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THE CAPABILITY APPROACH IN URBAN QUALITY OF LIFE. AN ETHNOGRAPHY WITH INTRA-EU MIGRANT FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AND THE INSTITUTION *GEBIETSBETREUUNG STADTERNEUERUNG* IN VIENNA

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Dedication and acknowledgements

I thank the Italian- and Hungarian-origin parents and children in Vienna who participated in the project with big generosity and enthusiasm despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the teams of Gebietsbetreuung Mitte and other Gebietsbetreuungen. Without their help, this research project would have run aground.

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Since the path to a PhD can be lonely and thorny, I suggest all PhD candidates to find peer groups to write and exchange with. I heartily thank the groups I met along my way: the informal, online group of URBEUR and ASEP PhD candidates from University of Milan-Bicocca, founded during the pandemic crisis; the regular round table on qualitative research (*Stammtisch qualitative Forschung*) of University of Graz; the open writing group of University of Graz. A special mention goes to my favorite writing mates Bessy and Teresa, who helped me concentrate and made my hours less dull.

As a phase approaches its end, my loving thoughts go to my grandmothers Ileana and Clelia, and to my dearest Professor Giovanna, who are a constant source of wisdom and confidence. I am truly grateful to my parents Domenico and Elvira, who have been nurturing my aspirations and helping me reach my goals for almost three decades, and to Dávid, my love, who has been on my side throughout the doctoral program.

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List of abbreviations, codes, and pseudonyms

CA, Capability Approach
QoL, quality of life
GB*, Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung

Here is an example of how to interpret the alphanumerical codes which I have associated with research participants for the purpose of safeguarding the anonymity of their person and their statements:
- M1 = child(ren)`s mother in family number 1
- F1 = child(ren)`s father in family number 1
- C1 = child in family number 1
- GB*1 = interviewee number 1 from Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung

Sometimes, to safeguard their humanity and for stylistic reasons, I resort to pseudonyms also to refer to the categories mentioned above, who are associated with alphanumerical codes too. This is the case especially in excerpts from interviews, go-alongs, virtual journeys, and my ethnographic log. Here is the key to link the codes to corresponding pseudonyms.
- Flóra (M3)
- Tamás (C4)
- Fiorenza (M6)
- Rossana (C6a)
- Milena (Friend of M6 with extra-EU citizenship)
- Letizia (M8)
- Rita (M10)
- Giorgio (C10a)
- Gaia (Friend of C10b)
- Lisa (Friend of C10b)
- Michela (Friend of C10b)
- Alba (M11)
- Pierluigi (C11b)
- Elisabetta (M12)
- Camilla (C12)
- Robert (C13a)
- Giulia (M15)

There are no alphanumerical codes for subjects who belong to none of these categories and practitioners working in the GB* team where I did my internship at (GB* Mitte). In these cases, I invented fantasy names.
- Silvia (Founder of the group *Italian Moms in Vienna*)
- Amelia (Daughter of mother out of sample from the Italian speaking part of Switzerland)
- Annelise (Leader of Jugendtrett Alte Trafik, institution targeted to youngsters with common projects with GB* Mitte)
- Annika (Public relations at GB* Mitte)
- Chesna (Housing consultant at GB* Mitte)
- Farah (Graphic designer working on public relations at GB* Mitte)
- Florian (Social worker at GB* Mitte. He had been working at GB* Mitte for 3 years when I made his acquaintance)

- Katharina (Team leader at GB* Mitte)
- Lena (The other intern at GB* Mitte)
- Manfred (Urban and regional planner, my gatekeeper at GB* Mitte. He had been working at GB*s for 17 years when I made his acquaintance)
- Mirek (Expert in visualization of spatial data at GB* Mitte)
- Petra (Architect and artist doing community work at GB*Mitte. My *de facto* supervisor)
- Sarah (Expert in public space and greening initiatives at GB* Mitte)

Abstract (English, Italian, German)

This doctoral research project intends to contribute to scholarly research on urban quality of life in urban studies and sociology of migration. It adopts the Capability Approach, founded by Amartya Sen, as a theoretical lens of analysis and attempts to contribute to its advancement through the collection and elaboration of empirical data. I analyze the migration biographies and daily lives of intra-EU migrant-origin families with children in Vienna. A gateway city and a popular destination of migration from Central and Eastern Europe, and since recently also from Southern Europe, Vienna has often topped international quality-of-life rankings. Alongside 16 EU migrant-origin families from Central (Hungary) and Southern (Italy) Europe with children aged 6-11, I attempt to ethnographically comprehend what capabilities were relevant for quality of life according to the mothers, children, and fathers in migration in the sample and the interactions between the capabilities of different family members. One of the key strengths of the research lies in the participation of children, who are still marginal subjects in migration and urban studies. I analyze what urban conversion factors mediate their use of the neighborhoods of residence and of the city in daily life, and how. Besides, the project tries to comprehend the motives for the increasing trend of intra-EU migration to Vienna considering the local rather than the national contexts of provenance and arrival. I argue that migration is a family practice motivated not only by economic reasons but also by aspirations about the future, including quality-of-life goals.

The fieldwork took place in Vienna between October 2020 and February 2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This period of crisis, which temporarily reduced the individual freedom of choice about the behaviors to adopt, influenced the daily lives and capabilities of EU migrant families with children, surprisingly not always in negative ways. Moreover, this original standpoint provides insights into intra-EU migrations and inspires novel reflections on quality of life. The hybrid (institutional) ethnographic methods used in this study include interviews, participant observation, go-alongs, and photo-elicited 'virtual journeys' to places of origin in Hungary and Italy.

Complementarily to the ethnography with families, I investigate the role of the area institutions working for the City of Vienna Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung for urban quality of life. These inform and advise the inhabitants about housing and neighborhood issues, carry out community-oriented neighborhood work, and accompany participatory planning processes in public space. The institutional ethnography with Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung revolves around the issue of target groups and how to reach them.

The ideal readers I address this work to are not only academics but also practitioners working in public and third-sector institutions, urban administrators, policymakers, and all actors interested in increasing the individual and collective freedom to live the life one reasons to value in cities.

