildings for appropriation and encounter.

Elements of built space	Characteristics of lived space
Meeting spaces for residents in and around the apartment building, on the roof, and at the front and back of the buildings (e.g., seating in the entrance areas) as well as service facilities (e.g., concierge, fitness rooms, childcare, libraries) Specifical functional spaces (e.g., party room, workshop, community kitchen) Rooms without specifications for usage (e.g., vacant rooms, foyers) Ownership of the residential buildings	Visible signs of community (e.g., self-made seating, barbecue areas) Location and access of areas that potentially can be used communally Presence of and access to a garden (e.g., tenant gardens directly beside the apartment) Visible signs of appropriation (e.g., plant pots and individual designs at entrance areas)

to read, interpret, and generalize spaces, their usage (or absence of usage), and the possibilities for appropriation and encounter at each location. Random encounters with residents allowed us to record further information, assessments, and moods through short conversations. Multi-layered information on current and past problems as well as on activities and everyday processes was collected and discussed in joint walks and digital workshops with estate managers and municipal urban planners.

Planning documents and urban concepts of the three cities and study neighborhoods were evaluated through document analysis with the aim of understanding local planning and conceptual history, framework conditions, and goals.

Additionally, local knowledge about the neighborhoods and their specific challenges was obtained through investigations conducted by the partners within the interdisciplinary research project:

1. Expert interviews with 54 representatives of city administrations, housing companies, and local initiatives and associations provided insights into the structural, open, and green space and infrastructure situation (Pilz, in press);
2. From a standardized survey of residents' perspectives being conducted in the Schwerin study area (*N* = 1,300; El-Kayed et al., in press) and individual interviews with residents in all three neighborhoods (*N* = 35; El-Kayed et al., in press), we borrowed findings on the perception of the structural, open, and green space and infrastructure situation.

As a result, we constructed the following: (a) inventory maps for all three areas showing open space and green space use, infrastructure/services provision, and ownership (Figures 1–3 show, for example, the maps of the case study Schwerin); (b) photo documentation; and (c) detailed site descriptions. Together, these formed the basis for our indicator analysis (Tables 1–3) of the opportunities for space appropriation and social encounters.

4. Results

Below we present our findings on the evaluation of the potentials for and obstacles to space appropriation and encounter in relation to the three fields of analysis: infrastructure/services, open and green space, and built structure and residential buildings.

4.1. Potentials and Obstacles of Infrastructure/Services Provision

The basic supply of food, health, education, care, and transport facilities is ensured. However, the absence of infrastructure/services in the peripheries of the estates (Figure 2) is exacerbated by transportation and natural barriers limiting access to alternative service locations. In the peripheral areas, this means inadequate provision for those with limited mobility. There exist subareas where only a few specific services for target groups are available, such as playgrounds for small children, although some of these are substandard. For the residents in these areas, there are hardly any opportunities to meet other people when running everyday errands. In addition, there is a lack of other opportunities to meet close to home (see Section 4.3).

A few of the private stores are owned by immigrants, who also assume networking functions for their newly arrived compatriots. These small stores are located in the few detached special-use buildings that have not been demolished, or, sometimes, in existing historic buildings along the street front. In the long residential buildings, public infrastructure like shops is integrated on the first floor only in exceptional cases. Thus, there are no opportunities for encounters or appropriations along these buildings. In addition, the very long walks for errands seem even longer due to the lack of any attractions along the way.

All areas have several discount stores. These are places where people shop and meet every day, but they do not meet the dire need for public areas to linger, seek entertainment, and get to know other people (Figure 4). The asphalted areas merely provide access to the shops for private vehicles. Often there are no safe footpaths for pedestrians. The open spaces around these shops usually do not offer seating or shady places to linger.

In all three estates, there are very few sites with a concentration of services. Those that do exist can be regarded as neighborhood centers. Alongside commercial services, these sometimes contain the offices of dedicated district managers or civic associations. These neighborhood centers are usually dominated by a large supermarkets built after 1990, sometimes accompanied by smaller stores, and are easy to reach by public transport. However, it is rare to find well-designed and maintained public open spaces which are so vital for successful neighborhood centers. For example, the original neighborhood center in Halle (Figure 5) consists of one- to two-story buildings that house various stores with some outdoor dining and restaurants. In 2021, a new shopping complex opened on the site of a demolished original department store, facing its windowless rear to the existing plaza. While the focus on car access is typical for all wholesale chains of the post-reunification period, it would have been sensible and easy to link this spatially to the existing ensemble. The existing plaza is frequented by people, either intentionally or when walking through the neighborhood, and—even without its large commercial neighbor—functions well with its own services like restaurants, markets, and pleasant spatial relationship (assessed as the relation of square area to the height of surrounding buildings; Gehl, 1987). In addition, trees, shrubbery, and street furniture such as fountains serve to structure the open space.

