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"FOR ME, THIS PLACE IS LESS ABOUT GARDENING THAN IT IS ABOUT COMMUNITY"

Urban gardeners' experiences of social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences
Master's Thesis
April 2022

ABSTRACT

Linda Niemisalo: *"For me, this place is less about gardening than it is about community"*
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Comparative Social Policy and Welfare
April 2020

Socio-spatial segregation is on the rise worldwide. This is also the case in Finland, particularly in the capital city Helsinki. In general, segregation has been defined as the separation of social groups in residential areas. In order to tackle the challenges related to segregation, literature and policy discourse often highlight the need to foster social cohesion among residents. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which a 'community' is achieved among a certain group of people. Simultaneously, research shows that 'third places', including urban gardens, offer residents spaces to interact in a way that they may be able to build a strong sense of community and mitigate the feelings of separation.

The aim of this study was to explore how urban gardeners experience social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki. Asking this question is relevant since this has not been studied previously although residents' experiences on social cohesion in third places are important, particularly in times of increasing segregation. In order to carry out the research, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted and then analyzed thematically.

The findings show that shared interest is the building block for social cohesion in the allotment gardens. Gardeners experienced that shared interests enabled them to identify common goals, which, in turn, helped them to work collectively towards the common good in the allotment gardens. Collective action fostered the generation of acceptance and celebration of diversity and a sense of community and equality. These are all indicators of social cohesion.

This is significant because these findings could help the local decision-makers to understand how social cohesion in certain third places is fostered and what can we learn from them when aiming to build social cohesion in other domains, particularly in times of segregation. Given the paucity of empirical studies exploring the role of third places in segregated settings, findings from the study represent an original and distinctive contribution to the literature on socio-spatial segregation and social cohesion in the context of Helsinki. In addition, the findings provide updated information to the Finnish decision-makers and local authorities to design and develop policies and strategies for social cohesion based on the experiences of residents who actively engage in a community that is somewhat 'outside' of the segregation development.

Keywords: segregation; allotment gardens; social cohesion; third place; collective action

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

Segregation is on the rise worldwide. In general, this phenomenon has been defined as the separation of social groups in residential areas (e.g. Wissink et al. 2016). Neighborhoods are, however, not the only place people spend time, and this notion has resulted in a growing interest in broadening the segregation research to the different domains of life (e.g. Musterd et al. 2017; Piekut et al. 2019).

Segregation does not occur only in residential areas, but also in schools, workplaces, and leisure time activities. Considering leisure time, Oldenburg (1989) introduced the term 'third place' to emphasize the importance of non-work and non-home activities by arguing that free time activities are important in meeting people from different social groups and building sense of community. The ways different social groups interact shape their understanding of others, creating a possible connectedness between different social groups.

Segregation is also increasing in the Nordic countries regardless of their universalistic nature in social policy. Finland is not an exception in this regard. Even though segregation levels in Finland are not high in international comparison, the social groups and neighborhoods are increasingly diverging in many Finnish cities (Vaattovaara 2021). Particularly the capital city Helsinki has experienced a rapid increase in segregation levels in the past decades (Vaattovaara et al. 2021).

From all third places, the potential of urban gardens to bring different social groups together has been widely studied in the international literature (e.g. Artmann & Sartison 2018; Dolley 2020; Firth et al. 2011; Glover 2004; Linn 1999; Veen et al. 2016). Previous literature shows that urban gardens can potentially act as 'third places', which be highly beneficial for a city to fight social exclusion and isolation, bring neighbors together, create possibilities to interact, and this way promote social cohesion (Dolley 2020). However, the social benefits of urban gardens seem to vary greatly over space and time, and therefore it is essential to study this in different contexts.

To date, there is a lack of research on the social benefits of urban gardens in the context of Helsinki. This research aims to fill this gap in research by exploring social cohesion in the allotment gardens

in Helsinki. I chose to focus on social cohesion since the concept is used in both segregation and urban garden research. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which 'community' is achieved among people in the sense of shared values, cooperation, and social interaction (Beckley 1994). In order to explore this, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with urban gardeners. The research question is the following:

How do urban gardeners experience social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki?

Asking this question is relevant since academic knowledge on the allotment gardens' possible social benefits in a segregated setting is extremely scarce, especially in the context of Helsinki. Based on the findings, I further analyzed what is the role of allotment gardens in segregated urban context.

This research extends across many social science disciplines, including sociology, public policy, and social policy, but also urban geography. This study does not aim to present solutions to increasing segregation or to measure the extent of segregation in a particular urban space, but instead looks at how people in certain urban spaces experience social cohesion, and what can be learned from them when building social cohesion in other domains of life.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters including this introduction. Chapter two provides theoretical background that involves the conceptualization of socio-spatial segregation and urban gardens as third places as well as the operationalization of social cohesion. The third chapter describes the policy discourse on segregation in the Finnish context and the structure of the allotment gardens. The fourth chapter outlines the research methods and methodology. Then, chapter five illustrates the findings gathered from data analysis. Chapter six discusses the main findings in relation to the literature and policy discourse on segregation. Finally, chapter six concludes the research, discusses the limitations, possible directions for future research, and recommendations for policy and practice on how to build social cohesion.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is outlined. Theoretical framework of this study consists of the literature on socio-spatial segregation, urban gardens as third places as well as the operationalization of social cohesion. First, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by socio-spatial segregation and urban gardens in this research as they are the key concepts. The terms are conceptualized by reviewing relevant studies on the topics. Then follows an explanation of how social cohesion is linked to socio-spatial segregation and urban gardens, and how it was operationalized in order to conduct this study.

2.1. Socio-spatial segregation

Research has long recognized that segregation can be seen as manifestation of inequalities and separation of social groups within the city (e.g. Musterd & Ostendorf 1998; Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012; van Ham & Tammaru 2016). At the beginning of the 19th century, scholars working within the Chicago school aimed to understand the separation of social groups in cities, describing it as a 'natural' phenomenon (Timberlake & Ignatov 2014). This perspective understands segregation as a mere incident of urban growth and notes that it is a normal element of city life (Burgess 1928), and has influenced a large number of segregation studies and policies in many big cities, particularly in the United States (Timberlake & Ignatov 2014).

Chicago school theory on segregation may be criticized for many reasons. Most importantly, the theory does not consider the deeply rooted inequalities and oppression which in reality are highly related to the phenomenon. Chicago school theory simply describes segregation as a 'natural' occurrence in cities. Although the current system is based on economic growth, which is often characterized by high inequalities, segregation cannot be described as a 'natural' occurrence since the system itself is not. In contrast to the Chicago school theory, in this study, segregation is understood as a phenomenon that may be an "unavoidable consequence of capitalist urban development" (Pacione 1997, p. 55), but by no means a 'natural' occurrence.

In addition, this study understands that segregation is highly contextual, meaning that its' mechanisms, causes, and consequences depend strongly on local circumstances. Regardless of the contextual nature of the phenomenon, some scholars have discussed segregation in a cross-national manner. One example of such works has been conducted by van Kempen and Özüekren (1998) who consider segregation as something far more nuanced and complex than how the Chicago scholars understood the phenomenon. Van Kempen and Özüekren (1998) justifiably noted that one should not apply American segregation theories uncritically to the European context since they differ greatly. More recently, Lloyd et al. (2014) have also taken a rather cross-national perspective on segregation. They explored various methods and data sources that can be used to study segregation in different contexts and conclude that as segregation is also related to time, the concepts should keep pace with a changing world (Lloyd et al. 2014). This thesis focuses on the context of Helsinki, but in line with the van Van Kempen and Özüekren (1998) and Lloyd et al. (2014) perspectives, it understands segregation as a phenomenon that occurs in different ways in different people's lives.

Today, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines segregation as "the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2022). This study uses this definition. Segregation needs to be understood and examined as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon within broader societal processes (Wissink et al. 2016).

However, diverging social groups is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. After all, some levels of division can be understood as an expression of residents' freedom of choice, individuality, and similar values (OECD 2018). This can also mean the emergence of local identity, which can increase interaction between local residents by creating networks and joint activities, which in turn can, at best, strengthen a sense of security, well-being, and community building (Vaattovaara 1998). However, in the policy discourse, segregation is defined as the non-voluntary separation of social groups which is often the consequence of social or economic inequalities and is connected to the lower levels of social trust and other social problems (Uslaner 2012).

Although segregation is often discussed together with social inequality, the two are not synonymous (Piekut et al. 2019). It depends on the social context in which the separation of people

is linked to inequality (Piekut et al. 2019). For example, in more liberal contexts such as in the United States and in the United Kingdom, the link between segregation and inequality is the strongest while in the strong welfare contexts, such as in Finland, where the state ensures a level of distribution and direct intervention, the link is significantly weaker (Piekut et al. 2019l; Musterd & Ostendorf 1998). Yet, in recent years, as the social inequalities have been growing all over the world, the question of diverging social groups is becoming more relevant as it maintains, reinforces, and reproduces spatial inequalities (Galster & Sharkey 2017). Thus, despite not being synonymous, segregation and social inequality may become mutually reinforcing in various contexts. Thus, segregation is not a simple concept but a nuanced, highly contextual, dynamic, and multifaceted phenomenon.

In recent decades, segregation has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Sociology understands segregation as the separation of social groups and the absence of interaction between them (Charles 2003; Wissink et al. 2016). From the sociologist's perspective, segregation results in people interacting in 'social bubbles'. Urban geography, in contrast, focuses on the separation of people in urban space (Schnell and Yoav 2001). The geographical approach to segregation has been more widely used than the sociological approach. When segregation occurs in urban space, it leads to diverging neighborhoods, which in turn increases the possibility that the daily lives of the residents become increasingly disconnected from each other (Schnell and Yoav 2001). Often these two approaches, sociological and geographical, are used separately from one another.

However, the concept of socio-spatial segregation, which is used in this research, aims to combine these two approaches. Socio-spatial segregation consists of two types of segregation. Social segregation refers to the uneven distribution of social groups in city space based on ethnicity, socio-economic background, religion, or gender (Charles 2003). Spatial segregation, on the other hand, is defined as the residential separation of social groups within a whole population (van Kempen and Özüekren 1998). Social segregation and spatial segregation together make socio-spatial segregation which is one of the key concepts of this study.

Social scientists have studied the socio-spatial division of social groups in cities for decades (e.g. Lloyd et al. 2014; Massey and Denton 1988; Schnell and Yoav 2001). However, such studies tend to focus on people's residential locations and study why and to what extent different social groups live apart from each other by using various spatial scales and mapping software (Schnell and Yoav

2001). Yet, the ways people understand segregation in their neighborhoods and other spaces in their daily lives such as in sites for recreational activities are much fewer studied in segregation literature (Kwan 2013). When studies consider other spaces where people spend time outside their residential areas, it allows the research to better evaluate and explore people's experiences of segregation, and ultimately reveal the complexities of social life in contemporary cities.

In recent years, social science studies have increasingly taken into account the complex dynamics of which socio-spatial segregation consists. There is a growing literature that has acknowledged the need to expand the focus of segregation studies to other domains, such as schools (Malmberg et al., 2013), workplaces (Ellis et al., 2004), and leisure time activities and recreational sites (Kamenik et al. 2015; Kukk et al. 2019).

In recent years, research has been increasingly interested in exploring the spaces outside the neighborhoods bringing a new understanding of how different social groups interact in the various domains of their lives (Piekut et al. 2012; Piekut et al. 2019). This is related to the 'domains approach' which conceptualizes segregation across different spaces of life (Kukk et al. 2019). Domains approach has proposed various perspectives to accurately explore segregation and integration in urban space (van Ham & Tammaru 2016). Indeed, studying segregation and integration across different domains rather than in one particular domain enhances understanding of the complex social processes underlying socio-spatial segregation in an urban setting.

From the leisure domain studies, Kukk et al. (2019), discuss the leisure time activities in the Estonian context and conclude that leisure time activities in Tallinn are rather segregated since members of the different ethnic groups tend to visit different leisure sites (Kukk et al. 2019). In the Finnish context, Marucco (2020) studied the leisure and segregation patterns of Finnish Somalis in Turku and found that age, time of migration as well as norms were the main issues shaping leisure segregation and interactions between ethnic Somalis and Finns. Both Kukk et al. (2019) and Marucco (2020) show the importance of segregation studies to explore beyond people's residential spaces to understand how people spend their daily lives, whom they meet and interact with and how, and what kind of communities they create in such places.