Questa dissertazione di dottorato presenta un progetto di ricerca volto a contribuire allo studio scientifico della qualità della vita urbana nell'ambito degli studi urbani e nella sociologia delle migrazioni. Adotta come lente teorica di analisi il *Capability Approach* (Approccio delle Capacità), fondato da Amartya Sen, e cerca di contribuirne all'avanzamento attraverso la raccolta e l'elaborazione di dati empirici. Si analizzano le biografie migratorie e la vita quotidiana di famiglie di origine migratoria provenienti dall'Unione Europea e con bambini a Vienna. Questa città, porta di collegamento tra l'Europa dell'Ovest e dell'Est e popolare meta di migrazioni dall'Europa centrale e orientale, e in tempi recenti anche dall'Europa meridionale, è spesso stata ai vertici delle classifiche internazionali sulla qualità della vita. Insieme a 16 famiglie di origine migratoria provenienti dall'Europa centrale (Ungheria) e meridionale (Italia) e con bambini di età compresa tra i 6 e gli 11 anni, cerco di comprendere etnograficamente quali capacità siano rilevanti per la qualità della vita secondo le madri, le figlie, i figli e i padri in migrazione nel campione e le interazioni tra le capacità dei diversi membri della famiglia. Uno dei punti di forza della ricerca è la partecipazione dei bambini, che sono ancora soggetti marginali nella ricerca sulle migrazioni e negli studi urbani. Analizzo quali fattori di conversione urbani medino il loro uso dei quartieri di residenza e della città nella vita quotidiana, e in che modo. Inoltre, il progetto cerca di comprendere le motivazioni della crescente tendenza alla migrazione verso Vienna da paesi membri dell'Unione Europea, considerando i contesti locali piuttosto che nazionali di provenienza e di arrivo. Si argomenta che la migrazione è una pratica famigliare motivata non solo da ragioni economiche, ma anche da aspirazioni per il futuro che comprendono obiettivi di qualità della vita.

Il lavoro di campo si è svolto a Vienna tra l'ottobre del 2020 e il febbraio del 2022, durante la pandemia di Covid-19. Questo periodo di crisi, che ha temporaneamente ridotto la libertà di scelta individuale sui comportamenti da adottare, ha influenzato la vita quotidiana e le capacità delle famiglie migranti da paesi membri dell'EU con bambini, sorprendentemente non sempre in modo negativo. Inoltre, questo punto di vista originale apre a una nuova comprensione delle migrazioni all'interno dell'Unione Europea e ispira nuove riflessioni sulla qualità della vita. I metodi di etnografia (istituzionale) ibrida utilizzati in questo studio comprendono interviste, osservazione partecipante, go-along (passeggiate con conversazioni), viaggi virtuali nei luoghi di provenienza in Ungheria e in Italia a partire da fotografie.

A complemento dell'etnografia con le famiglie, indago il contributo alla qualità della vita urbana proveniente dalle istituzioni di zona appaltate dal Comune di Vienna dal nome Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung. Queste informano e forniscono consulenza agli abitanti su questioni abitative e di quartiere, svolgono un lavoro di quartiere di stampo sociale e accompagnano processi di pianificazione partecipativa dello spazio pubblico. L'etnografia istituzionale con la Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung è imperniata sulla questione dei gruppi target e di come raggiungerli.

Il pubblico ideale a cui rivolgo questo lavoro non comprende solo gli accademici, ma anche gli operatori che lavorano nelle istituzioni pubbliche e del terzo settore, gli amministratori urbani, i politici e tutti gli attori interessati ad aumentare la libertà individuale e collettiva di vivere la vita che si ha motivo di apprezzare nelle città.

Dieses Dissertationsprojekt leistet einen Beitrag zur wissenschaftlichen Forschung zum Thema urbane Lebensqualität in der Stadtforschung und in der Migrationssoziologie. Der von Amartya Sen begründete Befähigungsansatz (*Capability Approach*) stellt den theoretischen Rahmen für die Analyse dar. Ferner wird versucht, durch die Erhebung und Aufbereitung empirischer Daten zu Weiterentwicklung von diesem beizutragen. Konkret analysiere ich die Migrationsbiographien und das tägliche Leben von Familien mit Migrationshintergrund innerhalb der EU und mit Kindern in Wien. Als *Gateway-Stadt* und beliebtes Ziel der Migration aus Mittel- und Osteuropa, in jüngeren Zeiten auch aus Südeuropa, hat Wien in internationalen Rankings zur Lebensqualität oft eine Spitzenposition belegt. Zusammen mit 16 Familien mit EU-Migrationshintergrund aus Mittel- (Ungarn) und Südeuropa (Italien) mit Kindern im Alter von 6-11 Jahren versuche ich mit ethnographischen Methoden nachzuvollziehen, welche Fähigkeiten für die Lebensqualität der Mütter, Kinder und Väter in der Stichprobe relevant sind und welche Wechselwirkungen zwischen den Fähigkeiten der verschiedenen Familienmitglieder bestehen. Eine der Hauptstärken dieses Forschungsprojektes liegt in der Beteiligung von Kindern, die in der Migrations- und Stadtforschung noch immer unterrepräsentiert sind. Ich analysiere, welche städtischen Konversionsfaktoren ihre Nutzung der Wohngegend und der Stadt im Alltag vermittelnd beeinflussen und auf welcher Weise. Es wurden statt den nationalen verstärkt die lokalen Kontexte der Herkunft und Ankunft berücksichtigt, um die Motive für den zunehmenden Trend der EU-internen Migration nach Wien nachzuvollziehen, was ein weiteres Merkmal der Studie darstellt. Meine Untersuchung zeigt, dass Migration eine familiäre Praxis ist, die nicht nur durch wirtschaftliche Gründe motiviert ist, sondern auch durch Erwartungen an die Zukunft, einschließlich Ziele im Hinblick auf die Lebensqualität.

Die Feldforschung fand zwischen Oktober 2020 und Februar 2022 und damit während der Covid-19-Pandemie in Wien statt. Diese Krisenzeit, die die individuelle Handlungsfreiheit vorübergehend einschränkte, hatte entgegen der Erwartung nicht nur negative Auswirkungen auf das tägliche Leben und die Fähigkeiten von EU-Migrantenfamilien mit Kindern. Darüber hinaus bot dieser einzigartige Standpunkt Einblicke in die Migrationsbewegungen innerhalb der EU und regte zu neuen Überlegungen zur Lebensqualität an. Die in dieser Studie angewandten hybriden (institutionellen) ethnografischen Methoden umfassen Interviews, teilnehmende Beobachtung, *go-alongs* und bildgestützte "virtuelle Reisen" zu den Herkunftsorten in Ungarn und Italien.

