



Spatial solidarity among older adults in age-related housing

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ABSTRACT

Ageing-in-place policies encourage older adults to live at home as long as possible; however, this challenges the abilities of both formal care and informal help. Utilizing the results of my research, I introduce the term spatial solidarity to describe the help that older individuals give each other in age-related housing. One starting point for solidarity is the ability to relate to others. In age-related housing people understand the challenges they face because of aging, although giving reciprocal help might not be possible due to a variety of challenges people face including illness. Helping may be exhausting for those who provide the help and furthermore may cause clashes between helpers and authorities. The results show that solidarity is connected to spatiality in many ways. I have introduced three spatial points that have an influence on solidarity and vice versa: relational space, everyday spatialities and affective qualities. In relational space, solidarity can change the spaces we live in but also the spaces can create solidarity. Furthermore, solidarity can change spaces both physically and through social relationships. Through everyday spatialities solidarity creates spatial patterns in everyday life and has an influence on everyday decisions. Solidarity is affective in the sense that it emerges in spaces where discussions are made about values and norms. Furthermore, when people show solidarity towards each other, it may influence others. Spatial solidarity amongst older individuals fills the gap between any inadequacy in the form of the home care and the needs of the residents. However, the spatial solidarity between older adults is precarious and may change due to the physical conditions of the people. Furthermore, the main responsibility for care of older individuals should not lie with other older people.

1. Introduction

In Finland, older individuals are encouraged to live at home as long as possible. However, at the same time large-scale reductions are being planned for the care of older individuals. Indeed, the current condition and deficiencies in home care services have already been in the headlines. Ageing in place has in many ways increased the need for outside help and care for older individuals. Currently, in relation to older individuals, the offered official care services may be inadequate, especially regarding people with dementia (Aaltonen and Van Aerschot, 2021), which means that those in need do not get proper formal or informal care (Kröger et al., 2019). The deficiency in proper care can be related to an unequal distribution of society's resources (Bertogg and Koos, 2021) and it increases the need for informal and formal care and help from the social networks of older adults (Luoma-Halkola and Häikiö, 2022).

There are slight differences between care and help. Care is often seen as performing physical care, such as washing, assisting with the use of the toilet etc., while help is considered as household help or helping deal with authorities and official paperwork (Brandt et al., 2009). Help and

care also differ from both a legal and economic perspective. For example, in Finland a family carer may be financially supported while informal help is not paid for. Furthermore, in official care relationships the carer has rights that are lacking in the interactions with informal help.

Care has been conceptualized in research for many decades now and it is therefore impossible to thoroughly present all the existing literature in this article. Nevertheless, some basic points have been included in to clarify the terms care and help. The definition of the term care was introduced in 1990s by feminist scholars, such as Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher (Tronto, 1998). Fisher and Tronto (1990) considered that being able to care each other was an essential part of humanity. They presented four phases of care: Caring about, caring for, caregiving and care receiving (Tronto, 1998). Caring about involves concern, the awareness of the need that someone has for care. Caring for refers to the phase, in which someone acknowledges these needs. Caregiving refers to the fulfilling of the actual physical and material care needs of an individual. Care receiving involves the group that receives the care. Receiving care is also a morally complex situation; for care receivers it

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may cause a moral burden and for caregivers it can involve moral obligations (Tronto, 1998). For de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 5) care includes three dimensions: “care as a labor/work, affect/affections and ethics/politics”, which although intertwined also challenge the ways care is seen in different situations. For example the relationship between care work and affects is difficult an a challenge which care workers have to deal with in their everyday life (de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Care may imply both a mental disposition and the actual practices of care (Lundman and Kymäläinen, 2023; Tronto, 1998). How care is understood as a mental disposition and as a practice changes constantly. Not least because of the modification in society as regards austerity policies and economic issues. For example, the commodification of care has a significant influence on how care is seen and performed (Green and Lawson, 2011). It is thus both a politically and ontologically ambivalent term that needs to be considered from a several different perspectives (de la Bellacasa, 2017).

While care has been vastly conceptualized, help has been a rather understudied in that regard. Help, in mundane thinking, is related to solidarity, altruism, responsibility and communality. It is also related to wider societal challenges and decisions from ageing in place to a vast spectrum of self-help guides. In research, help has been connected to informal volunteering (Hank and Stuck, 2008), cooperation and selflessness (Nowak, 2012) and has also been connected to social networks (Bertogg and Koos, 2021). Social networks may function as channels, through which information is provided to others about someone needing help. People are also more likely to help others who belong to their social network (Bertogg and Koos, 2021). In addition, people may expect help more easily from people they know or are close to, rather than from strangers (Habermas, 2013). Providing help demands certain aspects: use of time, economic situation, and in some cases, altruistic attitude (Bertogg and Koos, 2021), thus it is not possible for everyone to give help.

Help and care can be linked at least at a mental level. The views of Fisher and Tronto (1990) suggest that behind help there is an idea of “caring about” someone who is in need. Thus, it may be difficult to see where help ends, and care starts. However, help can be a spontaneous and instant act, for example, if you see a person that has fallen in the street, you might want to help them, not because you care about them as a person, but because of the moral norms that are related to humanity and helping a fellow human. Hence, help is also associated with solidarity between humans.

