



LUND UNIVERSITY

‘Loneliness is a Very Special Place’

*A Cultural Analysis of Urban Loneliness within
Scandinavia*

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Abstract in English

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This thesis is a cultural analytical research project that aims to understand how social and cultural processes in spaces within the city contribute to the experience of loneliness. The thesis explores loneliness at different layers of the city, from housing, the neighbourhood, to the district and the wider city scale. This is achieved by using a phenomenological framework that analyses the individual narratives of loneliness, as well as from a governance perspective of a planning department at a municipality and a local housing association in Sweden. This allows for the understanding of how loneliness is perceived, enacted and embodied, which assists in the understanding of how the city is implicated in the creation of loneliness.

Loneliness is part of the human condition, and is considered a public health challenge. Through a cultural analytical approach, it is possible to uncover the intrinsic meanings, values, habits, and norms that exist in different spaces in the city, and contribute to feelings of loneliness. The methods used are semi-structured interviews and photographs. The findings show that trust and belonging are fundamental for the prevention of loneliness, and need to be present at different layers of the city. Issues such as discrimination, fear, and societal expectations are among some of the factors that contribute to loneliness, and that are reinforced through the built environment. The insight that loneliness is layered is important for this thesis, as it shows that trust or belonging can exist in some parts of an individual’s life, yet still leaving them susceptible to loneliness.

Keywords: loneliness; Sweden; Denmark; city planning; urban living; trust; belonging; cultural analysis; ethnography; public health

Abstract in Swedish

‘Loneliness is a Very Special Place’: En Kulturanalys om Ofrivillig Ensamhet i Urbana Miljöer i Skandinavien

Martina Gnewski

Denna uppsats är ett kulturanalytiskt forskningsprojekt som syftar till att förstå hur sociala och kulturella processer i olika rum i staden bidrar till upplevelsen av ofrivillig ensamhet. Uppsatsen undersöker den ofrivilliga ensamheten i olika skalor i staden, från bostaden, kvarteret, ut i bostadsområdet och vidare ut i staden. Detta uppnås genom att använda ett fenomenologiskt ramverk som analyserar de enskilda berättelserna om ensamhet, men även perspektivet från ett kommunalt stadsbyggnadskontor och en lokal bostadsförening i Sverige. Detta möjliggör för förståelsen om hur ensamhet uppfattas, realiseras och förkroppsligas, vilket stödjer uppfattningen om stadens involvering i skapandet av den ofrivilliga ensamheten.

Ensamhet är en del av det mänskliga tillståndet och är klassat som skadligt för folkhälsan. Ur ett kulturanalytiskt perspektiv är det möjligt att visa de inneboende betydelseerna, värderingarna, vanorna och normerna som existerar på olika rum i staden och som bidrar till ensamhetskänslor. Metoderna som används är semistrukturerade intervjuer och fotografier. Resultaten visar att både förtroende och tillhörighet är grundläggande för att förebygga ofrivillig ensamhet och bör vara närvarande på olika skalor i staden. Faktorer som diskriminering, rädsla och sociala förväntningar är bland några av de förhållanden som bidrar till ofrivillig ensamhet och som förstärks genom den byggda miljön. Insikten att den ofrivilliga ensamheten kan förstås i olika lager är viktig för denna uppsats, då det visar att förtroende och tillhörighet kan existera i vissa delar av en individs liv, men ändå lämna dem sårbara för ensamhet.

Keywords: ofrivillig ensamhet; Sverige; Danmark; stadsplanering; urbana miljöer; förtroende; tillhörighet; kulturanalys; etnografi; folkhälsa

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1. Introduction

The title of this thesis “Loneliness is a very special place” is from a track on the album *Pacific Ocean Blue* by Dennis Wilson, drummer of the Beach Boys. I found it while reading Olivia Laing’s book *The Lonely City*. Although Wilson’s lyrics appear to be more of a love song, I agree with the sentiment, that loneliness is a special place. To me it is an intricate cobweb of circumstances and processes that culminate in a state of ‘emptiness’ for an individual. The motivation to research loneliness stems from having experienced it myself, and having seen people in my close surroundings battling it. This made me reflect on what opportunities there are for people to prevent loneliness. I hold a particular interest in how the city influences the everyday life of people, which led me to think about the relationship between loneliness and urban living.

Loneliness has been acknowledged as a major public health challenge and can cause serious health consequences, such as high blood pressure, stroke and cardiac arrest (Thelander, 2020, p. 28–29). There is a distinction between loneliness and solitude, with the latter being a self-imposed withdrawal. Rather, loneliness is when there is a disconnect between desired and actual social relationships (Thelander, 2020, p. 7). The stigmatisation of loneliness in the public narrative makes it difficult to talk about openly. This is perhaps a result of social relationships being deeply ingrained in what it means to be a ‘successful’ individual. This stigmatisation of loneliness is problematic, as it perhaps discourages people from actively seeking help. It is important to broaden the understanding of loneliness, due to the serious health consequences for the public.

In particular, I believe it is important to understand loneliness from a cultural analytical perspective. This can offer insight into how loneliness is perceived, embodied and enacted. In cultural analysis the seemingly ‘everyday’ human experience is at the forefront. By investigating the human experience of loneliness, it is possible to reveal the underlying habits, norms, values and expectations that contribute to that experience (Hagström, 2019b). The phenomenological perspective, thus the lived-in account, allows for the development of dynamic and preventative measures that are aligned with the actual experience. In my early research stage, I was able to find a great deal of research on loneliness from disciplines such as psychology and sociology, however not many dealt with the built environment, more specifically the city. This was surprising to me, as the city and places within it frame people’s experiences, actions and movements. This is where social ties and relationships develop and strengthen, which highlights the importance of planning and designing accessible and inclusive

cities. Therefore, to widen the perception of loneliness I decided to explore it in the context of urban areas within Scandinavia.

However, there are a few terms that need clarification given the context of this thesis. In ethnology, anthropology and similar disciplines, there is a distinction between *space* and *place*. For the purpose of this thesis I have decided not to delve into the discussion of the definitions of space and place. I am using Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, which believes that the process of producing space, and the product itself are inseparable (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). This approach proposes that there is no distinction between space and the material product, referred to as place. Place is therefore the process in which space is produced through the concept of the ‘spatial triad’ (Merrifield, 1993). The spatial triad is introduced in more detail in Chapter 4, the theoretical chapter. Another term that may need clarification is dwelling. In the context for this thesis I am referring to *home*, that is, where someone lives. It is a commonly used term within urban development and architecture and it was therefore appropriate to use in this context.

1.1 The Pandemic

This thesis has been written during the spring of 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic gripped the world. Although the empirical material was collected prior to the pandemic outbreak, nonetheless it highlights the cause and effect nature of urban living and loneliness. It has been strange studying loneliness during a global pandemic. The pandemic has put loneliness at the forefront of public debate, and the role that housing and neighbourhoods play has never appeared to be more important. I hope that the recent traction and heightened interest in loneliness can generate and bring forth real change that has a positive impact for society. For this to happen I believe new perspectives on loneliness are needed. The cultural analytical perspective should be included when considering preventative measures for loneliness, as it can broaden existing knowledge and provide dynamic insights and perspectives on loneliness that would perhaps otherwise go unnoticed.

1.2 Disposition

This thesis will continue by presenting the aim and research questions. Thereafter, a second chapter follows presenting the literature review of relevant research. From there, a third practical chapter follows that outlines the fieldwork process, the methodology, and the collected empirical material. In that chapter I also discuss the ethical considerations and limitations of this thesis. The theoretical framework and perspectives are presented in chapter

four, followed by chapters five and six that continue with the cultural analytical perspectives on loneliness and the different layers of the city. In chapter seven the thesis concludes with a discussion of applicability and the implications for further research.

1.3 Aim of Study & Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to understand the social and cultural processes that develop within different spaces of the city, and that contribute to the experience of loneliness. The aim is summarised in the research questions below.

- How are feelings of loneliness described and defined?
- How is loneliness experienced and enacted in different spaces of the city?
- What opportunities and limitations are afforded by space, at different layers in the city, for people to prevent loneliness?

2. Literature Review

I have structured the literature review around the following areas of existing research: loneliness and urban living, public health and the urban inequalities of health, and an overview of cultural geography with a specific focus on feminist geography. I have chosen this existing research as I believe it best sums up the background and issues related to loneliness that are relevant to my thesis.

2.1 Loneliness & Urban Living

The American Psychological Association has defined loneliness as an “affective and cognitive discomfort or uneasiness from being or perceiving oneself to be alone or otherwise solitary” (APA, 2018). There is an abundance of research on loneliness from the perspective of psychological theory, ranging from social psychology, cognitive psychology and other disciplines within the field. The field of sociology has also examined loneliness with publications of well-known books such as *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney published in 1950, and *The Pursuit of Loneliness* by Philip Slater first published in 1970. However, there is not as much available on loneliness within the context of housing, architecture, and urban development. I find this surprising given the extensive research on public health and its relation to the development of cities.

Nonetheless, there has been some research exploring the topic of loneliness and its relation to urban living. A study conducted in marginalised communities in Glasgow examined whether feelings of loneliness are associated with aspects of the home and neighbourhood of residence. It was found that there was a somewhat higher number of people living in flats that had reported feeling lonely. However, once the researchers added socio-demographic data, such as age, the results between residential types was not noticeable (Kearns et al., 2015, p. 857). This is perhaps why the perspective of cultural analysis is important in loneliness research, as it explores associations that may appear insignificant, but upon closer inspection play a significant role in people’s experience of loneliness. Furthermore, the results also found that people living in lower quality neighbourhoods reported higher levels of loneliness. Local amenities play a significant role, with people who made little use of the amenities reporting higher levels of loneliness. People who felt disconnected from the community were more likely to feel lonely. The study shows that there is a connection between feelings of loneliness and living situation, and that people in marginalised areas are more likely to experience loneliness (Kearns et al., 2015, p. 857–858).

The effects of flat living and mental health has been researched previously, where it has been found that living in a flat can have detrimental consequences on residents' mental health (Moore, 1976). Due to the close proximity of neighbours, especially in apartment blocks, they have the unique possibility to provide functions that perhaps family and friends are not always able to do (Halpern, 1995, p. 112). A number of studies have shown that living in flats, at least for women, is associated with higher levels of loneliness. A common misconception about loneliness is that it exists on a continuum, with isolation on one end and lack of privacy on the other. However, flat dwellers seem to feel both lonely and experience a lack of privacy. The critical issue is therefore the ability to control social interactions. Flat dwellers are not able to chat with neighbours over the garden fence, thus interacting without intrusion, to the same extent as their house dwelling counterparts. The perceived control of when, how, and where social interactions take place appears to be significant to find a balance between the risk of loneliness and intrusion on privacy (Halpern, 1995, p. 153; Moore, 1975, p. 112–114; Richman, 1974, p. 56–57).

Another common misconception about loneliness is that people living in one-person households are lonely. There has been an increase in one-person households over the last couple of decades in Europe and North America. While living alone is associated with many challenges, in particular loneliness, it also has many positive aspects. It allows people to be more independent and live as they desire without interference from others (Klinenberg, 2012). The increase in one-person households is visible in many Western countries, and the highest rates of people living alone are reported in the Scandinavian countries. The main driving forces are said to be individual economic prosperity and social security that allows people to live comfortably on their own (Klinenberg, 2012, p. 10). Simultaneously, the family unit has been shrinking, which is a visible trend across, for example, Europe and the United States. As a result, many children can have their own room. Therefore, although children are not taught explicitly to live alone, their social environment is normalising the desire to have independent space from others from a young age (Klinenberg, 2012, p. 48–50). While it is not possible to only equate living alone with the experience of loneliness, the normalisation of living alone highlights the individualistic mindset that has spanned over the past few decades allowing people to live more separately from one another.

Furthermore, most research on loneliness and urban living is concerned with the elderly population in particular. The elderly population is less likely to participate in social activities for many reasons, such as reduced mobility and smaller social networks compared to their younger selves. This leaves them vulnerable to experiencing loneliness, which can lead to

social isolation (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001, p. 246; Prieto–Flores et al., 2011, p. 1187). Research has indicated there is a positive association between health and residential satisfaction, meaning elderly people who are able to function more independently are more satisfied with their living arrangements. There is a direct relation between loneliness and neighbourhood attachment among the elderly. Loneliness was more likely to emerge in elderly who felt little attachment to the neighbourhood they are residing in. The residential environment, such as the care home or neighbourhood, plays an integral part for the development of belonging, which in turn is proven integral for preventing loneliness. Stronger residential satisfaction translates to a greater sense of belonging and can alleviate feelings of loneliness (Kemperman et al., 2019, p. 12; Prieto–Flores et al., 2011, p. 1187–1188; Halpern, 1995, p. 113).