To summarize, as this research is conducted from a social science perspective, the interest lies in the complexity of social life. It is acknowledged that segregation is not a normative concept like injustice but rather a condition that requires attention to the different dimensions and domains.

Socio-spatial segregation is not a simple concept but a nuanced, highly contextual, and multi-dimensional phenomenon that may have implications for social life in the cities by hindering integration and encounters. For this reason, it is particularly important to understand more about the different domains that are affected by segregation, and explore the experiences of the residents in those domains. This way one can learn about the ways people may feel less segregated throughout their daily lives.

2.1.1. Segregation in the Finnish context

Recent studies show that socio-spatial segregation is generally on the rise in European cities (see e.g. OECD 2018). Finland is an interesting case in this regard since the segregation levels in the Finnish cities are not as high as in many other European cities. However, there is a consensus among scholars that socio-spatial inequalities have been increasing in recent years, which has resulted in, among other things, spatial differentiation of social groups (Vaattovaara et al. 2021). In fact, the quantitative studies conducted in past decades show that particularly Helsinki is increasingly segregated (see e.g. Siirilä et al. 2002).

Since Helsinki seems to be the most segregated city in Finland, it seems that theories on international segregation mechanisms and patterns seem to apply better in Helsinki than in other Finnish cities (Andersson et al. 2010). However, despite the rising socio-spatial divergence of neighborhoods and social groups, the previous research shows that social segregation in Helsinki appears to be rather "mosaic-like", which means that the spatial dispersion of the underprivileged is relatively scattered in comparison with Europe's other major cities (Siirilä et al. 2002). Siirilä et al. (2002) note that it is thus possible to pinpoint "pockets of poverty" rather than a trend towards polarization (p. 146).

The previous studies show that in Finland, socio-spatial segregation is accelerated by rising inequality and social distance, strengthening of social hierarchies, and the weakening of trust and sense of belonging in Finnish society (Vaattovaara et al. 2021). It has been shown that it is mainly the Finnish middle-class residents' avoidance and residential mobility strategies that is the main cause of residential segregation in Helsinki (Page 2020). This residential segregation mechanism can be regarded as upward income mobility, and it is connected to the theory of exit strategies

from low-income areas (Vaalavuo et al. 2019). Selective mobility of the well-off residents is problematic particularly in the areas where the major population is socio-economically disadvantaged.

In addition to the Finnish origin middle-class residents' avoidance and mobility strategies, the previous research shows that another major mechanism behind segregation is that the ethnic minorities move to neighborhoods with a higher share of immigrants due to discrimination or other problems (Vaalavuo et al. 2019). However, ethnic segregation in Helsinki appears to be different from, for example, the ethnic segregation in the United States. In Helsinki, the reason behind ethnic segregation seems to be more the ethnic minorities' socio-economic status (Vilkama 2011). Residents with migratory backgrounds depend more on social housing, especially in Helsinki, where almost half of the foreign-speaking population lives in socially supported housing, with the corresponding share of the Finnish population being 13 percent (Andersson et al. 2010).

2.2. Urban gardens as third places

Considering how much segregation and rising inequalities have been discussed in past years, very little research has been conducted on social life in places where different people living in a segregated context can meet and interact (Whyte 1980). Apart from work and home, people do spend time in other domains of life too, for example in leisure time activities. As the contemporary cities are increasingly segregated in many life domains, it is extremely relevant to take a closer look at social life in urban spaces outside of work and home.

Third place is an idea developed by Ray Oldenburg (1989) and demonstrated in the book *The Great Good Place.* Third places are informal public places in cities where people may interact in a way that they may be able to build a strong sense of community and mitigate the feelings of separation even if they are from different social groups (Dolley 2020). The interactions in these out-of-home and out-of-work spaces often exhibit inclusivity and openness (Piekut & Valentine 2017). Urban gardens can be regarded as third places since Oldenburg (1989) notes that third places are both public spaces and commercial places such as green areas, parks, cafes, and bars.

Urban gardens have been studied from many perspectives. Previous studies show that urban gardens are third places that not only facilitate informal interactions between people but also create a sense of community among gardeners (Corcoran & Kettle, 2015; Dolley 2020; Firth et al. 2011; Glover 2004; Linn 1999; Veen et al. 2016). Corcoran & Kettle (2015) suggest that urban gardens are "shared politics of place" (p. 1228) that create and sustain civil interfaces. Firth et al. (2011) conducted a case study that describes how the urban gardens create a sense of community. Dolley (2020) shows that in addition, urban gardens are places for "placemaking", helping to connect and integrate people into the place. In this way, urban gardens can foster active citizenship of the gardeners (Linn 1999). Glover (2004) argues that urban gardens are third places where networks between neighbors and the sense of community are strengthened. This indicates that urban gardens have the potential to increase social capital (Glover 2004; Firth et al. 2011). Urban gardens can also be seen as a nature-based solution (NBS) to various social problems (Artmann & Sartison, 2018).

The physical structure of urban gardens can stimulate sociability as the plots are often close to each other, and in most cases, you are not allowed to choose your gardening neighbors. Veen et al. (2016) show that urban gardens are third places where people may relax and enjoy interactions with each other. Purcell & Tyman (2014) analyze the ways urban gardeners produce and manage urban spaces for themselves, the concept known as "right to the city" (p. 1133). Urban gardens have also been shown to decrease loneliness and isolation (Sharif & Ujang 2021), and improve the sense of safety in neighborhoods (Kuo et al. 1998). In sum, previous literature shows that urban gardens are third places where people can gather, network, socialize, and create their own communities.

However, the social benefits of urban gardens highly depend on local circumstances. Just as communities in different cities are diverse, the gardens serve residents in different ways in different places. While numerous studies on the social benefits of urban gardens have been conducted across the world, this has not been studied in the context of Helsinki. Since there is a research gap in the literature on the social benefits of allotment gardens in the context of Helsinki, it is important and relevant to explore this. Additionally, while substantial research has been conducted on social life in urban gardens, this has been rarely done from the perspective of segregation. Although there

seems to be a consensus among scholars that urban gardens bring people together and enable interaction, less attention has been paid to their role in segregated context.

2.3. Social cohesion

Based on the conceptualization of socio-spatial segregation and urban gardens, social cohesion was found to be an integrative concept that emerges in both strands of literature. Segregation discourse often understands the separation of neighborhoods and social groups as a negative element for functioning societies and is in many ways seen as a barrier to social inclusion and social cohesion (van Kempen and Özüekren 1998). Moreover, there is a widespread belief in policy discourse on segregation that fighting segregation contributes to strengthening social cohesion (Cassiers & Kesteloot 2012). This is the case in Finland as well.

Urban gardens, on the other hand, have been regarded as fostering social cohesion in some contexts (Veen et al. 2016). As shown in the previous subchapter, the previous urban garden research shows that the urban gardens contribute to societal challenges in various ways, by strengthening social interactions, mutual help, and a sense of community, which are indicators of social cohesion (Artmann & Sartison 2018; Corcoran & Kettle 2015; Ghose & Pettygrove 2014).

Social cohesion has been explored by many disciplines, including sociology, law, political science, and anthropology. Social cohesion is defined by different authors in different ways which has caused confusion and polemic. In fact, some scholars note that social cohesion is not a concept at all but can be regarded as a "domain of causally interrelated phenomena, as a 'field of forces' or, in more modern language, as a class of causal models, in which some of the major dimensions of social cohesion occupy different theoretical positions with respect to one another as antecedent, intervening, or outcome variables" (Fiedkin, 2004, p. 421).

Research on social cohesion started in the late nineteenth century (Fonseca et al. 2018). According to Fonseca et al. (2018), social cohesion was first theorized by Le Bon in 1897 with the theory of collective behavior and contagion where he distinguished different types of communities that had

different characteristics and studied their relationships. Further ahead, Durkheim (1897) defined social cohesion as the absence of social conflicts, and the presence of strong social bonds (Fonseca et al. 2018).

In recent years, the Council of Europe has defined social cohesion as "the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members – minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation – to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members." (Council of Europe 2008). In contrast to the rather broad definition by the Council of Europe, United Nations Development Programme (UNPD, 2020) conceptualizes social cohesion along two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Vertical social cohesion refers to the trust between government and society, and is measured based on political participation, for example (UNPD 2020). Horizontal social cohesion refers to the trust, relationships and interactions across social groups or other social constructs, including ethnicity and class (UNPD 2020). OECD (2011), on the other hand, defines cohesive society as one which "works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility." (p. 3). In all these definitions social cohesion is understood as a desirable end. The reason why social cohesion has been widely discussed in recent years is the idea that high levels of social cohesion have desirable outcomes for individuals as well as for society as a whole (Arant et al. 2021). So, regardless of the often vague definition, social cohesion is a goal of many policies and part of the segregation discourse.

This study uses Beckely's (1994) definition of social cohesion. Beckley (1994) defines social cohesion as the extent to which 'community' is achieved among certain population in the sense of shared values, cooperation, and social interaction. Along the same lines, van Kempen et al. (2009) describe it as a glue holding society together. This study uses this broad definition of social cohesion because the general aim of this study is to look at how urban gardeners experience social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. The broad definition gives room for the experiences of the gardeners.

In order to study social cohesion in the allotment gardens, it is useful to operationalize the concept. This research operationalizes social cohesion in several elements based on previous literature. Operationalization is also usual for similar concepts such as social capital (Veen et al. 2016).

Operationalization of the concept enables systematic exploration of the ways social cohesion is understood among urban gardeners in Helsinki.

Kearns and Forrest (2000) provide a useful overview of literature on how previous research has operationalized social cohesion, and provide a list of elements that they found in such literature. These elements are: (1) common values and civic culture; (2) social order and social control; (3) social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth; (4) social networks and social capital; (5) territorial belonging and identity (Kearns and Forrest 2000). Many others, such as van Kempen & Bolt (2009) have made use of this operationalization. As Beckley (1994) notes, operationalization enables accurate measurement of social cohesion regardless of it being a rather "slippery" term (p. 4). While these elements are highly interlinked, it is for the purpose of careful examination of social cohesion in allotment gardens to deal with each element separately. Next, follows a short description of each element.

Common values and civic culture

The first element of social cohesion in this research is the sense of shared values. In a cohesive society, members share common values which enable them to identify common aims and objectives (Kearns & Forrest 2000). Common aims and objectives, in turn, help members to set "moral principles" and "codes of behavior" (Kearns & Forrest 2000, p. 997). Thus, society can be understood as cohesive if residents share a common idea on how to conduct collective affairs, and if collectively agreed rights and responsibilities are mostly met (Kearns & Forrest 2000). Previous literature shows that people join gardening communities mainly due to their mutual interest in gardening (e.g. Corcoran & Kettle, 2015; Dolley 2020; Veen et al. 2016). In addition, mutual interest may indicate a sense of shared values, and may lead to cooperation (Purcell & Tyman 2005).

Social order and social control

The second element of social cohesion in this research is social order and social control. According to Kearns and Forrest (2000), this refers to the "absence of general conflict within society and of any serious challenge to the existing order and system" (p. 998). In other words, a cohesive society gets along and comprises intergroup cooperation, respect and celebrates difference and diversity, and does not manifest hatred or prejudice. Schridde (1999) points out that cities have not paid enough attention to social order challenges that are the result of increasing segregation and inequalities. Although Schridde (1999) discusses the issue from the British perspective, the following chapter shows that this is the case in the Finnish context as well.

Social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth

The third element is social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth. According to Kearns and Forrest (2000), this element is particularly visible in the policy goals of the European Union. This refers to the "harmonious development of society and its constituent groups towards common economic, social and environmental standards" (Kearns and Forrest 2000). In other words, a cohesive society is regarded as one with a sense of equality and mutual social support.

Social networks and social capital

The fourth element of social cohesion in this research is social networks and social capital. Kearns and Forrest (2000) note that this element highlights the widespread idea that a "cohesive society contains a high degree of social interaction within communities and families" (p. 999). Beckley (1994) also suggests that social interactions are key for cohesive communities. According to Peters et al. (2010), Beckley (1994) understood social interactions as the "intensive relations in social networks" through which social capital is constructed (p. 94). Indeed, social capital and social cohesion are connected in many ways. In fact, social capital is often understood as a prerequisite for social cohesion (Forrest & Kearns 2001). Putnam (1993) defines social capital as networks, norms, and trust that strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit. Putnam (1993) notes that networks and interactions help individuals to actively engage with other members of the community and in

many ways participate in society. Participation may also create feelings of connectedness, belonging, and acceptance.

