Neighbourhood and Community

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Which Came First, Neighbourhood or Community?
—Community Construction in a Self-Built Neighbourhood

Abstract: The interest in changing social ties in urban neighbourhoods has generated sociological debate for decades. This paper contributes to this debate by focusing on the relationship between community and neighbourhood formation in the development of an informal settlement. While informal urbanisation is widely researched, the attention is usually placed on urban planning and development rather than a socio-spatial aspect. Drawing on an ethnographic case study, this paper analyses the transformation of agricultural land to urban settlement following residents' self-organisation in Mexico City. The case study shows how social ties developed alongside collaboration between residents, highlighting a relationship between the social and spatial processes. Collaborative processes from small neighbour groups to broader neighbourhood-wide projects that contributed to the delivery of basic services and urban infrastructure also enabled the formation of community support networks. The findings highlight the intertwined nature of community and neighbourhood formation.

Keywords: Community formation, neighbourhood, case study, self-build urbanisation, Mexico City

Introduction

The relation between neighbourhoods and communities has been debated in urban sociology by a vast number of scholars (Hallman 1984; Somerville 2016; Tönnies 1957). The role of neighbourhoods in local social ties has been shifting over time as urban neighbourhoods and people's interactions in them have changed. While people's interactions in contemporary urban settings are no longer defined only by local settings (Lupi & Musterd 2006; Wellman 1979), the extent to which neighbourhoods as shared spatial surroundings affect local interactions also depends on local context (Kennett & Forrest 2006). Informal settlements that are formed through residents' collaborations to improve local infrastructure are an interesting setting for the consideration of the relation between neighbourhood and community because of the intertwined nature of social and spatial processes. Yet, informal settlements are not often studied from this aspect, considering how the social outcomes of the shared practices relate to the shared living environment (Dovey 2015; Woodcroft, Osuteye, Ndezi, & Makoba 2020).

This paper addresses the question of how social processes are embedded in the spatial processes by analysing neighbourhood formation and the subsequent social interactions of the residents of an informally formed urban neighbourhood. Drawing on an ethnographic case study, this paper analyses the transformation of agricultural land to urban settlement

following residents' self-organisation in Mexico City. The paper is based on a qualitative doctoral research project that combined aspects of urban sociology and urban development. The paper proceeds as follows. Further details of the research project and research methods are provided after a review of literature on communities, neighbourhoods and socio-spatial processes. The findings of the research are then discussed in the fourth section, which is followed by a discussion focusing on the relation between community and neighbourhood within and beyond the context of self-built neighbourhoods. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the contributions of this paper and how its shortcomings can be addressed by further research.

Communities and Urban Settings

The concept of community has aimed to explain what brings people together in changing social environments. Sociological debates have questioned whether community is only a product of solidarity-based traditional societies, as proposed by Tönnies (1957) and in what circumstances community can be sustained in societies that have moved towards modern industrial settings characterised by bureaucracy and individualism (Durkheim 1964). Whereas Tönnies (1957) made the distinction between community and society (*gemeinshschaft* and *gesellschaft*), finding modern society disintegrated and impersonal, extensive sociological studies have shown how new communities are formed and previous practices sustained in changing social environments. Thomas and Znaniecki (1958) showed how immigrants who emigrated from Polish countryside to industrialising USA both adopted their shared cultural practices in new settings and sought to maintain family-ties in their home country. Warner and Lunt (1941) researched the social setting of a new 'Yankee City', showing how class structures and ethnic groups define social interactions and hierarchies within communities that are assimilating to then new urban living (Warner & Lunt 1941). This paper follows the Weberian notion of community in the sense that social action both creates a sense of belonging and "sustains collective values" (Weber 1947: 136), however examining social interactions in a place-based setting.

