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Chilli, cress and cosmopolitanism: 
The moral geographies of a “refugees welcome” community garden in Germany

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The world lost your bright consciousness far too early,
so much needed in these times of radical openness.
Abstract for PhD thesis

Chilli, cress and cosmopolitanism: the moral geographies of a “refugees welcome” community garden in Germany

This thesis argues that the moral geographies (Creswell, 2005) that underpin different ways of ‘approaching’ refugees (Rozakou, 2016) need to be critically examined in research, policy and practice. At core, this work is an ethnographic exploration of the complex relationalities (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) in an inclusive, intercultural community garden in Southern Germany, originally created as a ‘refugees welcome’ project in 2015. The garden sprouted among other ‘welcome projects’ that make use of ‘nature spaces’ to support the inclusion of refugees in their new homes. It explores how the involvement of, with and by refugees, understood here as an everyday socio-material practice (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016), works in a space where people follow the moral imperative to support refugees’ wellbeing, recognition and participation in their host societies. Furthermore, it pays particular attention to how the encounters and relationships between people are shaped by the interactions with the local ecosystem of plants, soils, animals, water, and more.

I first conducted a mapping review to provide an overview of “nature-based integration” projects (Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al., 2017) in Germany, Norway and Scotland. Such endeavours offer a variety of activities such as walking, cycling, conservation work or gardening; their aims are to create spaces of encounter between people, involve those who may be excluded, offer learning opportunities, support sustainable living and promote good health. This contextualising overview was followed by an in-depth study of the aforementioned community garden.

My ethnographic fieldwork was a practice of engaged observation, participation and listening over the course of eight months, from April to November 2020, with 66 visits to the garden and approximately 270 hours spent there. Based on these visits, as well as on semi-structured recorded conversations with 24 people from the garden, I offer three substantive contributions. First, looking to how this the garden is a space of social heterogeneity and diversity, I find that it can be conceived of as a cosmopolitan canopy (E. Anderson, 2011), with several complexities and paradoxes that form part of this protective umbrella: the cosmopolitan spirit is alive in this place as people try their best to navigate it with goodwill and kindness, and the plants play a significant part in its expression (Myers, 2019). Yet, this place is not neutral. While it works as a retreat from hostilities that people may experience outside, its boundaries are permeable, and segregation inside the canopy points to it being honeycombed by power dynamics and instances of control. Second, focussing on tensions that emerged in the garden, I observe that people may co-create this space (Cornwall, 2008) as long as their practices do not collide with the garden’s wider ethos. This becomes visible as the practices of people with refugee biographies rub against the garden’s ideals, which can be seen as a way of testing and confirming their equality (Bingham, Biesta, & Rancière, 2010). What the stories reveal to me, too, is that the nature-cultures (Haraway, 2008) that people’s practices are grounded in fundamentally form part of the creation of hierarchies. Third, looking to people’s homemaking practices (Ahmed, 2003; Obeid, 2013; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011) in this space, I discover that all people in the garden are engaged in unique ways of creating homes, of establishing continuity in their biographies. People in diaspora specifically (re)create familiarity through a politics of presence (Obeid, 2013) and the expression of their yearnings for home. The shared joy of making and watching life grow, as the plants mirror and speak in their own language about vital continuity (Raphaely & Orbach, 2022), connects all gardeners in this space.

I conclude that through this garden, we get to see what inclusion really is about: to be included means to be seen as a complex, multifaceted person (Gümüşay, 2020), to have one’s multiple
cultural ties appreciated, and to be able to connect with others, both inside and across intersecting belongings. To be included means to find a home, a space that allows for a person to be, to breathe, and to exchange with others in a climate of recognition and respect.

Through my power-critical reflections on cosmopolitanism, participation and equality, and the dynamics between ‘the host’ and ‘the newcomer’ (Heins & Unrau, 2018; Rozakou, 2016) in homemaking, my thesis speaks to literature in education and sociology, in particular to works that explore complexities of migration, integration and community-making in pluralistic societies. As I consider social complexities in entanglement with the more-than-human world, my work supports an ecological comprehension of these ties.

The empirical findings allow me to offer three propositions to researchers, governments and policy makers, as well as to (educational) practitioners in civic spaces that seek to ‘approach’ refugees: First, we need to cultivate the joy of cultural expression to be able to harvest the wisdom of socially heterogeneous communities. Second, we need to sow and nurture solidarity to accomplish lateral relationships, which involves active engagement with the moral geographies of our doings to recognise the risks and potentials around the boundaries they create. Last, we need to raise relationality in both research and practice to ensure that we stay surprised about the injustices we encounter and are complicit with on an everyday basis. These three invitations hold the opportunity to contribute to the (re)making and (re)shaping of worlds that allow for people to live together in active recognition of one another and in careful consideration of divergent nature-cultures.
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I am indelibly marked by the small and seemingly insignificant promise I made to find you a home. To topple regimes of knowing, petition water spirits, climb mountains, and be pierced by a thousand proboscises if only one inch closer to understanding what it would take to live peaceably in this world of dust, shadow and burning sun. And, yes, huffing-puffing wolves.

But where to begin this quest? What does a home mean in this world of shifting sands and eroding foundations?

...

Our days and nights are like that: filled with a certain feeling that something is missing, that there is something yet to be done, that the world could be more beautiful, more just, more inviting to leaf and limb. More like home. Perhaps a good deed here and there. Perhaps another hero who could swing his rope, anchor it to a stern, and pull us in. Perhaps another sacred book. The hypotheticals are endless. So where do we go from here? Where do you go, my dear?

(Akomolafe, 2017, pp. 1–3)
1. Introduction

In last year’s Global Trends report, UNHCR predicted that "the question is no longer if forced displacement will exceed 100 million people – but rather when". The when is now. With millions of Ukrainians displaced and further displacement elsewhere in 2022, total forced displacement now exceeds 100 million people. This means 1 in every 78 people on earth has been forced to flee – a dramatic milestone that few would have expected a decade ago (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022, emphasis in original).

Over 100 million people worldwide were forced to migrate due to conflict, war, persecution, violence, poverty or natural disaster in 2022. Continuing a worrying upward trend, this more than doubles the 42.7 million displaced people in 2012, and the number of conflict-affected countries, too, has doubled in the last decade. In 2021, more than two thirds of displaced people worldwide come from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. In early 2022, one of the largest, and fastest, forced displacement crises since World War II was triggered by the war in Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022).

An all-time high of over 21 million displaced persons crossed international borders in 2021 and became definable as refugees. Population estimates suggest 42% of these refugees are children (UNHCR, 2022). According to the UN’s 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person

\[\text{[... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.}\]

The high numbers of people on the move and seeking survival and safety show that the world is experiencing a refugee crisis, perhaps more accurately framed as refugee protection crisis (Filsinger, 2017). Looking to Europe, the high number of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean and the reappearance of fences, systematic border controls and surveillance measures at previously open Schengen borders indicate that it is debatable whether Europe is taking on adequate responsibility to protect high numbers of people (Bauböck, 2018; Köpf & Osel, 2018). In the heat of European political debates addressing immigration, it is important to bear in mind that most of the world’s refugees are neither hosted in nor trying to reach Europe. The top hosting countries in the world in 2021 were Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, and Pakistan; Germany was fifth in the rankings (1.3 million refugees). 72 per cent of refugees remain in countries neighbouring those they have fled (UNHCR, 2022). Even though Europeans have not been hosting high numbers of refugees compared with other countries, European societies are still affected by people arriving as refugees and becoming asylum seekers.

Migration, though not the kernel of linguistic, socio-cultural, and religious diversity, enhances pluralisation within societies (Filsinger, 2017). These processes are often discussed in terms of pluralism and integration, at the heart of which lies the tension between social diversity and social cohesion (Filsinger, 2017; McLaughlin, 2008). “Migration problematises borders” (Mecheril, Castro Varela, Dirim, Kalpaka, & Melter, 2010, p. 12, emphasis in original) in the sense that societies are confronted with questions of where to draw lines between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, and how to deal with perceived or real heterogeneity. While physical and territorial borders are crossed in the process of migration, the borders I refer to here are symbolic: they define the space of
socio-cultural belonging, and membership needs not only to be claimed by the newcomer, but also be validated by the receiving community (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

Generally, immigration policies across Europe have tightened and populist parties have gained force (and majorities) through their discourse on immigration as threat to employment security, national identity and social cohesion (Jolliffe, 2016; Morrice, 2014; Perchinig, 2012). Parallel to this, integration policies in many European countries have shifted from rights- to duty-based integration measures. Responsibility shifted from the State, which before guaranteed equality and security of residence, to the individual migrant who needs to prove his or her commitment to the values of the host country (Perchinig, 2012). Several authors highlight a deficit perspective which constructs migrants as morally problematic, as persons to be managed and contained, rather than as individuals who bring their resources and assets to a country (Filsinger, 2017; Morrice, 2014). The focus on total numbers in public and political discourse casts people as faceless and tends to overlook the fact that ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee populations’ are really groups of individuals with unique life stories (Catarci, Gomes, & Siqueira, 2017; Morrice, 2014). If groups are principally encountered through statistics, the abstraction carries the risk of negating their personal experience of “adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities” (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 236).

Refugees are among the most marginalised groups in societies (Jolliffe, 2016). Often victimised or criminalised in the current political climate (Filsinger, 2017; Inhetveen, 2010), they are confronted specifically with hostility from their host communities and societies. Research in the UK suggests public attitudes towards refugees are generally characterised by ambivalence, but can include open hostility and discrimination which expresses itself as harassment or even murder (Kirkwood, Goodman, McVittie, & McKinlay, 2016). The presence of refugees in Germany has triggered right-wing violence, xenophobic demonstrations, arson, assault, and several attacks of different kinds against refugee housing which could be classified as terrorism (Benček & Strasheim, 2016). However, they also experience welcoming responses. As Togral Koca (2016) describes, the UK-based Refugees Welcome movement unified a very heterogeneous group of people with respect to gender, social backgrounds, political orientations, religious beliefs, and those with and without refugee backgrounds. As such, it represented a ‘new’ movement on a local, national and transnational level that brought together people with the non-material objective of protecting the human rights of marginalised groups.

Refugee integration, in the light of these social complexities and dramatic developments internationally, is a complicated, multifaceted and inherently political undertaking which researchers, governments and policy makers are trying to gain a better understanding of (Ager & Strang, 2008; Die Bundesregierung, 2017; Heins & Unrau, 2018; Johansson et al., 2015; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011; Müller, 2002; Perchinig, 2012; The Scottish Government, 2018). Depending on one’s perspective, it can be either descriptive of a social process or a goal to be achieved. It can also be understood as a two-way process (All Party Parliamentary Group [APPG], 2017), a three-way process (give, take and reciprocate) (Heins & Unrau, 2018), or as a one-way street, which implies assimilation (Yuval-Davis, 2007). What I find is that all of these understandings are entangled. The concept itself needs critical interrogation as the integration of ‘immigrants’ who are supposed to be ‘integrated into’ the host society has homogenising tendencies: it may homogenise both the receiving societies that are in themselves diverse and increasingly marked by multiple forms of migration and mobility (Castles & Miller, 2003; Elliott & Urry, 2010), and the refugee or migrant communities who are uniformly marked ‘foreign’ (Castles, 2004; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Mecheril et al., 2010; Schinkel, 2018). Schinkel (2018), in a compelling account about the “conceptual quagmire” (p. 2) of
integration, calls for researchers to not ally with immigrant integration policy through their research. His critical question of “what happens when some people are evaluated in terms of their ‘integration’ and others are not?” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 14) is one that motivates this thesis.

The rising number of displaced people is intertwined with ongoing destruction of the planet’s ecosystems, many of which have been altered and degraded (e.g., Sapkota, Stahl, & Rijal, 2018). Neoliberal economic policies discourage mechanisms for the support of environmental and social well-being and spur further ecological collapse (Gaztambide-Fernández & Rubén, 2016). The nexus between climate change and human mobility is highly complex, but as aggravating climate change heightens the risk of conflict, especially in countries with weak governance and infrastructure and/or insufficient resources, there is a clear link, generating real concern that it will fuel long-term displacement, among other more short-term effects like displacement through sudden events such as floods, storms, or wildfires and seasonal effects triggered by droughts, salination from rising sea-levels and changes in precipitation patterns (UNHCR, 2022).

This thesis is situated within the tensions around how to respond to refugees, and in a context of urgent need for more sustainable people-nature relations. Its purpose is to explore how the involvement with, of and by refugees, understood here as an everyday socio-material practice (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016), works in a space where people follow the moral imperative to support refugees’ recognition by, and wellbeing and participation in their host societies. I found a specific expression of the moral ambition of refugee support in ‘welcoming projects’ that use ‘nature spaces’, which my work will address. I have chosen this specific sector for my inquiry because while these projects, much like others, are marked by increased socio-cultural, lingual, religious and socio-economic plurality, they take a particular approach to ‘refugee integration’ through outdoor activities, where ‘nature’ forms a fundamental part of the encounter between people. Closer examination of this sector can provide crucial insights about how relations in heterogeneous groups unfold in and through outdoor places, and how encounters are shaped by understandings of ‘nature’. Environments and ecological matter such as plants, soil, and water, may spark dialogues and mutual understanding, or exclusion may be perpetuated as people interact with them. To inquire into how people shape these ‘nature spaces’, then, means to also inquire into how ‘nature’ sculpts these ‘people spaces’.

I take a critical approach towards integration, following Schinkel (2018): “the question is ultimately whether we want to make resources available for racist modes of relating to migrants and their children, or for alternatives” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 15). My research falls within the “alternatives”, in line with others who try to conceptualise integration differently (Flowers & Swan, 2017; Heins & Unrau, 2018), and avoid integration as a framing concept. I remain aware, however, that my research touches on many aspects of integration discourses and so may hold relevance for them.

I aspire to provide useful knowledge for governments, policy makers and civic spaces that seek to support the wellbeing of refugees in, and their connection to, their communities. The information gained can be useful for civic organisations active in the field, and this thesis is also a push towards greater recognition of how people make sustainable use of nature spaces in refugee support. Showing some of the significant endeavours for community resilience in these spaces, this knowledge can provide incentives for funding and acknowledging of quality projects. Furthermore, this thesis increases our understanding of how people with refugee experiences navigate their lives within the constraints imposed by the asylum system, and how they shape their new surroundings as active agents. In sum, a better understanding of what happens in these spaces of encounter that welcome refugees can provide crucial insights into what social practice involving people with
refugee biographies\textsuperscript{1} looks like “on the ground”, in the civic spaces of everyday life that are entangled with local and global ecosystems. More academically, my thesis speaks to three related and sometimes intersecting educational fields (Diversity and social justice education, outdoor & environmental education, and community education) as well as to theorising and research in sociology that explores the dynamics of migration, integration, and community-making in pluralistic societies.

My research had two stages: an initial pilot study, in which I sought to identify the sector of ‘nature-based integration projects’, and an ethnographic, in-depth study of an inclusive community garden in Southern Germany, originally created in 2015 as a ‘refugees’ welcome’ project. This second study forms the core of my thesis.

Becoming aware of the dearth of research about the niche I was looking at, my inquiry first directed me towards a mapping exercise which tried to conceptualise the characteristics of current outdoor activity projects for refugees. Such mapping was useful in order to ‘set the scene’ and to select a site for further in-depth study with full awareness of alternatives. Scotland, Germany and Norway were selected as locations based on my language capabilities and my familiarity with the outdoor education and activity sector in these countries. The pilot study was guided by a general scoping question:

\textit{What organised outdoor activities are provided for refugees in Germany, Norway, and Scotland? What kinds of projects exist, for which social groups, and what are their aims?}

Through the mapping review, I explored the types and missions of projects in this sector to provide an overview of the then-current provision, develop a typology and thereby to lay a base for future professional exchange and research in this field. I identified five ambitions that these projects hold: to provide people with spaces of mutual encounter, support refugees’ participation and access to resources, promote sustainable living and positive people-nature relations, offer learning opportunities, and support refugees’ health and wellbeing.

The mapping, as well as my move to Germany, led me to select a site for an ethnographic in-depth study (see 4.1): an inclusive community garden which was both representative of projects and of particular interest because of the underlying critical approach to refugee ‘integration’. The ethnographic inquiry was guided by open-ended research questions focussing on how encounters and participation in this space were enacted:

\textit{What happens in this space of encounter? Who gets to shape what is done there? How is the more-than-human involved in this?}

I was curious what mattered to these people in the garden, and how national-ethno-cultural diversity (Mecheril et al., 2010) was expressed here: the negotiation of difference, friction, richness. I aspired to learn how ownership and participation were materialised, in a space intended as an example of sustainable living.

The term and concept of “moral geographies”, present in my title, has become an important element of my inquiry, but it crystallised only towards the end of my research project. I follow Creswell’s (2005) definition of a moral geography, which “is the idea that certain people, things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscapes and not in others” (p. 128). This idea

\textsuperscript{1} I use this term, adopted from the association I worked with for the ethnography, as this term is less essentialising and recognises refugeedom as a lived experience that marks people’s biographies.
shaped the relationalities and dynamics of the garden space I was examining, and the entanglement of geographical and sociological “objects” is crucial here:

This deceptively simple definition underlies the centrality on an understanding and theorisation of the interdependence of geographical objects of space, place, landscape, territory, boundary and movement with the sociological/cultural objects of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, (dis)ability etc. The word ‘moral’, therefore, indicates a fairly contingent set of rules and expectations dressed up as though it was common sense (p. 128).

Creswell sees power as essential in determining peoples’ fit with a space and so the landscapes that define their belonging, and therefore calls to open taken-for-granted relationships to inquiry, since “what counts as moral is infused with geographical imagination and shot through with ideology” (Creswell, 2005, p. 128). In line with his call, this thesis has come to address aspects of encountering, participating, and homemaking – all connected to a sense of belonging – in the civic space of a community garden, where all geographical objects are tied together with the boundaries that people create, e.g. around ethnic identities. It describes how people enact common sense in this garden, a place of diversity nested within the dynamics of the wider society (see 4.2), how the common sense defined by the association and the more established people is not always shared across groups (see 4.3), and also how another common sense, that of building homes and continuing biographies, connects all of the people involved (see 4.4).

In conclusion, the thesis traces a process that I have undertaken over five years: with the mapping review as an initial attempt to understand the area, and the completion of a comprehensive ethnographic study which provides deep knowledge about a specific location and the complex relationalities that constitute it, and that can be useful for related research, policy and practice. I close this chapter by investigating how ‘the personal is political’ and its inverse apply to myself and this research.

A personal introduction: exploring relational inquiry

As I would like to see myself as an active part of a collectivity in which people live sustainably and in recognition of one another, the quest for knowledge in this thesis is a personal ethical undertaking as much as it is also professional. I aspired to learn from what people were doing in such communities, wanted to grow personally, and find inspiration for how I could use my own skills to positively impact the world. From its beginnings, I hoped for my PhD research to be relational, and at the early stage this meant not exploring an external research topic like an object taken off a shelf but recognising how my research brought together strands of my own identities and interests, and where the moral grounds and theories underpinning it were continuously nurturing my own morality and intellect. I aspired to display my own entanglement with what I was exploring, learning to know, writing about, writing with. This is easier imagined than done, especially as I must maintain (whether I agree or not) the normative standards of academic writing for this PhD to be ‘successful’ in the broader academic community I placed myself in. I tried to think of myself as a “wayfarer” (Ingold, 2007; Pirrie & Macleod, 2010) and see the “tripping, slipping and losing the way” (Pirrie & Macleod, 2010, p. 369) as part of my journey.

This research certainly relates to and is built from my own professional background and experiences in both academic and educational practice. I draw on academic knowledge obtained in my Master’s degrees (M.Ed. in Intercultural Education, Freie Universität Berlin and M.Sc. in Outdoor Education, University of Edinburgh). Furthermore, I build on my educational practice as an (adult) educator, in
recent years in the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (education21) and in an advocacy project with young unaccompanied refugees, run by the Swiss National Youth Council. In addition to this, the course of my PhD has been marked by significant life events that impacted my work. It included two privileged migration trajectories – between Switzerland and Scotland, and between Scotland and Germany. These experiences nurtured my reflections on migration, and on practices of homemaking in particular (see 4.4). It also included becoming a mother of and being a mother to two children, which strongly influenced my work approach and relationships with people in the garden (see 3.2). It included the physical, local experience of a global pandemic, which crashed into my fieldwork (see 3.2.6, 3.2.6). And it included living in the rapid unfolding of events that shattered my European belongings: The consequences of Brexit, already beyond my imagination and part of our decision to leave the UK, and later the violent Russian invasion of Ukraine, which drastically altered the dynamics of the ‘refugee crisis’ in Germany (though this happened after I completed my formal fieldwork).

Looking for guidance early in the PhD on how to practice relational research, I came across McNamee and Hosking’s (2012) *Research and Social Change: A Relational Constructionist Approach*, which profoundly influenced my research perspective, together with other works foregrounding relationality (Desmond, 2014; McKenzie & Bieler, 2016; Michael, 2020; Raittila & Vuorisalo, 2021). I was also inspired by feminist (Ackerly & True, 2010; Allen, 1999; Archer, 2004; Brah, 1999), poststructuralist and posthuman readings (Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010; Jackson, 2012; Rae, 2020; Salazar, Granjou, Kearnes, Krzywoszynska, & Tironi Rodó, 2020; Thomassen, 2015) as relationality, as e.g. Fox and Aldred (2020) recognise, is a core quality of these perspectives.

McNamee and Hosking (2012) take a postmodern orientation towards the world, which is sometimes seen as the political ‘wing’ of poststructural research (Fox, 2014) and celebrate the complex, ambiguous, messy nature of the social world and of (ethnographic) research. Postmodernists often self-consciously abandon attempts to provide neat, ordered narrative accounts written from an ‘objective’ angle (O’Reilly, 2009). McNamee and Hosking (2012) find that the postmodern view changes everything - not only our basic assumptions, but also the kinds of questions we ask and the interest our work holds for us:

> For us, a key issue concerns the kinds of realities that we are part of and contribute to making, for example, in our (research) work. So what sort of world do we invite each other into when we act as if it is possible to represent the one way things really are? And, in contrast, what sort of world do we invite each other into when we assume realities are community-based local, historical, and cultural co-constructions? (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 35)

The relational stance implies that attention is directed to ongoing processes of relating, in which relational realities are constructed. It moves away from the assumption that there is an independent, individual mind which examines an external, independently existing reality, but rather assumes that individuals, more than being bounded, are themselves intertwined with ongoing, local-historical reality constructions. As a consequence, the inquiry is not directed towards the exploration of individual mental processes, characteristics or traits, but engages with questions about what people do together and what their doing creates. The constructionist stance may be confused with a constructivist orientation, which is often concerned with how knowledge or meaning is constructed through interaction in a specific milieu. Instead, the constructionist perspective takes interest in what various forms of life are constructed through relational processes. Another difference is that in a constructionist perspective, both human and non-human actors contribute to and are part of
reality construction processes. Following this, I inquired into what people did together and what their doing created in this garden space. I understood their practice as socio-material, including the practice of seeking to welcome refugees. The socio-material perspective finds everyday interactions of humans entangled with land, place, and other forms of matter (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008; Heins & Unrau, 2018; Ingold, 2007; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011; McKenzie & Bieler, 2016; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

As I experienced that writing with my topic could be quite personal, I saw the boundaries blur between ethnographic and autoethnographic inquiry both when I was writing fieldnotes and later when making sense of them. While I was drawn several times to include autoethnographic writing, I decided against this option. Of course, every decision comes with a cost. Autoethnography would have offered a space to unmask my own privilege and more fully recognise situations in which I was complicit with non-relational research practices. However, I saw the path to a more equitable research practice in making space (in word-count and content) for other people’s daily lives. This made me stumble upon a paradox: while I did not want to foreground my own personal experiences, I still had to recognise that the relations I wrote about were as much part of my own web of life as they were part of this garden and the biographies of others I encountered.

Over the course of time, I came to realise that relationality in my specific research setting meant to look beyond categories and to see people. This may sound like an obvious, perhaps banal recognition, yet I find it is overlooked in much research I have come across. I have come to see more clearly what to me feels like an extractive research approach, where multifaceted individuals become instrumentised as research subjects (objects?), life stories become data that is chopped up to establish themes, and open-ended, partial interpretations become findings that need to withstand the test of rigid interpretation as they find their way into “sanitised reports” (Pirrie & Macleod, 2010, p. 369). Dramatic international events involving millions of people, such as the ‘refugee crisis’, become social context, which I see as a banalisation of violence and death. The literature that guided my research is part of a movement in academia (expressed most profoundly, but not only, in post-structuralist and posthuman research) which I am hoping this thesis forms part of, even though I am still very much connected to the predominant forms of knowledge production.

Seeing people led to a key difficulty in my research: simply working with constructed social categories (such as ‘refugees’, ‘locals’, ‘Germans’, ‘Afghans’, etc.), even in awareness of their constructedness, was problematic, for two principal reasons. First, it meant to be complicit with exclusionary practice of policymakers, politicians and society more broadly because the use of categories suggests homogenous, bounded groups. Categories are not just a problem of semantics, as Crawley and Skleparis (2018) show, but they may do harm “as a mechanism to distinguish, divide and discriminate […] or even to render entirely invisible” (p. 61). Second, the more I got to know people in the garden, as they became familiar and close, not just ‘my’ research participants but complex human beings, the more it became impossible to describe them through their nationality only, as if this was what defined them. It was not social categories that I encountered in this space, not “locals” and “refugees”, not “members of different ethnic groups”. Instead, individuals with complicated refugee biographies were local here; they had made it their own in the many years they had already spent here, and yet they were still navigating asylum systems. The people who I met in this space were individuals with different phenotypes, sexes and genders, ages and physical conditions, with political and religious or spiritual orientations to the world, with complex pasts, with personal as well as professional aspirations for the future, holding onto and wrestling with myriad social roles and attachments, who had daily routines and spontaneous ideas – in a specific context of time and locality.
I followed Crawley and Skleparis's (2018) call to engage with the ‘politics of bounding’ as part of my research in order to denaturalise the use of categories:

_We need to explicitly engage with the politics of bounding, that is to say, the process by which categories are constructed, the purpose that they serve and their consequences. Our call is not for an end to the use of categories as a way of making sense of our social and political worlds, but for explicit recognition and engagement with the idea that categories do not simply represent or reflect the world but simultaneously create and limit it. (pp. 60-61)_

My aim became to shake up the shared assumptions about groups which implied to pay attention to bounding processes in the garden, and direct focus to the underlying power relations. This ‘theme’ of boundary-interrogation sits across all the ethnography finding chapters, finding both explicit and implicit expression.

The commitment to relationality also meant that I lost some of the language I was very used to using, which is an effect Desmond (2014) recognises when he refers to the “burden” or “difficulty of writing relationally in a language of substances” (p. 571). I wrestled a lot with writing styles. While I saw that narrative writing styles did at times do the complex entanglements of people and plants in this garden more justice, I also found that an argumentative voice was needed to make sense of the garden space in dialogue with the academic literature, and especially for the critical consideration of power relations and their workings. I found it challenging to reconcile the narrative writing which pays close attention to the fluidity of events, often bound together by socio-material coincidence (marked by power-relations, of course!) rather than by themes or by arguments, and the argumentative writing which intends to harness evidence and further advocate for social justice. Hence, part of my learning process in this journey was seeking to become skilled in relational writing, doing so in a way that could meet academic standards and provide thematically organised arguments, but also express the very subjective, situated, partial and emotionally coloured knowledge (Haraway, 1988) I was trying to communicate, to both academic and other audiences, such as the garden community itself.

This also included writing about and with the more-than-human world. As explained above, the entanglement of people and ‘nature’ are consciously attended to in my relational, socio-material approach. As a second ‘theme’ that sits across my finding chapters (and you now know I see ‘findings’ as open-ended), is how the social practices in this garden were influenced by the garden as a ‘nature site’, where plants quite literally occupy most of the space. They do this not only through their physical presence, but also in how they form part of conversations and nearly all social activities practiced in this garden. One subchapter in each finding chapter focuses on this theme (see 4.2.2, 4.3.4, 4.4.4) and is implicitly part of everything I am writing. Ontologically, I see the social and the environmental sphere as one and the same (Barad, 2007). People are as much part of the ecosystems they are placed in as the ecosystems form part of people’s worlds. Or, simply put: there is no environment without people, and there are no people without environments.

Having described some of the ethical, ontological and epistemological soils I have dug and sifted during my PhD, I now present to you the document that you are about to read.

This thesis has five chapters. After Chapter 1, this introduction, I describe the mapping review which provides information about the wider field my ethnographic inquiry is situated in (see 2). The chapter on the mapping review contains the literature review that preceded the mapping, the
methods employed, as well as the findings and discussion that sparked my research questions for the ethnography.

The ethnography section, which follows, is divided into two chapters: the first chapter describes my methodology, the second my findings. Its first subchapter (see 4.1, providing a context for my findings, presents the garden and its specific characteristics, and the following three subchapters present my in-depth findings (see 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). In the latter, I explore the garden’s events and relationalities in dialogue with suitable theoretical literature, so the literature review of this second section is situated within the ethnographic writing (as is common in this approach). Each finding chapter also contains a discussion as its last subchapter. The chapters are somewhat arbitrary, as stories and patterns may repeat or unite them, but this structure allowed me to write about most aspects I sought to include.

The first findings chapter is about my observations of how this garden was a space of social diversity and heterogeneity. I let the stories from and about the people in the garden speak to Anderson’s descriptions of *cosmopolitan canopies* to inquire what getting together people with different backgrounds looks like in a contrived, shared space. As this space is a community garden, I also dedicate particular attention to how the plants, seeds, and soils are involved in the social encounters.

In the second findings chapter, I focus on tensions I witnessed in the garden, and follow them to trace the moral geographies of this space. Asking the question, “who gets to shape what is done in this space”, I draw on, in particular, Cornwall’s unpacking of participation and Rancière’s understanding of equality to shed light on how people may express their agency in this space, or indeed see it limited in instances where the ‘local’ habitus is dominant. I also explore how the perspectives und understandings of this ‘nature’ space are entangled with the power dynamics I observe.

In the last findings chapter, I write about my observations of people’s homemaking in this space. I let the stories I heard from people in the garden speak to feminist, diasporic and queer discourses about homemaking to better understand the quiet politics that form part of people’s everyday production of homes. I also inquire into what the plants mean to people, as they are growing and preparing food from countries they have strong cultural ties with, and involve others in these cultural connections.

These finding chapters are followed by the last chapter (see 5) which provides a general conclusion and implications for policy and practice. I turn now to the mapping review, which helps to situate this community garden among other similar projects in a variety of national contexts.
PART A: The mapping review

Public photos from refugee welcome projects²

https://www.rodekors.no/aktuelt/rekordmange-innvandrere-og-flyktninger-til-galdhopiggen
https://gardens.cityofsanctuary.org
https://www.norskfriluftsliv.no/flerkulturelt-friluftsliv-i-praksis
http://www.mcfb.org.uk/projects/mcfb-groupwork-project
https://www.alpenliebenmenschen.de
2. Mapping ‘nature’-based activities for refugees in Scotland, Norway and Germany

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores characteristics of organised outdoor activity provision for recent refugees and migrants in Germany, Norway and Scotland. Several outdoor leisure and environmental education providers across Europe currently run projects in which they seek to engage with refugee or (new) migrant populations. Similarly, some refugee and migrant support organisations and social service providers include outdoor activities in their programmes.

Whilst becoming aware that there are many organisations practicing outdoor activities to support the arrival of people in new environments, I also realised that little academic research has concentrated on this area. The grey literature suggests that projects which seek to contribute to refugee’s integration, participation or wellbeing through outdoor activities or environmental engagement are gaining ground, yet this provision is fragmented and lacks clear conceptualisation (Fengler, Jagenlauf, & Michl, 2016; Gentin et al., 2018; Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al., 2017).

The aim of this mapping review is to provide an overview of the current provision and to reveal details about its characteristics. The grey literature (Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al., 2017) suggests that there are examples of highly innovative and respectable practice that seeks to support the wellbeing and social cohesion of and within communities, and society at large. This work, however, has not yet caught the attention of academic researchers. With this review, I seek to provide a basis for future academic discourse, professional exchange and research in this field. ‘Sketching’ the current landscape may inform further in-depth reviews or qualitative inquiries into the processes and potentials of this sector. It is hoped that this will support the conceptualisation of this emergent outdoor activity sector and assist research in the area.

The geographical focus in this mapping review is on Germany, Norway and Scotland. This selection is based on my language capabilities and my familiarity with the outdoor education and activity sector in these countries. Moreover, Germany and Norway are currently hosting a high proportion of refugees within Europe. Germany registered the largest number of asylum applicants in 2017 (more than 30% of applications in EU-28), and both Germany and Norway rated highly in per capita statistics of accepted asylum applications per 1000 inhabitants (Norway 11/1000, Germany 12/1000, Scotland 2/1000) (UNHCR, 2017).

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the relevant literature, both peer reviewed and grey. I then go on to justify my research approach and methodology. The next part presents my findings which I go on to discuss in the last part of the chapter, together with recommendations for further research.

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3 Within the Scandinavian countries, Norway comes second, after Sweden.
4 Data on Scotland is available for the year 2012, per capita number is self-calculated.
http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/media/facts_and_figures/asylum_applications_uk_figures
2.2 Literature review

Because of the lack of published academic research on organised outdoor activities for new migrant and refugee groups in Europe, this mapping review takes a slightly wider scope. As far as grey literature is concerned, I have included studies or accounts that take a meta-perspective towards projects, i.e., those that describe not only individual practices, but also provide either an overview of several projects, and/or involve some elements of analysis. I conducted my academic literature research mainly in English, but also cross-checked key terms in German and Norwegian to see if there is specific literature available on this sector. I will discuss refugee participation in outdoor recreation; integration in, with, and through nature; educational practices in the outdoors; and close with the rationale, which summarises the review.

2.2.1 Refugee participation in outdoor recreation

There is a plethora of peer-reviewed research about race, ethnicity and recreation (or leisure), and this literature also touches on migration trajectories. Authors in this area explore outdoor recreation patterns of immigrant populations or ethnic and black minority groups, how different ethnic groups perceive (mainly urban) nature, or how these groups are included in the planning of green spaces (Gentin, 2011; Gobster, 2002; Jay & Schraml, 2014; Kloek et al., 2015, 2017; K. Lovelock et al., 2011; B. Lovelock et al., 2012; Sandoval, 2017). Most of this literature focuses on self-organised, i.e. non-facilitated activity, or does not specify who organised it (e.g. Stodolska, 2000). Stodolska (2018) provides a thorough overview of research that has been carried out on minority groups’ leisure needs and constraints, discrimination in leisure, and issues of social justice, privilege and Whiteness. Some of it looks into the work of leisure organisations (e.g. football) but does not focus on outdoor or environmental activities (e.g. Maxwell & Taylor, 2010; Spracklen, Long, & Hylton, 2015). Some studies specifically investigate the role of natural environments in the development of a sense of belonging (Jay & Schraml, 2009; K. Lovelock et al., 2011; Peters, Stodolska, & Horolets, 2016).

In the field of leisure studies, Hurly (2015) and Hurly and Walker (2019) provide the only peer-reviewed in-depth study that my search identified which focuses specifically on facilitated outdoor recreation with refugees. Hurly’s doctoral dissertation, later published with Walker in a peer-reviewed article, seeks to investigate how nature-based leisure can impact refugees’ well-being in Canada. The analysis of four refugee’s experiences of a two-day camping trip in northern Alberta reveals how participants, originally from Congo, Sudan, Somalia and Iran, responded in myriad ways to the exposure to new outdoor environments and activities. Fascination and curiosity were sparked, but so were fears related to this unknown, which were mediated through good information and staff support. Furthermore, participants reported on how the natural environments reminded them of their native lands, which provoked both negative and positive memories, of fatal destruction or strong community. The refugees also reported on how this experience contributed to their well-being, how they had deeply enjoyed the remote location, open scenery and organised activities:

*They expressed satisfaction, pleasure, and enjoyment at learning new activities that involved their children, and they appreciated having supportive mentors to provide guidance. They welcomed opportunities to make friends, and described*

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5 It is important to make the distinction that ethnic minority groups may not necessarily have migrant experiences, and migrant groups may, but do not have to, include people who would self-identify as part of an ethnic minority.
feelings of confidence, independence, and overcoming reticence (Hurly & Walker, 2019, p. 268).

This study, even with its small sample, demonstrates the range of experiences participants may have in this kind of organised outdoor activity setting, and to some extent confirms the potential for enhancing refugees’ wellbeing. Given the political and economic capital behind ‘integration’, much of the literature concerned the role that nature might play in this process.

2.2.2 Integration in, through and with nature

A larger research grouping in the Nordic countries, which includes Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, worked on a collaborative project between 2016-2018 to “increase the role of nature in the successful integration of immigrants into the Nordic societies” (Gentin et al., 2018, p. 9). The project initiated Nordic cooperation in the field of ‘nature-based integration’ and established a network between researchers, third sector organisations and public as well as private bodies. Two comprehensive reports provide descriptions of and reflections about outdoor activity projects active in this sector (Gentin et al., 2018; Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al., 2017). Gentin et al. (2018) conclude that outdoor activities can potentially foster refugees’ identity building and place-attachment, may provide support for mental and physical health, and possibly improve capabilities through education, job skills and health promotion. More research is needed, however, to evaluate and further explore these potentials. Most importantly, I find that they have not yet been critically examined from the perspective of refugee participants. The pioneering research of this group shows that information remains fragmented and the particularities of this sector need further exploration. Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al. (2017) and Gentin et al. (2018) conclude that while high quality work appears to be ongoing, the potentials for ‘nature-based integration’ have not yet been recognised in the public sector or in policy making. Also, as in many areas, results from related research have not yet found its way into current practice.

Gentin et al. (2019) were the first to provide a peer-reviewed systematic review of European literature on the “relationship between nature, immigration and integration” (p. 2). Their analysis of eleven European papers, which to some extent address the relationship between nature and integration, reveals that natural environments can either be understood as a medium to facilitate integration or a target for integration. Where nature is seen as a medium for integration, the authors discuss how natural environments can be places for social encounters. Moreover, the articles included in their review emphasise how natural environments facilitate the development of affective bonds to the new daily living environments and host country, but also how they help to maintain links to former home-countries. Where nature is perceived as a target for integration, natural environments are understood as a social domain such as education, health or employment, which newcomers should have access to. Access then also includes non-tangible aspects such as local cultural meanings and understandings of nature and outdoor recreation.

S. Anderson (2018) is, to my knowledge, the first author to critically examine whether friluftsliv (which translates to free air living), the Norwegian way of practicing outdoor leisure and learning, is a useful area for the integration of refugees as claimed by several members of the Norwegian Friluftsliv organisation. She systematically includes refugees’ perspectives through interviews with friluftsliv participants from Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia, Iran, Afghanistan and Palestine. S. Anderson (2018) concludes that getting together both locals and refugees in friluftsliv activities provides opportunities for getting to know each other and developing closer relationships. These relationships can contribute to a better understanding between people who usually do not come
into contact in quotidian circumstances. However, limitations arise from the fact that locals who practice *friluftsliv* with newcomers are usually those who already engage with inclusion work, and not people who hold prejudices. Her study also reveals that because *friluftsliv* is ideologically charged, tightly linked to Norwegian national identity and narratives of the (White) countryside idyll, it can possess mechanisms that create experiences of exclusion among newcomers. Migrants (especially if non-White) may feel they do not belong, or are only ‘guests’, in Norwegian nature because of these representations. Next, I turn to what particular educational practices were employed in European outdoor settings as focused interventions with migrant populations.

### 2.2.3 Educational practices in the outdoors

Koch (2016) provides the only account my search identified that effectively seeks to combine perspectives from intercultural education and its more current developments, such as diversity education, which are concerned with education and migration, and the outdoor education field (*Erlebnispädagogik*, in the German context). Being written from a practitioner’s perspective, the theoretical underpinnings in these two fields are either swiftly touched upon or stay unexplored, but the book provides a good overview of the different strands and approaches. Furthermore, the author develops a concept for practice with young people from diverse backgrounds. While this book does not mention any particularities that may arise when educators work with refugee youth, it provides a basis for further exploration of what outdoor learning practices with heterogeneous groups, including people with refugee experience, may look like.

As far as grey literature is concerned, the German practitioner’s journal for experiential learning *Erleben und Lernen* dedicated a double issue (3&4, 2016) to the topic of *experiential learning with young refugees* (*erlebnispädagogische Arbeit mit jungen Flüchtlingen*). Contributions reflect on critical issues in educational work outdoors with refugees. On one hand, authors discuss particularities related to the ‘new’ target group, such as language barriers, cultural differences, trauma, or questions of belonging. On the other, they critically reflect on the suitability for and potential adaptations of educational methods to this group. While it is an interesting discussion displaying professional flexibility in the field, there is a disturbing absence of refugee perspectives and experiences. I also notice that some accounts take a deficit perspective on refugees, while others seem to display a more nuanced understanding of diverse life situations and experiences of heterogeneous refugee groups.

My grey literature search revealed that many projects have been carried out in the related field of environmental education. The umbrella organisation for environmental education bodies ran the large-scale project *Integration of refugees through environmental education* between 2016-2018 (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natur- und Umweltbildung [ANU], 2018b*). This project offered training and counselling for associations active in the field and contributed to networking and public visibility through a website that mapped over 100 projects across the country. It also allowed for new cooperation between environmental education or conservation bodies and humanitarian organisations such as *Terre des hommes* and *The Red Cross*. A second project which ran between 2018-2020 takes a broader perspective and focused on ‘intercultural opening’ [*Interkulturelle Öffnung*] of environmental education sites for the inclusion of people with migrant biographies.