In general, third places often offer ground for different social groups to interact. Interactions between people from different social groups are also one way to promote social cohesion, and for this reason, this research is particularly interested in these interactions in the allotment gardens. Yet, it may be argued that interactions in third places are too informal and superficial to foster social cohesion (Henning & Lieberg 1996). In addition, many urban spaces are places of transit where very little or no interaction between strangers occur (Amin & Thrift 2002), or they can be even places of discrimination that discourage minorities from using those places (Gobster 1998). This research is interested to explore the meaning and content of the social interactions in these urban spaces.

Territorial belonging and identity

The fifth element for social cohesion is concerned particularly with notions of place and belonging. According to Kearns and Forrest (2000), a strong attachment to a place contribute to social cohesion through common values, networks, and cooperation, for example. Kearns and Forrest (2000) note that Altman and Low (1992) have defined place attachment as a "sense of security, a link to people who are important to us; a symbolic bond to people, past experiences, ideas and culture (which collectively are important for cohesion), the maintenance of individual and group identity, fostering self-esteem" (p. 1001).

2.4. Summary of the theoretical framework

This chapter presented the theoretical framework which introduced and described the theories that explain why the research problem exists. First, the previous literature on socio-spatial segregation and domains approach to segregation was reviewed followed by literature review on urban gardens as third places. Then followed an explanation of how social cohesion is linked to socio-spatial segregation and urban gardens, and how it is operationalized in this study. Operationalization of social cohesion is necessary to systematically study how urban gardeners experience social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki.

In order to achieve the goal of this research, a relatively broad definition of social cohesion is used. Yet, the operationalization was chosen to be as relevant to urban garden research as possible. Kearns and Forrest's operationalization was seen as very appropriate for this study because the social cohesion elements seemed relevant for urban garden research. Others have studied other elements of social cohesion too. Political participation, for example, is often seen as one of the elements, but it seems less significant when the focus is on the urban gardens. For this operationalization, this study is highly informed by authors measuring related social cohesion or related concepts.

3. Finnish context

This chapter discusses the policy discourse on segregation in the context of Finland as well as describes the structure of allotment gardens in Helsinki. This is essential because, in addition to theoretical framework, it offers a more specific research context through which the findings and conclusions can be viewed.

3.1. Policy discourse on segregation

In the Finnish context, policies have recognized the need to prevent spatial differentiation of social groups since the 1960s (Siirilä et al. 2002). In the earliest discourse, the term spatial differentiation was used more often than 'segregaatio', but now the usage of the latter term has increased (Vaattovaara et al. 2021). This is mainly due to the fact that previously segregation in Finland was not considered an acute problem as in many other cities in the global context (Saikkonen et al. 2018).

Regarding the discourse of segregation in the context of Helsinki, the importance of combating inequality and ensuring the social cohesion of society are often highlighted (Tampereen kaupunki 2018). The Helsinki City Strategy 2017-2021 states that:

"*Curbing the differentiation between population groups and neighborhoods is high on the city's agenda. Maintaining social cohesion is vital for a good and competitive city also in the years to come.*" (p. 20).

Similarly, in The Helsinki City Strategy for 2021–2025, preventing segregation has been raised as one of its main goals:

"*We will seriously address the threat of segregation, listening carefully to what the city's residents have to say on the matter and learning from research. Helsinki will universally practice positive discrimination and combat segregation in all of its activities, stretching from housing policy and zoning to social work and education as well as culture and leisure.*" (p. 35).

The spatial concentration of disadvantage has been identified as one of the main problems related to segregation. Social mixing policies and area-based initiatives have been introduced as a solution or response to such problems (see e.g. Musterd & Ostendorf 1998; Galster & Sharkey 2017). Also in Finland, these responses have been widely used.

In recent years, housing policy in Finland has been focused on improving the most low-income urban districts. In fact, it seems that neighborhood development is increasingly becoming the priority in the Finnish housing policy (Vaattovaara et al. 2021). Especially the development and renovation of suburban neighborhoods has been widely discussed.

Regarding the improvement of disadvantaged urban districts, the City of Helsinki is in the Ministry of the Environment's Suburb Programme 2020–2022 (Ympäristöministeriö n.d.), which aims to foster the development of suburban neighborhoods and prevent their segregation, is one of the key neighborhood development programs in Finland. The goal of this neighborhood development project is to (1) prevent segregation of residential areas, (2) increase the well-being and inclusion of residents, (3) promote the vitality of residential areas, and (4) ensure a good level of services and housing (Ympäristöministeriö n.d.). The program is intended for Finland's largest cities, which choose the suburbs to be developed with the help of the program. The projects in Helsinki are located in the three residential areas: Malminkartano-Kannelmäki, Malmi, and Mellunkylä. The objectives for these projects in the three areas are to develop the functionality and attractiveness of the neighborhood to residents of all ages, improve the well-being of children and young people, and increase the sense of community and safety. For example in Malmi, the plan is to renew the market square and in Malminkartano and Kannelmäki the focus is on the development of the areas surrounding train stations. The Suburb Programme states that the starting point for these development projects is the rise of segregation levels in Finnish cities, particularly in Helsinki. The project document highlights the importance to work collectively with researchers to learn more about segregation as well as social cohesion (Ympäristöministeriö n.d.).

3.2. Allotment gardens in Helsinki

Allotment gardens are urban green spaces that are located almost in every neighborhood in Helsinki. In Finland, an allotment garden refers to a plot of land where individuals may grow food plants or flowers, for example. The plot of land is divided into subdividing pieces, i.e. individual plots, which are assigned to individual gardeners. Allotment garden may consist of only a few or up to several hundred small plots. In Finland, the individual plots are typically 10x10 meters in size. These individual plots are cultivated by individuals, unlike community gardens in which the entire area is cultivated collectively by people. There are in total more than 35 allotment gardens in Helsinki.

In Finland, the allotment gardens are owned by the city. However, the city does not manage the gardens but leases them to the district associations or allotment cultivator associations. These associations rent the individual plots to the gardeners. The rent of the individual allotment is approximately 30-60 euros per year depending on the size of the plot.

The history of Finnish allotment gardens is not studied in detail. However, similar to Germany and the United Kingdom, the first allotment gardens were established for workers who had migrated to the cities from the rural areas to the cities to find employment and a better life in the 19th century (Seppo 2010). In Helsinki, the first urban gardeners were Russians who grew Russian cabbages in the city center and sold them at the Helsinki Market Square (Seppo 2010).

Over time, different types of allotment gardens emerged. Some of the allotments were left for cultivation only, but other areas were leased to the gardeners for the long term and allowed to build a small summer cabin in the garden. These are nowadays called 'siirtolapuutarha' in Finnish. Such allotments are governed by a common plan for the aesthetic appearance of the area, which usually means that the summer cabins look alike.

In this research, the focus is on the allotment gardens that are used for gardening only. Such allotment gardens are called 'viljelypalsta' in Finnish. These allotment gardens are regarded as semi-wild since the gardener can freely decide what plants they will grow and how.

There is no conscious plan for the allotment gardens in terms of appearance, but the City of Helsinki has set some rules regarding maintenance and cultivation. Probably the most important

rule is that the gardeners are not allowed to build cabins or other big settlements in their plots, and they must use the plot mainly for cultivation (Helsingin kaupunki, n.d.). However, many have built fences and small huts, terraces, and similar. Also, one rule is that the cultivation must begin by the end of May each year and the plot should be kept in orderly and tidy condition (Helsingin kaupunki, n.d.). If the gardener does not take care of the plot, they are first notified, and eventually they will lose the plot if the notification does not lead to desirable outcomes.

In the past 10-20 years, urban gardening has become more and more popular in Helsinki. The queues for the allotment gardens are long and many gardeners have to wait for years before they get their allotment. However, this is highly dependent on the location of the garden. In downtown, Lapinlahti allotment garden, there are several hundred people in the queue while on the outskirts of Helsinki one may get a plot already within a year.

While findings of previous studies show that allotment gardens are places for cooperation, mutual help, social interaction, and other factors that are indicators of social cohesion, this is not studied in Helsinki. In fact, Seppo (2010) is one of the few who has documented the social life in allotment gardens in Helsinki. In the book, *Palsta*, Seppo (2010) aims to show the importance of urban gardening to gardeners through photographs and short extracts. Yet, the book is not a systematic study of allotment gardens, but rather a superficial description of social life in the gardens. This present research aimed to take a step forward, and studied social cohesion in the allotment gardens more systematically, and analyzed their role in segregated context.

In addition to *Palsta* (2010), there is an ongoing research project at Helsinki University, Connecting the Plots, that aims to study the potential of the allotment gardens to improve the community vitality and social cohesion of Finnish suburbs. However, this research project focuses on the city of Vantaa. Also, as this project is still ongoing, the findings had not been published before this thesis.

4. Research design

In this chapter, I will present the study design of this research. I will describe the methodological choices and methods as well as the processes of collecting and analyzing data. The goal of this study was to explore how urban gardeners experience social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki. This study chose to focus on social cohesion since the concept emerges in both segregation and urban garden research.

Very different methods have been used to study social cohesion. However, given that the aim is to learn how urban gardeners experience social cohesion, this study chose to use qualitative approach which is in many ways appropriate to collect such data since it allows a more in-depth account of people's experiences and perceptions. Also, qualitative research does not require definitive, black-and-white, data-driven results. Also, 'how' type of research questions often imply more qualitative than quantitative study if it is directed at exploring and understanding some phenomenon in-depth (Yin, 2018).

In order to study how urban gardeners experience social cohesion, this study conducted seven in-depth interviews with gardeners from six different allotment gardens in Helsinki. The individual interviews focused on the gardener's self-reported experiences with social cohesion in these urban spaces. The data analysis method was thematic analysis, and the inductive approach was used.

4.1. Research question

The starting point for this research was the question of what brings people together in times of increasing socio-spatial segregation. I chose to study social cohesion in the allotment gardens because previous literature shows that urban gardens may foster social cohesion in some contexts but this has not been studied in Helsinki. Social cohesion is understood as the glue holding society together (van Kempen et al. 2009) and the extent to which a particular space achieves 'community' in the sense of shared values, cooperation, and social interaction (Beckley 1994). Moreover, social

cohesion was found to be an integrative concept that emerges in both segregation discourse as well as in urban garden research.

This study does not aim to present solutions to segregation or to measure the extent of segregation in a particular urban space but instead understand how social cohesion in certain urban spaces is understood, and what can be learned from the experiences of the urban gardeners when building social cohesion in other domains of life.

Therefore, the aim was to explore the experiences of urban gardeners on social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. Then, based on the experiences of the gardeners, this study further analyzed what is the role of urban gardens in segregated urban setting. The interest is in the potential of urban gardens to act as 'third places' in the city and provide residents ways to meet, interact and ultimately build a sense of 'community' in a segregated context.

What makes this study original and distinctive is the fact that social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki from the perspective of segregation has not been studied previously. What can we learn about social cohesion from these urban spaces? Asking this question is relevant since residents experiences on social cohesion in third places is important in times of segregation.

The research question is:

How do urban gardeners experience social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki?

By answering this question, this research will provide a 'snap shot' of the experiences of urban gardeners on social cohesion in the allotment gardens. This 'snap shot' will show what are the elements of social cohesion in the allotment gardens and provide updated information on how social cohesion can be built in segregated context of Helsinki.

4.2. Data collection

Seven in-depth interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of urban gardeners on social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. Since the intent was to understand the experiences of the gardeners, I chose to conduct semi-structured thematic interviews. In thematic interviews the broad themes of the conversation are pre-decided but the conversation can freely flow in the direction the interview sees important.

The themes for the interviews rose from the operationalization of social cohesion by Kearns and Forrest (2000). The themes for the interviews were:

1. Common values and civic culture

2. Social order and social control

3. Social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth

4. Social networks and social capital

5. Territorial belonging and identity

Considering the first theme, informants' experiences of shared values in the allotment gardens were discussed. The conversation on this theme revolved around the mutual interest in gardening and the feelings of shared values.