Ergänzend zur Ethnographie mit Familien untersuchte ich die Rolle der von der Stadt Wien beauftragten Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung für urbane Lebensqualität. Diese informieren und beraten die Bewohner*innen zu Fragen rund ums Wohnen und die Nachbarschaft, betreiben gemeinwesenorientierte Stadtteilarbeit und begleiten partizipative Planungsprozesse im öffentlichen Raum. Die institutionelle Ethnographie mit der Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung drehte sich um die Frage, welche Zielgruppen erreicht werden (sollen) und wie diese zu erreichen sind.

Mit dieser Arbeit wende ich mich an ein Publikum, das nicht nur Sozialwissenschaftler*innen umfasst, sondern auch Praktiker*innen, die im öffentlichen und im dritten Sektor arbeiten, Stadtverwalter*innen, politische Entscheidungsträger*innen und alle Akteur*innen, denen es ein Anliegen ist, die individuelle und kollektive Freiheit zu erhöhen, im städtischen Umfeld das Leben zu leben, das man zu schätzen weiß.

Introduction

This research is an empirical and theoretical contribution to the scientific debate on urban quality of life and on the Capability Approach. Its distinctive focus lies on children`s and families` peculiar perspectives on the city and on experiences of family migration within the EU along the lines South-North and East-West/ Central East-Central West. It is the fruit of one and a half year of fieldwork in Vienna, differentiated into two sub-fieldworks: one with migrant-origin families from Italy and Hungary, including both adults and children, in the neighborhoods of residence; the other with an institution named *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung[1]*, tendered by the Municipality of Vienna. I hereby study quality of life both at the micro-level constituted by everyday life of families and their individual members, and at the urban mezzo-level where the work of the Gebietsbetreuung is situated. Using a *jigsaw* approach inspired by Dorothy Edith Smith's institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), I tried to put in communication two categories of actors who, as it turned out during fieldwork, have few direct interactions with each other but occupy complementary positions in the city. In fact, families with children are among the strongest users of neighborhoods of residence, according both to previous studies (cited in chapter 1) and to the findings of this research. At the same time, *Gebietsbetreuungen* aim to take care of the quality of public space in neighborhoods concerning both its physical and social components. I delved into mutual representations, focusing especially on how children are viewed and treated by this institution.

My analysis of migration is not located at the macro-level of push-pull dynamics, but at the micro-level. However, rather than an isolated individual as a rational actor, I believe it is worth looking into family and its practices. Family migration is likely to be driven not only by the prospects of economic gain or career advancement, but also by aspirations about the present and the future of the children and the family in different spheres of life. Moreover, previous research suggests that moving abroad with children leads to a stronger embeddedness in the neighborhood and city of migration. I acknowledge the interdependency of family members without overlooking diversities of needs and interests within families, also along gender and generational lines. I looked into the way gendered relationships within couples and families change, due to migration, with the passing of time. I argue that gender can influence individual agency and choices, as well as the concretely available options in a certain territory. Family represents the lens of analysis rather than the object of this research, which contributes primarily to the scholarly debates in urban studies and sociology of migration, and secondarily to the sociology of childhood.

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[1] This German name literally means *area care (or attendance) and urban renewal*.

It is a specificity and strength of this research that it brough to light the living conditions and aspirations of EU migrant-origin families not only in national States of provenance and arrival or in the spaces of fluxes, but also in the neighborhoods, towns, and cities of provenance and of arrival. Rather than on transnational practices or practices of border-crossing, I directed my focus onto the daily lives of research participants. Intra-European migrations have been boosted since the 2000s by EU enlargements (movement from East to West), the 2008 economic crisis and its aftermath (movement from South to North), and the recent wave of multiple crisis including the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the economic crisis. The choice of Vienna as research context is due to its repeated high placement in urban quality-of-life rankings and its attractivity as destination of intra-EU migration. The Italian and Hungarian migration to Vienna is a rapidly increasing trend and can be interpreted in Italy as a symptom of demographic malaise and in Hungary of a generalized crisis of the economy, the public sector, and the future. Already before fieldwork, I decided not to label the migrants from Southern and Central-Eastern Europe I wanted to research with as *élites* by default. Especially the ones with children, forced to immerse more into the society of migration, may encounter problems with housing, labor market, and taxation, or also informational and linguistic barriers and discriminations. Nevertheless, I expected them to be in a better position to use the city than migrants from outside the EU. This intermediate position between natives and extra-EU migrants makes migrants from Southern and Central-Eastern Europe significant categories to investigate urban accessibility.

The main theory I use is the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Sen, 1993, 1992, 1985; Nussbaum, 2011, 2000), and its further developments in urban studies (Blečić, Cecchini, & Talu, 2018, 2013; Nuvolati, 2019b, 2010, 2009) and sociology (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009; Robeyns, 2003, 2000). In urban studies, the CA points out the difference and gap between availability and quality of urban spaces and services on one side, and their accessibility on the other side. In other words, not everybody has the resources, the competences, and the enabling external conditions to be indeed able to use the city or parts of it. The Capability Approach takes into consideration both individual diversity of aspirations and preferences, and inequality in preference formation and in the concrete possibility to act as one values to, or be who one wants to be, compatibly with socially accepted behaviors and ways of living agreed upon through a democratic deliberation (Sen, 1985). I apply the Capability Approach to study the agency and constraints of relatively disadvantaged urban actors, women and children. The Capability Approach supports the reading of migration, mentioned earlier, as more than the search for better job opportunities and income. In this sense, I propose to introduce the concept of a 'capability of second degree' to signify the potential of migration to enable further achievements in different spheres of life. Being based on freedom of choice, the Capability