In some cases, the development of housing for the elderly has had the distinct purpose of preventing the experience of loneliness. For instance, co–housing developments have been proposed as a part solution to provide opportunities for new social interactions (Jolanki & Vilkkö, 2015, p. 113). In a study conducted in Finland, many elderly people had relocated to co–housing communities based on having already experienced loneliness or were anticipating loneliness in the near future. Co–housing is an intentional community in the sense that residents engage in the common purpose of living together with shared values and ideas. The shared practices of living, such as meal preparation, help residents to feel they belong to the co–housing community, consequently also lessening feelings of loneliness (Jarvis, 2015, p. 6, 13; Jolanki & Vilkkö, 2015, p. 117–120).

However, a study from the United States shows that the experience of loneliness facing the elderly population in some cases corresponds with living in subsidised housing with limited economic resources and poor health. This is due to the impact of disadvantages and racial discrimination that some residents living in subsidised housing have been subjected to during their lives, which increases their risk of negative psychological health as they grow older (Gonyea et al., 2018, p. 469). This indicates loneliness can be a product of societal circumstances with potentially long–term detrimental impacts on individuals' mental health.

2.2 Public Health & Urban Development

Public health is considered central to the planning and designing of new cities and neighbourhoods. In the context of development in urban environments, public health is concerned with the well–being of city residents, such as adequate access to green areas, leisurely activities, employment opportunities, and so forth. The World Health Organisation's

initiative ‘Healthy Cities’ aims to support the creation of a ‘good quality of life’ for all through the development and improvement of existing cities (WHO, 2020). Designing for health and well-being uses preventative measures that promote healthy activities, rather than focusing on the treatment of disease. Designing places in cities that afford residents access to physical activity, clean air, safety and social interactions has significant impacts on well-being and can reduce mental health issues, loneliness and social isolation (Cushing & Miller, 2020, p. 101–103; Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 170). As loneliness is considered a public health challenge designing places that improve access to, for example, leisurely activities and green areas, increases the chances of forming social bonds with people living in close surroundings. Strong communities and a sense of belonging is crucial for health and well-being, hence, creating places where it is easy for residents to meet their neighbours is important (Thrift, 2020, p. 323; Montgomery, 2013, p. 36–37).

Danish architect Jan Gehl emphasises the human dimension in the development of cities that are lively, safe, sustainable, and healthy. By referring to lively, Gehl suggests that cities should invite people to walk, bike and use the city spaces to a greater extent. The city should offer possibilities for social interactions, recreational activities, and pedestrian traffic. In short, the lively city should be inviting for participating in public urban life (Gehl, 2010, p. 64–65). Studies from the United States and Canada have also shown that frequent interactions with friends and neighbours is associated with higher levels of subjective well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004, p. 1441–1442). According to Gehl, the safe city is accomplished by, for example, increased mobility as it allows for people to move about the city safely and participate in urban life (2010, p. 91–92). Dense social networks in a neighbourhood can deter crime, create strong bonds in the community and contribute to increased levels of well-being for residents (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004, p. 1436). Cities should also be sustainable – that means rethinking, for example, the public transport system, and focusing on green mobility where people travel by foot, bike or public transport, rather than cars. Lastly, the city should be healthy, which is strengthened by increasing the walkability and cyclability of cities. It has great health benefits for the urban population, with reduced risks of many health-related issues (Gehl, 2010, p. 6–7).

Furthermore, research has shown there is an inequality in health in urban areas primarily affecting the lower socioeconomic groups. It is crucial to understand that health and well-being is not only determined by an individual’s access to quality health services, but also largely by their living conditions, which are the environmental and socioeconomic conditions. There is a link between lower socioeconomic circumstances and poorer health (Lawrence,

2002, p. 37–38). To ensure the development of healthy living for all, there needs to be cross-collaboration between governments and stakeholders to understand the complexity of urban health (D’Onofrio & Trusiani, 2018, p. 21–22, 32). In a study conducted in the United States the researchers asked the question of: what is the root cause of urban violence? Urban violence has been acknowledged as a public health issue, and the study found that violence is predominantly perpetrated by young black males. The researchers argued that by focusing solely on the perpetrators, the broader question of understanding what urban environments are more associated with violence is missed (Greenberg & Schneider, 1994, p. 179–180). An important aspect of developing healthy cities is the understanding of how places can be charged with public discourses, and how these illustrate the power dynamics and inequalities that are manifested in the physical, social and material characteristics of places in the city (Corburn, 2009, p. 14). Violence is often produced of unstable neighbourhood environments. It can only be reduced by understanding how the formation of marginalised environments contributes to urban violence, and that a serious effort needs to be made to create a more equitable landscape to reduce crime and death rates (Greenberg & Schneider, 1994, p. 185–186).

In the United States suburban sprawl has led to the hollowing of urban areas, which particularly impacts on black communities. It has contributed to inequalities in health, as it leaves people disenfranchised from employment opportunities, thus impacting their accessibility to health care, and increasing the economic segregation. The systematic discrimination has resulted in predominantly the white population relocating to the suburbs from the city centres. As a result, inner city neighbourhoods have become an aggregation of poverty, such as New York’s Harlem, with higher mortality rates and poorer overall health (Frumkin, et al., 2004, p. 198–200). Therefore, it is vital to co-create new developments with the local communities, not merely consulting them. This co-creation must involve the marginalised people of the community to ensure their views and experiences are not ignored. Otherwise, new developments run the risk of limiting the opportunities for marginalised people to live healthy lives and can further increase health inequalities (Thrift, 2020).

Lastly, to put urban health inequalities in a more Scandinavian context for this thesis, the Malmö Commission for Social Sustainability released a report in 2013 exploring health determinants in the city. It was found that an individual’s social position is strongly associated with their living conditions. Living conditions encompasses factors such as, housing type, neighbourhood characteristics, both physical and social, as well as schools and employment opportunities. In the context of the report, social position refers to education, income and housing type to name a few. People with a lower social position often lived in marginalised

districts with poorer living conditions that impacted their health. For example, it was found that six-year olds’ oral health across Malmö is significantly affected by their parents’ social position. In districts where the parents are of lower social position, the children’s oral health was six times more likely to be worse than for children living in district with parents of a higher social position (Stigendal & Östergren, 2013, p. 30–35).

2.3 Cultural Geography

Through culture people transform everyday phenomena into significant symbols to which they attach meaning and value (Cosgrove & Jackson, 1987, p. 99). It is a way of understanding the world. Cultural geographers are interested in the relationship between these everyday symbols and practices, and space. This notion makes it relevant for this thesis, as loneliness is explored as an artifact of spatial relations. As a field, cultural geography is very diverse ranging from matters of politics and gender, to race and national identity, and plenty more. For that reason, it is not possible to speak of cultural geography as a singular field. However, what all the subfields have in common is the understanding that culture is spatial, meaning that cultural processes are integrated in space, and are a result of space (Mitchell, 2000, p. 63). I have chosen to focus this section on feminist geography as it shows how a phenomenon, in this case gender, can be affected and reinforced through spatial relations (Massey, 1994). This perspective is useful to understand for this thesis, as loneliness is a phenomenon that is affected by geographical relations. There is a plenitude of research on feminist geography, therefore I aim to present a brief overview of the topic.

During the 19th century the colliery villages in the United Kingdom had a distinct division of labour between men and women. Men were the breadwinners and were paid for their labour, while women’s place was at home raising the family, thus unpaid labour. The hazardous work of a coalminer contributed to the construction of a masculinity that expressed itself in various ways, such as in the solidarity between men. This solidarity, and women’s exclusion from it, resulted in the creation of pubs, clubs and other places in the villages that were for men only. The exclusion of women from the paid workforce trickled into the remainder of society and left it a male domain. The oppression of women in the public often also translated to the home, where women were bullied and abused by their partners. Men had shifted their fighting against class in capitalism to a generalised fight against women. These social relations created a toxic masculinity that permeated the colliery villages, and that produced a unique set of patriarchal relations based on the extreme separation between men

and women's lives (Massey & McDowell, 1994, p. 193–194). This construction of the male and female domains illustrates how the development of gender is in fact a social construct.

Further to this, feminist geographers believe the city is divided into the private and the public spheres, where the private is defined as the feminine, and the public is regarded as the masculine. The city is an extension of the home for women, and through this their accessibility to the city as active citizens is legitimised. This is further represented in the urban form (Parker, 2011, p. 434–435). The urban sprawl of the twentieth century isolated women from the accessibility of the city. They were spatially removed, which contributed to the new ideal of domesticity. The city was seen as chaotic and dirty, while the suburbs were clean and orderly (Domosh & Seager, 2001, p. 95). Many women feared, and still fear, the city in itself, an heirloom from past understandings of the city as unsafe. This has resulted in women living under a self-imposed curfew thus, avoiding certain places in the city entirely, or dictated by time. These notions remain prevalent in many Western cities, even though they have undergone several changes. Most women in Sweden can access all the city, thus both the private and the public sphere, however the accessibility is still determined by men. The physical planning of cities is today considered gender neutral, but in practice it is still a male domain. This is visible through the planning and designing, for example, of the inability or inconvenience of accessing parts of cities with a pram. As childcare has been considered a 'women's issue' only, the lived experience of accessing places with a pram has not been taken into consideration. It is also visible in the understanding of women's perceived safety in urban areas, where women experience fear at a higher rate than men (Andersson, 2001).

Lastly, gentrification is the movement of the middle and upper classes to predominantly working-class neighbourhoods, consequently driving the low-income residents out from their neighbourhoods as the property prices increase. The gentrification of many Western cities has led to spaces becoming 'feminised'. This is a result of single women moving to cities in search for employment opportunities, resulting in a renewed presence of women, children and the domestic in public spaces of the city. However, women's relationship with public spaces is still different from men's, where their mobility is largely dictated by the fear of violence that keeps them in constant state of spatial uncertainty (Domosh & Seager, 2001, p. 99–102).

2.4 Research Gap

As has been presented in this chapter, there has been research conducted that explores the connection between loneliness and urban living conditions. Often loneliness falls under the broader domain of public health and is addressed through preventative urban planning and

design measures. Within feminist geography, norms, values and expectations are embedded in spaces, which is a highly relevant perspective to understand for this thesis. However, I have not been able to locate research that deals with loneliness as a socially and culturally produced phenomenon. This vantage point is important as it helps to understand the lived-in experience of loneliness, and how it influences actions and behaviours within different spaces of the city. It illustrates the relationship between the urban resident, their everyday life, and loneliness. The benefit of studying loneliness from a cultural analytical perspective is that it exposes deeply rooted social discourses and how these contribute to the experience. By understanding loneliness as a social construct, the knowledge of loneliness as a human condition can deepen and reveal new insights and perspectives.

3. Into the Field

This thesis is based on empirical material collected using ethnographic research methods. The fieldwork was conducted in Sweden and Denmark during the autumn of 2019 and the winter of 2020. Parts of the material were collected while I was completing a work placement at COurban Design Collective in Copenhagen during the autumn of 2019. This thesis is in some part a development of that research project. The following sections in this chapter will outline the methodology, describe the collected material, and discuss the ethical considerations, as well as the limitations of this thesis.

3.1 Methods & Materials

My methodological and analytical approach for this thesis is the understanding that humans are *doing* loneliness, which is visible in how the world is understood, and also in how loneliness is perceived and enacted (Högdahl, 2003). I used a phenomenological approach to seize the subjectiveness of the experience, and grasp the informant’s individual narratives and perspectives of loneliness. This was achieved by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews as my main ethnographic method. In total I did seven in-depth interviews, all of which were face-to-face except for one that was through Skype telephone call. In my approach to the fieldwork I was not concerned with *when* they had experienced loneliness, rather I focused on *if* they had experienced it. This way, I was more likely to capture the experience of loneliness, as I am not restricting the research to the constraints of time. Informants were also able to talk about their experiences with a sense of distance, without feeling they have revealed a deeply personal experience to a stranger (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001). The aim of the interviews was to focus on gathering subjective experiences, thoughts and opinions. Through this perspective, the body can be viewed as a text where facial expressions, silence and other utterances indicate structural relations (Nairn et al., 2005, p. 224). This aspect of the interview was lost in the telephone interview, where the informant was ‘faceless’.

Although the interviews I conducted were semi-structured and followed the informant’s narrative, the question-answer dominant discourse was still prevalent, which can position the informant as less powerful (Nairn et al., 2005, p. 227–228). I had topics in mind for the interviews that I intended to explore, which meant I somewhat directed the conversation towards these topics. However, the informants were in control of their own narrative and were able to select how much or little they wished to reveal (Davies, 2008; Alm, 2019). It was important that the informants told me their experiences in their own words, thus I often asked

follow-up questions, such as 'how'. This allowed me to delve into the recollections and continue asking the more critical 'why' questions that encourage informants to elaborate and reflect on their story (Crang & Cook, 2007). In order to change the dominant discourse of the interviews, in some encounters I told the informants anecdotes and stories of my own experiences with loneliness. This resulted in informants becoming more comfortable in the interview setting and more inclined to share their experiences. The interviews ranged between 60–90 minutes long, although my longest interview clocked in at nearly two hours. The discussed topics differed due to the nature of semi-structured interviews.