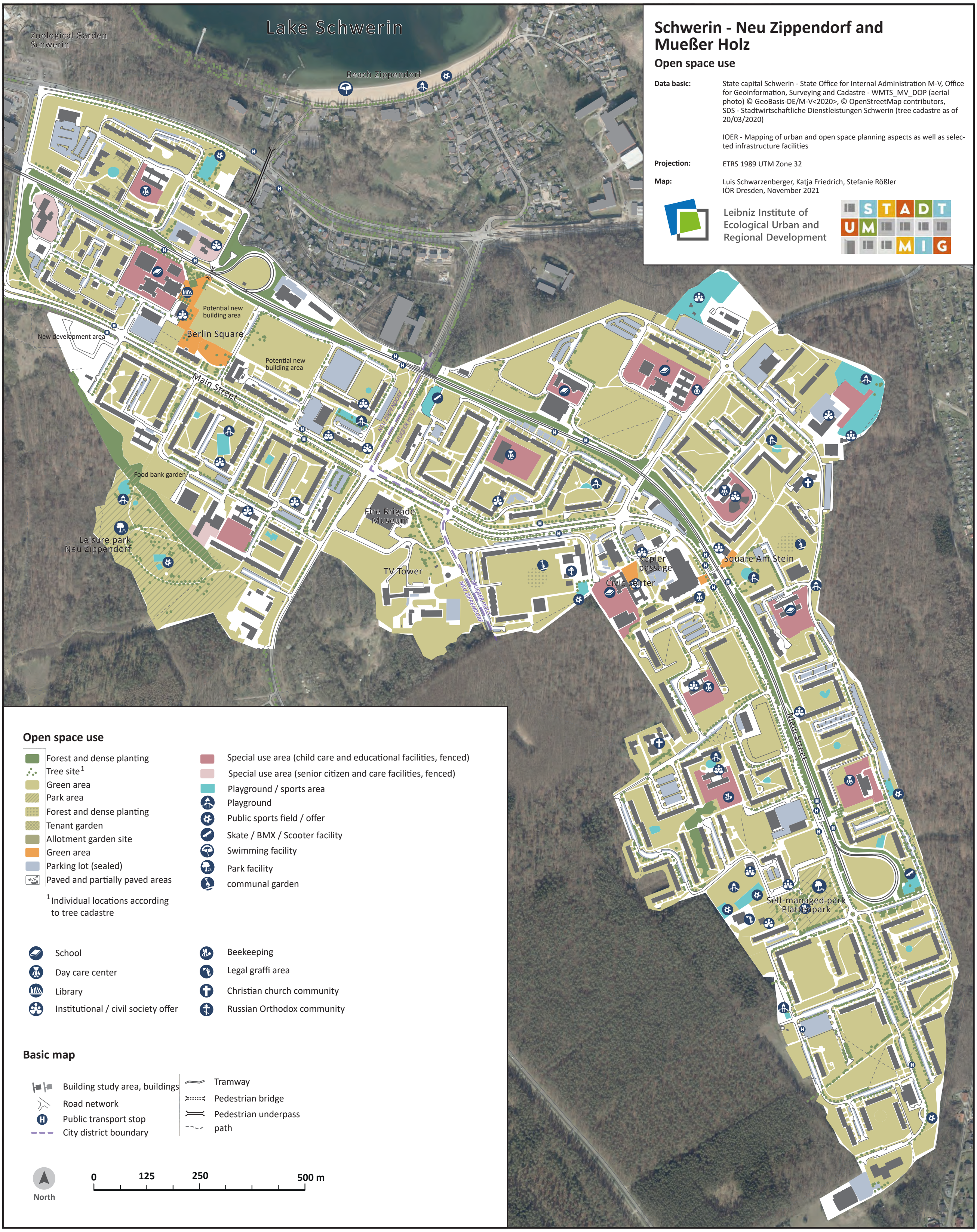
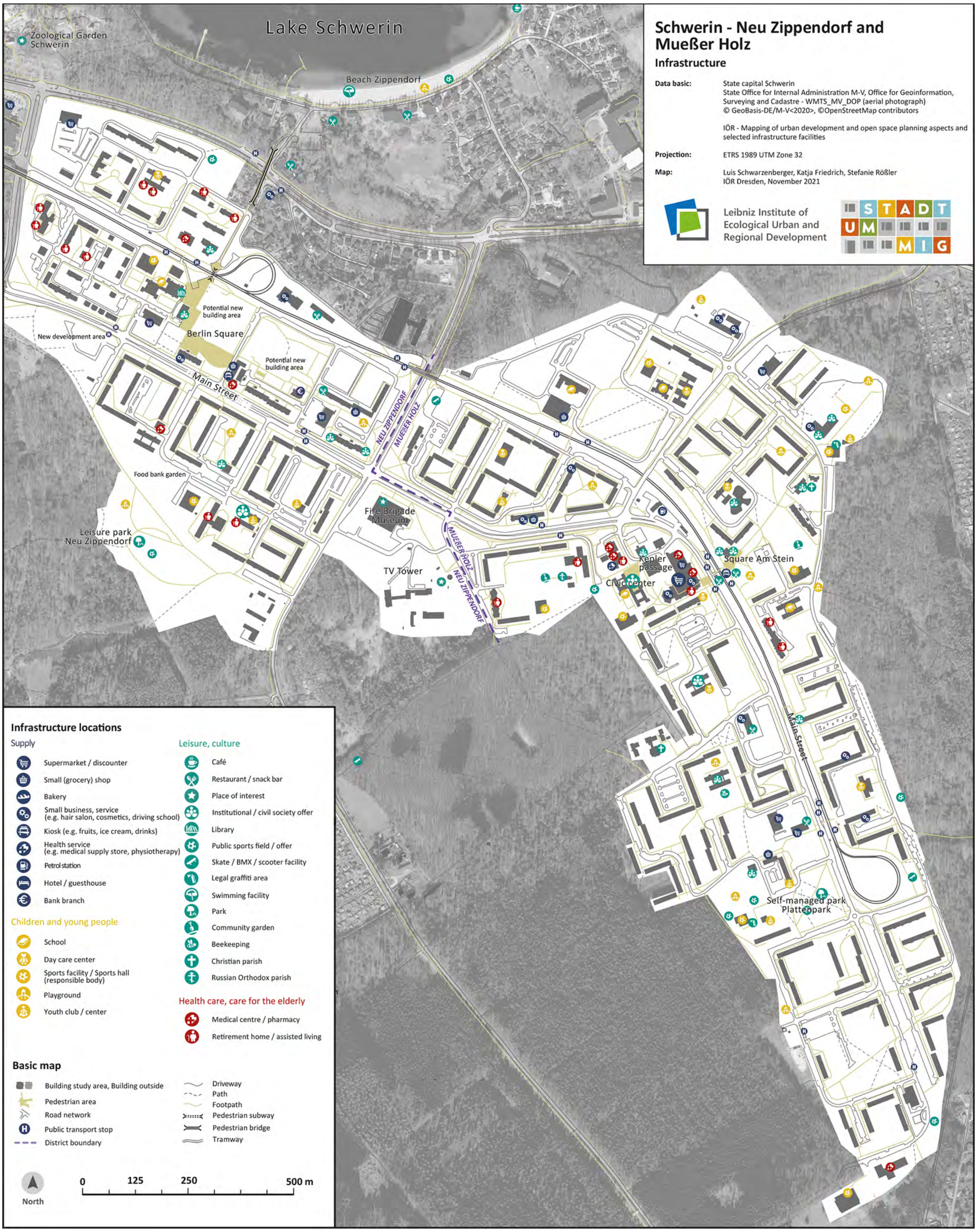

