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Reconsidering neighbourhood communality through the lens of intersectionality: resident and authority perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how neighbourhood communality emerges and is restricted by a range of conditions, a topic that has received increasing attention in current research yet remains unresolved. The concept of communality provides a lens through which to examine how a variety of intersectional factors related to the informants' social status affect the perceptions of the sense of community in the study's focus neighbourhoods in Vaasa, Finland, where interview materials were gathered. The analysis scrutinizes the ways in which local institutions, the environment and residents interact with the three types of narration gestalts – inclusion, recollection and segregation – construing the idea of communality in the studied neighbourhoods. The study combines actor-network theory with intersectionality to gain insight into how and where people come together and interact. It became clear that the target neighbourhoods and people who live there are marginalized and seen as 'others' because of their socioeconomic status and other demographics.

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Communality; inclusion; recollection; segregation; neighbourhood

1. Introduction

Scholars in sociology, urban studies and human geography have conducted a great deal of research on neighbourhood communality and belonging. In her seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jane Jacobs argued that compact, diverse neighbourhoods encouraged social interaction and a sense of community. *Bowling Alone* (2000), a book by Robert Putnam (2000), examined the decline of social capital in American communities and the influence of individualism on neighbourhood relationships (see also Klinenberg 2012; Wilson 2012).

Finnish neighbourhoods have seen a slow but significant change in their population. Neighbourhoods are becoming greyer and poorer, with increasing numbers of ethnic minorities (Vaattovaara et al. 2023). As the situation in some Swedish neighbourhoods shows, social segregation can lead to inequality and, in extreme cases, violence (Egorova, Ivanova, and Varshaver 2020; Gerell, Puur, and Guldåker 2022; Vogiazides and Mondani 2023). Despite the differences in housing and educational policies, Finland has also seen the same sorting out of people and places that has been happening throughout Europe in the last few decades.

The aim of this article is to analyse how residents and municipal authorities, from their different standpoints, narratively construct the suburban communities of Ristinummi and Olympia in the city of Vaasa, Finland. For this, we utilize the concept of 'communality' as a tool to investigate the intersections of individuals and varied social groupings in the target neighbourhoods. We

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identify different understandings of communality through a close reading of interviews in which the informants express their ideas of place-based belonging and togetherness. The intersectional discourses in our empirical data, and actor-network theory (hereafter ANT), with its emphasis on overcoming the dualism between the natural and social worlds (Arias-Maldonado 2013; Crutzen and Stoermer 2000), provide the basis for identifying and analysing the key narratives and various positions of power among the stakeholders (i.e. residents and authorities) who play a significant role in the development of the focus neighbourhoods. These theoretical and methodological extensions fill a research gap in the understanding of the mechanisms and patterns of communality in cities' neighbourhoods.

In terms of contributions to community theories, both intersectionality theory and ANT offer unique insights into the emerging complexities of social relationships and community formation. Intersectionality theory provides a critical lens for understanding the ways in which social identities and power relations interconnect to shape individual experiences of community. Intersectionality, a term first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity of social groups and the ways in which different forms of social stratification intersect to create complex social hierarchies and forms of discrimination (Garcia 2016; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006). ANT, for its part, provides a framework for understanding the ways in which social actors and networks interact to shape the formation and maintenance of communities. It also emphasizes the importance of non-human actors and material objects in the construction of social networks, and the ways in which these actors can have a significant impact on the dynamics of social relationships (Farias and Bender 2010; Latour 2005).

In previous research, the obstacles and hindrances to community spirit and activity have frequently been studied from the standpoint of a lack of economic, social or cultural capital, which can be identified both at the individual and community levels or in terms of the potential for conflict between different individuals and/or groups (e.g. between the native population and immigrants) (Bourdieu 1986; Turner 2005; Elder-Vass 2012; Lehtonen 2015). Less research has been done on communality with an emphasis on different neighbourhood discourses and the intersectional characteristics of a local community. This has an impact on the social standing of its residents and, in the worst cases, activates discrimination, alienation and negative stereotyping (Back 1996; Gordon, Christie, and Robinson 1989; Kurban and Tobin 2009; Lockwood et al. 2018).

When analysing and discussing our data, we discovered that the concept of communality enables us to identify important intersections determined by local institutions, environments and residents. In this regard, the idea of communality seemed to be a more nuanced and effective tool than the concept of inclusion alone, which has been employed more frequently in neighbourhood research (Kohon 2018; Short 2021; Mirzoev et al. 2022), especially when combined with intersectionality. Thus, we believe that including our concept of communality in the body of literature adds a perspective that has frequently been neglected and should be considered more carefully because of its usefulness in facilitating analysis.

By communality, we refer to meaningful social interactions and entanglements creating a sense of belonging among individuals. We use the term 'communality' in this sense throughout this study. Accordingly, we assume that communality has relational, emotional and functional manifestations from which we can obtain discursively constructed information from our interviewees (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Furthermore, our study generates the idea of neighbourhood from research data containing three types of narrative gestalts: inclusion, recollection and segregation. These gestalts are shaped by local institutions, the environment and residents. We also discuss how neighbourhood community spaces and local development activities are viewed from different perspectives by the informants. We recognize that a shared location of residence in a neighbourhood does not necessarily mean shared values and activities among the residents (Salimi, Foroutan, and Naghdi 2019). Here it is important to note that in some literature, the word 'communality' is used to refer to conflict, even violence, between separate groups, notably those with different

religions or ethnic origins (Väyrynen 1998; Brosché 2023). In this article, we do not focus on communal violence or conflict resolution.

We seek to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How do the interviewees' understandings of communality affect their perceptions of and ideas about the neighbourhoods studied and their development?
- (2) How are different understandings of a desirable urban community linked with institutionalized power structures produced by socio-economic differences, privilege and disadvantage, and public authorities?

Through these questions, we identify various understandings of communality – from different positions, roles and perspectives – and the ways they interconnect at the level of urban development.

We argue that the sense of place, the sense of community and one's identity are interlinked and intra-active. By 'intra-active' we refer to agency as a dynamic process of change and mutability emerging in encounters with things, rather than as an inherent property of an actor (see Barad 2007). We further suggest that by understanding this intersecting, intra-active nature of community narratives in the formation of place, community, and self-identity, we may better understand how these accounts contribute to the marginalization and oppression of certain groups.