The discussion on the second theme, social order and social control, focused on how the gardeners experience diversity in the allotment gardens and to what extent they respect and accept it. As stereotypes and prejudices of 'others' are one reason the social groups and neighborhoods are increasingly segregated, there was an attempt to understand whether these exist among the gardeners.

The theme of social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth were discussed in order to understand perceived equality, mutual help, cooperation, trust, and joint responsibilities in the gardens.

Social networks and social capital were discussed in order to find out the perceived sense of 'community' in the gardens. In this sense, the gardeners were asked about their social contacts,

friendships, and other social networks in the gardens. Special focus was paid to the interactions with diverse people as it has been regarded as one way to promote social cohesion. Also, the attempt was to understand the significance of the social contacts in the gardens to the informants, and whether these created feelings of connectedness, belonging, and acceptance. In other words, the discussion aimed to explore the meaning and content of the social interactions in allotment gardens: rather quality than quantity.

The discussion on territorial belonging and identity was discussed to understand how the perceived sense of 'community' was tied to the particular space and whether it expanded outside the garden setting. The discussions aimed to find out whether there is a symbolic bond between the gardeners and the sense of individual and group identity.

Prior to the main interviews, two preliminary interviews were conducted to find out whether the social dimension is at all visible in the allotment gardens. Due to the lack of previous research on social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki, the preliminary interviews were seen as potentially benefitting the upcoming research. The informants for the preliminary interviews were two chairpersons of different allotment gardens associations and they lasted for 20 to 30 minutes. Additionally, these conversations helped to confirm that the interview themes that were identified from the theoretical framework applied in the context of Helsinki as well. These conversations confirmed that the social dimension is apparent in the allotment gardens.

Not long after the preliminary interviews, the main interviews were conducted. The seven informants were gardeners from six allotment gardens in Helsinki. This means that only two informants have their plots in the same garden, while the rest were all from different gardens. These six gardens were selected to reflect both geographical diversity and to ensure coverage of different neighborhoods with the intention to choose allotment gardens from both low-income and high-income neighborhoods in order for the sample to be representative of the entire population of all the allotment gardens in the Helsinki region. The map below shows the location of the gardens in Helsinki. The gardeners selected for this study are circled red. The green sign shows the locations of all allotment gardens in Helsinki.
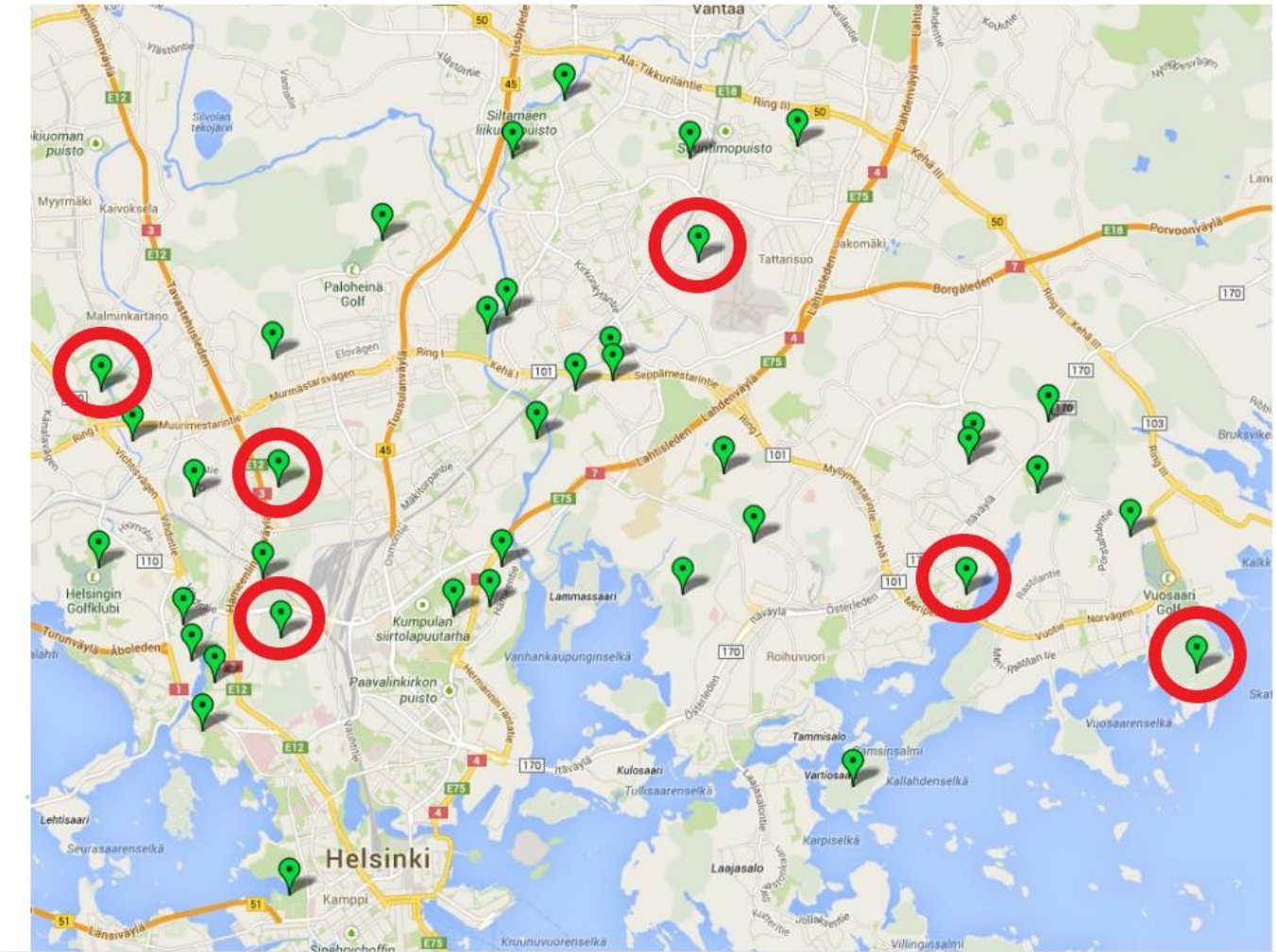
Source: Helsingin kaupunki. *Helsingin Viljelypalstat kartalla.*

The participants were recruited from social media and with the help of the chairpersons of the allotment gardens associations. Of the seven key informants, five were female, and two were male. One of the informants had a migrant background (informant 1) and six identified as Finnish. The fact that the informants were recruited outside the gardening season, i.e. in late autumn and winter, added a challenge to the recruitment process. If I was to conduct the study in summer, the recruitment process could have been easier as then I could have met the potential informants in the gardens. Moreover, in summer, an ethnographic approach would have been appropriate as well.

The participants were aged 33-83. The average age of the participants is 55. The informants had gardening experience in the allotment gardens from 3 to 50 years. Most of the interviews were conducted on Teams but two were on the phone. The aim was to interview a diverse group of gardeners from different backgrounds. Also, it was made sure that those interviewed were not close friends because their networks may overlap and their ways to socialize in the gardens may be similar (Kukk et al. 2018). Six interviews were conducted in Finnish and one in English (Informant 1). The direct quotations presented in the following chapter are translated by me. The original extracts are in the footnotes excluding the extracts of the informant 1 since they are presented in their original language.

All the interviews were recorded and data were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed thematically. Interviews were between 50 and 85 minutes in duration. The interviews focused on the five themes based on the operationalization of social cohesion by Kearns and Forrest (2000).

During the interviews, I was careful not to use the term 'social cohesion' since I sought to understand the informants' own experienced on how social cohesion is built in the allotment gardens. In Table 1, general information on the research informants is presented.

Table 1: General information on research informants

INFORMANT	GENDER	LOCATION OF THE ALLOTMENT GARDEN	ENGAGED IN GARDENING
1	M	Malmi	3 years
2	F	Puotila	~ 50 years
3	M	Puotila	~ 30 years
4	F	Pasila	~ 30 years
5	F	Vuosaari	3 years
6	F	Malminkartano-Kannelmäki	~ 20 years
7	F	Maunula	23 years

4.3. Ethical considerations

Since the data collection method was semi-structured interviews, some ethical considerations needed to be considered.

First, informal consent was obtained from the informants prior to the study. Informed consent was sent to each informant before the interview took place. The consent form provided detailed information to informants about the nature of the research stating that participation is voluntary, and highlighted that the informants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wish to do so.

Second, the consent was asked again right before the interview. The informants were notified that the interviews will be recorded. I highlighted that the data will be anonymous so that no individuals cannot be identified by the reader of the interview transcripts or the thesis.

Third, the anonymity of research informants was ensured by processing personal data in a manner that makes it impossible to identify individuals from them. In addition, any unnecessary personal information was not collected at all.

4.4. Data analysis

I used thematic analysis for analyzing data. Thematic analysis is a popular method in the qualitative analysis since it is rather flexible and can be used to study diverse topics. Thematic analysis can be defined as: "… the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data" (Maguire & Delahunt 2017, p. 3353). In other words, thematic analysis aims to identify themes that are important or interesting for the topic studied, and then use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Therefore, it is more than simply summarizing the data, but rather interpreting and making sense of it. Various data can be analyzed thematically, including in-depth interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is particularly useful method for identifying patterns from data and thus understanding informants' perspectives on a topic (Maguire & Delahunt 2017).

In the analysis, I applied six steps to identify patterns and themes (see e.g. Maguire & Delahunt 2017). The six stages of thematic analysis are not always straightforward but often require moving back and forth between the stages.

In the first stage, my goal was to familiarize myself with the data by searching for meanings and patterns. This included transcribing data and then reading the interview transcripts several times. I aimed not to create the codes yet but started to focus my thoughts on potential codes to create in the next stage. Codes are the smallest units of analysis and the starting point for organizing data into patterns and finally themes.

In the second stage, I was familiar with the data so I started to generate the initial codes. In this stage, I used colored pens to identify popular words from printed interview transcripts. From these highlighted words, I generated mind maps which helped me to understand patterns and meanings. Here, I focused on identifying the interesting excerpts and then applied the appropriate initial codes to them. This required me to read through the interview transcripts many more times. A vast number of initial codes were identified from the data at this point. These highlighted initial codes and mind maps proved useful in the later stages of data analysis since I was able to return to them whenever needed.

In the third stage, I started to look for potential themes. I did this by looking at the initial codes that were highlighted with colored pens. At this stage, I started using Atlas.ti software in order to arrange the codes. When familiarizing myself with the data, it was useful to have printed versions of the interview transcripts, but in the following steps, the software proved very convenient. In the end, from the highlighted initial codes, some became sub-themes and some final themes of the research. At this stage, the initial codes were collated into final codes and sub-themes by using Atlas.ti. Table 2 shows the codes and sub-themes that had identified at this stage. As I used inductive approach to generate the themes, the themes were identified from the data. This is opposite to deductive approach which identifies the themes from previous research and theoretical framework. Although I used the operationalization of social cohesion to formulate the thematic interviews, these were the final themes for the analysis.

In the fourth stage, I collated sub-themes and identified four distinct themes from the coded data (Table 2). I did this by grouping the codes first into sub-themes and then into themes. Then, I looked at the frequency and distribution of the sub-themes in the data (Table 3). At this stage, I had to discard one theme because there was not enough data to fully support it and because it was not particularly meaningful for the research question.

The fifth stage included revising and defining the themes that were identified from the data. At this stage, I chose the final names for the themes: shared interest and common goals, social diversity, social community, and equality (as evident from Table 2). Since one theme had to be discarded in the previous stage, I aimed to make sure during this stage that I have enough data to support all the remaining themes.

Then, as the last step, I started to formulate the themes into a narrative by writing the analysis. At this stage, I had identified and defined all the four themes and started to work on the analysis chapter in which I analyze the themes and discuss the findings.