Schwerin - Neu Zippendorf and Mueßer Holz
Open space use
Data basic:
State capital Schwerin - State Office for Internal Administration M-V, Office for Geoinformation, Surveying and Cadastre - WMTS_MV_DOP (aerial photo) © GeoBasis-DE/M-V<2020>, © OpenStreetMap contributors, SDS - Stadtwirtschaftliche Dienstleistungen Schwerin (tree cadastre as of 20/03/2020)
IOER - Mapping of urban and open space planning aspects as well as selected infrastructure facilities
Projection:
ETRS 1989 UTM Zone 32
Map:
Luis Schwarzenberger, Katja Friedrich, Stefanie Rößler
IÖR Dresden, November 2021
Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development
STADT UMMIG
Lake Schwerin
Zoological Garden Schwerin
Beach Zippendorf
Potential new building area
Berlin Square
New development area
Potential new building area
Main Street
Food bank garden
Leisure park Neu Zippendorf
Fire Brigade Museum
TV Tower
Kepler passage
Civic center
Square Am Stein
Main Street
Self-managed park Plattenpark
Open space use
Forest and dense planting
Tree site¹
Green area
Park area
Forest and dense planting
Tenant garden
Allotment garden site
Green area
Parking lot (sealed)
Paved and partially paved areas
¹Individual locations according to tree cadastre
Special use area (child care and educational facilities, fenced)
Special use area (senior citizen and care facilities, fenced)
Playground / sports area
Playground
Public sports field / offer
Skate / BMX / Scooter facility
Swimming facility
Park facility
communal garden
School
Day care center
Library
Institutional / civil society offer
Beekeeping
Legal graffi area
Christian church community
Russian Orthodox community
Basic map
Building study area, buildings
Road network
Public transport stop
City district boundary
Tramway
Pedestrian bridge
Pedestrian underpass
path
North
0
125
250
500 m

Figure 1. Schwerin Neu Zippendorf/Mueßer Holz: Open space and green space use.


Schwerin - Neu Zippendorf and Mueßer Holz
Infrastructure
Data basic:
State capital Schwerin
State Office for Internal Administration M-V, Office for Geoinformation, Surveying and Cadastre - WMTS_MV_DOP (aerial photograph)
© GeoBasis-DE/M-V<2020>, ©OpenStreetMap contributors
IÖR - Mapping of urban development and open space planning aspects and selected infrastructure facilities
Projection:
ETRS 1989 UTM Zone 32
Map:
Luis Schwarzenberger, Katja Friedrich, Stefanie Rößler
IÖR Dresden, November 2021
Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development
STADT UM MIG
Lake Schwerin
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Main Street
NEU ZIPPENDORF
MUEßER HOLZ
Food bank garden
Leisure park Neu Zippendorf
Fire Brigade Museum
TV Tower
Kepler passage
Civic center
Square Am Stein
Main Street
Self-managed park Plattenpark
Infrastructure locations
Supply
Supermarket / discounter
Small (grocery) shop
Bakery
Small business, service (e.g. hair salon, cosmetics, driving school)
Kiosk (e.g. fruits, ice cream, drinks)
Health service (e.g. medical supply store, physiotherapy)
Petrol station
Hotel / guesthouse
Bank branch
Children and young people
School
Day care center
Sports facility / Sports hall (responsible body)
Playground
Youth club / center
Leisure, culture
Café
Restaurant / snack bar
Place of interest
Institutional / civil society offer
Library
Public sports field / offer
Skate / BMX / scooter facility
Legal graffiti area
Swimming facility
Park
Community garden
Beekeeping
Christian parish
Russian Orthodox parish
Health care, care for the elderly
Medical centre / pharmacy
Retirement home / assisted living
Basic map
Building study area, Building outside
Pedestrian area
Road network
Public transport stop
District boundary
Driveway
Path
Footpath
Pedestrian subway
Pedestrian bridge
Tramway
North
0
125
250
500 m

Figure 2. Schwerin Neu Zippendorf/Mueßer Holz: Infrastructure.