Whereas community and neighbourhood were previously considered as inherently connected concepts, network-approaches to the 'community question' suggest otherwise (Wellman 1979). The decrease of "solidarity communities as the principal source of interpersonal support" (Wellman 1981: 176) is generally linked to urban change and the rise of more personal social networks (Day 2006; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall 1988). This includes the recognition that neighbourhoods are becoming less close-knit as social contacts are increasingly consisting of extra-local social ties (Blokland 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990). It is then proposed that, the concept of community should not be attached to neighbourhoods as local settings but to people, reflecting the paths that individuals take in life, and the varied geographical locations they tend to socialise in with a broader variety of individuals (Spencer & Pahl 2006; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

Personal interactions have conventionally been understood to be at the heart of 'community', whereas contemporary theories of communities of place are less bound to geographical boundaries. Wellman identified three potential scenarios for community

following the effects of "social systemic divisions of labour": community lost, community saved and community liberated (Wellman 1979). The loss of "traditional forms of relationship" that were "specific to rural spaces…as the urbanization process intensified" was a sign of 'community lost' (Carmo & Ferreira 2019: 519). However, the 'community liberated' hypothesis suggests that contemporary urban settings allow local community networks to become more broad, including extra-local social ties that provide more diverse access to support and resources than local ties (Drouhot 2017; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall 1988). A community would be considered to be 'saved' when local settings still boast community networks or a combination of dense and supportive kinship ties and more sparsely knit ties with non-kin (Wellman & Wortley 1990: 580).

A neighbourhood is understood here as a spatial unit or "limited territory within a larger urban area where people inhabit dwellings and interact socially" (Hallman 1984: 13). This definition draws attention to place-specific interactions with others in a shared environment. Historically, neighbourhoods have been seen as cohesive units, formed arounds the needs of residents who inhabit the same areas for generations (Phillips, Athwal, Robinson, & Harrison 2013). Blokland suggests that neighbourhood refers to the "built environment that people use practically and symbolically" (Blokland 2003: 213). While the extent to which local social and spatial settings overlap in contemporary urban settings has been questioned (Tjora & Scambler 2020), the "physical and demographic features of the neighbourhood" have been shown to define social behaviours (Haggerty 1982: 359). While literature shows that the interactions and activities that contribute to the formation of communities and social ties (Hickman 2013; van Eijk 2010), fewer scholars have considered how interactions relating to the physical environment can facilitate this (Hamiduddin & Gallent 2016).

Space shared between people can act as a common setting in which people develop a sense of belonging and construct local communities (Massey 1999). Place-based analysis of social ties suggests that individuals' build belonging through their interpretations of the space they interact in as part of their everyday lives (Preece 2019). These practices can also be need-based, relating for example to resisting unwanted external development (Kuecker, Mulligan, & Nadarajah 2010) or internal issues of neighbourhood decline due to lack of services (Martin 2003). Taking part in activities that bring local residents together in new ways such as working on a community garden (Del Viso, Fernández Casadevante, & Morán 2017) or to maintain public parks (Bennett 2014) and community centres (Healey 2015) is suggested to have the potential to rekindle local neighbourhoods. Interactions that develop trust and social ties are part of the formation of neighbourhood communities (Phillips et al. 2013). How extensively collaborations can support community formation depends on local contexts and the sustainability of the shared activities (Phillips et al. 2013: 46).

Despite the rise of extra-local socialising, neighbourhoods are still one of the settings where social relations based on spatial proximity can continue to prosper in urban areas (Carmo & Ferreira 2019). Neighbourhoods are an important scene of everyday encounters that act as the "building-blocks for better social relations" (Phillips et al. 2013: 43). However, proximity or length of residence in the same neighbourhood does not alone guarantee a sense of community. Community infrastructure needs to be combined with meaningful activities that can foster local social ties (Hickman 2013). Wenger's concept of "communities of practice" suggests that "joint enterprise" creates opportunities for

dialogue that acts as "community maintenance" (Wenger 1998: 74). Taking part in joint ventures facilitates the formation of "dense relations of mutual engagement" (Wenger 1998: 74)—what others refer to as social capital (Putnam 2001) or community networks (Wellman & Wortley 1990). Community-building activities are attempts to counteract the disintegration of local communities based on externally designed social spaces (Evans 2001: 6). Local community centres are suggested to facilitate the formation of local social ties by providing "contact zones" where community can be actively constructed (Leaney 2020).