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6 See https://umweltbildung-mit-fluechtlingen.de/hintergrund/ein-projekt-der-anu/
7 See https://www.umweltbildung.de/interkulturalitaet.html
2.2.4 Rationale for this review

While some literature is available that can relate to or focuses on outdoor activity projects with refugees, information remains fragmented. Research is needed to provide a basis, some general knowledge, on which further inquiry can build. The Scandinavian research group has carried out important pioneering research in the sector, yet this undertaking is framed entirely around ‘integration’. As ‘integration’, depending on how it is framed, can support exclusionary practice (see Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.), I do not use it as a lens or framework, but rather intend to openly explore what organisations state their work is about. Furthermore, while some information is available on Norway, systematic information on the recent project landscapes in Germany and Scotland is still missing. It is therefore reasonable to engage in a mapping review that systematically explores some of the characteristics, as well as purposes, of current outdoor activity provision for recent refugees and migrants. This approach is suitable to provide the needed general knowledge about this sector, as outlined in the methodology section below.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The mapping review

Grant and Booth (2009) analyse fourteen review types and associated methodologies in order to outline the variations of process and quality within various review types. Drawing on their contribution, I classify my review as a mapping review. The key difference from this kind of review is that I did not review peer-reviewed literature but instead examined projects through their publicly available descriptions. Applying Grant and Booth’s (2009) description of a mapping review to my case, my inquiry aims to “map out and categorise” (p. 97) existing projects in a particular field. Instead of identifying gaps, I intend to understand what the landscape of outdoor activity provision for refugees and new migrants looks like. From this, I am seeking to derive implications for further review work or primary research (Eppi-Centre, 2006; Grant & Booth, 2009; Hooper, King, Wood, Bilics, & Gupta, 2013).

In line with Grant and Booth’s (2009) account of strengths of a mapping review, this approach enables me to identify narrower policy and practice-relevant review or research questions. Mapping also allows me to make an informed decision about a potential further in-depth review of all projects or of a particular subset, which in my case would imply an in-depth study of a limited number of projects, namely one community garden in Southern Germany. The map can also help to establish whether projects may potentially answer future research questions. Lastly, a mapping review is a pragmatic approach which responds to limited time and personal resources. As I am undertaking this review on my own in the context of a PhD which later focused on a more time-consuming in-depth study, this approach is more ‘fit for purpose’ than the potential ‘gold standard’ of a systematic review (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Grant and Booth (2009) also draw attention to the perceived weaknesses of a mapping review: as this study is more time-constrained, it will “lack the synthesis and analysis of more considered approaches” (p. 98). I agree that there is a risk for projects to be characterised at a ‘broad descriptive level’ and that this may “oversimplify the image or mask considerable variation (heterogeneity)” (p. 98) between projects’ public descriptions and their complex practices on the ground. Related to this limitation, my mapping does not assess the quality of the information
available. This decision is justifiable because the quality of the information may not at all correspond with the quality of the project itself, since communication resources may be restricted in a project doing very valuable work. The following section shows how I identified projects for inclusion in the mapping review.

2.3.2 Search methodology

The search methodology drew on previous mapping work in the sector. My main data sources were the report by Gentin et al. (2018) on the Scandinavian countries, from which I drew information about Norway, and the German database of projects run by the German umbrella organisation for environmental education ANU (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natur- und Umweltbildung) (see 2.4.1). Furthermore, I systematically looked for projects in search engines and social media and engaged with my Scottish professional networks and personal contacts, as I was based there at the time of the mapping. General Google searches in English and German, as well as in Norwegian within the limitations of my language skills, allowed for me to find projects in Scotland and some more in Germany.

In the search process I drew on some key elements of a systematic review as guidance for my work (Khan, Kunz, Kleijnen, & Antes, 2003; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). First of all, I started with a refined, clearly framed question with defined boundaries. My question was, “What is the nature of organised outdoor activity provision for refugees and new migrants in Scotland, Norway and Germany?” Boundaries were hence delineated by geographical spaces, but also by the fact that I looked for organised, facilitated outdoor activities rather than self-led opportunities. As Khan et al. (2003) suggest, I worked with inclusion and exclusion criteria flowing from my initial research question. Projects had to be based in the geographic areas defined and had to be ongoing, though frequency of activity could vary. I included projects without evidence of project termination. Activities had to take place in outdoor environments, which could be urban, rural, or anything in between.

As anticipated, additional criteria emerged during the process, to narrow down the search and provide sufficient focus for my analysis. I decided that projects had to be carried out by an institution, not individuals, so that I could get a clearer idea of their general profile, funding, and missions. I furthermore excluded offers that were mediated through schools, because where refugee children have access to schooling, they naturally take part in outdoor activities, and a screening of this formally provided outdoor education was beyond the scope of my study. I also excluded outdoor activities that were part of leisure provision at refugee accommodation centres, because these would not involve any established, local people beyond the staff in charge. Another marker appeared as I realised that some professional development projects, such as work in monument renovation, included outdoor elements. I concluded that it would make sense to exclude projects with their sole focus on professional learning as my research focuses on learning opportunities beyond formalised career paths. I also excluded the particular case of a mobile institution providing equipment for outdoor play.

I conducted Google searches with key terms and synonyms in their multiple possible combinations (see Table 1). As a concrete example, I would state that one of the refugee term synonyms would have to figure in the search (refugee OR migrant OR displaced OR asylum OR immigrant), together with one of the outdoor related terms ("outdoor learning").
Table 1. English Search Terms Used to Identify Organisations for Mapping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee</th>
<th>Migrant</th>
<th>immigrant</th>
<th>displaced</th>
<th>asylum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“outdoor education”</td>
<td>“outdoor learning”</td>
<td>“outdoor activity”</td>
<td>“outdoor recreation”</td>
<td>“outdoor leisure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“environmental education”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“nature activity”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted the same search with respective German terms that sometimes varied because of the socio-cultural and linguistic context. The number of hits was too high in both English and German to look at all of them, therefore I worked through the search returns until I saw the relevance strongly decreasing, often already the case after 50 results. Once this point had been reached, I then continued to search the next 20 returns to ensure I did not miss highly relevant projects.

Limitations of this search strategy are given by the fact that not all projects will have an Internet presence, or they may not employ the search terms used. I am aware of two Scottish projects which were not included due to their lack of presence on the internet. Furthermore, the bias and subjectivity present in this study needs to be acknowledged: I learned about several Scottish community projects through my local engagement and not Internet search, which shows that if I had been placed in another location, I could possibly have discovered more projects there. Small-scale, local projects in different places may easily have escaped the focus of my screening. The systematic Google searches mediated some, but not all, of this subjectivity. Another limitation is that I may have missed out on projects doing engagement work with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, which in many cases can include refugees. I considered including BME communities in my search but decided against it to keep the focus on refugee issues as tangible, not implicit, in organisations’ missions and approaches. Since the aim of the study is not to provide an exhaustive overview of projects, but to map the landscape, these limitations do not reduce the trustworthiness or value of this research. After identifying which organisations would be mapped, I went on to synthesise and analyse their descriptions.

2.3.3 Data synthesis and analysis

My synthesis and analysis included two stages. At first, I used categories to describe key features of the projects: country, organisation profile, type of activities, target group, and funding. I made use of these pre-defined categories to cluster projects into several groups. At a second stage, I analysed the mission statements to derive general themes about what this sector is trying to achieve. I employed the method of ‘thematic analysis’ as described by Braun & Clarke (2006), whilst crosschecking with other authors (Bryman, 2012; Robson, 2011; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2012). According to the authors “thematic analysis involves the searching across a data set [...] to find repeated patterns of meaning.” (p. 86). The patterns of meaning are reported under five themes which capture the purposes of outdoor activity projects for recent refugees and migrants (and often locals). In the clustering process of both stages I paid close attention to project heterogeneity (Khan et al., 2003) to mediate the oversimplifying tendencies of my approach. As a limitation, I did not engage with a
comparative analysis between national contexts because this was beyond the scope of my mapping review.

My final dataset consisted of twenty-nine projects. Of these, fifteen projects are German, six Norwegian, and eight Scottish. One particularity of the German group is that two are not individual projects, but collections of many projects. The first is an umbrella organisation for gardens in Germany, whose database comprises, among others, over 200 intercultural gardens across Germany. The second is a collection of 24 integration gardens across Berlin. The final dataset for the thematic analysis was my (self-translated) English copy of the project purposes given on websites or in reports.

The amount of information available about each project varies and I would describe information about this sector as fragmented. Some projects have well developed websites with activity reports, photos, sometimes media coverage, and information about possibilities for involvement. Other websites merely mention some activity without providing further specifications. For pragmatic reasons, I decided to not get in touch with projects to find missing information, but to work with what is publicly available in the languages I confidently understand, which are German, English and Norwegian.

The following section provides information about the projects I identified: what types of organisations run these projects, what kind of activities they offer, what groups they target, how they fund their activities and what they are seeking to achieve.

2.4 Findings

2.4.1 Who is doing this work?

Most organisations included in my dataset are situated in the non-profit sector (23), some in the public sector (4), and fewer still in the private sector (2). Appendix A provides an overview of the organisations I have mapped. Outdoor activity projects are, to a large extent, run by associations and charities in all three countries. In three cases, projects are run together with a Humanitarian Aid organisation. Almost all projects mention partnerships and cooperation, so they are not run in isolation. In the public sector, two Norwegian projects are run by State-funded organisations, and two Scottish projects are under the umbrella of a government agency. In the private sector, two German commercial outdoor activity providers also ventured into the field.

Organisations in the non-profit sector are environmental associations (7), gardening associations (58), outdoor leisure associations (4), community development (4) or social work organisations (2). The latter are working in the field of migrant or refugee support. Up to this point, I have come across only one migrant organisation running outdoor activities, which also claims to be the only multicultural friluftsliv organisation in Norway. There may, however, be more migrant-led organisations which I have not been able to identify due to my language bias, as my search did not include languages beyond the host countries’ principal languages.

Most environmental or outdoor leisure associations have several projects, of which one is an engagement project for migrant or refugee groups. An example of this is a German project which

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8 With many more in Germany, as mentioned above. Two of the projects are collections of more projects.
offers mountaineering activities to both newcomers and long-established residents, but with a focus on refugee involvement. Other environmental or outdoor leisure organisations talk about including people of refugee or migrant background in their general work (4). The youth sector of a German environmental organisation is reaching out so that refugee children join the organisation’s children’s groups. A third means of inclusion is exemplified by a Norwegian mountaineering organisation which offers free family trips during the summer holidays, and these are based in neighbourhoods with a high ratio of migrant communities and families with less financial means.

Gardening associations and charities are either open to people of all backgrounds, placing some emphasis on the inclusion of migrant and refugee communities, or target (particular) migrant and refugee groups. For example, a community garden project in Scotland works with a support organisation for refugees, as well as with a service for survivors of torture, to allow specific groups to engage with gardening activities in a safe space.

Community development or social work organisations include outdoor activities in their programme alongside other educational and leisure activities. An example of this, also based in Scotland, is an integration network which runs a weekly gardening project and has been undertaking occasional outdoor trips to various locations and with several of their groups. Another association, based in Germany, reaches out to locals and newcomers alike, and runs a gardening project alongside a café, poetry slams, music nights, and other cultural events.

Commercial providers do not run projects themselves, but offer their programmes and facilitation to interested clients, including services that work with refugees. One German provider emphasises that their staff has worked with refugee youth in the past and promote their outdoor education services (Erlebnispädagogik) to schools, associations, or companies.

2.4.2 What kind of activities do organisations propose?

Projects include different kinds of outdoor activities. Not surprisingly, these correlate with the organisations’ profiles. Three projects run educational outdoor activities (Erlebnispädagogik), five projects offer nature and conservation activities, eight projects do garden related work, and 13 projects undertake outdoor sport or leisure activities. Within the field of outdoor sport and leisure, three projects take participants on mountaineering or hillwalking trips, two on cycle rides, four on general outdoor activities (Friluftsliv), one on ski trips, one on visits to local places, and one offers a range of activities, including kayaking, archery and climbing.

There are some local-cultural particularities regarding the activities. The Norwegian way of practicing outdoor leisure and learning is called friluftsliv, therefore in this context organisations specify their activities as friluftsliv activities. In Germany, three projects talk about offering Erlebnispädagogik activities, and this approach may include different outdoor sports, but can also refer to outdoor team building activities and group games.

The most widespread activity is gardening: as mentioned above, two of the projects classified as garden projects are really databases pointing to more gardens in Germany. This shows the existence of a major gardening scene that actively reaches out to people of diverse (migrant) backgrounds and ethnicities. As ‘gardening’ was not part of my key word research and I did not search for specific activities, it is possible that many more local gardening projects than those I have identified exist.
2.4.3 Who are the target groups?

Of the twenty-nine projects, twelve explicitly target refugees and/or new migrants whilst using different terms for their participant groups: refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, foreign nationals, or newcomers. Sixteen projects can be classified as open to people both with and without refugee or migrant background, or from diverse communities in general. The degree of local involvement may vary in both cases and is difficult to estimate based on websites alone. One project is an outlier with respect to target group: a German project targets the umbrella organisation’s members (institutions, not individuals) and seeks to support their intercultural inclusivity.

With respect to age, eight projects are for young people and children. One project works specifically with unaccompanied minors, another targets families with children. The remaining projects do not specify their target age groups. As far as sex and gender are concerned, one project, a cycle training project in Germany, particularly target refugee women, the rest do not specify whether they target men, women or diverse genders. In two projects, another criterion mentioned with respect to the target group is mental health. One is a community garden which collaborates with a service working with survivors of torture. The other is a Scottish project working in woodland settings with people who use mental health services, including refugees. Next, who foots the bill for these projects?

2.4.4 How are the projects funded?

Information about funding was available in the case of twenty-two projects. Where no information was available on the funding of the specific project, I searched for details about the organisation’s general funding. Apart from the projects run by public sector organisations and so funded by local or national governments, or those run by companies, the largest number of projects are based in the non-profit sector (see 2.4.1). For these projects, financial means are provided through fundraising activities for specific projects. Projects are then funded by local and/or national governments, foundations or trusts, as well as through some donations, sponsorships or member contributions.

The localisation of the outdoor activity projects in the non-profit sector implies that there are hardly any long-term projects and financial means are always limited. One of my main sources of data, the German ANU (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natur- und Umweltbildung) database of projects established between 2016-2018 (see 2.4.1) shows this: despite containing over 100 projects from across the country, only nine appear to be ongoing and an up-to-date programme is visible in only four cases. Given this scramble for funding, we might expect that justifications or purposes figure heavily into these projects’ web presence – and they do.

2.4.5 What is the purpose of this work? Emerging themes

In all twenty-nine projects information was available about their respective purposes and aims. Thematic analysis (see 2.3.3) elicited five themes relating to the sector’s aims. The vast majority of projects ‘sit across’ these themes, i.e., they have multiple purposes and cannot be located within one theme only. The themes that emerged from my analysis suggest projects intend to:

- Offer spaces of encounter between locals and newcomers, or people of diverse backgrounds more broadly,
- Enable access for and participation of refugees,
- Facilitate sustainable living and positive relations with environments,
- Provide learning opportunities, and/or
- Support health and wellbeing.

While the themes are based on website information and not necessarily representative of complex everyday practices, they can provide grounds for more in-depth analysis and bring to light what this sector intends to achieve. In the following, I describe the themes and provide examples from various projects.

**Spaces of encounter between people**

One major purpose is to create spaces of encounter between established people and newcomers, or more generally speaking between people from diverse backgrounds. The terms “encounters” or “contact” are mentioned in nine projects and are the terms mentioned most frequently, together with “sustainability” (8) and “integration” (7). The theme of ‘spaces of encounter’ is, in most examples, expressed in terms of people meeting each other, spending time together and getting to know each other better. Projects aim to offer a welcoming space wherein participants can share experiences, develop positive relationships and friendships. Within this theme, there is also a strand of projects aiming to work against prejudice and cultural barriers in order to build bridges and promote mutual understanding. A German gardening project states that community building is a principal aim. This can be fostered through the exploration of commonalities and differences:

> At the intersection of nature, culture and the social, the migrant society is re-invented every gardening season. Cultivating vegetables is not enough. It is about discovering, interpreting and expressing differences and commonalities. A new “Us” emerges in the intercultural space-in-between (Anstiftung, 2018, para 7).

As mentioned above, a variety of projects state that they contribute to integration. In most cases, the meaning of ‘integration’ is not specified, but can be related to the theme of ‘spaces of encounter’ between locals and newcomers, as these are frequently mentioned together. As an outlier within this theme, one project states that it seeks to support cohesion within migrant groups, as opposed to fostering understanding across groups.

**Access and participation**

Another theme is the intention to support refugee participation and widen access to both greenspaces and outdoor activities in the host society. As with integration, it is not always specified how participation is understood, or what it might look like in practice. Refugees and migrants, here represented as marginalised communities, get an opportunity to move towards the centre of society. It is also mentioned in this context that refugees should have the opportunity to experience alternatives to victim-perspectives and discrimination. An example of this is a Norwegian organisation, also the only migrant-led project I could find, which states that it is “Norway’s only multicultural friluft- and environmental organisation. We want the minority youth to conquer new parts of Norwegian society” (Wild X, 2018, para 1).

A strong expression of the wish to support active participation is also tangible, if differently, in a British (and Scottish) project, which seeks to provide a safe space for refugees:
We have a vision of a network of green spaces with a culture of welcome, in which asylum seekers and refugees feel safe and appreciated as valued contributors and co-creators of community gardens and environmental projects across the UK (Gardens of Sanctuary, 2018, para 1).

In many cases, participation is related to issues of access. Enabling access, then, means offering opportunities to visit local or more remote greenspaces, to practice outdoor activities, and/or to actively get involved with the organisation, e.g., as volunteers.

As mentioned earlier, some outdoor activity or environmental organisations seek to include refugees in their ‘mainstream’ activities which means that they seek to increase migrant participation in their organisation, or in a network, and not limit it to particular projects. An example of this is a German project framed around ‘intercultural opening’ [interkulturelle Öffnung] of environmental education sites. The latter are meant to become more accessible and relevant to people from diverse migrant backgrounds, but also the organisation network seeks to reach wider audiences through this strategy (ANU, 2018a).

**Sustainable living and positive relations with/in environments**

Another aspect of this work is about supporting sustainable living. “Sustainability” is among the most frequently mentioned terms, with eight references. This is not too surprising, given the fact that nearly half the projects are run by environmental organisations or gardening associations (see 2.4.1). As a result, participants actively engage with forms of sustainable living in many projects. This may take the form of gardening work, cycling (sustainable transport), or conservation activities. As a German project states:

> No matter where you come from, what language you speak, how old you are, if you have a disability or not, or what garden experience you bring: come and join the community garden at the village stream. We want to explore, work on and experience future-relevant issues of ecology, biodiversity and sustainable alimentation (Zusammen leben e.V., 2018, para 1-2, emphasis in original).

The wider theme elicited here concerns the development of positive people-environment relations more broadly. Projects state that they offer the opportunity to engage with green spaces, to celebrate nature, or to explore natural environments together with others. This is expected to enhance place-attachment, and some projects describe ‘nature’ as a refuge or ‘home’ for people, where they can feel they belong. This is most comprehensively expressed in another German project:

> The encounter in and with nature can support, strengthen and console people. Nature can be a refuge and offers positive sensual experiences. Natural environments and nature experiences can be a way of supporting people to grow new roots (Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V., Kreisgruppe Bamberg, 2018, para 1).

**Learning opportunities**

A fourth theme is the provision of learning opportunities. Projects seek to support refugees’ learning, shared learning among diverse participants, or learning by local communities. In most projects, the focus is on refugees’ learning and a majority of projects refer to the acquisition of the
host-countries’ language (even though this may be a side-effect of doing activities together with locals). Apart from language support, projects state that their activities facilitate personal or social development, or the acquisition of new skills. Some also provide information about the host country, as a Scottish project explains:

There is a different topic and outing or activity every week, offering you a chance to get together, improve your English conversational skills and learn about Scotland – its people, culture, music, geography and much, much more (The Welcoming, 2018, para 1).

Other projects seek to introduce specifically local ways of practicing outdoor recreation. In this case, participants are familiarised with (getting access to) green spaces as well as with rights and duties related to their use. This is supposed to empower participants to practice activities or seek out places themselves. A Norwegian project describes this intention well:

The overarching aim of the project is to get more people of minority background to know the Norwegian culture- and outdoor-tradition [turtradisjon], so that they themselves can use nature for recreation and self-development (Midt-Agder Friluftsråd, 2018, para 25).

Other projects emphasise the learning journeys that all participants, locals or newcomers, undertake together. One project highlights the importance of the expertise and experiences refugees bring to their new communities, multiplying knowledge. Another more marginal perspective, found only in one example, is support of the locals’ learning, who get to see familiar environments with new eyes through the intercultural encounter with people from other countries.

Health and wellbeing

This last theme of ‘health and wellbeing’ has the fewest references but is still tangible in the dataset. Several projects state that they seek to improve the health of their participants or contribute to public health more widely. Some highlight the therapeutic and restorative potentials of spending time outside and being active. This theme is a focus, but not exclusively used in this context, for groups of people who suffer from mental health problems.

One Norwegian project expresses that “the aim […] is to contribute to better integration and public health through shared outdoor journey experiences.” Another project, this time from Scotland, claims the mission is “Working with communities to improve their health, widening access to the natural environment & helping create a better life for present and future generations” (Boots and beards, 2018, para 1).

Health and wellbeing are also expressed in terms of fun, enjoyment and relaxation, and one project mentions the opportunities for refugees to get away from the confined space of refugee accommodation centres.

2.5 Discussion

The findings of the mapping review raise many questions about the everyday practices of this particular landscape of outdoor activity projects and organisations. In the discussion below, I first dedicate some thought to general project characteristics (such as target group and funding), and then reflect on the themes that emerged in the thematic analysis of project purposes.
2.5.1 Funding for refugees as a target group

The exploration of organisation profiles and project funding brought to light that most projects work in the context of short-term funding. Due to this fact, organisations are likely to face barriers related to their capacity to develop long-term strategies and relationships, and to provide activities on an ongoing basis. This raises questions about policy and funding opportunities that recognise the potentials of these practices and provide adequate financial support. More research is needed to explore how organisations work within these constraints, and to establish how and if these practices benefit individuals and communities (or not).

As far as the target group is concerned, the review showed that nearly half of the projects target refugees specifically, while all others target people of diverse background in general while also actively reaching out to refugees. Sprung (2013), in the context of adult education for migrants and refugees, raises the concern that where a ‘target group approach’ for refugees is employed, responsibility is often delegated to specialised community or social work institutions and programmes. This has a segregating effect on a deeper societal level, meaning that migration is not acknowledged as a wider channel of social change but is rather seen as a ‘special circumstance’ that can be ‘fixed’ through social services. It is encouraging to learn that several organisations not specialised in migration issues but having expertise in outdoor or environment-related areas engage with questions of migrant participation and inclusion. Moreover, it is positive in this respect that many projects are not targeted at refugees only.

Still, categorising ‘refugees’ as a homogeneous group of people, often understood as ‘needing help’ in the context of support work, needs to be problematised (Cornwall, 2008; Shaw, 2007; Sprung, 2013; Tett & Fyfe, 2010). This is not to say that specialised, targeted support, as in the example of a garden for women suffering from mental health issues, is flawed – such projects may provide invaluable assistance. Rather, it becomes vital to look behind the ‘refugee’ label and recognise the diversity of situations, life circumstances, backgrounds and experiences lurking there.

Projects may do this to varying degrees, by negotiating the social figure of ‘the refugee’ in their own ways, reproducing dominant narratives, and/or challenging mainstreams, depending on the situation. One question that is sparked here is whether the ‘refugee label’ is employed for funding purposes only, but does not persist in project practices, or if it also influences everyday relations and practices. Do projects follow a situated approach, where individual life stories, relations, and experiences are recognised, or do they take an objectivist approach as they work with a ‘group of refugees’? Projects may on the one hand represent particular spaces in which identities that are negated in mainstream society can be recognised and accepted, whereas other identities imposed by the immigration system for instrumental purposes (such as asylum seeker, undocumented, family reunion) are silenced for a moment (Morrice, 2014). On the other hand, dominant deficit perspectives and prejudice about refugees (Filsinger, 2017; Heins & Unrau, 2018; Morrice, 2014) may run through the agendas and stories of any kind of project, in explicit or implicit expressions, even if they are striving for change (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016).

2.5.2 Reflections on project purposes

The theme ‘spaces of encounter’ can be related to Gentin’s (2011) systematic review. Several of the papers reviewed describe nature and green spaces as platforms for social encounters. People get together and socialise in open environments, on one hand, but on the other this literature also emphasises that contacts between people from outside of one’s own ethnic group, or contacts with strangers more broadly, are infrequent. As this literature refers to studies of self-organised leisure
activity, it still needs to be explored if bridges are created between people from different groups in a facilitated experience. Gentin et al. (2018) state in their report about Scandinavian projects for refugees and locals that:

*the most challenging task seems to be the promotion of true social interaction between immigrants and locals and in many of these practices there is only limited involvement by locals (p. 18).*

S. Anderson’s (2018) report, in contrast, states that organised *friluftsliv* activities offer local people and newcomers the opportunity to get to know each other better and create closer relationships. Questions can be raised here about what a positive facilitation of encounters, of bringing people together in and through outdoor activities, may look like (Flowers & Swan, 2017). Can projects possibly contribute to better mutual understanding between people of refugee and non-refugee backgrounds, and of diverse backgrounds more widely? It is yet to be explored how participants of outdoor activity projects engage with questions of difference and commonality, or in general how power relations unfold in these practices. This is especially important as refugees may be facing major inequalities because of their legal status, limited financial means and restricted access to other social resources. According to Heins and Unrau (2018) “small cycles of giving, receiving, and returning” can contribute to “the restoration of equality and respect in a situation of gross asymmetry between citizens and newcomers” (p. 8). These kinds of cycles, possibly, may form part of everyday project practices.

When projects make claims about their contribution to *integration*, they may have different understandings of the social processes that underpin it, and how activities and spaces work in its favour. Integration changes its meaning depending on the political and ideological stance it is discussed from (see 1). The concept in itself needs critical interrogation (see 1), which organisations may do to different extents, locating themselves consciously or not in the political tensions that interweave with integration. Part of this is that they may see themselves as involved in integration processes as all persons change and learn when they make connections across groups, or they may see the refugees as the main ‘objects’ of integration.

Issues of *participation* are equally multifaceted. Cornwall (2008) points out that “participation is ultimately about power and control” (p. 271): Who is participating, in which activities, under what conditions and for whose benefit? Since participation is raised in many projects, it would be interesting to explore what form this endeavour may take. People with refugee and migrant experiences may or may not be involved in the definition of project aims and further agenda-setting. In scrutinising the projects, I noticed that little was explicitly written from refugee or migrant perspectives. Spaces that invite participation may be beneficial, but who is invited and under what terms are critical considerations. Furthermore, when new migrants are provided with the information and opportunity to *access* outdoor environments, does this mean they also get to shape and decide what is done in these spaces? These are crucial questions to consider, especially if the outdoor places sought out are historically and culturally non-migrant and White spaces.

A third theme that emerged was the purpose of ‘sustainable living’ and the development of ‘positive relations with environments’. Where a focus is placed on people-land relations, the local approaches to environments are potentially place-responsive (Baker, 2005; Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Theobald & Siskar, 2008; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Environments however, will always carry different meanings for different people (Garrard, 2010), and these meanings will impact people-land relations. Different factors such as the individual migration experience, country of origin and destination, but also social identities and backgrounds will influence the ways in which various environments are judged (Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al., 2017; Rishbeth, Blachnicka-Ciacek, Bynon,
Landscapes, understood as beautiful restorative places by some, can be perceived as frightening or incomprehensible by others. Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al. (2017) point out that "In some parts of the world nature means snipers, grenades, poisonous plants and venomous animals, and perhaps a place where you throw the garbage" (p. 71). Furthermore, as S. Anderson (2018) has raised for Norwegian friluftsli, environments can be ideologically charged and closely related to national and local identities, which may foster exclusion. The diversity of perceptions is therefore deeply relevant where environments are described as a ‘refuge’ or places where attachment and belonging can be fostered. Places can also be sites of exclusion and discomfort, and localised understandings of place may not resonate with migrants’ experiences of living in-between multiple places (Grillo, 2007; Mecheril et al., 2010; O’Reilly, 2012b; Pitkänen, Içduygu, & Sert, 2012; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). These reflections point towards questions about how places are approached in these outdoor activity projects, and how people-place relations emerge and unfold.

A fourth theme was the purpose of offering learning opportunities. Most projects describe benefits for refugee participants when it comes to learning, fewer mention the significance of learning together, from each other, in community. The question of ‘who needs to learn what?’ strikes me as fundamental in this context. Deficit perspectives on refugees may lead to questions about the necessary skills and capacities for refugees to gain, yet less so for long-term residents. This relates to the concern raised by Flowers and Swan (2017) that, “There is little research about the types of adult education needed by host communities to help them learn ways to welcome new arrivals” (Flowers & Swan, 2017, p. 269).

The last aim that crystallised in the analysis was the support of participants’ (mental) health and wellbeing. This intention is in line with Hurly and Walker’s (2019) study approach, which also focuses on the outdoor trips’ contribution to wellbeing. The findings bring to light that if participants feel safe and comfortable, outdoor activities may offer great benefits. The purpose is also in accordance with findings from Gentin et al.’s (2019) systematic literature review on integration and nature, in which they uncover an “integration-nature-health nexus” (p. 6). Six out of the seven papers they analysed emphasise the positive contribution of greenspaces and natural environments to migrants’ (mental) health and well-being. Again, as mentioned above in the context of people-land relations, the contribution to health will depend on people’s perceptions and experiences of greenspaces and environments.

### 2.5.3 Implications for the in-depth study

As there is little research available about organised outdoor activity provision for migrants and refugees, there are numerous possibilities for researchers who would like to venture into the field. While I acknowledge that providing an exhaustive mapping of projects is nearly impossible, I believe that future research could try to provide a (nearly) exhaustive map of this provision, if a more local focus is chosen. As an example, further inquiry could try to provide more information about projects based in Scotland, ideally in collaboration with the already identified organisations and other professional networks who will know of more ‘hidden’ projects (e.g. that do not have a website). A collaborative approach, such as taken by Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al. (2017) in the Scandinavian countries, could be valuable in other countries. This kind of study would, whilst providing more information about the sector, also make valuable connections between research and practice.

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11 The research group identified projects through surveys and consequently brought actors of the field together in two thematic workshops.
The themes elicited in the review provide fertile ground for research questions. They display a richness in these projects which seek to achieve multiple aims, inclusive of both social and environmental perspectives. I see value in ethnographic approaches to understanding the ongoing relations between people and people and environments. Observations may relate back to issues of encounters between people, participation, learning, and sustainable living, and/or they may reveal entirely new issues and questions that are yet to be uncovered.

Several motivations led to the selection of the research site I portray comprehensively in chapter 4. The project appeared to be both a common example in the field of refugee support through outdoor activities, and it stood out as a particularly interesting site. As to the first aspect, the association mentioned on their website four of five project aims synthesised in my mapping review: the garden was supposed to work as a *space of encounter*, support the *participation of refugees* (and migrants more widely), be a model of *sustainable living*, and offer (new) *learning opportunities*. Furthermore, the majority of projects I had found through my mapping were gardening projects.

The garden was of particular interest because the association was explicitly committed to both social inclusion and equality, and to ecological sustainability, and I was intrigued how this intersection was addressed. I became curious about how this critical approach would play out in practice in this local garden community. Furthermore, while several descriptions of projects in the mapping review reminded me of dominant social discourses of refugee victimisation and heroism as its counterpart, I was interested in conducting research in a space that, at least from the outside, appeared to differently address power relations. My first contact with the organisation brought out their sensitive awareness of dominant narratives about refugees and intersecting inequalities in wider society. As an illustration, the association acknowledged the complexities within a ‘target group’ approach and recognised the politics of the term ‘refugee’. To refer to the human experience of becoming a refugee, they used the term *people with refugee biographies* [*Menschen mit Fluchtabiographien*], which I adopted from them.

In conclusion to this chapter, I found that there is a richness among projects which make use of nature spaces in the realms of refugee support. Their moral ambitions show that there is an aspiration to ground people with refugee biographies in their new homes and support them to make connections to both people and place, yet these ambitions also need critical consideration in order to ensure that projects really benefit the people they target.

The following section is the ethnographic part of this thesis. I present first the methodology, then the research site, and then the findings, with each finding chapter also containing a discussion of relevant literature.

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12 In their communications, and/or in the character of their events. An example is their yearly conference “Dear White People” which thematises and reflects on Racism, Race inequalities and White privilege.
PART B: Ethnography of a community garden

Maybe I can be part of the consciousness of this garden for a little while,
weaving together thoughts, ideas, impulses, ways of being and becoming -
into a net, a story, something to keep and offer to the future,
a gift to the unknown.
(Fieldnotes, 25.4.2020)
3. **In black and white: ethnographic methodology and me**

**Black and white**

Words
Once written
*Cannot be taken back*
*They stare back at me*
*Even if I close my eyes*
*I know they are still there*
*In black and white*
Pondering
Observing
Questioning

Words
*Once read*
*Cannot be taken back*
*They stray in your thoughts*
*And even if you wish*
*For the page to be white*
*They will keep your company*
*Slightly amused maybe*
*Or rather waiting*
*To be changed*
*To be rectified*
*To be justified*

Words
*Once omitted*
*Or left unsaid*
*Become restless*
*They sting and reel*
*They stumble and mumble*
*Until they finally find the paper*
*In black and white*
*Until they are written*
*Until they are read*
3.1 Introduction

I entered into contact with the association in autumn 2019 and started my in-depth study of the community garden in Spring 2020. Over the course of eight months, between April and November, I visited the garden on a regular basis. I recorded 66 visits to the garden and spent approximately 270 hours in the location. My visits lasted from 30 minutes, when just checking in, to 5 hours (on activity days or for other community events). The average visit time was about 2 hours. On average, I came to the garden 10 times a month between April and November (with fewer visits in August because of the summer break). I visited at all times of the day, usually between 10am and 8pm. In about half of the visits (35), especially in spring, I brought my daughter and sometimes my partner with me which had a strong influence on the relationships I was able to form (see 3.2.4).

My interpretations and findings are based on fieldnotes in which I recorded my observations as well as informal conversations, and of audio-recorded conversations which were informal and unstructured but had an allocated time. These conversations were more ‘formalised’ in the sense that people sat down with me to have a conversation about the garden for my PhD research, whereas other conversations were not arranged and emerged more spontaneously. These latter could be fleeting, in-between chats that had the character of small-talk. On the other hand, my fieldnotes also record longer, more in-depth and sometimes very intimate conversations with people which developed in the moment and which I did not want to interrupt or change through a suggestion to record. Kwame Harrison (2018) identifies three aspirational goals of methodological reporting in ethnography: to detail the methods used, to represent the researcher in self-awareness instead of self-indulgence, and to represent the research. Guided by these aims, I describe my ethnographic approach, as well as the methods used, in the following sections. As ethical considerations formed part of the entire research project, they also sit across my depictions in this chapter.

3.2 Methods, or rather: it is all about the ethics

3.2.1 Access, consent and anonymisation

Having ethical approval for the study from the Moray House Ethics Committee, I negotiated access with the association that runs the community garden, first via email, then in-person at a garden activity day. Recognising the complexities and challenges around informed consent in ethnographic research, such as the tensions between formalist and flexible, dynamic approaches (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), I came to see consent as a process that is continuously (re)negotiated in the relationships with people rather than as a one-off event (Lewis & Graham, 2007). Having gained formal access to the garden through emails with association staff, I formalised our mutual engagement through a Memorandum of Understanding (see appendix B). I considered obtaining written consent from all garden participants carefully but decided against it, as a formal consent procedure could have been misunderstood as categorising people in a very fluid social context. This is related to the nature of the people who use the garden; several among them had refugee and migrant biographies and needed to prove their legitimacy in society on a daily basis. The garden, as a counterweight, was an open drop-in location where people could move in and out freely at any time.
without needing to sign up or provide any information about themselves. In fact, the association in charge of the garden refrained from using ‘membership’ terminology in order to be clear that their activities and spaces were entirely open.

I took several measures to ensure that participants were well-informed, participated on a voluntary basis and knew they could withdraw at any stage of the research (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Robson, 2011). First, I distributed information about my research via the garden mailing list when my participation in the garden officially started. I then made core information about my research available through a multilingual information sheet (see appendix C) on the garden shed, a central location in the garden. Information was available in German, English, Persian, Arabic and French which I had been told were the languages people could access, if they were able to read at all, at least as their second or third language. I kept the language of these sheets accessible with short and simple text; this also helped to not lose important information in the translation process. In addition to this, I provided a more detailed, ‘take-away’ information sheet in English and German (see appendix D). Through these written documents, people were informed that they can speak to the community gardener or a staff member from the association, both impartial persons of confidence, if they did not wish to participate. Whenever I spoke to people, especially in first contacts and when longer conversations started to unfold, I drew people’s attention to my research and their voluntary participation. In my planned, recorded conversations, I ensured informed consent orally. Where I got the impression that people did not really want to participate in a more formalised, recorded conversation, I refrained from trying to convince them.

Names of people in the finding chapters are pseudonyms and the location of the garden is kept confidential, to not put people with unsecured residential status at risk. I promised confidentiality to all persons involved in the research whilst informing them that they could be identifiable by people from the community. This choice is not to be taken for granted however, as Moore (2012) points out, but deserves some examination, since the practice of anonymisation or naming is a political and ethical undertaking. Anonymisation comes with an ethical cost: it may function as a form of protection but at the same time constitutes a form of erasing – rendering individuals whose presence is already contested in society invisible (see 1, 4.2.3). Often refugees remain nameless, faceless and anonymous, and since we encounter them only through statistics or media stories, unique life stories and individuality risk negation. I seek to counterbalance this risk through a kind of writing that brings people’s uniqueness to life, in awareness that this is possible only to a certain extent.

3.2.2 Engagement, observation and fieldnotes

O’Reilly (2009) defines ethnography as an iterative-inductive methodology that draws on a family of methods (such as observation, interviews, and visual exploration), which results in “richly written accounts that respect the irreducibility of human experience” (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 3). Following my relational approach to research (see 1), I was inspired by Desmond’s (2014) description of and call for relational ethnography. One of the core critiques of a non-relational approach, according to him, is that the substantialist perspective on social reality has several shortcomings: it disassembles the world into a collection of essences or substances, instead of recognising the totality of...
interconnected processes. Second, is constructs sharply bounded, homogeneous groups, and it freezes dynamic processes as it renders them static. Desmond suggests that

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\text{ethnographic fieldwork, when done with commitment and humility, can offer a powerful corrective to thin and uncharitable beliefs about marginalized people or institutions. Relational ethnography goes further, not only challenging the stereotypes affixed to stigmatized people or places (e.g., lazy, violent) but also by rejecting the basic conceptual formula on which those stereotypes rely: that is, } a = x, \text{ where } a \text{ is a bounded group or place and } x \text{ its defining attributes (Desmond, 2014, p. 568).}
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He suggests that as relational objects of analysis, ethnographers could study “(1) fields rather than places; (2) boundaries rather than bounded groups; (3) processes rather than processed people; and (4) cultural conflict rather than group culture” (Desmond, 2014, p. 562). In my case, I sought to see how the garden (as place) is interconnected with what is beyond its bounds, paying attention to the “politics of bounding” in the garden community (see 1), seeking to understand people as complex beings and recognising tensions instead of, for example, cultural characteristics of individuals or groups.

I agree with Hockey and Forsey (2020) that ethnography is better framed in terms of engagement rather than participation, as this term best conveys the sense of ‘being present’ with research participants where and how they are. Through this kind of immersion in the field (O’Reilly, 2012a), the researcher gets a sound understanding of what members of a group consider important or meaningful, how they go about their activities and what conditions shape their lives. In the process, the researcher experiences routines that people in a particular community follow and gains insight into both the opportunities and constraints that such ways of living entail (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

As a researcher, I was involved in engaged observation and engaged listening (Hockey & Forsey, 2020). In following the garden’s routines and rhythms, I became familiar with the people active in the garden, started creating relationships with them and got glimpses of the joy and tensions present in this space. I engaged with the life of the garden and tried to use it in the many ways that other people did: I worked in my own plot that the association had given me, participated in communal gardening tasks, enjoyed shorter or longer conversations with people, tried out different garden tools, and sat on a sun-soaked bench with my lunch. I came with my family, played with my daughter in the sand pitch, got involved with other parents and their children. I joined most action days that took place on a monthly basis and came along to the Thursday afternoon gardening meet-ups whenever time permitted. Most planned events had to be cancelled because of COVID-19 restrictions, but when infection numbers dropped during the summer, some gathering was possible. I joined a concert, a participatory storytelling night, a silent disco event and an Arabic film night with discussion panel\(^\text{14}\). I soon noticed that the ‘free’ visits during which I tended my plot and thereby got in touch with other plot owners, the ‘garden guardians’ (see 4.1.3), were most significant for my research as this was the group that was most heterogeneous, and it included (more) people with refugee biographies.

I came into closer contact with about 30 people, who I think got a sense of the person I am – as a researcher and beyond. I did not hold a clear-cut professional role in the garden, and while people

\(^{14}\) This one was held in a different space, namely the association’s café, though other film nights were also held in the garden.
knew that my PhD research was the reason why I was there, this did not seem to matter much to them after the initial contact. With some people, I started sharing more intimate conversations, which meant that some, though not all, relationships touched on friendship. While more intimate contact is judged as over-rapport and seen as critical by some authors, Tillmann-Healy (2003), in exploring friendship as a method, see it as an opportunity to practice an inquiry that is “open, multivoiced, and emotionally rich” (p. 734) as it follows the pace (as relationships deepen and change), practices (conversation, involvement, compassion) and ethics of friendship which among many other aspects include “a level of investment in participants’ lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project” (p. 735). Risks related to potential over-rapport, such as increased vulnerability, conflicting obligations, loss of the capacity to critically examine experiences and information, or potential exploitation of participants because of the power relations (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) were mitigated by the nature of the garden as a drop-in space, where people could come and go as they pleased (see 4.3.1). This quality of the space allowed for spontaneous intimacy to occur, but equally enabled detachment and distance without harm to on-going relationships.

Another significant relationality was my physical engagement with and entanglement in the space, the plants, and the non-human world more widely. Its life and ecological processes somehow became part of me as I became part of them, even if I failed to grasp or observe their complexity in detail. I was a complete newcomer to this activity, by no means a gardening enthusiast like most people in this community. As I learned this practice through observation, some reading, and advice, wonderment sprouted in me as I came to see some of the ‘magic’ of active involvement with soil, seeds, the flourishing of plants (or indeed their illness or decay), and the harvest. As an example, my fieldnotes display the excitement about my first harvest, and the sense of ownership I developed for my plot.