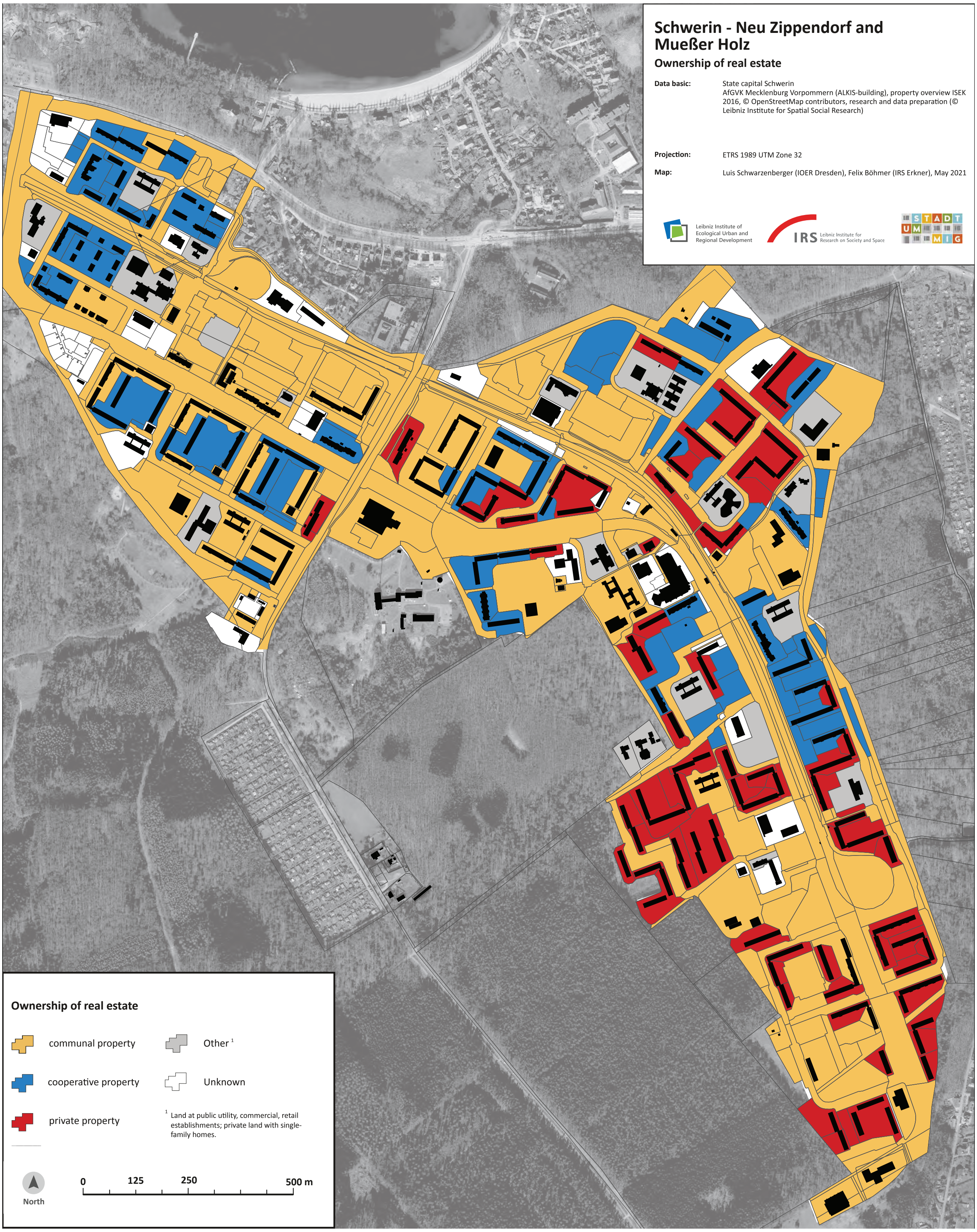

Schwerin - Neu Zippendorf and Mueßer Holz
Ownership of real estate
Data basic: State capital Schwerin AfGVK Mecklenburg Vorpommern (ALKIS-building), property overview ISEK 2016, © OpenStreetMap contributors, research and data preparation (© Leibniz Institute for Spatial Social Research)
Projection: ETRS 1989 UTM Zone 32
Map: Luis Schwarzenberger (IOER Dresden), Felix Böhmer (IRS Erkner), May 2021
Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development
IRS Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space
STADT UM MIG
Ownership of real estate
communal property
Other¹
cooperative property
Unknown
private property
¹ Land at public utility, commercial, retail establishments; private land with single-family homes.
North
0
125
250
500 m

Figure 3. Schwerin Neu Zippendorf/Mueßer Holz: Ownership.

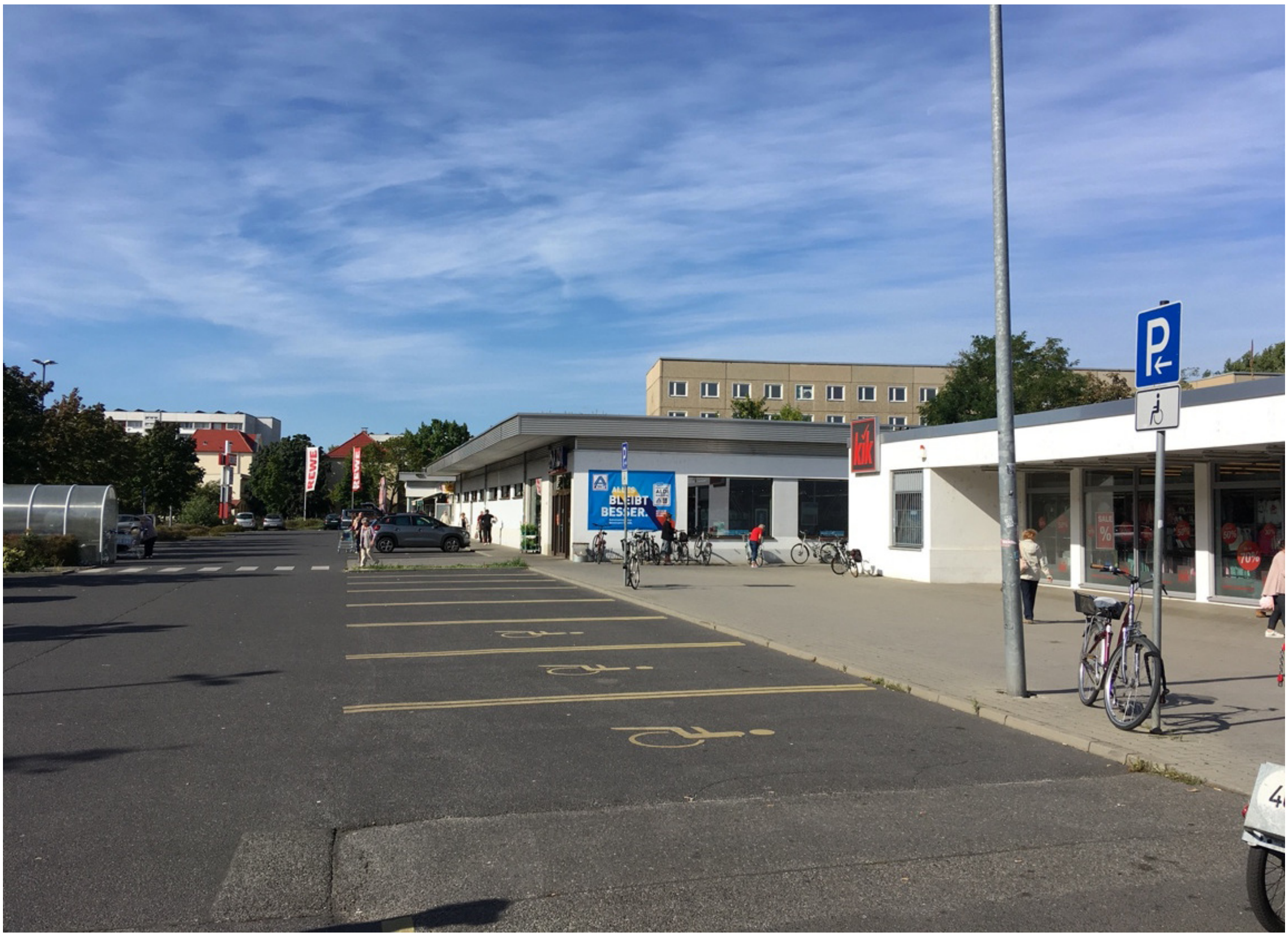


Figure 4. Unsociable entrance situation in front of a discount store in Cottbus. Photograph by Katja Friedrich.

All neighborhoods lack infrastructure such as cultural or neighborhood centers, where people can come together at the neighborhood level and beyond, express themselves, and experience themselves as a community. In general, there is also a lack of meeting places such as cafés and stores. A few recreational opportunities for fitness or dance are available but there are no music clubs or movie theaters. Large extents of the estates offer no opportunities for shopping or eating out.