Table 2: From the codes to themes

Interview excerpts	Examples of codes	Sub-themes	Themes
"...we all want to keep the garden nice and cozy because we all spend so much time there and… because gardening is important to all of us… it is extremely easy to find topics to talk about with others. We all care about the weather, for example, because crops need rain and sun."	Watering, food systems, cultivation, weeding, planting, composting, bug removal, harvesting, prevention of plant diseases	Interest in gardening chores and activities	Shared interests and common goals
	Community projects, reaching out to the fellow gardeners, telling others that they can ask for help if needed	Fostering social relationships within the community	
	Environmental footprint, food systems, water system, food consumption, and disposal	Interest in sustainability	
	Care for the common areas in the garden, care for the surroundings of the garden	Care for the urban environment	

"It's a very diverse group of people… we are all little different from each other" *"…there is widespread acceptance and everyone are encouraged to cultivate their plot as they wish… everyone is accepted in the way they are… we are all different, but it doesn't matter here…"*	Social categories, demographics, distinct characteristics and qualities, differing motivations, knowledge and experiences	Awareness of the social distinction of the group	Social diversity
	Appreciation of cultural differences and generations, respect for different views, knowledge-sharing between different people	Respecting and appreciating others	
"…the social aspect is absolutely key. I've often thought how wonderful it really is to have these people in my life. For me, this place is less about gardening than it is about community…"	Cooperation, mutual help, knowledge-sharing, listening and encouraging others, sharing information on collective affairs, group spirit, trust	Social support	Social community
	Social interactions, meaningful social connections between the members, emotional connections, decrease in loneliness and isolation	Social networks	

	In-group and out-group rhetoric, sense of belonging, membership, work towards supporting inclusion	Shared participation and identification as a group	
"...in the garden the clothes don't tell anything about a person's social status…" *"The cars are left far away"*	Clothing, gardening accessories	Appearance	Equality
	Recognition of decreased stereotypes and prejudices, correcting stereotypes of others	Diminishing stereotypes and prejudices	
	Lack of fine clothes, accessories, cars Social status not visible or discussed	Paucity of status symbols	

Table 3: Frequency of the sub-themes

Sub-themes	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	Total
interest in gardening chores and activities	3	6	7	5	6	5	3	**34**
Fostering social relationships within the community	1	1	-	1	2	5	1	**11**
Interest in sustainability	1	1	1	-	1	2	-	**6**
Care for the urban environment	2	4	4	5	-	4	5	**24**
Awareness of the social distinction of the group	2	1	1	2	5	4	3	**18**
Respecting and appreciating others	5	1	5	4	3	6	1	**25**
Social support	6	4	4	5	6	7	2	**34**
Social networks	9	3	8	6	7	9	4	**46**
Shared participation and identification as a group	1	-	-	1	-	3	1	**6**
Appearance	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	**4**
Diminishing stereotypes and prejudices	2	-	-	2	-	2	-	**6**
Paucity of status symbols	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	**5**

Table 2 demonstrates the coding process from the codes to sub-themes and then to themes. In this process, I identified four themes of how the urban gardeners experience social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. Table 3, on the other hand, shows the frequency and distribution of the sub-themes in the data. In Table 3, the prevalence of sub-themes is shown for each individual informant. I1 refers to informant 1, I2 to informant 2, and so on. In the following section, I will discuss each theme separately focusing on the frequency and occurrence of the sub-themes in the data.

Shared interests and common goals

Shared interests and common goals was the first theme that emerged from the data. This theme consists of four sub-themes: interest in gardening chores and activities, fostering the social relationships within the community, interest in sustainability, and care for the urban environment. From the sub-themes, interest in gardening chores and activities appeared and reappeared most frequently. All informants referred to this sub-theme in the conversations. Interest in gardening chores included codes such as watering the plants, weeding, planting, composting, bug removal, harvesting, and so on. Of the latter three, the second most frequent sub-theme was the common goal to care for the urban environment which was also discussed by most informants. This included care for the common areas as well as the care for the surroundings of the garden. Fostering social relationships within the community involved codes such as community projects, and reaching out to fellow gardeners, to name a few.

Social diversity

The second theme that emerged from the interview transcripts was social diversity which consists of two sub-themes. Both sub-themes appeared frequently in the data. All informants referred to both sub-themes in the conversations. Respecting and appreciating others were discussed slightly more frequently including the appreciation of cultural differences and different generations, respect for different views, and knowledge-sharing between different people. Interestingly, knowledge-sharing between different people occurred most frequently.

Social community

The third theme is the social community which consists of three sub-themes: social support, social networks, and shared participation and identification as a group. These three sub-themes appeared most frequently in the data. The informants discussed social support and social networks most often. In fact, social networks occurred most frequently in all the sub-themes. Social network consists of numerous codes such as social interactions, meaningful social connections between the members, and emotional connections.

Equality

The final theme that emerged from the interview transcripts was equality. In total three sub-themes were identified from the data relating to this theme. The appearance and reappearance of these sub-themes were not particularly frequent, yet equality was regarded as a meaningful theme for answering the research question as it is an important element of social cohesion. In other words, it is not always only about the frequency of the theme since certain codes may not appear often but may support the answer to the research question. For this reason, equality was identified as the final theme regardless of the relatively infrequent occurrence.

5. Social cohesion in allotment gardens

In this chapter, the findings are presented. The study identified four themes looking at the ways the research informants experienced social cohesion in the allotment gardens. The four themes are: shared interest and common goals, social diversity, social community, and equality. In this chapter, these themes are discussed separately although they are highly connected.

It was clear already during the interviews that the gardens are deeply meaningful spaces to the gardeners. All the informants reported that the garden means a lot to them, and an overwhelming majority noted that they feel strongly connected with the gardening community in their respective gardens.

5.1. Shared interest and common goals

The first theme that was identified from data analysis, was shared interest and common goals. All informants shared mutual interest in gardening but many also described that they have a common interest in urban environment and sustainability, for example. In the quote below, Informant 7 explains that regardless of their differences, the gardeners felt that they are 'in the same boat' since the garden brings people together with shared interests. The quote shows that the informant regarded allotment gardens as diverse places, but does not see diversity as a barrier to shared interests and common goals. This makes shared interest a significant finding of this study:

> *"Nowadays it has been widely discussed how lonely people are since it is not easy to socialize in the cities. Today we have no places in the cities where people can meet each other, but in the allotment gardens, it's possible. People from different backgrounds and different ages can meet and feel a real sense of belonging… although we are all very different from each other, gardening brings us together. Gardening is something*

we all have in common. I might not have even the same language with someone, but still, we understand each other and help each other because we have a shared purpose. In that sense we are like-minded." [1] (Informant 7)

It is apparent from the interviews that shared interest enabled gardeners to identify common goals and work towards them collectively, which, in turn, led to sense of community and equality and appreciation and celebration of diversity. These are all indicators of strong social cohesion and will be discussed in the next sections. This suggests that shared interests is the building block for social cohesion in the allotment gardens.

In their operationalization, Kearns and Forrest (2000) viewed common values and civic culture as the primary element of social cohesion. According to Kearns and Forrest (2000), in a cohesive society, members share common values which enable them to identify common aims and objectives.

It is an important finding that in the allotment gardens, regardless of diversity, shared interest and common goals created 'common values' that enabled people to work collectively. Thus, 'common values' were not the starting point for how gardeners experienced social cohesion, but they were created along the way:

> *"No, we certainly don't have shared personal values… we are all so different from each other. It is rather that… we all want to keep the garden nice and cozy because we all spend so much time there and… because gardening is important to all of us… it is extremely easy to find topics to talk about with others. We all care about the weather, for example, because crops need rain and sun."* (Informant 1).

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[1] "Kauheesti nykyään puhutaan siitä, että miten yksinäisiä ihmiset on, kun kaupungeissa ei ole niin helppo sosiaalistua. Tänä päivänä kaupungeissa ei ole paikkoja missä tavata muita, mutta toi on sellanen paikka, että tällanen on mahdollista. Siellä ihmiset eri taustoista ja eri ikäiset voi tavata ja tuntee oikeeta yhteenkuuluvuutta… vaikka me ollaan kaikki tosi erilaisia, niin on se viljely joka yhdistää. Viljeleminen on asia joka on meille yhteinen. Mulla ei välttämättä oo ees samaa kieltä kaikkien kanssa, mutta silti me ymmärretään toisiimme ja autetaan toisiimme, koska meillä on yhteinen tarkoitus. Siinä määrin ollaan samanmielisiä."

The interviews showed that shared interest in the gardens typically strengthened cooperation and collective work. All informants perceived that collective action is a big part of the gardening community. In this research, collective action was defined as the ways gardeners reported engaging in mutual help and worked together in order to achieve something. The importance of collective action is an important finding because it led to the acceptance and celebration of diversity and other elements of social cohesion. In addition, social cooperation depends to a great extent on the degree to which citizens trust each other (Uslaner, 2012). Collective action was also much appreciated and highlighted as a significant part of social life in urban gardens:

> *"Now that I think, yes, you can see cooperation everywhere. For example, we take turns with my gardening neighbor in watering the plants in our plots when it's dry... And, if someone leaves for a vacation, we help to keep their plot in order. And then people exchange things with each other. I got some potatoes from someone when they told me that they don't need that much. I had some leftover sunflower seedlings, so I gave seedlings for the potatoes… Also, we exchange tools and other stuff… And we make an effort together to keep the common path nice and tidy… we also have bees in autumn and in spring. Then we divide the chores that need to be done… and we do them together… And then we have some coffee and buns when all the chores have been finished."* [2] (Informant 5)

While collective action has been regarded as one key to social cohesion (e.g. Harris & Young 2009), this study importantly found that, in allotment gardens, it was shared interests and common goals that led to collective action.

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[2] Nyt kun mietin niin joo, kyllä, yhteistyötä näkyy kaikkialla. Tää mun lähinaapuri on sellanen jonka kanssa me just kastellaan vuorotellen sillon kun on kuivaa, esimerkiksi... ja jos porukkaa on poissa, niin kun vaikka lomalla jossain, niinkun autetaan toisiamme pitämään palstat kunnossa. Sitten ihmiset myös jakaa asioita. Sain joltain perunoita kun hänellä oli liian paljon noita siemenperunoita ja hän sanoi, että hänellä ei ole käyttöä näin paljolle. Mä vastalahjaksi annoin auringonkukan taimia, niin ne mä annoin sit hänelle. Ja muutakin tarviketta me vaihdellaan, niin kun työkaluja... ja sitten meillä on talkoot syksyllä ja keväällä. Niissä me jaetaan tehtävät mitkä pitää tehdä ja sitten tehdään ne yhdessä... ja sitten on kahvia pullaa kun kaikki tehtävät on tehty."

5.2. Social diversity

The seven key informants range in age from 33 to 83. The informants described an average gardener as Finnish, middle-class female in their 60s or 70s. Despite all informants reflecting that it is relatively easy to describe the average gardener, all of them also highlighted that the gardening community consists of a socially diverse group of people: *"It's a very diverse group of people… we are all little different from each other"*[3] (informant 5).

The informants noted that the differences across gardeners are based on age, gender, ethnicity, language, educational background, and socioeconomic status. Diversity can also be seen in the different motivations, perspectives, and experiences in gardening. In other words, it is apparent that the allotment gardens in Helsinki are places for social diversity. Informants with decades of gardening experience, commented on the demographics of the allotment gardens by reflecting the changes in age and background over the years. They all noted that diversity has increased over the years:

> *"There is a whole new generation now although I would say that… I'm still a quite typical gardener. I mean, I am 67 years old and I'd say that there are still many gardeners from my generation… but I can see the change, there is a whole new generation now. Today the community consists of young families and some with academic background… older people…people with migrant background… all kinds of people... the gardening community used to be more homogenous, let's say, ten or twenty years ago… but it is a good thing… all these different people have different knowledge on how to cultivate… I think that the young learned it all from the internet since they are so knowledgeable… our way to*

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[3] "siellä on niin monipuolinen joukko ihmisiä... me ollaan kaikki vähän erilaisia"

cultivate is more traditional… and some come with their children… I think

there are many kinds of people there…"[4]   (Informant 4).

This quote shows that many had gathered information about 'others' habits and knowledge, categorizing people into social categories of ethnicity and age, for example. Although the differences between the gardeners were widely recognized, diversity was received and discussed in a particularly positive manner. All gardeners agreed that the gardening community benefits from social diversity. In fact, diversity was often not only accepted but also celebrated. Most of the informants described the diversity as pleasant, valuable, and beneficial. In fact, this was a significant result, particularly in light of socio-spatial segregation. Importantly, the celebration of diversity seemed to occur particularly between people who might otherwise not be in contact with one other:

"*I have learned so much about gardening from my gardening neighbor*
who is from Turkey. I could not be happier that I got to know him. I would
have never gotten to know him without this community. This diversity…
simply promotes my well-being." (Informant 1)

"*The atmosphere is uplifting… there is widespread acceptance and*
everyone is encouraged to cultivate their plot as they wish… everyone can
spend time in their plot as they would do in their own backyard… everyone
is accepted in the way they are… we are all different, but it doesn't matter
here. In fact, everyone is encouraged to be themselves, not to merge into
the group but bring their very own knowledge to the community" [5]
(Informant 5).