Solidarity can indeed be displayed through peoples’ actions related to the help given and their motivations to help. However, it can also overlap with a sense of duty, for example, we may feel that we have obligations to help our friends (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015a). Thus, it is sometimes difficult to interpret whether an action occurs because of solidarity or because of moral obligations. Nevertheless, in the case of solidarity, the helper also gains something (Jaakkola, 2015; Jennings and Dawson, 2015; Jolanki and Vilkkö, 2015) or at least there is the hope of receiving reciprocal favors (Habermas, 2013). The social and emotional reciprocal support in the community can also be called nurturing (Wiles and Jayasinha, 2013), and it thus implies care. Bertogg and Koos (2021) connect solidarity directly to help and volunteering but also to the “co-production of care”. While in their study the terms are used quite loosely, the idea of solidarity as a co-produced care is an interesting one.

The definition of solidarity varies depending on whether we consider solidarity as the support certain group members confer on each other, or a form of social cohesion in relation to society (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012). Habermas (2013) refers to solidarity as an ethical obligation that relies on reciprocal favors; thus, solidarity is related to one’s own interests. If solidarity is used to describe the empirical fact that some people are bound together in relationships that include care, help and support, solidarity becomes a “a feature of all social and political interaction; the fact of life” (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012, p. 344). Hence, solidarity does not have to be political *per se*, but it is intertwined with

politics, for example through political decisions that will influence people’s lives.

Habermas (2013) states that solidarity is not similar to justice, since justice aims to secure equal rights. However, the need for solidarity may arise from injustice and social inequalities (Bertogg and Koos, 2021). Nevertheless, solidarity does not guarantee justice. For example, people may experience solidarity among some groups but are prepared to exclude others from this circle of solidarity (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015b).

In action, solidarity is associated with practices that lead to common commitments at three levels: the interpersonal level, the group level and the contractual and legal level (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012). At the interpersonal level solidarity requires recognizing that the individual who is giving assistance could be in the same situation and they aim to improve the situation. Group practices include collective commitment to support each other, for example, in peer groups. Solidarity practices can also be defined through different contracts and laws, especially in the case of welfare societies (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012).

Jennings (2018) has suggested that the fundamental stance for solidarity is standing up for, standing up with or standing up as someone or something. Standing up for represents the idea of defending someone or something which might be experiencing injustice or is somehow in danger. Standing up with adds personal knowledge and understanding of the others’ experiences into the act of solidarity. Standing up as needs an even stronger identification with those who are in need of an act of solidarity.

While potentially being associated with feelings such as shame or guilt linked with moral obligations, (Lindenberg, 2015), solidarity can also be related to positive feelings such as a sense of belonging, concern for other’s well-being and valuing social bonds (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015b). However, solidarity and empathy are not necessarily the same things (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012). Solidarity is about recognizing similarity in another individual’s situation. Thus, feeling empathy towards someone is not necessarily solidarity if there is a lack of similarity.

Shared emotions and affects are significant in relation to group solidarity (Salmela, 2015). In groups, solidarity can arise from the idea that “we are all in the same boat” (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012, p. 348). Shared feelings may also develop into affects amongst older individuals (Repo, 2024). Affects can be understood as forward pushing, collective emotions (Thrift, 2004), that lead to acts instead of reactions.

In examining the older individuals’ relation to help, I observed that solidarity is one of the most important reasons to help each other. Therefore, this article studies help and solidarity in age-related housing. Help and solidarity are also connected to space. While help between neighbors has been studied in Finland as part of communality in rural areas (Jaakkola, 2015) and as part of social networks between neighbors (Varjakoski, 2021), the spatiality of help between neighbors has been less studied. However, little research has been conducted on the importance of the spatial dimensions of solidarity and the means by which space influences solidarity and vice versa, especially in the case of older individuals. The research questions concern the everyday processes of help among older individuals in age-related housing. What kind of everyday spatialities does help create? What kind of spatial meanings does help have? How does space influence help and vice versa?

First, the theoretical framework is introduced, and then the methods and data used, after which the data is analyzed in the following three sections based on the empirical data. The first section focuses on help and solidarity in age-related housing, the second on the everyday spaces of solidarity, and the third analyses solidarity in relation to authorities. The final section of the article includes discussion, where the concept of spatial solidarity is introduced and lastly, the concluding remarks.

2. Space and ageing – theoretical approach to the research

The theoretical starting point of the article is based on how space is seen in human geography and especially in geographical gerontology. Space in this study is understood as relational. Space is thus not seen

merely as stable physical structures, but constantly changing (Elden, 2009; Massey, 2005, 2008; Ridell et al., 2009) and as a “product of interrelations” (Elden, 2009, p. 265). Relational space includes affects and emotions as well as imagined spaces (Elden, 2009; Massey, 2005). Spaces can be seen as moments constructed through social relations, understanding and experiences (Massey, 2008).