This article is structured as follows. The next section briefly reviews the theoretical framework of our study, including a discussion of the concept of communality. This is followed by a discussion on the role of 'new cultural geography' in conjunction with ANT and an intersectional approach that together form the theoretical lens through which we analyse our data.

In the analysis chapters, we specify and address the different narrative structures and compositions through which the understanding of communality is provided and represented by our informants. The intersectional implications that relate to different ways of narrating communality are also examined. Finally, we provide directions for future research of value to both academic researchers and practitioners, such as social workers and youth workers seeking to integrate communality initiatives into their activities. This discussion focuses, in particular, on the concept of communality and the need for supplementary research on this topic.

2. Theoretical directions

Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) famously theorized human association by distinguishing *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In *Gemeinschaft*, often translated as community, individuals are associated with each other based on social bonds and common goals. According to Tönnies, family is an archetypal example of *Gemeinschaft*. In *Gesellschaft*, referring to society, common goals do not exist to the same extent, but membership is defined based on an individual's self-interest, best promoted by social networking. Despite its merits as an analytical tool, Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* distinction is simplistic and (somewhat) limited, especially when viewed from the more recent perspective of intersectionality, a key framework for understanding how human beings are shaped and influenced by the interaction of multidimensional social identities (e.g. gender, class, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, ability and age) (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Collins 2015; Garcia 2016). In the present study, we try to enhance and broaden Tönnies' understanding of community by considering the perspective provided by intersectionality, where social and societal roles intersect in the context of a location or place. This kind of location-related sense of community, at the intersection of multiple values, activities and drivers, can thus be called 'communality'. Limited space prevents our discussing Tönnies' viewpoints and their reception in greater detail. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to state that despite its idealistic and normative aspects, the Tönnian concept of a community does not need to preclude conflict between community members and between different communities; in fact, it includes this possibility.

Community is also a situated, place-related concept, even though information technology and social media have changed how places are represented. As suggested by Gusfield (1975), a sense of community is both emotional (sense of place) and relational (sense of belonging). A sense of belonging causes people to socially engage with others within the community, supporting shared interests, cultural values and social well-being, characteristics that might be seen to engender a strong sense of community (Taylor, Pooley, and Carragher 2016). In actor-network theory (Latour 2005), things, ideas and people are seen as equally important in the creation of meaningful collectives and assemblages. Situated communality in neighbourhoods is never static; it is constantly living and changing in connection to the objects and people around it.

We also rely on the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986) on the four features of community (membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection). When identifying different conceptions of community in our research, we pay attention to which features are the most relevant in the opinions of our interviewees. We furthermore acknowledge that community and sense of community are relational concepts, usually connected to the place, landscape and environmental artefacts in the location. However, as Thrift (2008, 98) points out, the fabric of space is open-ended rather than enclosed. Community can also be a virtual or hybrid 'space' in which individuals share similar interests and values, without necessarily sharing the same location. Ultimately, everyone is physically interacting someplace, carrying the ideas of social networks and bringing them into their habitats. Community based on this can also be symbolic, connecting the values and ideas of a certain group of people with their behaviours.

Furthermore, we recognize that community and sense of community are not merely descriptive concepts; they also include the idea that community and communality are valued and regulatory. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that many organizations, both in the private and public sectors, have named either 'community', the 'sense of community' or 'communality' as an organizational value and a branding attribute (Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; van der Wal, de Graaf, and Lasthuizen 2008). Thus, communities are not only interactions between people in a certain place and time, they are also discursively maintained through shared values, narratives and recognition (Lewis 2016).

As narratives are central meaning-making systems for individuals and human social networks, such as families, neighbourhoods and urban communities, it is reasonable to suggest that one's identity as a community member appears in the nexus of place, social interaction, and narratives. Accordingly, cohesion within communities and neighbourhoods derives from their shared narrative heritage (Lejano et al. 2018; Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram 2013).

It is also important to study community narratives, because stories can maintain internalized, exclusive and even detrimental social structures, such as racism or ableism. Authors such as Susan Friedman (1998), have pointed out that cultural narratives encode and encrypt the norms, values and ideologies of the social order. As narratives often draw from normative symbols and stereotypes, recognizing the prevalent aspect of community accounts is important because strong extrinsic articulations (e.g. those given by researchers, urban planners and marketers) or hegemonic, unilateral narratives of community are at risk of conveying stereotypes and assumptions that may be a component of the oppression and marginalization of certain demographics. These dynamics can lead to the formation of imaginaries and assumptions that make some iterations of communality more desirable than others and eventually lead to segregation and exclusion.

Our approach closely reflects the key features of the new cultural geography, a theoretically informed paradigm for recognizing cultural nuances and social behaviour related to human spatiality (i.e. the fundamental physical and social feature of human life that frames and constrains all our actions). This paradigm emerged from the 'cultural turn' in geographic studies and was associated with the 'culturalization' of multiple fields of study that took place during the 1980s (Cresswell 2010; Jackson 2016). More recently, the 'new cultural geography' was enriched with paradigms such as actor-network theory (ANT) and non-representational theory (NRT) in the 1990s, which then opened a perspective to a combined theoretical standpoint ('more-than-human-geography scene'), where all living and non-living things surrounding humans are seen to be related to social,

material and semiotic meaning-making (Anderson 2006, 610; Barad 2007, Bennett 2010; Eriksson 2008; Willett 2021).

The human relationship to location and space is intrinsically connected to the idea of dwelling, which again is connected to the idea of building and the construction of meaning within it (Heidegger 1971). Lingual practices paced by culture and governance determine how the flows of physical matter and actions are coordinated within a social sign system and within narratives (Gren 1994). In addition, language not only describes the state of events, but also represents direct exercise of power (e.g. ratification of a city plan in the city hall permits the start of construction work) (Austin 1975). With reference to the political dimension of human action, ANT indicates how material is involved with human will and power (Anderson and Harrison 2010).

This enhanced paradigm also underpins the present study, in which narrativity is understood as a coproduct of a whole suburban realm, including natural and human-made environments that shape our informants' perceptions of the target neighbourhoods' potential as regards creating and maintaining communality, for example, by providing meeting and gathering places and by providing opportunities and facilities for interests and leisure time activities. Combining intersectional theory and actor-network theory provides a framework that allows us to understand how social identities and networks interact to produce systems of oppression. For example, intersectional theory suggests that particular social identities are more vulnerable to oppression in certain networks, while ANT helps to identify the actors and objects that are involved in sustaining these networks.