No matter my experience, I got to engage fully with the physical elements of this garden life, using all my senses as an ethnographer, as Emerson et al. (2011) suggest:

*Ethnographers learn to experience through the senses in anticipation of writing: to recall observed scenes and interactions like a reporter; to remember dialogue and movement like an actor; to see colours, shapes, textures, and spatial relations as a painter or photographer; and to sense moods, rhythms, and tone of voice like a poet (p. 34).*

Despite using ‘all the senses’, complexities of the socio-ecological world are inevitably reduced once captured in written words, in fieldnotes. In an interpretive process, the ethnographer provides her own understanding about other people’s lives and the spaces they move across, to future readers who get to know the protagonists of the story only through her authorial voice. Fieldnotes are therefore always pruned and selective and in what they contain and what they miss. Moreover, fieldnotes also frame events, processes and persons in particular ways through the interpretation of the researcher. The same event, witnessed by a number of people, could be presented in numerous ways in written text because of the different writing conventions of people (Emerson et al., 2011). My experiences and observations, as well as the way I interpreted them, were neither objective nor impartial, and I reconstructed memories which privileged certain experiences and voices over others. My ethnographic writing acted as another filter, another form of selection (Clifford, Marcus, & Fortuny, 2009).

My fieldnotes are written accounts of approximately 270 hours I spent in the garden. In my writing, I took on several practical pieces of advice from Emerson et al. (2011), in that I followed their useful distinction between jottings, fieldnotes, and final ethnographic writing. I made my jottings directly
after my garden visit, paying close attention to details of scenes, descriptions of all my senses, and avoiding summaries or generalisations in my writing. The fieldnotes, written in English (with some German fragments where the translation was not obvious), include both sketches and episodes (Emerson et al., 2011): they elicit a sense of place with visual and kinetic details, or narrate the course of events.

A strong limitation in my fieldnotes is my incapacity to describe the space and its non-human world as precisely as I would have aspired to. I was not familiar with the plants, vegetables, herbs and fruits, having neither ‘basic knowledge’, nor specialist insight to recognise their great diversity. I think this relates to the “plant blindness” that shapes Western culture (Myers, 2019), and which gardeners to some extent escape. With few exceptions, I was not able to name or recognise them and knew little about their ecological cycles, their ways of growing from seed to plant, to full bloom and wither. I am convinced that I also, quite in the same way, missed out on a whole world of insects, birds, small mammals, amphibians, and even reptiles (at some point I learned about the presence of a ring snake) in the garden. I did not have the capacity to detect them, name them, or connect with them in any way. It was very frustrating, on one hand. On the other, I could always be surprised, learn, and discover something new. As people shared their knowledge or close observations, more details became visible to me as well. As an example, I gained a much better understanding of the bees and their ways of living listening to the beekeeper’s stories.

3.2.3 Organised conversations

According to O’Reilly (2009) an ethnographic interview is an in-depth conversation that builds on reciprocal relationships established over time and is grounded in familiarity and trust. I organised recorded conversations with 24 people which are captured in high-quality audio files. Of those, twelve conversations are between an individual and me (and in one case also a small child under 3), four with a romantic couple and myself (in one case, another small child), and two with a pair of friends and myself. In three cases, namely with two individuals and one couple, an interpreter was present as well. As to the interpreter, she was a person from the community fluent in Persian in German who I asked, on the occasion of our organised conversation, if she would support me in other conversations. I also made use of financial resources from University, available to me as a PhD student, to offer her remuneration for the interpretation service.

In total, this dataset comprises 18 conversations, 15 with community members (‘garden guardians’, see 4.1.3) and 3 with association staff. Of these conversations, one is in French, one in English, one in a mix of English and German, three in Persian with translation to German, and twelve are in German only. Duration of the recorded conversations varies between 30 mins (1) and 1h50mins (2), but the majority (15) are one hour long.

As to the sample, I left leeway to interview people whom I identified as key informants over time, either because they were especially sensitive and experienced with the garden as a space of encounter, and/or because I knew they were willing to talk, because of their interest in the research and in the development of the garden (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). I approached individuals within the group of garden guardians, who were the regulars in this space, a group which included people with refugee biographies. Within this group, I selected a representative sample that took account of the diversity in the garden with respect to nationality, country of origin, ethnicity, age and sex (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). My sampling was also opportunistic as in the beginning I prioritised people I had been able to knit closer ties with. People with whom I did not share a language and who were therefore more difficult for me to reach were contacted later, when
interpretation was assured. Luckily, a community member who was fluent in German and Persian (her mother tongue) agreed to translate for me when I asked her after our own recorded conversation.

Of the 24 people, eleven were of German origin, association staff included. The other thirteen people were originally from Afghanistan (4), Iraq (2), Palestine (2), Iran (1), Benin (1), Côte d’Ivoire (1), Poland (1), and France (1). This ‘origin’ does not imply that these countries were where they had spent most of their time living; migration biographies and trajectories were varied and, from what people decided to tell me, often included movement across several countries. As an example, all individuals from Afghanistan had lived in Iran for some time. All of the people interviewed had been in Germany for at least one year. Eleven of the 24 were women, including the three association staff, and thirteen were men. The youngest person was in his mid-twenties (not confirmed), the oldest in her seventies. The majority of people, in my estimation, were in their thirties and forties.

The conversations took place between July and November (with one exception in May). In summer, I had been able to connect with most people who came regularly and had gained some understanding of the social habits in the garden. I started feeling the limitations of observation and was looking for deeper conversations about what the garden meant to people, so a combination of methods seemed suitable (Greener, 2011; Onís & Pezullo, 2018). This is in line with Hockey and Forsey’s (2020) call to recognise interviews as a method for ethnography that allows for insights not possible through observation alone: we cannot know what people have on their minds, how they locate themselves, without really listening to what they tell us. The interview, furthermore, often allows the researcher to “immerse herself quite intimately in the life of a fellow human being, one with whom we share the status of offspring, parent, lover; the gifts of creativity and artistry; the struggles of life in general and ultimately for all of us” (Hockey & Forsey, 2020, p. 76). This was certainly my experience, as I felt the longer conversations were often intimate and deepened the relationships or facilitated the start of a mutual connection. As an example, one of the Afghan persons I had spoken with called me from time to time after the interview, just to say hello, as we could not exchange more than one word.

Initially, I had hoped to conduct group conversations as I thought this format would facilitate exchange and bring up interesting aspects about the garden in the dialogue between people. Moreover, I did not want to lead conversations with my questions (beyond some initial guidance), but rather let the conversation be guided by the group. This approach seemed to sit well with my relational perspective. I soon realised, however, that group conversations were too complicated to arrange; most people did not appreciate the format as they were short on time, and it was difficult to make appointments. I realised this format clashed with the drop-in culture of the garden. Another important factor that made me abandon this idea was that I did not want random groups but to bring together people who already had a closer relationship so they would be more comfortable conversing. Despite my observations, at that point, these relationships were still difficult for me to judge and became more apparent to me only through the recorded conversations. As an adapted alternative to this initial approach, I asked people if they wanted to bring somebody else along, or join me as a couple, or meet with me individually.

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15 A person had self-selected for a conversation after having read my information sheets, and I appreciated the initiative and jumped at the chance.
Despite my good rapport with them, I refrained from asking those people for a conversation who had already participated interviews with other researchers\(^\text{16}\), as I had been warned by association staff not to create research fatigue in this community. My fieldnotes include longer, intimate conversations with two people from Syria who have complex refugee biographies. One of them told me in an informal conversation that she had not appreciated being audio-recorded by another researcher, and therefore that person does not figure in my thesis. The other person told me she had already participated in an interview, so I did not suggest another, but as that person had not minded the interview and was very open to sharing, details of her stories are included.

Recruitment for conversations was initially very unproblematic but became more challenging towards the end, as people started coming less and less in autumn when plots needed less attention\(^\text{17}\), and the logistics of conversations became more complex: I needed to have the interpreter with me, and the weather needed to be warm enough for us to still meet outside.\(^\text{18}\) The interpreter and an Afghan couple came to work as gatekeepers for me and opened up other conversation opportunities, which meant that three conversations took place in Persian, interpreted to German, with four people who frequently used the garden and who were part of the larger Afghan community present there. At the end of this conversation phase, which also represented the end of my fieldwork more widely, I sent an invitation out via the mailing list to ensure that people who still wanted to participate had the opportunity to speak with me, and one last person reached out.

Most people were very open to conversations and gave me their mobile number to arrange meetings. Others were more reserved, and I avoided pushing anyone to participate. With about five people I approached, the recorded conversations did not take place, usually for want of time, but possibly because they did not want to participate. I avoided asking the association for people’s contact details to strengthen consent without a mediating authority. In three cases, after not having seen familiar persons in the garden for a longer period, I contacted them through contact details I received from the association. All interviews (with one exception) took place in the garden, a space both my interlocutors and I were familiar with. When possible\(^\text{19}\), I let my participants chose where they wanted to sit with me.

The conversations themselves were semi-formal, unstructured and open ended (O’Reilly, 2009). All took place in the garden, except for one where a person invited me to her nearby balcony for coffee. I understood them as active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), where all involved are seen to be engaged in a reciprocal meaning-making process. Kvale (2005) uses the term InterViews, to put emphasis on the interconnection of views rather than a question-and-answer one-way street. I always started with a personal introduction and overview of my research and re-explained issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. I also obtained their oral consent to record the conversation. To start the exchange, I asked one or two orienteering questions, such as “How long have you been active in the garden?” or “What does this garden mean to you in your daily life?”, and

\(^{16}\) An anthropology undergraduate student came to the garden for one or two months and approached people for interviews, and one of the gardeners told me he had already participated in an interview in earlier years.

\(^{17}\) I had thought that the gardening season would continue until the end of October and that I had sufficient time to catch people, but only realised the seasonal pattern of the garden in the process of researching.

\(^{18}\) Even though one of the staff members had offered me use of one of the sheds for our conversations, I was reluctant to do so because of COVID-19 infection risks.

\(^{19}\) This was usually possible, with exception of conversations I had with three or more people, for example when the interpreter was with us, and I had to make sure we had adequate distance to minimise COVID-19 transmission risks; and I needed a good position for my recording devices.
then followed the conversation wherever my interlocutor(s) led. Where suitable, I started the conversation with reference to a prior conversation between that person and myself. The conversations also built on my observations insofar as I referred to what I had observed my interlocutor(s) do, or how I perceived their plots. Most conversations were relaxed, easy, often intimate, sometimes filled with humour, and had a positive feel to them, which O’Reilly (2009) states is often the case for interviews within ethnography, though some conversations had their difficult moments as well, especially when they touched on very sensitive or dramatic issues in my interlocutors’ lives. I tried to be aware of my own positionality in the conversations and to react reflexively.

3.2.4 Positionality and reflexivity

Traditionally, ethnography seeks to describe the culture or social structures of a particular social group with the aim of understanding it from the ‘inside’, using the terms that people who are part of this group would employ (Robson, 2011). While some authors start from the premise that ethnography implies that a researcher, as an outsider, gets involved with an initially unfamiliar context and social group (Emerson et al., 2011), others acknowledge or even advocate for the ethnographer already being an insider from the start, a member of the group who she is trying to portray (Onís & Pezullo, 2018).

As to my positioning in the garden, an either/or perspective in this insider/outsider debate seems misleading. While it is true that I entered this garden as a newcomer, an outsider to this place, my social location possibly brought myself closer to an ‘insider’s position’: as a German and German-speaking person, a White person, a woman, a Mum in her thirties, with an academic background, I shared many characteristics with other community members and with people in the wider neighbourhood. Furthermore, as this community is heterogeneous, I was certainly an insider to some groups within that community (e.g., young families), but an outsider to other groups (e.g., the Afghan community). People with refugee or migrant biographies were likely to place me in the group of well-situated White families in the neighbourhood when they saw me, and to see me in tight relation with the association instead of as a ‘neutral’ person, which I think impacted what they decided to tell me in recorded conversations. As an example, I was not sure after one interview, where a person asked me if I “had liked what he said”, if he expected me to directly pass on information to the staff as I know he was also looking to find work. A movement from the ‘outside’ to the ‘inside’ was nevertheless tangible, as I experienced first the nervousness of being a newcomer in a space, and later the ease of the regular visitor who ‘knows her way around’ with people and place. I often brought my daughter to the garden and my partner joined us on a regular basis. I think that it mattered that the gardeners got to know us as a family, influencing the status I held in this community. As a family, we blended in more naturally into the garden’s social make-up than I would have done as a solo researcher. My relationships with several people, and my general ‘integration’ into the garden community, gained in depth because of my family’s presence. On many occasions my daughter created ‘bridges’, helping me to win people’s trust, or became the frequent element in or entry-point for conversations (“How is your family? Where is your daughter today?”).

20 First, this was related to the COVID-19 outbreak, as childcare facilities were closed or less accessible, but I continued bringing her for some time after the situation had eased as she had become a natural part of my research practice.

21 My family was not present for any of the visits where I had also arranged recorded conversations.
As I became a gardener, a researcher, and a writer, I experienced some of the tensions inherent in ethnographic study and writing, one of which is so well captured in Back’s (2007) *The Art of Listening*:

> When we listen to people, do they give us their stories or do we steal them? At the heart of all social investigation is a dialectical tension between theft and gift, appropriation and exchange (p. 97).

Many situations did indeed feel like I was receiving ‘gifts’ from people: I enjoyed when a person stopped for a conversation or advised me on gardening work. It was precious when they opened up and told me intimate details about their lives. If active participation in a setting and writing about it are closely interconnected (Emerson et al., 2011), then at what stage does the theft or gift exchange happen? Is it in the process of listening, when I am listening as a researcher and not ‘just’ another community member, or is it in the process of writing, when I interpret the story and turn it into a static event in written text, in fieldnotes? Or is the crucial moment the time when I write a final, full story about everything I have learned? A story which then becomes my own story, to be read by others?

In these dialectics of gift exchange and appropriation, language seemed to me an element to pay close attention to. On one hand, my concern was related to consent: Even though I had taken the necessary steps to ensure that people were informed about my role and that the research was ethically adapted to the garden context (see 3.2.1), I felt the tension between gift and appropriation in the dialectics between overt and covert research which is a recognised element of ethnography (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011): namely that participants become used to the ethnographer being around, they do not pay particular attention to them but ‘relax their guards’. The researcher therefore carries an extra burden to protect research participants. Furthermore, as to the people I did not share a language with, I did not know if they had been able to access my written information. It was crucial for me to be able to later speak with some of these people with an interpreter so that I could explain to them what I had been doing in the garden. I was concerned about my own portrayal of people. When I wrote about them, I tried to avoid stereotypical representations (Emerson et al., 2011) but had to recognise I could not live up to this ideal in the beginning: all my mind was able to reproduce after the initial encounters was their sex, colour of skin, approximate age, and stereotypes about where I thought they ‘came from’. The more I got to know people, however, the better I became at describing them. Maybe this is the beauty that lies in the movement from strangeness to familiarity: the more familiar a person becomes, the more details one is able to perceive about that person.

Writing from a position of refugee advocacy, I saw it as my responsibility to practice awareness of my own privileges related to my Whiteness, German citizenship, and social class or financial and educational status. I was sensitive about questions that could be disturbing or understood as non-appreciative in a migration context and did not initiate ‘collection’ of any personal information about my interlocutors. The information provided in this thesis is based on what people decided to tell me, not what I sought to find out about them – a subtle but important difference.

Research requires social, personal and financial resources and I recognise “the luxury of investigating” (Harari, 2018, p. 9). As I investigate and write *in the place of others*, and write *about them*, coloured through my interpretation, I am complicit with a knowledge production system that
many authors recognise has colonial, supremacist legacies (e.g., Girei, 2017; Lincoln & González y González, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Research is not for the researcher’s sake, and we owe the people we write about the courtesy of serious attention. Wrestling with the conundrum of representation, I was inspired by the art of visiting, a concept that Biesta (2006), in reference to Arendt and Disch, describes as alternative to empathy and tourism: empathy suggests it is possible to fully identify with somebody else; tourism measures difference against an objectivist stance of what is normal to me. Visiting, in contrast, means that we do not try to see the world through the eyes of another person, but to see with our own eyes a position that differs from our own, in a story that clearly differs from our own. Arendt calls for us to practice an enlarged way of thinking in the context of political representation: “To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting” (Arendt & Beiner, 1982, p. 43). I think this is very much relatable to practicing the art of listening, as Back (2007) urges us to do. In this thesis, I am sharing what I have come to understand through my listening, and I hope that it will serve the people I am writing about.

There were some instances where I became painfully aware of the status I held as a German, White person with established residence, and so my ease in navigating German institutions. In one instance, I realised that the person I was talking to had seemingly not understood my position and agenda in a recorded interview. Part of this was that we would have needed an interpreter, that I had overestimated the German skills of my interlocutor based on earlier small-talk as I had no knowledge of his mother tongue. My interlocutor had his own agenda, which I realised because he also brought a friend who was asking me to support him as a journalist, in his writing about the horrendous refugee situation he had experienced in Greece. However, while I first had to recognise that I did not fully understand the agenda of the two men (what I am describing here is my understanding of the situation), who I think had misidentified me as a gatekeeper because of my status, I also had to recognise that the privileged status did not even put me in the position to help. There were several situations similar to this, in which I guessed at people’s motives and their effects on our relationship, as both of us were bound by our own languages.

From the beginning of my research, I had been drawn to participatory, democratic forms of conducting research, and aspired to involve people as much as possible in my undertaking of the study, as I saw this as the necessary bridge across differences. While this was my intention, Back (2007) reminded me of the limitations of such an aspiration, of turning research participants into partners and co-researchers:

> Claiming that research participants are empowered through the research process conceals some of the inevitable unevenness of agreement, consent and participation. [...] Even the most righteous researcher keeps a firm grasp on analytical control and sociological authority. Perhaps, abandoning radical pretence may be liberating and allow for greater candour about the limits of democracy in research and also, for that matter, in understanding and insight (p. 18).

I agree, and in my experience that ‘unevenness’ can become more even only through time, familiarity and possibly intimacy with people (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). The more I got to experience and understand participation patterns in this community (see 4.3.1), the more I was relieved that I had not designed and implemented a ‘participatory research project’ from the outset. Participation patterns struck me as specific, contextual, and while the barriers and complexities are more tangible for me now, they were almost entirely invisible beforehand. I believe that the initiative of a participation process would have needed to start with, and spring from, the relationships I was able
to knit only over the course of time. My conclusion is that a truly participatory approach needs a lot of time, sensitivity and insider knowledge – most of which I had gained only at the end of my fieldwork. While I recognise that the knowledge was coproduced as other people’s ways of seeing and experiencing the garden always offered me new interpretations and insights (Hockey & Forsey, 2020), it was me who captured these for the ends and purposes of my PhD study which I kept ownership of.

3.2.5 Data analysis

In ethnographic research, data collection, analysis and writing are inextricably linked. Analysis is best understood as an iterative process, tangled up with every stage of the ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; O'Reilly, 2009, 2012a). Therefore ethnographic analysis is “something of a messy business” (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 13), which is guided by an inquisitive mind and the desire to make sense of the various elements that the researcher is exposed to in the field. This implies that the analytical process was already ongoing during my fieldwork. I started commenting on my fieldnotes, and wrote down “flashes of insight” (O'Reilly, 2012a, p. 184), while still in the process of data collection. After I had completed garden visits, I nevertheless entered a phase of more focused analysis, during which I did not go back to the garden to learn more.

Making sense of it all, as O'Reilly (2009) indicates, involved sorting, translating, summarising and organising my ‘unstructured data’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). I decided to pool the fieldnotes and semi-formal, recorded conversations together as they were not separate entities, but rather two different versions of ongoing storytelling and relationship-building through which I learned about this garden and its community. I did not want to prioritise fieldnotes or audio files since each recorded equally significant details of the site at different times and in varied aspects. The great strength of the recorded conversations was that the data contained the in vivo voice of community members who expressed their own thinking-feeling about the garden at one given moment in time. In contrast, conversations sketched in my fieldnotes had already been ‘filtered’ through my own thinking-expressing, even though I had tried to keep the actual wording and spirit of the moment alive in my writing. The strength of the fieldnotes was their capacity to capture processes in the garden through the observation of events and the doings of people. They also captured conversations with people who I did not have recorded conversations with but whose stories reveal significant details about the community.

My analysis was inductive and guided by the data (Gray, 2022; Greener, 2011; Robson, 2011), with my focus kept on aspects of migration and its related diversities and intersectionalities. I wanted to focus on how the inclusion and participation of people with refugee biographies worked in this space, but with full attention to what people considered important in this respect. As there is a clear necessity to “know” one’s data to avoid superficial ideas and cherry-picking elements (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010), I took time to re-immerse myself in the fieldnotes and recordings. I re-read the fieldnotes and commented on them again, re-listened to the interviews, took extensive notes on them, and drew a mind map (Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012) of each interview to get a better overview of what people talked about. As I got a clearer view of what elements stood out, I partially transcribed the interviews, whilst also continuously engaging in the process of ethnographic writing. In the sorting process, I looked for patterns, startling facts and inconsistencies in the data (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; O’Reilly, 2012a). Patterns of action or thought enabled me to notice processes in the garden through their reoccurrence at different moments in time, or in accounts from different people. Startling facts made me aware of what I had thought I knew about but which presented itself differently, and inconsistencies helped me question my own emerging hypotheses. My own
curiosity and interests made me revisit events in and experiences of the garden that had marked me, surprised me or drawn my attention.

I progressed in a spiral, moving between the interpretation of stories and events, the generation of ideas and/or analytical categories, and the (recurrent) reading of theory and engagement with academic discourse. My writing in itself became a method of data interpretation, as I was constructing economies, or systems of partial truths – of true fictions (Clifford et al., 2009). Narayan’s book *Alive in the Writing* supported me in this process of (re)establishing the focus and structure of the PhD, again and again, in a reiterative process. I sought to bring the data in conversation with theory which offered deeper insights of how it could be understood, and/or offer it as a way of bringing a theoretical concept to life (e.g., the cosmopolitan canopy, or the concept of refugee participation or homemaking). Theorising, in line with Hammersley and Atkinson (2010), was an iterative process where I used ideas to make sense of data, and the data to change ideas. Over time, I came to see the funnel structure that ethnographic research should have (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010) becoming more focused over its course, taking the form of four chapters in which many details I was trying to portray about the garden found their place. While I have alluded to it above, some systematic attention must be paid to how the COVID-19 pandemic altered the course of my research.

### 3.2.6 Alterations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

The corona virus outbreak affected the research site and my personal and professional life as a researcher. During a strict lockdown in Spring 2020 (March and April), all but essential infrastructure closed, and different households were not supposed to gather. In those days, I was still recovering from an illness of my own, possibly COVID-19. As far as the garden was concerned, all events (gardening meet-ups, action days, celebrations, other gatherings) had to be cancelled. Access to the garden was only permitted to people who tended beds there, and only for 10 people at a time, including children. Everyone was asked to keep a distance of 1-2 meters to avoid infection. This was my new research setting; luckily it turned out that people still used the garden - more than they usually would, since they had more time and fewer other activities - and that it was possible to enter into contact with them despite social distancing.

After careful consideration of alternatives (see e.g., CAHSS Research Ethics Committee, 2020), I decided it was more ethical to continue with my study in the garden under these new circumstances rather than trying to switch to online data collection. The garden association supported this, saying that any contact with participants was much easier face-to-face and seemed reluctant to pass along any contact details for online-only contact. As to the mitigation of risk of spreading or infecting myself with the virus, I estimated this as rather low as my research site was an open-air environment and people were able to keep the recommended distance of 1-2 meters. I monitored the situation closely and followed local and national government advice on COVID-19 carefully. I kept myself informed through trustworthy media and ensured that neither my research participants nor I were exposed to any unnecessary risks.

Infection numbers dropped during summer and more socialising was possible, albeit with hygiene measures in place. The association kept their events open to the wider community, but not to the general public, and made use of sign-up processes to keep control of the number of participants. They also had to keep contact details of all participants at events. These new rules were in great conflict with the association’s ethos and policy of an ‘open-to-all’ drop-in community and
environment, but it was the only option if they wanted to enable some exchange during these
difficult and isolating periods.

As to my own research study, it was affected again in autumn, during the phase of arranged
conversations. I had to make sure that people involved sat at a distance but still aspired to facilitate
comfortable conversation. The fact that I did my ethnography in an outdoor environment was one of
the main reasons I was able to conduct my research as planned. Encounters were still possible until
the second strict lockdown in December when I had already completed my fieldwork; and the
garden was a comfortable, airy place where people could feel at ease and did not have to wear face
masks.

To conclude, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the usual habits and ways of being at my research
site, but it was still a space where it was possible to conduct social research without compromising
the security of all people involved. The pandemic represents an unprecedented social context for my
study and influences some of my findings (see 3.2.6.). As the virus’ presence was tangible
throughout my entire fieldwork phase, be it expressed through people’s behaviours or in
conversations, the pandemic formed part of both my data and of my analysis.

In the next chapter, I present to you the community garden that I became part of as a researcher in
detail.
4. Ethnography findings

_Growing out of harm_

This is all too big for me
Yet, in my own size, I need to respond
Must not be over-whelmed
Must not be swept away

With the force of my body’s weight
I need to fit in, file out, flit in between
Must be where I can still stand
Must be where I can still swim

Where is this space
That allows us to grow out of harm
To soften the storm’s edges
To calm the water

So that tomorrow
We are still able to live
In our collective size
4.1 Welcome to the garden

4.1.1 About the association

The association I worked with was founded in 2015, when a large number of refugees arrived in Germany. At this time, many civil society organisations and communities in favour of refugee support sought to facilitate their arrival. The association started with a simple website that tried to connect locals and refugees around a shared dinner. Through this newly created online platform, established people could invite newcomers to their homes. Unfortunately, the association had to recognise rather soon the many complexities of and complications around sharing personal data, such as people’s names and addresses, and therefore changed their format. Instead of the dinner website, the organisation created two spaces in the city where people could get together, meet, interact, and feel included: a café and a community garden.

Since their foundation, the association has undergone constant change and development. This dynamic of constant amelioration and shocked responsiveness to new developments was still very tangible during my fieldwork. Shortly after I arrived, they launched a new website which more clearly presented the current structures and areas of activity. There are now four domains: gardening & environment, food & drink, arts & culture and employment & qualification. Within these, the association develops and accomplishes a range of projects and events, many in collaboration with other local actors. Furthermore, these domains are not seen as separate but form part of a larger circular concept: the vegetables and herbs harvested from the community allotments in the garden are used as ingredients in the café kitchen (which also is a qualification site, see below) and the café, like the garden, is used as a space for culture and arts events, among others.

At the moment of writing (November 2022), the association has eight members of staff on different work percentages, and one associated volunteer (in his Voluntary Year of Social Service\(^{22}\)). The core team is made up of five women and three men. While this group holds the threads together, the association’s work is based on a large number of volunteers. Without them, the realisation of their various projects would not be possible, and they contribute to the organisation’s progressive and dynamic spirit.

The association’s principal aim is to create spaces where people with different life trajectories, backgrounds and circumstances can come together. Their core mission is stated on the website:

> We open up civic spaces of encounter. To work against prejudice, to work for getting to know and understand. For a sustainable sense of belonging and as a base for peaceful living together (Association website, 1/12/2020).

As to the specificities of refugee support, the association has changed its focus over the course of time. In our conversations, the member of staff who became my designated person of contact told me that they had started out in the spirit of ‘helper’s syndrome’ and that she now felt embarrassed by their earlier communications. Having progressed through this phase, mainly driven by recognition of the complexities and diversities, but also of power relationships around refugee situations (e.g. the fact that their activism would not stop people being expelled) and by the fact that the association staff knit close ties, often friendships, with many people they worked with, the

\(^{22}\) The Voluntary Year of Social Service [Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr, FSJ] is a voluntary service that young people aged 16-18 may undertake over the course of one year in social institutions (e.g. in health, public welfare, children and youth education).
association now takes a more self-reflective approach. Moreover, the staff team is more aware about their sphere of influence, which is restricted and bound significantly by current integration policies. The qualification programme in the food and drink domain is the result of the association’s learning process and illustrates their realistic approach to refugee support. People with migrant and/or refugee biographies, who very frequently face large barriers in the job market, can join the association for an ‘internship’ with a qualified cook and develop their skills in the food-service industry whilst bringing in recipes from their own home-country. The lunch is then sold in the association’s café where customers can themselves decide how much they wish to pay for their meal (albeit with a suggested price), making the food accessible for people with lower or no income. Generally speaking, the association has never provided support in asylum procedures, accommodation search or other practicalities associated with formal asylum and integration procedures. Instead, it has focussed on the creation of social networks and community through which newcomers can benefit in manifold ways. As an example, locals may act as gatekeepers to provide information and access to a range of social structures (which also became part of my role in some relationships).

I familiarised myself with the different spaces and projects that the organisation offers, but limited my in-depth study to the gardening & environment domain, more precisely to the realities and life of and in the garden community. This made sense because of my PhD focus on outdoor environments and activities. In the next section, I present you the community garden that I inquired into.

4.1.2 The community garden

The community garden was created and founded in July 2016, nearly a year after the association’s dinner share website had been launched. Its location was promising for local refugee support, as it was positioned at the intersection of two larger refugee accommodations and more peripherally organised refugee housing. The space had been a horse stable and grazing area before, but the owner of the grounds decided to follow his vision to create an inclusive, intercultural community garden in this area (‘Inclusion’ here, in line with policies, refers to the inclusion of people with disabilities, and ‘intercultural’ to refugees in particular). He gathered a group of people, mainly his personal contacts, and the group obtained project funding. The space, at the time, was no more than a field. The beautifully designed and created community garden, as it stands today, has been the result of many years of development and the work of different people who connected with this community.

The garden is located in a demographically interesting area, in a district on the edges of a smaller German city with 230,000 inhabitants. The neighbourhood is the most recent one of the city and counts approximately 5,500 inhabitants. Historically, and until quite recently in 1992, the district had been the base of the French army after the defeat of the German army in World War II. Today, it is a renowned eco-district. Most streets are traffic-calmed, cars are only allowed to be parked for short spells and a tramway connects the district directly with the city centre. Modern buildings have been built to low energy standards and the 100 elements of a solar settlement are supposed to produce more energy than they use within a year. The largest proportion of the inhabitants are families who have grouped as housing cooperation to build low-cost housing often with a high amount of own self-funding (which may indicate good financial means). Approximately one third of inhabitants are under the age of 18 years; the district is sometimes referred to as one of the most child-rich areas in

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23 To the extent this was possible, as the café faced major restrictions because of the corona pandemic and most events the association had envisioned, both in the garden and in the café, had to be cancelled.
all of Germany. Compared with other neighbourhoods, it is politically oriented strongly left-wing and green, scores low (under average) on risk of poverty and in the “foreigner” and “migrant background” population and scored high in the perception of security.24

Let us travel back to the year 2020 and I can take you on a short walk to and across the garden as I experienced it during my fieldwork. From the city centre, you take one of the trams to its final stop to reach the eco-district described above. Once you get off, you may - if you are a good observer - recognise the association’s logo on a small signpost, indicating the project “Gardening together”. A short walk will take you to a small stream, called the ‘village’s stream’, alongside which grows a grove of legally protected trees. A footpath runs along one side, and on the other you can walk on soil, under the shadow of the trees. The latter is well travelled in summer as it keeps cool; you will see many families, children and dog walkers. Even small children can easily access the stream here to play and bathe (though you may be surprised how cold it is even on a hot summer’s day with possibly over 35 degrees).

You cross a small bridge to get to a sandy-grained, more official-looking path, and turn right to follow it for about 5 minutes. From time to time, you are able to get glimpses of the stream and the other side through the trees to your right, and to your left you see a field, then an experiential learning site for children (farm-style, with animals), then another field. On the path, you are likely to meet cyclists, families with children, older people from the nearby retirement home, or dog walkers. Then you arrive at your destination.

You find yourself at the main entrance of the community garden, which stretches out to your left. It is bounded by a fence, but entrances are open, there are no gates. The front entrance may be perceived as the main entrance as it is marked by a large blackboard that sometimes announces events in the garden (though more often it is forgotten about, you are better off informing yourself online) and displays a garden flyer with some basic information.

When you take a look around, you can see four wooden sheds at the shorter end of the garden on this side, the first one just an open space with a roof, the remaining three closed wooden buildings with doors. A small glasshouse, you will notice the window front, forms part of the last shed. As you walk on, you will come to a roundish space in the middle of the garden, with solid wooden benches around a fireplace marked by a circle of larger stones. You can see the small wooden toilets, with a wooden ramp leading up to it on one side to make it accessible, stairs on the front, and the compost next to it, both situated at the back of the long side of the garden. You will also immediately notice the ‘geodome’, a round tent with appealing architecture, built from wooden poles and planks, with triangular, white tarp pieces making up its roof, and open on its sides. Underneath you may sit in a circle on benches that alternate with raised, wooden beds, both integrated in the dome structure. Next to it, you find a small sand pitch for children, with plastic shovels, buckets and other toys. If you peek behind the dome, you will notice five wooden beehives at the back of the garden.

If you walk along the rounded main path through the garden, you will see a large number of individual plots to your right, a patchwork of different sizes and shapes, and the community side with longer beds to your left. I have decided to use the term plots instead of ‘allotments’, because the latter would point to a fenced ‘department’ in a larger, shared garden area. Plots in this garden are not larger, fenced areas, where individuals can lay out their vegetable patches, build a shed, and add a small grass area. Rather, as you can see, they are areas of soil of no more than a couple of square meters. This is related to the garden’s history: when it was first created in 2015, the soil was

24 The reference is omitted for anonymisation.
measured and broken up into plots, and their size was determined according to the number of people in the group, or family, whom the plot was meant for. As you can see, neatly organised plots sit next to ones that were wildly grown over, some gardeners use vegetable rows while others use an approach closer to permaculture, where different vegetables grow in less organised ways. Some plots are free of weeds, others are wildly grown over as their tenders have less time or lost interest in the plot over the season. For an outsider, it is sometimes difficult to see where one plot begins and where the other one ends. Yet, you may have noticed that some people use marking techniques; they frame their plots with wooden planks or build middle-high fences around them (see 4.3.2). Small paths lead through the tangle of plots, and I am sure you will, like the people here, enjoy walking along them to see what others are growing and how they are doing it.

The path you are standing on, as I noticed after some time, separates the garden into two parts: the individually held (but not owned, see below) and the commonly shared. The space is therefore a combination of an allotment garden, where individuals tend their own ‘adopted’ areas, and a community garden, where the plots and work are shared. The separation of the garden is not necessarily visible to a newcomer, but intrinsically known to its regulars or to any visitor who received a formal introduction to the garden. The term ‘allotment garden’ is not used as a reference, rather the entire garden is simply called a community garden.

However, as I came to understand, the separation of the garden implies different kinds of social practices: individual or family gardening, and community gardening. While the allotment area is cultivated by individuals and families, the garden guardians (see below), the community area is mainly cultivated through community events, and to some extent through the work of association staff who are professional gardeners (and their friends and family). A gardening meet-up takes place every Thursday night, and one Saturday a month the association holds an “action day” in the garden. Tasks change with the seasons and the current development of the garden, and may include gardening, maintenance or building. In addition to these events, the association started an “inclusion project”, led by a professional vegetable gardener, for people with disabilities in the year I did my fieldwork. A small group of young people work on the cultivation tasks as an internship, to find out if this is an activity they enjoy.

The bulk of the harvest is brought to the association café in another part of town, where the food is prepared in the context of a job skill training programme for people who have difficulties accessing the job market, mainly those with refugee biographies. Some of the harvest is also used to cater social events in the garden. Apart from the gardening activities, the community area is used for a broad range of cultural events: celebrations, concerts, storytelling nights, film screenings, and silent disco events, among others.

Of course, as soon as you come to this garden, you will notice the various plants that, in the allocated spaces and beyond, breathe life into the garden. In front of the sheds, there are two rows of larger vegetable patches, and at the back side of the garden, next to the dome, you also find long beds. A bit further, some berry bushes. Alongside a wooden ramp that leads to the toilets, you may see the patches sprouting different herbs. And all around the fireplace, as by the geodome, you may notice wooden-framed raised beds. The individual allotments, making up a large area along the side of the garden, are filled with life. At the beginning of the season, in March, you find the garden in shades of ochre and brown, and you are able to look across its length and width as the plants, apart from the trees in the garden, are not yet growing very high. Yet soon the first vegetables will be ready to harvest: carrots, salad, leeks. As the season progresses, the garden turns from a light to a deep green, impressive with its rich colours and flowers, fruits, and vegetables. The tomatoes are turning red. In late summer and early autumn, the sunflowers stand tall, as if they want to overlook
all the life in this garden, and the brambles are ripe at the back of the garden. By the end of the summer, the garden has turned into a jungle. You cannot even see who is here but have to walk across, or be tall like the sunflowers, to find out. As the season turns further into autumn and winter, the ochres and browns return. In winter, you find the beds prepared to be taken up in the next season, or filled with winter vegetables such as spinach, beetroot or cabbage.

As you listen, you may hear the sound of a moving breeze in the trees, although the garden feels quite sheltered. The air often stands still here, and in summer it may get very hot as a result, making you want to escape and sit under the trees by the stream. You may hear some tapping from yellow shields that are set up as a scare for the voles, the noise of a shovel hitting the earth, one person shouting over to another, or as you stand closer, conversation of people in different languages. Some snorting of horses is audible from the small riding arena right next to the garden, just behind the bushes. And birdsong in spring.

The garden may get busy with people (though never really crowded, as the space is of decent size), especially on a hot summer’s evening when all the garden guardians come to water their plants, or during activity days. It may also lie completely fallow at other moments during the day or accommodate just two or three gardeners on a late morning during the week. The routines of people change with the seasons: in spring, when everyone is busy preparing their plots, seeding, watering, the garden is abuzz with activity; in late autumn it thins out, before going into hibernation during December and January.

Come and help me with some of the work, my plot is close to the back entrance. The association has offered it to me for the gardening season so that I can better immerse myself by becoming a member of the garden guardians. We can go to the shed and get some tools for weeding, and you may also borrow gloves if you have not brought your own. We can take the path back to the plot, and on the way we say hello to people, I’ll introduce you! Then we can crouch down by my plot and try to get the weeds out in this line, I sometimes find this easier without gloves. Your hands will become all muddy, now that the soil is wet after the rain, but the humidity makes weeding much easier and you can wash off in the stream afterwards. We can loosen up the soil a little, and then put in seeds, I am always fascinated by how different plant seeds never look alike. Can you make little holes and throw a couple of carrot seeds in, with 10cm distance between them? If you put them along the line, the weeding will be easier for me later. But there are different approaches to that, you can walk around and take a look if you like! We should also water the seeds a little, you can find watering cans at a holder next to the toilet and there is a small trail down to the stream when you cross the path on this side of the garden.

4.1.3 The garden guardians

I had not been sure how to translate the concept of the “Beetpat*innen”. One of the association staff had asked me at some point how to translate this term, when the association had to restrict access to the garden to this group of people because of COVID-19. They wanted to know what to write on the signs that stood so awkwardly in the context of an open-to-all community garden: “access restricted to [Beetpat*innen] only.” The term may be translated to “plot godparent” or “plot mentor”. Later, the association had come up with the term “garden guardian”.

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Who are the garden guardians, the main characters of the stories that follow? And what are they guarding? The association, which leases the garden area for a “mates’ rate”, oversees the allocation of vegetable plots. A particularity is that the plots are allocated for free, without any financial contribution. Instead, the association asks for a certain number of hours to be spent on communal tasks in the garden (e.g. participating in the activity days), but without any authority or control. With the plot, the garden guardians also get access to the shed where all the gardening tools and shared material are stored.

In the distribution of vegetable plots, people with refugee or migrant biographies, or people from ethnic minority groups more widely, are prioritised. The association works with a 1/3 quota which implies that German, White people who ask for plots do not easily get access, unless they are particularly active in the association. Most Germans who hold plots in the garden have been there for a longer time, many since the garden was originally created. Miriam, who had designed the garden and was the principal project manager in charge of it, told me in our recorded conversation:

“This focus is super important. That’s what it’s about. To recognise the barrier to access and know that the people who have grown up here and have been socialised here have natural and easy access to such structures, such organisations, and people who don’t know about this, who did not grow up with this, don’t have it. For those people you need to facilitate this (access) or you at least have to have it on your radar and create doorways. This, I think, we manage quite well until up to this day. People come, spend their free time here, take it very seriously, and in the evening, you see girls running around with watering cans or people who take their dinner here. In this sense, the garden has accomplished its mission.”

I had asked the association early whether they did outreach work to engage with their target group and learned that they did not. Instead, plots were distributed through word-of-mouth recommendation; people brought in their friends or neighbours. Still, the group was heterogeneous with respect to ethnic background, migration trajectory, mother tongue and language skills in other languages, age, sex and social status (see 4.2.1). According to the association, there are 43 individual plots, which are cultivated by about 100 people if you count all family members. During the year I was in the garden, my impression was that about 40 people came on a regular basis. There was some change of plot holders during the season. Naturally, the degree of engagement with the garden also depended on the individuals’ or families’ life beyond the garden. Plots got redistributed when a person communicated that they no longer had the time or ability to continue gardening.

The garden is frequented and used by various groups of people, so it may be misleading to think that there is one community in the garden. It is open to the public and represents a fluid social context in which different people seek out different activities and occasions. It is frequented by people who live in the neighbourhood and who enjoy the space on their walks. Others stay to relax, meet friends, or play with their children. An affiliation with the association is not necessarily given. The garden is also used by other institutions (such as the nearby experiential learning site for children) and groups who collaborate with the association or who have gained permission to go about their activities there.

Nevertheless, people with ties to the association are the most present. The people one could say make up ‘the core’ of this collectivity are the garden guardians as well as the people who actively

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25 The owner of the garden was involved in the creation of the community garden and has been a member of the garden’s board.
take part in organised activities such as the weekly gardening meet-up or the monthly activity day, with some overlap between these groups. The COVID-19 pandemic worked as a ‘filter’ for me, because during the first lockdown which was implemented when I started my fieldwork, only people who were allocated vegetable plots in the garden were allowed to spend time there. All other access was prohibited. To some extent, this otherwise sad circumstance became an advantage for me as it facilitated my contact with the garden guardians, the group most relevant for my study as it was heterogeneous and contained people with refugee biographies (see 4.2.1). The garden guardians, together with people who join the activity days on a regular basis (with some overlap between these groups, see 4.2.4) shape the space most actively and have a sense of belonging to the garden. I started knitting closer ties with this group as I slowly became ‘one of them’.