Self-built Housing and Self-built Neighbourhoods

There are also settings in which local people are actively involved in the construction of local neighbourhoods without external attempts of community-building. Self-build neighbourhoods, often referred to as informal settlements, are the outcome of local people's collaborations to address individual needs for housing in a shared setting (Dovey 2015). A phenomena of the global South, informal settlements involve often simultaneous processes where residents build their own homes and make requests as well as take part in the construction of basic services such as water, electricity and drainage (Silvonen 2021; Moctezuma 2001). These self-build processes that are inherently part of informal urbanisation provide a setting where shared struggles but also hopes contribute to the construction of shared spaces as well as place-based identities (Lombard 2013). Self-created housing reflects people's needs as well as their aspirations, which intertwines individuals' ideals with their spatial surroundings (Brown 2007). Place-making activities such as transforming physical environment through changing land use and the shared struggles relating to incremental activities of building dwellings and improving local services contribute to the formation of a place identity and a sense of belonging (Lombard 2013).

Self-build housing takes place in a different context in Europe as the construction of basic services is not usually part of the process. This makes self-building a more individual process, despite a shift towards group approaches to self-build. Redevelopment and restructuring of European cities such as Hamburg and Gothenburg have opened avenues for the support of self-build groups that provide cohousing in a sustainable setting (Scheller & Thörn 2018). Group-based production of housing has been proposed to be one aspect of constructing liveable communities through communitarian projects of housing development, even though the contributions in terms of social capital may be temporary (Hamiduddin & Gallent 2016). In many cities in the global South, self-building and informal settlements are a common approach to persisting housing shortages, often resulting in the formation of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Georgiadou & Loggia 2021; Varley & Salazar 2021).

Mexico City is typical of major Latin American cities in the sense that it expanded rapidly due to rural-urban migration following industrialisation in the 1930s onwards (Castillo Palma 2012). This led to exponential population increase and a housing shortage which gave rise to informal self-built settlements (Connolly 2009). The processes to acquire land for building houses was further complicated by laws and legislative changes regarding

collective farming land and the release of collective land for development (Varley & Salazar 2021). Rapid urbanisation has made Mexico City a spatially fragmented city, with concentrations of disadvantage being located in the peripheral areas (Silvonen 2019). The many informally formed neighbourhoods in Mexico City were regularised during the 1990s, however, many of the areas still have inadequate infrastructure and lack sufficient public services due to the high concentration of people as the population of the metropolitan area reached 18 million in 2000 (Connolly 2009).

The population of Mexico City increased by 31% from 1940 to 1950 (Castillo Palma 2012: 147). This rapid growth led to the rise of self-built housing: the number of self-built settlements increased especially during 1977–1981 (Moctezuma 2001: 119). Undeveloped areas such as the east of the megacity became densely populated self-built neighbourhoods where workers who had already lived in the city sought land to build homes for their expanding families (Castillo Palma 2012). The peripheral areas kept growing rapidly still in the 1970s and 1980s, making self-build housing a majority, not a minority, way to acquire housing (Connolly 2009). Large parts of Mexico City were developed informally and this history of informality lives on in the contemporary city in the form of informal employment and trade (Silvonen 2019).

Research Context and Methods

The research was completed in Iztapalapa borough in Mexico City, which was chosen as the research location because of its history of self-built neighbourhoods, urban disadvantage and high population density (Connolly 2009). Situated in the south-eastern part of Mexico City, Iztapalapa is known as the peripheral area that experienced rapid population growth and intense processes of informal urbanisation in the 1940s onwards (Castillo Palma 2012). To this day, Iztapalapa continues to be a working-class borough characterised by self-built neighbourhoods and homes that residents have expanded incrementally over the years (Silvonen 2019).

Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (CAM) was chosen as the research locality for its location in the southern part of the wider borough, varying levels of marginalisation and high population density. While CAM was a densely built-up and highly populated neighbourhood, levels of marginalisation had varied between medium and very high (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal 2003). As a working-class self-built neighbourhood, CAM was characteristic of the broader borough. CAM was also one of the newer neighbourhoods in Iztapalapa as it formed mostly in the 1980s, after the peak of urbanisation in Iztapalapa. This meant that very little information was held about the formation of the research locality. It formed as an irregular settlement, meaning that people acquired land there through land invasion but also legal and illegal land sale of previously agricultural land (Silvonen 2021). The population of Iztapalapa—one of 16 boroughs in the megacity—is 1.8 million which is 20% of the population of Mexico City (INEGI 2014).

Over six months of fieldwork was completed during 2016 and 2017 in the south-eastern borough of Iztapalapa in Mexico City for the doctoral research project that this paper draws on. The neighbourhood case study set out to research informal social networks and the

exchange of social support in the context of urban disadvantage and urban development. Qualitative data was gathered utilising ethnographic methods to answer the question 'how have informal social networks contributed to processes of urban development and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality?' (Silvonen 2019). This involved piecing together the history of the formation of the case study neighbourhood by asking the participants about their past experiences to support understanding the relationship between local social ties and urban development.

Fieldwork comprised of a scoping study in July 2016 and two phases of data collection between October 2016 and May 2017. The first month of data collection was spent completing non-participant observation and 'hanging out' (Geertz 1973) before proceeding with interviewing. This supported making general observations of local issues and lifestyle as well as becoming familiar with the research locality and its residents. As the fieldwork progressed, interactions with locals deepened which also led to more partaking observation after the initial non-participant observation. Due to lacking public spaces in the research locality, two community centres were used as gatekeepers to provide a base for spending time. All participants were recruited directly by the researcher and the gatekeepers did not have any involvement in the actual research process.

The first stage of data collection involved completing one-to-one interviews, whereas focus groups were added as a method for the second stage of data collection. Combining the three methods—observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups—made it possible to triangulate initial findings by drawing comparisons between the different forms of data. Out of the 73 participants who either lived or worked in the research locality, 19 were men and 54 were women. 56 interviews were completed, complimented by four focus groups. 13 participants attended both interviews and focus groups. 48 of the participants were aged 55 or over as this supported collecting data that related to past experiences during neighbourhood formation in the 1980s. The youngest participant was aged 20 and the oldest was aged 81. Most participants had lived in the area since the 1980s and 27 of them had built their own houses, which made it possible to analyse participants' experiences of neighbourhood transformation.

Data collection focused on providing detail of the types of support provided by different actors, how social ties were formed and what hindered or supported the exchange of social support. The four focus groups discussed neighbourhood formation processes and the history of the neighbourhood. The 56 interviews discussed participants' social ties, exchange of social support and personal accounts of their experiences in the neighbourhood. Comparing data from focus groups and interviews supported the analysis of residents' interactions alongside neighbourhood transformation.

Findings of the Neighbourhood Case Study

CAM became populated first in the South-Western part of the neighbourhood where people started to gradually build their houses in the 1970s. The starting point in neighbourhood formation was undeveloped agricultural land where working-class people were looking for land to build a permanent home for their growing families (Silvonen 2021). The sale

of plots of land in CAM started around the 1970s and after the mid-1980s there were no vacant plots left. Those who arrived in the area at the beginning of the 1970s lived without basic services for over 10 years. *There were a few houses already but there was no light, no water, no drainage… I have lived here for 34 years this year [2017] in August* explained Helena (focus group, 24/04/2017) who arrived to CAM in 1983 and stated that there were no empty plots of land left on her street by 1985.

Each family built their own house and it was uncommon for neighbours to help each other in the building work. This was partially because those living on the same street were usually building houses at the same time as others, meaning there were no spare hands to help those beyond the immediate household. *We were both working while building this place. First, we just made a small provisional room and had to put all the tools and materials there because our neighbour across the road said that people were trying to get in when we weren't here. One time someone broke in and stole all our things so the neighbour opposite said he can store our things so that they wouldn't get stolen again* (Laura, interview 29/03/2017). While neighbours did not help with the actual building work, they often provided support in other ways. Providing a safe storage place was one example of support provided by nearby neighbours who understood the challenges of self-building due to having experienced the same process themselves. These shared experiences enabled the formation of local social ties and were also part of the shared identity of living in a self-built neighbourhood.