However, it resulted in material that contextualised the experience of loneliness, and how it is perceived and enacted in society. By utilising a phenomenological approach, the material revealed a lived-in account where informants reflected on their positions in society. This approach can also be referred to as the emic perspective, which in ethnography refers to the insider's point of view. The emic perspective aided me in the categorisation of the empirical material, as the categories I discovered were obtained directly from the informants themselves (Alm, 2019, p. 22). For example, a category that appeared in a few interviews was 'safety', albeit from different perspectives. The lived-in account of loneliness is the primary strength of the research, as it reveals the underlying discourses that causes the experience to fester.

I also used photographs in my fieldwork as a secondary source to support the gathered material from the interviews. Photographs have the ability to show new meanings and insights once revisited later during the research process (Sunderland & Denny, 2007, p. 279–281). However, photographs have a tendency to appear objective and transparent. The 'mechanical capturing' of the field presents itself as impartial when in fact photographs have the ability to promote certain research interests. It is therefore imperative to understand the subjectivity of photographs, and that they do not reveal the 'truth'. They capture and frame a moment in time and disregard the social surroundings that they are implicated in (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 105). The ethical considerations of photographs will be discussed further in the ethics subchapter.

The photographs for this thesis were taken both in and outside the informants' dwellings. I used my mobile phone camera primarily as it is small, and it is an item I always carry with me. The purpose was to capture activity and usage of the various locations. This perspective can in ethnography be referred to as etic, and is the viewpoint of the observer. The gathered photographs were categorised based on my interpretation of what I had seen, such as a narrow staircase, rather than categorised based on what my informants had told me (Alm, 2019). I think using both the etic and emic perspectives strengthened my research as it allowed me to reflect on categories and themes independently with the help of photographs, while also

using the categories from the emic perspective that surfaced in the interviews. I found that the photographs in particular helped me in the analytical process. When looking at a photograph I was immediately thrown back to the situation it was taken, and able to remember the surroundings in more detail (Crang & Cook, 2007). One of the photographs, Figure 3: the Scandinavian cottages on page 48, is a photograph taken prior to the research for this thesis. I decided to include it as it helps visualise the small-scale developments that I discuss in subchapter 6.2, 'Habitus'. The photographs also helped to support the informants' experiences and made it possible for me to visualise how some spaces are utilised.

3.2 Participants

The aim of selecting my informants was to gain an insight into the lived experience of loneliness, but from various perspectives and vantage points. All names in this thesis are pseudonyms to ensure the informants anonymity. Most interviews were conducted in Swedish, with the exception of one that was conducted in English. The Swedish interviews were translated to English with the intention to capture the essence of what the informant was aiming to convey. Quotes have been edited for readability and in some instances, they have also been shortened. This will be discussed in the ethics. I selected my informants in different ways. For the informants living alone I scouted my private network, and was able to include four informants, Andrea, Caroline, Sarah and Olivia, who range between the ages of 25 and 75. They all live in urban areas in southern Sweden or in Denmark. This is not to say that all people who live alone are lonely, but it was a way for me to narrow down my research by selecting a dwelling type. I wanted to keep the demographic profile open as I was insistent on not assigning the experience of loneliness to a specific group. The four informants shared different experiences of loneliness, some from more recent times, while others spoke about their past experiences.

Further to this, I also wanted to include the perspective of a municipality to understand how they address loneliness through city planning. It was hoped this would provide a governance perspective, in contrast to the personal accounts of other interviews. I was able to get in contact with an architect, Maria, and a strategist, Susanne, working at the planning department of a municipality in southern Sweden. Maria is in her early 60s while Susanne is in her early 40s. Both have several years professional experience in their respective fields; therefore, it was a great opportunity to understand the workings of a local planning department. I was also interested in finding out how districts in a city work to prevent loneliness. I was able to interview Lea, who is working at a part-public, part-private owned housing association as a

housing coordinator. Lea is in her early 40s and has extensive experience working as a housing coordinator. Her role within the community is diverse, ranging from assisting tenants with various tasks, organising initiatives and programmes that benefit tenants, to partnering with organisations to develop the district as a whole, and to give new opportunities to people residing there. The district that Lea operates in has a large immigrant population, and consists of many residents from lower socioeconomic circumstances.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this thesis include the maintenance of informants’ anonymity, using empirical material from a previous research project, transcribing, and receiving consent from informants to use their quotes. To strive for anonymity the names in this thesis are all pseudonyms. I have generalised the research area to southern Sweden and Denmark, and changed attributes such as ethnicity, in case there was a risk this made the informants identifiable. The topic of loneliness is a highly personal experience that is often stigmatised, therefore the importance of maintaining informant’s anonymity became fundamental for my research. The possibility for any harmful consequences by this research is unlikely, however was not investigated or discussed in-depth, thus I felt it was important to anonymise where possible. The empirical material was collected in two stages. First, the material from the informants living alone was collected, as this was part of a research project that I completed at COurban Design Collective. I had discussed with COurban the intention of using the collected material for my thesis, which they were supportive of.

During the interview encounters I made the informants aware that the material may be used for my thesis, however, I am not sure they understood to what extent. Therefore, it is important that I do not disclose the location of my interviews, as this adds another layer of anonymity. My interview with Lea, the housing coordinator, describes both her personal experience with loneliness, and how loneliness is combatted and prevented through her work. I was not able to speak to residents of the district Lea works in; therefore, the experiences of residents are understood from the perspective of her role. The residents’ experiences are therefore recounted, and not necessarily the only representations of their experiences. Using experiences that are in some part recounted by others may seem ethically uncertain, however, the purpose of Lea’s interview was to understand how district’s work to prevent loneliness. It is important to understand this for the context of this thesis, and that her work was the focal point of the interview.

Another ethical challenge in the in-depth interviews was the consent process. Informants are consenting to participating in research without fully knowing how the topics of the interview will unfold and whether it will stir up negative emotions (Buckle et al., 2010, p. 112). To combat this, it is suggested to seek consent at more than one occasion during the interview encounter. This was not something I did, as at the time it seemed it would interrupt the flow of the interview. I was comfortable with the level of consent given, where I have it recorded for all interviews, as well as signed for the ones that took place this year. This is due to the signed form being a requirement for the thesis project. My approach throughout my interview encounters has been to take on the role of learner, thus making the informants the experts of their experience. This allows the informants to control the narrative of the encounter, which means they can select how much or little they want to contribute. However, it is important to notice that this decision cannot be done without fully understanding what the purpose of the research is (Buckle et al., 2010).

In retrospect, I should have been clearer on the aim of the research, however at the time this was not fully developed, and has been refined throughout the process of writing this thesis. The uncertainty was perhaps also why the informants working at the municipality, Maria and Susanne, wanted to review their quotes before consenting to it being included in the thesis. To ensure they knew what they were consenting to, I sent the quotes along with a brief description of the context they are discussed in. This way, I have given them an opportunity to clarify any statements, and ensure they are comfortable with how they are represented. Although the informants are anonymous, both Maria and Susanne are employed at a municipality in Sweden, thus inevitably representing a public organisation. As it turned out, they were satisfied with the quotes, and gave me the go-ahead to proceed.

Most interviews were conducted in Swedish and had to be translated to English. Once translated I edited the quotes for readability by shortening and changing from spoken language to text form. Ethically this may seem questionable, however, the purpose has been to achieve a coherent textual representation that furthers the understanding of loneliness and conveys what the informants communicated. The aim for the informants has been to showcase their experiences, therefore, editing their quotes for readability means the message is clearer and easier to take in. While transcripts enable the reader to interpret the data in particular ways, with the ability to frame it and advance certain interests, the intention of this thesis has been to allow the lived-in experience to shine through. A transcript is a form of representation, and a subjective task, therefore there is no correct version of transcribing. Rather the aim should be to capture the essence of the encounter (Bucholtz, 2000; Rendall, 1997).

Further to this, while transcribing I decided to exclude sounds and utterances, such as 'ums', sighs, and laughter. This decision was mostly driven by time constraints. In retrospect these sounds may have given insight into the thought process of the informants. The strength of adding these types of sounds is the layering of the encounter. In the "ums" there is perhaps hesitation that ties in with the answer, and without the transcription of the sound the layering gets lost. However, in some contexts adding dialects, pauses and sounds to a transcript can further marginalise groups and reinforce power structures (O'Dell & Willim, 2013).

Lastly, there are ethical and moral implications to be considered when using photographic evidence, such as understanding that a photograph is only a representation of a brief moment in time. It is not necessarily a representation of the 'truth', as previously mentioned. For instance, a photograph of a space on a sunny day may provide a misleading representation of how pleasant the space actually is at all times. Therefore, it is important to view photographs critically and to consider the context they are added in (Sunderland & Denny, 2007; Crang & Cook, 2007). I have used the photographs as supportive evidence during my analytical process. I made a conscious effort of excluding the informants from the photographs as their presence was not essential for the interpretation of the spaces I visited. I have only included three photographs in the thesis, as I was also mindful of revealing the locations of my research and compromising the anonymity of my informants (Crang & Cook, 2007). My intention of this thesis has always been to try to represent my informants in an accurate way, however, simultaneously also remain honest to the research.

3.4 Limitations

There are various limitations to be considered for this thesis. Firstly, observational fieldwork was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the observations were not essential for this thesis, I believe they would have added an additional layer of context for me during the analytical process. In particular, I would have revisited some of the sites to remind myself of their specific context. I am grateful for the interview with Lea, the housing coordinator, however I believe with more time and resources I would have also liked to interview some of the residents in her district. This would have ensured their personal experiences are included, as well as added another depth to the research and perhaps revealed further insights and perspectives on loneliness. Similarly, the residents of the district discussed in subchapter 6.2, 'Habitus', would have been able to provide further insights into the habits and traditions of their district.

Lastly, and perhaps the largest obstacle, is the topic in itself. Loneliness is a highly personal and sensitive subject to discuss, especially in the context of a research encounter. A research encounter is never neutral; hence, my informants were aware that their interview would be dissected, analysed, and discussed in various ways. Nevertheless, based on my interview encounters I believe I was able to collect diverse and interesting perspectives on loneliness. Due to the perceived sensitivity and the stigmatisation of loneliness in society, there is an added difficulty of discussing it openly. It is important to note that the representation of loneliness in this thesis is not the only ‘truth’. There are rather countless other complex and disparate experiences of loneliness, which I believe further highlights the importance of including a cultural analytical approach to loneliness research.

4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this thesis that guides the analysis of the collected empirical material. The chapter ends by including a brief explanation of the additional theoretical perspectives that also feature in the analysis. The main theoretical framework I have chosen is Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the spatial triad. Lefebvre’s theory has been widely used within research of urban development and architecture to explain the complexities of space. While there are also other theories relating to space, such as affordance theory, Lefebvre’s theory distinguishes itself through the spatial triad showing how the production of space moves beyond phenomenology and the lived experiences, and links with socio-political structures that form and inhibit these experiences (Meer & Müller, 2017, p. 97). I believe the theory facilitates the viewing of loneliness from a different, and more structural lens that takes into account how spatial practices and relations influence that experience.

4.1 Spatial Triad

Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a room in an apartment, the corner of the street, the marketplace, a public space and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but not isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 16)

Lefebvre (1991) believes that “social space is a social product” and as such, also believed power is exercised and produced through space (p. 26). Within social space actions are performed by subjects both as individuals and as collectives (p. 33). By this Lefebvre means people act in their own way, but the action also reflects wider societal norms and values. For Lefebvre the construction of social space relies on “prohibition”, thus making the assumption that exclusion is created by others, either directly or indirectly, which places restrictions on the individual (p. 35). To illustrate the complexity in the production of social space, and the significance of the body in space, Lefebvre created the spatial triad consisting of three components – spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. These are interconnected to produce space in a dialectic relationship in which an individual is able to move between these spaces seamlessly (Pierce & Martin, 2015, p. 1282; Merrifield, 1993, p. 523).

Spatial practice, also known as perceived space, refers to the space that structures everyday reality. It sets the expectations of daily life. It embodies daily routine and the urban reality, which is the routes and networks that link up places for private life, work and leisure. Perceived space is also constantly produced and reproduced (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38–40). My

interpretation of Lefebvre’s perceived space is that it is the space in which the individual acts based on their position in society, and thus, the background and knowledge available to them. The individual performs in reference to who they are and the boundaries that exist in that space. Therefore, the individual expects and presumes certain things in a social space based on their knowledge, essentially, how they understand their body in that space, which informs how they act. As perceived space is produced and reproduced, the production means that the individual’s existing boundaries, based on their position in that social space, can only be produced to as far as that knowledge is available to them. This production happens as the individual is not able to go beyond their existing boundaries and knowledge therefore, they use their boundaries as a reference point. The reproduction happens when the individual’s position is reproduced in other social spaces.

