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The reciprocal development of the object of common space and the emergence of the collective agency in residents' workshops

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the study of agency by addressing the reciprocal development of collective agency and the object of common space. The aim is to investigate residents' collective agency in urban development from the perspective of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) with the help of applied ethnography. Residents' workshops focusing on the capacity to act together collectively provided a space for the residents to share their needs for a common space. The development of the collective agency of the residents began by expressing their individual needs in the development of their neighborhood. The collective elaboration of the fragmented needs in the residents' workshops enabled the formation of a joint object with the aid of cultural means and tools and with expansions of the object. In this study we provide an overview of the reciprocal development of residents' collective agency and the object of 'space'. Our findings call attention to 1) the significance of the joint object in coordinating the fragmented needs of the residents, 2) new participatory practices which enable the long process of transitions in the formation of the joint object, and 3) guidance and support that allowed the residents' local place-based knowledge to emerge and promote their participation.

1. Introduction

A large body of research has focused on agency in professional and occupational contexts; however, less attention has been paid to the study of collective agency of the residents in the context of urban development. This article creates new knowledge about the development of residents' agency in the development of their neighborhoods. Our focus is on the formation of residents' agency, namely the residents' collective agency in the efforts of a diverse group to act together to make a difference in the prevailing circumstances in an urban setting. In line with the socio-cultural perspective, we examine residents' learning as embedded in social activities (see [Mäkitalo, 2016](#)).

Our purpose is to investigate the emergence of residents' agency while they produce shared meanings in the developmental needs of their neighborhood. The production of shared meanings creates a basis for a collective agency that enables collective actions and in which shared meanings could be produced ([Freire, 2003](#)). The residents' workshops formed a context in which residents' actions of

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exerting influence could be manifested. The aim of the workshops was to hear the residents' voice without the jargon of administration, and to allow them to work with their distributed local knowledge in a free atmosphere.

Citizens' participation involves a process of becoming critical, gaining autonomy, and being empowered to act in communal and societal settings. [Gamble and Weil \(1995\)](#) define that citizen participation is individuals' and groups' active and voluntary involvement in changing problematic situations in communities and influencing the policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives and the lives of others. Participation is interconnected with power, democracy, and collective action for social change. It manifests social justice and the possibility for citizens to exercise the kind of agency that enables them to become involved in making decisions that affect their life ([Ledwich & Springett, 2010](#); [Putnam, 2000](#)). Residents engage in the development of their neighborhoods in different ways, both collective and individual. Involvement in collective efforts, which was the focus of this research, refers to participation in collaborative resident efforts to influence decision-making, such as engagement in neighborhood block groups, citizens' committees, or neighborhood organizing efforts. Individual activism refers to trailblazing residents and their actions to express the neighborhood concerns to key decision-makers with their local knowledge, networks and skills. An active citizenry necessitates, besides residents' individual activism and collective actions, collaboration between residents and local actors ([Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007](#)).

In Finland, the concept of urban development has changed to encompass residents' local knowledge and to include residents' participation in urban development. The communal decision-making processes are open to citizens' viewpoints, and the development of public services asks for citizens' contributions and co-designing. Public administration draws on transparency, equality, and democracy in their governance. The [Local Government Act \(2015\)](#) enhances citizens' public input prior to decision-making by giving people the right to have a say. This provides several opportunities for citizens: to give feedback to municipal decision-makers, to vote, to propose an initiative, to organize delegations, to follow and influence the progress of implemented plans, and to be chosen for a position of trust in the municipality.

This study is based on the three-year participatory action research project *Caring and Sharing Networks* (2013–2015) in the city of Espoo, Finland. The settlement of the town of Espoo started from rural Espoo Centre with its old and valuable cultural buildings, such as the cathedral of Espoo and office and administration buildings. The close neighborhoods are tightly built social housing districts, and they are marked by a low level of education, high unemployment, poor housing conditions and a high concentration of immigrants. Cultural diversity in daily life is reflected in the high proportion of immigrants and the presence of more than 70 spoken languages ([Lehtinen, 2016](#)). According to [Hirvonen \(2011\)](#), feelings of solidarity and social interaction are low in the apartment buildings. Furthermore, the residents regard the area as unsafe, untidy, and non-aesthetic. On the other hand, the services, transportation, and nature resources of the area are regarded as good.

The city of Espoo has launched several regeneration and development projects to improve the area in recent years, but an established way to cooperate with the residents has not been created so far. There is a wish to enhance the effectiveness of governance since it is encountering its limits regarding the conventional and bureaucratic policy of involving citizens via elected officials. Governmental bodies are facing demands to become more accountable for decisions and responsive to the public, and to involve citizens in policy decision-making. However, this abovementioned rhetoric has not yet led anywhere. For these reasons and due to the ongoing reconstruction work of the renewal of the area, the experiential place-based knowledge of the residents should be recognized, and a call should be made for stronger participation from residents as a means of giving them an influence.

The project under study focused on improving the involvement and participation of residents through different means, in order to integrate their experiences, creativity, and resources into the development of their environment. The goals of the research project were to enhance residents' participation and to develop efficient means (e.g. models, methods) for the collaboration of stakeholders and residents in urban development. The project consisted of three main data collections. First, participant observation and context-mapping interviews were conducted to acquire an understanding of residents' motives and interests in their neighborhood development ([Lund & Juujärvi, 2018](#)). Second, a series of four workshops for residents, called residents' workshops, were organized as a form of creative encounters to find residents who would participate in the future development actions of their neighborhood. Third, a series of five workshops called community workshops for residents and stakeholders concerning urban planning and governance were organized as an intervention in the project. The three phases of the data collection create a continuum in the formation of collective agency, each of which entails a specific dynamism. The focus of this study is on the second phase of the project, as the other two phases are reported in separate articles.

The aim of the residents' workshops was to contribute to collective collaboration in urban development. During the workshops the residents had an opportunity to develop their agency in collaboration with other residents. The research questions are: (1) How does the residents' collective agency emerge in the workshops? (2) How does the creation of the object of 'space' develop in the workshop activities?

The development of the object of space and the emergence of collective agency are examined in the framework of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) ([Engeström, 1987](#); [Leont'ev, 1978](#); [Vygotsky, 1978](#)). In the context of CHAT, recent studies of agency are related to formative intervention research and its methodological principles such as the principles of double stimulation, ascending from the abstract to the concrete and transformative agency ([Engeström, Sannino, & Virkkunen, 2014](#)). The workshops of this research are not based on the methodological principles of formative intervention but they are creative workshops described in [Section 3](#). The idea is to examine the initial expressions of the emerging agency of the residents. The theoretical concepts of CHAT are used in the analysis of the object of the activity. First, in [Section 2](#), we introduce the activity-theoretical approach and the main concepts of the research. Second, in [Section 3](#), we present the data, the research methods and the residents' workshops as the research context. Third, in [Section 4](#), we report the findings on the development of the object of space and the emergence of collective agency. Finally, we discuss our findings in relation to the concept of relational agency and present our conclusions about the development of

the residents' collective agency in a reciprocal relation with the object of activity in social interaction in urban development.