While all gardening activity in the community area is overseen by association staff, the garden guardians are to a certain extent free to do what they please (see 4.3). People decide for themselves what to grow, how to grow it, and how to use the plants. This means there is not only a mix of fruit, herbs and vegetables – which of course changes with the seasons – but also a range of growing techniques. Depending on people’s preferences, availabilities and motivations, the plots are more cultivated or more overgrown by whatever the seeds in the soil have brought up. Naturally, the season, the weather, soil conditions, and the occurrence and distribution of different species all influence the thriving or decay of vegetables and flowers that their gardeners care for. In the year I was doing my fieldwork, voles constrained most of the possibilities of growing in the garden, and at some point, potato blight did too. One of the most important factors, however, was the drought, which had an impact on everything in this ecosystem, as water became a rare resource.

The following stories tell and show the multiple relationalities at play in this garden, the socio-material entanglements I witnessed, and the processes they engendered. I hope that you, the reader, will add your own interpretation to mine as you encounter the people I have been privileged to meet. Our journey begins with looking at how the space worked as a cosmopolitan canopy.
The garden from above, action day 2019 © the association, public picture

Garden guardians’ distribution of plots, June 2020 (less clearly marked and identifiable in the territory) © the association
View across the garden: high beds in front, guardian plots to the left, main path and geodome to the right (April 2020) © author’s photograph

The fireplace with wooden benches, sheds in the background, toilets on the right (June 2020) © author’s photograph
The garden guardian plots (September 2020) © author’s photograph

Action day September, weeding the path (A German gardener to the left, myself in the middle, a Syrian gardener to the right) © the association, public picture
“Accommodating instead of walling off! Evacuate now #LeaveNoOneBehind”, referring to the inhuman conditions in refugee camps in Greece (June 2020) © author’s photograph

Radish harvest (June 2020) © author’s photograph
4.2 In full bloom: a cosmopolitan canopy

This findings chapter details my observations of how this garden was a space of social diversity and heterogeneity. I let the stories from and about the people in the garden speak to Anderson’s (2011) descriptions of cosmopolitan canopies to inquire into what this gathering of people with different backgrounds looks like in a contrived, shared space. As this space is a community garden, I also dedicate particular attention to how the plants, seeds, and soils are involved in the social encounters.

What I find is that the garden can be seen as a cosmopolitan canopy, with several complexities and paradoxes that form part of this protective umbrella: the cosmopolitan spirit is alive in this place as people try their best to navigate it in goodwill and with kindness, and the plants play a significant part in its expression. Yet, this place is not neutral. While it works as a retreat from hostilities that people may experience outside, its boundaries are permeable, and the segregation inside the canopy points to the fact that it is honeycombed by power dynamics and instances of control.
March

A sigh of relief
in the middle of downpouring rain

A gesture of familiarity
In a neighbourhood of estrangement

A piece of calm
In the shivering of the early morning

A short moment of laughter
In a mind full of unsettling thoughts

A subtle surprise
In the heavy solidity of the soil

A word of yes
In a long street of no-goes

A glimpse of the future
In the heavy coat of the past

And in the middle of this
Your smile in March
A hand full of seeds
And the quiet scent of Spring
4.2.1 A colourful canopy: the garden as a bubble of diversity

The garden attracted a mix of people with migrant and/or refugee biographies as well as long-established people who all lived in the neighbourhood. The migrants had lived in and come from different places, blending alongside those who had spent most of their lives in this country or region but had the capital and interest to travel and go to see other places. People of various ethnic origins\(^ {26} \) and migration statuses came together in this space, among them persons who were part of ethnic minorities, and there were also several mixed families (or a single White mother with a PoC child). A variety of languages could be heard in the garden, as co-existing voices and sounds. Over time I learned more about the diversity in legal status that people held through what they told me about their life-circumstances. Some migrants came from ‘third countries\(^ {27} \)’ (non-EU member states), with differing rights of residence. While some of them had secure residency, possibly because they were married to a German national, others I met were in the process of asylum-seeking procedures or had been granted asylum, and some individuals had unclear right to remain. In contrast, migrants from European Union member states held secured residential status.

Ages were mixed as well: the garden was as much a children’s space as it was a retreat for some older people, yet the majority of regulars were between 25 and 45 years old. Since the garden had started an inclusion project for people with disabilities, 3-4 young people who had mental and physical disabilities and who were local German residents, too, came to visit and do volunteer work.

Let me introduce some of these people to you so you can get an idea of the social diversity in the garden. The selection is random; it corresponds with the garden being a fluid social space where people came and went as they pleased. There was Lena, for example, a White, middle-aged woman who had migrated to Germany from Poland and spoke with a mild accent, and her husband, Baptiste, a black man about her age who had been born in Côte d’Ivoire. They had two children who, according to Lena, enjoyed spending time in the garden as it was for them a place of both tranquillity and fun activity.

Ahmed was a sturdy man about my age with a broad, welcoming smile and a round belly, who was Iraqi. He and his family had experienced tremendous hardship, yet he struck me as a bastion of calm because he radiated optimism. At one point he asked me whether I could help him with the translation of official documents from the German offices, which again made me aware of how complicated bureaucratic systems were to understand especially for people who had not been socialised within them.

Maja was a young Muslim woman and mother of two, usually well-dressed in a longer dress, sandals with rhinestones, and a headscarf. She had been trying out different vegetables in the last three years and thought that gardening was hard work. She was exhausted as, “Mothers don’t have a life…” and hardly had the time to come to the garden even for watering as she was also studying and taking care of the household alone.

Farah was a slender Iranian woman of medium height, maybe in her late fifties or early sixties, with sparkling dark eyes, curly grey hair, an energetic tone in her voice and vivid facial expressions. She

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\(^ {26} \) I am including White people here, as White and/or European culture is equally “ethnic” in relation to other ethnicities (Anthias 2011).

\(^ {27} \) This is a legal term in European law signalling that citizens of the Third State are excluded from the right to freedom of movement. It is used in German law with respect to a person’s right of residence (Non-EU member state citizens do not have recourse to European rights) and in European/German asylum law with respect to the definition of safe third country.
worked as a dance teacher and sculpture artist and was an important mediator in the garden (a quality others commented on, and she also interpreted the recorded conversations of this study) since her fluency in Persian and German, as well as her life in Iran, allowed her to communicate across language barriers and culturally bound understandings.

Antoine had a reputation as the garden’s green thumb – “He just throws things out wherever, and they will grow!” – a French man in his thirties, married to another man, and who worked as a pharmacist in the neighbourhood where I lived. He had a great sense of humour. Conversations with him were often full of irony and he would imitate other people as he spoke about them with affection.

Antonia was a young woman with thick dark hair and a feminine but relaxed-style including a leather jacket, who told me that she was called “the herb witch” as she had an obsession with making things grow everywhere she could. She seemed to be one of those people who have open eyes, open ears, and open suitcases – able to unpack their own heavy luggage and make space for the load of others, to then store it away carefully for them. She used to come to the garden with her two-year-old son, and together they would work away and enjoy this, as she said, “small piece of paradise, at the edge of the city.”

Nimatullah was a man who I guessed was in his forties, who had fled from Afghanistan and spent several years in Iran. He was always wearing a shirt, fine trousers and clean shoes, almost too well dressed for gardening, but someone pointed out to me he had an extra pair of shoes by his plot. One day in Spring, the year after my fieldwork, he held up his phone to my face, and I could see just enough to understand that he and his family had finally been granted asylum, after five years of waiting.

Jakob was a young man who did his Voluntary Year of Social Service28 in the garden, a programme the association had got funding for to include people with disabilities. He had ‘Down-syndrome’ and always appeared to be a person of action when I watched him pushing around the wheelbarrow or working away in the shared plots.

Not to mention, parents often brought their young children who were running around, digging in the sand pitch, moving around tools and watering cans, sitting on small colourful plastic chairs, or sleeping in bike trailers alongside the plots.

And of course, the association staff responsible for the space: a trio of women, who all had children, and held control over the garden’s developments. Sandra was energetic, seemingly always ready to tackle what was thrown her way. She struck me as very talented event curator as the events I witnessed were well organised with some improvisation almost naturally engrained. From my conversations with her, I understood she was committed to quality work and identified strongly with the association, which she had been one of the founders of. Miriam, equally committed, was a garden designer who seemed to breathe out unadulterated optimism, flexibility, and warmth. She had been the person who had designed this space, an impressive task as the garden still worked well and was literally in full bloom 5 years after it had been conceived. Emma had joined the team more recently. Her joyful attitude always filled the space and she was usually busy, seemingly never tiring of the garden work despite it being so very physical. She was a vegetable gardener whose advice was greatly appreciated – “go, ask Emma” – people would say, and despite some frustration she had with the garden she without a doubt nourished and cherished the space.

28 Freiwilliges soziales Jahr, FSJ.
Many more people came to the garden, and I wish I had the space to present them all, at least those I have been privileged to meet. The garden’s social make-up was more heterogeneous than the city’s population which counted about 230,000 inhabitants. In its official statistics, the city had 17% ‘foreigners’ and 13% ‘Germans with migration background’, but in the garden people with migration biographies made up over 50% of the whole. Furthermore, the garden mixed people differently than the city did – if in the city migrants were overrepresented in one neighbourhood, but not much present in the other, they all mixed in this one confined area - the garden. As such, the space was a ‘bubble of diversity’ where people of various backgrounds could potentially come into contact.

When returning to the literature after my fieldwork, I came across E. Anderson’s (2011) narrative on cosmopolitan canopies. These are pluralistic spaces in urban environments where people of different backgrounds get the opportunity to encounter one another in a relaxed atmosphere, as under the canopy less emphasis is placed on racial and ethnic boundaries. Under the canopy, people engage with one another in a “spirit of civility, or even comity and goodwill” (E. Anderson, 2011, p. 14). Cosmopolitan canopies are

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\text{settings that offer a respite from the lingering tensions of urban life and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together. [... Through personal observation, they may come casually to appreciate one another's differences and empathise with the other in a spirit of shared humanity (pp. xiv-xv).}
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One canopy Anderson depicts is interesting to pull out as an example, because it is an outdoor location: Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. Anderson calls the public park a “green canopy” (p. 107), full of active life with different kinds of urban people who pursue their personal pleasures. Pedestrians of all ages stroll along its pathways, people walk their dogs, and others again make use of the space to meet their friends, play chess, Frisbee or other games. He identifies this park as a canopy because it hosts a very mixed population where “each group seems to find its niche” (p. 112). As a result, what is exhibited here is some kind of peaceful coexistence, a safe environment which allows for friendships across racial divides to be openly expressed. He also notices how the park is one of the few sites where women of different ethnicities and social class backgrounds, all who come to take children to the park and enjoy the socialising, can interact with each other on common ground. Despite clear disparities in the levels of wealth that may be on display, Philadelphians have the feeling that the park belongs to everyone - no group cedes the park to the other, but all assert their presence in awareness of the social choreographies of the space, knowing what groups come when and to which parts of the park.

As Anderson’s research is based in Philadelphia, in the US, the concept of the cosmopolitan canopy is arguably not readily transferable to a German town with only 230,000 inhabitants. Histories of migration, racial segregation, and urban development are hardly comparable. Yet, the cosmopolitan canopy resonated with me, as it was a useful metaphor to inquire into the quality of the space as an ‘international hub’.

From the conversations with people in the garden, I learned that many found that the garden was an inspiring, rich and special place, where they could have interesting encounters and conversations. It seemed likely that they were attracted by the social mix the space offered, a space that also held the promise of opportunities to make contact and socialise.

Mechtild was a German woman in her sixties who radiated confidence and strength that always impressed me when we met. I admired her for how she had navigated a non-conformist life. She had been an organic farmer before becoming a midwife (“It’s not that different,” she said to me, “both
are about making life grow!”) and told me she still needed a piece of soil to feel complete. This was how the garden mattered, yet she also emphasised how much she enjoyed encountering people from different places. She told me she had exchanged words with a young Palestinian after the screening of a Palestinian film the other day, and she thought that “somehow this is rewarding, revitalising for me, to learn about the world this way.” She laughed. “You know, if I had only this here” - she pointed around the area of her balcony where we were sitting - “read the local newspaper and that’s it, I would wither away!”

The Palestinian could have been Yousef whom I too had met. He had been the only person to take initiative and return my information-sheet-invitation for a recorded conversation. He told me he had liked that fact that I had written “Any language welcome” on it. He had short, shaved hair, shaved a little more on the sides. Dark eyes, awake and curious. He was probably younger than me, maybe in his late twenties, but it was hard to guess. It was tangible in the conversation how much he liked the garden, a place where he felt he could really connect with nature and people.

The fact that he mentioned several times that there were not only Germans in this garden, made it obvious to me that this was something he liked:

> It’s so amazing to see a guy from Türkei [Turkey], a guy from Palestina [Palestine], a guy from Germany, a guy from Pakistan, a guy from… I don’t know… [...] And they just come and mix. In the evening one day I came, and all the group sat here, it was super nice. Like different people, not all of them German, like different families. One with headscarf, one Muslim, one Christian…

He thought that in this diversity a real sense of togetherness was alive in this garden.

> I feel everyone open, everyone wants to talk, like the neighbour has a little place, I say hello, I’m Yousef, and I’m looking, and they explain to me… not only Germans, but also people from different countries. I never feel here that someone is closed off, doesn’t want to speak. This is why I come more and more, why I’m more in love with this garden. We are really zusammen [together]. This is not just zusammen in name, but we are really zusammen. 

This spirit of togetherness in a space marked by heterogeneity resonates with what Anderson describes in his cosmopolitan canopies, but it also seems to go beyond. What Yousef refers to shows that the garden is not just a space where different kinds of people “dance around one another” (p. 109), displaying civility in a shared space and avoiding collisions and conflict. People in the garden were open to making contact, but without obligation - contact could stay in the realm of small-talk, but also be deepened as people kept encountering each other in the garden over extended periods of time, even over years. Different from a public park where contact is often fleeting, the garden allowed for a different kind of familiarity, sometimes friendship, to be nurtured and expressed, since despite being open to the public it was mainly frequented by regulars, but also because there was an open-mindedness towards newcomers.

29 Mechtild was the only person who insisted on inviting me to her place for the recorded conversation, which was just a couple of meters away from the garden, and I followed her invitation to sit on her balcony with her. Other people invited me to their places at the end of recorded conversations. Unfortunately, I could not follow any because of COVID-19-associatied rules and risks.

30 As this conversation took place in English, I use his phrasing.
Beck (2002) identifies three characteristics of cosmopolitanism: *globality, plurality and civility*. Globality expresses that there is a global sphere of responsibility as we all live in a world risk society, with a collective future that concerns everyone; plurality is the acknowledgement of the otherness of others; and civility the commitment to non-violence and dialogue (p. 36). As I see it, these characteristics express some of the spirit in the garden, as the people here, either through their own migration or interest in other people’s journeys, had a sense of global connections, and the commitment to organic gardening was part of the acknowledgement of local responsibility in the face of global concerns such as climate change and globalised capitalism. Furthermore, people were generally interested in the exchange with other people, in this space that radiated a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and the garden was set up as a site for sharing – of work, tools, and food among others (see 4.4.1). Emma found that “the garden attracts a particular kind of people, fascinating people, who have somehow experienced interesting things or radiate interesting life wisdom”. When I asked her what she meant by this, she responded “people who appreciate that there is a space that is used collectively, who want to make this real and think this is good.”

Cosmopolitan canopies, according to Riga, Holmes, Dakessian, Langer, and Anderson (2021) are like small oases in the wider city that work as “protective social umbrellas” (p. 51) offering calmness and safety due to their special civil character. Riga et al. (2021) find that this mediating role “is in its own way quietly political” (p. 51) and the same rings true for the garden. People were practicing cosmopolitanism ‘from below’ in a civic space, exhibiting continuously that doing activities together in a constrained area was not just in the realm of possibility but of reality.

4.2.2 Under a green canopy: staging relationships with plants

In Anderson’s description of *Rittenhouse Square*, apart from some reference to birds and rats, the park is staged as a backdrop or context for social interactions. The absence of ecology in social research, and indeed the dualistic divide between everything ‘social’ and ‘environmental’ has been critically interrogated (e.g., Greenwood, 2009; Sterling, 2004). My aspiration was, guided by the socio-material perspective (see 1), to explore the garden holistically, with close attention paid to the active involvement of the more-than-human world, especially of the plants. I argue that it strongly mattered that the space I was inquiring into was a community garden and not a community centre: the plants were entangled with how the cosmopolitan idea was brought to life (see below), they formed part of the tensions that emerged in the garden (see 4.3), and they were significant participants in the homemaking practices (see 4.4).

I was inspired by Myers (2019) who loosely defines gardens as “sites where people stage their relationships with plants” (p. 116, emphasis in original). In her article, she inquires into how garden designs in cities inform, sediment and disrupt the infrastructure of plant-people relations, and asks:

*What might different gardens teach anthropologists about the ways that people stage relationships with plants? What might we learn about plants and their people by examining the aesthetics and politics of garden infrastructures? And how, in a time of massive ecological destruction, are people renegotiating their relationships with plants? How are people designing gardens to stage plant-people relations otherwise? (p. 116)*

Etymologically, gardens are enclosures, bounded regions fenced off from the farm or the home (Myers, 2019). Myers argues that gardens are sites in which we can examine the more-than-human dimensions of social, political and economic life. We can make sense of them as cultural productions that “express particular aesthetics, politics, values and desires” (Myers, 2019, p. 125). Gardens are
performative as they reveal something about how the relations among plants and people are understood in a given location, and also how people intervene in order to ensure that these relations are (re)made. Garden designs determine how people should position themselves in relation to nature, convey meaning about what plants are ‘for’ and “how one should appreciate these forms of life as beautiful, healing, nourishing, exotic, dangerous, economically productive, or ecologically significant” (Myers, 2019, pp. 125–126). As such, gardens are also spaces in which predominant definitions of people-plant relations can be subverted. As a site of cultural critique, they can stage alternative aesthetics and counternarratives about how people and plants can coexist. In conclusion, “gardens stage moral orders. As sites where social facts and cultural norms are activated and sedimented, and where these norms and mores can be challenged and remade” (Myers, 2019, p. 125).

Conan (1999) finds that gardens do not have specific characteristics in and of themselves, but they are products of the people who design and cultivate them:

*There is no essence of a garden to be found in form, enclosure, or etymology. Gardens are simply places where a social group engages in gardening. This makes the definition of gardens contingent on the economy, environment, and culture of any group of gardeners (p. 183).*

This is why looking to the ways in which people stage their relationships with plants in a given location reveals something about the cultural dynamics and choreographies at play. As people were staging their relationships with plants in this garden (directed by its design, see 4.2.2), they also expressed their social, economic and political worlds. While I dedicate more attention to the qualities of people-plant relationships in chapter 4.4, I here direct my focus to what was expressed and brought to life through these relationships. My observation is that as the people-plant relationships staged here were marked by migration, they also co-produced the cosmopolitan spirit in this garden. Or, to say it differently: the plants were entangled with the quiet politics of cosmopolitanism.

Part of the richness and certainly the aesthetics of this garden was that people in the allotment area decided themselves what plants to grow in their plots, and some grew plants that were common in other countries. They cultivated plants they knew from places they had lived in before, or where they grew up, and this made this place cosmopolitan in another way – anyone who came here could potentially learn about gardening practices from other places around the world, or hear how vegetables, fruits and herbs were used differently there (see 4.4.1.). As such, the site was not only a canopy for people who had come from abroad or had traversed multiple places, but multiple places were alive in this one place, through the life of the plants.

*Huckleberries, water channels and multiple belongings*

Cultivating vegetables from countries that they had once called their home clearly mattered to people with migrant or refugee biographies (see 4.4). One clear expression was in my encounter with Jerry and his plants, in which I also caught a glimpse of Cameroon. His plot was absolutely beautiful: he had flattened the top of the hilly area and had woven small bamboo sticks around the sides – to keep if from sliding down, he explained to me. I asked him if he was a gardener. He was not, but in his childhood, he had worked on the farm with his mother, so he was familiar with this activity. “It’s been hard work, not too much play back then, but I still really enjoy it now.” The love and joy he brought to this space was visible. “I can see your carpenter’s skills”, I commented. He was a Black man, probably in his mid-thirties, with an open and friendly attitude, easy to chat with,
smiling a lot, radiating energy. I asked him what he was planting: A vegetable similar to spinach, a variety from Cameroon. He told me the Latin name of the plant, but unfortunately it escaped my mind the next moment. The plant grew dark round fruits which were not edible, just the greens, he explained. He had seen them grow somewhere else around here, so he concluded they should thrive.

He was also planting okra, peppers, and huckleberries, all of which were used in Cameroonian cuisine. He had built multiple small wooden pyramids, two or three small sticks tied together with a rope, to mark the seeds or small plants. I noticed that he had not made rows which I had seen in several plots, like others he had chosen a “mixed” approach. We joked about how he was close to the expert, Emma, and how he could watch her way of doing things. He told me that he wanted to spread sand around the plot and over the path, just like she had done. Later that day, or maybe the next, he had already proceeded with this task, making his plot look even more beautiful. And in one of my next visits, I noticed he had put up little signs, indicating the plants’ Latin and German names.

When I Googled the plants at a later moment, I learned that Ndole was Cameroon’s national dish, and the vegetable was sometimes compared to spinach for the colour and texture, its bitter leaves indigenous to Western Africa. Or was it Gnetum africanum, called Eru in Cameroon, a vine which developed red berries? It was used for soups, I read. How difficult it was to find comprehensive information about native African plants. I regretted that I missed the occasion to ask again what plant it had been, and if he had been able to harvest some.

In either way this plant on display, in my interpretation, was a metonymy for his cultural ties to at least two countries: Germany and Cameroon (and possibly more I am not aware of). By planting vegetables, fruits and herbs from prior ‘home countries’, migrants expressed their negotiation of belonging in multiple places (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). I could see how Jerry’s staging of his plant relationships called into question essentialist origin stories - narratives that also form part of duty-based integration policies and discourses (see introduction) which situate belonging in one location only, asking the migrant to commit fully to the ‘host’ country (and between the lines, to abandon his or her ‘home’ culture, which is constructed as ‘foreign’). The plants he had known in his childhood flourished in a different place and time, and subverted the idea that he belonged to Cameroon ‘back then’ but belonged to Germany now. Several gardeners, quite like him, filled the cosmopolitan ideal with life, cultivating a counternarrative to nationalist understandings of belonging and opposing hostilities that existed outside the canopy (see 4.2.3). Through and with the plants, the in-betweenness, the hybrid and the transnational qualities that form part of cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2002) were propagated:

> Cosmopolitanism is an expansive act of the moral imagination. It sees human beings as shaping their lives within nesting memberships: a family, a neighbourhood, a plurality of overlapping identity groups, spiralling out to encompass all humanity. It asks us to be many things, because we are many things (Appiah, 2019, 22).

As people and plants ‘breathed together’ in this garden, they co-created a cosmopolitan space where different people could get glimpses of each other’s nesting memberships that could reach across the globe.

These memberships were not only expressed through the gardener’s choice of vegetables, plants and herbs, but also through habits and modes of interaction with the soil, the seeds, and the plants.
One illustration of the diversity of gardening practices are the water channel systems that individual gardeners built in their plots.

I had not yet seen Naajy and Mia, a Palestinian-German couple with a young child, in the garden very often, and when I engaged in conversation with them (and they spontaneously agreed to be recorded), they explained to me they had only recently taken over the plot from a Syrian friend who had given it up due to time constraints. I felt Naajy’s love for plants when he told me about how sad he was his tomatoes had all been destroyed by the potato blight that had ravaged the garden this season. With some resignation, Naajy sighed he would not plant tomatoes again here. He would not plant pumpkins again, either, but for a different reason: they had grown too well. By their plot, he showed me: “We placed the plant over there, it was small, and now, do you see? It’s even come to this side!” He had observed other people pull up nets for the pumpkin to grow along and had not understood what they were needed for. Now he knew: the pumpkins did not take up all the space if they grew vertically instead of horizontally.

He had built a system of watering channels in their plot and kindly explained it to me. There were lines of soil, with higher and lower ground. The way of doing this was to put the seeds into the higher ground, and according to Naajy, they grew their roots deeper this way to reach down to the water. The water stayed in longer, too, it did not evaporate as quickly. In addition, he told me, this technique made the weeding easier. With sparkling motivation, he said he would like to develop it in the following season to make it work better.

Another day, when I was working in our plot, an older couple walked past on the path and stopped: “Oh, you are taking over now! This is the plot we used to have!” They told me they had cultivated this plot two seasons ago and had shared it with two Eritreans who were now no longer living in the area as they have found work elsewhere. Leon, one of the German garden guardians, too had mentioned that there had been a group of Eritreans in the garden. In my recorded conversation with him, when we talked about how people had different kinds of relations to ‘nature’, to the soil, and to the gardening activities (see 4.3.4), he told me that the Eritreans had always built the paths between their beds on a higher level. This was nearly the opposite of the Palestinian water channels I had learned about – to not have the plants grow on the higher grounds, but instead in the channels. Leon said that people in the garden had asked them: “What are you doing? Why are you doing this?” The Eritreans had responded that with dry soil, elevated paths were useful since the water would not always flow down from the beds to the paths and gather there, but instead stay with the plants where it was needed. Leon told me that this was something he wanted to experiment with as well.

With my very limited knowledge about soils, I could not evaluate whether the loamy soils in the garden’s location did or did not allow for a similar kind of water channel strategy that worked in Eritrean or in Palestinian regions. I found it fascinating, however, in what fundamental ways the practices of building beds could differ, and how these practices, quite like the choice of the vegetables as in the case of the huckleberries, expressed people’s connection to several places. The connection implied that they had access to the cultural knowledge of respective communities and places. As a result, the presence of people who expressed their multiple belongings allowed for all gardeners who came to this site in Germany to get glimpses of diverse, culturally engrained treasures of knowing.

31 Of course, there is also a wide range of gardening practices that exist within a country; I focus on examples here that German gardeners were not necessarily familiar with as it was not their habit.
Another aspect of how the plants were entangled with the cosmopolitanism cultivated in this space was through how they performed as mediators between gardeners who did not share the same language. Contact and exchange was possible between any persons, yet language boundaries were salient. Invisible lines, tangible in the ways people were able to make conversation or not, were drawn between those who spoke German with great comfort, be it because it was their mother tongue or because they were fluent speakers, and those who wrestled with the language. The wrestling, too, was tangible, and any person who has learned a foreign language through immersion will know what it is like to experience being lost for words, lost for sentences, lost for expression.

Language is inherently intertwined with a person’s sense of identity. Gümüşay (2020) elaborates on how different languages have different functions in the biographies of people who speak several languages, with different emotions and roles attached to them. “In Arabic, I can be myself,” Yousef, a Palestinian gardener, said to me on one occasion. I recall a moment in the conversation with Fereshtah, an Afghan woman, and in which Farah translated for us. At some point, as we noticed Fereshtah’s passion for cooking (see chapter 4.4.1), Farah and I suggested that we should have a cooking event in the garden, where she could teach us how to prepare some of her delicacies. Fereshtah seemed both honoured and intimidated by our suggestion: “You have to know German to be able to do this”, she said. It was only one moment of many in understanding how language boundaries mattered in this community, especially for the people who did not speak German at a level which made them feel at ease. I also noticed that when I asked the garden guardians if they knew and had contact with their “neighbours”, or other people more generally in the garden, they referred to people that spoke their language, and not to others equally physically proximate. At some point, I became aware that some German-speakers told me details about another person that proved wrong, for example a German would refer to a family as a “Syrian family” when I knew that the family had migrated to Germany from Afghanistan.

Where people did not have a shared language, notably the case between several Afghan people and the German-speaking majority, the exchange was often limited to smiles and a couple of words. Yet, I became aware that the plants facilitated encounters beyond words, or with few words. Again, it became apparent that it mattered that this space was a garden and not an enclosed building. The ecosphere of this garden, with its plants and animals, worked as an active bridge between the gardeners, it fostered small transgressions of language boundaries that allowed people to connect.

No matter what language, the space and the gardening activity facilitated making contact as there was always something to observe or do: people could speak briefly about the weather, about how the vegetables were doing, how disturbing the voles were, or what they were planning to plant next. These aspects brought ease into exchanges that contained only a couple of German words, and a lot could be shown with pointing fingers and gestures. Furthermore, gardening held great potential for working together without words. Amelie, one of the German-speaking garden guardians who had been active in this garden since it first had been created, still had the enthusiasm of the project’s beginnings in her voice when she told me: “Especially at action days [back then in 2015], it was such an incredibly nice connection with people who had freshly arrived, to work on something collaboratively, and to simply do things together across language barriers, with hands and feet.” She laughed joyfully, as she said: “To see this was really precious to me.” Her account shows how the interaction with the plants and the materiality of the gardening formed part of the dialogue that became possible between people who could not form relationships through language. The cosmopolitan spirit, here in the quality of dialogue (Beck, 2002), was constructed by, through and with the plants. Similarly, Raphaely and Orbach (2022) find that the elements can work as points of
connection between people: “We have all known open skies, high winds, sunshine and pouring rain, birdsong, growth and decay” (p 166). They conclude that nature spaces can therefore provide meaningful bridges between people with different life trajectories.

This was not without limitations in the garden, however. Language boundaries meant that it was difficult for people to bring a conversation to a point where individuals could really get a deeper understanding of another person’s motives, aspirations, and/or intentions. Antonia told stories about how she and a friend had shared a plot with a Syrian family in the early days of the garden, revealing that it remained unclear for both parties what the gardening meant to the other. Language was entangled with power dynamics between the host and the guest (see 4.4.5), and with different understandings of what this space was or should be. She and her friend had invited the Syrian family, who she had met through a different refugee-support programme, to the garden and to share a plot, but looking back she said:

I think we had communication difficulties about how much they really wanted this [to garden together]. Or how much they simply slid into this. [...] In the beginning we always wanted to discuss with them where we plant what and so on, and I believe they found this rather strange, how we had laid out [the bed], round and so on, not in this neat manner. This was my feeling somehow. [...] I think there were misunderstandings, related to language, about who thinks how this is all meant to be. And I think it has never come to really feel like ‘theirs’ to them.

Without a mediator at their side, they could not resolve what the reason for the Syrian’s disengagement from the garden was, and over the course of time the family started coming less and less. While the plants, on one hand, supported dialogue, they also carried different cultural meaning for different people (see 4.3.4), and these meanings could not easily be conveyed without words.

Where deeper exchange was possible, the plants could work as springboards into exchanges on cultural norms and habits or the characteristics of places elsewhere in the world. “I did not know what growing like a weed meant before I came here”, Naajy said to me, with a smile. “In Palestine you pull the weeds out and that’s it, you’re done, but here they keep coming back and are growing so quickly!” Similarly, Bake said to me on another occasion he did not understand when someone told him for the first time that he wanted to eat seasonal food: “Back home you can plant year-round – harvest, seed – year-round. There’s no problem. Once it’s in the soil, it’s growing! But here I’ve understood you need to use different methods, which are good as well, because of the seasons, that’s what I’ve come to understand.” While any artefact could be used as springboard into exchange, I argue that plants as living organisms have particular qualities as they react to differing exposure to soil, sun, wind and rain, and thereby demonstrate and call into question the differences across and within ecosystems. In these conversations, gardeners were provoked to think about their people-plant relations in new ways and consider those that exist in other places – a form of cosmopolitan dialogue, I find.

32 there could have been many influencing factors, e.g. the fact that many Syrian refugees came from big cities and did not have interest in community gardening, or the time-consuming engagements necessary to build a new home in this country, related to language training, the quest for housing and working opportunities, the children’s schooling, etc.
4.2.3 Hostilities outside of the canopy: the garden as a retreat

Over time, I understood how the garden was not only cosmopolitan, but certainly a canopy. I particularly became aware of this when people portrayed it as a mixed space with a welcoming atmosphere in contrast to hostilities that they had experienced outside. Despite the city’s politically liberal, left-wing and green orientation, segregation and harassment based in racist, ethnocentric and nationalist ideology was part of its daily life and social make-up.

You’re not the only foreigner

Socialising in the garden was important to Lena. She had been enjoying the celebrations, like the autumn celebration, where you could meet others and chat. “The garden here is a [space of] encounter, of different people, different cultures, different languages” she laughed. “Even if it is somehow like… as he [her husband] said it… multiculti… you still feel tied together.” She appreciated that “You’re not the only foreigner, to say it this way, but there are many.” The aspect of ethnic diversity mattered for their children, she thought:

The idea that you meet up here and get to know the people, that’s quite...
Friendships develop then, and you know each other, “aah, how is your daughter”, or... And [daughter’s name] got to know someone here and they like to play when they meet here. This is a mixed child... girl, too. And... that they are not so alone somehow. As sometimes, for the children it’s... maybe not difficult, but... that’s an issue they picked up at kindergarten, with the skin colour, that... I am the only child in the class, or at school, or in kindergarten [...] Last week it was an issue in kindergarten [...], because an educator came and had dark skin and many children were completely, like... eehh? [...] Yes, surprised! [...] Some children were afraid that there was suddenly a man standing there, dark skin like that, and you had to explain this to the children, but here it’s no problem because the children are simply more used to it.

When Lena mentioned their daughter’s experiences as a bi-racial child, Baptiste uttered something that may have been “That’s your thing” and leaned back. It felt as if we had nudged a boundary, a social and personal tissue too delicate to touch.

In another instance, Bake in contrast told me openly about his experiences of everyday racism in this city. He was a man in his thirties who usually spent half of the year in Benin where he had been born, and half of the year in this city. Married to a German, White woman, like Baptiste, his children and wife were regular visitors to the garden. He had been employed by the association on a part-time-basis and worked as a gardener in the community space three mornings a week. His account of the garden highlighted the same feature that Lena had raised: that the garden was a space that represented a counterweight to the artificial racial segregation of other social spaces, a social space with cosmopolitan qualities.

Bake: Integration here is entirely closed. Because it’s a different life. You are only integrated with a minority of people who maybe have been to your country once or who have been to another country and who have seen that over there, you have fun like this, you speak like that...

If you’ve never been anywhere else, you’re not able to [forgive each other]. I’ve tried to have many friends here, but it will never work because I know he’s never
been over there, he’s never seen over there, he doesn’t know how things work there. Not only in Benin! But in general, in other countries!

Me: There are quite a few people here [in this garden] who have travelled to other places.

Bake: Those [people] are open. It’s those where you feel they are open, that they are forgiving, those who know that well, life can be different in other places. That’s why I said that I still liked it here because I see that the majority of people were open. It’s the mix. Even if you experience culture shock.

[…] Today everything is put into brackets. At school, somebody who has known a Black person, or a mixed-race person [métisse], who has grown up with him, played with him – that’s different from a school where there’s no Black or mixed-race persons. There’s not even an Arab person. He’s grown up this way! He grows up this way, and at some point, he will learn it’s like this here, like this...

It’s all prejudices which do that. They are at the origin of everything! And ideologies like Racism – we’re not even speaking about Racism. It exists among the Blacks as well, they are also fighting ethnic wars over there, there’s Racism [there] as well. If I’m a victim of Racism here I don’t complain because I know it’s normal. […]

Me: Do you experience Racism a lot here, in Germany and in [city]?

Bake: All days! Every day! If you’re used to it, it doesn’t tell you anything anymore. Because you’re Black you’re stupid! You’re not intelligent! You’re not educated, that’s for sure! You are Black, you don’t have any education. It’s true.

The conversation continued with him telling me about situations where he had been treated as a thief and had been harassed by the police, based on his skin colour and dreadlocks. He had been able to get out of the situation only with the help of his White partner.

The fact that he had referred to most people in the garden as “open” made me think of the cosmopolitan spirit that people could experience in this garden and made me hope that he was less confronted with Racism in this space. I could tell Bake’s passion for African music could live in the silent disco events he hosted as a DJ for people in the garden, together with another Black member of the community. When I finally made it to one of his disco nights, I was in the minority as a White person, an experience I had never had in this region before. From his and Lena’s accounts, I concluded that the garden allowed for People of Colour who were often made to feel out-of-place to feel they belonged. In my understanding, what he referred to when he said “we can forgive each other” was that people in the garden expected others to be different as they recognised their diverse migrations and related biographies. The space was pre-defined as “welcoming to difference”, which resonates with what Beck (2002) identifies as a second characteristic of cosmopolitanism (besides globality and dialogue), namely the recognition of plurality: others are recognised as other, and the otherness is not coloured as threatening but rather experienced as an empirical fact.

Even though the garden felt like a safe environment to people, it could not necessarily keep people safe, as the next section shows. Its boundaries were permeable. Another aspect of hostilities directed towards migrants and refugees, interwoven with the Racism they encountered as ethnic
minorities, was the constant threat to the residential safety for those who were navigating the asylum system or had no right to remain.

They all ask – Fuck Germany

When Farah asked Abdul, an elderly man who held a plot neighbouring mine, if he wanted to join a conversation, he had first agreed and then hesitated. “It’s not been a clear “Yes”, so I didn’t want to be intrusive”, she told me. “He said ‘They all ask’”. This comment made me curious. “You mean he’s been asked to participate in research interviews before?” I had heard that others had used this interesting place for their academic inquiries, and that research fatigue was an issue in this garden.

No, everyone asks where you’re from. I told him I’d had a conversation with you and that it’s been nice. He’s a really fine person, you know? He’s fine. I understand him. At some point you just want to be, you’ve been here for a long time. I can tell you a lot of stories about how people used to question me. You need a thick skin.

What I think Farah was referring to here was the everyday experience of the fact that “migration problematises borders” (Mecheril et al., 2010, p. 12, emphasis in original). It is not enough to describe it in terms of the ‘border crossings’, but it is a phenomenon that calls into question lines that are drawn between insiders and outsiders, between members and non-members. Membership in imagined communities (Nohl, 2010) such as Nation States cannot be claimed, but need to be validated by the receiving community (Mecheril et al., 2010). In a context of tightening immigration policies (see 1), where people are expelled from the country because this is not “where they belong”, this question is challenging their legitimacy to ask for a right to stay; the question of “where are you from?” is no longer benign.

Nimatullah, who had been here with a status of temporary suspension of deportation for five years, told me how his status was worth nothing. “You cannot even buy a SIM card”, he said. Farah translated for us: “Now he is young and should work, but later he’ll be older and then it’s not good.” His status did not allow him to work, anytime he had found an employer and showed him the identity card, they had sent him away.

He was not alone in this experience. Perchinig’s (2012) review of integration policies in nine European countries concludes that since the 1990s there has been a shift from a rights-based to a duty-based framework underpinning integration measures (see 1). Whereas before policy focused on equality, security of residence and participation, with the state having to step in for migrant support, integration reframed as a duty-based concept shifts responsibility to the individual migrant. This implies that compulsory measures of language and civic education courses (and the accompanying testing), which are intended to serve demonstration of the migrant’s commitment to the values of the host country, have become central parts of integration policies across Europe.

Nimatullah was certainly aware of this. Despite the risk of expulsion, he had been doing all he could to build a successful life here, for himself and his family. “There are people who have committed crimes who still got granted a right to stay”, he expressed with frustration, “but those who are virtuous and do everything that is expected from them, are not recognised.” He had been participating in German classes for over two years, had started writing in German while he had never known how to write in his mother tongue Farsi. He was trying to obtain his driving licence as well, frustrated about the fact that the theoretical part was available in many different languages but not in his. He was obliged to complete it in German.
Morrice (2014) highlights a ‘deficit perspective’ on migrants which tends to disregard prior experiences, education, employment qualifications and linguistic skills:

...policy is constructing migrants as morally problematic, in need of civic education in order to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs to become good or successful European citizens. This deficit construction sees migrants as a problem to be contained and managed, rather than an asset or resource to be developed. (pp. 156-157)

Migrants learn that these are ‘non-resources’ which cannot be of value or support in the host country. This deficiency perspective not only negates individual pre-migration lives and identities, but also narrows the possibilities of who refugees can become in host countries (Morrice, 2014).

I wonder who Yousef, who said he was a refugee in his own country Palestine, could have become in this country. His aspiration was strong to stay in this city where he “felt fresh”. He was a cook and had started his own business in Palestine. The ideas he held about how he wanted to turn this garden into a children’s space, where children could roam around freely in groups as they would in his country, not always controlled by the words of adults, fascinated me and shed new light on my own parenting practices. The way he spoke about his communities in Palestine, the proximity, loyalty, and hospitality that people enacted despite the hostile conditions they lived in, changed my outlook on my own individually structured social surroundings.

At the end of our first and last deep and long conversation, I handed him my notebook so he could give me his phone number. On the first page, I had drawn tiny pictures to distract my daughter from a bee sting. “You do drawings?” He asked. He suddenly pulled out an A5 notebook, filled with beautiful drawings. He flipped across the pages, showing me many of them. Figures, faces, boats on the water. Often there was something written in Arabic next to the picture. One image showed big woman’s breasts, the other one a bum and a hole, a vagina? “This is some crazy stuff”, he said, I laughed, “yes”. He pulled out another notebook, A4 this time. “Wow, there is more!” I exclaimed. I remembered two pictures in particular: one showed a big hand that held a tiny figure by the neck, picking her up into the air, transporting it (where to?!) with dangling head and legs. It was an expressive picture. “Fuck Germany”, he translated the Arabic for me. “Fuck German bureaucracy.” Another picture displayed a crouched figure carrying a large ball: the globe, I realised. “This is the weight to carry,” he said. He explained that the world was supposed to be nice and beautiful, but that it could be heavy at times.

I was surprised to not see him again. A couple of months later, I met Sandra, one of the association staff, for a chat at the association café. At some point in our conversation, she asked: “Have you heard about Yousef? He’s been moved to the initial reception camp.” A lump formed in my throat. “The association is a safe space, but only until other systems are more powerful. [...] It took us some time to recognise that the association does work as a network, but that the risk [for people to be expelled] always remains.”

I wonder what this city could have become with Yousef. In the garden, he had expressed his deep commitment to harmonious living with both people and the more-than-human. The space was quietly political therefore, offering a site for people who were ‘not meant to belong’ to express themselves, with and through their relationships with soil, water and plants. Nevertheless, it did not have the structural force to stop these people from being expelled.
Interestingly, as the next section shows, the garden was a canopy for several of the Germans as well, where they could hide from, or where it was easier to ignore, the great inequalities and injustices they had encountered in their close contact with people who had to navigate the asylum system.