With these premises as a background, our interviewees' discussions about neighbourhood communities can be considered to contain symbols, indicators and insinuations, which can be interpreted as signs in the 'maps of meaning', which form the patterns of social organizations and relationships. Through these 'maps', individuals become not just humans (Clarke 1976, Jackson 2016), but also members of relational networks that connect humans, buildings, stones, plans, trees, dogs, hedgehogs, roads, bushes and lawns, as well as different stakeholders, media and politics. In the contemporary era of coproduction and inclusion, maps of meaning are objectified in social practices of mutual interpretation, and finally in the appearance of physical artefacts and environments established by urban planners and administrators.

3. Data and methods

Throughout this study, we identify different understandings of communality through a close reading and content analysis of gathered data in which our interviewees share their opinions on the communities in the Ristinummi and Olympia Quarter. We chose these Vaasa neighbourhoods to better understand the continuing urban transformation, because on the one hand, Vaasa embodies the Nordic welfare heritage; on the other hand, the city and its people have noted a reputational burden and changing population, especially in these two neighbourhoods.

Vaasa is a city on the west coast of Finland (see Figure 1). The city has a population of approximately 68,000 and is bilingual, with 70% of the population speaking Finnish as their first language and 25% speaking Swedish. Vaasa is a major university and college city and the largest energy technology hub in the Nordic countries.

The suburban communities of Ristinummi (pop. 7,048) and Olympia (pop. 800) are below the city's average income level. The Olympia Quarter, built in the beginning of the 1990s, is densely populated, predominantly with students and immigrants. Ristinummi, a typical 1970s Finnish residential area located on the outskirts of the city, has a higher unemployment rate than Vaasa on average. In addition, Ristinummi has a larger immigrant population than most other neighbourhoods in the city. In Ristinummi, 16.5% of the population speaks a foreign language (Nylén 2023).

The Olympia Quarter in the Vöyrinkaupunki area, boasts one of the most diverse demographics (pop. 4,160) in the city. The large number of new apartment complexes in the area built in the 2010s and 2020s, has benefitted the area's population development. Vöyrinkaupunki's foreign-language

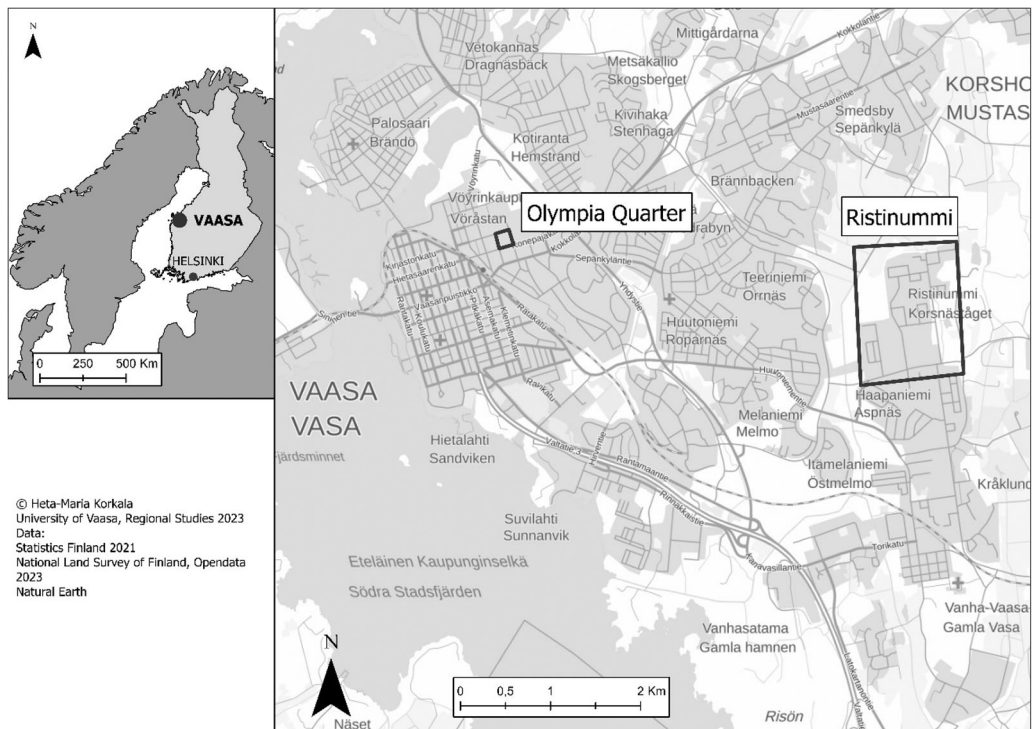


Figure 1. Map of Finland and Vaasa.

population has increased dramatically in the previous 20 years. In the 0–15 age range, the proportion of foreign-language speakers exceeds 40% (Nylén 2023).

In this study, neighbourhood development served as a starting point for the discussions through which our respondents' experiences and perspectives could be examined. The city officials and residents had varied perspectives about the target neighbourhoods, even though they agreed on many points.

The qualitative research material consists of transcribed recordings of interviews and focus group discussions (hereafter called the Community Urban Planning Lab or CUPL), which were conducted in the Finnish language. The team's five researchers conducted 25 thematic interviews and seven CUPL sessions with 33 residents and 11 authorities during 2020 and 2021. The data were recorded using dictation equipment and online sessions, and the research material was transcribed.

The authorities we used as informants consisted of 19 local government officials and politicians, project specialists and urban planners. The resident informants represented various ethnic groups, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. There were 33 resident respondents consisting of both immigrants (first and second generation) ($n = 7$) and the Finnish population ($n = 26$); 60% of informants were women, while 40% were men. Throughout the data gathering process, special consideration was given to disadvantaged populations such as immigrants, the unemployed, the elderly and those with disabilities. In addition, young people were considered as a special group.

According to our hypothesis, neighbourhood communities are constructed socially and culturally via customs, signification, policies and practices that are continually changing over time, and in which some individuals and groups have a more dominant position than others. Therefore, an intersectional analysis that addresses the underlying social and structural dimensions of community may not only shed new light on communality in neighbourhoods, but also help to avoid reproducing marginalization and systemic oppression by valuing particular experiences of community

while obscuring others. Furthermore, intersectional analysis contributes to place-based neighbourhood research by considering not only the physical environment and its spatial features, but also social status-influencing and governance-influencing factors that impact neighbourhood reputation, residents and communality (Gorbunova, Ambrasat, and von Scheve 2015).