Representations of space, known as conceived space, is the conceptualised space of scientists, urban planners, architects, engineers and others, who use a system of verbal signs. It is the dominant space in any society and takes on a physical structure in the form of maps, designs, plans and models. These physical structures are, according to Lefebvre, representations of ideologies, knowledge and history and are emphasised in the production of space through constructions such as monuments, buildings and other structures. By studying the plans, maps and other physical forms of representations of space, it is possible to examine how plans of space alter over time and examine the symbolic features that have been emphasised to understand the ideologies that are being represented. Conceived space plays a significant role in social and political discourse of a society (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 41–42). Conceived space is the space of thoughts, it is the abstract space that is imagined before it is acted upon. I understand this feature of Lefebvre’s spatial triad as the space that continuously affects and influences the individual. Urban professionals are through their plans, designs and structuring trying to achieve something, and through this, control people and their actions. Therefore, conceived space can also be understood as the space in which a society’s expectations of their residents is created into physical form. It creates opportunities but also limitations. For example, assuming that the norm is the white male, monuments, buildings and art depict this norm within the social space. If perceived space creates the boundaries to which the individual constantly negotiates their place, conceived space creates the physical forms to which the individual acts and reacts. Thus, perceived space happens within the conceived space.

The last feature of Lefebvre’s spatial triad is representational spaces, often referred to as the lived space. Lefebvre describes this space as the space of inhabitants and users, who

utilise it through its associated images and symbols. In other words, it is the space of everyday experience, and it is felt more than thought. Lived space overlays physical space and makes symbolic use of its objects. It is the space where social movements form, hence it is also deeply rooted in historic symbolism. These can be murals, artwork or slogans that are visible throughout certain places. Lived space does not need to be cohesive; it is derived from imaginary and symbolic elements. Essentially, the lived space is constantly changing and dynamic (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 42). I interpret this feature of the spatial triad as experienced more than imagined, therefore, for example, a statue in a public square has symbolic meaning that results in the individual experiencing that social space in a particular way. It is also the space in which the individual is allowed to do things without expectations, where they can truly feel and react to aspects and features of a space. Hence, it also influences the way in which individuals perceive space. In lived space, the individual's experience can be said to derive from the symbolic meanings in a social space. Therefore, the lived space is the space in which the individual negotiates the symbolic meanings of a space, which are constructed in the conceived space based on preconceived notions. The perceived space, on the other hand, guides the individual's interpretation of a space based on their background and pre-existing knowledge, but can also be further influenced by the lived space. This way, the spatial triad is deeply interconnected, and dialectic, therefore, removing one of its features would leave a gap in the understanding of how space affects an individual.

4.2 Additional Perspectives for Analysis

The empirical materials in the cultural analysis chapters are analysed using Lefebvre's spatial triad as the primary theoretical framework. However, one of the main benefits of cultural analysis is the ability to apply theories from a wide range of disciplines to strengthen the research and extract insights and understandings that would otherwise go unnoticed. Therefore, in the analytical chapters I am deepening the findings even further by applying additional theoretical perspectives, such as performativity, phenomenology of whiteness, habitus, and more. By doing so, the aim is to illustrate the flexibility of cultural analysis, while also obtaining a broader understanding of loneliness as a phenomenon.

5. Analysis: Trust

Trust is to have confidence in a person or thing, and to be able to rely on them (OED, 2015). In my empirical material I found that trust was a recurring theme amongst my informants, albeit in different contexts, such as relations with neighbours or trust in the wider neighbourhood that one resides in. In the following analytical chapter, trust is analysed using the theoretical framework of Lefebvre’s spatial triad. In each subchapter I have chosen to use the spatial triad in relation to one other theoretical perspective to deepen the analysis and extract new insights. The first subchapter, ‘Suspicious Neighbours’, starts from the perspective of an individual’s immediate surroundings, such as the dwelling and its setting. In the second and third subchapters, ‘Bonding and Bridging’ and ‘Lightscapes’ respectively, the lens broadens to the neighbourhood, district and the city as a whole. I have chosen to divide up the analysis this way to illustrate the different layers of the city that I am operating in, but also to emphasise the presence of loneliness in varying scales. Through analysing trust in the context of space, it is possible to uncover how loneliness is continuously produced in society through the different scales of the city.

5.1 Suspicious Neighbours

I met my informant Andrea at the end of summer last year (2019). We met at her apartment in order for me to familiarise myself with its layout and surroundings. Andrea generously shared her experience of living alone and reflected on her circumstances openly. She has lived in her apartment, which is located in a small town in southern Sweden, for over a decade. The apartment is part of a larger housing development with rows of buildings and green spaces in between. The green spaces are publicly accessible, and the buildings are surrounded by villas on one side, and a highway on the other. The apartment is situated in a moderately central location, making it a desirable spot to live given its closeness to public transport links, and the services available in the city centre.

Despite the popularity of the location, Andrea very rarely sees her neighbours. “Are they a good neighbour or not, you know? I don’t trust them completely, because I don’t see them, [...] and I don’t talk to them”. Since the building block lacks a purposefully designed shared courtyard, the only common spaces where she can potentially meet her neighbours are the staircases, laundry room and the gym, neither of which are spaces that encourage social interaction between residents. It is unusual to have a communal gym in a housing development; most neighbours only share a laundry room and potentially a courtyard. As the quote shows,

the main reason Andrea was not interacting with her neighbours was because she did not see them. This made her feel suspicious towards them and their intentions. Andrea’s experience was not unique among the informants living alone. Many would rarely see their neighbours, but would hear them pottering about their apartments or leaving home.

Olivia, another informant living in a larger city in Denmark, had been living in her apartment for many years. Recently, a new next-door neighbour had moved in.

I got a new neighbour living next door and I’ve never seen him. [...] He’s lived there at least five months. I can only hear him sometimes in the morning, but only when he shuts the door, [...] I can only hear him on the staircase and that’s it. (Olivia)

Olivia’s housing complex is made up of several apartments facing a courtyard that is occupied by garbage bins. There are no other shared spaces for neighbours to interact, apart from the staircase. Olivia mentioned she would appreciate a shared courtyard as it allows for the opportunity to interact with her neighbours in a spontaneous way that has the potential to lead to new friendships.

I know the feeling of loneliness just from living here, from now. [...] this apartment is the first time I’ve lived alone. And I think it’s also the first time I’ve felt alone, felt loneliness. Because at my other places where I’ve lived, there was always someone else home. I’ve definitely felt loneliness from living here. (Olivia)

The loneliness is sporadic, yet one of Olivia’s desires to know her neighbours derives from a feeling of not being socially close to others in her current living arrangements. Previously, Olivia’s friend had lived in an apartment just above hers, which allowed for the two of them to spend more time together, such as cook dinners or watch films. This arrangement was only possible as Olivia knew her friend from before, thus their ‘co-living’ situation was enabled by their friendship. Apart from her friend, who had moved out a few years ago, Olivia did not know any of her neighbours. When asked whether she would recognise neighbours in her building, Olivia thought she would perhaps recognise some of them. She believes that knowing her neighbours can make it “more comfortable and cosy” as she would know more about them, not only their names and what floor they live on. They would no longer be strangers. Olivia’s wish to know more about her neighbours also stemmed from the lack of trust in them. As she rarely met them, they could be anybody. Similarly, although Andrea recognised that she could benefit from closer relationships with her neighbours, in her case the reluctance to develop friendships with them stemmed from the lack of trust, which is a result of not seeing and

meeting them. She was therefore not particularly interested in developing close friendships with them "because I'm already busy enough dealing with my friends. [...] It's a bit sad because when you need someone at hand they're not here". Both Andrea and Olivia demonstrate in different ways a desire to feel more connected to their neighbours, because the lack of trust either inhibited or encouraged their level of interest. People who trust their neighbours have a greater sense of belonging, and casual social encounters are reported to also impact on the sense of belonging (Montgomery, 2013, p. 138).

Existing shared spaces in housing complexes, such as staircases, can become filled with a fixed display of behaviours and gestures. For example, residents going about their own business without interacting with their neighbours. The behaviours are the body's reaction to its environment, and the more restricted the body is by space, the more the need to connect with others is suppressed. The restriction of the body by space is demonstrated in the lack of shared spaces that promote social interactions. Both Andrea, Olivia, and their neighbours navigate their surroundings based on the avoidance, and unintentional interaction with neighbours in the spaces of their buildings.

Erving Goffman suggests that although no verbal communication is spoken, individuals communicate through the significance that is ascribed to appearance and personal acts, such as clothing, bearing and movement. Every society follows communication rules that have acquired common meaning through institutionalisation. In public, individuals adjust and alter their behaviour to correspond to the consensus. By doing so, they practice body idiom, meaning that an individual's gestures elicit corresponding behaviour in others (Goffman, 1963, p. 33). For example, the act of waiting inside one's apartment until a neighbour has cleared the staircase to avoid interaction, or to swiftly move past a neighbour in the staircase conveys a certain symbolic value to the concept of being a neighbour. It extracts corresponding behaviour in others, hence perhaps also sets a standard, and obligation, for the way in which neighbours interact in a particular building (Goffman, 1963).

In the perceived space of the spatial triad, an individual's actions are guided by the knowledge and background available to them, which includes what is deemed appropriate neighbourly behaviour (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore, Andrea and Olivia continuously negotiate their position in the shared spaces of their buildings based on the understanding of what a neighbour is in their respective housing complex. The habits and values that cause a distrust in neighbours is an enactment of loneliness, as it leads to social interactions becoming inhibited. The limited opportunities to meet neighbours result in this notion of neighbourly behaviour not being challenged, thus the behaviour is reproduced in other shared spaces in the buildings.

Further to this, in the conceived space, the buildings are abstract spaces created by architects, who imagined specific functionality for each and every space of the buildings. Through architectural design, the architects can direct residents’ movements to fulfil their abstract idea of what social interactions are like, and should be in a housing complex in an urban area in Sweden and Denmark. The symbolic meaning of spaces, for example a narrow staircase, alters the behaviour of residents as it is perhaps not appropriate to socialise (Lefebvre, 1991). The narrow staircases in Figure 1 are imagined as a space to pass through, to get from point A to point B.



Figure 1: Functional staircases from two different locations. Photographed in September 2019

It is not a social space by function, as neighbours do not linger in the staircases and intentionally interact with one another, as this is not common practice (Goffman, 1963). This carries symbolic meaning, as the development of spaces for social interactions has not been prioritised, and there exists more limitations than opportunities for social interactions. Hence, socialising is not considered important and is not encouraged. In Olivia’s case this causes her to experience loneliness, as she desires a somewhat more shared and social co-existence with her neighbours. Thus, it can be said that one of the main mistakes with modern cities is that they have been designed for the nuclear family unit with less regard to other types of social relationships (Montgomery, 2013). The nuclear family is the prevalent societal heteronormative discourse

that has resulted in cities expanding into suburban clusters, with little consideration of social relationships beyond the family constellation.

In the lived space, an individual can act and feel without prior expectations. Andrea and Olivia’s experiences in the moment of meeting a neighbour in the staircase also informs their perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore, if they challenge the status quo by starting up a conversation with a neighbour in their respective narrow staircases, the lived space that influences the perceived space, can alter the expectations and knowledge of interactions with neighbours. The onus is placed on the individual to overcome the limitations of the present space to make social interactions. Additionally, by challenging the conceived space, it can also challenge the preconceived notion of how relationships are formed between neighbours (Lefebvre, 1991).

Yet, the act of challenging established behaviour can cause neighbours to feel suspicious as Andrea and Olivia are not adhering to the commonly accepted communication rules of their respective building (Goffman, 1963). It is safe to say neighbourly interactions and behaviours are complex with a myriad of individual, abstract, and social pressures that have to continuously be considered and navigated within the shared spaces of buildings. Therefore, to prevent loneliness spatial limitations and opportunities have to be considered when designing new housing. Creating spaces within, and around, housing complexes that encourage social interactions have the long-term benefit of establishing trust between neighbours that supports the development of healthier local communities that are socially closer.

5.2 Bonding and Bridging

At the beginning of 2020 I met with Maria, an architect and Susanne, a strategist from the planning department of a municipality in the southern region of Sweden. They shared their insights on the planning and development of new housing, districts and neighbourhoods that promote social interactions and prevent loneliness from flourishing. One of the biggest challenges for the municipality is managing the changing landscape of society, where a lot of places that previously would have contained opportunities for social interactions, such as the bank, have been transformed into digital services or removed entirely. Maria was reflecting on spaces that allow for spontaneous social interactions, and thought that public transportation is an opportunity for many to connect.

I work with the dense city, that it shouldn't be too dense and so forth. [...] I like the regional trains because they're one of the few places where you can connect with people. We don't have the post office and the bank and, in the grocery store I don't need to speak to the cashier. We've removed a lot of these places but the regional trains are an opportunity for those that want to. (Maria)

Therefore, while the city may be dense, this does not alleviate the lack of spaces purposefully designated for social interactions in a neighbourhood, as density in itself does not always result in social interaction. Maria believes that it is important to create spaces for people to meet spontaneously, as this then allows social relationships to foster and grow. She is concerned that there are less spaces for social interactions in the neighbourhood, as “individualisation” has increasingly become prioritised in new housing developments. This means that previously shared spaces, such as laundry rooms, are no longer prioritised in new developments, and instead there is a washing machine in each dwelling. Thus, there are less opportunities for people to meet, and develop trust within the privacy of their neighbourhoods. The private merges with the public, which forces people to take part in social life in the public sphere.