2. The activity-theoretical approach of the study

2.1. The object of an activity

The framework of CHAT (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) offers a methodology for examining how links are built between people and practices in changing situations and contexts. In particular, the concepts of need and the motive and object of activity, originating from CHAT, enable the analysis of the dialectical constitution of these concepts. Activities consist of a sequence of learning actions (and interactions) which follow one another in a certain order, entailing transitions from one action to another. On the ideal level, this sequence of learning actions involves a movement of ascending from abstract ideas to concrete practices (Davydov, 1990). During the process, the essence of an object and its development are grasped through their manifestations in an activity undergoing transformation.

Every activity is motivated by its object, without which it could not exist (Leont'ev, 1978). An object of an activity is a historically accumulated, need-related moving target which shapes and directs the activity and determines the possible actions (Engeström, 2001). In interaction human beings objectify what matters to them and build shared knowledge of their needs, which then deepens their collaboration and enables the formation of a joint object of activity (Miettinen, 2006). In our research, the formation of the joint object of activity is especially important since the residents' scattered individual needs call for elaboration with significant others through interaction.

According to Leont'ev (1978), human needs are social in origin, and there is a need or desire embedded in every object of activity. Miettinen (2005) articulates that needs can emerge as dilemmas, tensions, and contradictions in an activity. Needs can also be expressed as a set of problems representing historically formed internal contradictions of an activity (Engeström, 1987). Desires for approval and recognition from a larger community are social needs which relate to individual resources (Miettinen, 2005). Consequently, the expression of needs directs the formation of an object of activity and allows the development of agency. In this study, the needs of the residents are universal in character and at the same time they act as a motivating force in their creation of the joint object and collective agency.

A human being orients towards an object through actions mediated by cultural means and tools, and needs become a motive when an activity finds its object. The object as a collective motive of an activity is described as a complex and contradictory assembly of the various individual motives attached to it, which call for a collectively articulated solution (Engeström & Blackler, 2005; Nardi, 2005; Sannino, 2014).

2.2. Agency

The concept of agency refers to the human capacity to act and make choices that have an impact on human lives and their environments (Emirbayer & Miche, 1998). According to Mäkitalo and Säljö (2017), the sociocultural approach to agency emphasizes human beings' capacity to coordinate perspectives in reciprocal relations between each other in particular contexts. In these communicative practices, language is considered the most important mediational mean by which human beings contribute to the shaping of their collective practices and the transforming of their environment. Learning emerges from challenges in situated activities which necessitate (activity-bound) interaction, the coordination of actions, and a (shared) understanding (Mäkitalo, 2012).

The residents' workshops form a specific stage for studying agency and its power to change their environment. Freire's (2003) notion of collective agency emphasizes human beings' abilities to integrate into their environment and community by acting dialogically and reflecting critically upon how to transform their social reality through further action and reflection. According to Freire, human beings can transform their conditions step by step by comparing, judging, choosing, deciding, and breaking the boundaries in their living conditions.

The capacity to work with others and the ability to share knowledge are important features that shape collaboration in collective and collaborative endeavors. Edwards (2005) relates these abilities to relational agency, which is the human "capacity to work with others to expand the object and trying to transform it by recognizing the resources that others bring to bear as they interpret and respond to the object" (p.172). Working relationally takes place between professionals (and clients) in institutional settings. The alignment of motives and the interpretation of objects occur at the intersection of practices. According to Edwards, the dialectical relationship between an object and a motive relates to how human beings interpret an object of actions and, further, how they engage with it. Recognizing the motives and resources of others, making sense of and interpreting what matters to practice, and aligning responses to an expanded object of activity are crucial in social interaction. In collaboration, an object of activity is usually recognized in different ways. However, culturally valued knowledge, concepts, and tools can act as mediators in establishing a new relationship between the subject and object that is relevant for practice (Edwards, 2012).

In our study, the features of relational agency are relevant in examining the residents' interaction with each other, for instance, when they are seeking help from each other, giving help to each other, and aligning their motives with the motives of others. These relational aspects enable recognizing how available resources can support individual action and how to use the support of others in the creation and transformation of the joint object. Subjects' creation of joint objects of activity may not only involve consensus-seeking of the participants' overlapping needs and goals, but it may also entail disagreements (Matusov, 1996). Conflicts of motives and other disturbances can emerge during the creation of joint objects. The development of collective activities may be influenced by power relations between municipal practices and the needs of residents. Our focus is on the fragile process of collaboration between

the residents, during which the collective initiative for transformation begins to take place in a residential area. We study the residents' workshops as collaborative face-to-face encounters that enable the participants to recognize their resources in the creation of a joint object for urban development.

3. The data and the methods of the study

The main methodological approach of this study is applied ethnography (Chambers, 2000), with the aim of studying the residents' manifestations of the object of their activity and the actions related to it by following these through the successive workshops. Applied ethnography is used as a general approach of the study to influence change in residents' participation process. The residents' actions are analyzed from the transcribed interactional turns guided by the research questions. The analysis focuses on the residents' suggestions, thoughts, opinions, needs, hopes, and perspectives as reflected in their discourse, which lead to the commonly negotiated developmental goals of the residential area. Consequently, the development of the residents' agency and the object of their activity can be followed over the four successive workshops.

The discussions in the four workshops were video and audio recorded, yielding 17 h of recordings and 178 verbatim transcribed text pages (12pt Times New Roman font, double spacing, right and left margins at 2 cm, top and bottom margins at 2.5 cm). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The first author of this paper planned and implemented the workshops, attended several meetings before and during the workshop process, and observed and documented the data and other material with three other researchers. The researchers received orientation and participated in the workshops as facilitators in the residents' groups, while the interventionist, hired from outside, was in charge of leading the workshops. The second author is one of the supervisors, and she was involved in the analysis of the data and the writing of this paper; however, she was not involved in the fieldwork.

The data were first read and listened through to get an overall view of the topics and issues that the residents highlighted. During the diligent re-reading process, sharper attention was focused on the residents' expressions of insufficient or sufficient resources, satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the ongoing development of their neighborhood, and expressions of internal tensions, referring to the contradictions embedded in practical activities and focusing on what mattered to everyone. The most frequent expressions were suggestions and expressions of the needs in urban development.