We have deliberately focused on the intersectional determinants influencing the social status of residents and their sense of communality. These determinants include local institutions, the environment and residents (see Figure 2). They interact with the three types of narration gestalts – inclusion, recollection and segregation – constructing the idea of communality in the studied neighbourhoods. The determinants are analysed indirectly, when only the outcome might be observable; for example, income might have an effect on the spectrum of hobbies which are possible for a resident. The narratives of our participants exemplified how varied and mutually reinforcing the factors that affect communality are, both at the individual level and at the social level.

Recent intersectional research has acknowledged the significance of place, space and location in constructing identities, social categories and oppressive structures in society (Lundström 2010; Nightingale 2011; Castán Broto and Alves 2018; Vietinghoff 2021; Blidon 2018, Baylina Ferré and Rodó-de-Zárate 2016, Datta 2007). As a location may have a recognized identity or *genius loci* of its own (Stedman 2003), the identity of a certain place also interrelates and intersects with the identities and categorizations of people residing in the location (Vietinghoff 2021). One's location within a city may thus become an element of one's identity that intersects with other identity elements (Vietinghoff 2021), but the place people inhabit may also be part of the oppressive and marginalizing structure that they face in their daily lives.

We consider the intersecting concepts of locality and communality to illuminate how certain groups of people may be marginalized as a result of the location within the city where they reside, as well as through narration gestalts connected to certain locations. In the most concrete sense, this means that residents have or do not have opportunities to realize their aspirations in relation to the

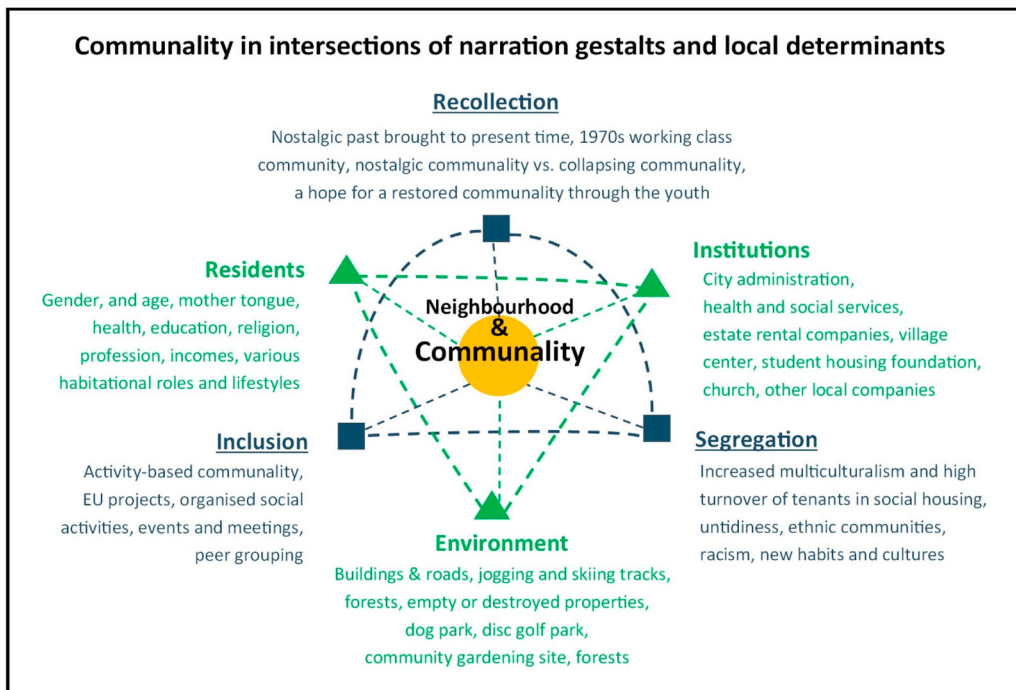


Figure 2. Communality in intersections.

environment's affordances. Considering discursively emerged and narrated communality, we want to emphasize that discourse and narratives are here considered to be part of the agential becoming of the material world (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Bürk, Kühn, and Sommer 2012; Willett 2016). Furthermore, we discuss how the concept of communality is discursively and semiotically constructed when considering marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, refugees and immigrants living in marginalized locations, like blocks of council flats, which have a negative reputation.

4. Othering places, weaving communities

In the following section, we present and discuss our informants' views on communality and sense of community, to the extent that is necessary for detecting and identifying repeated discursive conceptualizations.

One of our research questions specifically focused on how our interviewees perceived and characterized communality. Accordingly, we asked them to respond to the following questions: 'What do you think about communality in Ristinummi or in the Olympia Quarter?' and 'Has communality changed somehow in the neighbourhood in question?'. Based on the answers given, we were able to identify three major discursive conceptualizations of communality. These narration gestalts – inclusion, recollection and segregation – reflect a range of social and organizational perspectives on living in a suburban community.

As our main method of data gathering was focus group interviewing in CUPLs with different stakeholders, the perceptions of communality appear to us to be storied and narrated. We emphasize that these narratives are not inherently distinct, but rather co-constitutive, generating complex and intersectional identities for places and the people who live in them. As Samara Brock (2009) has argued, stories about us and others, both conscious and unconscious, create either the cohesiveness or divisiveness of communities and societies. According to ANT, the structures of the physical environment, formed by stones, trees and buildings, also function as markers and symbols of, for instance, nostalgia, decadence and cooperation. Thus, stories do not determine their own sphere, but have a connection to everything that surrounds people; they point at something and frame people's views (Fariás and Bender 2010).

However, as narratives are a potent tool for identification, which can be empowering, they may also be problematic. As these accounts shape the way we think and act, and thus ultimately shape the world we live in, it is crucial to discern whose stories are plausible and accountable and whose are not. Leonie Sandercock (2003) suggests that official urban discourses produced by city council planning departments, police departments and mainstream media tend to legitimize and privilege the fears of the bourgeoisie, reinforcing narratives and fears about 'others' who might invade or disrupt their familiar local spaces and their habitus.