*With less obligation, but more harmonious*

Many of the established, German people I met in the garden had been engaged in the local welcoming movement in 2015, when in a historical moment, Germany’s borders had been open for brief period of time and larger numbers of refugees had been able to move into the country. The German gardeners had engaged with different kinds of refugee support groups, but disillusionment had often been the result. The supporters had got exhausted over the ‘fight against the system’, and they had found the difference in social and financial status (and interpersonal challenges that resulted from this difference) gnawing away on them. The garden was a great place for them to follow their gardening passions, but it was also a place where they felt they could encounter and spend time with people who had come to the country as refugees, but without the direct obligation to help.

Amelie, a very active gardener who had been involved since the garden’s beginnings, told me about her experience in a recorded conversation with her and Axel, another German gardener whom she was sharing a plot with:

> There was a time when many people committed themselves to the social, for language education or for... what do I know... do something with the children, education offers, cultural offers, etc. The garden stood out for me a little, because... in the 90s I already did a lot of refugee support, and advice, and then at some point I was so... tired... because it was often hopeless, because at some point, people still had to leave, and because I also always felt such a big imbalance, between me and the people, who expected so much support from my side. And that’s where I really enjoyed the garden, because I – of course I did speak with some people about the social situation – but I was in a different position. What I described to you earlier, the shared construction of something [the garden], for me it had something that was more at eye-level. Although of course,” she laughed out with cynicism, “this could not resolve the social differences at all, they were of course extreme, and they still are extreme.” She let Axel speak and then came to her own personal conclusion: “And of course, this is a little... I’m dodging this by...” She paused. “By taking away the beautiful sides of this, the togetherness. [...] In some way I keep my distance in this garden.

Axel, a man in his fifties who usually had something very easy-going about him, said with a serious tone:

> It’s very work intensive to do this in your free time. We have tried this with 4-5 people, to support somebody [a refugee person]. And this is the number of people you need, when you go against all of this bureaucracy and offices and what not, and that was... He [the refugee] was just about to start his federal volunteer service [Bundesfreiwilligendienst], and then he was sent away, somewhere else, I say, sent off, deported. And then with all means we tried to take him back, and that was more... It wasn’t integration that gobbled up time and energy, but it was simply the fight against the offices and the institutions that took so much strength.
It was clear that he, too, needed some kind of retreat from these realities, when he said:

*I think it is good that you can encounter people here, without needing to help, or somehow... the incline of expectations, what Amelie talked about, you have to fulfil it somehow, and often this creates frustrating experiences. And then here it is... maybe with less obligation, but maybe somehow more harmonious as well.*

As the stories above indicate, the hostilities of the world outside the canopy could always float through its open doors, in many different shapes and shades. The socio-material worlds of asylum and integration policies, of racist and ethnocentric thoughts and actions, of structures of feelings of *otherness* – all of these impacted on life in the garden. The garden somehow was a safe space for people with different migration trajectories and ethnic backgrounds, it was a retreat even for people with settled residency, and yet somehow it was not. This is the complexity of social reality: relational processes are happening all at once, and the web of social patterns escapes our dualistic logics of either/or (see 4.2.5).

Part of this complexity was that segregation existed inside the canopy. I noticed this already on the second day I came to the garden when I participated in an action day and concluded to myself that people who had joined the garden in 2015 and whom I could read as ‘refugees’ were no longer part of this community. The event was full of German-speaking, White people from the local neighbourhood. Only later when I met the garden guardians, did I realise that many of them did not join the community activities. In particular a friend group of middle-aged individuals from Afghanistan and Syria, mainly with families, and who grew their own vegetables in individual plots, was not seen at these events.

4.2.4 Segregation inside the canopy: White Saturdays

“I was baffled this morning when I saw how White today is”, said Joanna as we stood by my new plot, as if she had read my thoughts. “The weather is nice today; this is a plus. Maybe this is because of Hanau and because the Kurdish-Turkish community is occupied with something else. I did not put any emphasis on this through social media this time, I thought it was out of place because of Hanau.”

*Hanau.* On February 19th, 2020, an extremist with racist and right-wing orientations killed nine inhabitants of the city, all with migrant biographies. The city’s name became the placeholder for the violent xenophobia alive everywhere in the country. It was not the first incident, and the survivors of the day kept repeating to the public: this was neither a coincidence nor an isolated case; you cannot continue to treat it as if it was. Research endorses their cause: right-wing violence, xenophobic demonstrations, arson attacks, assault, and attacks of different kinds against refugee housing, for example, which could be classified as terrorism, are part of Germany’s everyday life (Benček & Strasheim, 2016).

The association that ran the garden, and the communities around it, positioned itself as a counterweight to hostility and violence against people with migrant biographies, and other social groups that were marginalised in wider society.33 In their mission statement, the association wrote on their website:

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33 Examples of this are the inclusion project for young people with disabilities (see 4.1), and a food supply project for homeless people they started during the COVID-19 lockdowns.
We understand integration as a project which concerns society as a whole. We open up civic spaces of encounter. To work against prejudice, to work for getting to know and understand. For a sustainable sense of belonging and as a base for peaceful living together.

In this context, association staff, as well as German members of the community, were startled and to some degree discontent, to notice some form of ‘segregation’ in the garden community. Most people with refugee biographies, mainly a group of Afghans and Syrians, did not join the community events. If they came on a Saturday, they would do so to tend their plants, but not to participate in shared activities. This showed that the garden was not a ‘neutral’ site, but that boundaries were replicated in here as well. Complex boundaries had to do with the different kinds of agencies and instances of control that people produced in the garden, which I explore further in chapter 4.3.

Segregation inside the canopy, on one hand, was against the association’s moral ambitions to facilitate encounters, enable social mixing, and thereby contribute to positive mutual ties between people, on the other hand the participation in community events was understood as a practice of reciprocity: by cultivating the other side of the garden, plot holders ‘paid’ for their plots which were free of charge. “Volunteering [Ehrenamt] is a very ethnic-German [bio-Deutsch] concept,” Sandra had commented on the same occasion as she referred to the Whiteness of the day, pointing to the fact that this format of reciprocity was possibly not understood by all in the garden.

Depending on the situation, the segregation was not necessarily seen as a problem, rather as something the association staff were trying to understand. Miriam used the term of “participation formats” as she told me, with real astonishment in her voice: “I am very surprised about how the various formats we offer attract totally different people, this is impressive.” Her elaboration drew my attention to what I had previously observed but had not quite been able to make sense of: people bounded by different social ties formed groups that intermingled in the space on different occasions and with different motives. For example, the gardening meet-up was used as an occasion to get to know the garden by students who were looking for places where they could meet people and engage themselves. Then, at action days, a group of regulars gathered, as Miriam explained:

At action days, you can really count on this, I find it remarkable after such a long time, that always the same people keep coming back. Sometimes they don’t come for one action day, but they always find their way back. This somehow is like a grown community that has emerged over the years, it’s cool.

For Miriam and her colleagues, a big question mark remained, and this is what puzzled her: why did people with refugee biographies not come to action days (anymore)? Some of the garden guardians noticed this absence as well. Leon, one of the German garden guardians commented: “Unfortunately it’s only the organic-local neighbourhood-coterie, which I am also a part of, which integrates among themselves. But why is this? The others are invited, too, after all.” And Antonia wondered in her conversation with me: “I don’t know if they are not interested or if they have the feeling that they are not really meant with this invitation. Maybe you’ll find out.”

I learned from conversations that Saturdays had not always been White. In the beginning of the project, many more people who had arrived as refugees, had been part of these days. Was there another way to reach out to these people? Miriam wanted to make sure they did not miss out on a “brick in the bridge”. The association’s aspiration was to undertake every step they could to make

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34 The term bio-Deutsch [ethnic German] is a self-ironic description here.
the garden a place worthwhile for any person, especially those who were marginalised in wider society.

4.2.5 Discussion: a space of encounter

As shown above, the garden was performative in that cosmopolitan qualities of being together were displayed here, and plants were entangled with this. The garden attracted people who had different migrant trajectories and/or different ethnic backgrounds, and it attracted people who enjoyed being exposed to this kind of diversity in a spirit of welcome and civility. Looking to the hostilities outside, the garden worked as a canopy, even if permeable.

Thinking of the cosmopolitan canopy in a wider social context, I notice a paradox: it both transcends and reinforces segregation. Sprung (2013), in the context of adult education for migrants and refugees, raises the concern that where a ‘target group’ approach for refugees is employed, responsibility is often delegated to specialised community or social work institutions and programmes. This has a segregating effect and means on a deeper societal level that migration is not acknowledged as a wider factor of social change but is rather seen as a ‘special circumstance’ that can be ‘fixed’ through social services (see 2.5.1). As I learned about the ‘ethnic minority and refugee’ quota in the garden, I became aware that the association to some extent took on the role of such a social service, yet this service had been born out of the civic “refugees welcome” grassroots movement. Civilians had stepped in for refugee support, covering for what the State had been unable to fulfil. As such, the canopy was born out of migrant support, yet it also supported the infrastructures of segregation in wider society, offering migrants a place to be whilst really migrants should be allowed to be in any place in society. This could arguably support the stabilisation of a narrative that fixed migrants as problematic figures (Filsinger, 2017; Mecheril et al., 2010; Morrice, 2014). In a world without this kind of xenophobia, without suspicion and rejection of whoever is made to not belong, we would not need canopies.

Anderson (2011), however, is optimistic though that the canopy works beyond its boundaries:

When people have visited places like Rittenhouse Square, they share story of their visit with friends, communicating to them the ambiance of cosmopolitanism and the discoveries about others that the canopy permits. When people have positive experiences again and again, this scenario becomes expected and, over time, is built upon (p. 112).

As people take what they have observed and learned in the canopy into their communities, the civic behaviours can become more and more established, even institutionalised in some places, and this has potential to spill over. People in the garden gave me a similar answer when I asked them if they thought the spirit of the garden could have a wider influence: that they felt the place could have some kind of radiating force, that it was a signal to wider society to show how people from different backgrounds could work on something collectively, and that the knowledge cultivated in this garden (here in the context of eco-sustainability) could also flower in other places.

We therefore do need the cosmopolitan canopies, those promising places where people get along, and which possibly, in and through people’s embodied experiences, have transformative potential. Still, the fact that we need cosmopolitan canopies also shows that in society more widely, the same spirit of comity and togetherness, of cosmopolitanism, is not mainstreamed. This paradox was tangible in the garden, too, which worked as a retreat from hostilities that existed in wider society, but concomitantly these hostilities were part of the garden’s web of relationalities. This is in line
with Riga et al.’s (2021) account of humanitarian organisations which offer care and infrastructures of kindness (Brownlie & Anderson, 2016), quite like the garden I was part of, but in this context of young refugees in Beirut: walls of organisations paradoxically were “both permeable with and immune to the refugeedom’s politicised realities” (Riga et al., 2021, p. 43).

But what about the segregation inside the canopy? Wondering about the White Saturdays, I was reminded of two questions that are at the core of most integration discourse, be it academic or political (Ager & Strang, 2008): do different ethnic groups really connect and intermingle in a shared space, and if they do, does this imply that relations are improved? Or, simply put: Do encounters imply contact, and does contact imply connection in form of positive relations? And then, in the context of outdoor recreation and education, how does an outdoor space contribute to this?

In E. Anderson’s (2011) book, the significant quality of these canopy spaces is that they are shared, that they appear to belong to all, and that civic behaviour across race and ethnic divides is displayed in these spaces. Not all groups may necessarily use these spaces at the same time of the day, and Andersons also notices how a place such as Rittenhouse Square may evoke a feeling of cosmopolitanism and safety during daytime but become a place to quickly pass through after dusk. Additionally, Anderson does not claim or expect that these spaces necessarily work to create friendship or positive contact between people who would otherwise live in segregated areas (though he does observe that interracial friendship is displayed under the canopy), but still thinks that they contribute to easing interracial tensions.

I noticed that Anderson’s idea, his observation of the cosmopolitan canopies as spaces of encounter differs from the concept of spaces of encounter that projects like the garden sought to create in the aim of social integration: while the first is open-ended yet hopeful about the easing of interracial tensions, the latter is built on expectations about the qualities and aims of encounters between people. Underlying this idea is the moral aspiration for people to form social ties across groups. An example of this is how Putnam’s (1993) framework of bonding and bridging is employed as a means to conceptualise encounters in integration (e.g., Ager & Strang, 2008). Depending on what concept of integration the idea of encounters is grounded in (Heins & Unrau, 2018), the expectation is that newcomers either assimilate or that a new shared transcultural space, with an ideal of hybridity (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990), is created that allows individuals to communicate and live across ethnic, national and cultural divides.

In Gentin’s (2011) systematic review on ethnicity and outdoor recreation in Europe, several of the articles describe nature and green spaces as platforms for social encounters. People get together and socialise in open environments, on one hand, but on the other this literature also emphasises that contacts between people from outside of one’s own ethnic group, or contacts with strangers more broadly, are infrequent. This is in line with Matejskova and Leitner’s (2011) critical view of urban planning literature and policy that enthusiastically favours the creation of greenspaces as a space of encounter between different ethnic groups. These spaces would not necessarily support the emergence of hybrid cultures, they argue. They find that assumption that encountering is enough to diminish segregation and tension between groups is grounded in a romanticised or incomplete understanding of socio-cultural contact theory.

I agree with Matejskova & Leitner (2011) that encounters with difference are best understood as “potentially open: They hold open the possibility of either reinforcing or disorienting us from firmly held habits, stereotypes, and prejudices” (p. 722). These processes may all happen at the same time, encounters may concomitantly “both (re)inscribe and help transcend existing boundaries between individuals and groups” (p. 722). As I see it, the garden did it all. It facilitated encounters of different
kinds, ones which confirmed boundaries or transcended them, and it furthered segregation. The ecology of the garden, especially the plants, formed a significant part of how these relationships were produced. They co-produced the cosmopolitan spirit that was alive in the garden, staging people's multiple belongings and facilitating dialogue, but where interpretations differed, they also were entangled with segregating processes (this is further explored in the next chapter).

I find that another shared problematic of the discourse about spaces of encounter and integration is that it contains two taken-for-granted assumptions: that bounded groups exist and are identifiable, and that these group affiliations are enough to explain behaviour. Or, as Gentin (2011) puts it:

_The problem is that researchers sample individuals who presumably represent different ethnic groups and commonly assume that intra-cultural differences are less important than inter-group differences (p. 159)._

This logic was also tangible in the communication about people's absences on activity days: the *Afghans*, the *refugees*, the *People of Colour* don't come. It was difficult for me, too, to escape it as a researcher. Too easily could I have interpreted the absence of people on activity days as proof of ethnic or racial segregation. If segregation existed in this garden, was it really based on ethnicity and nationality? Did people really not join the events *because* they were Afghans?

One of the critiques of the concept of the cosmopolitan canopy is that it may be “an aspiration more than a reality” (Logan, 2013, p. 1446). Logan critically states that the spaces Anderson identifies as cosmopolitan canopies are spaces of only fleeting encounters, sometimes limited to brief eye contact. Diversity in these spaces is according to him “a spectacle but not a lifestyle” (p. 1446), especially since these spaces are also well-guarded by security. He therefore asks:

_Is this neighborhood a cosmopolitan canopy or a highly guarded environment where different kinds of people clearly know their place and stay within it (p. 1446)?_

There is an issue of high relevance in that critical question, namely that of power and the possibility of transgression of social positioning. To some extent Logan may here be critiquing the much-cherished notion of acknowledging or celebrating diversity which is also at the core of the cosmopolitan idea. Anthias (2011) does not think that this is necessarily the best approach to heterogeneity and alterity. She warns:

_Present-day discussions of diversity may act as a code for introducing compensatory mechanisms to soften the edges of inequality but do not function as radical transformations in the ways these are produced and sustained (Anthias, 2011, p. 206)._

The question of whether people with refugee biographies and People of Colour got to shape what was done in the garden, in an environment guarded by the association’s rules, is crucial here. Did they make experiences that could make up for or even transform the hostilities they encountered outside the canopy? While the garden was certainly not patrolled by security, the association that owned the space unarguably held a certain control. The fact that all these people came to this space and (re)created it through their presence and activities, did not necessarily imply that they all held equal power in this process of creation.

Questions of equality and participation seemed to crystallise in tensions that I experienced during my time in this garden community. In the next chapter, I explore agency, participation patterns and
instances of control. I also describe how these issues were interwoven with people’s interpretations of the space, and with the different ways of how people-plant relationships were staged.
4.3 Burgeoning and pruning: the shaping of the space

In this third ethnographic chapter, I focus on tensions I witnessed in the garden, and follow their traces to more clearly sketch the moral geographies of this space. Asking the question, “who gets to shape what is done in this space?”, I draw on Cornwall’s unpacking of participation and Rancière’s understanding of equality in particular to shed light on how people may express their agency in this space, or indeed see it limited in instances where the ‘local’ habits and mores are dominantly expressed. I also explore how the perspectives and understandings of this ‘nature’ space are entangled within the power dynamics I observe.

I find that people may co-create this space as long as their practices do not collide with or contradict the garden’s wider ethos. This becomes visible as the practices of people with refugee biographies rub against the garden’s ideals, which can be seen as a way of testing and confirming their equality. What the stories reveal to me, too, is that the nature-cultures that ground people’s practices fundamentally form part of the creation of hierarchies.

A fence built by one of the gardeners around his/her plot (October 2020) © author’s photograph
Fences

Don't lock me out, lock me in
And then, once I'm in your territory
Show me around
So I can move my feet vigilantly,
Learn about the soil
Its colours, temperatures,
The density of its grains.

This soil has been taking and returning
The shapes of your practice
Through the hours, days, seasonal turns.
I desire to know, in fact I cannot hold back,
If it will hold
Both of our bodies,
Both of our worlds.

Then open the gate again
Lock me out, no matter the code
Next time I glimpse through the fence
I will recognise pieces of the soil
That once used to carry our weight
The texture that we have to offer
To this place.
4.3.1 A path between two areas: the practice of agency, participation and control

As described in the introduction to the garden, a path separated the community and the allotment sides of the garden. The absence of some people from the community side, but their active engagement on the allotment side, pointed to the fact that participation patterns were more complex than may be expected at first (in the sense that people participate, or they do not). Over the course of time, I came to see that the different social practices, namely the individual gardening on the one side, and the community gardening on the other, implied the expression of different kinds of agencies and control on each side, with different people contributing to the shaping of the space in different ways.

We choose what to grow: self-led gardening and spontaneous encounters

In the allotment area, people to a certain extent were free to do what they pleased. People decided what to grow, how to grow it, and how to use the harvest. This implied not only variation in vegetables, but also a range of growing techniques formed part of the people-plant relations staged in this garden (see 4.2.2). The allotment area was particularly meaningful to people because they could practice self-sufficiency, which also implies agency. I learned there were different reasons why this agency mattered: for several people, it was part of their political orientation in the world; they saw the approach as a counterplay to mass consumption and ecological destruction. As such, organic gardening was a practice of a (more) sustainable lifestyle.

For gardeners with stable and decent incomes, the harvest was a nice but not existentially necessary contribution to their meals. For individuals and families with lower incomes, the economic benefit that came with free access to healthy, organic food was important. Mechtild, an older German woman just beginning her retirement, said the vegetables offered good support. An Afghan family (see 4.4.1) told me that they liked to cultivate tomatoes, chilli and other vegetables as well as herbs, and it helped them economically as they did not have to buy everything. The harvest was not enough to feed the family, still an adequate support. Furthermore, tomatoes and fresh vegetables you bought at Aldi [local discounter] were not as tasty as those from the garden. They emphasised how much they liked that everyone had the freedom to choose what they wanted to plant in their plots, and this self-determination, too, was a significant aspect of the agency the allotment area offered.

The same Afghan couple told me that garden was nice as they could get in touch with different people. Agency related not only to the gardening, but also to the self-determined and self-paced establishment of contact among gardeners. In the allotment area, where the garden guardians tended their plots, socialising was non-organised: time and access were flexible, people could come and go as they pleased. Gardeners stopped on the main path to chat with others working away in their plot. They passed each other with their watering cans on their way to or from the stream or the shed where tools were stored. Conversations had a friendly tone; there was small talk between persons who were less close, and deeper conversations between friends. You could simply smile and nod when passing people, or you could approach them, as you pleased. And Ali did this when he noticed we were now neighbours:

“Hi, I’m new”, he said to me. I realised it was the first time someone else told me they were new; it jolted me that I was comparatively well established. I showed him our plot, next to his. “Do you know a little about gardening then?” He inquired. “No, not at all,” I responded. He laughed, admitting that he had no experience either. “What is your name?” “Ali, and yours?” He told me that Susanne was Arabic and Persian. “You have an international name!” he exclaimed, joyfully, making it
sound like “internaschionalt” to my ears, in his accent. “In my country, everyone is called Abdul and Ali.” “What is your country?” I asked. “Iran!” He was turning his soil to prepare his plot, I told him he should let me know if I could help with what he was doing, as he let me know he had troubles with his foot. We were now neighbours.

There were encounters between people who met for the first time, but there were also the encounters between regulars. The more I became a regular myself, the more I was familiar with other garden guardians. With it came to the joy of bumping into people I knew, of seeing familiar faces without making any arrangements. I noticed the particular beauty of this kind of socialising: you may head to a space and can be sure to meet somebody you like, but very casually and without any obligations. Depending on how you feel, you can approach others or spend time on your own, with the plants only, quietly immersing yourself in the work. Antoine, one of the guardians, told me that especially in summer when it was hot, you could always count on running into somebody:

> It was quite funny, because often in the last years I thought, I’ll go over quickly for some watering, and didn’t even calculate half an hour… And then Lina arrives, “aaah hello!”, who I haven’t seen in the last one, two weeks or longer, and then blah-blah-blah and then I realise a quarter of an hour is already gone. It’s actually nice after all, it’s just part of it. And then […] we go our ways and continue to half chat, half do some gardening work. And then I say “aaah I still need to do some watering,” and then I start but Sonja arrives “aaah hello, how are you?!” It’s not always that extreme, but I remember once, I chatted with Sonja, then Lina, then Michael and then Farah, and in the end, I didn’t do any work!

This energy was of particular importance when COVID-19 hit, and people had to live through a series of lockdowns in 2020. Sandra, one of the association staff, thought it was impressive to see how much the garden was frequented in these COVID times:

> You really noticed how the garden is for all of the people who have a plot here an important place that they come to on a regular basis, multiple times per week. Connecting with the earth, spending time outside, and at the same time coming to a socially stable place which offered a bit of continuity in those crazily unstable times. You could not arrange to meet up, but you could be sure that somebody you knew would be here who you could see. I thought that was very special this year. And I haven’t seen that in other years, that people come as frequently.

The spontaneous and obligation-free socialising mattered for another reason. Gardeners waiting for a response to their asylum requests could practice German without much pressure. Still facing many restrictions in their daily lives (such as limited or no access to housing, work, and financial income), the contact and easy socialising with German speakers meant that they could expand their resources to navigate their daily life. An example was Nimatullah, who had been in Germany with a status of temporary suspension of deportation and who you have met in the previous chapter (see 4.2.1). At some point during the season, he asked me if we could exchange WhatsApp messages, as a game, where he could practice writing in German. It was clear that he enjoyed the contact with German speakers, but part of this was that he needed the language to get on with his life.

The social practice on the other side of the path had a different quality since it was framed by organised activities and fully controlled by the association staff. This side did not offer the same agency to people, a space where they could do as they pleased, and possibly lacked the same spirit.
of spontaneity. However, if offered something else: a spirit of community-making, of togetherness, of shared ambition.

*My boys built this! Organised activities and collective energy*

Community events, in contrast to the fluid socialising presented above, had a particular date, time and activity associated, and therewith implied different choreographies than the gatherings in the allotment area. On a sunny day in late February, I participated in an action day for the first time. When I arrived at 11.30 with my partner and my daughter, the activities were already in full swing. The garden was busy; small groups were sprinkled around the space, and all seemed occupied with something. The atmosphere was relaxed, I felt there was a sense of order: not in a geometrical sense, but everyone seemed to have their place. The sunshine created a friendly, warm light. The garden lay in browns and ochres on this day in late winter, yet it felt as if this could be the beginning of spring. A smell of smoke wafted up, as someone had lit a fire in the fireplace between the solid wooden benches in the middle of the garden.

A blackboard near the garden entrance indicated today’s tasks, written with white charcoal: ‘weaving the pasture fence’, ‘cooking’, ‘weeding the paths’, among others. A woman asked what tool she could use to clear the paths, Sandra responded that she would bring knives. We could look for some buckets over there towards the sheds, or in the sandpit, maybe. Everything seemed a little improvised. I decided to help with the weeding and waited for Sandra to bring the knives to the table. A young woman joined me, smiled and asked if I knew if there was a vegetable brush. “I won’t peel the potatoes”, she told me. “It’s better with the skin”. With contentment in her voice, she explained that they had just harvested the vegetables: not the potatoes, but the celery and cauliflower. She told me she was in the garden for the first time, a student in her teacher training, and we engaged in conversation before I moved on to my weeding.

At first it was very slow, but I continuously got better at clearing the side of the path from the weeds. It was narrow; just wide enough for a person to walk comfortably. A mix of earth and stones, dry on the surface, more damp below. The sun was warm on my back, almost too warm, and bright in my face. My hands had dried up from the soil and turned a brownish colour. I was part of this soil, and it was part of me.

“Oh, I have found an earthworm”, she exclaimed, and it sounded surprised and a little delighted. She had suddenly stood beside me who was in my thoughts, telling me that over there, where people are weaving, they were still figuring out how to do this, so she thought she could do something else instead of just standing around. Her long, blond hair fell onto her lower arms as she bent down to dig the weed out. Was there another knife she can use? Yes, there was. She let me know she was here for the first time, a friend has asked her to come along, and she had immediately been motivated to come. She was a student and we started talking about her studies in social work, and her practice semester in Ireland, Dublin, in community work. She was sitting cross-legged on the path, with her tight, light blue Jeans, and did not seem too bothered sitting on ‘dirty’ ground.

Later, people sat in a circle as everyone was having their lunch. Since the solid wooden benches around the fire did not provide enough space for everyone, some people simply sat on the earth. In the middle of the circle, a woman was pouring soup into people’s bowl. Relaxed voices under open skies, in the sunshine. People seemed to know each other, or at least know the person next to them, or if they didn’t conversations had been picked up with ease. Children sat on two or three small, colourful plastic chairs. I had noticed before how they had been running around freely in the garden or had joined in the work. They, too, were part of this collective making of the garden.
From my conversations with garden guardians who frequented the ‘action days’, I understood that they appreciated the spirit of creating something together and enjoyed each other’s company, sharing activities and a collaboratively cooked meal. I got a new sense of what participation meant for those who had been around since the garden’s beginnings when I listened to Lena who, like others, had been part of its creation. The garden had been designed by the association, but in the process of turning ideas into concrete reality, the people involved felt they had actively contributed to making something special. They had been part of the making of a space that mirrored their moral ideals: a garden that brought people together, with and through the activity of organic gardening. With collective energy, these people had turned it into what it had become – beautiful as it stood today. This energy had created a strong sense of connectedness to the garden’s grounds, the place itself. I recall the pride and sense of achievement in Lena’s voice when she told me how she and her family had contributed actively to the building of the dome, a large round pavilion structure with a roof made of multiple triangles and wooden cross struts (see 4.1) which allowed people to find shelter and gather under a roof, both solid and airy. “The boys, my boys, contributed to building this. It was so much work!”

Not everyone was part of this spirit of community that was shared on action days, and that Lena referred to. As depicted in the previous chapter, several garden guardians did not join the community events, which turned the monthly Saturday gatherings into “White” events (see 4.2.4). Somehow the part of the garden that enabled self-organised activity and spontaneous encounters allowed for more social mixing and cosmopolitanism than the organised events. This observation made me interrogate if this space accommodated the shaping of and by people, or rather was established as a pre-designed ‘template’ which those invited to learned to navigate.

Cornwall’s (2008) account of the complexities of participation helped me read this garden, as she makes a pellucid distinction between spaces that are created through invitations and those created by people themselves. She argues that while creating spaces for dialogue through invitation is useful, it is not sufficient to ensure people’s effective engagement. People will make use of the offer (or not) depending on their own inclinations and interests, as well as on the support available to build their capacities:

‘Invited spaces’ and opportunities to participate that are made available by community development workers – whether in response to statutory obligations or their own initiative – are often structured and owned by those who provide them, no matter how participatory they may seek to be. Transferring that ownership to those who come to fill them is far from easy; sometimes, such spaces are regarded, in a very instrumental way by participants, as means to gain access to benefits or to improve their own access to services (Cornwall, 2008, p. 275).

The latter is entirely understandable since often people with less financial and social resources are asked to “participate”, while those better off have the structural power to see their positions defended. Possibly, the community events were perceived in such an instrumental way by the people who did not come and did not meet their expectations. While I found no proof of this in the data, I did notice how the community space was in fact very much ‘structured and owned’ by the association. In the story of the tandoori, this ownership and control of the garden crystallised.
Amelie, one of the German garden guardians, thought that participation was a very fascinating issue in this community since a lot had already been tried out.

“In the first year we had some working groups, but many of them tailed off. About gardening issues. We also had experimental things such as mushroom cultivation and composting, and one group was about cycles. I don’t really recall what else was there. They tailed off, and that was a try to put more responsibility on more feet. We also had a plenary once,” she laughed, “pretty typical, how Germans organise their meetings – a plenary,” she elaborated, laughing more. “To make decisions about the garden?” I asked.

“Yes, especially to start working groups based on needs – in principle, the approach was to ask about needs: What do you wish for, how should this continue, what working groups should there be and so on, and that was very German and European in character.” She emphasised the very in the phrase, and I could see this is something she was really interested in, as she continued: “I think these questions are fascinating. How do you really enable exchange that does not only happen across the fence and follows a principle of coincidence, but one that is fixed structurally. Also, with respect to: we have financed positions at the moment, but that might not always be the case, and then the shop somehow needs to keep organising itself!”

“Do you know why that was the case, that it was so German/European?” I inquired.

“I think it’s the format. We did a lot with translation back then, nearly everything was communicated in different languages. The emails were multilingual, the flyers were very, very multilingual. When necessary, we had interpreters. The people were invited with translations, a lot was done for this, but nevertheless... This is where I would like to know how these things work in other projects, if there are formats that work better, possibly because they aren’t coined too much by our forms.”

This stuck with me: *Coined by our forms.* The ‘German’ plenum was a format where information could be shared, plans could be made, and where potential conflicts solved. It was grounded in the pluralist ideal that everyone could raise their voice and speak out about what mattered to them, and then needs could be negotiated. What if this ideal of participation and representation, put into practice by a majority that had its control established, was not what people were expecting or used to, willing to take part in, or valorising as useful? This was an aspect that did not seem to be addressed.

I, too, had noticed how events seemed coined by the social habitus of a group of long-established, European, mainly White, eco-oriented, well-educated individuals. As to decision-making specifically, the association staff were the ones to establish the frame of events, to organise activities, and thereby determine what was shared, taught, learned, and discussed. It was possible to make suggestions and engage with the work that needed doing on the community side, but the management was done during staff meetings, spontaneously on site, or during a yearly meet-up of a steering group. I learned in my conversation with Sandra that individual garden guardians were sometimes asked to join these yearly meet-ups yet no wider involvement of the garden guardians was practiced.
It was obvious, on the other hand, that the association staff were genuinely concerned about diversity in their agenda setting: they always tried to involve people from their network read as ethnic minority members such as musicians of different cultural traditions or caterers (often people with refugee biographies who worked in the community café) who would cook meals from their home countries. Nevertheless, the majority of people who joined the events were White, middle-class and German or European, with some exceptions such as film night about the Palestinian cause that attracted Palestinians and other people interested or involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the silent disco event run by Black DJs that attracted many People of Colour.

As to the dynamics of participation, people may be granted access to a certain space without necessarily having an opportunity to shape it (Cornwall, 2008; Gümüşay, 2020; Young, 2000). In conversations with some of the garden guardians who did not join community events, I learned that individuals did not necessarily join the activity day but still held ideas about how the communal space could be developed.

In spring, not long after I had arrived in the garden, I met Haadiya, one of my neighbours. I already knew about her, as Sandra had told me that she had given the plot next to ours to a woman who worked as a translator of Farsi and Pashto. Her German was perfect. “If you become friends with her, she might help you too as an interpreter,” she had said meaningfully. While Haadiya and I did get on well and shared friendly conversations, she never seemed too interested in my research. When I asked her and another woman for a recorded conversation one day, they responded airily that I might be able to catch them this weekend or another, and we could then see. I did not meet them in the weekends when I was there and consequently a recorded conversation never took place.

When we first met, we engaged in small talk about how nicely she and her friends, among them Nimatullah and his wife, had prepared it. They had turned the soil completely and had removed all the weeds and I was impressed how quickly they had managed to do this. I asked her what she wanted to cultivate. “We have our vegetables as well: I would like to grow estragon and mint”, she responded. I noticed the emphasis on “our”. I guessed that she referred to food culture in ‘her’ country, Afghanistan. In another instance, I noticed how Ahmed, too, distinguished with some emphasis between his and the local food culture. “Looking good”, I commented on the fresh bundle of mangold in his hand. He took a couple of steps towards me, to start a conversation. “I don’t prepare it the way Germans do,” he expressed, and explained to me how he boiled the mangold in a pot, with mince, or pepper, or other vegetables, for 40 minutes, until it was all nice. In my interpretation, this emphasis on “theirs”, expressed in contrast to “the German ways”, was a move of cultural assertion (also see 4.4.2). It also seemed to me as a move of resistance against dominance of the expressions of the ‘local’ culture, against the way in which everything was ‘coined’ in this garden, as Amelie had stated self-critically.

When I was about to leave on that day of our first encounter, I asked Haadiya if Sandra had told her about my research, and she had. I said I was looking at how people encountered each other and how participation worked in this garden. “Do you know what Tandoori is?” She asked me in return. “I’m not entirely sure,” I hesitated. She told me it was a hot stone to cook on – “Aah, yes, I remember now”, I said, “like a stone oven?”. She told me this was not what she was referring to, I noticed she had stopped smiling: “No, it is like a barbecue on which you fry food”, she corrected, and I could see it mattered to her that I understood what she was referring to, instead of making my own projections. “It could be placed on that side of the path where there is still space”, she waved over to the communal area, “together with a bench for people to sit on”. She had already spoken to Emma about her idea. “To make this garden even more beautiful”, she added.
Later in Spring I asked her what had become of her tandoori idea, but she waved it aside: “They need to finish in front first,” she said. “Then we can build it. All of this has to be cleaned up first” She pointed over to the side of the garden, where the hedge had grown wildly. “COVID has slowed everything down.”

COVID continued, time went on, and the tandoori was never built. In my conversation with Sandra, we talked about the different ways in which the association had tried to widen participation, and their plan to support participation of all garden guardians in the future. She told me they would like to organise a workshop where the aims of the garden would be made explicit and where people could voice what they thought was missing in the garden. “So, are matters brought to your attention?” I asked her. “Most matters that are brought to our attention are fully material things”, Sandra responded. “The last thing was from Haadiya, from the Afghan community, that they would like a separated fireplace, that they would like an oven to bake bread, where their men then – that’s how I understood it – can sit in a circle with shishas and bake bread for hours, like a proper parallel society. We have a fireplace here, and then we should build one somewhere else, right... A tandoori [Lehmbackofen] is a recurrent issue.”

Like a proper parallel society. This comment echoed in my head. My impression was that there had been a conflict between Haadiya and Sandra as I had felt some tension between them, but even if something was not quite at ease on the interpersonal level, I was surprised she rejected entirely the idea of having a tandoori in the garden. The “parallel society” was often voiced as an argument of “failed integration” in wider social and political debates where the responsibility to integrate was placed entirely on the newcomer (see 1). How did this fit in with the garden’s welcoming ethos? Did this imply that the welcoming spirit was just a veiled expression of assimilationist ideals?

Possibly, yes. Even if it had only been expressed once in this way, the comment was another nod to my recurrent observation of how the shaping of the space, and therewith the depth of participation (Cornwall, 2008), was controlled and in some instances restrained. My impression was that the suggestion of a clay pizza oven could have resonated as ‘trendy’, as opposed to the tandoori that was judged as ‘out of place’, as not the right thing in a community where people should intermingle. The tandoori idea, however, had been an opportunity to coin the garden otherwise – part of the cultivation of vegetables that made this space cosmopolitan was the assertion of different food and socialising cultures (see 4.2). The attempt to install a tandoori could be read as a form of self-mobilisation from gardeners who wished to use the space for their ways of socialising (Cornwall, 2008). It had been an attempt to let other social habits enter this space, but it had been dismissed.

In the allotment area, where people had the autonomy to create their space, these instances of coin the garden otherwise were tangible as well. I paid close attention to them as I inquired into dynamics of participation and the infrastructures of (in)equality in this garden. The tensions that these instances created revealed the premises and moral ambitions that this garden had been built on. I also saw how these dynamics of power were entangled with divergent people-nature subjectivities – with interpretations of what this garden space represented. The stories about the fences, and the voles and the varnish, illustrate these dynamics.

4.3.2 Fences: the testing of equality

“There’s always a space where one plot ends and the next one begins, there’s always a borderline...” Alex, one of the German guardians, said to me. She thought it was interesting how people would draw lines between them. “The fences?” I asked. “Yes, they mean a lot to some people.” The Afghan
family next to her plot had got a small piece of soil and built a giant fence around it. “They are very
nice,” she added, as if to say despite the fence.

Alex did not seem to like the fences very much. As we were crouched by the tanks, an alternative
water resource in times of draught, she suddenly told me about a moment in her physiotherapy
training where people had been asked to bring objects and place them on a mat in the gym, to then
talk about why they had selected them, how they mattered to them. “The fences remind me of this,”
she said. Was this not an interesting thought? In my reading, she suggested that the fences could be
one of the elements on a gym mat, an object ready to be explored, to reveal its meaning to other
members of the group. As we walked to the stream – the tanks did not even fill two watering cans –
we passed the fence at the entrance she had been referring to. “This one is huge, you see. When
plants are growing in it, it’s not possible to look through anymore.”

I had witnessed the building of fences, in other instances. Haadiya and Nimatullah were sitting on
the tree trunk together in front of her big plot which was just next to ours. She told me with some
regret in her voice that someone had broken a tomato and a zucchini plant. “Oh no, sorry!” I said,
“Maybe people are coming into the garden, and we are quite close to the entrance?” “Yes, maybe a
couple of teenagers,” she responded. Another garden guardian, Axel, who had been cutting greens
on the side of the garden walked past us and said with a wink “Ah, the teenagers always need to
serve as scapegoats. Maybe it was just a dog.” Haadiya did not seem to appreciate this comment,
and she insisted that in her friends’ allotment the coriander had been pulled out. Axel looked at me
with a complicit smile as if he wanted to say more, but then decided to continue his way. A little
later, Ali, Nimatullah, Haadiya, Nimatullah’s wife and Haadiya’s three girls were all holding onto a
long roll of bamboo pegs and wire, trying to work it into a fence along Haadiya’s allotment.

About a week later when I was in the garden, Ali and Elias worked together to build Ali’s new plot
after he had moved to another location in the allotment area. Ali had already left when I was done
with my gardening work, but Elias was still up for a chat. “We went to the forest yesterday to get
some trunks”, he told me, showing me the trunks that they had already used to build something that
looked like a railing at the back of the plot. “He wants to build a fence”, he said to me, with a
meaningful voice. He had started the conversation in such way that I got the impression he wanted
to share the stories ‘behind the scenes’ in this garden with me. “It’s funny with those fences. I would
have thought it’s such a very German thing – like in those allotment gardens [Schrebergärten].”

In my recorded conversation with him, he elaborated on the fences:

> When the garden kicked off, a couple of people immediately started to build
> fences. A piece of 5, 10 square meters, immediately a fence around it, 1.5 meters
> high. I was quite surprised that it wasn’t the… It somehow was a German trait for
> me, this is mine, something around it. But it was more the people with migration
> background who did this. They are probably used to it from their homes, be it to
> prevent theft of the vegetables, or keep away stray dogs and cats. I have never
> asked anyone, why are you building a fence? Maahir has one, his plot is a high
> security cage, it’s extreme. I don’t know what it’s like here, how much is stolen, if
> there’s a lot of theft and so on. It’s not a major thing – surprising really, as this is
> [a garden] in the city. On the borders of the city, it’s surprising.

When I asked garden guardians about the fences they had built, they told me that theft was an issue
for them, and that they wanted mark the territory. “When a person wants something, it’s nice if they
come and ask him, then he happily gives it away. But it’s not nice if someone just pulls things out,”
Farah translated as I had asked Jazeb, an Afghan man, who cultivated with his family the big plot by the entrance (see 4.4.1). Abdul, my old friendly neighbour, minded the theft, too. “When the fruits are ripe, some people come and take them away. He has already seen people come with bags to pick them. This year, he has not seen anyone, but in the last years. Not just in his plot, but everywhere. They come with bags. They came on their bikes.” Farah translated and commented “That’s possible”. “Does the fence help?” I asked. “Not really, just a little.” Abdul did not seem to believe other people from the community were thieves, rather that other people from the area came to steal vegetables and fruits.

As the fences mattered to the people who built them, they could again (similar to the Tandoori on the community side) be seen as a form of self-mobilised participation (Cornwall, 2008). One way in which to think this further is through Rancière’s understanding of equality and emancipation. Biesta (2013) discerns fundamental contradictions of ‘traditional’ accounts of emancipation, as voiced in critical (education) theory, and shows how Rancière provides us with a different logic. If equality is perceived as a future goal which can be reached through well-designed interventions - in which the unknowing oppressed gets emancipated through a knowing emancipator – inequality will always be perpetuated as this logic necessarily (re)creates a hierarchy of and dependency between the “emancipator” and the “oppressed”. Equality “is nothing” if it is envisaged as a goal, according to Rancière:

Equality is not a goal that governments and societies could succeed in reaching. To pose equality as a goal is to hand it over to the pedagogues of progress, who widen endlessly the distance they promise that they will abolish. Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing (Rancière, 2004, p. 223).

Rancière claims that ontological equality simply is and has only to be imagined and asserted (Bingham et al., 2010). The consequence is, as Biesta (2013) recognises, it that we need “to bring equality into the here and now and act on the basis of the assumption on the equality of all human beings [...] or the equality of intelligence of all human beings” (p. 96). Such an understanding of equality allows for new situations to emerge in which it is constantly (re)established through verification processes:

To act on the basis of this assumption requires a constant verification of it - not in order to check whether the assumption is true in abstracto, but in order to practice the truth of the assumption, that is, to make it true in always concrete situations (Biesta, 2013, p. 96, emphasis in original).