The unit of analysis is the object-related activity and the way that the ideas connected to it, expressed in words, were carried out in actions (Davydov & Radzikhovskii, 1985; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). Relationality is an essential quality of the object, and it connects those who are involved in the pursuit of the shared object (see Leont'ev, 1981, p.49). To be able to examine the residents' actions and interactions, it is important to follow how they were orientated towards other residents, and how they relationally built up a shared object of collaboration from their distributed knowledge and experience. This was realized by following the development of how the residents mastered their relations and how they engaged in micro-negotiations when working on the object. The unit of analysis is an interactive speaking episode on the micro level of analysis. It consists of the communicative sequences and consequences expressed in the interaction.

Four workshops for the residents were conducted within two months during March–May 2014 in Kirkkojärvi, Suvola, and Espoo Centre, the city of Espoo. These neighborhoods form a residential area for about 17,000 inhabitants. Two main goals were established: (1) to bring together the residents to participate and express their thoughts about developmental issues concerning their residential area, and (2) to find suitable residents who would participate in and take responsibility for future development actions. The purpose of the workshops was to provide a forum for shared learning and reflection (see Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

The residents worked in groups, including four researchers as facilitators, supervised by the interventionist. The groups composed of different individuals each time. This obviously slowed the working process, and much attention was paid to the repetition of the information to ensure that everyone was able to participate. The methods used in the workshops were Open Space (Owen, 2008) and World Café meetings (Carson, 2011), and incubator, trade-off, and theme meetings aiming at brainstorming, enriching, and inventing the development topics, which will be described in the following paragraphs.

The first workshop started with the Open Space method (Owen, 2008), and the residents were encouraged to write down important issues that they want to influence. Residents were guided to choose a group with the same issue and sit down in a half circle. They started several small self-organized meetings lasting about 30 min. The researchers facilitated the meetings by giving poster sheets to use to make residents' agenda visible, encouraging them to visit other groups, and controlling the timing. The issues were presented to everyone. Some of the issues were not shared in common, but they were recorded in a visible way.

In the second workshop the residents sat in World Café tables (Carson, 2011), with the researchers facilitating the groups to start the dialogue and take notes. The aim was to enrich the topics by asking questions, combining facts, and in the end crystalizing a small summary. The residents were able to move around the room and influence other groups. The newcomers first spent time in the incubator, which was set apart from the World Café tables. They were asked to discuss the issues that emerged in the previous workshop and evaluate whether their own ideas fit the existing ideas. Later on, their opinions and thoughts were discussed together with all the participants in plenary discussion but they were not included with the ideas of the other group. The process of this workshop was visualized in posters, notepapers, and summaries in flipchart. The residents were asked to prepare for the next workshop with the assignment of making observations, photographing, and conducting interviews in their residential area.

In the third workshop residents worked in a trade-off setting (Keeney & Raiffa, 1993), making their presentations visible with creative material and preparing speeches on their theme for forthcoming events. The group had to decide the roles, responsibilities, and the following concrete steps as they would in a meeting with the municipalities or to draw up some public questionnaires to explore the topic further. The residents were asked to prepare for the next workshop with the assignment to invite people who would be highly interested in the issue.

Table 1
Overview of the residents' workshops.

Workshops	Participants	Aims	Working methods	Outcomes
Workshop 1, 19 th of March, 2014	4 women 6 men	Brainstorming	Open Space Meetings	Tentative themes (4): 1. A common space 2. Common activities 3. A pleasant and safe environment 4. New housing models
Workshop 2, 14 th of April, 2014	4 women 3 men	Enriching the ideas	World Cafe, Incubator	Consolidated themes (3): 1. A common space and activities 2. A pleasant and safe environment 3. New housing models
Workshop 3, 28 th of April, 2014	10 women 1 man	Preparing presentations	Trade-offs	Pictures, mind maps, and texts about the future visions connected to the themes
Workshop 4, 12 th of May, 2014	13 women 10 men	Deciding the developmental steps	Theme meetings	Implementation plans (3): 1. An excursion to empty spaces 2. A cleaning day 3. A meeting with the housing department

At the beginning of the fourth workshop, special attention was paid to the results of the previous workshops, and these results were presented to the audience. The aim was to progress further with the issues and find out whether new ideas were still arising. The residents had to decide the next developmental steps, which were how to implement their ideas and with whom to meet, in order to fulfill their ideas. The concrete next steps were then attached to a wall chart.

In [Table 1](#) we present the aims, methods, outcomes, and the number of participants of the workshops. As a result of the workshop process, the participants created four themes. We chose the theme 'common space' for further analysis.

The number of participants in the four workshops varied from seven to 23, resulting in 36 individuals, aged 27 to 79 years. The participants in the workshops were local residents; ten participants were immigrants from Somalia, Ghana, Kosovo, Morocco, and Cameroon, and 26 participants were residents of major population. Some of the participants were socially and politically active, participated as members of neighborhood organizations, or had responsibilities in voluntary work. In [Table 2](#), the residents involved in the analysis are introduced.

4. The emergence of the object and collective agency in neighborhood development

The analysis started by selecting the interactive speaking episodes in which residents discuss their thoughts about urban development with others and which show the reactions to their thoughts. The focuses are on the development of the residents' actions of negotiation and the recognition of mutual understandings during the workshop process. It is crucial here to describe the dynamics of how people act and make an impact in social situations, interpret the motives of others, and build relationships between people and practices. This means investigating how the residents co-author their actions and how this process develops. During the analysis, it became clear that the residents' workshops did not form an organized activity system, they were loosely coupled groups of residents expressing their scattered opinions and wishes with no joint object. However, a thorough investigation revealed that the residents had much in common while they searched for the joint object.

During the analysis we paid attention to the residents' wishes, needs, and desires regarding developmental issues while analyzing

Table 2
Descriptions of the residents.

Name	Background
Alan (A1)	Project worker, involved in immigrant issues
Amy (A2)	Project worker, involved in multicultural issues
Ashley (A3)	Employed, deputy representative on the municipal council
Cecilia (C)	Retired, involved in voluntary work
Helen (H1)	Retired
Hester (H2)	Retired
Jeff (J1)	Employed, involved in politics and immigrant issues
John (J2)	Teacher in the local vocational school
Justin (J3)	Retired
Karen (K1)	Researcher and architect, not responsible in the mentioned neighborhood
Keith (K2)	Worker in a local community association
Kitty (K3)	Local resident, a student
Miriam (M)	Local civil servant in community development
Rose (R)	Employed, active in community development, politics, and multicultural issues
Samuel (S1)	Resident from the next neighborhood
Sebastian (S2)	Retired
Simon (S3)	Retired, active in voluntary work and politics

the interactional episodes. Residents constructed their opinions based on their personal perspectives, which reflected their individual goals in the development of the neighborhood. However, these opinions were collectively developed (see [Holland & Reeves, 1994](#)) during the workshops, as will be shown later. The diversity of the population in the neighborhood produced a variety of standpoints and perspectives on the conception of the object.