The roots of the geographical gerontology are in geographies of ageing and in spatial turn within social gerontology (Skinner et al., 2018). Geographical gerontology studies the connections between ageing and space and can provide essential contributions to studies of ageing by developing interdisciplinary and bringing geographical concepts and approaches to the studies of aged populations (Skinner et al., 2018). In the case of older adults, it is crucial to understand the importance of where the ageing occurs (Skinner et al., 2018) and how spaces influence the processes of ageing (Wiles, 2018). As Buffel and Phillipson notes Buffel and Phillipson, 2018, p. 131 “Viewing older people as spatial and social is essential for a fuller understanding of the unequal way in which ageing is experienced.” Space (and place) are important to older individuals, since they have influence on their happiness and everyday life (Andrews et al., 2018). While ageing, people tend to establish routines for a sense of continuity, comfort and understanding their living environment (Cutchin and Rowles, 2024).

The demand for the spatial understanding of ageing is increasing mainly because of the shift of demographics in many countries. For example, social services and social policy has spatial influence regarding the means of access to aged care services (Robertson, 2022). Furthermore, ageing “as well as you can” is depended on spatial processes of everyday life of older adults (Grove, 2021, p. 9). Aging well or ageing “unwell” has significant influence on spatialities and everyday spaces through mobility and accessibility (Robertson, 2022).

Ageing in place has caused criticism among researchers. The abilities to age in place are strongly related to accessible environment as well as the older individual’s access to essential services (Wiles, 2018). These care policies and the need for care may not always agree (Aaltonen and Van Aerscht, 2021). Policies may also fail to recognize that older individuals have different socio-economical and cultural backgrounds (Wiles, 2018). Furthermore, place in many research concerning ageing in place is seen as a static container and in the research the focus is less on place than older individuals (Cutchin and Rowles, 2024). Thus, geographers have started to use term ageing and place, which allows the focus to be place on people-space relationships (Cutchin and Rowles, 2024). This research in its own part answers the call for acknowledging space or place in the studies concerning older individuals.

3. Methods, data and ethics

The research was implemented in an apartment house for older adults in a Finnish city. The housing of older adults varies in Finland. Most adults over 75 years live at home in their own houses or apartments, or rental apartments that can be maintained by parishes, foundations, municipalities or other authorities (Lintunen, 2019). In 2022, only 0.7% of adults over 75 years lived in a sheltered housing and 6.4% in 24-h service housing. Home care was provided for 7.7% of older adults (Mielikäinen and Kuronen, 2022). Home care is organized by the wellbeing services counties (in Finland, 21 counties are responsible for organizing health, social and rescue services in their area) and since 2023 older adults pay for the care themselves. However, the services are supported by the state to keep the expenses reasonable (*Wellbeing services counties will be responsible for organising health, social and rescue services, 2023*).

In the apartment building used for this research, the residents were over 65-years old or/and had reduced mobility. The apartments were built in 1990 and consist of 70 accessible rental apartments of between 41 and 50 m². Most of the residents lived alone but some lived with their spouses. There is one common room downstairs, where, for example, the local parish organizes devotional services, and volunteers organize

activities. There is also a small yard with benches, which is quite popular during the summertime.

The apartment house was owned by a foundation. In Finland, different foundations offer housing for older adults. The housing services vary greatly. In this particular residence, no common services were provided; the residents paid themselves for home care, cleaning and other services when needed. There was a caretaker who cleaned the common areas and handled small tasks in the apartments, but currently the caretaker’s position has been deferred for the time being.

The data was gathered between June and October 10th, 2023. Ethnographical research is needed to observe bottom-up processes and unofficially consolidated politics (Dawson, 2018). Building trust with the residents was essential, since the data gathering methods included close observation, in-depth interviews and a questionnaire. Firstly, I recruited a key informant who lived in the house. The key informant provided help for her neighbors and was actively involved in the resident’s committee. She helped to organize the interviews and with completing the questionnaire. Furthermore, I observed her daily tasks related to helping others on several days during the research period and kept a field diary about these observations. Mostly the observations included going to the grocery store and to the parish center to collect food for other residents and delivering the groceries and food to the people. We also talked regularly on the telephone.

In addition, I conducted nine in-depth interviews. Seven interviews were with the residents (one person was interviewed twice), one was with a person who used to work at the house but was now a carer for one of the residents and one interview was with the house manager. The interviews lasted from 45 min to 2 h. The main theme of the interviews was help. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author.

The questionnaire included multiple choice questions related to help, which followed the theme of the interviews in a more simplified manner: What kind of help do you receive? Who helps you? How do you help others? Do you participate in the common activities in the house? Furthermore, there was space to write their own answers, if they did not find any proper choices. There were also a few open-ended questions: What are the main reasons why you need help? Do you receive enough help? If not, what additional kind of help do you need? What are the reasons that you give help to others? Finally, there was space at the end of the questionnaire to freely write what ever came to mind. The questionnaire was printed and handed out to every apartment in the building (n = 70). The percentage of questionnaires returned was 28.6% (n = 20), however, many questionnaire forms were inadequately completed and thus, the role of the questionnaire is more indicative than acceptable. Furthermore, some of the residents may not have been able to complete the form due to health or other reasons. I had the managers permission to hand out the questionnaires and I prepared a report for her and for the resident’s committee about the results. Apart from this, the house manager and the foundation had no other role in conducting this research.