Emancipation, then, is no longer about overcoming the challenge of inequality, but about establishing new relationships from which new identities can flower. Such a practice could carry the potential to engender a different social reality, one based on equality. In On the shores of politics (1995) Rancière describes emancipation as “escaping from a minority” (p. 48) in a highly political process of subjectification which reconfigures the established order in a way that transforms identities (as opposed to the understanding that one pre-existing group, previously excluded, now claims their rightful space) (Bingham et al., 2010). Politics, according to Rancière, is the space in which the dominant status quo is called into question and struggled against (Tolia-Kelly, 2019).

Looking to the garden, Rancière allows us to see the fence-building and the reactions as part of such politics and verification of ontological equality: were all garden guardians, including those who had migrated to this place from other non-European countries, equally free to do what they pleased in their plots? Was this social practice as equality? One way to look at this is that since the fence-
builders assertively built fences while they clearly saw that other people did not, they also asserted their equality. They chose their vegetables and built fences, and even though it was only a small piece of soil, they shaped the space according to their own aspirations. The fences were thereby an act of dismantling the structural wrong, of reimagining the fundamental ontological equality that was not reflected in the social rules of the garden.

In this way of reordering the world from as it was into a world as it should be, namely one of equality, the deeper values that underpinned the garden and its guardian practices were made visible. The frequent comments from other garden guardians about the fences contained both the surprise at the fence-building and its disapproval, which pointed to taken-for-granted assumptions grounded in the existing order of things, which in turn was challenged by the fence-building.

The complexities of an open-to-all territory

Amelie’s comment on the fences made me aware of how the fence-building was opposed to the way in which the garden had been conceived, and how this conception had been a source of identification for people who had been part of it (Bhattacharyya, 2004).

“I also find it interesting how differently these sections are made, our individual plots. And this was a huge irritation in the beginning, that different people from Afghanistan and Syria built quite clear fences around their tiny little garden and that, in the beginning this was quite... Sure, you were used to the view of this open area, and it was like uuuuuuuh!” She made a strangling noise, pulling her chin back, and continued, with indignation: “Now fences are being built there! That’s not what we want! And...yes, I’ve come to think, ok that’s the way it is, and it responds to a need, I don’t necessarily have to understand it, that’s the force of this area, that the distinctness is allowed to be. But it was a learning process, well for me, it was a learning process, yes. This... ok, you can do it this way as well,” she laughed. “You build a fence around your incredibly small thing! And we had essentially decided to leave it entirely open, it was a conscious decision, yes, and I love it this way, that so many people pass through and simply enjoy the place.
And that, we have our plot by the path, and how often I get told this by different people, yes, how much they are enjoying this, and particularly in 2015-2016 ... I had the impression, this energy that was here, it gave an incredible signal to the public. Well, this: we, we are simply working on a thing together in all the distinctness that we bring with us. And that had an incredible radiance, to the people who were passing, certainly for the public relations work, clearly political as well, but also really in concrete practice. [...] And that is why I thought it was great that it was so open,” she exclaimed laughing again, “at the same time there are these small private fences, well, I think it’s quite a phenomenon.”

As the fence-builders practice rubbed against the garden’s ideals, it irritated several other guardians who thought they disturbed the garden’s open-access ethos and harmed its aesthetics. They found the need for protection of plots rather exaggerated. Leon, one of the German garden guardians, told me that his neighbour, an older woman, and the Syrian friend he had introduced to the garden had got into a fight at some point, he had found both in a huff. His friend had wanted to build a fence around the shared plot, but she had refused. “We don’t understand that they would like to protect the plot,” he concluded. Not only German people refused the fences, though. An example was Yousef’s reaction, a Palestinian (see 1.1) who appreciated the garden’s openness:
Borders. Between me and you. I don’t like them. But I don’t complain. Maybe people want to have the place for them. You can’t change them. But I would want to see it open. Not it’s my place, don’t touch. Our nana [mint] is for everyone. You can cut, you can eat. Not for me. You can take from my stuff what you want. I give water to the big flower before I give water to my things. I’m a small part in a big community. What you see: I want to have my place nice. No! We are in a garden together! It’s not nice!

Other garden guardians described the fence-building as a habit from another country or thought that the fence builders did not know the surroundings well enough, so they needed protection. Axel, a German gardener, thought they were built out of misjudgement:

They are thought of as protection, because you don’t know what kind of uncertainties you may encounter here. When a tomato plant is broken, the last thing you think of is an animal. Maybe it was also the wind, or the branches are heavy. It is in humankind’s nature to accuse others – I catch myself doing this as well.

For the people who had been involved in the garden’s design, the absence of fences in the garden meant open access to all, as a metaphor for open-mindedness, mutual trust, reciprocity and a welcoming attitude, quite in line with the cosmopolitan spirit (see 4.2). Open access was not just an ideal, a utopia, but a material reality: any person who wanted could access the garden at any time, enjoy its special energy, sit on the benches, get involved with work - or steal vegetables. The garden was seen and experienced in great contrast with traditional German allotment gardens [Schrebergärten] which several referred to in the context of the fences somewhat scornfully. In those gardens, people had their own tiny garden fenced and allotment holders had to follow strict gardening regulations. These gardens represented German nationalism, a political right-wing orientation, narrow mindedness, and smugness [Spiessigkeit]. The absence of fencing, indeed exceptional, could be seen as disrupting societal norms of territory marking, private property, and defence against foreign Others. The garden positioned itself in a quiet opposition and thereby created new openings.

Yet, much of the disruptive force was energised through the privileged positions of people who held protected citizenship status and financial security. The decision to keep the garden open was made when it was first created, by a committee of local, mainly White and well-established residents who had received funding for a “refugee welcome” project. Decisions about the garden’s design had been reserved to a small group of local people that had not accommodated the diverse perspectives of people who this garden had been funded and designed for.

Some of those, however, refused the openness. Nimatullah told me in the recorded conversation, via Farah’s interpretation, that if he was given the permission – and this was another reference to how he was not able to shape the community space – he would make this place much nicer. He would remove everything on the community area and build a swimming pool. He would tidy up, install tables and chairs, like in a park, grow nice flowers and build a fence with a door. No outsiders would be allowed to come as a result, only the people who were here...

“Why wouldn’t you want outsiders to come in? I asked him.

What followed was a long discussion between him and Farah, and unfortunately only pieces were
translated to me. Clearly, they disagreed. He said the garden did not work well this way – if strangers came here, they did not act responsibly, but people who also worked here would take on responsibility for the entire garden if access was restricted to them.

One could say that the fences therefore, still testing this social practice as equality, also stood out as a quiet opposition to exclusionary forces within the garden community – as a nod to the fact that the people who did mind the theft, or who wanted to support responsible behaviour through clear boundary-making like Nimatullah, had not been involved in the garden’s conceptualisation processes. It pointed to the fact that the felt needs of those individuals had not been taken into account; at the same time they owned their territories just enough to apply their own solutions (Bhattacharyya, 2004).

In the tensions, a dynamic emerged in which the fence-builders were subtly positioned as odd figures, slightly “out of place”. The fences became a marker of difference, which again led to a strong expression of social categories, a boundary-making around “the Afghans and Syrians” or “the migrants”. These categories were used to explain behaviour: the people built fences because they were Afghans, not because they minded the theft. In my observation, the fencing was not as clearly attributable: A Palestinian-German couple with a young child, too, had their allotment fenced because of the threat of theft, and the young father had even installed a keep-out sign at the entrance. Ali, one of the fence-builders, had told me his country was Iran, not Afghanistan or Syria. Furthermore, other migrants, including women from Iran and Syria, did not fence their allotments.

There was however never mention of any aspiration or attempt to ban the fences in this process of negotiating divergent needs. They were tolerated by association staff and other community members, and as visible in Elias’ action above, some gardeners who did not understand the fences still provided help with the fence-building. In one conversation with Miriam, I learned that she had defended the fences in an exchange with an older person who wanted to see them banned. To some extent, there was also solidarity with the fence-builders. Therewith, the fences became a natural part of the garden’s make-up, a part of its aesthetics, as a woman from a group of painters that once used the garden for their practice commented: “It’s a special place. The individual and the community. The improvised; the borderlines – that’s what makes the appeal of this garden.”

All of this shows how the garden contained its own complicated cultural politics. It implicated not only cultural practices around the growing of food, but also around claims for agency, equality and presence. The story of the voles and the varnish shows an instance of how the line of what was ‘acceptable’ in the garden was crossed.

4.3.3 The voles and the varnish: the crossing of a line

“No perspective is without its horizon”, Leon, one of the garden guardians, and I concluded in our recorded conversation, as we spoke about integration and religious orientations. Possibly, the fences were on the edge of what was acceptable in this garden’s community. Possibly they were boundaries that did not cross boundaries, lines that did not cross the red line - the line of tolerance drawn by the majority. However, this line was crossed in the few instances when garden guardians did something that was thought to be of greater harm to the garden or its ethos. One instance in which such a line was crossed was in a conflict about the voles and the varnish.

As I listened to the recordings, I considered asking Farah about a translation, but decided against this option. It did not seem appropriate to ask about it without new consent from both as the discussion had been between them.
This garden was the perfect home for voles. The soil was loamy, they managed to build their tunnels just fine, and an abundance of food was available right at hand. There were many of them in the garden this season. They were thriving, no doubt. I am sure the voles were sometimes annoyed, but sometimes a little amused by the people in the garden. All of the different methods people had tried to get rid of them, none had really impressed them. Yellow panels with a clicking noise, other sound-emitting instruments, the destruction of their tunnels – all were tried without major success. The meanest technique was to pour water into their tunnels. They probably preferred the persons who were gentler: the ones who just pressed the soil they had moved to the sides back underneath their vegetables so that the roots could get back the nutrition they needed. Elias told me he used a mixed crop approach, and said “here it’s like chips, schnitzel, salad, a nice menu. But if it’s mixed and there’s suddenly ice cream next to the schnitzel, the voles don’t appreciate it”. He was right, in a way, but sometimes the voles did not care too much, they just went ahead with the ice cream.

When I became a garden guardian, Maahir was the one I noticed first. A man of small height, with wrinkles around his eyes and forehead that could have been the effect of days in bright sunlight, or of his frequent smiles, or both. He was probably in his forties or early fifties, though he might have looked younger than he was, always wearing a cap and trainers. I guessed he was Nepalese. I had noticed the colourful Himalayan flags on his tomato trellis, and those flags always made me think of Nepal even though I had never been there to find out if this is where they actually belonged. Later I learned that he had migrated here from Afghanistan.

I was used to him showing me how he took care of his vegetables with great diligence and care, what steps he was taking that day or the other to make everything thrive. He grew his own vegetables from seed in small flowerpots, neatly lined up: spring onions, leek, carrots. “A lot of work, a lot of work”, he would repeat to me, not without pride, and “six days a week.” The few German words he knew, he used. I did notice he spent a lot of time in the garden. “He’s working properly. He’s even coming when it’s raining. He knows he needs to protect the plants, so he comes to look after them,” Bake had commented, not without admiration.

I knew, too, that the voles were a bother to him. He had already told me that they destroy everything: “broken, broken [kaput, kaput]!”. The day he was redoing his whole plot, when he took out all of the planks that had made up his fence and seemed content with the results of his efforts, they must have gone too far for him.

I never had a chance to have a longer conversation with him. When autumn arrived, and the garden was painted by ochres and browns, he had already started coming less, had prepared his plot for the winter. I could have known, possibly, had I had his understanding of the soil, his experience of farming. When I finally got his phone number from the association, which I had avoided as I wanted to ask people in the garden directly, and not in a mediated way, if they were willing to join me for a longer conversation, the voice message told me the number didn’t exist. To be completely honest, I would not have known what to tell him on the phone. “What’s your mother tongue?” I had asked him once. “Mother?” He had asked. “What is your language?” “Farsi”, he had replied. “Oh, I don’t know any, I’ll have to learn some!” I had uttered, and he had smiled.

To my great surprise, Antonia told me in the recorded conversation that she had “chatted a little” with Maahir. He had seemed somehow deprecating to her at first and she had been a little intimidated, but then they had entered into conversation, and he had started telling her about his family.
“Since then, it’s been lovely with him as a neighbour!”
“You were able to have a conversation?” I asked her.
“I have translated some things for myself for sure, in a way that’s maybe not quite right, but I did learn about his family stories, about his children. [...] I think he used to do gardening quite professionally, back then, at his home. Maybe I got this wrong, but I think he even sold [the harvest], early on the market or something like that. Or this is how I worked it out for myself. It all looks quite well thought through in his plot. But what broke the ice in the end was when I asked what he harvests, what he does with it, and then he told me I should come back tomorrow at 6pm and then he will bring us something. And I thought, I maybe got this wrong, but we came at 6 and he brought us some sort of flat bread, filled with onions. And some sort of cucumber... some sort of spicy chutney.”

On a spring day, I found Sandra sitting on one of the solid wooden benches by the fireplace, her head resting in her hands on the back of the bench. Her body communicated sadness, or frustration, or tiredness. “Hey, are you OK? What happened?” I asked with some concern. “This is the third crisis conversation that we’re having with him now”. She told me that he had brought planks with him even though no poison or pesticides were allowed in the garden. I had noticed the white beams in Maahir’s plot and realised that she was referring to the varnish. In a nutshell, the conflict had started with him wanting to use too much material. He had said no problem, he could simply get other planks from a friend. His friend then had delivered the varnished wood to the garden. When he had started using the planks in his plot, Sandra had told him that he had to stop building. He had followed her order but had left in a huff and had not shown up for this third conversation. “If he doesn’t show up now, I’d like to send him a letter”, Miriam said with some frustration. “He can’t read,” Sandra replied. “Oh,” Miriam uttered. I decided to not stand there like a silent witness and left them to it. The atmosphere was tense.

Later, I took two watering cans, to fill with water from the stream, and passed the fireplace. Sandra was sitting on a bench with Clara, another German garden guardian. In Clara’s opinion, Sandra should tell him clearly that this was not accepted and that if he didn’t stick to the rules, he would have to leave. Sandra was reluctant to voice a ban, rather she wanted to show him his options and then he could decide himself if he wanted to stay or not. Clara stuck to the position that he was a “nice guy” [ein Lieber], but also a “crook” [Schlitzohr] who needed to be told how things worked here. I noticed her belittling language. She went on to say that you could not always “be the milk cow”: the intention to offer all sorts of opportunities for them lead to them exploiting you. He had been doing his thing anyway. “You may feel privileged”, Clara said to Sandra, “but Maahir does not necessarily feel to be in a weak position.” Sandra voiced that there was a power imbalance, that she needed to acknowledge her own White stance. “I’m really angry he has not come to the meeting, however”, she said, “this is where he has crossed a line”. If he had not left a message on her phone via the interpreter, he would have to be sorry about this.

Quite suddenly, Sandra said that she needed to go get her children and got up. As soon as she had left the benches, Clara turned to me and commented “She has an issue with White privilege”, framing it in a way as if she was speaking about a quirk Sandra had. She let me know that she did not appreciate the “Dear White People” event, a conference on Racism and White privilege that the association hosted every year. She considered herself as bi-ethnic, with Asian background, and found the debate around White Privilege annoying. To her, it led to a new kind of arrogance from White people. Referring to Maahir again, Clara said that if he had another ethnic background (meaning if he was White), one would simply say to him “What do you think you’re doing here?”. 
She looked at me, her thick black hair bordering her face, her eyes keen, and concluded: “It’s a character trait he has, he’s a crook, you don’t need to pay too much attention to the background.”

What echoed in my head was Clara’s conclusion that if he had another ethnic background, he’d simply be told off. I concluded that in her opinion, People of Colour held some form of special status in this garden because of their ethnicity. This could be read as a form of empathy, with someone who encountered barriers, a form of mediating those barriers in fact, or a form of paternalism towards minority groups. I heard similar remarks from two other people. Emma told me that she, too, would have told Maahir that he was provoking her, but found it difficult to do so because of language barriers and different mentalities she perceived. She found some of the relationships in the garden complicated, not easy to be relaxed about, partly because of her own Whiteness:

> Sometimes I have the feeling that I get pushed into a corner, as White, German, wealthy, privileged person. Sometimes I find it really difficult, to feel as if I didn’t deserve this, or as if it was my fault. I don’t want to face them differently, because they look different or have less money or less opportunity or so, and that’s not what we want here, to make these differences. Right, we want the opposite. But yes, sometimes it’s not that easy to be relaxed about it when those issues can be so sensitive. And sometimes it’s really going on my nerves, this yes, this...mmmmh... how do you say this, not the attitude, but those mentalities. That are so different. They are totally foreign to me, and they get on my nerves, but I think that doesn’t mean that I condemn them, but you know, it’s naturally going on my nerves because it’s not familiar, because I cannot judge it really, and because I would do things differently! [...] Maahir, for example, he was going on my nerves and then I always tried to be nice, and if he had known my language I would have said: “Look, Mister Maier [stereotypical German name]!”, and then with him it was somehow complicated. You know?

Looking at it now, I think the conversations of that day were dense, and somehow proof of how muddy the water can get when culture, language, ethnic background, skin colour, individual personality, value orientations and power relations are all in a bucket. In everyday life, they are. Not often do we have the opportunity to pour out the water and see all these aspects. To me, all of this showed how the garden was a racialised space, with all the cultural and political baggage and the vulnerabilities that this carried. This racialisation needed to be navigated, in big and in small, by Germans and non-Germans, no matter their skin colour.

The conversations were also revealing of many aspects of how people shaped this garden space: all guardians were free to individually do what they pleased in their plots until their practices came to stand in tension with or contradict the garden’s ethos - in return the association exercised control. Where tensions emerged, socio-political categories that otherwise remained more silent in the relational web between people (re)emerged as they were used to explain behaviour. Clara’s and Sandra’s exchange made this apparent: Clara thought people in the garden were potentially treated differently, were protected, because of their ethnicity. Sandra, too, thought that ethnicity and race mattered, as she found it was her White privilege that allowed her to exercise control in this garden. In the focus around ethnicity and race, no other position remained possible for Maahir: In the eyes of others, he was either a fraud, taking advantage of the situation, or a victim, controlled through White supremacy. I wish I had had the opportunity to hear what he himself had thought about the situation.
This reminds me of instrumentalist public discourses describing what *function, role or effect* refugees have or should have in host societies. Heins and Unrau (2018), who examined German public discourse after the arrival of almost one million refugees without visas or documentation in 2015, distinguished four political languages that dominated the debate: the languages of liberal rationalism, anti-liberal realism, Marxist revolutionism and solidarist rationalism. While the first insists on the beneficial effect refugees can have on the local markets as consumers and workers addressing labour shortages, the second places refugees in the position to existentially threaten both State and Nation, with arguments based in fears of the Other. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, left-wing voices embrace this threat, claiming that the existence of refugees shows the misfunctioning of the liberal-capitalist order and that borders should be open. A fourth response stands as the ‘Refugees Welcome’ movement which sees refugees as ‘friends’ and seeks to include them in an act of hospitality.

The construction of negative or deficient identities is accentuated in Inhetveen’s (2010) account of attributions made to the social figure of the refugee in public discourse and media: the refugee is represented as a victim or a benefit cheat, as an illegal person or a person to be politically instrumented, as a capable, self-made person or a concealed war agent looking for a secure base. Filsinger (2017) boils these down to two opposing figures – the same that appeared in the garden that day: the refugee as a victim or a criminal fraud.

If Maahir had crossed a line, I was curious to examine what this line was made of - its texture, pattern and density. A significant ingredient of what it was made of was related to the people-nature subjectivities that existed in this space, which the next section explores.

### 4.3.4 Nature-cultures: interpretations of the space

I became aware that an important aspect was not raised in the discussions around the conflict about the varnish. It was Bake who drew my attention to it, when he exclaimed in one of our early conversations: “This garden is too small!”. Looking to the surprise in my face he repeated eagerly “I’m sorry, but... it’s just too small”. He pointed to the individual allotments “This area over there, for 130 people! And there are flowers!”

Over time, I came to see divergent interpretations of this space. Humans and other species, such as the plants in this garden, were fundamentally interwoven in situated *naturecultures*,

*...in which all the actors become who they are in the dance of relating, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to this encounter. All the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact (Haraway, 2008, p. 25, emphasis in original).*

It mattered that this space was a garden and not an enclosed building. One of the main aspects was that it was not just a ‘garden’, but it was also a ‘field’. The gardening activity was both a practice of food production and of recreational vegetable cultivation. The activity mattered to all garden guardians, and yet the harvest mattered more to some people than to others. The theft and destruction of the harvest clearly was an issue for some while others would shrug it off.

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36 Germany is an interesting example here because the country is perceived to have been among the most ‘welcoming’ within Europe and research has explored responses since 2015.
“I realised a short while ago that I’m not a harvester,” Antoine said to me one day. “I don’t really harvest, it’s not what is most important to me [...] I find it more exciting how the small seed grows and how it’s turning out beautiful.” He added “When it did not work out, I do think aaah shit the voles ate it or it got sick or withered away, it is frustrating. But somehow this is not because I don’t get the harvest but because it has not turned out beautiful.” In another instance, Farah said “Gardening, it’s like a game!”

Antonia had made the same observation as me, that people wanted different things from their plots: “Maahir is focused on the harvest, he considers important that everything is done right, he has an incredible harvest, and on the other side is Farah who is so sweet and just standing there and says how beautifully everything is growing.” The field and the hobby garden perspectives were not two opposite extremes, however, but both subjectivities could be present, even within an individual’s perspective. Antonia situated herself in the middle, stating that “I’m proud when we eat something that I have grown myself, but I think there is also in itself a meaning and such joy in the gardening and looking if something has already stirred.” In the association itself, both perspectives were present: The small plots that were distributed for the majority were used as hobby-gardening, but the harvest from the community area was delivered to the association’s café where people could buy their lunches. There was nevertheless no productivity pressure, which Emma pointed out to me as an important aspect of how the garden was run.

“You’re right, the garden does not really feed people if so many share this space,” I admitted to Bake, “It’s certainly more like a place for free-time activity.” Yes, I’m starting to understand,” he responded. In another instance, he used the comparison of fishing, emphasizing that in his country, it was actually a profession, not just a hobby.

Germany, like Benin, had professional fishermen and farmers (though no doubt their realities may be very different). However, none of the German professional farmers were part of this garden community. This garden was located in a city, and more specifically in an expensive neighbourhood that was mainly White and middle-class. What constituted the hierarchy between the hobby gardener and the farmer? It appeared to me that the most significant marker that was produced relationally in this context was social class. Class and privilege worked in this space just as much as race or Whiteness. Intersectional approaches attest that no identity category works in isolation (Case, 2017a, 2017b; Fathi, 2017; Harris, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2007) – the classed subjectivities of the space were also influenced by sex, gender, race, age, physical (dis)ability and migration experience. As an example, social class continued to work within migration biographies in complex ways. I noticed that the Afghan man Jazeb talked dismissively about Maahir; he did not seem to be part of the small Afghan community within the garden, and my interpretation was that he, as the farmer in their view, did not hold equal social status. I became aware of this when they said to me that they appreciated the garden, but added, jokingly, that now they just needed someone “to come and do the work for them”. As they had told me they had owned a vast area of land in Afghanistan, one possible interpretation of this comment was that they had also had their own gardening staff. Of course, social status could change drastically in the process of becoming an asylum seeker, when people had to face the reality that their education and professional experience was worth nothing in the receiving country (Morrice, 2014), and Leon, one of the German gardeners, told me about how he had experienced that the refugee men he had met drastically saw their status reduced as they were no longer able to generate income, for themselves and their families.

It was Leon who, too, directed my attention to divergent interpretations of the garden, the soil, the plants. In our first encounter, when I told him about my research, he commented:
There are many things to learn here. The relationships between people and environments are different, that's something you notice quickly. The nature connection that Germans may have here - it's different for the people from Afghanistan. They would use the soil, but think it is weird that I would let my daughter play on the soil like I do.

I had noticed how he let his daughter, who was not yet able to walk, crawl around when he worked in his plot, without much surveillance. His observation was echoed by Antonia who had in the beginnings of the garden shared a plot with a Syrian family who did not want her children to get her hands dirty in the soil. Leon speculated that social status played a role in people-nature relations: Often people, especially if they had experienced plunging socio-financial status in Germany (Morrice, 2014), did not necessarily think that digging in the soil with their hands was a suitable task for them, especially some women who would think of the gardening tasks as men’s work.

Leon had through his engagements in the refugee welcome movement in 2015 become close friends with two refugee men and reflected on these friendships marked by alterity and power imbalance in the recorded conversation we shared. He told me about his Syrian friend who had been part of this garden for a long time but only came on rare occasions now as he now lived further away:

He never had an interest to take the fruit. He was practically given everything at the food bank, there was an abundance as far as food was concerned, and I think that feeling that this is your own salad, if I may say it trivially, was not so important. I can understand this, it’s part of our esoteric socialisation, or maybe this is put too negatively, I love my salad, but he’s simply more pragmatic about this.

Leon elaborated that instead, what mattered to his friend was that this was a space where they could meet up. “He helps me with his hands,” he said to me, “but we have entirely different aspirations though they both get met - this is the good thing. If you tell him to take a zucchini with him, he will do it now, but his interest in the garden, in the products, is still not really there. [...] Why should he get on his knees in front of the salad, when other things matter to him!”

Moving a little away from the garden, Leon also narrated how he and his other friend who was Afghan had at some point gone hiking in the region together. His friend had been irritated by the fact that people lived in lone houses close to the forest as he would think this was a dangerous location because of the animals, like wolves. This reminded me of Pitkänen, K., Hellgren, D. et al.’s (2017) report about “nature-based integration” which states: “In Sweden lot of people use nature for recreation and relaxation. In some parts of the world nature means snipers, grenades, poisonous plants and venomous animals, and perhaps a place where you throw the garbage” (p. 71).

What did these divergent perspectives mean for a garden in which ecological gardening was practiced as a sustainable way of life? Maahir had crossed a line, and this line had been defined by an ideal of sustainability. While people most of the time did conform to the practice of ecological gardening as they were taught to (as another example, Miriam explained to me that people did no longer place nappies and other plastic in the compost since they had put up pictorial signs), this did not imply that the sustainability agenda, and in fact the conceptualisation of live matter such as soil, plants, and poison, was shared by all, in the diversity and alterity of perspectives (Salazar et al., 2020).

Another instance that made this clear was the practice around watering. On hot summer days, water became a rare resource, and with this a source of conflict in this garden. The water level of the small...
stream that flowed along the garden’s side, just next to the walker’s path, fell drastically as temperatures hit nearly 40° Celsius on some days. The garden community was advised not to use the water from the stream in this period to not aggravate the water shortages of the stream. Of course, the lack of rainfall meant that many of the plants in the garden needed the water most during this period. The association held a workshop about the reduction of water use (on an action day), in contrast the Afghan couple Rahmat told me that the easy solution in times of drought would be to install a water hose, while no running water was available in the surroundings.

Again, as we consider spaces that people are invited to (Cornwall, 2008), this sparks the question whether people are also invited into a world of ideas and practices around notions of sustainability. Do people get to shape what sustainability ideals are followed, are these up for debate? Is sustainability part of the self-defined problems that more marginalised people set for themselves, is it part of their felt needs (Bhattacharyya, 2004)? Of course, this is not to question the urgent need for a sustainability agenda which demands nothing less than a societal transformation (IPCC, 2022). Instead, we need to critically ask ourselves how inclusive Western sustainability practices are, when the socio-ecological transformation need is of great urgency and prior importance to any living being on this planet, but especially to those with less means to protect themselves against the storms (quite literally) that spring from ecological destruction and human-made climate change.

The organic gardening ideal was part of the “staging otherwise” of people-plant relationships, it was part of an opposition to non-sustainable social practices which Myers (2019) refers to when she asks “And how, in a time of massive ecological destruction, are people renegotiating their relationships with plants? How are people designing gardens to stage plant-people relations otherwise?” (p. 116) One of the questions then is how these people-plant relationships can be fostered to include all people in a given locality so that this practice can be even more impactful and move beyond the garden’s boundaries, as is hoped for the cosmopolitan ideal (see 4.2).

4.3.5 Discussion: landscapes of difference and (in)equality

Clearly, there were various priorities and needs among the people who were making use of the garden. The distinction between individual allotments and community area, the fences, the varnish – all of these materialities formed part of the multiple people-nature entanglements that were alive in this space, and they also formed the landscape as a site where difference and social (in)equalities were constantly (re)produced.

The association’s mission was to create a participatory, open-to-all space where organic gardening was practiced as part of a sustainable lifestyle. This space enabled the emergence of a cosmopolitan spirit, yet the mission was not without its limits and conditions. The garden’s policies, developed to foster inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds, paradoxically also worked to relationally (re)establish the opposite in some instances: they perpetuated existing inequalities as the ethos and workings of the garden had been determined without the wider participation of more marginalised garden guardians. Following Young (1990, 2011), the garden thereby had its own assimilationist tendencies, as “assimilation always implies coming into the game after it is already begun, after the rules and standards have already been set, and having to prove oneself according to those rules and standards” (Young, 1990, 2011, p. 164).

Young (1990, 2011) argues that when privileged groups define standards, these standards are not recognized as culturally bound and specific, but as universally valid. Thinking with Bourdieus’ habitus, these standards remain unquestioned but define the bounds and workings of and within social milieus:
Individuals are born into a particular habitus and will inherit ways of thinking, attitudes and values; they will acquire the cultural and social capital necessary and appropriate to move and exist within their particular social milieu. All the time an individual exists within a social world of which they are a product, they do not feel or notice the tacit rules, norms and traditions which govern activity. Instead, life is experienced in a taken for granted or unthinking way (Morrice, 2014, p. 154).

The presumed neutrality veils the structural differences between more oppressed and dominant groups, and the disadvantages of oppressed groups are perpetuated as they are measured against dominant norms (Ahmed, 2004; Goodman, 2011; Gümüşay, 2020; Young, 1990, 2011).

When part of the garden’s “target group” did not join community events, built fences, or broke rules of organic gardening, social behaviour rubbed against the set standards grounded in moral ambitions and values, and created friction. In the conflictual friction, for example in the irritation that the fences engendered, a subtle boundary emerged between the fence-builders and the no-fence advocates. In the case of the varnish, a boundary emerged between the organic gardening advocates and, in this case an individual, who held primarily his harvest in mind. Collectives were formed not to include all garden guardians, but around what determined the predominant social habits and mores. In the irritation that emerged, emotions formed a significant part of these relational processes, as feelings about others (Ahmed, 2004). As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions are not inside getting out or outside getting in, but they work to create the very distinction between inside and outside – they create “the skin of the collective” (p. 30).

In these boundary events, this person, or the fence builders, or the people who did not join shared community practice, were subtly positioned as liminal. In the frictions that (re)positioned people as liminal, categories of “the foreigner”, “the refugee”, “the ethnic other”, “the Afghan/Syrian” re-emerged at the surface as they were used to explain or guide behaviour. Gümüşay (2020) convincingly lays out from her own experience as a Muslim, Turkish and German woman wearing a headscarf how individuals and groups that (re)establish the social norm also establish how problems are framed (Gümüşay, 2020; Moncrieffe, 2013). In these debates, marginalised people are not complex individuals and free speakers, they are treated as representatives of the social group and as a result their words are perceived in this context only. The group in itself is homogenised and has one single story to tell (Adichie, 2009). As a result, being a multifaceted individual, with a complex self, becomes a privilege, only accessible to people who correspond with what is constructed as “the norm”. With this privilege comes a taken for granted sense of entitlement, a social position of power from which one can denigrate others even accidentally, without great awareness (Goodman, 2011).

Differences are always relative and processual (Ahmed, 2004; Anthias, 2011). Archer (2004) calls out for a non-binary way of conceiving difference, for an and/both approach (Bradley, 2003) rather than either/or. Differences are therefore both fluid and enduring, both shifting and patterned, both discursive and embodied, both constructed and structurally produced, both active and imposed, both partial and lived as real (Archer, 2004). Difference itself may be benign, but it comes to matter when it provides legitimacy within processes of subordination, forming the basis for structural inequalities grounded in classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia or other supremacist ideologies (Case, 2017b).

We need to stay alert to what kind of difference is produced and how the situated and embodied relationalities may capture people as primitive and immobile figures through the constant accentuation of a facet of their identity. This means to “follow around” the lines of racialisation that
are drawn around people and which bound them, fixate them, enchain them (for compelling accounts of these mechanisms, see Archer (2001), (Hughes, 2012), Riga et al. (2021)). The complexities of the self and every person’s right to opacity (Riga et al., 2021) is what we need to take good care of. The inherent unknowability of another (Riga et al., 2021) may be a good starting point to accept that difference is part of any social relationship.

In their analysis of playground boundaries, Pitsikali and Parnell (2020) identify four features of childhood fences: their indeterminacy, climbability, playability and porosity. If fences, metaphorically speaking, could be the bounds in which people get caught, it would be useful to conceive of them in this way: as open-ended, there to be climbed for better views, that individuals and groups may play with to change their positioning, and permeable, subject to influence by the socio-material surroundings. If ethnic background, or the refugee-identity, were treated as fences rather than as walls, people could move around more freely.

What I think was overlooked in the frictions was the presence of differing people-nature subjectivities in the garden. When behaviour was interpreted, the framing was set around ethnicity and/or nationality, not around difference in how the space was perceived. The relationship with plants, soils and animals formed part of the standards that were set and established the bounds of what was acceptable, and it also formed part of the aspirations and needs that sometimes challenged the standards. The divergent nature-cultures in this space shaped people’s practices, and the people-nature relations were influenced by class, age, sex, gender, (dis)ability and race. Creswell points out that within these moral geographies, “certain people, things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscapes and not in others.” We need to acknowledge the interwovenness of geographical locations such as place, space, territory or landscape with the sociological locations of identity affiliations. If people-nature relationalities, as part of the social habitus of the majority, are understood as neutral, dominating aspects may be veiled. The organic gardening practice also contained aspects of eco-spirituality and commitment to “place” that can be grounded in, or easily relatable to, xenophobic and racist ideology (Cutting, 2016; Garrard, 2010). As I have argued elsewhere (Paulus, 2016), sustainability should be conceived pluralistically and ideals of “place” need to be critically interrogated. As Creswell (2005) aptly puts it: “Central is also the role of the non-compliant in disturbing these taken-for-granted relationships and opening them up to question. The constitution of what counts as moral is infused with geographical imagination and shot through with ideology” (p. 128).

Staying with a pluralist ideal, what follows is that exchange of ideas and communication about alterity in social practice is vital. The frictions matter. Their energy enables critical reflection, to explore and question the limits of the principles that social practice is grounded in and that it (re)produces. In this garden, this questioning happened individually and in informal conversation. Ideally, this critical reflection is also part of a collective process, organised in a way that involves the people for whom a space is conceived. Decisions about the depth and the breadth of participation need to be made with a conscious mind, and the significance of self-mobilisation should not be underestimated (Cornwall, 2008). This complexity around participation points clearly to the limits of representation: what is imagined to be “best” for people may still remain marked by elitism and elitist ideas of community. I agree with Anthias (2011) that if equal participation is to be fostered:

A starting point may be found in a move away from the idea of one dominant culture that sets out the frame of reference, and which sees the issue as a question of tolerance towards other cultures (p. 208).
In conclusion, the moral ambitions, bound by the social habitus of a group of people, both enabled and inhibited participation in the garden. People shaped the space as much as the ethos allowed them to, and with their practices such as the fence-building they also called it into question. Where the space was less “coined” by the mainstream culture, hierarchies between more privileged and marginalised groups were flattened and people could self-mobilise in accord with their needs - as long as the red lines of tolerance were not crossed. Where lines were crossed, power-laden hierarchies reappeared as salient, bounds became rigid, and control was exercised. As such, the shaping of the space was an ever-ongoing, dynamic and delicate dance.
4.4 Growing roots: the making of homes

In this final findings chapter, I write about my observations of people’s homemaking in this space. I let the stories I heard from people in the garden speak to feminist, diasporic and queer discourses about homemaking to better understand the quiet politics that form part of people’s everyday productions of home. I also inquire into what the plants mean to people, as they are growing and preparing food from countries they have strong cultural ties with, and involve others in these cultural connections.

I find that all people in the garden are engaged in their unique ways of creating their homes, of establishing continuity in their biographies. People in diaspora specifically (re)create familiarity through a politics of presence and the expression of their yearnings for home. The shared joy of making and watching life grow, as the plants mirror and speak in their own language about vital continuity, is what connects the gardeners in this space.

I conclude that through these stories, we get to see what inclusion really is about: to be included means to be seen as a complex, multifaceted person, in appreciation of one’s cultural ties, and to be able to connect with others, inside and across intersecting cultural belongings. To be included means to find a home in a space that allows for a person to be, to breathe, and to exchange thoughts and feelings with others in a climate of recognition and respect.

Caring for the plants: mulching with sheep’s wool (September 2020) © author’s photograph
**Home**

They say oh, you’re going home  
And I say No, I’m leaving home  
I’m not returning anywhere  
This place will bring new beginnings

And they don’t understand:  
But this is where you come from?  
This is where your language is spoken?  
This is where you were born and raised?

And I whisper how come you don’t see  
The home I have built in this place  
Of moving clouds and dripping rain  
How my eyes recognise this light  
And my ears know the seabird’s cry  
And how the language flows  
In and out of my thoughts  
As if it naturally belonged

And they say don’t you worry,  
The door remains open  
But quietly, I lose a home  
And the question haunts me again  
Of what person I will become  
Without the weight of its walls
4.4.1 Homemaking, food and reciprocity

The garden offered the garden guardians agency as they could choose what to grow, and the growing of food from places that had once been their homes was very meaningful to them. I learned about different aspects of why this was the case. On one hand, the cultivation of food was part of the yearning for a place that a person had lost through their migration, sometimes without the possibility to return. On the other hand, the practice offered continuity in people's biographies, as the growing and preparation of food implied continued cultural manifestation. Ties with other countries, and the related cultural practices, were fostered and expressed.

The chilli plot

Their plot was known as “the chilli plot” in the garden. It belonged to an Afghan family who cultivated decent amounts of chilli plants with passion each season, alongside some other vegetables. They had one of the larger plots, right by the back entrance. “These guys know what they’re doing”, Miriam, one of the association staff and a garden professional, had told me in summer. We had been standing by the plot, admiringly peeking over the fence, a neat and steady construction with a beautiful door, with plants climbing up.

Not long after my conversation with Miriam, I met one of the garden guardians busy working away in the plot: a teenage boy. I walked over to say hello. “Your allotment looks great,” I said, “beautiful chilli plants”. He looked at me attentively. “They’ll come out in several colours, maybe you saw them last year”, he told me in perfect German. I had not yet, unfortunately, as this was my first season in the garden. I asked if he was the one tending them. “No, I’m doing an apprenticeship. It’s my Dad. I’m waiting for him now.” “Oh good. Is the plot for the whole family?” “Yes, it is!” I learned they were six people. “It’s nice to have the vegetables fresh” he commented, and I agreed.

In autumn, I met his parents, the couple “Rahmat”. The two of them were in the plot, a plastic bag full of small peppers, chillis and some tomatoes was sitting on the ground. A great harvest. I commented on the chilli again, how colourful, now I could see it myself! “You want?” said the woman. “No, no, it’s yours,” I said, a little worried I had made it sound as if I was expecting a gift, she did not insist. I asked them if they would like to join me for a conversation about the garden, they smiled and nodded, then returned to their harvest. I realised we were not able to communicate. “Farsi?” I asked. “Yes, Farsi,” they looked at me again and smiled. The woman came to the fence to look at the information sheet I was holding out to her. She read, spoke to her husband, then nodded. I told her we could speak in Farsi, with an interpreter, Farah. They did not seem to know her. “Several people?” she asked me. “Maybe just me, you, and Farah”, I held up four fingers, “because of COVID.” She nodded. “When do you have time?” “With the interpreter,” she insisted, “We don’t speak much German”. I told them I would be in touch.

It was a warm and friendly conversation when we met again a couple of days later. Jazeb laughed openly from time to time, and they both engaged in the conversation. Unknowingly, I had created contact between Farah and them, and they seemed to appreciate the exchange. They thought the garden was a nice place where you could get in contact with different people, and they enjoyed gardening. They liked to cultivate the tomatoes, chilli and herbs - it helped them economically and they appreciated the fresh, healthy food (see 4.3.1). The biggest problem, they repeated, was the voles. The fact that they would come from below and eat everything was a real worry. Jazeb, again jokingly, said that everyone was really nice and friendly in this garden, apart from the voles. He hoped that they would be listening to us now, and they would go away.
They told me they did not have too much experience with gardening work, but I learned that they had had a large house in Afghanistan, with a big garden where they grew fruit trees, vegetables and herbs. We did not talk about their migration or asylum status in the conversation; it was a topic I would never raise if it was not brought up by the people themselves. Their daily-life struggle within the constraints of the asylum system became obvious, however, when they told me about their difficulties with finding a flat. They were stuck in refugee accommodation where several families lived together. They reported that it was always noisy, and for a long time they had not had their own kitchen. It was difficult in this city, which was among those with the highest rents in the country, to find a flat for six people. They had applied for a three-room flat they had been told that they were too many persons to live there.

As the conversation took its course, I could see why they had referred specifically to the shared kitchen as a problem, where they did not have enough space and calm to prepare food: cooking their traditional meals was of high importance to them. When I asked them for a recipe with chilli, I noticed how Fereshtah started speaking a lot more and her face lit up. “How she’s preparing all these things, that’s great!” Farah uttered, in a short comment about everything she had heard. In some moments, she herself got carried away by the conversation, and would only provide summaries in German. I did not mind but enjoyed the fact that we could sit there together and that I could listen to their conversation in Farsi. “They both enjoy cooking. They make yoghurt themselves. And paneer.” Farah resumed. At some point, Fereshtah enthusiastically showed us pictures from their chilli making at home on her phone. Clearly, the preparation of food was a great joy to her.

The excitement and care about the preparation of meals reminded me of Obeid’s (2013) account of a Palestinian family who emigrated to London and their ways of growing roots in the new location. In particular, the author sheds light on the family’s political project to make Palestine visible in London through the promotion of “national” dishes they offer in a traditional Palestinian café, their family business. Through the creation of this Palestinian space, they also create a sense of familiarity and deploy the food for telling and experiencing Palestine’s story beyond occupation. Quite similarly, my interpretation of the stories I was told was that through the dishes they made from the vegetables, the gardeners also (re)made their homes and asserted their presence. Food preparation and sharing meals with family and friends allowed them to express their cultural ties, to evoke a sense of familiarity, and to feature elements of what they had left behind in the new home. In and through the social activity, they produced their home on an everyday level (Obeid, 2013).