The object of activity, 'space', was referred to several times in every workshop, and it seemed to motivate the activity of the residents. We found altogether 19 episodes in which the residents' current interests concerning a space were manifested. Three conceptions of the object of space in the neighborhood development were manifested in the data. These are a) creating a social space, b) creating a physical space, and c) creating a cultural space. In the next sections, we describe the manifestations of the object of space that is produced in a dialectical relationship between the physical and the historically evolved cultural environments ([Lefebvre, 1991](#)). The cultural space concerns the social and the multicultural aspects of the environment.

4.1. *The first workshop: creating a social space*

The aim of the first workshop was to express thoughts about developmental issues concerning the neighborhood. The episodes of interaction chosen for analysis were when someone described a motive or a desire for the use of a space, when existing resources or a need for resources were recognized, and when a need arose for understanding the current situation in the neighborhood. Several manifestations of the concept of 'space' were expressed by the residents, and these referred to social space, physical space, and cultural space.

At the beginning of the workshop, Simon, an elderly participant referred to the social aspect of the conception of space by emphasizing its importance for voluntary work. He highlighted the value of voluntary work as common practice of the residents in the neighborhood, and furthermore, he considered voluntary work as a significant element improving the daily lives of families in need. Besides interlinking the need for a space for voluntary work, a social need was indicated; the residents wished for approval and recognition of the voluntary work they conducted (see [Miettinen, 2005](#)). Furthermore, the residents explicated that space was needed for exchanging knowledge and chores between generations in learning traditional skills, such as woodworking, and IT skills, by fixing technical equipment. They stressed the need for an easy-access space for people during their free time for meeting friends. The space was also considered necessary for educational activities such as teaching, learning, and counselling, for associations' meetings and activities, and for residents' commercial activities, such as selling their own products. They needed a multipurpose structure for doing activities and being together.

Some of the residents expressed cultural aspects of the conception of space, manifesting as the image of the multicultural neighborhood. For instance, Amy, who was experienced with immigrant issues, expressed a wish to understand the cultural diversity and values of others in the neighborhood, which would require a space where different cultures could meet. The presence of many artists working in the space would raise the image and reputation of the area.

Two episodes contained emerging worries about the physical aspects of the space concerning the organization of the activities and the responsibilities of the municipality to plan the use of empty not-yet-in-use spaces in the city. These comments remained, however, singular manifestations, although the municipality's responsibility and its administrative role is often highlighted and considered important in neighborhood development even when citizen participation is concurrently highly valued and promoted ([Local Government Act, 2015](#)).

The residents constructed the object of the common space of their activity by listening to each other's needs and ideas related to the uses of the space. They built links between their desires and shared their knowledge about spaces. They approached the features and roles of their similar long-term goals related to a space from different angles. The social and cultural aspects were manifested more frequently than the physical aspect of a space, but the manifestations of the object conceptions were interlinked with each other in a way that makes it hard to distinguish between them. Public, popular, and social spaces, where people can improve their relations and networks, enhance debates, and participate in actions towards citizens' welfare in the society, are crucial to cities (see [Bodnar, 2015](#); [Cornwall, 2004](#); [Gaventa, 2004](#); [Lefebvre, 1991](#)). The dialectical movement between sharing knowledge and information in networks of relations develops the social space ([Lefebvre, 1991](#)). According to [Magalhaes \(2016\)](#), participants' mutual dialectical negotiations of visions of future development enable a creation of collaborative space where shared meanings are supported by reflections and actions based on relations. [Fig. 1](#) illustrates how the links between residents' desires and shared knowledge are built.

4.2. *The second workshop: creating a physical space*

The aim of the second workshop was to develop the ideas about the issues that emerged in the first workshop. There were two groups in the workshop; the first group elaborated on their conceptions of space and brought up new ideas in four episodes related to space selected for the analysis. The second group, consisting of newcomers, spent time in the incubator, where they were facilitated to familiarize themselves with the thoughts and ideas concerning the conception of space. The residents of the first group explained and interpreted their ideas and listened to each other's interpretations. Their conceptions of space related both to physical and social perspectives of a space.

The first episode began with the facilitator reading a letter from the city authorities, the aim of which was to motivate the residents to influence the development of their neighborhood. The letter provided information about the city and the goals of the administration of the development of the neighborhood. In the workshop, the participants recognized on their part what matters to residents and expanded the object of space to include their 'activities'. One resident reflected, "What comes first: a space or an activity?" This issue indicates a dialectical movement between the physical and social aspects of a space in their conversation.

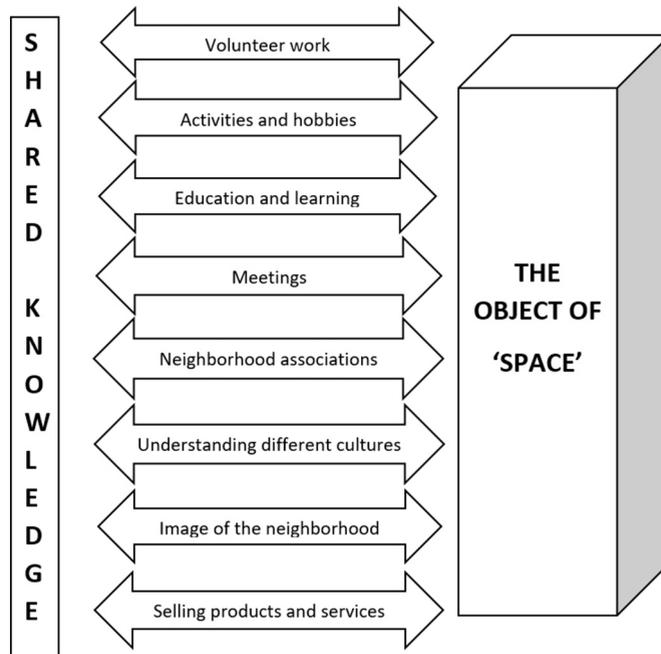


Fig. 1. The building of shared knowledge and the needs of the residents related to the uses of space.

Group 1: Episode 1, Facilitator, A3 = Ashley

Facilitator: Hey, we got a letter from the city planner. I will read it. *“The planning of the renovation of the neighborhood primary school has started. We will draw a future illustration of the block with the school, shopping center, and service center. We would like to know what kind of facilities the residents need. This could at the same time promote the appeal and wellbeing of the residential area.”*

A3: Well, that is located at the central place.

Facilitator: There have been various ideas from the city planners that the residents' place could be located, for example, upstairs in some existing buildings. What do you think; would that be a place for people to come?

A3: Yes, I think so...if there is something interesting...activities..., not if there is only the space. That doesn't attract anyone...