In the beginning of the analyzing process I used the three-phased documental analysis, which includes skimming, reading and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). I used content analysis for analyzing the data and coded the material according to the terms help, spatiality and solidarity. Because some of the questionnaires were inadequately completed, a proper statistical analysis was not possible. However, it was possible to obtain some numerical elements (for example percentages) from the data. Many of those responding had written additional thoughts on the form. These comments gave useful insights into the everyday life of the house. The comments and the field diary notes were analyzed in the same way as the interviews.

For reasons of confidentiality, I will not mention any names of the residents or the city where the research was conducted. For the sake of fluency, the interviewees have been given pseudonyms. Three males (Mikko, Juhani and Kalevi) and six females (Hannele, Terttu, Niina, Marja and Anneli and the house manager, who is not referred with a pseudonym to separate her from the residents) took part into the

interviews. In the questionnaire no names or gender were requested. The average age of the respondents was 72.2 years. The youngest responder was 63 years old and the oldest was 90 years old. The respondents had lived in the house from under one year to 20 years. Those who had answered the questionnaire are referred to as “responders”. I refer to responders with ordinal numbers (A1, A2 etc.). The whole questionnaire is referred to as Q1.

I have followed the ethical guidelines of Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. The ethical committee of Tampere University stated that ethical assessment was not needed in this research. All the residents were able to give their permission to participate in the research themselves. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants, and they were given the names and contact information of the people who implement the research and who have access to the data. They were also told that they can refuse or withdraw from the research at any time. All this information as well as the information about data management was given to participants in a printed form. Data was gathered according to the rules of EU’s data protection law, GDPR (*Complete guide to GDPR compliance, 2024*).

4. Results - help and solidarity in age-related housing

According to the questionnaire (Q1), 40% of the respondents felt that they do not need any help. Those who needed help, received it from different informal sources, for example relatives, neighbors and friends and from formal sources such as personal assistants and home care. The most frequent help was given by the home care service personnels, who visited the residents up to several times a day. Daily help was also given by personal assistants, as well as neighbors and friends who lived in the same building (*Fig. 1*).

In this research, only a few people really helped others with mundane matters, such as collecting or shopping for groceries or helping others with technical devices (Q1). One of the responders had been active in helping but could not continue because of illness (A7). Another responder stated that the whole idea of helping others was absurd, since older individuals needed help themselves (A10). However, 61.1% of the responders said that they helped by keeping others company, 27.8% doing this many times a week (Q1). Emotional and social support and conversations between neighbors are an important part of the lives of older adults (*Jaakkola, 2015; Jolanki and Vilkkö, 2015; Wiles and Jayasinha, 2013*). Keeping company with others can reduce the sense of loneliness for both participants. Thus, it can be seen as a form of solidarity, where all parties benefit. The conversations between residents

took place in the residents’ apartments or in the courtyard or one of the common areas, thus benefiting from the proximity of the other people and implying the meaning of space to solidarity.

Hannele, who had worked as a caretaker in the house for over 30 years, located the roots of the solidarity and help to the Ingrians that lived in the house. The Ingrians were a persecuted minority in Soviet Union, and they were expelled from their home regions to for example to workcamps in Siberia. Many of them immigrated to different parts of Finland from the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Hannele stated: “... they were their own community and helped each other ...” The Ingrians were connected to each other through their former geographical location, culture, and experiences. Solidarity is also a form of remembrance, an acknowledgment of the historical path and sacrifices that people had to make when they collectively fought to gain something (*Habermas, 1992*). Both past and present spatialities connected Ingrians and lead to solidarity. In addition, Hannele mentioned that Finnish residents followed the example of Ingrians: “bit by bit the Finnish [residents] started to realize that this is something that we can also do ...” which enabled the whole house became bonded as one community. This example shows the affective qualities of solidarity (e.g. *Salmela, 2015*). In this case the solidarity spread from a small community of the Ingrians to others uniting the whole house. However, Hannele stated that changes in circumstances, residents and administration have altered the situation drastically and a sense of communality is no longer present in the house. This indicates the precarity of solidarity and its susceptibility to changes (*Laitinen and Pessi, 2015b*).

Helping neighbors is not strictly related to the feeling of closeness people have towards their neighbors (*Laitinen and Pessi, 2015a*). It can be interpreted that spatiality is one reason for the solidarity of neighbors. The example of Mikko strengthens this idea. Mikko moved into the house four years ago from a completely different area in Finland. He brings groceries and food from the local parish center to some of the residents and helps in the parish center kitchen. He said: “Sometimes people ask for help themselves, sometimes they call the parish and the social worker asks me to help them”. Thus, Mikko helps people he does not necessarily previously know and may not feel particularly close to them. Living in the same building and sharing the same spaces has led to solidarity in this case.