You start with bonding, that starts in your neighbourhood where you create trust with your neighbours. Then comes bridging, that's when you develop trust for people who may not be like you. So, per definition bridging is trusting other people who are not like you. But you cannot, not have bonding first, because you won't reach bridging. You first need trust in your close surroundings to develop into trust for people who are not like you and who live on the other side of the city with a different financial situation and educational background. (Maria)

Therefore, trust needs to be developed and built from within the spaces of the direct neighbourhood, and extended to wider society, which makes neighbourhood dynamics a fundamental component for any city. Once trust is established in the direct neighbourhood through bonding, the process of bridging makes people more susceptible to accepting differences in others, who may look, speak, and behave differently.

In the interview with Lea, the housing coordinator, she reflected on the accessibility of public spaces. She told the story of a situation in which she, and a couple of her colleagues, had an assignment in another part of the city. At the time, she was working for a municipality in Sweden. Once they arrived at their destination, one of her colleagues refused to exit the car.

Yes, he said why, and I was shocked. He is black. He didn't want to get out because apparently something had happened there before. [...] That was a mental barrier for him. He stayed in the car while we carried out the assignment. (Lea)

Lea did not share details of the incident her colleague had been involved in, however insinuated it was of racist nature. This highlights that public life is not available to everyone who wishes to participate in it. Spaces in cities can become excluding through the creation of mental barriers that are a result of prejudicial experiences. This is further visible in another quote below by Lea. Her family is North African, and came to Sweden when she was a child. In the interview Lea reflected on a time when she considered relocating to a new apartment. She was looking for a new adventure at the time, and imagined that a change of scenery had the potential to change her perspective. The district she was residing in at the time had, and still has, a mixed demographic with a large immigrant population. The district she was considering relocating to was, and is still, affluent with a homogenous demographic profile. She went there several times to view the apartment but did not feel comfortable.

I wouldn't recognise myself there, I would feel alone in my appearance. [...] And it's not because, and this is important, I feel that I don't belong to the group. No. It's about how others will look at me that will have an indirect effect on me. Not direct interactions, more a feeling, gazing and stuff. (Lea)

The feeling and the gazing that Lea mentions derives from a sense of distrustfulness to others, to what is ‘different’. Thus, bonding and bridging processes are complex. Bonding needs to be achieved in the local neighbourhood, which suggests that bridging is determined by the level of trust that exists on the neighbourhood scale. However, perhaps there is a risk that homogenous districts within the city cannot develop bridging, based on their separation from one another. This aspect of trust should be investigated further, but was not in the scope for this thesis.

By applying theoretical perspectives, it is possible to gain deeper insights into the complexity of the bonding and bridging processes, and a new understanding of Lea's experiences. Sara Ahmed explores the phenomenology of whiteness, thus, how whiteness informs the lived experience in space, and orients bodies in specific directions. The historical and racial dimensions of the body are constantly directing the body and positioning it in its social context (Ahmed, 2007, p. 150–153). Spaces become orientated by some bodies (such as white) at the expense of others, which is a result of them inhabiting these spaces, and the institutionalisation of white bodies (Harris, 1993, p. 1762). This results in whiteness ‘not being seen’, it becomes normative, and consequently a privilege that is not noticed by white people themselves (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157; Fanon, 2008, p. 82–83; Knowles, 2003, p. 3; Harris, 1993, p. 1713). This normalisation of white bodies results in the exclusion and suppression of non-

white bodies in social spaces. The suppression of non-white bodies, and other racial and social processes, can be seen to be influenced by the spaces we inhabit that are created collectively over time through social interactions that endorse societal values, norms and ideals (Neely & Samura, 2011; Harris, 1993). Ahmed states in her research on queer phenomenology, that what is considered normative can be understood as a repetition of bodily actions over time, producing the bodily horizon (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66). I interpret this as being the accumulation of collective actions towards an ideal. These actions direct subjects towards or away from objects.

As Maria explained, the regional trains can be a great place for impromptu social interactions. From the perspective of Lefebvre's lived space in the spatial triad, the experience of spaces, such as a public square or the regional train, can be unequal, as the normalisation of some bodies in favour of others creates boundaries and limitations for some, but not all (Meer & Müller, 2017; Harris, 1993; Lefebvre, 1991). The act of reaching out to a stranger on the train is an act that happens in the spur of a moment, without prior expectations, and allows an individual to feel the space, and the objects within it. The individual is moving towards an object, in this case, another human being. As the individual is within this space, and feeling it, they are simultaneously reacting to it and its objects. This can be the reaction of entering a space of whiteness as a non-white, and negotiating one's position in this space (Fanon, 2008; Ahmed, 2004). The visible, in this case white bodies, are imbued with value. Social, historical, and cultural processes actively produce these bodies, and embody them, therefore also situate them in a social context (Alcoff, 1999, p. 19). Ahmed argues that non-white bodies become invisible and suppressed in white spaces, thus the act of reaching out and engaging with fellow travellers on the regional trains is a different experience. To 'stand out' in white spaces is in the form of political and personal trouble (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159).

In a similar way it is possible to argue spaces become gendered, dominated by men, through institutionalisation, or by the sheer numbers of men occupying a space (Ahmed, 2007). The reaction that is shaped in the lived space can be the feeling of uncomfortableness, such as the experience Lea endured from the gazing of others. It made her feel excluded by the residents of the district. However, by using the excluding space, where she was perhaps seen as an 'obstacle' by others, she was also creating space for herself, and through this, reclaiming power in society by not conforming to the defined boundaries. Similarly, but from a different angle, I interpret Lea's colleague's act of refusal to exit the car as an act of resistance. He is through his bodily movements directing what 'objects' he is willing to move towards, and therefore

showing he is not accepting discriminatory and racist behaviour (Lefebvre, 1991; Ahmed, 2007).

Furthermore, the lived space influences the perceived space, where individuals act based on their position in a particular social space. Within the perceived space, the residents of the affluent district expect and presume certain things about the social space that is the district. They act in reference to their existing knowledge of that space, and who they expect to see there. Spaces can become ‘racialised’, where the preconceived knowledge is not challenged and therefore racist practices are maintained (Schein, 1999, p. 189). This is perhaps the reason why Lea’s colleague refused to exit the car and enter a space dominated by white bodies. This feeling of distrustfulness to white spaces creates boundaries and mental barriers within the city for him, which also limits his accessibility to public social life. When the residents of the affluent district encounter a contradictory object, ‘the other body’, it challenges their existing knowledge of that particular space (Lefebvre, 1991). It challenges the bodily horizon, thus their notion of the ‘ideal’, and what is considered normative in their neighbourhood and district (Ahmed, 2006). This differentiation and categorisation of human bodies is based on ingrained attitudes and notions, and through discrimination, are exercised in power that stem from whiteness as the dominant construct (Harris, 1993, p. 1761; Alcoff, 1999, p. 18; Knowles, 2003, p. 9).

Therefore, it is imperative to recognise the social context of any neighbourhood and public space, and ponder on the ways in which people can develop bonding and bridging processes, and to what extent the space is including and excluding through the assignment of normative concepts within space. As Maria suggests in her interview, if a neighbourhood does not contribute to trust through bonding, the residents can become distrustful to other parts of their city. They succumb to expected knowledge of particular spaces, resulting in the creation of boundaries that dictate their actions. By disengaging with public social life in society they do not reach bridging, and are through this relinquishing their power as individuals to claim space through utilising the city in the lived space. The boundaries are produced to the extent of an individual’s existing knowledge, and as the boundaries are not challenged, they are not engaging in public life.

The perceived space is reproduced in other spaces in the city, making the city as a whole a distrustful place (Lefebvre, 1991). For Lea, although she was intending on relocating it became clear to her that in the new district she would be defined by preconceived knowledge, which illustrates that trust also comes down to how other people perceive you, and perceive your belonging in a particular social space. However, simultaneously, both Lea and her

colleague's experiences, contribute to a perception of the districts as being prejudiced based on their past experiences, as they may convey this perception to others who have not experienced discrimination in those particular areas. This way, spaces can reflect specific discourses and narratives from past experiences (Meer & Müller, 2017).

Furthermore, in the conceived space, depictions that have taken shape in physical form, such as monuments or advertisements, reinforce the normative ideal, which then contributes to the 'invisibility' of some bodies in public spaces by excluding them from the public narrative (Lefebvre, 1991; Ahmed, 2007). The absence of diverse representations affirms the normative ideal, while also excluding the alternative. It is an exercise of power that identifies what can and should be imagined within a space (Meer & Müller, 2017, p. 95). The power of whiteness is therefore maintained by it being prevalent in the public narrative (Ahmed, 2004). These depictions also influence the lived space, so the way in which individuals react in the moment reminds them through symbolism what bodies are 'accepted' and valued in society (Lefebvre, 1991).

The conceived space, which is the abstract space of Lefebvre's spatial triad, has been imagined by architects, planners, scientists and others, and has been transformed into physical form. This is the space in which the bodily horizon has been imagined and shaped, thus whiteness, men and the hetero-normative 'ideal' are prevalent (Lefebvre, 1991; Ahmed, 2006). Monuments, buildings, and other features in the physical environment depict the norm within social spaces, while excluding other bodies by creating barriers, albeit mental. For example, the housing in the district Lea wanted to relocate to has been designed and built with a higher income resident in mind. This automatically creates limitations for low-income groups to live there, which preserves a homogenous and excluding environment. Additionally, as Maria explained, individualisation has been, and is, prioritised in new developments, meaning people do not meet and interact as frequently within their neighbourhoods. This creates a segregated society, where it is difficult for people to reach bonding, and even more complex to achieve bridging.

Therefore, it is possible to argue the experience of loneliness is enacted on an individual level, through everyday choices and actions, such as the avoidance of certain areas in a city. It is also possible to argue loneliness is enacted on a structural level through discriminatory and racist practices that are deeply imbued in society. It is important to understand that the bridging process is also highly dependent on the planning and structuring of the city, as this creates limitations and opportunities for people's movements. This also highlights the challenges with segregation in cities, as homogenisation of districts has made it more difficult for people to

connect with others outside of what they relate to. To reach bridging there needs to be adequate spaces for people to firstly develop trust in their close surroundings through bonding, and thereafter meet, connect, and develop trust in the diversity of society.

5.3 Lightscapes

I met Lea at a café not far from the district where she works in to talk about her role in the community, the residents of the district, and her thoughts on loneliness. The district is located in a fairly central part of the city and was developed as part of the ‘Million Programme’ (Miljonprogrammet) in Sweden. The Million Programme was a public housing project developed during the late 1960s to early 1970s as a response to the housing crisis at that time. The aim was to build a million new dwellings during a ten-year period to ensure everyone had access to decent and affordable housing. The developed housing was received with mixed reviews, with some supporting the high quality of the builds and the effectiveness, while others suggesting the districts were too isolated and unilateral (Boverket, 2020). Lea has worked in her district for at least three years. It predominantly consists of large apartment blocks with green spaces between. There are also several local businesses, schools and organisations operating in the district. Many of the residents are immigrants or refugees, and while plenty speak Swedish, there are also numerous other languages being used. The district has a rich and diverse culture, ranging from food and events to activities on offer. However, it also faces challenges with high crime and unemployment rates.

During the interview the topic of residents' mobility was raised, specifically the walkability of the district. Lea believed that the installation of additional street lights in the district has the potential to increase feelings of safety among the residents. She believed that more light could result in more people being out using their neighbourhoods, and through movement people can become accustomed to their surroundings, and develop trust in them. Through trust residents may feel more comfortable and inclined to connect with others. This can result in the development of new social relationships that in the long-term can prevent loneliness from flourishing. In particular, women and the elderly would feel safer being out after dark. In a climate such as Sweden, where it is dark for several months a year, appropriate street lights can be essential for people's ability to participate in social life outside their dwellings. Poor street lighting can have implications on people's sense of trust in their neighbourhood, as the visibility is poor, and therefore they do not feel safe to walk around. Lea used the example of Greta, a fictitious representation of elderly women in her district.

If it's poorly lit, it'll make Greta feel unsafe, and insecure on a dark pathway. So, she'll stay at home. [...] And the same way she reflects, a young woman might also think. Mobility creates safety, and poorly lit pathways and streets prevent mobility. (Lea)

Lighting plays an integral role for mobility in the city as it frames the way people experience a space, thus also dictating how people use that space (Bille & Sørensen, 2007, p. 271). Greta may not feel safe to visit her friends after dark, as she is not able to see properly where she is walking or who is in her vicinity, and is therefore not able to 'control' her surroundings. This results in her staying at home and increases the risk of becoming lonely as her movements are restricted by the amount of light on offer.