The everyday production of home is an important aspect here. Feminist (Ahmed, 2000; Anthias, 2011; Gedalof, 2003), queer (Fortier, 2003), diaspora and displacement (Obeid, 2013; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011), as well as other critical discourses on homemaking interrogate the notions of home and place in fixity. Ahmed (2000) challenges the concept of a sense of home that is produced once and for a lifetime, and around which an exclusionary border is drawn. Similarly, Obeid (2013) argues we need to rethink celebratory narratives of rootedness. There are links between place and belonging, she recognises, but we need to direct more attention to how the traces of the home(s) that has been left behind might shape the processes of creating a home in a new context. To recognise the makings of home, we may ask, “And what sort of efforts, strategies, and affects are involved in making a home?” (Obeid, 2013, p. 368). As Gedalof (2003) points out in line with Ahmed (2000), the production of home is an ever ongoing, constant process of redefinition, adjustment and negotiation.

37 Obeid pays close attention to the constructedness of “national” dishes, and to the politics of these processes.
Ralph and Staeheli (2011) observe that as individuals move between sameness and difference, they challenge static constructions of home, therefore the experience of homeliness is not subsumable in the conventional contrast between place-based homes (presence of homeliness) and the migration movement (its absence):

Rather than movement from one place to another uprooting or deterritorialising migrants’ identities - as has been intimated - what scholars witness among contemporary migrants is a strengthening and deepening of ties to multiple places. Numerous recent studies, for instance, suggest a general and re-orientation of migrant habitus whereby old- and new-world values are conceptualised together to transform identities, transform homes. (p. 521)

Looking at these discussions of homemaking, I find that the garden was a place that mattered for the growing of food from countries that people had strong ties with (to avoid the term “home country” here) and was also a place that was entangled with the production and transformation of home.

Gifts and weeds

Another ingredient of the homemaking process crystallised in my conversation with the couple Rahmat: how the expression of cultural ties and the creation of a sense of belonging was closely related to social practices of reciprocity, and how this reciprocity again enabled the transcending of imposed identities in the dynamics between ‘the host’ and ‘the guest’ (Flowers & Swan, 2017; Heins & Unrau, 2018; Müller, 2002). Research foregrounds that belonging cannot only be captured in terms of migrants’ feelings of ‘fitting in’, but needs to be seen in connection with how powerful others define who has the legitimacy to belong (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

A lot was shared and exchanged in the garden: smiles, seeds, tools, time, work, childcare, recipes, food and drinks, knowledge, words and stories. “I have two nice recipes for you now”, Farah said to me, translating from what Fereshtah had told her. “You blend red tomatoes, garlic, chilli and coriander, fill it into a glass and put salt in it. You can allow for it to stand for a while or eat it immediately. You can also make it with green tomatoes. Green tomatoes, coriander, chilli, salt and vinegar. Chilli is an important ingredient in both. You allow for it to stand for a week, it’s preserved in a way. It’s a side dish, you can always add it to your meals. Chutney. It’s not cooked so it’s less work. I have to learn to do that myself!” Jazeb suggested they could bring some of the chutney for Farah and myself. They invited us to their place at least twice, asking if we had their number.  

It was not the first and not the last time I witnessed migrant hospitality in this garden; in fact, several people I interviewed invited me to their homes after the conversation. While some people did not follow the logic of reciprocity established by the association, namely joining the action day for shared work, they still established reciprocity in other ways. The garden allowed for this to happen, because people could cultivate their own gifts, and work could always be shared. I also had the impression that it was more common for people from the Afghan community to share work, i.e. work together in plots that were not theirs, than it was for German or European gardeners who, at least from what I could observe, stayed within their ‘territories’ more.

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38 I had not been into any person’s homes recently and did not see myself in the position to accept their invitation; the then-current policy was that only two households were allowed to meet because of COVID-19.
I remember vividly the day I got to meet Abdul, and this was long before our conversation was facilitated by translation. My old friendly neighbour stood at the top of my family’s plot. He made a movement with his hand, palm down and his fingers moving in. I interpreted this as “come come”, but in my gesture repertoire I would have turned my hand the other way around to make the same movement. He pointed at the plant in my plot that I had already identified as a weed, I was not sure what it was, but it grew everywhere, fast and furiously. He gave me his hand, for a short moment I held his bony fingers in mine. The skin was a little rough, but it was a friendly hand I knew. I understood he suggested helping me with the weeds. I pulled on a plant and broke it at the stem at first, clumsily. He moved his hands down to the roots, pulled out a plant to show me the roots – yes, this needed to come out as well. I uttered a couple of words at first but stopped after a while as he would not understand what they meant. We worked silently. He coughed and his breathing was somehow heavy at times, I still found this unsettling in these COVID days. I had to remind myself that I had noticed his cough a long time ago and that he must have had some sort of chronic condition, that the virus was unlikely. His fingers were moving swiftly; after a short while he had already made a small pile of weeds on the top end of our plot, the space between his and ours. The space between. This is where we connected. Where the bamboo from his fence met the grass, where the grass met the soil, we had dug up to embrace the seeds, where the weeds had taken up all the space they could. We had connected before; his smile had always been heart-warming. In my head, he was the friendly grandpa, life’s wisdom in his bones. I felt affection for him even though we had not been able to speak, was always happy when I came to the garden and noticed he was around. But this was the first time we were working together, a different kind of connection. He had come into ‘my space’ where he had not been before.

The sun was hot, it was hitting my head, but I felt the strong need to stay here and continue the work together. At some point, I decided that I needed a sunhat at least and headed to the shed to get one of those commonly available. Back at the plot, I pointed at the hat, the old man smiled and nodded. After having pulled out many plants in the top end, he moved to the bigger part with the vegetable rows. I noticed he was placing his feet between the vegetable rows, he did not use the planks like we would, but he was certainly very mindful about not harming any plants.

At some point he was done and about to leave. I pointed to the salad, suggested giving it to him. He vividly shook his head, held up his hand, to say no, no. We continued to weed a little; at some point I pulled out one of the turnip cabbages, a green one of decent size, I handed it over to him. This time he accepted; he took it with him and headed back to his plot.

I witnessed frequently that people with refugee biographies would offer their vegetables or other gifts: tomatoes, sweets, tea. Antonia, too, commented on this hospitality in one of our conversations; she said it was impressive how much she received, especially after her first son had been born. She had not been sure how to react to this, as no one had accepted anything from her. I had seen that my old friendly neighbour had sometimes waited for her when they both were about to leave. He had made jokes with her son, and she had already commented to me one day that she wished he understood she preferred him giving her son tomatoes instead of candies. You cannot always choose your gifts, can you! “Is he called Habibi?” I asked her, to find out his name. I had never really got it, had only understood that association staff called him Habib. “You know, we communicate in a way where none of us knows what gets through to the other one, really”, Antonia said. “But I understood, well I think it’s rather a nickname then, you know Habibi means “darling” in Arabic. But this is how I approach him now, and he reacts to it.” This was the reciprocity, and in fact intimacy, they had established, two people with very different life-courses.
An important relationship was established in this reciprocity: Müller (2002) explains the practice of subsistence in international community gardens allows for gardeners who came to the country as ‘guests’ to become hosts. The gardens offer enough space to bring along friends, to bring children, and they produce socially appreciated and life-sustaining goods that people can keep for themselves, share, or give away. These gifts carry deep meaning as they transport the reassurance of reciprocity, but they also keep alive connotations from the countries that once were peoples’ homes. To be able to give something means that a person whose economic role has been reduced to the ‘welfare recipient’ is able to move beyond her limited status.

Related to this, Heins and Unrau (2018) who draw on gift theory to explore the relations between refugees and host societies, argue that the integration of migrants is not a two-step process of give and take, but a three-step process of giving, taking and reciprocating. They find that the “small cycles of giving, receiving, and returning”, the kind of exchange I also witnessed in the garden, can contribute to “the restoration of equality and respect in a situation of gross asymmetry between citizens and newcomers” (Heins & Unrau, 2018, 8). I conclude that these instances of sharing and invitations in the garden were quietly political practices of everyday hospitality (Flowers & Swan, 2017). In this hospitality, the identities imposed by the immigration system for instrumental purposes (such as asylum seeker, refugee, family reunion) were transcended and silenced for a moment (Morrice, 2014). The exchange contributed to establishing a person’s right to belong.

4.4.2 Homemaking in displacement: yearning and the politics of presence

The processes of homemaking and reciprocity were certainly not void of power relations. Home is not experienced in the same way by all: a refugee’s feeling of home may differ strongly from that of an elite business traveller’s, an asylum seeker does not experience home in the same way as a tourist (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Homemaking cannot be idealised in feelings of belonging – if our call is to resist flattening the oppressive features that may characterise home when it is understood in terms of an unchanging territorial identity, e.g. in terms of homeland or origin (Fortier, 2003; Obeid, 2013) – then careful, attentive listening needs to be directed to the experience of home within experiences of displacement.

The good and the bad go past

Abdul’s life story was a quiet proof of this. At some point, he accepted to have a conversation with myself and Farah, who interpreted for us, on a chilly day in November. One precious hour during which I was able to speak with him verbally. It was like a window pushed open for a little while, a window into his life. After this conversation, the curtain was closed again, but of course I would not forget the views.

Farah and I arrived before Abdul; she had offered me some sage and rosemary from her plot. Her red woollen hat looked nice on her grey curls. A woollen blue coat, a red patterned oriental-style scarf, warm tights and black legwarmers, as well as solid-looking leather shoes. She told me she had dressed warmly. Abdul arrived, we walked along the path together, I said “thank you for coming” knowing he would not understand, put my hand to my heart. He was wearing a face mask, but pulled it off on the way, opened his pocket to show Farah and me his asthma spray. He was not in a great condition, he said, and his wife had diabetes and was not healthy. I was happy to notice, as we took seats under the dome where I had arranged blankets and pillows to sit on, that there was sufficient distance between each of us – enough social distancing. I offered them tea and cake and they accepted; he explicitly thanked me for my hospitality.
He mainly looked at Farah when he was speaking, then looked down when she translated. Only in some moments, when I addressed him directly, he turned to me with his smile and spoke to me as if I could understand. I notice his eyes were a little cloudy, showing his age as did the wrinkles in his face, a narrow face with a fleeting chin. A very, very friendly looking face. The story intermingled with the smell of sage and rosemary from the little bundle, Farah’s gift, which I had put next to me.

After a difficult life in Afghanistan, where he had experienced both the Soviet-Afghan war and the Islamic Taliban regime which he had fled from, he lived for 35 years in Northeast Iran. He had done various jobs to feed his family, with no support from the Iranian government. His migration to Germany, where he had arrived 6 years ago when the border was momentarily open, involved 50 days of travelling: across Turkey, partly by car, partly on foot, up to 35 km one day. “God saved us,” he said, “the good and the bad go past”, and he told us that at the border to Germany he and his wife had been treated with dignity. He was happy now, had recently moved into a new flat and got support from the social services. However, the difficulties in his new life filtered through as well, via Farah, as he mentioned “when you’re older, it is difficult to learn. In the language classes here in Germany I couldn’t understand, or remember, what had been said.” No surprise, he was over 70. I asked if he was surrounded by people he liked, if there were friends, and this question brought us back to the garden: the people here in this place, they were a good connection, very positive for him. He enjoyed the gardening activity as he didn’t have any work, it was nice to get in touch with people. “You know,” commented Farah, “these are people who like to exchange with others and invite them over. This is what they miss!”

I thanked Farah for her translation. We were both moved, maybe he was too, by his account which was nothing less than a life story even though I had “only” suggested we speak about the community garden. While he had been talking, Jazeb and Nimatullah, two other Afghan men, had come to join us. He must have told them that he was going to be here, talking about his life, as this time it did not seem as if they had come in by coincidence. I offered them tea and cake, but they refused. Jazeb stayed on the side and took a seat there, listened quietly, only in rare moments joined the conversation. Nimatullah did not enter the dome but stayed lingering at its door, listening closely. It was a moment of intimate exchange, and I could see how these people were part of the togetherness he valued, the community he was yearning for, and to some extent I was now, too. I did notice that a couple of moments later, as we stood on the path and looked at the plots, Nimatullah planted a kiss on Abdul’s head. This place and these people were part of the home Abdul was constructing for himself and for his wife in this location, after and together with the other many homes he had built in very hostile conditions. The gifts he offered to the people in this garden community allowed him to move from being cared for to being a carer, which Raphaely and Orbach (2022) see as “vital for recovery” (p. 167) where people have experienced tremendous hardship.

*Iranian cress*

On a day in spring, I witnessed how Abdul, Nimatullah and his wife had a conversation in their mother tongue. After a while, they turned to me and asked the name of a plant in his vegetable bed. Nimatullah’s wife bent down to pull out a stem with leaves. She handed it over to me, then took one for herself, both of us smelled. Fresh, but not distinctive for me. I apologised for not knowing what it was, my knowledge about plants was very limited. She and Abdul exchanged again. He pointed over
to where he had another small plot. The same greens seemed to be growing there. “Irani”, Abdul said, and then “German”, pointing at the cress in our bed.

In June, Farah, too, noticed the cress plants in our plot and asked me what plant it was. She was so perfectly dressed in a dark blue dress that the green garden gloves looked almost out of place; yet they revealed that she had come to get some work done. She told me that there was a type of cress in Iran which looked a little like rocket, very tasty, but which you could not easily get in Germany. Her neighbour, who I figured out was Abdul, had some of the cress in his plot.

“I asked him if I could get a plant, only one”, she said to me, imitating a begging noise. “He has said no, you need so many of these.” She had told him that if he had some seeds later, she would love to have some. “I only need two seeds!” she exclaimed. Sometime later that day, I noticed she was speaking with Abdul. Nimatullah and his wife came to join them, and they all had a discussion. At some point the voices seemed agitated; I caught Farah’s eye and asked her what is going on: “Oh, we’re just talking about that cress. I’m trying to convince him, we’re just debating...”

What was it about that cress? My investigation revealed that the origins of the plant lay in Iran; like several of the people in this garden, it had migrated from there. The more I listened to them, when I got glimpses or fuller accounts of their migration trajectories, the more I started to understand how something like a tiny herb – the cress – could be of particular importance.

In my recorded conversation with her, Farah expressed the complicated relationship with ‘her’ country, Iran. She had been in this city since 1986. A long time, 35 years. “I’m a [name of the city’s inhabitants], one could say”, she told me. As I listened to her speak about Iran, I sensed the yearning that still lived in her after all these years, for a country that she had been forced to leave in search of a life beyond repression:

> When I came to Germany, the freedom was the most beautiful thing. I came because of that freedom essentially, not because I wanted to be in a different country. My mindset was that I do my work and then go travelling during the time I have available as holidays. But then it wasn’t like that. Because of the government in Iran, the repression was immense. I always thought I can do this; I was a teacher in Iran. I thought I educate the children in a way so that they don’t collaborate with the government. However, I realised there was no way to educate the government! No chance, you may do this indeed, but you get into a lot a lot of trouble, and fear. No chance. I thought I’d do this, I will succeed. But you perish. The repression is immense, in your private life as well. You cannot live like that. Well, I couldn’t. There are many wonderful people who say they stay; they continue the fight. Educated people. Hats off to them! I didn’t have the force. The fear. No, I don’t want to live there again.

It took her a long time to make that decision to leave, and the incredible difficulty of that decision was tangible as Farah told me,

> You have to give up a lot. Your mum, your friends, the country where you... you know, the smells, the air, the light... People say the light is the same everywhere. It is the same, but the atmosphere... When I go to the mountains there, the atmosphere, the air, the light are entirely different. Here you walk and it's green, few rocks. There it's rocky. It's a different atmosphere.
In the process of adapting to the new environments, she specifically mentioned the significance of Persian food. This again made me aware of the meaning that the Iranian cress could carry, for her and other garden guardians who had migrated from Afghanistan but had spent multiple years in Iran.

You also have to get used to the new place. The food. In the beginning I always had problems. I wanted to taste everything that was there. I always had stomach aches. Then I tried making Persian food. Slowly you start to adapt. Slowly, slowly. When I now hear refugees complain about the food, I fully understand.

Farah’s account touched on something that Peters et al. (2016), who study the role of natural environments in developing a sense of belonging (in this context with German, Polish and Dutch immigrants to the U.S.), found in their research: that the interactions with natural environments in the new homes lead to the developments of new memories, but also spark comparison and nostalgic feelings towards the environments of the homes people have left behind. Related to this, Raphaely and Orbach (2022) observe: “For displaced people in a strange city, there is something revelatory about discovering a familiar plant growing – a small part of home, thought lost, now recovered” (p. 164).

Farah had migrated to Germany many years ago and was fully established in this city, and she did not attribute much importance to a great harvest. And yet, her strong interest in Iranian cress and our conversation about Iran made me aware that a particular green in this garden could be related to a green from another home once lost, a green from the past, a grain of memory. The Iranian cress in this garden was part of the motions of journeying between homes, as Fortier (2003) aptly describes:

*It [home] is lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motions of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of ‘moving on’ or ‘going back’, the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/might have been. But ‘home’ is also remembered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to make home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way. Remembering home, then, is the physical and emotional work of creating ‘home’ [...] (pp. 130-131).*

*When I’m sad I come here and play*

The work of homemaking was not only tangible in the gardening practice, but the garden also performed as a social space where people felt they belonged and could express their cultural ties in different ways. Sidar was known for expressing his feelings through his music – I had heard about him before I met him – his musical pieces had become a recognised feature of this garden.

One day, I stopped my gardening work with the Brussels sprout as music in my ears had made me curious. I walked over to the other side of the garden. He was sitting there at his plot near the main entrance, playing. I stood on the small path, close to his allotment’s fence, and hesitated: was it too intrusive to stand here and listen? He did not seem to have noticed me, kept looking down at his instrument. His eyes were resting on his fingers, almost closed. His face was serious, concentrated, a little as if he was somewhere else. Maybe it was this absence that made me think I should leave him to it, but I could not resist the urge to stay, at least for a little while.
At some point he looked up: “Oh, hadn’t seen you.” He had dark grey hair, his forehead a little bold. I guessed he was in his mid-fifties. He was wearing dark flip flops, shorts, and a grey polo shirt. A thick ring on one of his fingers, which moved swiftly. I complimented him on the music. “When I’m sad I’m coming here to play for a little while and...”, he made a movement with his hand, as if he’s opening up his heart, letting something go. “Oh”, I responded, a little uneasily, and wondered again if he would rather be on his own. He simply started playing again, however, did not seem to mind my presence too much, or maybe he even enjoyed having an audience.

After another song or a little while, it was not entirely possible for me to distinguish different songs in the flow of music, he stopped again: “It’s Kurdish music, not Turkish or Persian, maybe you know it? This is a saz, some call it baglama.” Surprised that he had started a conversation, it took me a short moment to realise he was explaining his instrument to me. I noticed his emphasis on the Kurdish, not Turkish or Persian. “It’s got five or seven strings, but you can start with three. Seven is advanced, you need a teacher for it.” I was half-guessing in the dusk - did his saz have five or seven strings? – and concluded he was rather advanced. It was a beautiful instrument, with a round body, not flattened at the back like a guitar, and a little smaller, with a long and narrow neck.

While he was playing, I had a look around. Sunflowers on one side of his plot, tomatoes under a wooden roof on the other. From what I could see, he was mainly cultivating tomatoes. I peered up. Yellow small clouds against grey blue evening sky. I took a closer look at his fence: vertical bamboo sticks along a horizontal bamboo line. Every intersection was thoroughly tied together and fixed with thin blue yarn. This must have taken him a decent amount of time to build. Music in my ears. Energetic, fast, sad.

He stopped again and I learned more about how this music was a form of resistance, as it was passed on between people. The music told stories. “You can make a film from several songs,” he said, as the story stretched over a long period of over ten years. It was always about love: a man who fell in love with a woman. “Kurdish people don’t have schools. Not in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, or Syria. There’s no place to learn the history.” Instead, this music was given from older to younger people, it was kept alive this way.

He played three songs that he used to play with friends at a local traditional dance association he was involved with and had a chat with me in the middle. “Wow”, I said, to a song full of long trills. “People would have tears in their eyes for this song,” he commented. He told me passionately about Kurdish weddings, the way people would dress, about the festive dances, the great amounts of meat that were shared, and how important it was to pay larger amounts of money to the couple – otherwise there would be rumours about your poverty.

In a later conversation with him, when I met him on another day, I learned that he had held various jobs in Syria, as a teacher and in the car trade business (“You had to go to where the money was”, he commented), before he had been forced to leave due to the war. He had come to Germany on his own at first, had managed to get his wife and three children across, but his second daughter was still in Iraq. Despite their desperate attempts, they had not been able to reunite, and had to keep trying to get money to her as she moved around between hotels.

He had been wealthy in Syria where he had owned a big area of land, hundreds of square kilometres, which he had tended for more than 20 years. In the end, because of the conflict he had to sell it cheap – “Assad would have given it for no money” - and had to leave everything behind. He told me that in Germany, 1000 Euro were not a great amount, but in Syria it represented a lot of money.
People thought that Germany was paradise, but when they were here in the end, they realised:
Where is paradise? Life in Germany was difficult.

Sidar’s phone rang. He rejected the call and we continued to chat, but he started packing up. He had a black instrument bag for his saz, and it took him some time to get it in. “My name is Sidar,” he said. “Do you have a plot here?” I told him my name. He responded that ZoZán was Kurdish, and that meant: “on mountains, not the top, not the bottom, but in between. On the top the snow melts, at the bottom it melts as well and creates a river, in the middle it stays. This is what it means.” I liked this version of my name. Not the top, not the bottom, but in between. Where the snow would stay and rest. The fact that, again, I was told that my name was common in other languages (as before I had heard it was also an Arabic or Persian name) showed how people were constantly linking the local culture to the culture(s) they considered themselves a part of.

He walked out of his plot, through the door of his fence. His phone rang again as we were about to say goodbye, he rejected the call a second time, “You’re being called,” I commented. “It’s my son, he wants something to eat.” He smiled joyfully. He had a big transparent plastic bag in his hand, filled with tomatoes, and held it up to me. “Would you like some?”

Sidar had presented himself to me as a Syrian person, a Kurdish person, a refugee, a German speaker, a multi-oriented professional, a musician, a father, a fence-builder and a gardener. He had not only presented himself though – he had asserted his place in this garden as the multifaceted person he was, he had claimed his territory. The yearning for Kurdish culture, the sadness he felt, which he expressed through the music, contained an important element: with and through his music the garden became a space where Kurdish culture was practiced as a form of resistance. Through this practice, the Kurdish was established as belonging to this place, as part of this place, and its presence was reaffirmed.

This realisation made me think of Anzalduá’s (2012) book borderlands. What Anzalduá (2012) argues for is the recognition of the multifacetedness, of all aspects of her identity:

So don’t give me your tenets and your laws. Don’t give me your lukewarm gods.
What I want is an accounting with all three cultures - white, Mexican, Indian. (…) And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture - une cultura mestiza - with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (p. 44)

I think this is what Sidar, like other people in the garden, was doing: he was making a new culture, a new home, where all aspects of his person could be alive, and where the garden became “a site for enacting a politics of presence” (Obeid, 2013, p. 378) of Kurdish culture in diaspora.

4.4.3 Constructing a home: the interweaving of biographies

While I have consciously been focusing on refugee experiences in the above, homemaking was a practice that I think all garden guardians were involved with, each in their unique yet relatable ways. In many of the longer, recorded conversations I had with people, the garden was a springboard into accounts about what mattered to them in their lives, and not seldomly the conversations led to places of the past. Several people talked to me about the connection of the gardening activity with experiences they had made in places of their childhood or in later life locales, be it in rural Poland, Cameroon, France, Afghanistan or Iran. These places would take on various colours, shapes and shades as my mind visited them through the stories I listened to.
If homes were continuously remade in this territory, the people that encountered each other here become part of the processes of homemaking. As I spoke to the people in the garden, I came to see how their biographies interweaved in this place to create a colourful pattern, connected by the fact that they all cherished gardening, even if for different reasons. What was shared was that the cultivation practice connected them with positive experiences from the past, and with aspirations they held for the future.

**She had been a farmer.** For many years Mechtild, a German woman who had just retired, had worked on her and her husband’s organic farm and had also raised their children there. They had owned big gardens where they had cultivated for their own nourishment. When the community garden project started, she followed the developments with great interest, as she had also looked for a place where she could garden with her granddaughter. She was convinced that this practice gave the children a basis for their life which would carry them. She also told me how she had developed a passion for a particular plant, a rose from Damascus, which she had already offered to her Syrian neighbour: “They make expensive oil from it, I got it for myself. I have cultivated a couple of exclusivities on my small farmland. It always has to be with me, this rose. When it’s blooming, I feel I have arrived. I feel at home.” In the end of our conversation, she said to me: “I need a piece of soil to feel complete.” It was clear how much her own life was built around food cultivation, and how this garden now formed part of it, as an alternative to the farmland she had owned but given up following her and her husband’s separation.

**They had grown up on a farm.** Antonia and Lena had both had made the experience of farming in their childhood. Lena had grown up on a farm in Poland, Antonia’s parents were German “hobby farmers.” Both women brought their children to the garden and enthusiastically immersed them in gardening. I found that both were engaged in constructing the kind of home they aspired for their children to have.

Lena told me that this year, her children were each allowed to have a small piece of soil to themselves, where they could choose what they wanted to cultivate. She found that through this activity, the children developed a very different relationship with the vegetables than if they just got them from the supermarket. What joy they experienced as they could say “my turnip cabbage”, “my beans”! The harvest was a big thing for them. “They grow with the garden,” Lena said to me, “This is what I wanted for my children as well, this is how I grew up myself.”

Antonia told me that since her parents had a hobby farm and she was used to having a lot of greens around her, something she was missing in the city. She had been pleased to find this space which for her was some kind of “lived utopia” because of how everything was shared in the garden – the material, and the trust needed between people to make this work. The garden was a very important part of her daily life, she had come here every day when she had been pregnant with her son, and it had been her first place to go back to after he had been born. It was a lovely ritual for them both, to come in every day and check if something had already grown. Her son knew his way around in the garden and was aware of how it changed with the seasons. At the time we spoke, he had established his walnut-routine in the garden: he would go look for nuts with his mother and then open them with a specific stone.

**His grandfather had been a beekeeper.** Elias was the beekeeper in this garden where he and his family also held a plot. Throughout the year, he told me patiently and passionately about what the bees needed and what they were doing:
I came to this through my grandfather, he was a beekeeper. I was always with him, always watching. For me it brings calm in such a nice way, to be doing something with the bees. [...] Because you really quickly get feedback about how you are doing. If you are jittery, you immediately get feedback. This is the reason why I’m doing this and not because I am particularly interested in insects. That’s what others always think, I don’t know where that thought comes from. I like the honey, the wax, the scent.

He had been influenced by his past, by what he had learned from his grandfather, and I could see how the beekeeping was part of a wider critical, conscious and activist attitude and practice of his. He was concerned strongly by how unsustainable our social practices were, by the destructive manner in which humans lived on this planet. This aspiration to live more sustainably, a kind of quiet activism, was tangible in conversation with many other garden guardians. Like Elias, they were trying to practice, imagine and endorse a liveable future, and this orientation was an important element in their biographies, in this garden and beyond.

His love for plants had grown in his family. In this garden Antoine could be with the plants, in the safe realm of cosmopolitanism. He had moved to Germany from France over ten years ago. I learned that his grandparents and his father had been passionate about gardening and that he had been trying to find a piece of soil to cultivate wherever he had lived. He told me he was a little obsessed with irises, his favourite type of flowers. If he could, he would have an entire garden full of irises, not just a bed. He read iris catalogues on the toilet at home and confessed that he even had trespassed in other people’s front yards some evening to cut off a small part of their irises so he could plant new varieties. Listening to him, there was no doubt left that he was a real garden enthusiast.

Antoine: I’ve had this passion for a while. If I had 3 billion, dough with no end, I would have one wish, something that is truly material: A giant garden. A tiny house, mini, microscopic, so that you’re able to live in it, and a giant garden. Conversely, I could not care less about a villa, the luxury, and just a small grass area, that’s total bullshit. And when I mean giant, I mean truly giant. Big real trees, like the cedar, that will beautifully continue to grow when I am long dead, I don’t mind. A castle complex. Without the castle. [...]

Me: So, you’re playing the lottery? Or saving money?

Antoine: Neither. That’s why I’m thinking, ooh shit, I will never get that. Or I have to live somewhere in the pampa [wasteland, countryside], where no person lives, where gay people aren’t welcome, I don’t know. This [garden] is the substitute sort of. Then you would get things that you could get if you had a big complex, but most likely you would not get the people who are here.

It was a side comment, but it stuck with me, the fact that he would not be able to live in the countryside as he would feel threatened as a gay person by the conservative, traditional social surroundings. This garden was part of the imagined home that he secretly wished for, an alternative place where he could follow his passion to cultivate, in a socially safe environment.

He had worked in a garden in Iran. After having left Afghanistan at the age of 16, Nimatullah had spent several years of his life in Iran and had been employed in a garden there. He had been fully responsible for a variety of tasks there. He had benefited from the trust of his employer, had been allowed to shape the garden according to his own ideas, and he had been in charge of managing the
budget for the gardening. This garden had been a significant social space for him as well, as his patron had called in the evenings and asked if he would come and bring a couple of people along, and they had barbecues, played together, and had used the swimming pool which he had renovated. It was tangible in our longer conversation, in which Farah translated for us, how much this garden mattered to him, and how much of this garden ideal was part of how he looked at the German garden. He had ideas of how he wanted to shape this space (see 4.3.2) and told me if someone asked him, he would work 24 hours a day in the garden to make it much nicer. This garden clearly was part of the future he aspired to for himself and for his family.

She had come to the garden as a researcher. At the same time, she had seen this as an opportunity to connect herself and her family to a friendly community in this new place that they had just moved to. She needed a new home, and the garden offered her hominess. With no gardening experience, she noticed how as time went on, she always felt the urge to go check on her plot when she got to the garden. She was pleased and relieved to see when the Brussels sprout plants and the turnip cabbages were growing well, and disappointed that the salad was doing badly. It filled her with joy to notice the flowers she had grown from seed bloom in the back, around the young redcurrant bushes.

Gardening mattered to each of the gardeners for personal reasons. What bound them together was that through gardening they continued a thread of their biography, something that they held dear. Yousef had even developed a ritual for this sense of continuity in his biography which involved plants: he planted a tree in every place he had lived: “Like, any place in my life I stayed one month and more I bought a tree. For me, this is a memory, this is my memory. I leave you; I bought a tree. Then when you see the tree grow, oooh, Yousef, thank you. You’ll never forget me!”

The gardeners expressed their life-worlds and subjectivities that formed part of their homemaking practice through the cultivation of vegetables, fruits and herbs. As Sandu (2013) describes, practices based on tradition and memory form part of the (re)negotiation of belonging. Eden Almogi and Fenster (2020) find that the conceptualisation of home as process and practice, as also described here, opens up new analytical perspectives, and conceive of the psycho-geographical home, drawing interdisciplinarily on concepts from psychoanalysis and geography. They observe that home is a multifaceted space that exists as an internal-external dialogue throughout life, in which the childhood home continues to find reflection in the present home, which is what I found in many of the gardener’s stories. Projections in mental homemaking processes may include beneficial elements of home, or aspects where the stability of home has been eroded through life-events. They contain the effort to create a holding environment where unfavourable dimensions of home are compensated, and favourable dimensions are safeguarded in the process of homemaking.

This may point to the fact that the stories people told me show how the lives of all people in the garden were fluid, resting, nesting and moving between places – qualities that are often discussed specifically in the analysis of migrants’ lived worlds. Home was for all people “like an accordion,” both stretching out to distant and remote places, which arguably could be places of the past, or of the aspired-for future, and squeezing “to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 525).

As I see it, the different efforts around homemaking and their related life-worlds converged because the space was shared and contrived, they provided the ground everyone stood on together. The garden was constructed as a shared home that included all the multiple individual and family homes of this particular collectivity.
4.4.4 Organic homes: the joy of making and watching life grow

Part of this connection and the making of a collective home was the shared joy and compassion for watching and making life grow. An entanglement with life, in other words. Most gardeners expressed the excitement and joy that was part of the gardening experience for them, despite the frustrations it contained as well. There was something utterly rewarding in caring for the plants. Gardening was a good activity, many said, for body and mind. I could clearly make out the shared experience of a space and activity that people felt was beneficial for them as it offered them joy, excitement, calm and stress relief. The garden was therefore a breathing space in its truest sense of the word: the plants offered people new life.

Baptiste, who had been quiet throughout most of the recorded conversation that I had with him and his wife Lena, suddenly came to life when we spoke about the cultivation of the plants:

*When you put something in, some seeds, and then it starts to grow, and then aaaaah, it’s almost out, and then after two weeks ooooooh, oh my God, so many leaves already and then, then it’s coming this small… then comes this excitement and in the end aaaaah, finally. And then… yes, this joy […] to check every day, then the watering, look what’s happening, that’s… The occupation with all plants […] it’s not getting as boring as sitting on the terrace where you have nothing to do*, he added, laughing. “I’m always looking, always checking.”

As Baptiste was talking, he acted out the processes a little with his hands, showed how the plants came out of the soil, how they grew… I could sense his excitement. It made me remember having seen him another day, when I had observed several men working away in their plots. Their concentrated looks centred entirely on the plants. The way they had bent down, checked more closely, moved their fingers across the leaves with great diligence, how they had been fully present: fostering, tending, caring.

Mechtild thought that gardening responded to a primeval need people had, that the work with the soil had healing potential. She observed how she herself could release stress in this practice, how she became calmer and more content. This healing potential is explored and demonstrated by Raphaely and Orbach (2022), a group therapist and an artist and community gardener who engage in group-work with refugees and survivors of human rights abuse. They find that a community garden provides the landscape for different kinds of restorative experiences and that, “As the garden grows so do the participants’ confidence, connections and wellbeing” (p. 163). The ritual of working together builds trust and a sense of family can emerge in a group that provides security, where the activity provides a respite from inner distress. They see how the working in a nature space creates connections between the outer and the inner landscapes, as the activity is both physical and metaphorical “Being in nature is inherently mindful, engaging all our senses, reminding us that things change, today is different from yesterday, helping us to stay in the present. In nature the soul can breathe” (Raphaely & Orbach, 2022, p. 163).

The fact that people did this activity together in a shared space (even if each in their own plot on the one side of the garden), and not on their own in an individual allotment, seemed to matter as well. Abdul told me he felt he was in a safe place with the people who were, like him, involved with the gardening:

*So yes, I come here to the garden, I start to grow, I feel like super relaxed to be in the garden, super nice. Also, to create new contact. Also, to learn new things. Also, to cut my nana and to go at home and […] to drink the nana, and to cut my*
salad. And to say, wow, this is my garden, this is like I do it, and this is very special, like... special feeling, special like... I don't know I feel like I'm love with garden. I spend like a few hours in the garden, I come back, and I feel wow, super relaxed, super calm... [...] Also to meet people in the garden, and to speak, and to see the people how they try to grow things, to eat things, healthy things. It’s also something special for me. I appreciate people, they love Erde [soil], they love... I believe we are Erde. All of the people, we are Erde. So... so special for me. So nice. And it creates for me a safe space in this city. Creates for me... hmmm... safe contact. I don't know. I don't know how to explain exactly, but I feel like I'm in a safe place, I'm in a safe locale... like with the right people... People love to be in the garden, to grow, I think they are kind people.

While there were differences, clearly, in how this space was perceived and how the gardening was practiced (see 4.3.4), people across different backgrounds told me they enjoyed being physically active in this way and that they appreciated the involvement with the plants. Elias drew my attention to another significant aspect of this involvement: that this place allowed for people to watch the course of time, the passing of the months.

I like this. This enormous energy, the power that exists when it comes to the growth. It's very diverse. The biodynamic approach works really well. No chemicals or other things are used here, and yet the gardening is really successful.

There was something relieving in watching the repeating cycles, the turning seasons, the changing weather. And there was something utterly hopeful in the way the seeds turned into plants, flowered, grew fruits, and decayed, with no additional ingredients apart from water, light, air and soil. As Raphaely and Orbach (2022) state, “cycles of life, death and rebirth are evident in the sowing, growth, harvesting and dying back which nature provides” (p. 167). This sparked a sense of continuity in the confirmation of both impermanence and stability, in a people-plant relationship without harmful ingredients. Impermanence and stability, the characteristics of organically conceived homes. Additionally, the wider ecosystems enrich the human efforts, as plants self-seed and pop up all around, without even a human hand involved (Raphaely & Orbach, 2022).

Lilly, a gardener in her fifties, thought that the gardening taught one to be humble as one plant may grow well in one season but not the next, for many factors out of human control contribute to its flourishing or decay. She found herself learning with each season and was convinced that deep knowledge on gardening could only be built over the course of years. I liked this way of perceiving the gardening work: that the garden teaches people to try different things each season and to stay flexible in their approach, and how this seasonal, cyclical work may bring them closer to understanding local and global eco-cycles over the course of time. This view almost seemed like an outlook on life more generally.

For Farah, who thought there was something playful about the interaction with the plants, the garden was a place that made you want to stay and return:

You’re one with this place, aren’t you? It is a special place. When I wasn’t feeling well lately [...] I came here and forgot everything. You come here, you’re simply welcome. You’re going to certain places, it’s somehow difficult, you want to get out. When you come here you glue to it. Everything is in such a beautiful flow. Oh, this quince tree! I love quinces! Yesterday one fell off.
These expressions of how the gardening benefited people is consistent with a vast body of research that has found gardening beneficial for a range of physical and mental health outcomes (e.g., Soga, Gaston, & Yamaura, 2017) and psychosocial well-being (Spano et al., 2020). The healing impact of plants has been proven by research on horticultural therapy (Cipriani et al., 2017; Müller, 2002). Research also finds that the therapeutic effects of community gardens may offer support for refugees in particular: people can direct their attention to their potentials and resources in gardening and thereby gain new strength to respond to the multiple burdens of exile. Engagement with plants may help to establish connections and bonds with the new homes and the people that form part of it (Müller, 2002; Peters et al., 2016). Furthermore, feeling useful and having a sense of purpose is important to all people, yet this is denied by the enforced stasis of the asylum system. In this context, Raphaely and Orbach (2022) see how “there is huge satisfaction to be gained from clearing weeds from a piece of land and preparing it for new growth”(p. 168). Gardeners can rediscover an old sense of themselves through tackling of physical tasks. A condition for this is that the garden is relevant to the people who cultivate it, which again is ensured in the selection of plants that are meaningful for the group of people involved (Raphaely & Orbach, 2022).

4.4.5 Discussion: homemaking in the relationships between guest and host

The complexities within practices of homemaking were tangible in this garden: the (re)creation of familiarity through gardening practice and the preparation of traditional meals, the yearning for homes that had to be left behind but formed part of the current home, the politics of presence of people who had to fight for recognition that this locality formed part of their new home: all of these aspects endorse that essentialist origin stories of belonging need to be interrogated (Brah, 1999). In my observation, homemaking was also a practice that was shared by all, no matter what their background. People with refugee and migration backgrounds, as well as people whose life had not been marked by mobility, sought for continuity in their biographies, and for the people in this space the gardening practice was an important element in this stability.

Experiencing the continuous ecological process that the garden offered people was a significant aspect in their homemaking practices. The garden and the plants mirrored the continuity that people sought to create in the course of their biographies; they echoed that homemaking was an ongoing, everyday production. Cultivation of the plants mattered to all gardeners as it sparked their senses and generated feelings of belonging for them in different ways, as they expressed their cultural ties. This belonging was enabled by the plant life, and by the cultural meanings that plants and food carry. The plants brought them (and their stories) to life as they brought the plants to life. This display of the cycles of life in the garden meant that the garden was a living environment for all, where people and plants could breathe, change, and become renewed.

A significant aspect of the homemaking was the related cycles of hospitality, the ways in which reciprocity was culturally expressed in social encounters. These draw our attention to the immobility or, in contrast, shifting of roles of the host and of the guest in the processes of homemaking. Rozakou (2016) analyses how in the course of the ‘European refugee crisis’ in 2015, which was also the impetus for this garden being created (see 4.1), the “socialities of solidarity” which are productive of lateral relationships between refugees and residents got threatened by what she calls “the collapse of the gift taboo” (p. 185). What she refers to, here in the Greek context, is that through the stream of material aid sent to the Greek islands from all over the world, refugees were again constructed as ‘needy’ figures, the classic portrayal within humanitarianism. This implied that the hierarchy inherent in the process of gift-giving was re-established. Hospitality, she reckons, is a “deeply hierarchical form of inclusion” (Rozakou, 2016, p. 188):
In recent decades, immigrants and refugees seem to fit ideally the hospitality scheme in the sense that it manifests their deeply hierarchical and conditional social incorporation. Nevertheless, contrary to their structural exclusion, liminal legal status, and invisibility, the sphere of informal daily interaction becomes the locus where their social existence is acknowledged (Rozakou, 2016, pp. 188–189).

She finds that the emphasis was turned away from egalitarian prospects of sociality, taking shape as a sociality that sought to incorporate refugees, to the emphasis on non-reflective, short-term help in the form of provision of goods and help for survival.

The garden, on one hand, reproduced these unequal relationships between the receiving host and the ‘newcomer’ guest, as refugees were invited to this space which was controlled by the association (see 4.3). On the other hand, in line with what Rozakou (2016) indicates, this informal, civic space was also one that supported the recognition of their social existence. The agency that the space brought to life meant that these sedimented relations of power got perturbed; people with refugee biographies also became hosts as they offered their own gifts in form of shared work, recipes, or food.

In my observation, the practice of homemaking produced a form of relational solidarity in the garden. “Solidarity seeks to overcome the limitations and the perils deriving from one-way offers,” Rozakou (2016, p. 190) writes. Allen (1999) defines relational solidarity as “a kind of power that arises when we make commitments to one another and act in concert” (p. 114). While relational solidarity is often conceived as part of a social mobilisation where people come together to confront and change what is unacceptable (Bellino & Loucky, 2017), I think the relational solidarity in this garden was of a different kind. Although many of this garden’s moral geographies were grounded in ideals of social inclusivity and ecological sustainability (see 4.3), these were not necessarily aims shared and understood by all, and not the aims around which relational solidarity orbited. Instead, it formed quietly, in a related but different social process: in the practice of the homemaking that everyone in the garden was involved with in their own way, and through which people (co)created the space. Within these processes, different kinds of reciprocities both became possible and were enacted. Even though not rebellious, this practice still encompassed a dimension of social change, a generative kind of critique (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016) that held the potential to change the persons involved as they engaged with social change:

> an active relational solidarity of this kind goes beyond individuals entering into relationships; instead, individuals are understood as being, in part, made through such solidarities (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016, pp. 18–19).