Four of the interviewed people who help others are members of the resident’s committee. Belonging to the social network (in this case the resident’s committee) and discussions with other members helps spread information about those who need help (*Bertogg and Koos, 2021*). When one of the residents had to go to a hospital, all four people took care of

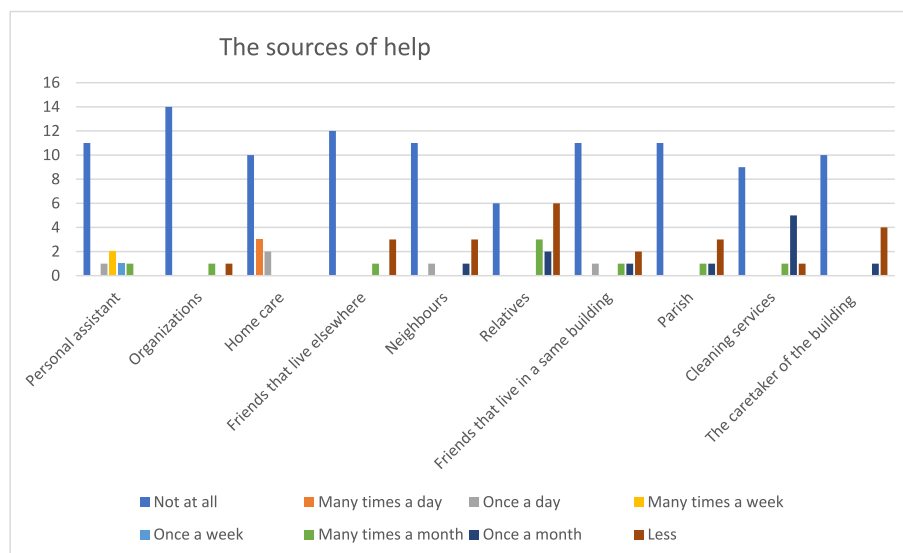


Fig. 1. The sources of help (Q1).

her mundane matters. Mikko explained: “I visited her in the hospital [in another city] and brought her cigarettes”. Interviewer: “So there are also friendships formed in this building?” Mikko: “Well, yes”. While the solidarity may not be the common goal of the resident’s committee *per se*, the fact that some of the committee members regularly talk and share the same space may have instigated the spreading of solidarity in the form of help. Furthermore, relationships might have deepened to friendships via solidarity which expanded the spatial patterns of help.

One important aspect of age-related housing is the opportunity it allows for reciprocal help (Jolanki and Vilko, 2015). Finns over sixty years old are more likely to help their neighbors than people from other age groups (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015a) and help is an important form of social relationships with neighbors amongst older individuals (Tuominen and Pirhonen, 2019).

Terttu moved to the house because her friend, Anneli already lived there. Anneli helps Terttu with mundane chores and visits her every day when she collects her newspaper. She also checks the physical condition of Terttu. Terttu stated: [she] called an ambulance and said that now you need to go to the hospital [...] she has been very helpful.” These daily visits give Terttu the feeling of safety and being taken care of. Terttu and Anneli had previously lived near each other as adults. The spatial proximity now continues during their later life as they have both lost their spouses. The common spatial history and sameness (see Prainsack and Buyx, 2012) in their lives have nurtured a sense of solidarity, which manifests as help.

The motivations for helping are related to compassion, moral principles, bringing joy or because it is the right thing to do (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015a). These aspects resonate quite well with the answers collected from the questionnaire (Q1). Those who helped others mentioned these aspects as being the reasons for why they helped: empathy, it is nice to help others, willingness to help and one responder felt it is normal behavior to help if someone needs it. In these cases, the helping was strongly related to moral values and emotions. Some responders stated that: “[when you help] you can chat with others (A2)” and “you can be together with neighbors (A9)” This kind of reciprocal thinking is said to be one of the main sources of solidarity (Habermas, 2013; Laitinen and Pessi, 2015b; Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Salmela, 2015) which in this case is formed spatially. Kalevi mentioned that he refuses to take any financial compensation for helping others: “They are just as broke as I am, maybe even more, so ...”. Helping others in the same situation refers to a form of solidarity that Jennings (2018) calls standing up with someone.

However, spatiality not necessarily guarantee solidarity. One of the responders stated that there are cliques in the house who help each other, but because they are not part of these cliques they are left without help (A18). Feelings of being excluded may cause jealousy and manifest in sinister ways. As the only negative aspect of helping, Mikko noted: “[some residents] said that I am exploiting the money of old people [...] although I have always brought receipts back [when buying groceries].” The accusers were those residents who he was not helping. The example illustrates that being excluded may cause antagonism and anti-solidarity.

5. Everyday spaces of solidarity

There is a strong connection between solidarity and space. Everyday spaces are formed in relation to solidarity and in practices used to show the solidarity. Helping neighbors creates certain spatial patterns in Anneli’s life. Anneli uses a rollator walker and she talks about the walker as a transport service which she can use to deliver groceries and food to the neighbors. She normally does such trips three times a week. First, she goes to the local shopping centre and buys some groceries for about one to three neighbors. It is very important to her, that the grocery shop is near and accessible with the rollator walker. She always uses the same (the easiest) route, since the environment is not very accessible with inclines and badly maintained walkways. After shopping for the

groceries, she goes to the parish center to eat and to collect take away-food for even up to eight neighbors.