The second episode started with Ashley bringing up her former experience in organizing common activities in a housing company. The discussion continued by listing aspects connected to a space, such as its accessibility, maintenance, rules and regulations, and its facilities. The residents also discussed the possibilities for cooperation with the city authorities about rules, the division of responsibilities, and the duties when organizing activities in the space. During the conversation the residents began to align their needs with the societal rules in their neighborhood. There is currently an ongoing tension between what the decision-makers say and what happens in real life. For instance, decision-makers give support to active citizenry but at the same time they ask the citizens pay rent. The residents did not, however, feel comfortable discussing the restrictions and division of duties between residents and municipal actors and the conversation became stuck in administrative practices. They were more keen to promote new practices that met their interests. When residents are heard on their chosen issues, citizen participation and, consequently, public deliberation increases in neighborhood governance (see Gomart & Hajer, 2003; Leino & Laine, 2011; Marres, 2007).

The third episode started with Karen providing her previous knowledge and experience from another urban planning context. The group took advantage of the information in the creation of concrete ideas for the maintenance of the possible future space in the neighborhood. They also recognized associations as resources for being the part of the division of responsibilities in the maintenance. Karen's contribution of her previous knowledge indicates that dialogue between the residents' experiential knowledge and the expert knowledge related to governance is necessary in neighborhood development. This is in parallel with Galvin and Mooney Simmie (2017) when they claim that citizens' participation must be based on the community's experiential knowledge.

The fourth episode involved the facilitator's summary of the discussions on how to take advantage of existing premises and how to engage residents to use the premises. The location of the premises was seen to be connected to their active use. The residents also recognized that they needed help and resources from the municipality, and this realization inspired them to plan the first civic action towards implementing their plans.

The social and physical manifestations of the object seem to be equally significant and not discernable from each other in the development of common spaces. The residents needed a space to cultivate their social activities, but when discussing the physical features of the space, some of the residents brought up administrative rules and perspectives from their previous experiences. This raised opposing reactions and even tensions among other residents. We think this may be due to residents' previous experiences in which their ideas and suggestions were rejected by administration in urban development. Prevailing collaboration practices do not

enable the recognition of place-based local needs and the knowledge of the residents (see Healey, 2003; Horelli & Wallin, 2013). Residents are able to organize their own activities if they receive enough resources, and municipal actors can strengthen their co-operation with citizens by implementing residents' initiatives together (see Sintomer, Hertzberg, & Röcke, 2008).

The discussion topics of the second group, the newcomers, did not concern the conception of space but local practices of governance. They emphasized the examination of the motives and intentions among stakeholders, and strongly criticized the administrative and political motives of the municipal decision-makers and the owners of premises. The discussion was heated, and the participants complained about the municipal practices. For instance, one discussant said, "They don't even show the urban plans here in the way they should." The members of the groups did not see the benefit of cooperation with the city authorities. For instance, Justin summarized the situation as follows, "You can't influence urban planning here." Criticism of and dissatisfaction towards the work of city planners and decision-makers are prevalent in the literature of urban development, and obscure urban practices have engendered distrust towards official governance and political decision-makers also elsewhere (see Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Pløger, 2004). The utilization of public premises in particular is strongly demanded by citizens. The residents often express their needs for space, but public premises are kept empty because residents cannot afford to rent them.

In this study, the residents identified premises such as schools and associations that provide spaces and activities that match their need for a common space. They recognized pensioners, youngsters, artists, and people in rehabilitative work who could benefit from a common physical space in the neighborhood. They discussed the physical and social conceptions of space, and it was noteworthy that multicultural issues did not manifest in this workshop. However, the different perspectives made the residents pay attention to the barriers in the development of a common space. The letter from the city authorities, the summaries, and their own lists enabled the development of their ideas. Sharing their motives affected their interpretations and ideas of the development for a common space, and the local knowledge of the residents was considered crucial for promoting further actions. The collaboration of the first group was strengthened in parallel with enriching the object of space. The second group created an alternative perspective by criticizing and resisting collaboration between citizens and decision-makers. However, they were bypassed since their object of activity was not made concrete in action. The residents prepared for the next workshop with the assignment to make observations, photograph and to carry out interviews in their residential area. Fig. 2 describes the residents' two alternative perspectives in their neighborhood development: group one manifested their needs for a common space, and group two expressed their opinions about the decision-makers and their practices of governance.

4.3. The third workshop: creating a multicultural space

The aim of the third workshop was to prepare presentations of the developmental issues in the neighborhood. As a result, the residents produced pictures, mind maps, and texts about their discussion topics. During the lively workshop discussions, the residents started to ask and give reasons for why they need a common space. They opened up a space of reasons (Derry, 2007) by asking why-questions such as "But why do we need a place?" instead of just giving ideas about the space. A space of reasons (Derry, 2007, 2013; Hopwood & Edwards, 2017; Rai, 2017) is a practice where the operations of 'giving and asking' for reasons (Brandom, 2000) help people to negotiate what matters to them. It is a site where motives are made explicit to facilitate the building of shared knowledge.

The episodes of discussion chosen for analysis indicate the building of a space of reasons. In the episodes new ideas about a shared communal place expanded the object of space. The expansion of the object involved the residents' uses of new materialized

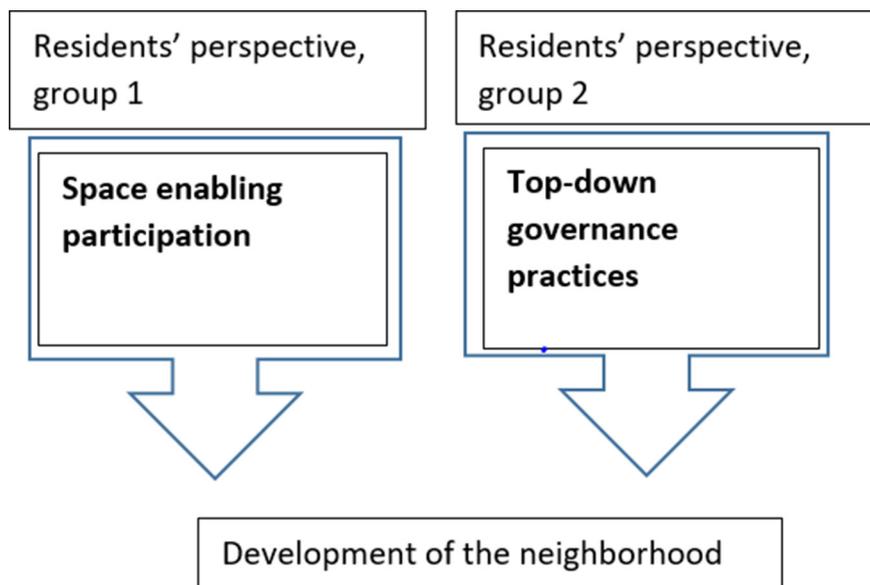


Fig. 2. Residents' two perspectives of urban development.