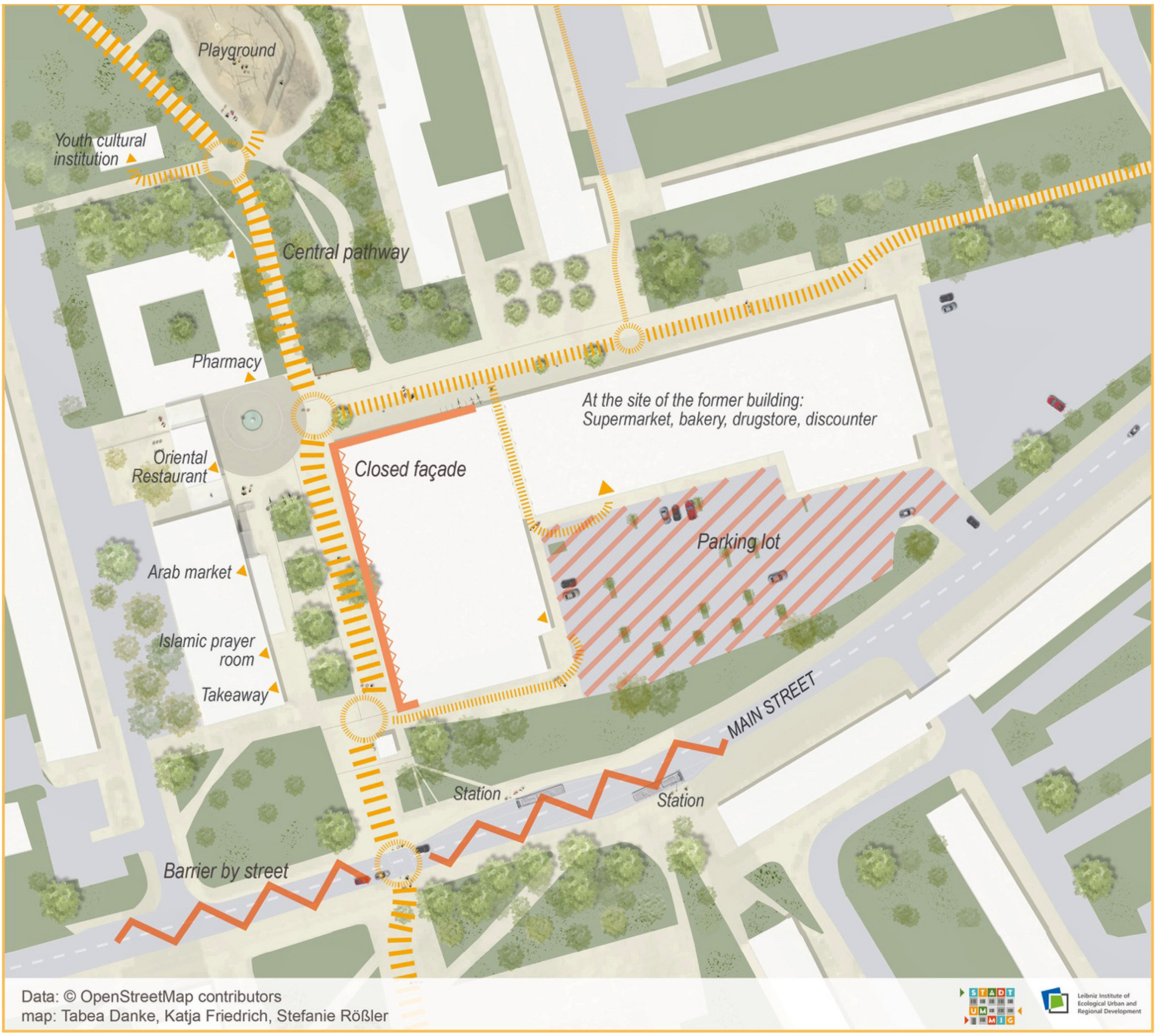
Some local groups organize attractive recreational services but these are only for children and young people. Neighborhood clubs for bicycle repairs or centers providing help to refugees are often tucked away in inconspicuous locations. Considering the large scale of the estates and the populations of roughly 15,000 inhabitants each, these scattered services for particular groups end up reaching only a few people. Additionally, they are unknown to many residents and do not exert any uplifting effect on public open spaces due to their out-of-the-way location.

4.2. Potentials and Obstacles of Open and Green Spaces

The neighborhoods have extensive green spaces and parks. Some estates border forests and attractive landscape areas (Figure 1). Although they possess very good environmental conditions, these green spaces do not leverage their potential for appropriation and encounter.

The housing estates have large open spaces between buildings as well as along the streets. Demolition work has further increased the extent of open space (Figure 6). Generally, the green spaces between buildings seldom have designated uses. Some residential courtyards feature small, unattractive playgrounds, which are used by families with small children due to the lack of any alternatives. For all other residents, the undeveloped green spaces offer no opportunities for local gatherings or activities. Opportunities for and evidence of appropriation appear absent beyond functional allocations, such as a sandbox for children. Additionally, any appropriation may be hindered by ownership and related regulations, which are not apparent to residents (Figure 3).

In Schwerin, a civil society association was engaged in developing a neighborhood park on a large former built-up site (Figure 7). Other associations established themselves nearby, addressing the needs of specific target groups, e.g., providing free lunches for children or sports activities for adolescents. The associations use containers for their premises owing to a lack of suitable rooms outside the residential buildings. In the absence of the associations' employees or activities, however, this area remains very quiet. It lacks services or attractions


Playground
Youth cultural institution
Central pathway
Pharmacy
Oriental Restaurant
Closed façade
At the site of the former building: Supermarket, bakery, drugstore, discounter
Parking lot
Arab market
Islamic prayer room
Takeaway
MAIN STREET
Station
Station
Barrier by street

Data: © OpenStreetMap contributors
map: Tabea Danke, Katja Friedrich, Stefanie Rößler

Figure 5. Neighborhood center "Am Treff.''

that are relevant to a broad swathe of the local population and has not become a public focal point for this neighborhood. Aside from the few targeted groups, the park offers few options for random or intentional meetings and encounters with different community members. The impression of feeling lost on the site results both from the absence of other people and the spatial configuration of the park (size, missing spatial relations to the adjoining buildings, and few design elements).

Most of the open and green spaces within the estates lack infrastructure such as water or electricity connections to accommodate larger public events. All (public) services such as schools, daycare centers, and nursing homes are fenced. For example, school buildings and their open spaces primarily serve teachers, students, and parents as meeting places; they are occasionally available in the evenings for other target groups, e.g., for sports activities, but do not offer open spaces for public encounters.

Traditionally, extensive allotment garden sites for individual garden activities were provided on the fringe of the housing estates. It is rare to find fenced tenant gardens directly beside or between residential buildings, which allow individual green space appropriation near the flats. In recent years, a few community gardens were established, mainly addressing specific communities such as migrants, women, or students.