In daylight a landscape may appear safer, as Greta is able to see who, and what is around her. As was presented in subchapter 2.3 on pages 15–16 in 'Cultural Geography', women are more likely to feel fear in the public domain despite most violence against women happening in the private sphere of their homes. Thus, there is a discrepancy between actual risk, and perceived risk. The fear of violence, in particular sexualised violence, is prevalent in all socio-economic groups, but is managed differently based on available social and economic resources. Elderly women are more afraid of generalised violence, whereas younger women are afraid of sexualised violence, and are more likely to avoid public spaces at particular times of the day. However, this may correspond with the fact that elderly women, due to also being less mobile, are not using public spaces as often as the younger generations. Women and men's experiences of fear are significantly different, where the perceived risk of violence substantially impacts women's mobility patterns in urban areas (Valentine, 1989, p. 386; Andersson, 2001, p. 25–28; Hagström & Sjöholm, 2007, p. 12; Listerborn, 2002, p. 8–9; Yates & Ceccato, 2020, p. 3).

In Lefebvre's lived space of the spatial triad, the experience of the same space can vary immensely between daytime and after dark. Light is used to enhance and expose certain places, people, and things making it a culturally significant tool to explore. In particular, the exchange between light and shadows, deemed lightscapes, reveals the relationships between people, things, and materials (Bille & Sørensen, 2007). For Greta, the walk between her apartment and her friend's apartment in the early afternoon generates a specific atmosphere. The light opens up spaces, thus influencing the way space is interpreted but also felt. The walk is enveloped in a sense of safety, where Greta is able to see every obstacle in her path there and then. Her assessment of the perceived risk is largely influenced by light (Bille & Sørensen, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991). During daylight hours Greta is able to see the objects, and materials surrounding her, such as other people walking, or the flowers in the park, which increases her sense of trust in the surroundings. All these factors create a visual atmosphere in the lived space

of being able to see, and feel the surroundings, which informs the expectations of that particular space in Lefebvre’s perceived space (1991).

However, the same walk is experienced remarkably differently after dark for Greta, even though men are more at risk of experiencing violence in public spaces in the evenings and at night (Hagström & Sjöholm, 2007). Street lights often illuminate one area, keeping the rest of the surroundings draped in darkness, which may become more apparent as the contrast between light and dark is so stark. However, in my interview with Maria, the architect, it became clear that the sense of safety and trust is not merely created by installing additional street lights. It derives from the perception that there is someone else watching, and who would help if necessary.

I don’t believe in street lighting, it’s either too harsh or just wrong. I’ve worked a lot with safety and street lighting and I’m tired of the discussion of increased safety if ‘we add street lights here and cut down some bushes’. It’s so much more than that, that is not how you achieve trust. [...] Trust is connected to loneliness. If I feel safe, then I feel that my surroundings will support me if something happens. That’s safety, not whether there are street lights so I can see properly where I walk. [...] We have so many misconceptions. (Maria)

Maria believes in a level of social surveillance and control that allows people to trust their surroundings, as they presume someone else is always watching. This is achieved by developing housing that faces public spaces, such as parks and streets, to increase the sense of safety in a neighbourhood, through informal social control. This relies on the potential of intervention by others if necessary. The constant presumed social control means people adjust their behaviour in accordance to what is deemed accepted behaviour and conduct. For example, if people know they are being watched they are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour (Foucault, 2008; Valentine, 1989). Figure 2 shows how balconies facing the street create a level of social surveillance of public spaces.



Figure 2: Balconies facing the street.

Drawing by Benjamin Dohrmann

Still, the discrepancy between actual risk, and anticipated risk is a felt experience in the lived space. Therefore, additional street lights can help women's mobility patterns after dark by virtue of making women feel safer. Although street lights do not replicate the visual atmosphere of daylight hours, in the case of Greta, she believes the street lights help, and she is more likely to adjust her mobility patterns after dark if there are street lights present (Hagström & Sjöholm, 2007). During night-time hours men can dominate public spaces, creating an unsafe atmosphere for women, thus restricting their movements. This is due to men and women experiencing the city differently. Women's perceived space, thus the anticipated fear of violence, and in particular sexual violence, determines and guides their behaviour in public spaces. Women also attach fear to particular spaces, such as a street, a neighbourhood, or an entire district as the public narrative often blames the victim of the crime, which encourages all women to transfer their fear onto spaces and not men (Valentine, 1989, p. 385; Yates & Ceccato, 2020, p. 4). This fear alters their mobility patterns to a far greater degree than men. The fear many women feel after dark stems from a generalised fear of men, and not knowing who is hiding in the nooks and crannies of the dark (Listerborn, 2002; Hagström & Sjöholm, 2007).

The preconceived notion of light as illuminating and revealing any potential dangers can make the installation of additional street lights important for women, and in this case, Greta's sense of safety. Even though a night-time stroll in the neighbourhood is most likely a safe activity, regardless of street lights or not, women's fear stems from the knowledge of being a woman (Lefebvre, 1991). Women continuously negotiate their position in society, and with this, assess the risk of violence, which informs their movements. Men do not feel unsafe to the same extent. For them, their place in the city is obvious, that is, it is accessible to them without the mental barriers that women experience (Listerborn, 2002). The knowledge of potential danger for women is also reproduced in spaces beyond the immediate surroundings, impacting women's accessibility to the public domain (Valentine, 1989). During daylight hours, Greta's observation in the perceived space is that the walk between her home and her friend's home is safe. This observation is based on her knowledge and position of being an elderly woman walking in her neighbourhood, and her experience during daylight hours (Lefebvre, 1991). Safety is therefore closely associated with spatial restrictions and opportunities presented by time, where daytime hours is perceived to offer more opportunities for movement (Andersson, 2001).

Through the conceived space in Lefebvre's spatial triad, it is possible to uncover the opportunities and limitations that light creates through the planning, designing, and structuring

of the city. Greta's mobility is controlled by urban professionals, who are attempting to achieve their 'vision' of a city (Lefebvre, 1991). This is executed through the way light is harnessed, which creates both opportunities and barriers for Greta's mobility. The placement of street lights, and the amount of natural light in a space controls people's movement. This subsequently increases the usability of certain spaces in the city, thus making them more attractive, while other spaces are kept more 'hidden' (Lefebvre, 1991; Bille & Sørensen, 2007).

In Sweden and many other countries, historically, the planning of cities has been created by men for men. The male experience has been at the forefront (Listerborn, 2002, p. 17). Through the control of light, the male experience underpins the city, therefore the patriarchal order remains intact as it dictates what experiences are 'valued', while also controlling women's accessibility to public spaces through fear (Listerborn, 2002). Although street lights per se do not fully solve women's concerns with safety, they enable women to use public spaces, such as the neighbourhood, as they believe they are safer. This can lead to altered mobility patterns for women in public spaces, which subsequently creates safer cities as public spaces are not dominated by only men. As women experience fear in public spaces to a much higher degree than men, the planning and design of lightscapes can be a question of creating an inclusive and equal city. This in turn, offers opportunities for social interactions that can prevent loneliness in the long-term.

6. Analysis: Belonging

The empirical material also shows that a sense of belonging is important for my informants. As the term 'belonging' is widely used within anthropology, to clarify, for the purpose of this thesis, it refers to feeling part of a group of individuals that care and share a similar worldview and values. The group can, for example, be the immediate family, friends, or the neighbourhood. In each subchapter I have chosen to use Lefebvre's spatial triad in relation to one other theoretical perspective to expand the analysis and draw out new insights. I use the same analytical structure as for the previous chapter. The first subchapter 'Spatial Performativity' is concerned with the informant's immediate surroundings, such as their dwelling or building of residence. The second and third subchapters, 'Habitus' and 'Mobility', explore belonging from the viewpoint of the neighbourhood, district and the city. By analysing belonging through the lens of the spatial triad, it is possible to broaden the understanding that the physical environment has on an individual's opportunities for developing meaningful social relationships. It allows for the structural aspect of belonging to become visible, such as the impact of urban renewal on community spirit.

6.1 Spatial Performativity

The fear of 'not fitting in' can increase feelings of loneliness among individuals. Loneliness is paradoxical, and can be present in an individual's life despite them objectively having a rich social life. Thus, it is largely determined by whether an individual feels their social relationships are meaningful (Swader, 2019, p. 1311). Loneliness often emerges when individuals feel disconnected from the 'group'. They are not 'seen' or accepted for who they are. As an international student from a Middle Eastern country Andrea spent about two years during her Bachelor's degree in North America.

It's not about living alone because I was living in a dormitory so there was constantly someone there, but [...] I felt I'm not inside college life, you know? [...] I was an international student and I had a totally different sense of values so I felt I'm not fitting in society. [...] when society is not accepting me, yeah, it is real loneliness I felt.
(Andrea)

Feelings of loneliness appeared when Andrea felt outside of society, and that she was not living up to what society was expecting of her. By applying a theory of performativity, and the lens of Lefebvre's spatial triad, it is possible to understand the connections between the experience, the social space, and the expectations from society that put direct and indirect pressure on

individuals. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is a performance, as it is an act that an individual performs, and therefore a social construct. To be a woman means to conform to the idea of what a woman is, therefore gender is not a fact, it is an assortment of actions that are performed in accordance to the expectations of womanhood (Butler, 1988, p. 522).

At the time, Andrea lived in shared dormitory accommodation, however she was eventually able to move into her own room. Although densely populated housing appears to provide an abundance of opportunities for socialising and forming close relationships, it can become counterproductive and result in individuals isolating themselves due to feeling overwhelmed. The issue essentially boils down to the ability of controlling one's social interactions (Montgomery, 2013; Halpern, 1995). Therefore, the design of housing can greatly impact people's perceived control of their social environment. In high density living people have to constantly negotiate and create their own space within the shared areas, such as making room for meal preparations. At times, the kitchen may be very spacious, however at other times, such as breakfast or dinner time, it can become crowded and busy. It can therefore be said that dense living is dynamic, which requires residents to continuously negotiate their space in relation to others (Rooney, 2003). Dense living can impact people's overall health and quality of life (Cramer et al., 2004). Public health and well-being are fundamental for the development of housing and neighbourhoods, as is presented in subchapter 2.2, 'Public Health & Urban Development', on pages 12–15.

In Andrea's case, she mentioned that her values did not correspond with college life, which made her feel detached from the others, and subsequently outside society. Through the conceived space in Lefebvre's spatial triad Andrea's dormitory has been imagined and designed according to how the architects expect students to be living (Lefebvre, 1991). In the conceived space, the student becomes a student in line with the architect's abstract imagination of what it means to be a student. The subjectivity of the student is enacted in the dormitory, while the dormitory also becomes a dormitory through the presence of the student. This entails presumed behaviours and actions associated with being a student, as student is not a fact, it is rather a collection of repeated performative acts that make an individual become a student. This presumed behaviour supports the creation of architecture that is implicated in the construction of societal norms and expectations (Butler, 1988; Smitheram, 2011; Bonnevier, 2007; Högdahl, 2003). In accordance with the presumed behaviour of students, there exists plenty of spaces for social interaction in Andrea's college dormitory. The architects have set out to achieve a space of sociability, and by doing so, they are controlling residents' actions by creating a space that

assumes, and endorses, a certain type of social behaviour. Andrea and her fellow students' movements, interactions and behaviours are dictated by the architect's expectations, and assumptions of what it means to be a student and live in a dormitory (Lefebvre, 1991).

In the lived space of the spatial triad, Andrea felt she was not living up to the expectations of college life. Andrea's feelings of detachment may have been due to the fact that she was an international student, thus she felt alienated from North American college values and expectations. In Andrea's case it is possible to argue that the experience of loneliness is enacted in the assumptions and expectations of the role of a student. The experience of living in close proximity with other students, who participate in social practices, such as frequent partying, may have made Andrea reflect on her own values, and how they differ from the group. It was in the moments of difference, in the situation of not performing the expected behaviour of a student, that Andrea felt alienated from the group (Lefebvre, 1991; Butler, 1988; Laketa, 2018). These moments of difference occurred in spaces filled with the norms of how students act, behave, and ultimately, perform as students.

Andrea's experience in the lived space informed her perceived space, thus her knowledge, and boundaries of a space. By living in a shared dormitory room Andrea was constantly negotiating her social environment, hence her place within these new set of values and expectations. She was made uncomfortable by the expectations and presumptions of living in a student dormitory, and also by reflecting on her own position in that space as a young, international student (Smitheram, 2011). Andrea's knowledge of how to be a student, thus how to perform 'studenthood' in her home country conflicted with her experience as an international student. She was restricted by her own knowledge of studenthood, and therefore reproduced this knowledge in new spaces, such as the college dormitory in North America (Lefebvre, 1991; Butler, 1988). The feeling of being disconnected was further strengthened by how other students expected her to act and behave, therefore depending on how others perceived her belonging in that particular space. Thus, spaces can be filled with expectations that individuals constantly have to manage and negotiate, which can highlight feelings of alienation from others if the expectations are not met (Högdahl, 2003).