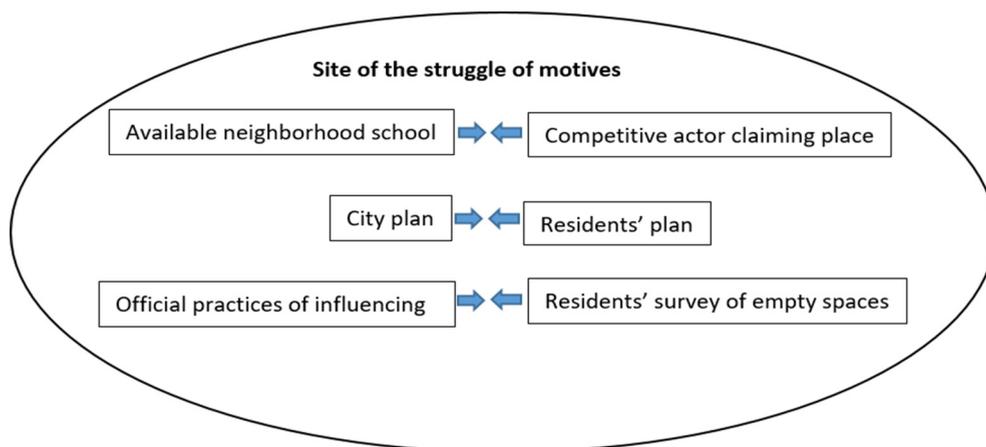


Fig. 3. The space as the site of the struggle of motives in the urban development.

mediational means, such as lists, summaries, plans, the residents' survey of urban planning, and presentations. They indicated expressions of collaborative intentions and collective efforts to influence the development of the neighborhood.

We identified two narratives of the object of 'space' in the analysis: a space representing the residents' struggle over their motives in urban development and a space representing the multicultural development of the area. In the first narrative, the residents' motives for a common space were driven by partly contradictory perspectives on physical premises, maintenance issues, and the division of labor. Fig. 3 describes the first narrative, the site of the struggle, where the residents' actions were mediated by opposite perspectives of creating a common space, its ownership and the sharing of responsibilities.

Two competitive alternatives were seen in the discussion in the first narrative. The space was either to be located in existing and available city premises, or the city was to provide new premises with suitable facilities and equipment and to share some of the tasks with the residents. The residents' actions were mediated by different contradictory perspectives on a) the neighborhood school being available vs. a competing actor claiming a space, b) the city plan vs. the residents' plan, and c) the official practices of influencing the neighborhood vs. the residents' survey of empty spaces in the neighborhood. These issues indicate a competition between different urban actors due to their different perspectives, and the fact that residents do not always trust city authorities to take their side in urban planning (Pløger, 2001). The interactive turns of the discussions revealed the different roles and opposing positions of the actors that created tensions among the residents in urban planning. The residents felt that their opinions were only asked about every now and then, or not at all. The experience was manifested by Kitty saying, "But when you said, that the residents' opinions will be asked, well, who are those residents whose opinions will be asked about, and where and who is that active person who asks?" The residents felt that the only opportunity to make an impact on community development is by being in the right place in the right time. The residents thought they had to be quick to have a say or simply had to have a powerful person to speak on their behalf. These experiences were illustrated by Miriam, "There should always be some powerful people involved here." The role of the city authorities was experienced as being quite demanding and authoritarian, as was explicated by the facilitator, "There is always the same problem that the city does not start anything unless they can be sure about the activities needed." But the residents' persistence was expressed by Helen, "And the communities of people organize the activities."

In the second narrative, a space was discussed from the societal perspective of the neighborhood. The residents explained that they needed a space close to their neighborhood in order to organize common meetings more easily. This was indicated in the residents' speaking turns: "People want to do things in their own neighborhood," "People will meet there," and "It is important for the wellbeing for all of us." The residents also recognized the need for more developed multicultural activities to increase communication between residents. The integration of immigrants was considered a long-term goal that would promote the wellbeing and future development of the neighborhood. The residents drew on their previous experiences with immigrants and their understanding of immigrants' needs and perspectives. Episode 2 below manifests this view.

Episode 2, Facilitator, H1 = Helen, K3 = Kitty.

Facilitator: What do you think Helen, could there be multicultural activities in the common place?

H1: Yes, I have had the experience that if a person with a multicultural background organizes the activities, he/she will have a better relationship with other multicultural people.

Facilitator: Yes, a worker with an immigrant background.

K3: A peer counsellor.

The face-to-face gatherings in a social space were regarded as a valuable means for the residents' capacity to influence and develop their neighborhood. Increasing interaction in governance enhances diversity and creativity, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Wagenaar, 2007). This was nicely expressed in a resident's speaking turn: "I believe that people who use the same premises start to understand each other and communicate."

During the discussion the residents started to position themselves on the multicultural arena of actors to understand the motives

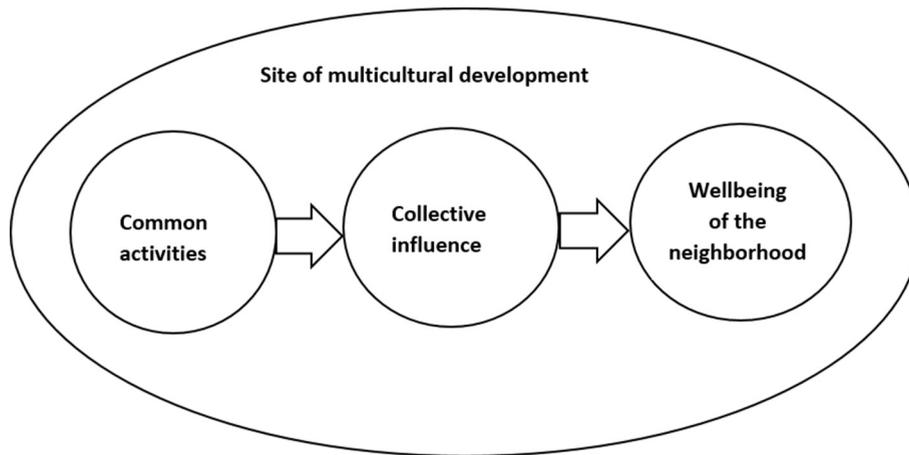


Fig. 4. The space as the site of the multicultural development.

of others. The motives of urban planners, ineffective practices, and the division of responsibility between actors began to shape the residents' motives for a common space, their responses, and their alignment with each other's motives. The residents recognized that the urban practices were complicated by multiple issues, and it was necessary to harness their experiential knowledge towards the preparation of a plan to make a difference in their neighborhood development. The residents created three expansions of the object of space in the site of multicultural development: (1) common activities and the sharing of the responsibility for their development among individual residents, (2) a collective influence on the ongoing development of the neighborhood, and (3) the wellbeing of their neighborhood based on multiculturalism (see Fig. 4).