4.3. Potentials and Obstacles of the Built Structure and Residential Buildings

The residential buildings are used almost exclusively for housing and may go up to 300 m in length. Each building entrance serves between 10 and 33 apartments. The few dedicated residential concepts such as housing for the elderly are always located in separate buildings with some (albeit rare) integrated services such as a hairdressing salon. In general, there is neither functional mixing

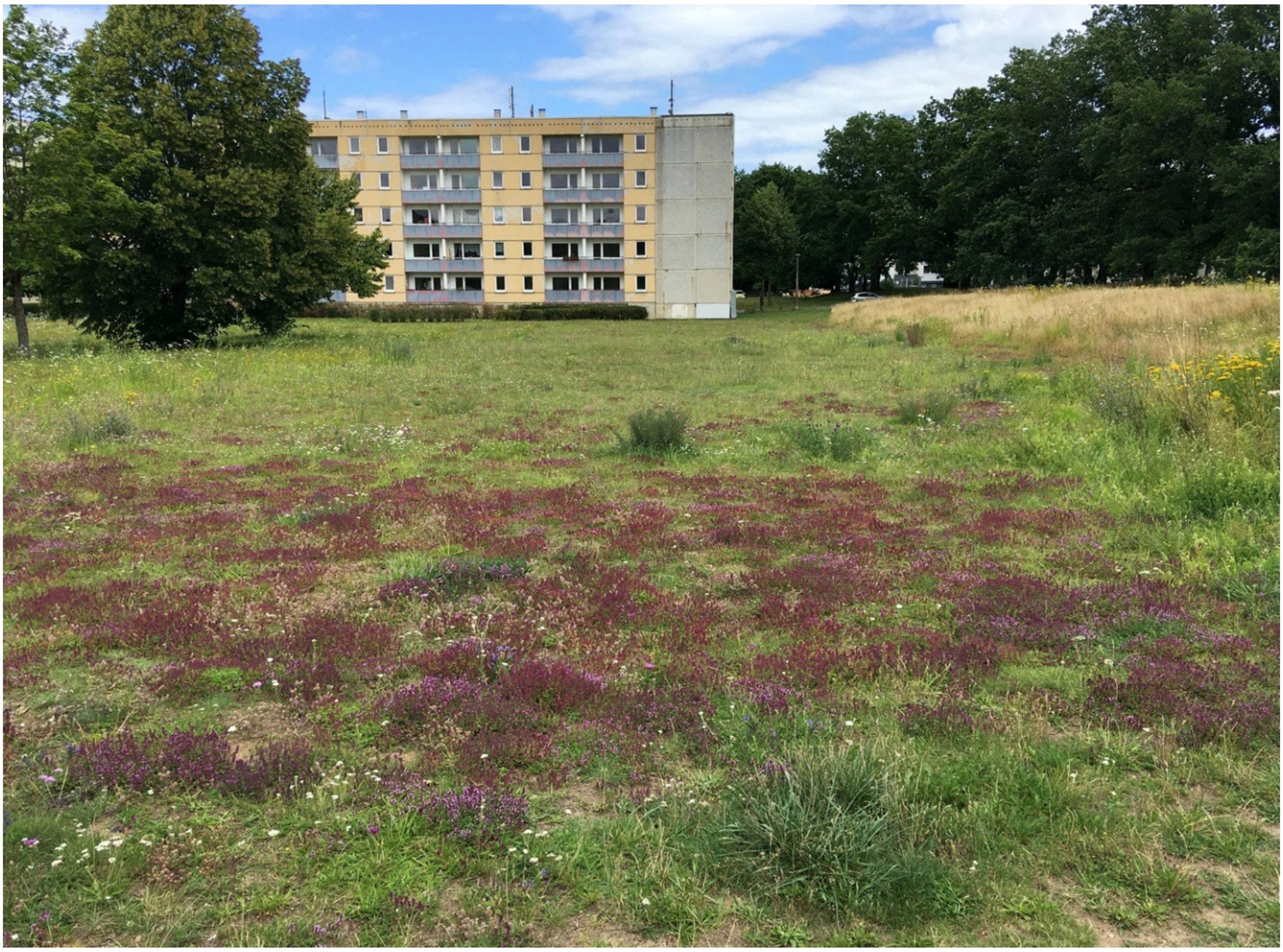


Figure 6. Large demolition site in Schwerin, currently designed as a bee-friendly lawn. Photograph by Katja Friedrich.

nor diversity with regard to the housing concept, from which spontaneous encounters among residents and customers could result. In particular, local stakeholders and residents complain that there are no suitable spaces for community purposes.

There are no meeting places for residents within the residential buildings, except for the rare organized services mentioned in Section 4.1. The flat roofs are completely unused. The cellars are usually occupied by laundry drying rooms. Narrow stairwells encourage casual encounters between residents but are not suitable for several residents to chat together. There are no rooms for communal uses such as for workshops, childcare, etc., nor for service providers in or around the residential building.

The areas at the entrances or the rear doors do not offer any particular features for communal appropriation. Very rarely, flower beds may be observed directly beside the building entrances. They appear inviting and friendly to passers-by compared to the usual lawns, encouraging some individuals to stop, which could provide an opportunity for conversation, for example. There are occasional indications of the need for community meeting places near the residential buildings (Figure 8).