Relational solidarity is in itself an emerging power that (if not based on a pre-assumed exclusive identity) embraces difference, sometimes incommensurability, and allows for an intersectional perspective (Allen, 1999; McKenzie & Bieler, 2016). Conceived in this way, I found relational solidarity in the encountering of people and the diversity of ways they (re)made their homes.

In my view, the practice of homemaking that is shared by all can be a springboard to exchange and dialogue, in a space marked by diversity with regard to various social affiliations: ethnicity, socio-cultural background, sex, gender, age, religious orientation, social (financial) status, refugee experience and more. The reciprocity within homemaking has a lot of potential for commensality. It focuses our attention to what is shared and what is different, but the starting point lies in a shared human activity and not in identity politics. Homemaking matters to people, and therewith we can encounter each other based on something that individuals really care about, not something that has
been projected onto ‘the other’. When we think of this space as a space of encounter where all people are equally engaged in the practice of homemaking, what could arise is the interest not in how people are different with regard to their ethnicity or nationality, but in what home means to people. We can learn more about each other’s strategies of and efforts at home production. Then, in a garden space, we may ask: How are nature relations intertwined within these practices? And in what ways are these practices sustainable, how do they express (or thwart) care for people and planet?

Hospitality, as part of the homemaking, should be established as a right rather than a favour, and “strangers” need to be treated as guests rather than aliens or enemies (Agier, 2021). Archer (2004) suggests that Brah (1999) provides us with an adequate terminology, using terms from Urdu, spoken on the South Asian subcontinent. In Urdu,

An ‘ajnabi’ is a stranger; a newcomer whom one does not yet know but who holds the promise of friendship, love, intimacy. The ‘ajnabi’ may have different ways of doing things but is not alien. She could be(come) ‘apna’; that is, ‘one of our own’ (Brah, 1999, pp. 20–21).

If we encountered people curious about this promise of intimacy that is part of each encounter, we could foster those kinds of relationship that can account for both sameness and difference. We could invite people to become part of our homemaking and enjoy their hospitality in return. What these practices of homemaking showed me, then, was that not everyone has to fit into the dominant culture. I understood from a number of interactions that people here were striving for recognition of and respect for their cultural ties: they wanted to be seen and heard, they wanted to maintain their culture which they manifested in small ways. Furthermore, people were looking for connection, closeness and intimacy as they found different ways of establishing reciprocity. In instances where this was possible, where people could express themselves culturally and could find connection, the garden held people in its embrace. These were moments where isolation, criminalisation and foreign otherness were transgressed. My conclusion is that this is what inclusion (or integration, depending on the conceptual focus) really looks like in a civic space where human relationships remain complicated, but where people are trying their best to see and hold each other. Possibly this is best achieved when the general aim of the interaction becomes the creation of lateral relationships (Rozakou, 2016).
5. Conclusion: The moral geographies of a “refugees welcome” community garden

“No perspective is without its horizon,” Leon and I concluded in one of our conversations, as we spoke about cultural differences. This acknowledgement seems important, even (or maybe especially) when looking to this community garden which I found overgrown by a welcoming spirit, open-mindedness in encounters with difference, and kindness. The cosmopolitan spirit that was co-created by people and by the ways they staged their relationships with plants came with its own set of expectations and quiet rules. The welcoming, open space could be portrayed as neutral, but it was filled with expectations and ideas about where and how people were supposed to act and relate in this space. People navigated this space as much as they shaped it, and power relations influenced to what extent people simply navigated or could take ownership of it.

I found that this garden, which shares characteristics with E. Anderson’s (2011) cosmopolitan canopies, attracted people with migration biographies and those interested in international encounters. It worked as a space of retreat and comfort for people who experience hostilities based on their ethnicity, race or refugee status in the wider society. The plants that people decided to grow in this garden, and through which they staged their nature-people relationships, played a significant part in the expression of cosmopolitan ideals: they displayed the multiple belongings of people, not restricted to the local surroundings but spreading between different places across the globe, and supported dialogue between people that shared little if any common language.

Nevertheless, the garden was a space that people were invited to, and this is the basis of the ‘welcome’: the dynamics between the host and the guest were at complex play. This is maybe what distinguishes a cosmopolitan canopy that develops organically within a city, and over the course of time. When E. Anderson is asked in an interview how such beautiful canopies can be created, he responds with caution: those spaces have grown over time (Saffy, 2013). As I understand this now, he is aware of the challenge to equality that an invited space may inherently pose, if we understand hospitality as deeply hierarchical per se, where one “has the power to invite” and the other lacks it. Yet, as this garden space showed, while these inequalities were reproduced, they were also perturbed and transgressed.

In instances and relationalities where the space was less coined by a particular social habitus, people with refugee biographies expressed their multiple belongings and enacted a “politics of presence” (Obeid, 2013). Instances where their behaviours rubbed against the garden’s wider ethos created tensions, and in these conflict-laden patterns unequal relationships came to the surface. People that were generally recognised members of the garden community were recast as “out of place”, not belonging. This shows that the space also remained racialised, which was tangible in the crossing of invisible lines of what was thought of as “acceptable” by more established people. The building of fences, for example, was ‘odd’ behaviour in a context of an open-for-all community garden, and yet it responded to a need. With their ‘odd’ behaviour, people tested their ontological equality (in Rancièrian terms); they dismantled the structural wrongs of the garden, thereby creating another kind of worlding.

In general, the canopy took people in its embrace as they were able to express themselves as complex, multifaceted individuals, which silenced imposed identities. They claimed their space in this location, which in many instances was also recognised in practices of reciprocity. Where people had the opportunity to actively remake their homes, the hierarchy between host and guest was subverted. Lateral relationships could emerge as the roles shifted. The processes of (re)making
homes, which all people in this garden community are engaged with, were common grounds where what matters to people could be expressed, shared, brought into dialogue. People in diaspora specifically (re)create familiarity through a politics of presence (Obeid, 2013) and the expression of their yearnings for home.

Understandings of the more-than-human, of ‘nature’ and ‘garden’, formed an integral part of the above-described relationalities and power dynamics. They co-produced inequalities as they intersected with social identities such as class, race, ethnicity or gender. As an example, the ‘traditional’ farmer was not on equal level with the hobby gardener in this space. The fact that this space was a garden and not a community centre, also carried great significance, however. The plants, soils and seeds, in their own vitality, facilitated the encountering of diverse and different, yet related worlds. Through the human-plant relationships, people could see and experience each other’s cultural ties, and these ties were kept alive and fostered through the tending of plants. Furthermore, the ecological cycles that people experienced and were entangled with in the garden, connected them in a sense of continuity of life. The shared joy of making and watching life grow, as the plants mirrored and spoke in their own language about vital continuity, was what connected the gardeners in this space.

Looking to these complex social dynamics of the space, we may ask: where to from here? What are the seeds we can take away from this, if we want to cultivate worlds of lateral relationships, and how can we bring them to flourish? In the following, I derive implications for policy and practice.

*Cultivating the joy of cultural expression*

Cultural expression is best enabled when a space is not dominated by the modes of expression of a particular group, especially if that group holds the power of being ‘in charge’. Dialogue can be seeded and fostered if people are provided with the opportunity to shape the space rather than made to navigate it. A focus could be to identify (lingual, structural, personal…) barriers to this happening. Related to this, it seems important to recognise that people do not need to express themselves in the same ways, in the same locations or formats. Different motivations may lead to different practices within a space. If we respect people’s opacity, we do not necessarily need to understand all aspects of their doings. If practices are conflicting with our own, this may be an opportunity to call into question taken-for-granted assumptions and value systems that otherwise remain invisible to us. We should accept that people do not have to adapt to what those in charge have prepared for them, but rather see their own ways of continuous adaptation to new environments. This refers to the importance of self-created spaces in participation (Cornwall, 2008). Self-created spaces are ones that long-established people may at some point be invited to and be allowed to participate in.

A premise of such an open approach to participation is the recognition of the possibility (and in fact reality!) of belonging to multiple places at the same time, without the necessity of worlds colliding. Different kinds of belonging, and of the ways people are socialised, could be interpreted as a fact and necessity rather than as a threat or challenge, as often posed in wider social discourses around migration and/or integration.

In the acknowledgement of people’s diverse cultural ties and belongings, there is space to see with open eyes the difficult life situations that are not only part of individual biographies, but that concern great numbers of people as they are the result of inhuman politics and their workings within and across societies. This opens up spaces for collective anger against repressive systems, and for the collective mourning of loss, both of people and of the more-than-human world.
Furthermore, this approach allows us to benefit from the strength of diversity within social practices: Experimenting with different forms of gardening, for example, may bring new knowledge to a location. The different strategies used to respond to drought, if they are seriously considered and not dismissed as marginal, may lead to more resilience within and of communities as climate change and collapse of ecosystems continue to threaten our existence. We could start to see sustainability as a practice that includes myriad forms of experimentation, as diverse as our relations to land may be, and judge the ways in which they support or inhibit the flourishing of life (as opposed to creating more harm). The cultivation of diversity in sustainability ideals could lead to the diversification and deepening of ideas, as contrasting understandings may bring to the surface shortcomings but also potentials of different, potentially intersecting practices. The precondition is that we stay conscious of diverse nature-cultures and work towards their full expression. The harvest of such an approach promises to be rich: it is the harvest of a whole community’s wisdom.

Cultivating inclusion and solidarity

Colourful canopies can be spaces that work to resist instrumentalist perspectives of refugees, and ways of enabling experiences and encounters that transcend inequalities. Under such canopies, tensions may always be part of the social make-up as spaces will never be neutral; they will remain honeycombed by power relations.

The moral geographies that permeate such spaces, which refers to the contingent bundle of expectations and rules that are dressed up as though they were common sense (Creswell, 2005), have a strong influence over the choreographies within a space. I argue that they need to be brought to the surface for careful examination, as this may allow for us the see the boundaries that ideals may create and where people become fixed in one location even though this may happen unintentionally. As we create, shape and live within these spaces, the invitation is to try to more clearly see the moral ambitions, as well as their racialising tendencies, that our doing is grounded in.

Tensions or conflicts need careful attention, as they make the moral geographies, often veiled in the coat of normalcy, tangible. Tensions open up spaces where we are able to see what we have become blind to, namely what we have accepted as ‘normal’, ‘true’, ‘necessary’, ‘good’ or ‘just’. This blindness is part of what can lead to the devaluation of people whose practices are measured against standards of what we think we know, what we think is right.

In this blindness, it is difficult to approach another person as an individual; it is difficult to recognise any encounter as potentially open, without expectations of where this encounter has to lead us. Thinking about the space of encounter, the expectations around the ‘inclusion’ of people may run counter to this. Emma makes us aware of the paradox in integration, inclusion, or any similar concept that tries to insert a group of people into a “larger whole”:

Inclusion, this term, you need to understand it at first. In the beginning it created a real knot in my brain, I didn’t get it. OK inclusion, we’re trying to bring everything together, for everyone, and all... but only for people with disabilities.\footnote{She is referring to people with disabilities here as this is the target group in her job, but the same could be said for people with refugee biographies, or any other ‘marginalised’ groups.} […] I still find it difficult to use the term in this way. But I mean, what we’re doing here, the bringing together of people and creating of a space where every person who wants to can feel at ease – this is inclusion. Inclusion means creating a space
that does simply not exclude anyone. That of course refers to people who are in our society markedly and frequently excluded.

I agree, and as I have seen through the stories of this garden, to be included means to be seen as a complex, multifaceted person, in appreciation of one’s cultural ties, in a climate of recognition and respect. This again refers to the creation of lateral relationships, which is best expressed in the concept of relational solidarity (see 4.4.4.5). Rozakou (2016) sees solidarity reflected in the terms used by Greek activists who “approach” refugees. This concept expresses well the hesitancy in the encounter with a yet-unknown-person, as well as the potentiality for the production of a world of equals. It opens up prospects of egalitarian relationships, as opposed to the dominant language used in projects where people are “working with refugees”, as if they were a homogeneous target group that needed “work” done on/with/to them, or “help refugees”, as if they were in general needy, vulnerable or victims. Much of this spirit of the “approach” was also tangible in the cosmopolitanism of the community garden – people with different life trajectories could approach each other.

Looking back to the project aspirations and missions I identified in the mapping review at the very beginning of my PhD, I now see one important project mission that possibly formed part of projects, but if it did, was not stated explicitly: to create lateral relationships between long-established and new residents. This aim, if we assume that the transcendence of hierarchies brings more equality, should sit across all other aims. This also implies that other aims would possibly be formulated differently if instrumentalist tendencies were replaced by expressions of solidarity in the projects’ frameworks. As the development of relationships between people cannot be planned or pre-conceived, practitioners then need to “trust the journey” (Arvidsen & Beames, 2019) and embrace the open-endedness in a well-conceived project framework.

Cultivating relationality in research, policy and practice

Last but not least, I believe that solidarity and relationality are tightly connected. Cultivating relationality can support ways of seeing people in both their multifaceted-ness and opacity. One aspect of cultivating relationality points to the co-design of (research) projects grounded in what I would call intimate participation. Intimate participation is different from a standardised approach to participatory projects, where participation is framed by researcher, the policy, or the educator/practitioner. Intimate participation takes seriously the importance of self-organised participatory spaces (Cornwall, 2008) that are defined and framed by the people we may be working with, and that are structured by their language. The bridge to these spaces, if we consider ourselves as ‘outsiders’ to communities, is through intimacy and care, which means that we need to really get to know the people we are working with, not just people we may (instrumentally) recognise as gatekeepers. We need to understand their priorities, needs and motives in their relationships with us (and all of these are of course continuously renegotiated) but also beyond, to co-design a space that is participatory not in name alone. Looking to this thesis, this would mean that the participatory research starts now, now that I have become one of the garden guardians. I acknowledge that insider research, or research making use as friendship as methodology, comes with its own challenges and risks, yet it may come closer to the production of intimate, emotional knowledge, much needed to counterbalance ‘extractive’ approaches to research.

Furthermore, relationality means to commit to the quiet politics of staying surprised, as a way of not becoming complicit with oppressive, racializing workings of and within the collectivities we are placed in. As Gümüşay (2020) states:
To stay surprised means not to abide a state of blindness, indifference or acceptance in face of
dehumanisations and injustices. A challenge is that we need to see injustices first before we can be
surprised, and this may be difficult for people with biographies shaped by privilege (like me) who
have in most respect been able to fit in with ‘the norm’. It is difficult, from such viewpoint, to see
what is outside of the norm, to feel what it feels like to be outside of the norm, to consistently be
made other. We need to practice the art of visiting (Arendt & Beiner, 1982), and of engaged listening
(Back, 2007), to choose pathways that recognise injustices, pathways where equality may flourish.

Through my power-critical reflections on cosmopolitanism, participation and equality, and the
dynamics between ‘the host’ and ‘the newcomer’ (Heins & Unrau, 2018; Rozakou, 2016) in
homemaking, my thesis speaks to literature in the fields of education and sociology, in particular to
works that explore complexities of migration, integration and community-making in pluralistic
societies. As I consider social complexities in entanglement with the more-than-human world, my
work supports an ecological comprehension of these ties. In the educational field, it relates to the
approaches of diversity & social justice education, community education as well as environmental &
outdoor education. I hope that researchers and practitioners alike may find inspiration in this
exploration of the complex relationalities in a garden that works as a space of encounter, in and
through the practice of organic gardening as part of a sustainable lifestyle.

This thesis has raised many questions and issues that can be further explored by other researchers
who would like to venture into this niche of ‘refugee welcome projects in ‘nature’ spaces. More
research could follow more specific research questions, e.g. inquiring into what ‘organic gardening’
means to people with diverse backgrounds in a community garden, and what kind of sustainability
practices they know from other places in the world. Another possible more research question that I
would appreciate is how specifically the sharing of material (and other things) plays out for people,
as issues of reciprocity within this ideal of sharing can be fascinating to explore.

Another aspect is that community gardens do much more quiet and explicit politics than I have been
able to explore in this thesis. As Raphaely & Orbach observe,

_There is something radical about community gardens in urban environments. They disrupt the norms: property prices make their existence unusual, and the values of shared space and accessibility contrast with the surrounding private and commercial ethos. They introduce a wild element into an otherwise regulated environment, creating a space that allows other versions of oneself to emerge. Here one can talk to strangers; everyone is a friend when watching tadpoles or sheltering from the rain (Raphaely & Orbach, 2022, p. 171)._

More research could look deeper into these “radical” qualities of community gardens, and how
these matter to people with refugee experiences or other participants. There are, of course, many
other possible pathways to take, and I hope this thesis can work as a potential inspiration.

As a personal reflection, there is an aspect that I could have done differently, and possibly would
have done if I had found the courage to do so. Instead of imposing the chapter structure that I have,
I could have written more relationally, telling the stories of this garden in a different way. This could
have shown how everything in this garden was related, like an ecological web, but not by the
standards of logic and argumentation. As an example, I could have shown how the bees were related with children’s play, how a bee sting was related to scribbling in a notebook, and how the scribbling was related to beautiful drawings about the frustration with integration regimes. There were many examples of such relationalities that no one could have thought of in the first place – what should be the link between a bee and an integration regime? The kinds of relations I am referring to here are of more coincidental nature, but I do believe they hold their own truths. Maybe this kind of writing may find its place in prose, if not within academia.

I would like to conclude this thesis with one final poem, another reflection on “making space” in spaces of encounter:
**Freiraum**

Gebt den Raum frei! Sagte sie.  
Ihr habt ihn gefangen.  
Gefüllt mit euren Werten, Gedanken und Taten.  
Nun ist er beschwert, kann sich nicht mehr frei bewegen.  
Kann sich nicht strecken nach neuen Ideen.

Ich gebe den Räumungsbefehl! Sagte sie.  
Sie müssen raus, die abwesenden Personen, aus euren Interpretationen.  
Nur so können sie den Raum neu betreten, mit eigener Kraft.  
Dann streckt er sich, wird zum Ort der Begegnung.  
Ohne Grenzen, frei und farbenfroh.

---

**Open space**

Clear the space! She said  
You have ensnared it  
Filled it with your values, thoughts and deeds  
Now it is heavy, can no longer freely move  
Cannot embrace new ideas.

I’m giving the eviction order! She said  
They must exit your interpretations, those absent people  
Only thus they can enter the space anew, under their own power  
Then it stretches forth, to become a space of encounter  
Without boundaries, free and colourful.
6. References


Eppi-Centre (2006). *EPPI-Centre methods for conducting systematic reviews*.


https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-46116-2


## APPENDIX A: Overview of projects identified in the mapping review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Project title</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Type of outdoor activities</th>
<th>Aims &amp; Purpose</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Integrative Woche</td>
<td>Bergwaldprojekt e.v.</td>
<td>Conservation work forest</td>
<td>Opportunity to participate in society, eco-awareness &amp; sustainability (in sense of global justice)</td>
<td>W/without refugee experience</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bergwaldprojekt.de/projekte/integrative-projekte">https://www.bergwaldprojekt.de/projekte/integrative-projekte</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Natur verbindet</td>
<td>BUND Kreis Bamberg</td>
<td>Outdoor activities, conservation?</td>
<td>support integration, positive encounters, nature as refuge, place-attachment, exit passivity and victim perspective, language support</td>
<td>W/without refugee experience</td>
<td><a href="https://bamberg.bund-naturschutz.de/umweltbildung/aktuelle-projekte/natur-verbindet.html">https://bamberg.bund-naturschutz.de/umweltbildung/aktuelle-projekte/natur-verbindet.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Gemeinsam ankommen - Radlschule für Geflüchtete</td>
<td>Green City e.V.</td>
<td>Cycle training</td>
<td>Access to independent autonomous mobility, learning how to bike in the city</td>
<td>Refugees, esp. Women</td>
<td><a href="https://www.greencity.de/projekt/gemeinsam-ankommen/">https://www.greencity.de/projekt/gemeinsam-ankommen/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Naturzufluchten - Natur als Raum für Begegnungen</td>
<td>Jugendorganisation BUND Naturschutz</td>
<td>Nature activities</td>
<td>Nature as refuge, bring integration to wider society through encounters, work against prejudice, support in arrival, Willkommenskultur, politics and society shall work to fight causes of flight</td>
<td>Refugee &amp; local youth</td>
<td><a href="http://naturzufluchten.jbn.de/naturzufluchten/">http://naturzufluchten.jbn.de/naturzufluchten/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Alpen.Leben. Menschen</td>
<td>Deutscher Alpenverein, Malteser Hilfsdienst</td>
<td>Walking, climbing, family trips, nature activities</td>
<td>Bring 'integration' alive without complications, invite refugees to get to know their new home together with locals. Meet new people, get away from accommodation centres, use their language skills. Development of friendships and job opportunities through networks.</td>
<td>Refugees &amp; locals</td>
<td><a href="https://www.alpenlebenmensch.de/">https://www.alpenlebenmensch.de/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Bunt-Projekt - interkulturelle Küche aus regionalen Gärten</td>
<td>Ökologisches Bildungszentrum München</td>
<td>Gardening, cooking</td>
<td>Participation, learning about bees, multiple competencies, integration/inclusion, encounters, support cohesion within migrant youth group</td>
<td>young refugees, 16-18</td>
<td><a href="https://www.oebz.de/default.asp?Menue=266">https://www.oebz.de/default.asp?Menue=266</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Zusammen gärtnern</td>
<td>zusammen leben e.V.</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>work together, learn together, have fun, enjoy, test &amp; experience sustainable living (ecology, biodiversity, food)</td>
<td>All welcome</td>
<td><a href="https://zlev.de/projekte/zusammen-gaertnern/">https://zlev.de/projekte/zusammen-gaertnern/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Erlebnispädagogische Arbeit mit Flüchtlingen &amp; Migranten</td>
<td>AdrenalinConzept</td>
<td>PSD-type activities, Erlebnispäd &amp; Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Support integration work of schools and other institutions, help arrive in new life and grow to be in the centre of society</td>
<td>Young migrants &amp; refugees (children and teens)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.adrenalinconzept.de/arbeit-mit-fluechtlingen-und-migranten.html">https://www.adrenalinconzept.de/arbeit-mit-fluechtlingen-und-migranten.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Integrationsprojekt für Kinder mit Fluchterfahrung</td>
<td>Strassenkinder e.V.</td>
<td>Erlebnispäd. Activities</td>
<td>Support arrival, language acquisition, build friendships and relationships</td>
<td>Refugee children</td>
<td><a href="https://strassenkinder-ev.de/integrationsfluechtlingendeveloper.html">https://strassenkinder-ev.de/integrationsfluechtlingendeveloper.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Betreuung jugendlicher Geflüchteter</td>
<td>Wolkenkratzer</td>
<td>Erlebnispäd. Activities</td>
<td>PSD: teamwork, personality, learning with heart, hand, mind</td>
<td>Unaccompanied minors</td>
<td><a href="http://wolkenkratzer.net/ube">http://wolkenkratzer.net/ube</a> runs/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Voneinander Lernen</td>
<td>NABU Hamburg</td>
<td>EE for children, Nature experiences for youth &amp; adults</td>
<td>Integration into association, access to nature and volunteering. Work against cultural barriers, support sense of belonging, develop English skills, explore nature together, contact between refugees and locals.</td>
<td>Refugee children, adult, youth &amp; locals</td>
<td><a href="https://hamburg.nabu.de/wir">https://hamburg.nabu.de/wir</a> ueberuns/umweltbild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Interkulturalität ausserschulischer Bildungsorte im Naturschutz</td>
<td>ANU Bundesverband e.V.</td>
<td>Modelling and consultancy work</td>
<td>Widen access to environmental education sites, anchor it in society. Break cultural barriers, increase participation of people with migrant background in dialogues around conservation and biodiversity.</td>
<td>(environmental) education institutions</td>
<td><a href="https://www.umweltbildung.de/interkulturalitat.html">https://www.umweltbildung.de/interkulturalitat.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Lieblingsfarbe bunt. Integrative Gärten in Berlin</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>getting to know each other, learning together and from each other, work against prejudice, building bridges through practical work of gardening.</td>
<td>Different origins, age, ability</td>
<td><a href="https://www.grueneliga-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Brosch%C3%BCre_WettbewerbLB_Anscih_01_1_1_17.pdf">https://www.grueneliga-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Brosch%C3%BCre_WettbewerbLB_Anscih_01_1_1_17.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Interkulturelle Gärten</td>
<td>Anstiftung</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>Urban ecology: a different city is possible, conservation. Drawing on knowledge of migrants: Überfluss statt Mangel.</td>
<td>Migrants &amp; locals</td>
<td><a href="https://anstiftung.de/urbane-gaerten/interku">https://anstiftung.de/urbane-gaerten/interku</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Wild X Oslo</td>
<td>Wild X</td>
<td>Friluftsliv activities</td>
<td>Minority youth seeks to conquer new parts of Norwegian society</td>
<td>1-25 years</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wildx.no/oslo/">http://www.wildx.no/oslo/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Til Topps</td>
<td>Røde kors, DNT</td>
<td>Hillwalking</td>
<td>Contribute to integration and health through shared experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.rodekors.no/om/aktuelt/rekordmange-innvandrere-og-flyktninger-til-galdhopiggen/">https://www.rodekors.no/om/aktuelt/rekordmange-innvandrere-og-flyktninger-til-galdhopiggen/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Friluftsliv for minoritetsgrupper</td>
<td>Midt-Agder Friluftsråd</td>
<td>Friluftsliv activities</td>
<td>Integration, societal health, get to know Norwegian nature and tur-tradition, so that they can themselves use nature for recreation and self-expression. Introduction to outdoor recreation. Empowerment through information about rights &amp; access, other laws.</td>
<td>Minority groups</td>
<td><a href="http://www.midtagderfriluft.no/om-maf/vare-prosjekter">http://www.midtagderfriluft.no/om-maf/vare-prosjekter</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Introduction programme for newly arrived immigrants</td>
<td>Norsk Friluftsliv member organisations, e.g. Oslo og Omland Friluftsråd</td>
<td>Outdoor recreation (obligatory)</td>
<td>Introduce local nature, outdoor recreation and practices</td>
<td>Foreign nationals, mostly non-Western immigrants (16-55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Barnefamilieturer</td>
<td>Den Norske Turistforening Oslo og Omegn</td>
<td>Friluftsliv turer</td>
<td>Inclusive space, new friluftsliv experiences, network building</td>
<td>Families with children, areas with high ratio of Non-</td>
<td><a href="https://www.norskriluftsliv.no/flerkulturelfriluftsliv-i-praksis/">https://www.norskriluftsliv.no/flerkulturelfriluftsliv-i-praksis/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Organization/Project</td>
<td>Program/Activity</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Target Groups</td>
<td>Website/Resource</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Skiforenings inkluderingsar beid</td>
<td>Skiforening</td>
<td>Ski activities, diverse to include newcomers</td>
<td>Contribution to active life, inclusion</td>
<td>Children, youth, adults</td>
<td><a href="https://www.norskfriluftsliv.no/ferlkulturel-friluftsliv-iplarksis/">https://www.norskfriluftsliv.no/ferlkulturel-friluftsliv-iplarksis/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Branching out</td>
<td>Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)</td>
<td>Conservation &amp; greenspace</td>
<td>Mental health support</td>
<td>On referral for mental health services</td>
<td><a href="https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-people/health-strategy/branching-out">https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-people/health-strategy/branching-out</a>; <a href="http://www.caledonianconservation.co.uk/services/environmental-education/">http://www.caledonianconservation.co.uk/services/environmental-education/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Scotland for newcomers &amp; The Welcoming</td>
<td>Outdoor visits, guided cycle rides</td>
<td>Get together, improve English, learn about Scotland. Support Syrian community to adopt new habits, encourage food growing, develop</td>
<td>Newcomers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thewelcoming.org/">http://www.thewelcoming.org/</a></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Gardening Club, Outdoor trips</td>
<td>Maryhill Integration Network</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>not specified; MIN: bring people together, develop new skills, share experiences, improve lives and communities.</td>
<td>Refugee, migrant &amp; local community members</td>
<td><a href="http://www.maryhillintegration.org.uk/?page_id=109">http://www.maryhillintegration.org.uk/?page_id=109</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Multi-cultural family base</td>
<td>Biking, Kayaking, Archery, Climbing</td>
<td>Give children opportunities to access activities, feel more confident and happier with who they are, make friendships, learn new group skills</td>
<td>Migrant children &amp; young people</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mcfb.org.uk/projects/mcfb-groupwork-project">http://www.mcfb.org.uk/projects/mcfb-groupwork-project</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Programme for Outdoors</td>
<td>Boots &amp; Beards</td>
<td>Hillwalking</td>
<td>Improve health, widen access to natural environments, create better life for present &amp; future</td>
<td>BME communities</td>
<td><a href="https://bootsandbeards.co.uk/#home-section">https://bootsandbeards.co.uk/#home-section</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: Memorandum of understanding between the association in charge of the community garden and me

Memorandum of Understanding

Dated

20/02/2020

between Susanne Paulus, PhD researcher at University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education and Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signatory:</th>
<th>Susanne Paulus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Alemannenstrasse 5, 79117 Freiburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone number:</td>
<td>+ 49 (0) 151 65016803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and

[association]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signatory:</th>
<th>XXXXXX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone number:</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hereinafter referred to as XXXXXX

A charity (eingetragener Verein) in XXXX, Germany, which seeks to create spaces of encounter for people of diverse backgrounds and thereby foster social cohesion, dialogue and understanding.

Registergericht: XXXX
Registernummer: XXXX

1. [association] objectives

Philosophie

Unsere Arbeit basiert auf einem zentralen menschlichen Bedürfnis: dem Wunsch nach Zusammengehörigkeit. Dabei richtet sich unser Fokus auf Menschen, die nicht dazugehören. Aktuell vor allem auf die, die aufgrund ihrer Herkunft ausgeschlossen sind.


Die Prinzipien unserer Arbeit


2. Purpose and scope of MoU

The purpose of this MoU is to establish a framework arrangement between Susanne Paulus and [association] that covers the research activities organised by both sides in order to inform the development and continuous improvement of the community garden. Susanne Paulus will conduct an ethnographic case study that seeks to understand relationalities in the garden space with focus on inclusivity and active participation (Teilhabe). The research follows a relational, intersectional approach, and dedicates special attention to the experiences of people with refugee background, thereby aiming to support the community in the garden to be responsive to refugee claims, perspectives and needs.

3. Period of MoU

The term of this MoU is from February 2020 until August 2020, and renewable

4. Solidarity

Both Susanne Paulus and [association] undertake the following:

- To respond openly, thoughtfully, collaboratively and promptly to partner’s request for assistance.
- To recognize and respect other stakeholders to which Susanne Paulus or [association] is accountable.
• If Susanne Paulus or [association] believes that the other side does not live up the MoU, they will communicate it to them.
• Confidential Information of any nature that either party acquires regarding any aspect of the other party’s business shall be treated in strict confidence. Information so obtained shall not be divulged, furnished or made accessible to third parties without the written permission of the other party to this agreement.

5. Individual responsibilities

Susanne Paulus:
• Agree to share research, data, findings and policy briefs with [association]
• Agree to mention, and when possible include, [association] in any publication and all subsequent end products or dissemination events based on this research project
• Prepare information sheet for the [association] community which provides details about the research project in the main languages spoken in the garden
• Prepare a consent form to be signed participants of potential group discussions, workshops or individual interviews
• Provide all the materials needed for group discussions or workshops
• Communicate between the PhD supervisors and [association], in transparency of interests and critical issues in the research process

[Association]:
• Provide research site, access to the community garden
• Provide coordinator to formalize communication with Susanne Paulus
• Support the communication about the research project
• Provide support for participant acquisition of potential group discussions or individual interviews

6. Conflict resolution

All unforeseen matters that arise on issues, as the cooperation evolves, should be resolved with mutual understanding. Every effort will be made to settle the matter through dialog and negotiation.

If [association] would like to raise any concern regarding the research, or in case of conflict, Susanne Paulus’ supervisor at Edinburgh University can be contacted:

Dr Gale Macleod, Senior Lecturer, Moray House School of Education and Sport.
Contact: email , phone +44 (0)131 651 6448

7. Entire Agreement

This agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof. This agreement is signed on two copies of 4 pages each.
Signatures and dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher signature:</th>
<th>[association] signature:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Surname: Susanne Paulus</td>
<td>Name &amp; Surname:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: 20.02.2020</td>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Multilingual information sheet

zusammen forschen

Hallo! Ich bin diese Saison Beetpatin im „zusammen gärtnern“ Gemeinschaftsgarten am Dorfbach und forsch hier gleichzeitig für meine Doktorarbeit, die ich an der Universität Edinburgh (Schottland) schreibe.

Meine Forschungsfrage ist, wie im Garten Begegnung, Teilhabe und gemeinsames Lernen stattfindet. Dies interessiert mich besonders im Zusammenhang von Migration und Flucht, wenn Menschen sich ein neues Zuhause aufbauen. Natürlich ist nun auch eine Frage, welche Rolle der Garten für die Beetpat*innen in Corona-Zeiten spielt.

Für die Forschung unterhalte ich mich gerne mit euch, arbeite selbst am Beet und notiere Beobachtungen. Ich freue mich auf den Austausch! Falls ihr aus irgendeinem Grund nicht in Forschung die miteinbezogen werden möchtet, kein Problem – sagt einfach XXXX oder mir Bescheid.

Naturally erzähl ich gerne mehr. Sprecht mich jederzeit an!
Email:  (alle Sprachen willkommen); Telefon: 0151 - 65016803

Hertzlich, Susanne

research together

Hello! I'm gardening in the "zusammen gärtnern" community garden this season whilst at the same time doing research here for my doctoral dissertation. I am a PhD student at the Edinburgh University (Scotland).

My research question is how encounters, participation and shared learning take place in the garden. This interests me particularly with respect to migration and refugeeism, when people need to build themselves new homes. Of course, I am now also wondering about the role of the garden for participants in times of corona.

For my study I’ll engage in conversation with you, work on the allotment and note down observations. I look forward to exchanging with you! If for any reason you would rather not participate in the research, that’s no problem at all – just let XXXX or me know.

Of course, I’ll happily tell you more. Please come and chat with me!
email:  (all languages welcome); phone: 0151 - 65016803

Thank you, Susanne
recherchons ensemble

Bonjour! Je fais du jardinage dans le jardin partagé « zusammen gärtnern » cette saison et en même temps je poursuis ma thèse à cet endroit. Je fais mon doctorat avec l'université d'Edimbourg (Ecosse).

Ma question de recherche est comment les rencontres, la participation et l'apprentissage commun se déroulent dans le jardin. Cela m'intéresse en particulier dans le contexte des migrations et des situations d'accueil de réfugié.e.s, quand les personnes se construisent un nouveau chez-soi. Une autre question concerne maintenant le rôle du jardin partagé pour les jardiniers durant cette période de corona.

Dans le cadre de ma recherche de thèse je me réjouis de discuter avec vous, je travaille dans le potager et je note mes observations. Si pour n'importe quelle raison vous ne souhaitez pas participer à la recherche, il n'y a pas de souci – simplement venez le dire à XXXX ou moi.

Bien sûr je reste à disposition pour vous raconter plus. Au plaisir d'échanger avec vous!

email : (toutes les langues bienvenues) ; phone : 0151 - 65016803

Cordialement, Susanne
APPENDIX D: Information sheet for research participants

German version:

Promotionsforschung im [association] Gemeinschaftsgarten am Dorfbach
Susanne Paulus, Bereich Bildungswissenschaften, University of Edinburgh

Inhalt und Ziele der Forschung

Dein Mitwirken

Ergebnisse der Studie

Hintergrund
PhD research study at the [association] Gemeinschaftsgarten am Dorfbach
Susanne Paulus, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh

Content and aims of the research
My research is about spaces of encounter under open skies for people of diverse backgrounds. I would like to learn more about how encounters take place in this garden, how people get to participate, and how we learn together. Of course, I am now also interested in the role of the garden in times of corona. The study can reveal potentials of the space and the community that not everyone may already know about. It might also show ideas about what is needed to make this garden even better. The results can moreover support similar projects, in Germany or beyond, to develop as they wish to.

Your own involvement
Your own participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Things I learn in the garden may form part of the ‘story’ I am able to tell about this place in the end. I will however keep all conversations confidential and will secure your anonymity at any moment of the research. Later this year I may possibly ask you to join a group discussion or an individual conversation with me. If you wish not to be included in the research for any reason, just let XXX or me know, that’s no problem at all.

Outcomes of the study
I will write about this garden in my doctoral dissertation, provide a report for our [association] community, and potentially give a presentation for those who are interested. I will also try to speak at conferences and write academic articles. In these communications I will not give individual details through which you could be identifiable.

Background
Several organisations or associations across Europe are currently running projects (or have done so in the past) in which they invite people with migrant or refugee biographies to join outdoor activities in their local environments. In a first part of my doctoral dissertation, I tried to find out what kind of projects exist. I took a closer look at the information about 29 projects in Germany, Norway and Scotland. Projects offer a variety of activities such as walking, cycling, conservation work or gardening. They wish to create spaces of encounter between people, involve those who may be excluded, offer learning opportunities, support sustainable living and promote good health. The [association] community garden is one of...
these examples and it is special in many ways, therefore I wish to explore this garden in a second study.

Contact: 0151-65016803
“Mummy-Work” she says to me on the bus. I still can’t believe Little One is actually starting to talk. When she says “work”, she is referring to my PhD. I guess it’s too complicated to explain to a nearly 2-year-old that I am doing some sort of research project where I’m trying to find out how outdoor activities can support recent refugees and migrants when they arrive to grow roots in a new country. But I totally shouldn’t underestimate her capacities, I know. She is so wise! I don’t feel very wise in comparison, despite of all the reading I’m doing.

I saw the clash coming: PhD AND baby. BOOM. I saw it coming because I wanted to start a family and did not want to wait much longer, but also had been wanting to do a PhD for quite some time. You cannot really plan for these things, can you? I ended up doing the interview for the scholarship when I was pregnant and was glad it was a long-distance Skype so no one could see the belly. Being accepted was a shock.

A couple of months later, my young family and I moved from Switzerland to Scotland. My supervisors had negotiated a delayed start for me, and I began when Little One was 6 months old. We set up a home office so that I could have a quiet space and be close when she needed a feed. I hid away and read and enjoyed it. I remember that I felt unable to communicate at an academic level for a long time, my head just wasn’t there. It got better when Little One started sleeping through the night, and when I stopped nursing. Women’s bodies do incredible things! Whilst I was working, Little One got to hang out with her Dad which was great for both. We tried to share work and baby time equally right from the start, and I am grateful this was possible for us.

The Chaplaincy at Edinburgh University has been hosting conversation circles called “Books and/or babies? How to decide, when we are already pregnant with research?!”. This title displays quite well the dilemma many women are facing when they wish to pursue higher education or an academic career, but also have children. Various concerns are raised in these conversations: restricted time to work, financial insecurity, lack of supportive policies for maternity leave, the competitiveness of and within academia, the pressures to perform. There are many barriers for women that make it difficult to commit to both children AND research. I find it sad that this is a clash, rather than an opportunity, or something that can flow naturally together. So, here is more work, policy makers, equality officers, society! These issues also concern (future) Dads, of course, but less so if men are the ones to continue in their careers while women step out, and of course women are differently involved with pregnancy, childbirth, and possibly nursing.

Doing a PhD is possible for me because I am in the privileged position to have a financial and social ‘safety net’ that supports me. It is also possible because my supervisors are two wonderful people who keep me on track, always have a kind word of encouragement for me, and remind me to be pragmatic in my research. It’s possible because my partner is probably as committed to my PhD as I am, and because our daughter, a resilient and calm little person, has made it easy for us in many situations.

It’s not only possible for me to be a PhD-ing Mum, it is also really really enjoyable! I get time off from my PhD, pouring millions of imagined cups of teas, learning Scottish nursery rhymes, digging into the
sand at Portobello beach, splashing about in puddles in Holyrood Park. But also, whenever I work on my study, it also means that I get some time away from being a Mum. It is very nice to have the headspace for something else, to get inspired by the academic work I’m engaged with. I never seem to get fed up with parenting or with the PhD because of this balance.

**Sometimes it’s challenging.** Being a parent can be incredibly demanding. Doing a PhD can be very demanding as well, in other ways. There are definitely some downsides of trying to do both at the same time. My wish was to be involved with the research and PhD community, but I just did not have the energy and time available to reach out to people. I’m not able to embrace this PhD as fully as I would have done otherwise. Going to conferences that are not local is just not an option these days, and any academic engagement beyond my own project is just a little too much. On the other hand, being a Mum has enabled me to escape the University bubble and get involved with other people and groups I wouldn’t have met otherwise. I regret that I don’t get to discuss my PhD with peers as often as I would like, but I do get to discuss children’s sleep patterns, foods, parenting ideals and realities, nappies and other. It’s just a little different.

**I’m toddling with research** these days. It’s a funny thing to do. My reading influences how I see the world as a parent, and Little One influences my research perspectives. When I was wondering about multiculturalism and integration the other day, I suddenly remembered a picture in her children’s book. It’s a book about colours, and how they merge to create new colours. “That’s it!” I thought. In an ideal world, locals and newcomers would both bring their colours into spaces of encounter, and then a third colour would emerge in that space. How pretty! - OK, it may be a little naïve. But maybe it is the kind of optimistic perspective that helps sometimes. I can’t help but really like the Rainbow Carnival Party:

![Image of a children's drawing](image_url)

Hervé Tullet (2007): Carnival of colours
Little One teaches me to stay relaxed in my PhD. It’s probably because I tend to care a little less about it. Many people say this about parenthood: priorities change, maybe just a little, maybe quite drastically. Little One has put a new weight in my life, in a way that is hard to describe in words. It took me over a year to realise that I am a Mum, and I am still exploring the joys and vulnerabilities that are attached to this new role for me. She certainly shows me how to be present, how to wonder and be curious about the little things, and this also flows into my research. Maybe children are the best kind of researchers, after all.

I would like to encourage other women here to not rule out any option for them, but instead follow their path as they wish to. You may not know how everything will turn out, but maybe toddling with research is something that you would really enjoy!