Approach has been defined as ethically individualistic. However, this does not mean that it ignores the connections between individuals or group-related advantages and constraints. In our specific case, it is necessary to consider access to capabilities both for each member of the family and collectively for the family. For example, as chapter 4 of this dissertation shows, women are the ones who invest the most time and energy to weave social ties that, beside their emotional value, may facilitate the access to information, support (for instance, to conciliation of work and care), and services (e.g., regarding the access to a school with limited capacity), to the benefit of all family members. The places of origin are also recalled because the decision to migrate matured there and because people may explicitly or implicitly go back, in their thought, to compare the life and context before and after migration. The overall goals of the research were to understand what capabilities make up quality of life according to the children and parents in the sample and what contextual urban elements facilitate and hinder their accomplishment (urban conversion factors), from an emic perspective. To reach these goals, I explored the aspirations and internal negotiations within families which led them to move to Vienna and the representations of Vienna and of places of provenance. Before moving to Vienna, I considered it likely that the city scored well in quality-of-life rankings thanks to its high standard of living, intended as the level of material wealth, as well as its excellences in the cultural and artistic field. Nevertheless, I intended to check whether it was regarded as a good place to live by the inhabitants, who see the city from the inside and use it daily. For instance, I wondered whether the city of institutions *par excellence* left adults, and even more children, the agency to find and create interstitial spaces and times. All the more so, considering that sociologists of childhood have been pointing out the increasing institutionalization, domestification, and individualization of children`s lives in Western societies. I expected the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic to be a relevant negative conversion factor which influenced the families` capabilities. The outcomes of this research provide insights into its negative effects and into a few positive impulses deriving from the pandemic crisis.

It has been an unconventional ethnography from its outset, since the families were dispersed in different parts of the large Viennese municipal area, which made it impossible to immerse ethnographically in a delimited area. The sanitary and social situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic – the research took place between October 2020 and February 2022 – and the policies adopted to contain it restrained and regulated the pace of the research advancement, so that the study took the shape of a 'hiccup ethnography', alternating phases of *stop and go*, immersion and emersion. The extraordinary circumstances of fieldwork during a pandemic forced me to flexibly adapt the methods according to ethic and pragmatic considerations, even more than normally necessary in

research with children. The pandemic and its burdens curbed children`s participation and led to the production of research results strongly influenced by the temporal research context. Furthermore, the situation of emergency and crises, which posed pressing problems partly also to the families I researched with, induced me to reflect on the significance of social scientists' work, which usually does not have the power to save lives. As a key to unravel ethical and practical dilemmas, I propose a distinction between formal / legal-bureaucratic ethics on the one hand, and substantial ethics on the other hand. The pandemic accentuated the reflexivity and recursivity between data collection and analysis typical of ethnography. The ethnography was hybrid, partly in person and partly online. I used the internet to find and recruit research participants, conduct interviews and virtual journeys, and get information on new digital migrant associationism. In person I conducted a few interviews, go-alongs, and participant observation of events organized by the Gebietsbetreuung. In total, I did 34 interviews with parents (from 16 families) and GB* practitioners (from all 5 teams), 19 go-alongs (with 12 families), and 7 virtual journeys (with 7 families). I also drew research findings from a five-week internship at GB* Mitte[2] which, together with interviews with GB* employees and participant observation, constituted the methods of an institutional ethnographic inquiry with a stronger geographical character than the version of the approach by its founder Dorothy Edith Smith. The most innovative methods, go-alongs and virtual journeys, consisted respectively in neighborhood walks with parents and children in the neighborhoods of residence, and photo-elicited online interviews supported by materials produced or found by the interviewees about their places of provenance in Italy and Hungary.

The sample was the result of a self-selection in terms of social class and, concerning the Hungarian subsample, language competences. Preliminarily, we need to acknowledge that it is not the most disadvantaged in terms of resources and competences who migrate. However, the parents in the sample did have linguistic and informational disadvantages and were going through a delicate phase in which they had to balance salaried work and care duties. I reflected on my positionality of woman and former teacher with reference to the interaction with different family members. Being Italian and new in Vienna remarked the role of experts of the children and parents in the sample, while my language competences probably created more closeness to the Italian than the Hungarian subsample.

I think this research may be a significant contribution to the field of quality-of-life research because it offers ethnographical depth and adherence to reality on a topic which is often reduced to dynamics of competition among cities to score better than the others on

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[2] In German, *Mitte* means *center*. This seat is responsible for Viennese central neighborhoods.

indicators imposed from above, rather than produced by urban inhabitants. Concerning migration, I hypothesize the need to overcome its mainstream interpretation as an individual phenomenon caused by merely economic reasons. Therefore, I bring into play and put to the test the concept of *quality of life* and use the family as a lens to reason about it.

This empirical research uses conceptual categories from the CA at the service of an open-ended, largely inductive process. The reported lists of capabilities and conversion factors (see section 3.1) are research results co-constructed with research participants, rather than pre-constructed indicators prepared by the researcher setting out to collect survey data. These lists also differ from the universal and normative lists of capabilities Martha Nussbaum advocates for. Beside applying the Capability Approach and making some novel points to bring forward the scientific reflection on it through empirical research originally enriched by child perspectives, with this doctoral dissertation I produced knowledge and suggestions aimed at boosting institutional learning by Gebietsbetreuung practitioners, the Municipality of Vienna, and practitioners and policymakers involved in or with similar institutions across Europe. Moreover, I fostered parents' reflexivity and awareness about their migration biographies and the way they use the city. I occasionally informed parents about the existence of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung and tried to sensibilize the GB* about the needs of children and families in the neighborhoods under their responsibility. Nevertheless, I missed the opportunity to create occasions for direct exchange between these two complementary actors, which may be considered as a limitation of the study, given its democratic and, in a sense, participatory stance.

A point of strength and originality of the research is the direct involvement of children, who are often still relegated to the role of invisible subjects in migration and urban studies. I explored the usefulness and limitations of the adult, scholarly concept of *quality of life* with respect to children`s lives according to their point of view. What does quality of life mean for children, also considering their limited freedom of choice about what to do? I refrain from normative discourses on children`s capabilities, such as those on the extent to what children are supposed and expected to be(come) autonomous in moving in the city and meeting with peers. Instead, I analyze the conditions which make autonomy more or less possible, easy to reach, and appealing to children. I also show the complementarities between children`s capabilities and those of other family members and, based on go-alongs, give a glimpse into the way the children in the sample engaged with the city. The research results show that the double view of parents and children enriched the work by directing the focus towards both functional and relational/interstitial aspects of quality of life. Children`s participation is even more valuable, considering that the fieldwork phase coincided with the most acute phases of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic, a stress test for every city, was an original and unexpected frame to reflect on quality of life. It reduced individual freedom of choice, at the base of the CA, precluding some behaviors in the city, especially regarding space use, mobility, and sociability. As I will illustrate, it also induced reflexivity on consolidated habits, whereby some subjects in the sample modified their preferences. The pandemic, which displayed the persistence of borders in the era of globalization and accentuated the downsides of being a 'free mover' within Europe, gave a further demonstration that EU migrants should not be viewed as a privileged *élite* by definition. The diachronical depth of the empirical phase of research – the fieldwork lasted about one and a half years – allowed to observe changes in different spheres of life, such as housing and labor, which might have been partly influenced by the research. The temporal extension, together with the involvement of complementary actors and the use of multiple research methods, increases the value and reliability of the study and its outcomes.