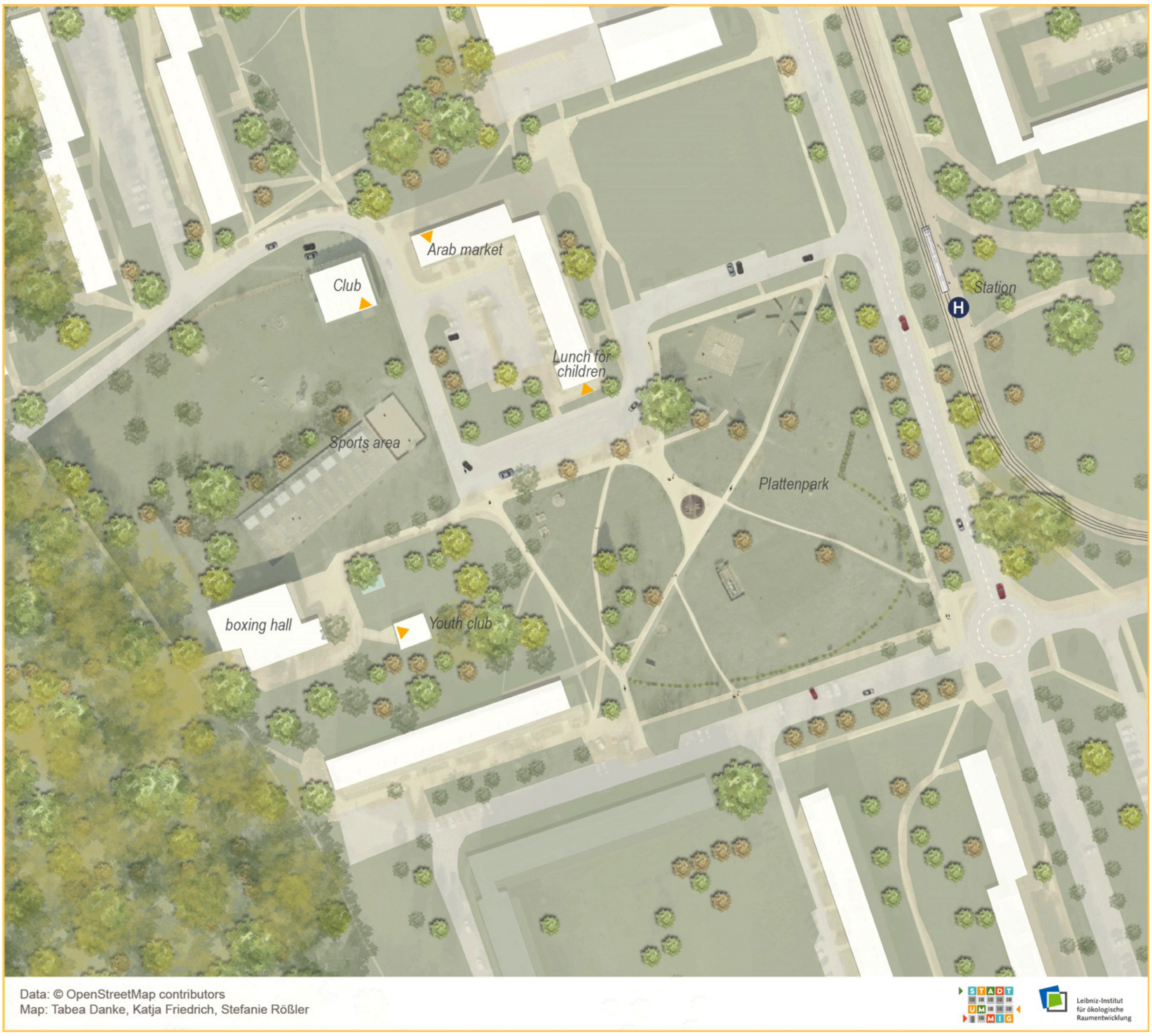
4.4. Obstacles to the Appropriation of Space and for Encounters

The following factors hinder potential appropriation and encounters with regard to infrastructure/services, open and green spaces, and built structures and residential buildings.

The very large plots and building scales exacerbated by demolition, together with the original structural-aesthetic mono-functionality, lead to fragmented neighborhoods with very long walking distances through monotonous open and green spaces. The strict separation of residential and service functions undermines the opportunity for chance encounters through overlapping usage. The undesigned, often functionless, and wide sites between buildings hinder appropriation by residents.

The basic service infrastructure dominated by a few discounters, the very low proportion of privately-run stores, and the lack of small eateries, for example, means that there are very few public places, where people can meet in different situations in the course of their everyday lives.

Demolition has weakened existing neighborhood centers or left them in poor condition. This is not



Data: © OpenStreetMap contributors
Map: Tabea Danke, Katja Friedrich, Stefanie Rößler

Figure 7. "Plattenpark Schwerin": Neighborhood park with robust design elements and some functional elements, intending encounter and appropriation.

remedied by the presence of international retail stores which show no architectural or personal connection or commitment to the local estate. Cultural or community centers are entirely absent.

Finally, residential buildings and adjacent open spaces offer almost no structurally and functionally suitable spaces for encounters and appropriation.

5. Discussion

Within the current context, two central strategies can be derived to overcome challenges and make use of the potentials of the estates to promote encounter and appropriation, making them valued and attractive neighborhoods: first, create new and diverse places for encounter and exchange, and second, make targeted use of the potential of extensive green spaces for appropriation and encounter.

5.1. Creating Places for Encounters

Neighborhood centers are ideal for the purpose of encounters because they are centrally located places and simultaneously a clear expression of the values and spirit of the neighborhood. Additional local infrastructure such as cultural, social, or commercial services must be established. This includes designing the public open spaces of the neighborhood centers and the existing discount stores in a way that encourages people to linger. The promotion of new (small) business ventures by migrants in the form of kiosks, street cafés, or snack bars would expand the range of local services while also enlivening the locality and creating small meeting places (Sandoz et al., 2022). In the process, local operators can play an active role in the community by building relationships with their customers and neighbors (and vice versa; Steigemann, 2019).

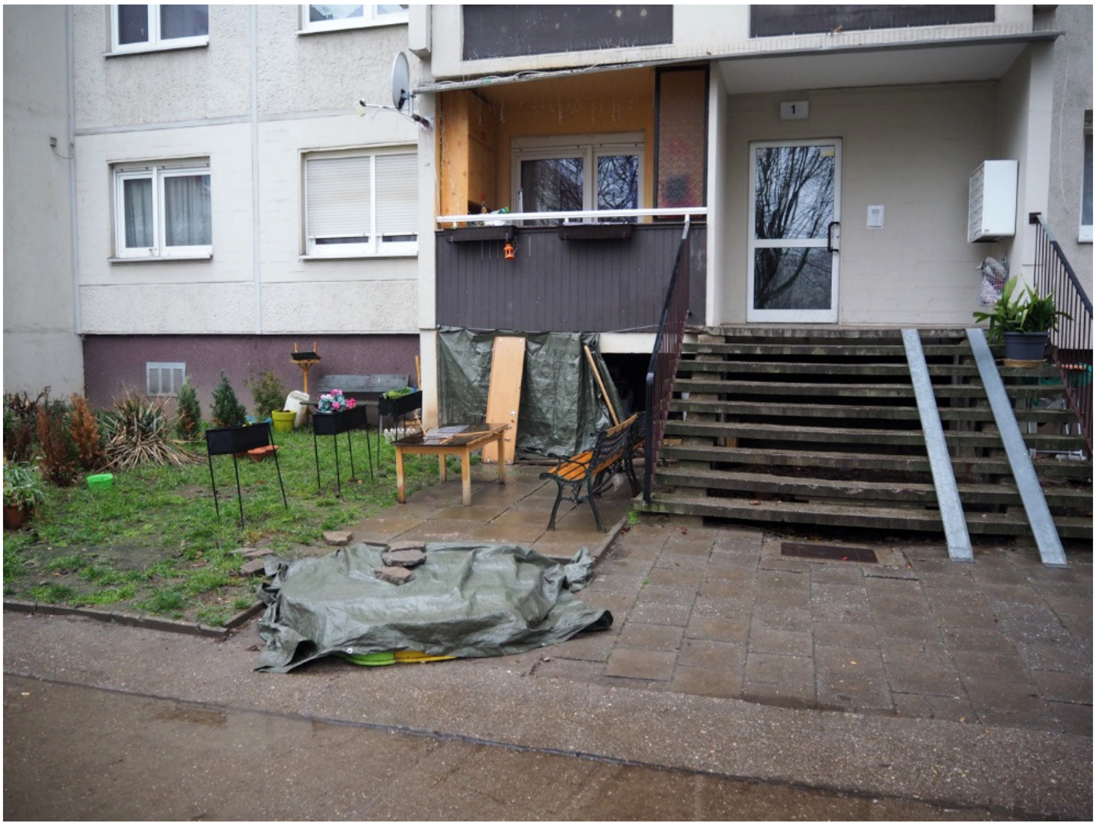


Figure 8. A rare case of an entrance situation appropriated by residents, in Halle. Photograph by Katja Friedrich.