The reasonably priced food at the parish center gathers older individuals from all over the neighborhood. It is a place for Anneli to meet acquaintances from outside her own building and be amongst peers. She also sometimes sits on the bench outside the shopping center. There are usually a group of alcoholics outside the shopping center, but she does not mind them and usually gives them advice to go and eat in the parish center. These kinds of encounters emerge because of her everyday processes of solidarity.

Getting out the building and shopping for groceries for others gives content to Anneli’s life. It is important that older adults are able to move around and do their daily chores (Luoma-Halkola and Häikiö, 2022). Furthermore, meeting peers at the parish center may increase the solidarity between people in the neighborhood. However, sometimes it seemingly exhausts her. Occasionally people might even try to take advantage of other’s good will. Kalevi uses an electric wheelchair, and he also buys groceries for some of the residents. Because of the wheelchair he can go to a larger market outside the area. He stated: “[there were] some women sitting in the smoking area outside, and I went and bought an ice cream for one of them. When I came back the other one asked me to buy her some cigarettes. [...] I said that you can walk yourself!”. Being asked non-stop to do errands felt to him as if people were taking advantage of his good will. If the efforts used for solidarity do not meet the emotional reward, then interest towards solidarity may be lost (Salmela, 2015).

As in Anneli’s case, willingness to support solidarity also depends on the physical condition of the helper as well as the space and surroundings in which they dwell. For example, during the wintertime the mundane grocery shopping is far more difficult than in the summertime. Anneli stated that she has found herself in dangerous situations when the roads have been slippery: “When the ice was this kind of steel ice, I slid down the hill with my rollator [...] with all the groceries ...” Marja also stated that she has special routes that she uses during the winter. Slippery roads limit the life circle of older adults (Rowles, 1978) which includes the inability to do mundane chores and engenders a lack of social encounters (Repo, 2024).

The living environment is often reduced because of ageing (Repo, 2019, 2024), due to physical changes and changes in the senses (Rowles, 1978), and these can cause boredom. Mikko’s motivation to volunteer at the parish center is that “at least there is something to do [...] the days go by rather nicely, it [volunteering] takes about 3 h a day.” When Mikko is in good physical shape, he is also able to help in other parishes. Volunteering expands Mikko’s living circle, even if the volunteering he does for the parish may be a result of escaping boredom (as he describes) or a moral obligation. He noted laughing: “They asked me if I can help a few times, now it has been three years”. Thus, all help is not related to solidarity, although the idea of reciprocal benefit in volunteering can be observed: helping in the parish will not only help other older individuals but will also give content to the everyday life of the helper.

The help Mikko gives in his own house has more spatial features. Many of the chores that can be related to solidarity are performed inside the house. “I help to hang pictures on the wall, and if someone needs help in moving in or out. Sometimes I change light bulbs”, Mikko states. In these cases, the solidarity comes into existence inside the apartments, and changes the spaces as well as the everyday environment.

Helping others may also passivate those who are helped. Kalevi’s opinion was that sometimes Anneli helps people too easily: “people should be urged to go and bustle around themselves, so that they keep their head clear, instead of being all the time indoors.” In these cases, helping can at worst, reduce the life circle of people and decrease their mobility. However, it might be very difficult to stop helping people who rely on this solidarity, since it may cause feelings of guilt (Lindenberg, 2015).

6. Solidarity vs. system - dealing with authorities

In relation to solidarity, people must deal with various authorities including, for example, house managers, social services, trustees and health care professionals. The building used to have a regular caretaker, who cleaned the common spaces and took care of little repairs and helped residents with different things, such as moving in and out the house. When the data was collected, the caretaker had left, and the regular caretaker had been substituted by “a house manager hour”, which means that the house manager is available in the house for 1 h twice a week. This provoked considerable emotions amongst the residents. Of the responders 43.8% stated that a regular caretaker would increase the feeling of security in the building. Without a caretaker the need for help from neighbors increased. “Now you can see what it is like in here, weak people help even weaker people”, Anneli stated when we saw one of the residents helping another to move in. The example illustrates how solidarity manifests when formal sources of help fail. The idea that weak people help the weaker is a splendid example of the solidarity that rises from sameness. Furthermore, solidarity emerges even though people might not know each other before, like in this case when someone was moving into the building.

House manager stated that helping the residents is firstly the responsibility of the welfare society, secondly close relatives, thirdly friends and neighbors and after that the house manager. According to the questionnaire (Q1), this opinion echoes the current situation. Home care services visited residents in need several times a day (Fig. 1). Kalevi was unsatisfied with the home care and had stopped using it. He thought it was waste of time: “[the nurse] came from the door to the hall, sign herself in and then said that I’m off again bye bye. I don’t want to pay for that.” Terttu and Niina said that their home care only helps them to take their medicine. Thus, Anneli helps Terttu with chores and Niina has a personal assistant to take her out. Relying on the welfare society can be seen as a promise of a national level of solidarity towards citizens. However, the current state of home care services and the plans to cut down the services for older adults proves otherwise.