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[4] "…on kokonaan uusi sukupolvi siellä vaikka sanoisin, että… ehkä mä oon siltikin sellanen suht tyypillinen viljelijä. Tarkoitan siis, että mä oon 67-vuotias ja sanoisin, että tommosia mun ikäpolven viljelijöitä siellä näkyy paljon… mutta mä nään muutoksen kans, sinne on tullut tällanen uusi sukupolvi nyt. Nykyään siellä yhteisö koostuu nuorista perheistä ja joillakin on akateemista taustaa… vanhuksia… ulkomaalaistaustaisia…. kaikenlaisia ihmisiä… tää yhteisö oli homogeenisempi sanotaan vaikka kymmenen-kaksikymmentä vuotta sitten…. mutta tää on hyvä… kaikki erilaiset ihmiset viljelee eri tavoilla…. uskoisin, että nuoret oppivat netistä, kun he tietävät niin paljon… meidän tapa viljellä on perinteisempi… ja osalla on lapsia siellä mukana… ja musta on siellä on hyvin erilaisia ihmisiä…"

[5] "siellä vallitsee sellanen tsemppaus henki… sellanen laaja hyväksyvä henki, että niin kun kannustaa toisia olemaan ja viljelemään sitä palstaansa juuri niin kun haluaa… että jokainen saa elää siellä palstalla niinkun

These quotes show how diversity is celebrated in the allotment gardens. In fact, many scholars note that group-level acceptance of diversity can be seen as a core feature of cohesive society and may lead to higher levels of trust (see e.g. Uslaner 2012; Arant et al. 2021). Moreover, Arant et al. (2021) note that subjective acceptance and celebration of diversity fosters social cohesion much more than the objective level of diversity in societies or communities. Many raised that it is particularly the minority ethnic groups that bring their diverse knowledge and experiences in gardening:

> *"Last summer I was thinking how international the community really is. My gardening neighbor is from Thailand… Then on the opposite side, there are people from Hungary… and then there are people from Far East Russia, from the other side of the Ural Mountains, they are a great couple. Then there are Estonians and one lady from Nepal, or in fact, there are two ladies from Nepal, I got to know them last summer. This internationality is beneficial because we can exchange seeds and seedlings. All these people have some exotic stuff… others can learn from them. The Finnish could also grow something else than only potatoes or carrots."* [6] (Informant 6)

Careful examination of the interview transcripts showed that diversity is mostly celebrated particularly when gardeners were in close contact with different people. This finding is in line with previous literature. As Tropp & Pettigrew (2005) suggest, contact with people of different backgrounds does lead to a reduction in prejudice and stereotypes against 'others'.

In summary, the findings show that the allotment gardens are places for acceptance and celebration of social diversity. Shared interests and common goals enabled gardeners to work collectively with

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takapihallaan… kaikki hyväksytään sellaisina kuin ovat… me ollaan kaikki erilaisia, mutta sillä ei ole merkitystä siellä. Oikeastaan kaikkia kannustetaan olemaan omia itsejään eikä vain sulautumaan ryhmään, vaan tuomaan heidän oma osaamisensa yhteisölle."

[6] "Viime kesänä siinä mietinkin, että miten kansainvälinen ryhmä se onkaan. Että mun viereinen naapuri on thaimaasta kotoisin… Sitten vastapäätä on unkarilaisia… no sitten on Venäjältä Kaukoidästä, Uralin takaa, hieno pariskunta siinä. Sitten on virolaisia ja on nepalilainen nainen, tai oikeastaan kaksi naista, tutustuin viime kesänä. Tässä kansainvälisyydessä on kaiken lisäksi se hyvä puoli, että voidaan jakaa siemeniä ja taimia. Kaikilla näillä on eksoottisia juttuja… toiset voi oppia heiltä. Vaikka suomalaiset vois joskus kasvataa muutakin kun perunoita ja porkkanoita.

each other. This led to familiarity with each other and importantly fostered acceptance and celebration of diversity. The acceptance and celebration of diversity were experienced to be widespread in the gardening community which is an important finding, particularly in times of segregation.

5.3. Social community

The social community was experienced as an important element of social cohesion in allotment gardens in Helsinki. Based on the interviews, the sense of community mainly consists of the sense of connectedness and belonging, mutual help, cooperation, knowledge sharing, social support, social networks and interaction, and solidarity. Many informants described the community as particularly meaningful:

> "*It is our small and lovely community… it means so much to me… My current life is completely dependent on gardening, mainly on the time spent there and on friendships. The social aspect is absolutely key. Yes, going there is a priority for me, one of the most important things in my life right now. I've often thought about how wonderful it really is to have these people in my life. For me, this place is less about gardening than it is about community. I cannot but say how wonderful it is there… it gives so many positive things to my life… also my friends reminded me to tell you how lovely and wonderful places the allotment gardens are".*" [7] (Informant 6).

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[7] "Se on on meidän pieni ja ihana yhteisö… tää merkitsee minulle niin paljon… Mun tämän hetkinen elämäni on täysin riippuvaista viljelystä, oleskelusta palstalla siellä syntyneistä ihmissuhteista. Sosiaalinen aspekti on aivan avainasemassa. Kyllä, viljely on äärimmäisen tärkeää mulle, yksi tärkeimmistä asioista mun elämässä. Usein mä mietin, että miten upeaa, että on nää ihmiset mun elämässä. Mulle tää paikka liittyy enemmän yhteisöllisyyteen kuin itse viljelyyn. Ei voi muuta sanoa kuin, että miten ihanaa täällä on… tää tuo paljon positiivisuutta mun elämään.. myös mun ystävän muistutti, että pitää korostaa sulle kuinka ihanaa ja upeaa näillä palstoilla on."

This quote shows that, for some, the community played a remarkably significant role in their lives. For many, garden involvement provided a sense of joy and happiness. Most informants described the community as an important part of their social life in general, and many noted that socializing in the garden was more important than the gardening itself. For many, allotment gardens created a sense of community where they found a sense of belonging and connectedness in the city. When asked about the meaningfulness of the community, most informants described it as an addition to their social lives. However, the social community was not important to all. However, those who noted that community was not important to them personally, stated that it is still visible in the gardens.

Both mutual help and knowledge sharing were highlighted in the interactions between different social groups. Thus, it seems that particularly different people learn from each other in the allotment gardens:

> *"A couple of years ago, a young couple came next to our plot and well, it's a bit of a thing that we, the elderly, sometimes think that we have to give advice to the young because they don't know much about these things! But then it turned out that they had a lot of knowledge about gardening that we didn't have, and sharing that knowledge and advice has been extremely useful and eye-opening… I'm always happy when I become aware of the fact that I'm not all-knowing although I'm older… sometimes it is the young people who know better… and hopefully they experience it in a similar way, I don't know, I haven't asked…"* [8] (informant 4).*
>
> *"I had made a flower bouquet but one flower was knackered so I gave it to the person from Thailand… she has become my friend too… she told me that in Thailand you should never give one flower, there should always*

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[8] "Nyt tuli ihan pari vuotta sitten sellanen nuoripari siihen ihan meidän viereen, ja tuota, se on vähän samanlainen juttu, että me tämän ikäiset joskus aina kuvitellaan, että meidän pitää neuvoa niitä ku ei nuo nuoret mittää tiedä näistä hommista! Mutta sitten kävikin niin, että heillä oli hirveesti tietoa, niin kun sellasta viljelemiseen liittyvää tietoa mitä meillä ei ole ja sen tiedon ja vinkkien vaihto on hirveen hyödyllistä ja avartavaa… mä olen aina iloinen kun havahdun siihen faktaan, että en mä ookkaan kaikkitietävä vaikka mulla on ikää… joskus nuorempi voi tietää jostain asiasta paljon enemmän… ja toivottavasti he kokevat sen samalla tavalla, en tiedä, en ole kysynyt…"

be two or more… one can learn about different cultures this way…" [9]

(Informant 6).

For many, the micro-communities seem to be the most important, and the garden neighbors often knew each other well. Even those who said that the social aspect is not personally important to them valued the contact with the gardening neighbors the most. In addition, most informants did talk to strangers in the allotment gardens too, although most conversations with strangers were rather short and related strictly to gardening.

Moreover, the interviews indicated that mutual help and cooperation with gardening chores is widespread. Mutual help was given and received in tasks such as maintaining common areas, in jobs that require two people, and helping others with watering when they were out of the city. In addition, gardeners exchanged seeds, plants, vegetables, and tools. Additionally, many informants perceived that social support and solidarity were very strong in the allotment gardens. One informant gave an example:

> *"There is a rule that you are not allowed to have tall plants in your plot…*
> *a short time ago my gardening neighbor had a beautiful rose but it grew*
> *too long and he was notified about that by the association… but the rose*
> *was so beautiful… in the end, he was told that he must cut the rose… it*
> *was horrible… we, the neighbors, said that it was not necessary… we*
> *didn't mind that the rose was so long… we were on his side, absolutely…*
> *but the association was right, it was too long, but I even told the*
> *association members that we didn't mind… the person was so sad about*
> *it… but rules are rules… and also, another example is that one day we*
> *had a bonfire there and police came to tell us that it's not allowed… it*
> *stirred up some general hilarity among us… I almost asked the police*

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[9] "…mä olin tehnyt kukkakimpun, mutta siinä oli yksi kukka poikki, niin annoin tälle thaimaalaiselle sen katkennen kukan… hän on tullut mun ystäväksi myös… niin hän sanoi, että Thaimaassa ei saa antaa yhtä kukkaa, että pitää olla aina kaksi tai enemmän… oppii siis paljon asioita eri kulttuureista tällä tavoin"

don't they have anything more important to do…in these examples you
can see that the group spirit is so strong…" [10] (Informant 6)

Also, many informants had experienced thefts and vandalism as the gardens are open recreational spaces in the city. Often the gardeners discussed these issues from the perspective of solidarity and social support: "*we've all together pondered on how to avoid these thefts but didn't come up with a solution yet… this is our common problem…"* (Informant 1)

One informant summarized:

> "*It is important that you care about others' plots too… I have seen many*
> *times when a stranger has come to the garden and started picking berries*
> *or taking potatoes from the ground… I go to tell them that I will call the*
> *police… I understand if someone wants to take one carrot or potato, if*
> *they want to taste a bit, but I don't understand why they steal everything…*
> *but often they come at night… then you can't do anything about it…"* [11]
> (Informant 7).

Gardeners also raised awareness around loneliness, social isolation, and exclusion and noted that allotment gardens are places where those feelings can be reduced. One informant explained this from his own experience:

> "*…as a migrant, I often have feelings of not belonging to the group… it'd*
> *be easy for me to isolate… but luckily I found this garden community…*
> *here it was easy to make Finnish friends. Much easier than elsewhere.*

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[10] "Siellä on sellainen sääntö, että ei saa olla liian korkeita kasveja palstalla… jokin aika sitten mun naapuri, hällä oli hieno ruusu, joka kasvoi liian pitkäksi ja hänelle sanottiin kerran siitä, että se pitäisi leikata… se oli kauheeta… me naapurit sanottiin että nokun ei tarvitsisi… meitä ei haitannut se liika pituus… me oltiin hänen puolella ehdottomasti… mutta hallitus oli oikeessa siinä, kun se oli liian pitkä, mutta mä puolustin häntä hallitukselle, että meitä ei haittaa… mutta säännöt on sääntöjä… toinen esimerkki on kun meillä oli nuotio siellä ja poliisit tuli ja se herätti yleistä hilpeyttä meidän keskuudessa… melkein sanoin niille poliiseille että eikö teillä ole muuta tekemistä… että näissä esimerkeissä näkyy se yhteishenki mun mielestä…"

[11] Se on tärkeetä, että välitetään muidenkin palstoista… mäkin oon nähnyt monta kertaa kun tuntematon hiipparoi siellä ja alkanut poimimaan marjoja tai ottamaan perunoita maasta… ja sanonutkin yhdelle sun toiselle, että mä soitan poliisit… ymmärrän jos ottaa yhden porkkanan tai potaatin, ymmärrän vallan mainiosti jos haluaa vähän maistaa, mutta jos vie koko sadon niin se menee jo yli ymmärryksen… usein nää tapahtuu yöllä, sillon ei oo mitään tehtävissä…"

Here I feel like an equal member of the community… I feel that I can trust
the people here" (Informant 1).