The search for a common space strengthened the building of new relations between multicultural residents in the development of the urban area. The expanded conceptions of the object were materialized through multicultural issues, the integration of new perspectives, and the involvement of residents of all cultures. The manifestations of the physical, social, and cultural perspectives of the conception of the object were merged to give a new meaning to a common space. For this achievement, it was necessary to empower the residents' activities and participation in the development of the area. This reminds us of Freire's (2003) notion that collective agency empowers people through community-based improvements in their residential area. The residents became a powerful urban player with their local knowledge and values in urban planning. They had an 'authority of experience' that the official administration did not possess (see Scott, 1991, p. 780).

With these two narratives of space, as a site of struggle and of development, the residents showed that there are contestations, battlegrounds, and oppositional parties in the neighborhood development between and among citizens and public administration. According to Foucault (1991), space refers to exercising power, where the cultures of politics and the spaces of power contradict each other, resulting in resistance and acceptance (Bourdieu, 1991). The discourses of people provide a dynamism which frames the boundaries of agency (Hayward, 1998). The residents' actions were strong when they criticized, asked questions, and demanded answers at the workshop. But towards the end of the workshop, the behavior of the residents changed, and they tried to reach a shared object by linking a space to the societal development of the neighborhood. With this expansion they stepped away from individual actions and learned collaboratively to broaden their views and expand the object of their activity. The residents were prepared for the next workshop with the assignment to invite people who would be enthusiastic about the issue.

4.4. The fourth workshop: deciding the next developmental steps

The aim of the fourth workshop was to decide the next developmental steps based on the discussions and documents from the previous workshops. The fourth workshop started by summarizing the features of the space and suggesting a meeting between the residents and civil servants on the facility management of the city premises. It was followed by a resident's suggestion to conduct a guided excursion of empty places, related to a former suggestion of conducting a survey of residents. The residents listed all of the empty-not-in-use places they knew. The workshop continued with further discussions, including the residents' suggestions, ideas, and needs in the neighborhood development, illustrated in episode 3 below.

Episode 3, J1 = Jeff, S1 = Samuel, A2 = Amy, H1 = Helen, R = Rose.

J1: We need teaching activities so that the immigrant women can learn language skills. And also the children. We need (languages) in two groups, evenings for those who work. And cost free... It would be great if many associations could collaborate... then it is just not the language...it is also the culture we can learn from each other.

S1: For example, I would like to learn the languages of immigrants. Why don't we think both ways?

A2: I could add to him now that I have always been thinking about how natives and immigrants could meet?

J1: I would like to answer that one of our challenges is how are we going to make them understand, I mean the immigrant women and young people, that they are members of this society? I can't do it alone.

H1: I would like to say now that we should not talk any more about multiculturalism only. My son came back from the States and he said that our neighborhood has become international.

R: But the lack of space makes us hang around with our own people only. Especially if there are strict rules.

H1: The city has its rules and regulations; one department needs a space, and another department charges the rent.

S1: But this is absolutely crazy, if we say that nobody can afford it.

After this conversation the participants specified their three previous suggestions: (a) they will need a big space for many activities, (b) they will organize a meeting with members of the facility management of the city and take an excursion with a mini-bus to empty spaces, and (c) they will express their concern about the integration of immigrant women to the mosque. The first suggestion (a) remained at the level of manifestation, the second suggestion (b) indicated an attempt to make a civic action and further promote the idea of a common space, and the third suggestion (c) revealed that the immigrant issue is coupled with the development of the whole neighborhood. The search for a common space was based on the building of a new perspective, which generated new collaborative relations among the residents towards the development of the area. Multicultural issues, integration, and the involvement of all residents were considered the highest priorities in the development of the neighborhood. The residents were not able to think about a space without considering the current development of the area connected to it. This is in line with [Uitermark, Rossi, and Van Houtum's \(2005\)](#) claim that the topic of ethnocultural diversity is increasingly incorporated into neighborhood practices and urban development. In our project, the residents compassionately defended all the residents' perspectives in the area, respecting and protecting them. This kind of value could serve as a cornerstone in their democratic community.

The residents showed developmental actions with their decision to have a meeting with the public authorities. Despite the emergence and criticism of top-down governance practices in the second workshop and the presence of this criticism in the discussions in the third workshop, the residents overcame it by starting the discussions from another point of view. The shift from expressions of needs for a common space to collective developmental initiatives emerged as a result of the residents' interaction in the workshops. Former experience and knowledge, opposite motives, and tensions played an important role and preceded the collective creation of the expanded object of a common space in the development. A transition emerged from the perceptions of a concrete object in a common space. However, the results of the development remained simply initiatives because of insufficient interventional support and the lack of organized community support. No fertile ground existed for a deeper transformation process (see [Sannino, 2010](#)). The residents had to struggle to draw attention to their societal, multicultural motives to develop their neighborhood in the current context. The picture below ([Fig. 5](#)) illustrates the temporal and reciprocal development of the object of space and collective agency during the four workshops. The upper axis represents the formation of residents' collective agency through their actions in each workshop. The lower axis represents the formation of the common space through the different orientations and features of the space. The middle axis represents the continuum of the workshop process. We identified two critical expansions in the development of the object of space and collective agency. The first expansion related to new tools introduced by the residents, which were taken into use in the development of the object of space at the workshop. These tools consisted of pictures of new housing opportunities and