In this paragraph, I will give a short overview of the structure of this doctoral dissertation. Chapter 1 introduces the research field, topic, goals, and design, focusing on the theories and concepts I chose to shed light on the quality of life of EU migrant-origin families and on the accessibility and target groups of the institution Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung. In this first chapter I define quality of life and give some coordinates about the Capability Approach. I also tap into research on intra-EU migrations, and families in migration. I review a part of the literature on children`s relationship with the neighborhood and the city, and provide a frame for a discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects.

In chapter 2, I explain the research approach and methods, addressing the ethical and practical difficulties posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. I provide information about the sample, as well as on sampling criteria and strategies, and reflect on issues related to positionality and my role as a researcher in the field.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the results of the research with families.

Chapter 3 is more focused on functional aspect of the city and its use, and mirrors mainly the parents` perspectives. It contains an overview of the capabilities and conversion factors which emerged from the empirical work with families, analyzes the drivers of family migration and parents` representations of Vienna, on the background of the families` places of provenance. The chapter delves into the two complementary capabilities relative to children`s autonomy to move in the city, play, and meet with other children; and parents` conciliation of work, care, and spare time for themselves. More in detail, I analyze the urban and cultural conversion factors that influence the extent of children`s autonomy and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on conciliation.

Chapter 4 focuses on relational and informal aspects of urban quality of life, exploring fulfilled and unfulfilled wishes and aspirations. It reports mostly the results of the research

with children, who were the ones who showed me that the city is not only a more or less well-functioning machine to 'use', but also the context and enabler of relationships with other humans, and also with plants, animals, objects. In other words, for children places are inextricably bound with relationships, in line with the socio-spatial model of spatial representation and appropriation. I report maps of the paths of go-alongs, the list of nodes and edges in the neighborhoods of residence, and subjective neighborhood descriptions deriving from the cognitive and emotional maps of child and adult research participants (Lynch, 1990). These data are reported with the aim of situating the opinions and discourses on quality of life in physical space, showing local specificities and internal differences between Viennese neighborhoods. Questioning the extension of the discourse on quality of life to children, I elaborate on children`s engagement with their neighborhood and the city in physical and relational terms. I also investigate the meaning of sociability and social capital to use the city of Vienna, and the surprising desire for informality in a city known for its institutional landscape. I spend some words on off- and online places and circumstances of encounter, such as the groups *Italian moms in Vienna* and *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*, and analyze the effects of the pandemic.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the institution Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, an actor which was not included in my initial research design and imposed itself to my attention soon after I moved to Vienna. I maintain that their work can be seen as an urban conversion factor. After a short introduction to explain what it is and give some historical background information, I delve into the effects of the reduction of the number of neighborhood centers over time, also regarding recent developments during the Covid-19 pandemic. The crucial part of the chapter is the reflection on the target groups of GB*s and the strategies to reach them. The lack of encounters between the families in the sample and the GB*s triggered my analysis of mutual representations. The ethnographic description of my internship at GB* Mitte, which I chose because of its pioneering role in the introduction of social and community work, fuels the arguments made in the whole chapter.

The final discussion summarizes the aims and design of the study and its main results, recontextualizing them within the broader research field. It also highlights its strengths and limitations.

I hope you will enjoy the reading.

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1. Family migration in the pursuit of a better quality of life. Conceptual and theoretical tools

This research aims at grasping the subjective dimensions of quality of life which elude quantitative assessments through urban indicators on urban infrastructures, facilities, and resources. It also aspires to complement the surveys based on questionnaires on levels of subjective satisfaction with different selected spheres of life in cities. In order to shed light on the topics of quality of urban life, as a wider framework, and migrant integration in the city of Vienna, as a specific case study, in their complexity, in this doctoral dissertation I apply the Capability Approach in an innovative way. The Capability Approach takes account of individual diversity of desires, needs, aspirations, competences, and life conditions. The latter ones may have favorable and unfavorable influences on human states and actions.

This work takes on a very specific lens, that of EU-migrant families from Italy and Hungary with children aged 6-11 and living in Vienna[3]. Between October 2020 and February 2022, for almost one a half year, I conducted interviews with parents from 16 families, go-alongs with parents and children in the neighborhoods of residence with 12 of the same 16 families who had taken part in interviews, and virtual journeys to the places of origin in Italy and Hungary with 7 of the same families. I could gain information about their everyday life in the city, with a focus on the access and use of spaces and services in their neighborhood of residence. Even more, the research delivered insights on the achievements which the parents and children in the sample deem as valuable in their daily lives in Vienna, such as children`s autonomy and the opportunity for parents to conciliate job, family, and time for themselves. It investigated the way urban spaces and services, beside individual and family characteristics, directly and indirectly influence the ways families use the city. Furthermore, I decided to explore the online and offline groups of Italian and Hungarian mothers in Vienna by interviewing group administrators and reading group posts. Complementarily to the fieldwork with families, I investigated what role the area-based institution tendered by the Municipality of Vienna *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* plays for urban quality of life, eager to understand whether and how children and families like the ones in my sample might profit from their work. The results of semi-structured interviews with GB* employees, of a 5-week internship at Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung Mitte, and of ethnographic observation of events organized by the institution are presented in chapter 5 of this work.