De-humanization of certain groups may result from questioning their capability to maintain communality (Chu and Martin 2021) or by questioning the way they maintain a sense of community. Some local government officials we interviewed put forward the idea that communality refers to one's identity as a member of a community (INTV 03/03/2021; cf. McMillan and Chavis 1986). This dovetails with the ANT's concept that when people play diverse roles in their communities, they build a web that has a more holistic meaning than its individual members, both functionally and in terms of its controls, including socio-psychological impacts, such as attitudes and feelings. A feeling of belonging may be especially valuable for people who face oppression in their daily lives, and there are carefully documented examples of well-functioning urban communities formed by marginalized groups for whom a community offers a safe space to live in a hostile society (e.g. Ghaziani 2014).

However, close-knit communities formed by marginalized and oppressed people may also face stigmatization by outsiders. Thus, communality as a term may also have the potential to exercise power over marginalized people and segregated areas, by creating exclusion if discursively used to separate some groups from each other. Following this reasoning, entire city districts can be

stigmatized through questioning, by means of narrative actions, the functioning of the community in that place.

We also argue that the displacement or placement of neighbourhood residents is often produced through narrated community (cf. Anderson 2006; Jupp 2021). The dominant image of the place is created through discursive conceptualization of community with many intersectional factors contributing, such as socio-economic status, gender, and ethnic background. One of our respondents, working but not living in the Olympia Quarter, points this out by saying:

I was walking there ... and, oh yeah, it is a silent neighbourhood ... Maybe in an apartment a family was having breakfast, and then a foreigner [was] smoking. Thus, I do not believe it is a communal block. I might be wrong, but during my workday, I did not notice any sign of the place being very communal. (INTV 14/02/2021)

As indicated above, the Olympia Quarter is described as silent but not completely empty, with no visible signs of communality. What is notable is that the quietness of the neighbourhood is not interpreted as a sign of residents working outside of home during typical working hours, but a proof of impaired communality, suggesting once again the widely accepted preconception of the Olympia Quarter's residents being unemployed immigrants. However, contesting the claim of deprived communality, an Olympia Quarter resident notes:

Here [at Olympia] the sense of community is good and neighbours chat and help each other. Negative opinions do not hold true, but frankly, it is the xenophobia and racism that are reflected onto the Olympia Quarter. (INTV 08/09/2020)

Examples such as the one above, suggest existing, marginalizing narratives that form and sustain the othered status of Ristinummi and the Olympia Quarter. When a neighbourhood is slandered, the residents living there are also negatively labelled, which the informant in the above quotation wishes to disclose and correct. Catrin Lundström (2010) noted that suburban areas are often racialized and seen as 'unsafe' in the daily press, whereas white, middle-class areas are seen as neutral and non-racialized. Thus, predominantly white residential areas are normalized and construed by the racialization of certain suburban areas. In a discursive process where preferred properties qualify as the norm, places that do not hold these properties become *othered* (Staszak 2009). However, not all the residents of an 'othered' suburb necessarily feel out of place, but may, in fact, feel a sense of belonging when bonded with their peer groups. In the following subsections, we discuss how social norms, margins and otherness are created and maintained through community narratives.

4.1. Inclusion

Our informants described good community spirit by enumerating and depicting different social activities. This was somewhat expected, as social interaction and inclusion can be considered a defining feature of community spirit. Our interviews contain explanatory examples of how this atmosphere is manifested.

Understanding communality as getting together with friends and neighbours for leisure activities was most often described as a premeditated, organized event arranged by different associations or city officials, or get-togethers informally organized by people living in the area. These activities include a wide variety of social events and casual outdoor gatherings, such as the annual Ristinummi Day and summer barbeque parties with music (INTV 08/03/2020; CUPL 18/11/2020, Speakers 6 and 8; INTV 23/02/2021). Additionally, many older residents in Ristinummi reminisce about sports competitions that used to be an important part of their neighbourhood's social activities (INTV 16/11/2020; CUPL 18/11/2020, Speaker 6; CUPL 23/02/2021, Speaker 3). City officials and community developers emphasized instructive and inclusive youth activities, such as clubs and cultural events, as a meaningful contribution to creating and maintaining a sense of community (INTV 26/04/2021).

What is noteworthy is the strong emphasis on the idea that communal living requires organization (INTV 16/11/2020; CUPL 18/11/2020, Speaker 6). It also requires facilities and primarily an understanding of how one's aspirations can be connected to existing environmental and spatial opportunities. Therefore, activity-based communality is organizer-dependent (and to some extent, authority and project-dependent) and vulnerable to the replacement of human resources. For example, if a residents' association loses an active leader, all of its activity can come to a halt (INTV 08/03/2021, Speaker 1).

In our data, active participation in social leisure activities was also understood as an expression of dedication to one's neighbourhood, an opinion that combines an operational understanding and a psychological understanding of communality (McMillan and Chavis 1986). This combination was explicitly referred to in the following statement: 'Communality means feeling like home and doing outdoor activities in the yard' (INTV 21/01/2020). This statement also illuminates that in the discourse on community, there is a strong linkage between communality and outdoor infrastructure. Accordingly, our informants identified several specific buildings and outdoor areas as central for communal activities and community involvement (INTV 26/01/2021; CUPL 18/11/2020, Speaker 8; CUPL 18/11/2021, Speaker 11). In addition, very specific enhancements to develop infrastructure were suggested, such as replacing asphalt courtyards with gardens and outdoor gym equipment (INTV 12/2/2021), indicating that communality is understood as something that requires physical activities.

In addition to premeditated and organized events, the social activities mentioned in our data also included descriptions of neighbourly mutual aid and peer groups. However, most of the descriptions given were expressed by ethnic minority residents. All of them described the community spirit as good, and indicated that it creates an atmosphere of mutual help, embodied in different measures of support:

Speaker 2: ... we help each other. We know what is going on here. When outside, I meet children from other families and I will know how they are doing, and that makes us feel that we are safe and at home here in Olympia.

Speaker 4: We have the connection, and the community we have is okay ... and we know each other ... And if we have time, we help each other voluntarily (CUPL 20/06/2021).

These informants also described communality as a network of communication rather than outdoor activity, and they linked acts like phone calls, knowledge sharing, informing and discussion between neighbours with the concept of community. Referring to the narration gestalt of segregation, it is significant that this kind of intimate and communicative network of residents is rarely visible for those who do not live in the same neighbourhood, and this may lead to the false judgement that the neighbourhood lacks inclusion and community spirit.