The informant with migrant background brought up an important aspect, namely that he feels as though the allotment gardens are places where it is easier to socialize, even if you are part of the minority group. In this quote, the informant also brought up that he trusted the other gardeners. This is in line with Uslaner's (2012) view that diverse communities will lead to higher levels of trust, but only if people also have diverse social networks.

All informants believed that by going to the gardens, it was possible to address many social sustainability issues related to the quality of life. For some, this was viewed as life-changing. Most informants noted that the main part of gardening was to develop social connections and networks. For retirees, migrants, and new residents of the neighborhoods the social community of the gardens was seen as essential:

"*It is, at least for me and many other retirees, a wonderful place to go,*
spend time and talk to people… especially now that there was this
pandemic, we weren't allowed to go anywhere else, so we could meet
different people here." [12] (Informant 4)

This quote shows that the importance to the elderly was pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the risk groups, including the elderly, were suggested to stay at home or meet people outside, allotment gardens served as safe places to socialize while keeping a social distance.

Some informants reflected on how their involvement in the garden facilitated their connectedness with the neighborhood. The informant who had moved to a new city raised that allotment gardens helped them to integrate into the new neighborhood: *"For many, it is like an extension of the home, like another living room or backyard… for me, it has made me feel at home in Vuosaari. Thanks to the allotment garden, I feel that I have rooted here"* [13](Informant 5).

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[12] "Se on ainakin mulle ja monelle muulle eläkeläiselle upea paikka mihin mennä, viettää aikaa ja saada kontakteja… varsinkin nyt pandemian aikaan, me ei saatu mennä muualle, niin saatiin tavata ihmisiä siellä."
[13] "Monelle se on kodin jatke, niin kuin vaikka toinen olohuone tai takapiha… Mulle se auttoi sen suhteen, että Vuosaari tuntuu nyt kodilta. Palstan ansiosta tunnen, että oon nyt juurtunut tänne."

For some, allotment gardens stimulate a feeling of being at home. This is in line with the previous studies on place attachment, which has also been seen as a way to foster social cohesion (Kearns & Forrest 2000). The use of allotment gardens involved seeing and meeting people from the nearby neighborhoods, which may lead to more familiarity with each other (Blokland, 2003).

Although for some, socializing in the gardens meant casual contact with gardening neighbors, for others, the interactions resulted in long-lasting friendships that were appreciated and valued. Some friendships had expanded beyond the garden setting, but interestingly many informants felt that the community did not expand outside the garden setting:

> *"The friendships stay quite strictly within the gardens… I have three garden neighbors, two women and then one granny of my age… so I am very close to these three… always after winter, we ask how are you and how is your health… and we know about each others' families… of course we also talk about gardening… but we don't even have phone numbers. We meet only in the garden."* [14](informant 2).

Many did not know the reason why it was hard to expand the friendship outside the garden setting, but one informant explained:

> *"I know my gardening neighbors very well, we talk a lot… but we don't meet anywhere else… we don't go to have coffee or visit the main building together… there is this a very high threshold to ask anyone to go for a coffee because it's not that typical in the city to make friends that way… and another reason is that… because interactions are rather superficial… I don't know if the others can afford to go to the coffee shop… living is quite expensive here"* [15](informant 2).

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[14] "Ystävyyssuhteet jää aika vahvasti palstoille… mulla on kolme palstanaapuria, kaksi naista ja yksi mun ikänen mummo… mä oon tosi läheinen heidän kanssaan… aina talven jälkeen me kysellään kuulumiset, että mitä kuuluu ja miten sun terveys… me myös tiedetään toistemme perheistä… ja totta kai me puhutaan myös viljelystä… mutta meillä ei oo edes toistemme puhelinnumeroita. Nähdään vaan palstoilla."

[15] "Tunnen mun palstanaapurit tosi hyvin, me höpistään paljon… mutta me ei tavata missään muualla… me ei käydä kahvilla tai päärakennuksessa yhdessä… siinä on joku kynnys kysyä ketään kahville, koska se oo kaupungissa tyypillistä ystävystyä niin… ja toinen syy on se, että koska meidän jutustelu on kuitenkin aika pinnallista, niin en voi tietää jos sillä toisella ei vaikka ole rahaa käydä kahvilla… asuminen täällä on hirmu kallista"

Although friendships did not sometimes expand outside the garden setting, it could be argued that even in a cohesive society, everyone cannot know each other well, and therefore also weak interactions are essential to enhance social cohesion. Moreover, it has been shown that in many societies, informal and superficial social interactions often occur more often than deeper neighborhood relations and that the weak ties may be equally significantly important to people (Henning & Lieberg 1996). Henning and Lieberg (1996) show that the neighborhood seems to be a suitable domain for weak ties due to the vicinity and continuity.

Although some informants noted that the social interactions did not expand outside the gardens, many nonetheless mentioned some examples during the interview. Some brought vegetables and flowers to their neighbors, some gave a lift home to a fellow gardener, offered seeds or vegetables on Facebook, or gave advice on the phone. Occasionally the gardeners noted that they had given or received a substantial amount of help outside the garden setting:

> *"One gardener got sick and her condition worsened quickly. Since I had a car, I used to take her to the local health station and stuff like that… I had to do it because her husband had passed away a few years ago and she didn't have any close friends… I was even the contact person when home care was organized for her…"* [16] (Informant 6).

Some had formed long-lasting friendships in the garden, and some had even found a life partner from there:

> *"our garden community has seen at least one romance… and they even got married in the garden and the wedding day was so beautiful… we were all invited … they were two lonely people who met in the garden… and they were from very different backgrounds… it was perhaps the highlight for us all…"* (Informant 1)

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[16] "Semmonen viljelijä sairasti ja meni huonoksi aika nopeesti. Kun mulla oli se auto, niin käytin häntä terveyskeskuksissa ja muuta tällasta… mun täytyi, koska hänen miehensä oli pari vuotta sitten kuollu ja hänellä ei ollut oikeen läheisiä kavereita… mä olin jopa yhteyshenkilö kun hänelle järjestettiin kotihoito."

These findings are in line with Kearns and Forrest's (2000) view that social cohesion stems from a high degree of social interaction within communities. In this view, social cohesion is maintained through socialization and social support mostly within smaller social entities, such as communities. Urban gardeners see allotment gardens as urban spaces for social connections where diverse individuals and groups come together and meet in a positive and accepting manner. In other words, allotment gardens are not only spaces where diversity is accepted and celebrated and where people share interests and have common goals but also places where the sense of social community is strong. Thus, the interviews revealed that the allotment gardens in Helsinki are places where mutual help and sharing knowledge is widespread which seems to create a bridge between people from different backgrounds. Similar 'bridging' strategies are often referred to in social capital research as well which is a similar concept to social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest 2000). Interestingly, the gardeners often noted that social connections do not expand beyond the garden setting, but after a careful reading of the interview transcripts, many examples were found where social cohesion did expand outside the gardens.

5.4. Sense of equality

The fourth theme that emerged from the interview transcripts is equality. One informant explained:

> "*Gardeners come there as gardeners, not as retirees or managers… we,*
> *as a group, don't represent any social status or position… we are just*
> *people who cultivate their plots… we have shared interest in the*
> *gardening… it fades the social differences…"* [17] (Informant 4).

Many noted that gardeners' social status, occupation, education level, or last names, are not discussed in the gardens. Informants noted that there is an unwritten rule that they do not talk about social status or related. Many noted that the social status of others is not relevant in the gardens.

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[17] "palstaviljelijät tulee sinne palstaviljelijöinä eikä niin kun eläkeläisinä tai toimitusjohtajina… me ryhmänä ei edusteta mitään asemaa… ollaan vaan ihmisiä ketkä viljelee palstoja… että meitä yhdistää se viljely… niin se hälvyttää ne sellaset yhteiskunnaliset erot…"

Sometimes occupations or education levels came up by chance when the gardeners were chit-chatting about something else. Many noted that they have been surprised when heard about someone's work or education: "*I'd have never thought that he is a doctor… he doesn't look like a doctor…*" (Informant 1)

Many noted that gardeners' clothing is something that reduced wealth disparities and blurs social differences:

> "*A good example is clothing… we are all wearing worn-out and ragged clothes… I don't even dare to go to the nearby grocery store when wearing my gardening clothes… in the garden, the clothes don't tell anything about a person's social status… in the city, the clothes can tell a lot about the person but this is not the case in the garden…*" [18] (Informant 6)

In addition to the clothes, many raised that the cars are left far away. As cars might be regarded as a status symbol in some urban spaces, their absence may influence the reduction of wealth disparities.

Many also noted that their stereotypes and prejudices have often diminished when talking to different people in the garden setting. One informant also had experienced that prejudices against him were diminished:

> "*I know that there has also been prejudice against me because I have to cope with racist stereotypes everywhere… but I believe they have diminished here… here the community is much more open and welcoming than in other places in the city… it is the shared interest in gardening that goes beyond language barriers… I did not know Finnish when I started gardening here… I feel good and accepted there… and my friends have experienced the same…*" (Informant 1)

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[18] "hyvä esimerkki on vaatetus… me ollaan ihan kulahtaneissa ryttyissä… että ei ehkä kehtaa kaupassa käydä samalla reissulla, kun mulla on ne vaatteet… mutta tota niin vaatetus ei kylläkään kerro siellä ihmisen sosiaalisesta asemasta mitään… niin kun kaupungilla voi vaatetus kertoa paljon ihmisestä, mutta ei palstalla…"

These quotes suggest that allotment gardens in Helsinki are places for equality. The sense of equality may challenge the idea of 'us against them' which, in turn, leads to increased tolerance towards difference. Many noted that their prejudices and stereotypes had diminished in the gardens as they continuously work with others from different backgrounds. Based on their literature review on social cohesion, Kearns and Forrest (2000) found that one of the most important elements of cohesive society refers to the "absence of general conflict within society and of any serious challenge to the existing order and system" (p. 998). In other words, a cohesive society comprises intergroup cooperation, respect and celebrates difference and diversity, and does not manifest hatred or prejudice.

Indeed, as societies become more diverse, the way to achieve social harmony becomes more and more important. As people from different backgrounds may have prejudices towards each other, it is important for the policymakers to identify and learn from the urban spaces where different social groups can meet and interact, and work towards common good, which may decrease prejudice and stereotypes, as demonstrated in this research. The findings of this research showed that many people in the gardens appreciated meeting and seeing diverse people, which led to feelings of respect, connectedness, and belonging and decreased prejudices of the 'others'. And, since the allotment gardens in Helsinki are mainly given to people who live nearby, it may stimulate feelings of comfort and connectedness between the residents of the same neighborhood.

To summarize, the findings show that shared interests was the building block for social cohesion in the allotment gardens. Shared interests enabled the gardens to identify common goals and work towards them collectively. Collective action fostered the acceptance and often even celebration of diversity, and created a strong sense of community and equality in the gardens. Shared interests and common goals created the sense of being 'in the same boat'. These are all indicators of social cohesion.

The ways social life occurred in the allotment gardens, it was not always about the norms or guidelines on how to behave in the urban garden, but rather based on the feeling that one must help the others who are 'in the same boat'. For example, if gardeners offered to help others, it was likely that they will also receive help. This provided concrete and emotional support and group spirit when needed. Much of the socializing occurred between gardening neighbors but the sense of community was experienced also among the gardeners who barely knew each other. These

findings support the claim that in an urban space where understanding the realities of life is a shared experience, strangers establish relationships in which mutual help, solidarity, and cooperation are practiced. It seems that considering issues such as loneliness and social exclusion, the gardens stimulated a positive acceptance, strong sense of community, and celebration of social diversity. This makes allotment gardens a unique urban space in times of segregation. In the next chapter, I will use these findings to further analyze the role of the allotment gardens in segregated context.

6. Allotment gardens in segregated context

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in relation to socio-spatial segregation literature. In addition, I will use the experiences of the urban gardeners in Helsinki to further analyze how social cohesion can be fostered in a segregated urban context. Thus, this chapter aims to connect the findings of this study to the broader discussion on socio-spatial segregation. In this research, segregation was not understood as a normative concept but rather a condition that requires attention to the different dimensions and domains.