Trivial acts of kindness and support with everyday issues were common in the undeveloped neighbourhood. Many relied on self-built wells to access water and there was often a need to collaborate with those living nearby when it came to accessing water. *I had a neighbour who had a well and she helped us with water because my husband never wanted to make a well* (Patricia, focus group 27/03/2017). The lack of basic services defined everyday-life practices and made the residents reach out to each other in order to fulfil their basic needs. The water network was gradually expanded during the 1980s but interruptions to service such as the 1985 earthquake, meant that those neighbours who had wells became well known in the neighbourhood.

Residents got to know people who lived on the same street as more people gradually arrived in the neighbourhood to build their own homes. These interactions were fuelled by the need to collaborate to make the neighbourhood liveable. This included meeting with neighbours to discuss ways to request basic services such as water, drainage and electricity. These processes varied depending on the part of the neighbourhood and when each street became populated as the borough responded to these demands in different ways at different times (Silvonen 2021). The first step of the process for all the residents was discussing the needs with neighbours living on the same street or block and collaborating with these neighbours over several years to little by little improve their immediate surroundings (Silvonen 2019). The first basic service that was installed was usually the water network, followed by electricity, drainage and finally pavement and sidewalks—which in most cases the residents completed themselves (Silvonen 2021).

People gradually increased the familiarity between them by collaborating with others living on the same street, forming small neighbour groups to request and deliver basic services. Separate requests had to be made for extending the water, electricity and

drainage network which meant neighbourly collaboration extended over several years. This continuous collaboration meant regular interaction was maintained between the neighbours living on the same street, which resulted in the formation of small neighbour groups (Silvonen 2021). As one participant said, *we didn't know anyone here when we first arrived, so it wasn't easy. But little by little I got to know some people by working together to make the area better. Most people have come here from somewhere else* (Ana, interview 24/11/2016)

These small groups formed the basis of several community-oriented networks as local social ties were formed alongside the process of constructing a liveable neighbourhood. As residents moved to the neighbourhood often with their spouse, they did not have any other local social contacts. The lack of pre-existing local social ties meant that neighbours were particularly important as a source of social support but also companionship. Women often had a major role in the construction of the house due to men being away at work during the day. *The experience of building a house here was lovely… I had to come here to organise things because I used to live near Portales and my husband could not be here because he had to work* (Araceli, interview 08/12/2016). The absence of men was echoed in the experiences of many female participants as many of them had arrived in CAM shortly after marrying their husbands. Once the residents had completed their houses, women usually stayed at home, which increased their opportunities to form local ties with the women living near them.

The small neighbour groups were the basis of social ties between those who lived near each other. Neighbourhood-wide collective projects that followed the completion of basic services supported creating more familiarity with others in the neighbourhood, enabling the formation of social ties across the neighbourhood beyond the context of one's home street. These broader projects included forming a local primary school and a community sports ground. While contributing to the education provision and public spaces for leisure activities, the broader projects also brought together residents from different sides of the neighbourhood. In the case of the community sports ground, the collective activities also brought together different age groups, as the initiative was led by local young people but eventually also gained the support of local adults. *I also helped with [the sports ground], helped them obtain the grounds* (Andrea, interview 21/03/2017), one of the participants explained, referring to the need for having a safe place where young people could spend time locally.

The formation of the school was led by local mothers of school age children who were unable to attend the only local primary school because it was already at capacity. *We started talking that it was not right to have to take our children so far [to go to school]… There was enough land for them to give us another primary school so we asked for it* (Guadalupe, interview 26/04/2017). Guadalupe was one of the mothers involved in the process of founding the school, from speaking to other mothers to making requests to the officials. Like with the basic services, the process involved interacting with others who shared the need for a new school but also making several visits to different authorities for the arrangements. *We also had to find the teachers to work there. There was an office where teachers went to look for work in public schools and that is where we had to go… And still if the teachers were ready to come they [the officials] told us that we had to wait for the authorisation and follow the procedures before we could open the school* (Guadalupe, interview 26/04/2017).