Another informant, Sarah, who lives in Denmark in an apartment block, reflected on the usage of the shared courtyard in her building. The courtyard is quite narrow, has no sunlight access and with brick paving. It is a space that is predominantly used by families with children.

It's a small courtyard shared with a lot of people [...] if I were to have kids, I've found there are a lot of families in our block and their kids play in the courtyard a lot. There's

a small play area for children [...] it’s a safe space to send your kids to play. If I was to have children, then I would probably use it more often. (Sarah)

For adults without children the courtyard is viewed as a functional space only; it is somewhere to park your bike. However, it fills a social function for some of the residents. Sarah’s statement about using the space once she has children of her own, illustrates that, similar to Andrea’s experience in the dormitory, spaces are filled with expectations. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of being an ‘adult without children’ in Sarah’s building of residence is filled with expectations and assumptions, in which one of them includes not using the shared courtyard. This social construct creates boundaries in the physical environment that are reinforced to the extent that they become natural, and thus normative (Bonnevier, 2007). This results in Sarah feeling excluded from the courtyard and is less likely to develop social relationships with her neighbours, as the courtyard is the only shared space in her building complex.

In the conceived space, the courtyard is presumably designed by architects that expect a different usage of that space. Since the courtyard is fairly narrow, dark and with brick paving, its primary imagined usage is that of a functional space. Yet, with the presence of families the courtyard transforms into a social space, which happens in the lived space of the spatial triad. This further informs the perceived space, thus changing the perception of the courtyard entirely (Lefebvre, 1991). This way, social spaces are not static, but rather continuously dynamic and evolving. As long as Sarah does not have children, the courtyard performs as a functional space to her, however, once she has a family the same space is transformed into a space for sociability and usage. Therefore, it can be said there are many ways of performing a role in society, be it gender, occupation, or an activity, however if the performative acts do not correspond to societal expectations of that particular role, the individual can become susceptible to experiencing loneliness by not feeling belonging with the group.

6.2 Habitus

The experience of loneliness varies between people; however, it often stems from not being part of a context that confirms you and ‘sees’ you in some capacity.

Loneliness, it’s when I don’t feel I’m participating in anything. In my family or neighbourhood or in society or an organisation. You feel ‘I’m outside everything’. That’s loneliness. [...] You have to be part of a context and feel and experience that you are. [...] Being part of a context confirms you’re someone, that you matter. (Maria)

During the interview with Maria and Susanne from the planning department of a municipality I was interested in knowing if they could tell me about a district in the city that they consider a good place to live for an individual that is experiencing loneliness. Both Maria, who is an architect, and Susanne, a strategist, mentioned a district located on the edge of the city, and despite facing some public health issues, the district has a strong sense of community.

It’s a village that’s grown into the city so they’ve managed to avoid the demolition craze that existed in some districts, where a majority of small-scale developments were demolished. So, they’ve kept the traditions and history. (Maria)

Historically the district, once a village, was home to families from the lower socio-economic group, yet as the city grew and merged with the village the demographic became mixed. Despite the historical transition the district managed to maintain its strong sense of community, which was presumably helped by avoiding the urban renewal craze in the mid-20th century. By averting demolition, the district retained its physical characteristics, and can still be viewed as a ‘village’ in some parts. Nowadays the district is home to a diverse demographic, with a strong arts and culture scene. Susanne lives in an adjacent district, which does not have the same ‘community spirit’, and was pondering on the reasons behind this.

I live in an adjacent district, mostly consisting of villas, and where the central old part of the district is much smaller. There are a lot of new people who’ve moved in [...], there’s not the same level of participation. Maybe there is a bigger mix of people in X, so not everyone comes from the ‘outside’. Perhaps there’s a ‘just right’ amount of people that come from outside the district. They have the cultural bearers [...] that carry the traditions forward with events and lectures and city walks and many other things. [...] it has become so established that newcomers accept this, and people may want to move there because they hear it’s nice. (Susanne)

The ‘cultural bearers’ are people who carry the values and expectations of living in the district forward, such as adhering to the various unique traditions, events and social gatherings. By having cultural bearers, the district is able to keep its identity intact, even with newcomers moving in. Newcomers are taught how to act and behave, and by doing so, they adhere to the identity of the district. The district becomes a place that teaches newcomers the expected behaviour through experiences, such as participating in social events. As Maria mentioned, one cause of loneliness is the experience of not feeling seen. This can be prevented through active participation in a community, which contributes to residents feeling they are ‘seen’ and valued, while also assisting in ‘legitimising’ their residency in the district (Högdahl, 2003). Values, norms, and traditions are social practices, which Pierre Bourdieu refers to as ‘habitus’

(Bourdieu, 2010, p. 165). They are unintentional activities that are not based on reason but are instead a set of tools that allow people to react swiftly in different aspects of their lives (Smith & Riley, 2009, p. 130–131). Habitus is based on social experiences, memories and ways of living that are deeply ingrained in people's minds. It provides guidelines for action and orientation in the social world, which includes how people think and feel, and how the world is structured (Broady, 1991, p. 226–228).

From the perspective of Lefebvre's perceived space in the spatial triad, people regulate and adjust their behaviour based on their position in a space, and the knowledge they have of that space. Therefore, the habitus, the values, norms and behaviours that permeate the spaces of the district, are absorbed by the residents and compels them to perform in line with certain expectations, such as actively participating in the community (Lefebvre, 1991). The ‘just right amount’ of people from the outside, as Susanne discussed, facilitates the traditions and habits to continue, as the norm to be involved in the community to some extent is maintained. It is important to note that without participation the public spaces of the district relinquish their meaning for the residents. Thus, the *doing*, the enactment, is fundamental for the benefit of living in the district. It is strengthened by the co-creation, where residents together develop their district in various ways. Residents are claiming power by actively engaging in the creation of their physical environment (Parker, 2014). The district's history of once being a village is manifested in its habitus, and creates a form of social order that provides guidance on the expected and appropriate behaviour of its residents (Broady, 1991).



Figure 3: Scandinavian cottages. Photographed June 2017

This is further experienced in the lived space, where residents envelop themselves in the habitus of the district. By participating in their neighbourhoods, they are actively taking part in creating meaning of the traditions, values and norms, while also building a social foundation with their neighbours (Bourdieu, 2010; Smith & Riley, 2009). In the lived space there is a continuous reminder of the history of the district that is visible in the small-scale developments, which Maria pointed out. In particular cottages that originally were used by the working class. Figure 3 shows a row of cottages from a different location; however, the photograph helps visualise the cottages that are common in the discussed district. The presence of these buildings perhaps carries symbolic meaning of 'village-living' that is further upheld by the residents creating an identity unique for the area (Lefebvre, 1991). This identity is infused in the entire district, creating a sense of community and belonging between residents and strengthens their connection to the district.

In the third feature of Lefebvre's spatial triad, the conceived space, the district was once a village, thus was imagined and developed based on this premise (Lefebvre, 1991). This perhaps means it has a 'core', as it was meant to originally function apart from the city. This core is not a physical space, rather an abstract imagination that supports the creation of an identity. It is the habitus of the district, thus the social practices that residents have been adhering to for decades, and by doing so, they have helped to maintain a strong community that encourages active participation from its residents (Bourdieu, 2010). The city is often imagined as a definite place with clear boundaries. However, cities, neighbourhoods and districts, both past and present, are part of human experiences. Spaces in cities can assist in building connections between past and present experiences, and by doing so, facilitate in the creation of community. However, this can also result in the creation of a 'master narrative', where the dominant voices are mostly heard. It is important to understand who is creating the narrative of any district to be able to recognise how to build an inclusive community (Högdahl & Petersen, 2019). By being spared from urban renewal the district has been able to maintain this core that is part of the physical characteristics, and that has also been translated into values, traditions and habits. Therefore, it can be said that belonging is connected to common social practices that are instilled in people through historical, social, and material processes. This has the ability to help prevent loneliness in the long-term.

6.3 Mobility

Lea, the housing coordinator, defines loneliness as when an individual does not have adequate knowledge of the society they live in. They are not familiar with the social infrastructure, such

as the various public organisations and institutions that work to support and assist people in difficult times. Therefore, these individuals are outside society’s safety zone, and prone to experiencing loneliness. A large portion of the residents that live in Lea’s district are immigrants, and in some cases, do not have adequate knowledge of Sweden’s social welfare system. In Sweden the social welfare system is predominantly funded by taxes, and includes public services, such as health care, aged care, and child care. These services have been established to assist individuals through various stages in life.

They help to the point that they themselves get burnt out, because they’re not aware that there is a system that can assist. [...] That’s where you become lonely, in the workload. (Lea)

Therefore, loneliness can be enacted in the habits and behaviours of not knowing this system exists, as for instance residents take on the heavy workload of a caretaker for their ageing parents. Despite Lea’s district being centrally located it appears to be further away, as it seems different from other parts of the city. The ‘otherness’ is largely due to the negative portrayal that some marginalised districts have to endure in the public narrative. This otherness becomes the public image that the media and other institutions assist in creating. These districts are not neutral; they are implicated in political and power dynamics that actively ascribe meaning and stigmatisation to them in relation to wider society (Ristilammi, 1994; Roelofs & Salonen, 2019). The separation from wider society can be visible in the manifestation of certain behaviour and attitudes. For instance, it is common for residents from other parts of the city to have never visited Lea’s district. This indirectly affects residents of Lea’s district as their separation from Swedish society can make them vulnerable to experiencing loneliness.

As with any district, the opportunities to develop social relationships varies on an individual level. However, as Lea discussed, residents may become lonely as a result of not being familiar with parts of Swedish society, such as the welfare system. Therefore, while it is important to achieve belonging on an individual level, it is equally vital for marginalised groups to be connected with wider society for proper accessibility to resources and amenities. To combat this segregation, Lea worked on initiatives to “collaborate and support local organisations that expand and give knowledge to the residents”, such as a bicycle initiative. The bicycle initiative aims to teach women from the district how to ride a bicycle. Through mobility she believes residents can acquire new knowledge and experiences that can lead to beneficial outcomes for them as individuals, and also for the district as a whole.

We’ve taught 53 women in X how to ride a bicycle [...]. We’ve broken a form of social isolation; they can travel out of X [...] and that’s also a way to prevent loneliness. You’re out, you see things, how society works. [...] Hopefully the new things you learn, you bring back and it becomes an increase in knowledge for the overall district. (Lea)

For people that are not able to ride a bicycle their accessibility to the city becomes limited. Riding a bicycle is viewed as a central part of living in Sweden, therefore if the individual does not know how to ride a bicycle, they diverge from what is considered normative behaviour. Biking is also associated with freedom and independence, as it allows the individual to gain a skill that benefits and empowers them (Hagström, 2019b, p. 20–25). Initiatives such as the bicycle school are important as it also cements the women’s feelings of belonging in Swedish society as they are actively participating in it. They are also ‘performing’ in line with normative behaviour, thus showing society they should, and want, to belong (Hagström, 2019b, p. 40). This performative act may appear problematic; however, it also illustrates the need for people to feel that they belong to the society they are residing in. This strengthens the argument that belonging should not only exist on an individual level, but that it is also necessary on a societal level for the prevention of loneliness.

The separation of Lea’s district from other parts of the city is further visible in the mobility patterns of the youth who travel to other more central parts of the city to immerse themselves in a ‘feeling’.

The youth feel as if they’re not worth as much as the youth in the central parts of the city. You have to catch the bus to get a certain ‘feeling’ that should exist in their district. (Lea)

The ‘feeling’ the youth of the district are in search of is the feeling of being valued. Mobility then, for the youth, is more than the movement itself, it is a way to assert themselves in Swedish society. The relationship the youth of the district have to mobility is influenced by their position in society, therefore, mobility is also about power and to what extent the individual is able to control their movements (Enevold, 2003; Massey, 1994). Lea explained that the youth often travel to spend time in shopping malls for things to do. Thus, for the youth, being ‘valued’ can mean access to amenities, such as cafés, shops, and other activities. It can also be a way to claim their right to inhabit public spaces outside their district, as there are not enough activities in their own district (Dijkema, 2019). Therefore, investments in a district in the form of different services and organisations keeps it alive. It means residents are activated within their area, and are not required to travel for experiences. The satisfaction in local services and

amenities is important for preventing loneliness, as it creates opportunities for social relationships to develop, as well as employment opportunities (Kemperman et al., 2019). The district becomes ‘more’ than its buildings and apartments.

What makes a district stable, despite what is happening, is the range of services, organisations and such, that keep it alive. It’s not about the buildings and the apartments. (Lea)

A city should offer suitable means for livelihood in the community, which includes appropriate facilities for recreation, however, as with any developments or improvements of public spaces, there is a risk of gentrification (Doreen, 2010; Kotus & Rzeszewski, 2013). Therefore, improvements to public spaces need to involve the community to ensure a co-creation process that develops inclusive services (Thrift, 2020).