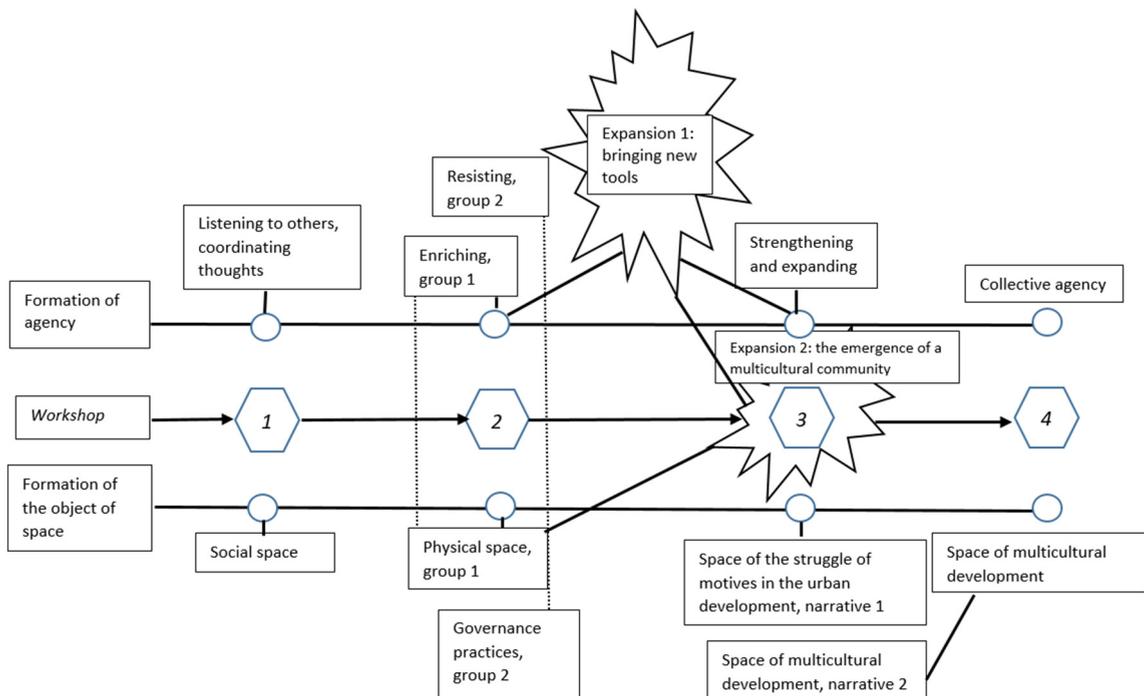


Fig. 5. The transitions of the formation of an object of space and collective agency in the development of the neighborhood.

city gardens, information from the residents' own expert contacts, and city maps. The second expansion involved discussions and concerns, such as opening up a space of reasons about the employment and language issues of immigrant women and youngsters, and discussions about the common activities in a common space. In the fourth workshop, the residents formed their collective agency with the help of the joint object formation of developing multicultural space.

5. Discussion

This study contributes to an understanding of residents' collective agency in their efforts to participate in and exert influence on urban development. The study presents an analysis of the development of residents' collective agency through a workshop process in an urban development project. The residents' actions have been analyzed through detailed interactional episodes focusing on the collective agency of the participants. CHAT provided the framework to elaborate on the intentions, interpretations, and understandings of the residents during their negotiation process.

In terms of agency, we used Edwards' (2005) concept of relational agency as a starting point in our research. However, instead of studying relational agency at work, our focus was on the lifeworld of residents in urban development, and no administrative authorities were involved. In line with Freire (2003), the residents' workshops formed encounters which enabled the residents to construct their community in social interaction and transform their living conditions through action and reflection. The residents' workshops, as a free social context without the participation of municipal authorities, enabled us to examine not only the explicit expressions of the residents but also the implicit interaction embedded in their social activities. The human capacity to exert social ability, listen to each other, and intervene in situated activities enabled the residents to build their agency (see Mäkitalo, 2016). In parallel with Edwards (2005), we found that the residents' agency developed in networks with other residents. The residents needed and asked for help, shared opinions, and considered others to be resources. They used their former experience and knowledge, and they brought their own tools, which helped them to orient themselves towards a solution.

The residents negotiated the joint object of their activity space with three conceptions, social, physical, and cultural perspectives, with the aid of their shared knowledge. While the residents worked on the object of space, new relations organized the activities of the residents. The residents strengthened their understanding of the neighborhood development by asking and giving reasons (Derry, 2007). The need for a common space was related to building their community, strengthening their collective agency, and manifesting their concern for the multicultural development of their neighborhood. By naming a concrete object of space, the residents bound themselves to the development of the neighborhood. The object of the residents' interaction expanded from a common space to concern common activities and the integration and cultural diversity of the neighborhood. This process enabled the building of shared knowledge by using the residents' local knowledge. The reciprocity of the collective agency and the object of activity strengthened the residents' opportunity to have an impact on the development of their neighborhood.

The residents' workshop process started at a time when there were inner tensions in the urban development of the residential area. Driving forces for the development of residents' agency included the ongoing reconstruction work in the area, the residents' expectations for a community center in the neighborhood, the discourse of power relations, the interest in participatory governance, and the expectation that residents would be engaged in development activities. These sometimes tension-laden and negatively experienced issues mediated the residents' activities in their neighborhood development.

The question of what kind of methodology is appropriate for investigating agency in social activities is crucial, and is also in focus in this study. In order to investigate collective actions in negotiations, a qualitative change must be identified between the relations of people and practices. The residents' collective actions emerged during the discussions as they expressed their needs and motives, figured out others' motives and standpoints, objectified what matters for everyone, recognized resources and possibilities, and were able to draw conclusions and to commit themselves to the collective development of activity based on these common understandings. This helped them to align with each other. The residents' learning was shaped by practices contributing to the object of their activity. By following the transitions in the formation of the object of space, we were able to recognize the emergence of collective agency and its qualitative changes. The shift from sharing their ideas about a common space emerged in congruence with the collectively elaborated expansion of the object of space.

In our study, we were interested in how the residents built their common understanding of a space, which was frequently manifested in their neighborhood development, and especially in how they manifested their own needs connected to a space. We found that the expressions and understandings of the term 'space' are manifold; it can refer to a physical and social space of being together or a space of interaction and sharing. The findings of this study provide insights into how the residents built their collective agency in their efforts to participate. The workshops provided a context where the freedom of movement between people and practices enabled the residents' voice to be heard, and promoted the residents' agency and learning through participation. The residents' local place-based knowledge further promoted the discussions, but to be able to conduct civic actions they needed guidance, support, and the aid of official expert knowledge.

6. Conclusion

This study indicates that collective agency developed in a reciprocal relation with the object of 'space' in the social interaction of the residents. The residents' collective agency was created step by step during their collaboration and discussions in the workshop activities. The shift from manifestations of individual needs to the collective object of space is supported by the residents' former experience, knowledge, and needs to expand the object of space towards the societal development of their neighborhood. During this process the residents produced shared meanings and common understandings of their neighborhood, and in addition, they learned to

collaborate with each other.

Residents' social capacity and place-based knowledge are not easily recognized in urban administrative culture, and therefore new participatory practices are needed which enable the coordination of their fragmented needs and thoughts and the building of their distributed agency. The formation of the joint object is a long process which demands time, support, neutral space, and free social interaction among residents in urban development. Our results demonstrate the significance of generating a joint object of activity in urban development. During this process residents, in collaboration with other residents, can learn to develop their agency, which they later will need when acting with city planners and other stakeholders.

The residents were empowered to be powerful urban players with local knowledge in community development. However, the residents had to struggle to exercise their agency with representatives of public governance to draw their attention and make an impact. The results highlight the importance of residents' capacity to create collective agency in order to engage in negotiations and to conduct a responsive exchange of support, demands, and resources embedded in practices. It can be said that the residents were motivated to develop their neighborhood, and that the residents' workshops enabled the emergence of their collective agency. The results show that in order to allow the emergence of the residents' agency it is necessary to promote their participation by supporting the creation of their place-based knowledge in urban development processes. Applied ethnography as an approach of the research allows in-depth understanding of the social context of urban development from different perspectives.

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Compliance with ethical standards

The research was conducted in accordance with research protocol concerning human participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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