A commonly repeated allegation in our data is that communality is disintegrating. For example, some long-time residents of Ristinummi relayed that their neighbourhood's adolescents used to side with each other in the 80s, but no longer do (CUPL 23/02/2021, Speaker 5). In terms of ANT, this means that some connections, roles or established patterns of activity in a communality network have been broken. These informants added that whilst residents' solidarity has decreased, independent initiative that used to be strong has also vanished (CUPL 23/02/2021, Speaker 6). Various reasons for the decline of community spirit were mentioned, such as time consumed on social media (CUPL 23/02/2021, Speaker 6), language barriers in a diverse and multicultural neighbourhood (INTV 22/09/2020), and the high turnover of tenants (INTV 16/11/2020).

Although the decline of community spirit is usually something that those living in the area can experience, the physical appearance of the neighbourhood was also linked with the assumption of declining community spirit. For example, some older informants suggested that graffiti and general untidiness indicated damaged communality. They believed that communality was stronger in earlier times when there was no graffiti (INTV 25/08/2020). Thus, visual roughness and pictorial anarchy in a residential area are among the factors that push some residents out of their comfort zones

and cause them to believe that a major change in terms of communality has occurred. However, graffiti may be regarded as a territorial claim as well as a sign of identity construction. It is also a reaction to the majority's interpretation of communality.

Conclusions drawn from the existence of street art and graffiti may indeed vary among residents, as graffiti can be associated with vandalism by some (Ross 2016); however, some fashionable urban districts, such as Hackney Wick in London, have made street art part of their identity and sense of place (Evans 2016). It might be that especially older residents consider graffiti to be 'untidy', as street art has only recently become more socially acceptable. While for adolescents, the possibility of taking part in the graffiti culture may be an important way to strengthen their identity and contribute to place-making (Taylor, Pooley, and Carragher 2016). It is important to acknowledge that aesthetics are always political; by choosing to support local youth and graffiti artists by offering walls to paint on, city officers can simultaneously show support to the young locals while alleviating the anxiety of older citizens by bringing graffiti into a socially acceptable sphere.

We noticed a slight difference between the way good community spirit is described by residents and by city officials. For city officials, communality more often indicates something visible, easy to monitor and witness or an activity to attend. Thus, according to city officials, good community spirit is associated with activities, such as projects, festivals, markets, sports events and concerts taking place in the urban environment where large groups of people gather together. From the ANT perspective, local institutions such as churches, the Settlement Association, the European Union funded TEO employment project and the Student Housing Foundation in Vaasa are important actors because they offer services, peer groups and facilities for residents. By contrast, instead of describing events, residents of Ristinummi and the Olympia Quarter, especially those with migratory backgrounds, associated community spirit with mutual connectedness of neighbours. Residents also linked communal activities more often to specific locations, such as schools or club rooms, where people from different backgrounds can effortlessly meet each other.

4.2. Recollection

In our study, we found that the narration gestalt of recollection is strongly linked with nostalgic and romanticized ideas of how communities used to be in the past. This recollection has to do with the acknowledged difficulty, if not outright impossibility, of revitalizing and reinvigorating an idealized community. At the same time, nostalgia can create boundaries between those who share a common past and those who do not (Lewis 2016).

The stories of collapsing communality and nostalgic communality may also feed into each other. In our data, nostalgia functioned as a framework for acknowledging systemic changes and grievances about the present situation. For example, some of our informants painted rosy images of an ideal communality in country villages. Such communality included neighbourly help and borrowing tools, such as a saw for wood chopping (INTV 25/08/2020). Again, ANT focus on the value of agent roles and social networking is relevant here. Furthermore, it was pointed out that many blocks of flats used to have their own caretaker who was considered to be a communality-generating figure (INTV 25/08/2020). Now such caretakers have largely been replaced by faceless maintenance agencies, which is an example of a change that causes services to become distanced and at least partially out of reach of residents, in turn causing the feeling of weakened accessibility. As a result, residents felt less in control of their environment and less able to access necessary information.

Some resident informants pointed out that the bad reputation of Ristinummi was due to social welfare supported housing, such as council flats (INTV 12/02/2021). This might refer to hyperlocal problems, i.e. the problems that are centred on specific buildings or even a specific wing of a building, but could nonetheless imply an unspoken prejudice towards people who do not conform to the middle-class norm. This reflects how income level and predominant housing forms can impact the reputation of a residential area and its dwellers' social status in general (Hooks 2000).

As an indication of the lack of community spirit, the neighbourhoods' aesthetic features were also mentioned, including its untidiness. Our intersectional analysis revealed how educated and high-ranking officials perceive the same location, for example a hiding place for drug users, in vastly different ways than some local residents such as substance abusers. The hiding place is an important location for drug addicts and drinking groups to meet and socialize. City officials, on the other hand, saw the same place as an example of a degenerated and corrupt environment that must be remedied through social work and urban planning. This suggests that discourses on the need to develop a neighbourhood are strongly influenced by a range of intersectional characteristics and communality ideals in which people differ greatly depending on their roles and responsibilities.

Some informants mentioned that communality in Ristinummi was originally based on a working-class community created in the 70s when Strömberg, a Finnish company that made electromechanical products, constructed new blocks of flats for its employees (INTV 27/01/2021). Many industrial workers shared a relocation background as arrivals from rural areas to the city of Vaasa and the neighbourhood of Ristinummi. Specific blocks of flats, in which many Strömberg workers lived with their families, were central to the formation of a community. Some informants noted that in the early stages of Ristinummi, people helped each other build new houses in the area, and at that time leisure activities for various age groups flourished (INTV 25/08/2020). In their report on the cities of Plymouth and Bristol in the UK, Clarke, Gilmour, and Garner (2007) note that the nostalgic narratives of safe and integrative yet lost communities, were important for white middle-class and working-class citizens when asked to describe their understanding of community. Class identity, place and community do form a tight narrative union. It is also notable that community was understood as something ongoing and immutable, as some of our older informants had a positive view of the youth, viewing young people in the capacity of successors and continuators who preserve and maintain given traditions, rather than disrupt them (INTV 16/11/2020).