Tim Cresswell proposes that mobility carries inherent meaning, and is ingrained with notions of power and social value. It is central for the human experience, and for understanding the social world. Cresswell sees a distinction between mobility and movement, where movement is the act of displacement stripped of social implications (Cresswell, 2006, p. 3–4). In the conceived space of Lefebvre’s spatial triad, urban professionals have developed the district with intentions to fulfil a political agenda under the Million Programme. This is evident in the housing of the district, with low-cost, efficient housing blocks scattered across the district. By imagining and planning the district with predominantly dense apartment living, it has created limitations and boundaries for its residents (Lefebvre, 1991). As the city has evolved and changed over time, many low-income groups have moved into the district, which has had the effect of separating them from the rest of society by being clustered into one location. This creates a segregated society, where residents have to travel outside of their district to access better quality resources and amenities, which places them in a vulnerable position.

However, on the contrary, with the help of cycling the women are reasserting their place in society through mobility and through this, claiming power and changing the perception of their bodies in space (Cresswell, 2006). For women, mobility is also a pathway to break free from the notion of domesticity and being place-bound to gain independence (Enevold, 2003, p. 69). Cycling is a deeply normalised activity in Sweden, and by using their bicycles the women are declaring their right to the city, while also performing an activity that is taken for granted by many (Hagström, 2019a; Hagström, 2019b). Similarly, the youth travelling out of the district are through mobility affirming their position in society, and challenging the

structural boundaries that are present in the conceived space. While the distance from the city centre and Lea’s district may not be far in kilometres, the district is surrounded by major highways that close it off. It is a form of visual segregation, and represents being ‘stored away’, which further creates a divide in accessibility to resources (Ristilammi, 1994).

Further to this, in the lived space, the experience of using the bicycle or the bus to move around the city happens at the time the individual is moving, thus without prior expectations. As Lea explained, the youth travel to spend time in shopping malls. However, the act of having to travel through the city as a necessity is felt, and illustrates the uneven distribution of power and resources, which impacts marginalised communities in particular. The physical surroundings can trigger feelings of discomfort, such as seeing only white bodies occupying a particular space, but also in the symbolic value of being ‘stored away’, and having to access certain amenities only through travel (Lefebvre, 1991; Enevold, 2003; Massey, 1994). However, the experience of riding a bicycle has the potential to strengthen the women’s self-esteem. They are through the act of cycling showing their neighbours and the district that they are part of Swedish society (Hagström, 2019a). This process of traveling outside of Lea’s district, either by bicycle or public transport, makes the residents of the district more visible and ‘real’ to the people that have never visited. This exposure may in turn help change attitudes and perceptions towards the residents.

Additionally, the experience in the lived space informs the perceived space, thus how residents view their body in a space. In the perceived space, the individual continuously negotiates their position, and how they are occupying space based on their knowledge and boundaries. The experience of feeling devalued, such as the youth felt, can travel through spaces, and be reproduced in other spaces in the city, if this notion is not challenged (Lefebvre, 1991). This shows that the power dynamic of mobility for the youth in Lea’s district is different than for the youth in the central parts of the city. The youth of the district are required to travel to access some recreational activities, leaving them in a dependency position to the ability to travel (Massey, 1994). However, through mobility the city becomes more accessible and previous barriers, such as limited services and amenities, become available. It is also an empowering act, such as for the women learning how to ride a bicycle, and it signifies social and cultural change (Hagström, 2019a; Enevold, 2003). Thus, mobility plays a significant role in accessibility to knowledge, resources and ultimately, to the sense of belonging in society that is important in the prevention of loneliness.

7. Conclusion & Recommendations

This chapter gives a brief conclusion of this thesis and continues by presenting the applicability of the findings outside of academia, and the implications for further research. To conclude, this thesis is a cultural analytical research project that was conducted in southern Sweden and Denmark. The aim is to understand how social and cultural processes in the city contribute to the experience of loneliness. This is done by exploring the different layers of the city, from housing, the neighbourhood, to the district and city scale. The research is concerned with the phenomenological account of loneliness; thus, how it is perceived and enacted from the perspective of the individual and from a governance perspective. Throughout my research it became evident that trust plays a significant role in the formation of social relationships, and is impacted by the opportunities and limitations that exist in different layers of the city. Trust is vital for preventing loneliness, as it is an essential part of social co-existence in society. People tend to not trust strangers, which may narrow their ability to develop strong social relationships. This causes them to behave in ways that puts barriers up between them and others. For example, it was visible in neighbourly behaviour, where the distrustfulness inhibited the connection between neighbours. In this way, loneliness is enacted in everyday spaces and in the choices and habits of individuals. By encouraging individuals to develop closer social bonds with neighbours, their sense of trust in people can begin to expand beyond their immediate surroundings.

I found that trust is complex and often needs to be established in the close surroundings through bonding before it can expand to wider society and reach bridging. Architecture is more of a cosmetic solution that facilitates social interaction through design. However, the root cause of racism, discrimination and segregation in cities needs to be addressed in order to reach bridging. Thus, it is important to understand the divide between groups, in terms of who is included and excluded from spaces within the city. Otherwise, there is an unequal accessibility to public spaces, which creates a disparity in the opportunities afforded for closer social ties and interaction. The implications to reach bridging are entangled, as without public spaces that offer opportunities for developing trust, individuals are less likely to accept differences in others who may speak, act and look different. Trust also closely correlates with safety. To trust your surroundings is to feel safe within them. It is important to understand that men and women experience public spaces differently, therefore it is vital to consider women’s experiences of the city to be able to develop inclusive cities. Without trust, individuals are bound to drift further apart, and are significantly more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness. By being further

apart, they are less likely to form close social bonds that are established through common interests, and a deeper involvement in each other's personal lives.

Similarly, to trust, belonging is a fundamental cornerstone in society. Trust and belonging do not exist in separation from each other. On the contrary, the two features depend on each other, as without trust there is no opportunity for belonging. Yet, belonging can exist in parts of an individual's life, while still leaving them exposed to loneliness. Belonging is not created by merely placing people in close proximity to one another. In my research I found that individuals can become lonely by feeling societal pressure to behave and act according to a particular role in society, such as occupation or gender. These feelings can become strengthened in spaces in the city, for example, in a dormitory. The loneliness surfaces in the feelings of alienation from the group. The paradox of loneliness is that it is not just the lack of social interactions per se that causes the experience. Rather, my research found that it is the lack of access to social interactions with people who share a similar outlook on life. It is formed in shared ideologies, values, and through accessibility to resources and knowledge of the society one resides in. An individual can have a strong sense of belonging within their family group, yet feel detached from wider society. I found that communities with strong identities and historical ties, and traditions can successfully prevent loneliness for their residents. Further to this, I found that marginalised communities are more prone to loneliness in their segregation from wider society. The ability to travel out and explore the city is an important preventative measure to loneliness, however to combat loneliness there needs to be an adequate effort made in the development of services in marginalised districts.

Loneliness is part of the human condition, however through a cultural analytical approach it is possible to uncover the lived-in account of loneliness and through this, develop dynamic and preventative measures that have a positive impact. As this thesis has shown, trust and belonging, at different layers in the city, should be present to prevent loneliness from developing. Although there may be opportunities to prevent loneliness on an individual level by being close with neighbours, the findings show that they can still be susceptible to loneliness by not feeling connected with the rest of society. Loneliness cannot be solved by one action alone. While the design of our cities has a large role to play in giving people the opportunity to make stronger social connections, the issue of loneliness is more far reaching. It takes cooperation across various organisations, stakeholders and civic society to ensure preventative measures are put in place. Through collective action the potential benefits are made stronger than they would be on their own, due to the snowball effect of one action supporting another.

7.1 Applicability of Findings

The following section outlines the applicability of the findings. To prevent loneliness there needs to be action from civic society and governing institutions. As this thesis has proven, a cultural analytical approach to the development of less lonely cities is important, as it allows for a bottom-up approach that takes into account the end user; the urban resident. The recommendations can add a layer of insight for architects, city planners, as well as be source of inspiration for policy makers in relation to urban development, social infrastructure, and public health. This thesis shows the entangled relationship between the city and its residents, and how we are imbued in our social surroundings. It highlights that loneliness is also institutionalised and visible in racism, discrimination, and segregation, which are prevalent in society. The recommendations below are in small ways attempting to contribute to a positive impact for a less lonely society.

Connecting with neighbours

My research has shown that connecting with neighbours can be filled with expectations and presumptions. The built environment, in particular housing, can greatly assist in creating opportunities for residents to interact. If possible, exploring how the ‘home’ can be extended to the staircases, or other shared spaces, is a way to spark conversations between residents. This can be done by, for example, adding a pinboard outside each flat. This way, residents can put up images, drawings or other small items that showcase more information about who they are, which can help to develop trust between neighbours. For the development of new housing, or redevelopment of existing buildings, shared spaces should be prioritised. Creating meaningful spaces that allow multiple uses to occur is important to consider. For example, when developing shared courtyards, consider how to make these as inclusive as possible, and how to ensure different groups are able to access the space and connect with others. While it is important for people to interact with their neighbours, dense living comes with some challenges and may even be counterproductive to tackling loneliness. To overcome the overwhelming sensation of living in dense housing, architects should consider including ‘break out’ spaces in developments. This enables the possibility to interact, while also allowing residents to mingle in smaller groups. The ‘break out’ spaces can for example, be sectioning off a large space into smaller areas.

Local initiatives

Low-income should not be a barrier for preventing loneliness. The city should offer public spaces that are free of charge, both on a neighbourhood level and district scale, and that promote social ties within the community. The public library and other similar institutions are great resources, but may be located too far away, which can require travel. This travel is not always possible due to financial circumstances, health reasons or other conditions. Therefore, it is fundamental to consider how neighbourhoods and wider districts can assist in the prevention of loneliness. This can include efforts to ensure that local initiatives and mobilisation is encouraged, such as starting a Sunday market or offering historical walks. Such initiatives require strong civic engagement. However, ensuring people have access to knowledge and resources on how to proceed would be an initial step to equalise local community efforts. Where possible, municipalities should engage with local organisations and stakeholders to support their investments and growth in districts.

Invest in local amenities and services

Youth should not have to travel to experience a ‘feeling’ that they are not able to get in an inner-city district. There needs to be an effort made in equalising the investments of services, resources and amenities between districts. Youth from lower income districts should not feel less valued than youth in more central parts of the city. Engaging in conversations with the youth and ensuring the community is part of the renewal process is important to prevent gentrification from taking hold. This includes ensuring that employment opportunities are given to local residents of the district where possible.

Physical characteristics

The physical characteristics of a district may strengthen the community spirit between residents. It is important that renewal projects consider the small historical details that make a place special, which add value to the community. Where possible, these characteristics should be preserved.

Understanding the residents

This ties back to ‘local initiatives’, as understanding the needs of the people that the development is being designed for is imperative. This approach should be reinforced across the planning, architecture and ongoing development of any city. Understanding how different groups in society use spaces is fundamental, for example, women’s mobility patterns after dark,

or elderly people's use of local services. Questions such as – “Who is this for? How will they use it? What does it mean for different groups in society?” – ensures a bottom-up approach to the development of the built environment, regardless of whether it is a housing complex, a park or a new train station. The approach of understanding how people use spaces should be informed by the society they are implicated in, thus their everyday lives. This highlights the importance of communication and talking directly to the residents and users of spaces in the city, to fully understand their needs.

Mental barriers

In my research it became apparent that there are mental barriers in the city. More housing with a mix of social and private dwellings would allow for different groups of people in society to live together. Although belonging is established with people that share a similar ideas, worldview and values, the notion of this only being possible with people from a similar background is counterproductive for wider society. Therefore, with the help of mixed-use housing people from different backgrounds, such as age and ethnicity, can meet and develop social ties and by doing so, prevent loneliness. The cultural analytical approach is fundamental in these types of developments, as for such housing to become successful, the bottom-up approach is necessary to ensure a process that involves future residents. Mixed-use housing has the potential to build knowledge sharing, equalise access to resources, and ultimately, a city that is built on trust and belonging. This has the potential to prevent loneliness in the long-term.

7.2 Implications for Further Research

This thesis has merely touched on the issue of loneliness from a cultural analytical approach. I think what this thesis shows is a need to broaden the understanding of loneliness and explore the issue from a variety of vantage points. In particular, there needs to be more research on loneliness from the cultural analytical perspective exploring topics beyond cities and urban living. This would ensure the lived-in account of loneliness is leading the implementation of preventative measures.

Future research into loneliness and urban living should also investigate the perspective of residents living in marginalised districts to ensure their everyday experience of loneliness are included. I believe there is a necessity to explore the connection between bonding and bridging processes, especially in relation to segregation. As I found in my research there exists mental barriers for people's abilities to live and thrive within their cities. This perspective should also be investigated further.

The impact of loneliness on public health is detrimental, and to truly grasp its magnitude, innovative and interdisciplinary solutions are needed. Therefore, due to its interdisciplinary nature and the ability to make sense of everyday habits and norms, I believe cultural analysis should be at the forefront.

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