This research identified four themes on how urban gardeners experience social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. The four themes were: shared interests and common goals, acceptance and celebration of social diversity, sense of community, and equality. The findings of this study show that the shared interest enabled the gardeners to identify common goals and work collectively towards common good. Collective action fostered the acceptance and celebration of diversity, and created sense of strong community and equality. These are all indicators of social cohesion.

As discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, the policy discourse on segregation highlights the importance of strengthening social cohesion in segregated neighborhoods. The findings show that in Helsinki, allotment gardens can be regarded as urban spaces where many indicators of social cohesion are experienced. I chose to focus on urban gardens because if the experiences of social networks and communities with people outside their residential neighborhoods are ignored, a considerable part of their everyday experiences is left out. These interactions may increase or mitigate segregation people experience in their neighborhoods and thus erroneously impact their segregation experiences. This may also create a deceptive impression of a city's social life as a whole.

The findings showed that socializing was an important reason to participate in urban gardening in Helsinki, and that the allotment gardens are perceived to decrease loneliness, exclusion, and isolation as well as raise awareness of them. This is particularly important findings in relation to segregation development because, in the Finnish context, segregation has been linked to the accumulation of social problems, including loneliness and social exclusion (Tunström & Wang

2019). Although the most important measure to prevent exclusion is to improve employment and employment conditions and invest in education (see e.g. Notkola et al. 2013), the findings of this study show how third places can also raise awareness of and decrease these social problems.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, in addition to isolation and social exclusion, inequality is also highly linked to segregation although the two cannot be used as synonyms. The findings of this study showed that the sense of equality was strong in the allotment gardens and the differences between gardeners were accepted and even celebrated. In a segregated society, social hierarchies created by social inequalities, are understood to lower trust by creating competition between people (Uslaner 2012). When social stratification is prevalent, disadvantaged people may feel that others have an advantage over them which increases the separation of social groups, which may lower generalized trust between people (Uslaner 2012). The findings of this study showed that although the gardeners felt they can trust others in the gardens, it was apparent that more than simple contact is needed. Informants noted that they did not trust the gardeners whom they did not know as closely or did not work together as much. Some also had more prejudice towards the gardeners with whom they had only superficial contact. This is in line with Allport's theory that 'optimal conditions' for social contacts demand deeper interactions and sense of equality (Tropp & Pettigrew 2005). These findings also show that with shared interest, the gardeners started to work more collectively, which, in turn, increased sense of equality and trust between different people.

Considering the background of the informants, unilateralism is one drawback of this study. Most informants identified as middle-class Finnish and consequently, the minority perspective is lacking. Yet, in segregation literature, the minority, and particularly ethnic, perspective is dominant. Often segregation research pays only little attention is paid to the role of the wealthier population in contributing to increasing segregation (Tunström & Wang 2019). In fact, as discussed previously, in the Finnish context, it is most often the Finnish middle-class that moves away from the low-income areas, and this way intensifies segregation (Andersen et al. 2016). In addition, white, middle-class groups are unlikely to move into socio-economically weaker areas than immigrant groups (Andersen et al. 2016). It has been argued that these mobility strategies might even play a key role in segregation development in Nordic countries (Andersen et al. 2016; Tunström & Wang 2019). Since the findings suggest that in the allotment gardens, the stereotypes and prejudices of

the Finnish middle-class towards 'others' seem to diminish, this makes allotment gardens a potential space to change the attitudes of the people who have the resources to move away from the low-income areas. How the changed attitudes in such third places where people work collectively have impacted the mobility strategies or even the stereotypes on the neighborhoods instead of social groups, is still beyond the scope of this research and would be interesting to study in the future.

Considering the neighborhoods development projects in Helsinki, some case studies from other Nordic cities have shown that neighborhood development may not always serve the needs of everyone and may lead to gentrification in the renewed neighborhoods. One example of such case study was conducted by Larsen and Hansen (2008) in Copenhagen. The results showed that neighborhood development projects led to a dramatic increase in housing prices in the area and consequently more than 50 percent of the original residents were forced to move to another neighborhood (Larsen & Hansen 2008). In the context of Helsinki, a similar trend towards gentrification has been seen already in several neighborhoods, Kallio probably being the clearest example (see e.g. Jussilainen 2019). The findings of this study showed that allotment gardens bring various social benefits to all the gardeners regardless without leading to gentrification. This is important since in times of segregation it is essential to identify inclusive urban spaces where diverse people can exist and act both individually and collectively. Urban planners can learn from these places and develop neighborhood renewal programs in ways that everyone benefits, not only the ones that have the most resources.

In addition, Dhalmann and Vilkama (2009) have pointed out that regardless of the widespread acknowledgment among urban planners in Finland that socio-spatial segregation is problematic, they often fail to recognize the role of discrimination and disadvantage in the neighborhoods. Dhalmann and Vilkama (2009) note that measures that "…acknowledge and respect the diversity of contemporary multicultural societies" are needed to tackle segregation (p. 437). As the findings of this study showed that allotment gardens are such inclusive urban places where diversity is respected and even celebrated, I suggest that urban planners could develop innovative measures based on these results.

In sum, this chapter showed how surprisingly 'outside' the allotment gardens are from segregation development in Helsinki. The chapter discussed that the allotment gardens are urban spaces where

many social challenges related to segregation can be tackled, including loneliness, isolation, social exclusion, and stereotypes and prejudices towards 'others', to name a few. In this way, one may learn about the mechanisms that make people feel less segregated throughout their daily lives. This is significant because these findings may help local decision-makers to understand how social cohesion in certain third places is built and what can we learn from them when aiming to foster social cohesion in other domains.

7. Conclusion

This thesis studied social cohesion in urban gardens in Helsinki since this was an identified gap in the literature. More specifically, the thesis aimed to look at how gardeners experience social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. In order to study this, the research conducted seven semi-structured interviews with urban gardeners in Helsinki. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts. The data analysis revealed four themes of how gardeners experienced social cohesion in the allotment gardens: shared interests and common goals, social diversity, social community, and equality.

The findings show that shared interest in gardening is the building block for social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. Shared interests enabled the gardeners to identify common goals and work collectively. Collective action resulted in acceptance and celebration of diversity, and sense of strong social community and equality. These are all indicators of social cohesion. In addition, even though most of the informants were not aware of the expansion of social cohesion

outside the garden setting, after a careful examination of the interview transcripts, it seems that interactions and mutual help between the gardeners did occur beyond the garden setting as well.

This is significant because these findings could help the local decision-makers to understand how social cohesion in certain third places is fostered and what can we learn from them when aiming to build social cohesion in other domains, particularly in a segregated setting.

Given the paucity of empirical studies exploring the role of third places in segregated settings, findings from the study represent an original and distinctive contribution to the social science literature on socio-spatial segregation and social cohesion in the context of Helsinki. In addition, the findings provide updated information to the Finnish decision-makers and local authorities to design and develop policies and strategies for social cohesion based on the experiences of residents who actively engage in a community that is somewhat 'outside' of the segregation development. Therefore, the research also shows the importance of bringing the perspectives of residents of segregated neighborhoods more fully into policy discussions. By providing empirical evidence of how certain third places are socially cohesive, even in segregated neighborhoods, this work can guide decision-makers as they continue their work to promote community cohesion in their local places since the puzzle of how to foster social cohesion in socially diverse and segregated cities will continue to be of major concern to policymakers in the future as well.

7.1. Limitations and further research

This study had some limitations that could be addressed in future research on social cohesion in third places.

First, the scope of the research was limited. With a bigger sample, the study could make some further generalizations on the issues and further deepen the analysis of how gardeners experience social cohesion in certain third places. Due to the limited scope, this study did not manage to acquire a presentation of gardeners from diverse backgrounds, and most of the interviewees identified as Finnish middle-class. Only one informant identified as a migrant. Therefore, as such, the informants' experiences are not representative of the whole gardening community. Due to the

limited sample size, the findings provide a 'snap shot' of how the allotment gardeners experience social cohesion in Helsinki. The longitudinal analysis would be necessary to provide a deeper picture of the gardeners' experiences. However, as this is the first research systematically studying social cohesion in the allotment gardens in the context of Helsinki, 'snap shot' may be enough at this point to grasp the idea of gardeners' experiences on the matter.

The second limitation is the limited generalizability of findings to other contexts which is a common drawback of qualitative research. As Edwards et al. (2001) highlight: "context counts, and it counts crucially" (p. 268). This is particularly the case with segregation and social cohesion as they are highly contextual. Undoubtedly this study is uniquely situated due to the lower levels of overall segregation in Helsinki in international comparison, for example. Unique context is seldom unavoidable in segregation or social cohesion research, yet this study argues that shared interests and common aims and objectives could work as a building block for social cohesion in many contexts.

Future research may contribute to this discussion by providing in-depth case studies of third places in the cities, and in this way provide information on how people experience social cohesion in various domains.

Future research could also address some particular elements of social cohesion in detail. For example, investigating how urban gardeners experience attachment to the neighborhood where they have their allotment would provide further evidence on what is the role of the space in social cohesion. Another interesting topic for further studies could be exploring social cohesion from the perspective of minority groups. Future research could examine, for example, whether minority groups experience social cohesion as positively as the informants in this research. Are allotment gardens in fact inclusive to all, or do some groups experience barriers through discrimination or hatred?

7.2. Recommendations for policy and practice

The significant finding in this thesis was that the shared interests worked as a building block for social cohesion in the allotment gardens in Helsinki. More specifically, shared interests enabled gardeners to identify common goals and work collectively. Collective action fostered the acceptance and celebration of diversity, and created sense of strong community and equality. These are all indicators of social cohesion.

While it may seem obvious that collective action fosters social cohesion, the ways how the people ended up working together was an important contribution, and could potentially contribute to the policy discourse on how to foster social cohesion in segregated neighborhoods.

This study showed that in order to strengthen collective action, it is important to create shared interests and common goals for people. Therefore, I suggest, that in the neighborhood development projects, a pronounced focus on the shared interests of the residents in the segregated neighborhoods could be a way to bring diverse people together. Fortunately, in neighborhoods, creating shared interest is not even necessary since most people do care about the surroundings of their homes. In neighborhoods, residents may be a diverse group of people, but they still all have shared interest in their neighborhood, as they probably spend a significant amount of time at home or close to their homes. However, how to organize diverse people with shared interests to work collectively is the question here. At the neighborhood level, shared interests of the residents could be fostered, for example, by giving residents more concrete shared responsibility in their neighborhood development projects. For example, parks and playgrounds, and other recreational areas in the neighborhoods could be built collectively instead of the 'top-down' development process. In other words, strengthening grassroots democracy could be the solution.

Indeed, also The Suburb Programme 2020-2022 recognizes that 'cooperation' is one key to combating rising segregation and fostering social cohesion (Ympäristöministeriö n.d.). The Suburb Programme's policy document rightfully notes that people's most significant experiences of inclusion and influence arise in their own neighborhoods. Therefore, by providing concrete empirical evidence on how social cohesion is experienced in the allotment gardens, this study supports this claim.

In many ways, collective action is against the current system in which people compete for resources instead of sharing them. For example, in the allotment gardens, many informants noted that they had prejudice and stereotypes towards 'others' before they started work collectively, but the prejudices diminished when they realized that they are all 'in the same boat' with shared interest and common goals. In fact, many neighborhood development projects are rather top-down processes, in which the residents are often regarded as just as passive inhabitants of segregated neighborhoods rather than actors of their own communities. This study argues that promoting certain values may not help societies to become more cohesive. Instead, the focus should be on creating shared interests within the diverse communities.

In sum, as the findings demonstrate, in a diverse urban space, different people can work collectively if they feel that they are 'in the same boat'. Therefore, this study may serve as a recommendation to the local decision-makers in Helsinki who ponder how to increase social cohesion, especially as societies have become more diverse and neighborhoods become more segregated. Without shared interest and common goals, it may be challenging to convince people that 'others' are part of the community too, especially when there are higher levels of segregation and inequality (Uslaner 2012). Findings show how meaningful such places can be where people share common interest and work towards common good. As Massey (2005) has noted: "the chance of space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbor" (p. 151). This should be seen as a benefit of diverse or segregated neighborhoods rather than an insurmountable challenge.

Resources

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