The nostalgic ideal for community described in our research is unitary and homogenous (white/Finnish speaking/working-class), and people living in the community are visibly active, playing outdoor sports and taking part in construction activities (INTV 25/08/2020). The depiction of people living in such recalled communities underlines their agency, reproducing an ideal community as a union of able-bodied, hardworking people. These accounts may indeed work as a glue between inhabitants, bringing them together with the shared oral history, but on the other hand, they may also exclude some groups that are not featured in the shared stories (Lewis 2016). As several informants with migratory backgrounds noted, opportunities to meet Finnish-speaking neighbours who would share stories of Ristinummi with them are non-existent (CUPL 10/05/2021).

Since the nostalgic recollection of the past is often linked to the area's history as a white working-class neighbourhood, it is in stark contrast to the reality of the multicultural and diverse area in the here-and-now. Whereas stories of a unitary community may have had an important social value at one time, the change of demographics and social structures may shift the function of these narratives from integrative to divisive. As the mental reproduction of idealized community has strongly affected the way the concept of community is perceived, the possibilities to formulate communality as something different are limited. This is seen in the double standard according to which the communities of populations with migratory backgrounds are considered dubious.

Whereas the nostalgic account of lost communities was seen as a model of community spirit, some respondents worried about existing communities formed by people with migratory backgrounds. Communities formed by different ethnic groups were linked to ethnic concentration (i.e. ghettoization) and were equated with low income, disadvantaged life situations and unemployment. Concentrated ethnic communities were even mentioned as weakening the reputation of the whole residential area (INTV 28/01/2021), yet the idealized, nostalgic neighbourhood of working-class, white Finns was never considered to represent a concentrated community in our data.

4.3. Segregation

Our informants described Ristinummi and the Olympia Quarter as deprived neighbourhoods and ‘colourful’ areas that are inhabited by immigrants (both first and second generation, thereby forming a heterogeneous group), students and the unemployed. We have also noted that community narratives are a way to create cohesion among neighbourhoods, point out deficiencies, set objectives, and create boundaries. Nonetheless, discursive acts that value certain communal activities over others may possibly fuel segregation, especially if the valuation of communal activity is linked with cultural essentialism, i.e. the view that certain characteristics of a culture are essential to the values of that ethnicity.

In our data, the discourses on family and community are often entangled, forming a foundation for the definition of a desirable community spirit. It is often the case that by defining a family and family life, the (ideal) community is defined. The status of Ristinummi and the Olympia Quarter as othered neighbourhoods is constructed through a narrative of the normalized way of living that is considered impossible to establish in these neighbourhoods:

An average citizen: two children, a father, and a mother – an engineer and a nurse, would under no circumstances move to the Olympia Quarter. It is not seen as a good or safe place for families or, so to speak, the working population that live a so-called ‘normal life’. Ristinummi is not a homogenous area, but there are places where people want to live. There is this residential area with beautiful houses where people can live a very good life. Then there is the apartment block area where one does not really want to move in. (INTV 19/01/2021)

In the above account, the normalized lifeway is depicted through the narrative of a heterosexual, nuclear family with two parents with stable incomes. Furthermore, the family is seen as able to lead a good life in a residential area, implying that owning a house is a part of the normalized way of living. The Olympia Quarter and some areas of Ristinummi were described as places where normal (*sic*) families could not lead a good life, as these places were unlikely to be safe or otherwise desirable places to live.

Some of our informants identified a high turnover of tenants as a reason for decreased communality (INTV 16/11/2020). Living in a rented flat on a continuous basis was considered ‘socially suspicious’ by some of the informants, which may imply possible prejudice against people with lower incomes. Again, the ANT’s underlying premise is that people playing different roles with different characteristics create a web of social relations that is more significant than any of its parts. In this case, tenants form a social group that is considered an important factor in explaining the absence of the neighbourhood’s communality. It was also noted that the students’ willingness to be part of the local community may be lessened, by the fact that most, if not all of them, live in a student apartment (in the Olympia Quarter) for only a relatively short period of time (INTV 11/02/2021). This highlights the intersectionality of the tenant role, where the short-term nature of housing and its life-stage reasons (e.g. studying) are seen to coincide. Furthermore, our data suggests that stability and longevity of occupants is considered important for community spirit to grow.

As previously stated, some informants pointed out that despite the general decline of communality, it remains strong in immigrant families, which can be seen, for example, in large families regularly getting together for dinner (INTV 05/02/2021). It was further indicated that communities varied in size depending on the origin countries and cultures. Hence, these respondents assumed that communities (e.g. ethnic and other local communities) in Finland are relatively small compared to communities in more populous countries (INTV 05/02/2021). It was also suggested that people of different ages and cultural backgrounds have their own forms of communality (CUPL 03/06/2021, Speaker 1). Language, once again, is a major divider or potential intersection: locally Finnish-Swedish and universally all minorities speaking their own language without the ability to fully participate in the majority population’s everyday life and culture. In these reports, the accounts of family function are integral drivers that determine the extent of communality among neighbours. People with migratory backgrounds were also considered to be essentially communal,

as the capacity for creating a strong sense of community is thought to be inherent to their culture. This narrative, echoing cultural essentialism (see e.g. Grillo 2003; Grillo 2008), maintains the view that inhabitants with migratory backgrounds are different from the native population.

The valuation of one lifeway over another affects the way communities are treated and the kinds of services that are targeted to the area. Local government officials also reported that immigrants have their own idea of communality and suggested that this has not helped them to integrate with the native population (INTV 26/01/2021). As a remedy for ethnic concentration, some respondents proposed that communal living of ethnic minorities should be avoided by means of social mixing. However, no evident consensus exists on social mixing being an effective way to solve structural problems, such as poverty and unemployment (Cheshire 2012). On the contrary, social mixing often seems to be a cosmetic policy, as it is rarely recommended for wealthier neighbourhoods that may be socially homogenous as well (Lees 2008). The notion of social mixing does not consider that people with migratory backgrounds form a heterogeneous group representing various life stages and multiple ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Furthermore, displaced people may experience their new neighbourhood negatively if they experience loss of social ties in the process (Doff 2010).

Nevertheless, according to our data, communities within the Ristinummi and Olympia Quarter already show signs of ethnic segregation. Several respondents with migratory backgrounds reported that they felt that they were not full members of the local community (cf. McMillan and Chavis 1986). A person who belongs to a particular immigrant community in Ristinummi shared that communities in her neighbourhood are formed based on ethnic background and that while local immigrant groups have strong community spirit, they rarely meet their Finnish neighbours (CUPL 10/05/2021, Speaker 3). This notion was repeated in several responses by residents with migratory backgrounds stressing the division between the Finnish-speaking population and the population with a migratory background.