The collaboration amongst the mothers extended beyond the formation of the school as once the provisional school building had been established, the mothers tried to improve the surroundings by planting trees to provide shade for the otherwise hot building. Once the formal school building was completed, many mothers continued their involvement in school planning matters through the parents' organisation.

The factors that supported the strengthening of local social ties in addition to the shared experiences of neighbourhood formation were residential stability, shared experiences of self-building as well as often having children that were of similar age. Geographical proximity was an important factor as residents often formed stronger ties with those living next to them or opposite them depending on family structures. Families often had children who were roughly the same age which enabled the formation of friendships that spanned several generations and extended social contact beyond one household member. *I get on well with the neighbour on the right because she is my age and we have known each other since we were children. It was their family that used to help my father when his shop was still there. But now it is different because we work long days… You just greet neighbours in the morning when you leave and, in the evening, when you come back* (Valeria, aged 31, interview 07/04/2017). The familiarity between several generations of neighbours meant that the familiarity that stemmed from the days of neighbourhood formation extends to this day even if interactions are more infrequent in the contemporary CAM, as explained in this quote by Valeria.

Some neighbours formed stronger and more meaningful friendships while others continued to interact mostly through casual encounters and convivial activities. The familiarity gained over years of collaboration during neighbourhood improvement was further facilitated by residential stability as it was rare for the self-builders to sell their homes and move away. While children who were born in the neighbourhood often moved to other parts of the city, their parents—the generation of the self-builders—stayed, many expressing pride for their homes that had been expanded over the years and had become an invaluable asset. The participants' motivations of coming to the neighbourhood to build a house for their family continued to be a defining factor that facilitated the formation of local social ties showing the connection between the spatial and social setting. The shared experiences of together improving the neighbourhood were also reflected in the shared values of pursuing home-ownership motivated by family wellbeing despite the hardships relating to inhabiting unurbanized land. Convivial activities in the form of celebratory get-togethers maintained interactions once regular contact no longer related to the delivery of basic services. *We contributed for the good of everyone and sometimes collected money to get some food and organise get-togethers* (Patricia, FG 27/03/2017).

The ties formed over the years enabled the exchange of social support when needed. *We always help each other. When there are celebrations we help each other with the food and all that. We have always helped each other… There is still some conviviality and one helps the others in any way one can… We look after each other's houses when the neighbours go out* (Carla, interview, 02/02/2017). While some chose to keep their distance when it came to socialising with neighbours and limiting exchange of support to emergencies or borrowing the occasional items, some had formed strong friendships with their neighbours. The formation of the neighbourhood from residents' building their own

houses to delivering basic services provided a basis for the formation of local social ties. Whereas the process of neighbourhood formation enabled interactions between neighbours, the broader neighbourhood-wide processes took this familiarity onwards. Generations living under the same roof and continuing to live on the same street meant high residential stability in the neighbourhood maintained local social ties years after the shared need to make CAM liveable.

Discussion—when Neighbourhood and Community Formation Coincide

The findings of this neighbourhood study show how neighbourhood and community formation can be intertwined processes in the context of a self-built neighbourhood that was formed by the local residents. The self-build context brings together elements of traditional solidarity communities and contemporary urban settings (see e.g., Evans 2001; Wellman 1979) to show how place-based communities can develop and prosper following shared activities that are bound to a shared environment. While the main driving force behind self-building and neighbourhood improvement was a basic need for housing, the outcome of the processes was not only an urbanised neighbourhood but also local communities where residents were bound to each other through the shared experiences, collaboration and social interactions relating to neighbourhood formation.