I immersed myself ethnographically in the world of Italian and Hungarian families with children in Vienna and tried to understand, through their words and the observation of

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[3] This methodological choice is justified and explained later in this chapter.

their everyday life in the neighborhoods of residence, what concretely achievable *beings* and *doings* (capabilities) were most important for their quality of life. Women and children are often among the strongest users of public and semi-public spaces, and thus their different gazes on the city are very precious. Children`s difference is most evidently physical and cognitive, but even more influenced by the generational order based on age differences the society is built upon (Satta, 2012). Women`s difference is only partially physical and, also in this case, prevalently social. This is true if we think of childbearing and childcare, which influence the way women live the city, and of geographies of fear and danger, especially in the urban night. Thus, children`s and women`s difference may be accompanied by inequalities in using the city, so that concretely working with them, acknowledging internal differences, may help get closer to the goal of inclusive and empowering cities. Since this research wants to go beyond synthetic scores attributed to quality of life in cities, it was essential to explore the contextual elements which facilitate and encourage the use of the city (positive conversion factors) and those which, instead, made the access to urban spaces and institutions harder (negative conversion factors). I tried to keep the perspectives of parents and children analytically and methodologically distinct, as far as possible, admitting the limits of my research conduct. Exploring the families` neighborhoods of residence in Vienna and, virtually, the places of origin in Italy and Hungary, I tried to find an explanation for the increase of Italian and Hungarian migration to Vienna, considering the family dimension of migration and taking account not only of economic reasons but also of quality-of-life goals in several spheres of life. The research process with families and neighborhood institutions and its outcomes aim at producing knowledge and thinking impulses for practitioners with different disciplinary backgrounds (sociologists, social workers, planners, architects) working at neighborhood institutions, district councilors, and urban policymakers. These suggestions regard how to enhance the capabilities and quality of life of children, families, and potentially also other neighborhood inhabitants, with their specificities and hurdles.

In this first chapter, I am going to present selected theoretical and conceptual tools fundamental to this research: the first subchapter is devoted to families in migration; the second to quality of life according to the perspective of the Capability Approach and to the concept of neighborhood; the third to the city of Vienna and the Hungarian and Italian communities in Vienna.

Family migration within the EU: motives, aspirations, and the role of children

Family research has, for a long time, grappled with the task of providing a clear definition of family and criteria to understand who is included and who is excluded from it. Moreover, a family can be defined in several different ways:

> "As a place/space (the home/house), as a social cell (by analogy with the biologic cell, constituting the bodily living organism), as a symbolic model (*pattern*), as a structure, as a function, as a group of the living environment (Lebenswelt) or as an institution, and so on."[4] (Donati, 2015, p. 16)

Researching with families makes it necessary to consider, at the same time: structures (e.g., position in the occupational market, in social stratification or in terms of migration status); perceptions, aspirations and agency of its individual members (Donati, 2015, p. 26); processes of social reproduction and change over generations. Post-modern societies are witnessing a complexification and diversification of family models, which makes it more appropriate than ever to talk about *families* in plural. The families can have variable patterns: nuclear and single-parent families; same-sex and heterosexual families; ethnically homogeneous and mixed couples; single- and dual-career-families; multiple families in horizontal or vertical sense; etc. To give account of this complexity, family researchers nowadays are in favor of relational rather than structural definitions of families, since these are less normative and more dynamic, more suitable to give account of the emic perspectives too. Above all, the family needs to be seen as a specific *network* of relations featured by intersubjectivity and mutual influences. Family members influence each other and there is no sphere of life not influenced by the family of origin and that of procreation. Thus, family configurates itself as:

> "a «total social phenomenon» which – directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly – involves all dimensions of human existence, from the biological to the psychological, economic, social, legal, political, religious ones." (Donati, 2015, p. 35*)[5]*

In this project, the families in the sample were selected not based on their structure – on the contrary, diverse family patterns were welcome – but on the experience of migration and integration within the EU. Embracing a currently widespread position in sociology of family, I adopt a relational perspective on family and direct my attention towards the

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[4]Translated from Italian by the author. Original text in Italian: "La famiglia può essere definita: come luogo/spazio (la casa), come cellula della società (per analogia con la cellula biologica che costituisce l'organismo corporeo vivente), come modello (pattern) simbolico, come struttura, come funzione, come gruppo di mondo vitale o come istituzione, e così via."

[5] Translated from Italian by the author. Original text in Italian: "un «fenomeno sociale totale», che - direttamente o indirettamente, esplicitamente o implicitamente - impiega tutte le dimensioni dell'esistenza umana, da quelle biologiche a quelle psicologiche, economiche, sociali, giuridiche, politiche, religiose."

intersections and complementarities of migratory paths and daily lives among family members. For instance, as we will see in the chapters about research results, the research revealed that the women in the sample often migrate after their partners or husbands, and that children`s autonomy of movement and women`s conciliation of work and care are complementary. Interdependency coexists with gender and intergenerational differences and inequalities within the family, as I thematize in relation to the ways of using the neighborhood and the city. Aware of the different needs and desires in using the city, as well as of power imbalances, I strove to differentiate the perspectives of each family member analytically and methodologically. I clarify that family does not constitute the object of my research and that the theoretical framework I adopt does not come from family studies. Instead, the family represents a valuable lens of analysis to show inner differentiations concerning migrants` needs and concrete opportunities in the city along gender and generational lines.

In this research, migration is seen as a family issue. The decision to migrate, the strategies and plans for migration are considered – unlike in the functionalist paradigm – not only as the mechanical results or push-pull dynamics, nor as the product of a lone (adult) individual rationally weighing the pros and cons, but rather as the outcome of processes of negotiation within the family, considering the needs and interests of the family of origin and of that of procreation (Zanfrini, 2016; Regalia, Scabini, & Rossi, 2008). This seems especially suitable to study the biographies of intra-EU migrants from Western Europe, whereby 'expressive reasons' – including the consolidation of relationships of love and friendship, but also the pursuit of a better quality of life – seem to overcome job reasons for migration, according to the literature on the topic (Recchi, 2013, p. 83). As we will see in the next chapters, the aspiration for better schools and schooling was one of the drivers for the Hungarian families in my sample to migrate to Vienna. While traditional migration research often ends up treating migration as a one-time event, studying migration as a family process brings back in the temporal dimension in its full fledge (Regalia, Scabini, & Rossi, 2008). In fact, the past story of the family and the future of the children are involved in the decision to migrate. Furthermore, scientific literature shows that the presence of children in the family favors the process of settling down and makes return migration rarer. It takes a strong motivation to move abroad with the intention of founding a family, even more if the children are already born and, once this step is taken, its reversibility is less probable than for single individuals. Studies show that long-term migration plans of Greek and Spanish migrants to London after the economic crisis of 2008 are motivated by the desire to escape the precarity and lack of perspective in the home country not only for themselves, but also and especially for their children and families (Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019). The embeddedness of families in the place of migration