Seeking help may not be easy due digitalization and the increased utilization of technology in reservation systems. As Kalevi stated, many of the older residents do not know how to use smartphones or computers. Thus, he helps whenever he can. However, the house manager found it problematic when someone needed help with bank issues or similar chores that may endanger the privacy of people. Nevertheless, the inability to have or even seek help may lead to care poverty (Kröger et al., 2019). Furthermore, it may create zones of neglect where services are withdrawn or not offered at all (Loughnan, 2022). Thirty percent of the residents felt that they do not receive the help they need (Q1).

Juhani stated that in its current state he had nothing positive to say about the administration of the building and “the attitude towards residents and their needs.” One of the responders wrote: “I know that I don’t live in sheltered accommodation, but [this house] is a little bit weird towards us residents” (A4). Some of the responders felt that they are not listened to concerning their needs in relation to the apartments. Because of this, the residents may feel that the authorities of apartment building lack solidarity towards them. Hannele related that in the early days of the building, the authorities emphasized providing helping and good relationships between the caretaker and residents. After the changes in administration, caretaker should only do chores related to the requirements of the building. These changes resonate with the recent overall changes in the care of older adults (see f.ex. Repo, 2019) where everything additional is omitted either for economic reasons or because of the lack of resources. These kind of austerity policies have become common at the welfare state level and increased the need for informal help. Policies may though produce solidarity if the management or authorities are seen as a common adversary.

Marja started to help another resident, Aune, with some mundane chores. After Aune fell in her apartment and lay there for over a day, Marja started to check in on her regularly. Marja and Aune were not in a

formal care-relationship. “I didn’t want any pay checks, the taxes would have increased, and I did it [helping] from my own free will”, Marja asserted. Nevertheless, this became a problem after Aune died. Without a formal care relationship Marja had no rights to deal with Aune’s issues, such as organizing the funeral and clearing the apartment. As Aune had only very distant relatives who were not interested in dealing with these issues either, the social services took over the situation, leaving no room for Marja to participate. While solidarity may be integrated in certain laws and contracts (Prainsack and Buyx, 2012) sometimes the law can also be an obstacle for solidarity.

The food service at the parish center is important for many of the residents because it is quite reasonably priced. Even though many of them cannot go there themselves, Anneli and Mikko will buy food there for the other residents. When this service was about to be withdrawn by the parish, Anneli told the minister of the parish that she would organize a rollator demonstration. After negotiations the food service was continued in the parish center by a private entrepreneur. If the service is important enough, any changes may cause resistance. This kind of strong resistance can be seen as standing up as (Jennings, 2018) one of those in need of the service. There is also the implication that if the food service would had been closed, it would have severely changed the everyday life of some of the residents.

7. Discussion - spatial solidarity

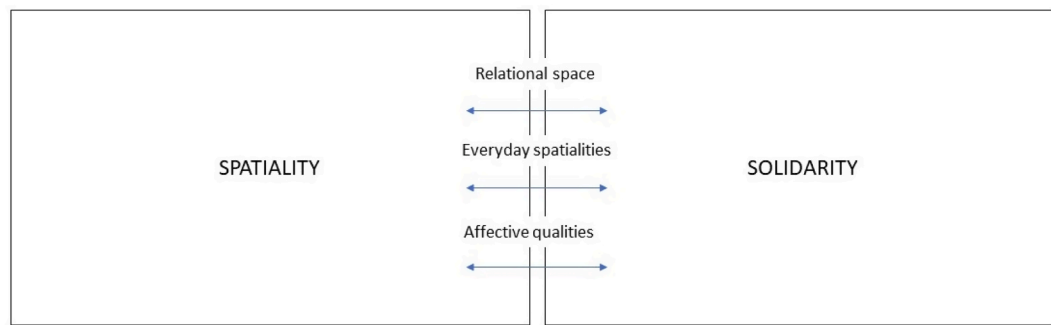
In previous studies, the connection between space and solidarity has been recognized as a being part of nationality and territoriality (Habermas, 2013; Oosterlynck et al., 2016), related to a sense of closeness (Laitinen and Pessi, 2015a), and being connected to special activist or alternative spaces (Daskalaki, 2018). Oosterlynck et al. (2016) states that due to the rapidly changing societal conditions in Western Europe, solidarity needs to be thought of as “different spatio-temporal register of everyday place-based practices” (Oosterlynck et al., 2016, p. 765). It is important to consider why different people share the same space. Is it voluntary or obligatory, and whether the spatial features will promote solidarity.

The results of the study show that solidarity has several connections to spatiality, thus suggesting the conceptualization of spatial solidarity. The ability to give and receive help and show solidarity may depend on the location of the helper and those in need of help. Not only is solidarity created and produced in spatial interactions, but it can also re-create physical spaces and spatial patterns in everyday life.

Based on the study, three spatial aspects related to solidarity have been categorized: relational space, everyday spatialities and affective qualities (Picture 1). Spatial solidarity depends on the relational spaces that bring people together. “Taking relationality as a starting point therefore opens up perspectives for solidarity among heterogeneous populations who do not have anything in common apart from the place they share” (Oosterlynck et al., 2016, p. 775). Thus, people do not necessarily need to share the same values if the solidarity is created spatially. For Jennings (2018) the basics of solidarity is seen as standing up besides another, which means the public recognition of another’s moral standing. I argue that there can also be silent solidarity, which is not perhaps directly related to values and morality but rather to spatiality; that is, spatiality as a concrete and imagined closeness and remoteness, which will influence an individual’s ability and willingness to perform acts of solidarity.