The formation of local social ties and familiarity with neighbours was intertwined with the process of constructing the neighbourhood in CAM. Interactions with others were sustained by the collaborations required to obtain basic services but also the acts of support between neighbours when help could be provided in the form of sharing a well or looking after others' materials. This kind of need-based social integration has been shown to enable the formation of "organic solidarity" due to the interdependence that forms between individuals (Tjora & Scambler 2020: 15). These need-based interactions are particularly common in self-built neighbourhoods in the global South where residents initially live without electricity or running water until they develop these systems themselves or with local officials (Georgiadou & Loggia 2021; Lombard 2013). The need to pool resources when upgrading shared living environments contributes to constructing "community social capital" (Moser 2021: 198), while the shared aspirations of home-ownership and common struggles of making the surroundings liveable contribute to a shared sense of community that is embedded in the shared neighbourhood (Lombard 2013). However, previous research on informal settlements (Lombard 2013; Moser 2021) tends to focus on the spatial outcomes of these shared practices (Connolly 2009; Woodcroft et al. 2020) over the social outcomes such as local social ties (Dovey 2015).

Whereas shared needs originally facilitated local interactions in CAM, this initial step of building social connections was followed by convivial socialising that furthered familiarity among neighbours. Residential stability meant that young families that had arrived in CAM to build their homes shared their life courses with their neighbours, watching each other's children grow up. This provided local social occasions because of the strong familiarity between the residents of the neighbourhood, mitigating the challenges that many scholars relate to the formation of local social relations in urban neighbourhoods.

Previous research has shown the importance of residential stability for local social relations (Leaney 2020; Wellman & Wortley 1990), yet high residential turnover is characteristic of changing urban settings (Forrest 2008; Lupi & Musterd 2006). While familiarity could grow through interactions in 'third places', the declining number of these spaces of casual social interactions limits these opportunities (Hickman 2013). Lacking joint ventures to take part in (Wenger 1998) or motivation to interact with one another locally hinder the formation of local social ties (Blokland 2003; van Eijk 2010). In CAM, the way the neighbourhood was constructed intertwined local familiarity with the spaces in the broader neighbourhood because the various shared ventures over the years had built a distinctive social setting of interaction. This indicates the potential of shared place-based experiences in the formation and upkeep of local interactions.

The neighbourhood improvement activities that took place in CAM in the 1980s, continued to facilitate social interactions for decades thereafter due to residential stability and further community-wide projects of founding the local primary school and the sports ground. Even though many of the residents now worked or studied outside of the neighbourhood, the interactions that forced them to engage with their neighbours during neighbourhood formation meant that there were local social ties to fall back on when needed in the contemporary setting. This finding is in line with the few longitudinal studies that have been completed in informal settlements. Moser shows in her longitudinal study in Guayaquil, Ecuador how social interactions are passed on from one generation to the next, creating "intergenerational reciprocities" (Moser 2021: 208). While research in contemporary European neighbourhoods shows that longstanding residents try to maintain established social settings (Leaney 2020), changes relating to external forces can limit the influence locals have in their neighbourhoods (Preece 2019). Residents' limited influence on their shared spaces poses a challenge for the mitigation of diminishing local social interactions that relate to the 'community lost'-hypothesis (Lupi & Musterd 2006; Wellman 1979). Further attention should be paid to consider the potential of interactions that contribute to the state of shared local spaces and how these can support shared ventures that maintain local social settings. Overall, the findings from CAM show that contemporary urban neighbourhoods can be home to local communities and meaningful social interactions if the neighbourhoods have a history of place-based shared ventures such as those found in self-built settlements.

Conclusion

The relation between community and neighbourhood continues to be debated, despite several indications that social ties are no longer tied to local neighbourhoods in contemporary settings (Tjora & Scambler 2020; Tönnies 1957; Wellman et al. 1988). This paper contributes to this debate by analysing how neighbourhood formation in a former informal settlement in Mexico City has resulted in the formation of lasting local communities. This indicates that when shared space is central to local interactions there is a distinctive two-way relationship between community and neighbourhood so that one supports the other.

Analysing participants' memories of past experiences poses a limitation for this study as memories can depict romanticised views of the past. However, the observed familiarity and social interactions in the contemporary neighbourhood along with the data relating to urbanisation processes indicated a strong link between the contemporary setting and neighbourhood formation. Further research would facilitate investigating how the observed connection between neighbourhood and community applies in currently forming neighbourhoods beyond the global South and the specific complex social settings that relate to informal settlements.

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