Synergies can emerge when temporary structures or businesses dovetail with newly designed spaces such as publicly used first floors of residential buildings or garden initiatives as well as with existing public facilities such as bus/tram stops. In terms of "urban islands," specific sites can be created with new offers, initiating concentration of people and serving as meeting points. These can be small-scale sites for diverse forms of use, oriented to the human scale and the everyday life of the residents (e.g., small marketplaces). This requires cooperation between municipal and local actors as well as targeted enhancement of the public open space to create inviting and attractive features. Aesthetically designed kiosks or construction trailers with flap elements can structure the open space and help to distinguish local sites. Features such as canopies, awnings, benches and tables, and small playground equipment can also be introduced to promote usage, communication, and comfort. Facilities should ideally be open to usage by non-customers as well.

At the neighborhood level, there is a need for places to promote identity and create community, such as cultural centers and smaller meeting places where informal encounters and exchanges can take place, and where, through the interaction of different actors and multipliers, diverse new services and meeting opportunities can arise within a heterogeneous neighborhood. This can, in turn, promote community expression at the neighborhood level. First-floor apartments could be repurposed for this at strategic locations. New buildings are also a way of showing that the neighborhood is valued. A good investment would be to create robust designs and floor plans which may be flexibly interpreted, encompassing a broad array of future uses. New gathering places, both within residential buildings and in the public open space, could foster related outdoor activities, mutually reinforcing their impact on the neighborhood (e. g., repair cafés using the adjoining open space, and mobile kitchens).

5.2. Creating Potential for Community Appropriation

While many cities and neighborhoods are characterized by high density, crowding, and noise, the studied estates have extensive open and green spaces that would be considered a luxury elsewhere. However, in the absence of people and activities, outdoor spaces do not provide opportunities for encounters or the shared experience of space. We recommend that the currently unused undeveloped areas be redesigned with diverse appropriation possibilities depending on their location and given "recognizable addresses." Overall, the dominant owners of open spaces are the municipalities, and thus there is considerable scope for them to make open spaces available for public use or community appropriation.

To strengthen the "urban islands" mentioned above, open spaces designed for public encounters and meetings should be linked with mutually reinforcing infrastructural services such as kiosks or the public use of first floors in residential buildings.

Community gardening is particularly suitable at sites that are less public. These could be residential or open garden projects as well as those designed for specific target groups, e.g., migrant women or teenagers. This requires the involvement of residents, as gardening projects generally fail if planned from above or brought in from outside (Nikolaidou et al., 2016). An institutional connection via owners, schools, or associations is helpful to source equipment and to moderate any conflicts.

The great potential of areas adjacent to the housing communities to support individual and community appropriation should be leveraged. This could be through gardens linked to residential buildings or green spaces for sports, childcare, and joint outdoor activities. Small open spaces could be allocated explicitly to each stairwell and given a robust design, the individual shaping and the maintenance could be taken over by the residents. This would give residential communities legitimate access to the spaces and encourage them to design and implement appropriate shared uses together. However, this requires committed stakeholders, legal safeguards, a high degree of self-management, supporting moderation, and financial support.

Encounters could be encouraged by furnishing the entrance areas of the residential buildings for short meetings. Shade-giving elements, planters, and seating may be beneficial. A variety of features could break up the monotonous architecture and give each entrance a unique design.

6. Conclusion

A sense of home is created by an atmosphere of complex, not entirely measurable interactions between interior and exterior spaces and between various appropriation processes. The feeling of being at home includes identification and belonging as well as social networks and ties within the neighborhood.

What does this understanding mean in the context of the large housing estates studied here? Can we make people feel comfortable in these areas, fostering a conscious wish to stay and shape their homes and lives in a self-determined way? For this, we recommend establishing ways of appropriating space and creating places for encounters. This is certainly not the case at present. While the studied estates offer affordable housing, educational and shopping opportunities, as well as vast green spaces, residents often move away as soon as they have the opportunity (Bernt et al., 2022). One particular problem here is the low level of participation in public life (Meeus et al., 2018).

Vulnerable groups such as immigrants cannot develop an atmosphere of safety within a residential building or in the neighborhood without participation and a means of encounter. These neighborhoods need to provide a high level of integration and this requires meeting places close to home for the transfer of resources between neighbors (Farwick et al., 2019). Only when people come into contact can they resolve conflicts and help each other. If neighbors do not even know each other, there will be no trust.

Our arguments highlight the obstacles within the built space of large housing estates for the creation of a home as lived space. A variety of measures are needed to encourage sociability in residential urban spaces. Resident participation is central to targeted and needs-based implementation (Masterson et al., 2017). If the municipality and building owners succeed in integrating people into their localities by involving them in design, decision-making, and implementation processes, this will also promote appropriation and encounters as a form of neighborhood cohesion (Sampson et al., 2002). Furthermore, it will trigger other positive effects such as self-empowerment (Adams, 2008). The low level of local, private resources could be compensated by community-based funding. Participatory approaches for new housing, ownership, and community concepts should be pursued for the future development of the neighborhood with committed rather than for-profit actors.

Of course, a community space is not necessarily created when an apartment on the first floor of a residential building is opened for public use; instead, diverse meeting places only emerge when a space is used by people with suitable equipment for making music, repairing bicycles, eating, and cooking together or when they strive to set up a community group. These new meeting places can provide further impetus for individuals to feel comfortable in their homes and neighborhood.

Good housing conditions are a prerequisite for a functioning society. Here we are talking about various "felt" dimensions of the home (Richardson, 2021). Even though atmospheres cannot be built, they are indispensable when considering housing situations (Waldenfels, 2001). Unfortunately, planning principles do not encompass pleasant places for encounter and attractive conditions for space appropriation. But, as we argue in this article, perhaps it is time they do so.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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