Spatial solidarity changes the physical spaces people live in if the help is focused, for example, on improving the lighting or decorating in an apartment. It also influences the space *per se* by making and re-making social relationships. As connected to relational space, spatial solidarity is also constantly changing, depending on the relations between people and people-space relations.

Everyday spatialities describes the mundane spatio-temporalities of people, who are connected for example because of the physical, imagined or emotional closeness they experience. The closeness may imply a



Picture 1. Aspects of spatial solidarity.

feeling of being close to someone (Habermas, 2013), for example a family member, but also to spatial closeness (Oosterlynck et al., 2016). Furthermore, everyday spatialities are in close relation to the places older adults live and use. Solidarity may rise from taking responsibility and care for these everyday spaces (Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Wiles and Jayasinha, 2013). Everyday spatialities also refer to the spatial patterns that are created via navigating in everyday surroundings. Thus, solidarity has influence on everyday spatialities and vice versa. In relation to everyday spatialities, spatial solidarity creates certain specific spatial patterns for those who help others, and it has an influence on the spatially related decisions people make concerning their everyday lives.

There is a strong connection between space and affects, for example they have an influence on how people see spaces and their living environment (Duff, 2010). Affects are shared and they transfer between people and bodies (Anderson, 2009; Jupp, 2022; Shouse, 2005; Thrift, 2004). The transfer of affects may occur because of spatial closeness, in the encounters between people and the everyday discussions that transpire in the same space (f.ex. Repo, 2024). Affects are forward pushing in a sense that they may cause people to act in a certain way (Thrift, 2004). Affects leads to solidarity between people, if the sense of “being in the same boat” manifests as acts or working together for a common goal. Thus, affects have influence on solidarity, but also the solidarity that arises from affects has influence on how people behave in their everyday life and how they see their living environment. It also influences whether they want to act in a certain way to change their conditions. The affective qualities of spatial solidarity manifest in spaces where people discuss and share their values and moral norms. Solidarity is affective in the sense that when people show solidarity it may influence others, as was the case with the Ingrians.

Finally, when ageing, the life circle of people is reduced for many reasons, most prominently because of reduced mobility. When the life circle is reduced the spaces of solidarity will also be limited. Thus, the solidarity between older individuals will be spatially related, focusing on the proximate environment. The social relationships between older adults are spatially attached (Tuominen and Pirhonen, 2019). Thus, it is important that the environment supports encounters with others (Varjakoski, 2021). As the examples show, spatial solidarity is also realized in these informal encounters between neighbors.

8. Concluding remarks

Care, help, and solidarity interact in many ways and sometimes the differences between the terms cannot easily be determined. At an abstract level the terms mix quite easily, for example care about might influence the urge to help and solidarity manifests in caring and helping. However, in practice care can be seen as more formal while help is legally and economically an informal act.

In this article, I have studied help and solidarity between older adults in an age-related apartment building. The study increases the relationship between ageing and space in relation to informal help and solidarity. In terms of spatial solidarity, age-related housing would seem to

be a good solution, since all the residents can easily understand the mundane challenges of ageing and can easily put themselves in “other people’s shoes”. Nevertheless, the problem lies in the current policies, when people who live at home might be so ill that any reciprocal help is not possible. Furthermore, the lack of resources in formal home care have increased the need for informal care and help. Consequently, helping might remain the responsibility of a few, which may feel exhausting for the helpers.

While many residents help because of their natural good will or sense of solidarity, the help might also cause them to be involved in complex situations with the authorities. As the opinion of house manager demonstrates, the general attitude is that the care of people should lie on the shoulders of the welfare society. Thus, it can be said that there is a responsibility to provide national solidarity. However, the current plans to reduce the services for older individuals speaks otherwise. As Habermas (1992) notes, solidarity is also remembrance; the current generation of older adults have done their part in building the welfare society. Thus, the reduction of care for older adults seems an unreasonable political decision, which transfers the responsibility to more informal helpers and a reliance on solidarity between people.

I argue that demographic changes and austerity policies influence how solidarity is perceived. Thus, spatial solidarity is connected or even dependent on policies which influence on people’s lives. Spatial solidarity should be treated critically if it is used to resolve the gaps of the formal services in the welfare society. In addition to being exhausting for helpers, spatial solidarity excludes some people if the helping occurs between some specific group of people. These arguments suggest that spatial solidarity may also increase inequalities, especially if wellbeing services counties rely on the help that people give each other rather than developing their services.

While affect is one of the main aspects of spatial solidarity, the focus in this article was more concerned with everyday spatialities and spaces. This leaves the possibility to further examine the relations between affects and (spatial) solidarity.

Statement about ethical approval

The ethical guidelines of Finnish National Board on Research Integrity was followed in this research. The ethical committee of Tampere University stated that ethical assessment was not needed. All the residents were able to give their permission to participate in the research themselves. Data was gathered according to the rules of EU’s data protection law, GDPR.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Virve Repo: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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