draws the attention to processes of urban and social integration beyond movement and circulation of migrants in the global economy, and thus to the main topic of this project, quality of life in the neighborhood and city of residence. As several studies show, households with children need to interact with neighborhood institutions, such as schools[6] and associations, more intensively than households without children (Ambrosini, 2020; Bartolini & Morga, 2007, p. 102). Everyday interactions in parks and shops – not necessarily positive, though – are also more frequent for persons with children (Collins & Coleman, 2008). The education of children in the context of migration requires negotiation between different culturally defined dimensions of life, taking into account individual and group values, aspirations, and lifestyles. In this perspective, culture is meant in a broad sense, rather than only as ethnic culture, and as a dynamic process of participation, rather than as a stable individual and group attribute. This negotiation is concretely embedded in everyday activities and interactions in the neighborhood and urban living contexts. Among others, a study on French expats in the UK shows that women are the ones who – starting from child-related places and activities in the neighborhood and ethnic networks – weave and maintain social ties for themselves, their husbands, and ultimately the whole family (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014). A specificity of this research is the attempt to involve children alongside their parents.

I argue that migrants and children are marginal subjects – 'non-citizens' and 'not yet citizens' (Blečić, Cecchini & Talu, 2013) – because they have no full national citizenship rights. It has been argued that children had for long time the status of 'invisible subjects' in mobility studies, being considered as passive followers of their parents and teachers, at least in the global North (Raffini e Giorgi, 2020). This implies disadvantages in comparison to natives and adults in terms of their capabilities to use the city. Migration research is still adult-centric, as the lack of data about the number of children in migration demonstrates. Such data are collected merely about specific cases that raise concern, for instance to monitor the number of trafficked children, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, or refugees (White, Laoire, Tyrrell, & Carpena-Méndez, 2011). Migrant children are mostly seen as needy and vulnerable, even more than children in general. While gender has made its entrance in family migration research, children are still invisible and silent in it, objects of care and fears rather than subjects and agents. Children`s opinions and perspectives seem to be almost irrelevant to decision-making processes regarding migration. Research shows that parents` ideas about their children`s future promote their decision to migrate, whereas there is little interest for children`s migration experience in the making. In some cases, they are even considered as 'luggage' in tow and burden to

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[6] The power of schools as places to build social ties, has been argued, depends on its distance from the place of residence (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014).

parents` capacity to be flexible, easily mobile, and economically productive. On the contrary, a few studies inspired by the New Sociology of Childhood demonstrate that children can also contribute actively to decision-making processes in family migration and mediate between family adult members and the new context of migration (White, Laoire, Tyrrell, & Carpena-Méndez, 2011).

Women – especially the mothers in the sample, who are women with migration background – are often, due to career disadvantage and discriminations, 'less citizens'. Who, better than these categories of people, to shed light on what a city and its institutions can do to improve quality of life, meant as access and satisfactory use of urban spaces, services and opportunities deemed as valuable by the subjects themselves? In this perspective, I see the children in this research not as consumers or passive users of the city, but as competent subjects and potential co-producers of the city. Caterina Satta (2014) provocatively argues that the idea of city for children as just city for all, by default, often bears the stereotypical imaginary of childhood as period of innocence and purity and risks producing, on the contrary, especially for some categories of children who are livelier and do not match the imaginary of the angel-like child, exclusion from public space and separation from the adults` world. That`s why, in my research, I involve children and parents together to investigate the concrete and situated meanings of quality of life ethnographically, starting from differentiated everyday lives and not from postulates about children`s needs and desires in general. Families with children are a permanent category whose representants change the whole time, as the children grow up and enter teenage and then adulthood. Due to the families` time scarcity and their temporary condition, when they start having more free time, the children are already older and the family`s life situation has changed. Therefore, I argue, the needs of families with children are little known[7].

The urban and rural contexts of provenance are relevant for this research because it is important to comprehend why the parents decided to leave them, which *beings* and *doings* were deemed as not satisfactorily achievable there for them and their children. Moreover, they remain in the background as implicit terms of comparison with the city of destination. Thus, migrants may have a more aware perspective on the city, since they often take less things for granted than locals.

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[7] See the notes from the go-along with family 12.

Child`s drawing and watercolor painting of the family`s place of provenance in Italy.

Finally, a terminological note. Regarding the families of Italian and Hungarian origin in my sample, I prefer to speak of 'migration' instead of 'mobility'[8] (Camozzi, 2020a; 2020b), although the subjects are EU-citizens, because 'mobility' is rather used for 'liquid', even 'effervescent' relocations on voluntary basis (Pugliese, 2018; Raffini e Giorgi, 2020),

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[8] Camozzi, in her study on Italian migration to Berlin in relation to the transition to adulthood (Camozzi, 2020a), also introduces the third concept of 'tourism', which I did not consider in this paper because the life stage of adult research participants, marked by parenthood and family-making practices, makes them feel way more rooted than tourists. It is even harder – and pointless, since these would be adult categories imposed from the outside without being able to grasp children`s stance about them – to define the position of the children in the sample, some of them born in Vienna and all of them attending school in Vienna.

whereas family practices in migration bring a certain stability and rootedness in the city of destination. European free movers' liquid migration has been described as: temporary, for example circular; primarily economically motivated; legal, according to national State categorizations; spontaneous and unpredictable; individualized; flexible, as all doors are kept open for further changes (Engbersen et al. in Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019, p. 17-18). However, it has been argued that this frame does not reflect the majority of intra-EU migration:

> "Yet the primacy of economic motivations cannot be said to be a defining characteristic of intra-EU mobility in general; quite the contrary. Several studies have highlighted the significance of non-material considerations for EU citizens who move looking for healthier environments, self-fulfillment, new lifestyles, better socio-political systems, and a better quality of life; also because of love." (Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019, p. 18)

Moreover, as we have seen, there are several intermediate situations between the poles of migration by necessity vs lifestyle migration. Re-elaborating on the typology of intra-European migration proposed by Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli (2019), we can distinguish three ideal-types.

a) Necessity-driven migration: Individuals who migrate because of precarious economic and life conditions in the country of origin, with no intention to further migrate. This applies to intra-EU migrations directly linked to the economic crisis of 2008 and, as we are starting to see, reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis and by the war in Ukraine.
b) Targeted migration: Strong intentionality related to career plans. Temporal migration and flexible plans.
c) Migration as occasion and chance, intermediate form. Without urgence to leave the home country, these migrants grasp an occasion with undefined outlines to improve their own condition, often following the partner or a close friend.