This division was considered to be a disadvantage. Ethnic minorities especially emphasized that the lack of proper meeting places limits the possibility of forming social cohesion between ethnic minorities and native Finns. Several people with migratory backgrounds also noted that the evanescence of public services, such as club rooms, youth clubs and gyms, makes it difficult, especially for children and young adults, to meet with native Finnish-speakers (CUPL 05/11/2021).

It is notable that while the non-resident respondents (i.e. city officials and local politicians) proposed breaking up the non-white communities as a means to create a heterogeneous population structure, residents with migratory backgrounds more frequently suggested *including* white, Finnish-speaking people in the already existing neighbourhood as a solution. Those with diverse ethnic backgrounds more often suggested that the obstacles to enhancing the sense of community in the neighbourhood were due to the lack of proper infrastructure in the form of meeting places. From their perspective, the problems were structural, whereas Finnish-speaking respondents more often suggested that difficulties in forming a cohesive community were cultural and lingual.

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have analysed the ways in which residents and authorities narratively construct, from their different standpoints, two suburban areas and their communities in Vaasa, Finland. Through this analysis, we have enriched and dynamized Tönnies (2001) understanding of community by considering, in addition to the *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* distinction, the perspective of intersectionality. In our analysis, the authorities' and native population's view of (ideal) communality is oriented towards *Gesellschaft*, or society and its services.

Our research team devised the term 'communality' in order to facilitate intersectional analysis. The concept of communality enabled us to focus on various intersections of individuals' characteristics relevant to their sense of community, such as local institutions, environment and residency, which again were brought together with the narration gestalts of inclusion, recollection and

segregation. We observed that the intersectional characteristics of our informants undermined and reduced their social position and capabilities of versatile participation and interaction in the target neighbourhoods. We also concluded that intersectionality is connected to environmental opportunities and affordances, which manifest themselves interdependently in educational or ethical backgrounds of residents, and more generally, to residents' other capabilities such as physical or psychological restrictions.

During this research project, an intersectional approach proved to be useful for illuminating underlying biases in urban planning and public opinion on the neighbourhoods studied (Baylina Ferré and Rodó-de-Zárate 2016; Castán Broto and Alves 2018). With reference to our research questions, we were able to track stereotyping narratives and stigmatizing discourses that reflected the residents' understandings of communality and affected their ideas on the target neighbourhoods and their development. Additionally, these narratives and discourses were recognized as affecting the way the city areas are further developed and how the residents are seen in the public debate (Blidon 2018; Collins 2015; Garcia 2016; Nightingale 2011; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006).

In our data, the term 'communality' was used in varying ways. For residents, communality was experienced in contact with their friends, families, and neighbours on a daily basis. In addition, if lack of communality was reported, it was often seen to be a result of inadequate urban planning and the shortage of public places for people to gather. Furthermore, for outsider-observers (e.g. city officials), communality was something to witness, not to experience. It was also articulated as part of the identity of the place, rather than as daily connections with neighbours. At the same time, local institutions are essential for establishing communal spaces and diverse situational opportunities for residents.

An intersectional analysis of the data illuminated how, by questioning the level of communality, the residential area is othered and stigmatized as deprived, which may lead to denouncement of the persons inhabiting the place as well (Vietinghoff 2021). As communality was seen as something that would elevate the status of the area among the 'normal' people, the inherent idea of desirable communality as Finnish-speaking middle-class was revealed. This indicates that the discourse of communality includes structurally segregated features. The nostalgic notion of (white) communality is seen as desirable and safe. To the contrary, communities of ethnic minorities are regarded with suspicion and considered to be something that should be dissolved, or at least diluted. The tone of these notions is dependent on whether they arise from inside or outside of the communities themselves. This structural and covert racism greatly affects both the possibilities and the courage needed to talk about community in general or to strive for communality.

Based on our analysis, the following narration *gestalts* explaining communality in a neighbourhood can be distinguished: *inclusion, recollection and segregation*. Inclusion represents a functionalist understanding that emphasizes gathering for social events, on activities and services that require a home base, such as a specific building or outdoor area. Many concrete examples were mentioned as being important for residents, such as disc golf parks, outdoor fireplaces, and heated spaces for spending time with friends. This understanding also emphasizes communality as something that is easy for outsiders to monitor and needs organization and timely investments. At the same time, this discourse lacks understanding of more intimate forms of communality with a low threshold to interact with one's neighbour, such as casual chatting and shared social media groups.

The narration *gestalt* of *recollection* pays attention to how nostalgic accounts were produced and consists of stories from the 'golden era' of the local community. Repeatedly, the contrast of the past to the present was added to express grievances. Thus, nostalgic narratives frequently functioned as a frame supporting the account of collapsing communality. The areal history as a unitary, white and working-class neighbourhood was often mentioned, and communal activities, such as sport competitions and collective building projects, were mentioned, depicting nostalgic community as visible and active and emphasizing the able-bodiedness of inhabitants.

Entangled with the narrative of collapsing communality, the description of nostalgic community stands out. The discourse that produces the understanding of local communality as diminished is,

in our research, linked to the feeling of change, the change of aesthetics, infrastructure and population mobility in an area. An underlying, normative narrative that good community is formed by stable, middle-class people owning their homes is implicitly present, as people living in rental apartments were considered to weaken the community spirit.

In the third category of communality narrations, we discussed community as segregated or people displaced within the community. This narrative category is linked to the stereotyping discourse of ethnic minorities and cultural essentialism, transmitting accounts of immigrant communities as concentrated and problematic. Behind this narrative, the implicit discourse of normative family structure can be found, promoting the middle-class nuclear family as a norm that people living in the area are unlikely to meet.

The narrative structures listed here overlap and are in constant interplay with each other. Together they produce an idealization of community, the side effects of which include othering and marginalization of certain residential areas and their populations. Accordingly, the narrative structures may also produce expectations that are difficult to meet, fostering the tales of a collapsing community even further. It is important to identify this kind of internalized account in order to be able to produce policies that do not strengthen already hegemonic narratives that favour people in privileged positions (Castán Broto and Alves 2018; Vietinghoff 2021). The creation of versatile imageries and the development of multiple understandings of community living are needed in order to enhance the idea of community as a diverse and mutable entity.

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