It has been noted about South European migration within the EU that the Erasmus generation partly overlaps with the generation of young adults with precarious working conditions (Raffini, 2014; Alberio & Berti, 2020). Studies on Central and East European mobile citizens show that downward mobility in the sphere of labor and loss of symbolic capital are typical phenomena (Favell, 2014; Raffini e Giorgi, 2020). Finally, the term 'migration' seems to me more neutral than 'mobility', 'migrant' more neutral than 'expat', the latter being often used as auto-attribution and sign of distinction.

Quality of life as a matter of aspirations and capabilities: the role of urban conversion factors

Quality of life

'Quality of life' is a complex, multidimensional concept. Material and immaterial, individual and collective, objective and subjective dimensions all contribute to define it (Nuvolati, 2010). It would be simplistic to think of quality of life as a very personal and subjective assessment of the level of well-being or happiness of a person. Far from being an inner state of mind, quality of life can be strongly influenced by the national and local (city/town, neighborhood) living context in its physical, social, and political dimensions. The places of residence, their features and the differentiated connectedness to places and areas outside, mirror and in turn produce inequalities, also regarding quality of life.

Although it is not easy to define human needs and to hierarchize them, there is a certain level of agreement on the fact that the satisfaction of some primary needs – such as eating or having a home – is a prerequisite for being able and motivated to exercise more refined forms of use of the city, such as voluntary involvement in events organized by neighborhood institutions or in local participatory planning processes aimed at interventions in public space. In this regard, Maslow`s pyramid with materialistic needs at the base and post-materialistic needs towards the upper vertex (Maslow, 1954) still holds some truth, especially in pandemic and post-pandemic social and historical context characterized by multiple crisis. In its further developments by Ronald Inglehart (Inglehart, 1977), the theory suggests that the differentiation between materialistic and post-materialistic dimensions relates not only to universal human needs but also to values and lifestyles, which are generationally and culturally influenced. We also note that quality of life is multiscalar, in the sense that the way it configurates itself in a neighborhood partly depends on the characteristics and arrangements in the city and urban quality of life which, in turn, partly depends on regional and national features. The aspects of quality of life related to politics, economy, and welfare state are especially subject to multiscalarity. Quality of life is also relational: in a family, for instance, the parents` quality of life influences their children`s, and vice versa. I could also reflect that quality of life changes over time, not only in different phases of life but also depending on the contingent situation, for example due to pandemics, extreme natural events, or to the political situation in a country.

Studies on quality of life not only from an economic but also from a social and cultural point of view started in the USA in the 1960s` with the so-called Social Indicators Movement. Through Scandinavia and Germany, the study of quality of life by means of

social indicators spread to Europe in the following decades and flourished until nowadays (Nuvolati, 2019b). Its aims are to measure and compare quality of life in different contexts through indexes and to inform urban politics and policies. Since quantitative data about objective and subjective indicators need to be made comparable, weighting represents a considerable methodological challenge. Another challenge, especially for the studies focusing on objective indicators, is to give account of subjective perceptions and social inequalities. Moreover, objective indicators are not able to deterministically predict the quality of life of individuals: sometimes, research participants express satisfaction with the city they live in despite objectively unfavorable conditions. Conversely, subjective feelings of dissatisfaction are possible even in a city topping international rankings on quality of life (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Zapf, 1979). This has to do with mechanisms of habituation and to the accommodation of expectations up- or downwards. To exemplify these mechanisms, I report below some comments collected in the course of fieldwork.

> *"When we moved to Vienna and then visited Budapest again the first times, we were struck by how dirty and filthy the streets are in Budapest and also how neglected the buildings are. You don't even notice that, if you live there. And now after 3 years, oddly enough, I notice, for example today, where we were walking, that it is not so clean here either, but compared to Budapest it is maybe still clean here. Yes, you really get used to the things that surround you. And to the good, I think, you get used faster."* (Mother during go-along with MC3)

> *"For Viennese, people who have really lived here for decades, they certainly notice it from a different angle, or experience it from a different angle, and maybe complain more than me or us who have lived here for a year. I have colleagues who complain all the time about how terrible everything is, and it's all terrible. And then I sometimes say "Yeah, you know, Budapest or Hungary is even worse". And I mean, sure, everyone relativizes their own environment as they know it."* (Interview with M4)

The concept of *interstices of everyday life* has been developed to complement studies using objective and subjective indicators through the consideration of minute aspects of quality of life beyond direct and clear influences of institutions and politics on the experience of the city (Nuvolati, 2019a, 2019b). Interstices are residual spaces and times, in the sense that they are void of predefined functions, which people use in informal and hard-to-predict ways to take a break, linger, and cultivate relationships. Interstitial public and semi-public spaces are not the well-known places of the city, visited by tourists and cited in the media, but rather clues to (re-)construct alternative, minor stories.

> "Looking at an artwork, our attention is often drawn to the central message that the artist intends to convey. The rest is in the background, behind the protagonists, almost disappearing from view, yet potentially recalling equally significant scenes.

[…] Centrality and periphery as the outcome of perceptual processes draw our mental maps and graduate our view of the world."[9] (Nuvolati, 2019a, p.55)

Interstices are often small – in contrast to the big size of 'blocks' such as schools, workplaces, or blocks of flats – and bound with affective meanings and loaded with memory and place attachment.[10] They are connected to routines but, given the high speed of changes in the urban fabric, also reserve surprises. Interstices are also highly differentiated practices, fruit of high levels of diversity in contemporary cities.

The optimal city size theory hypothesizes that a certain middle urban size would represent the most advantageous compromise between the costs (such as traffic, poverty, criminality, and anonymity) and the benefits (such as job opportunities, services, and social control) of living in an urban rather than a rural context (Nuvolati 2009, 2010). Its shortcomings consist in the fact that this theory overlooks urban complexity and individual preferences. A more flexible and differentiated picture of urban quality of life is made possible by adopting the Capability Approach. According to the Capability Approach, in order to ensure high levels of quality of life to its inhabitants a city should propose a broad spectrum of different infrastructures and services – taking into account the different needs and desires in diverse, globalized societies – and facilitate the access to them for as many people as possible, abandoning the ill-meant principle of 'one size fits all', typically excluding the non-adults, non-males, non-natives, less educated, less healthy, and persons with impairments[11].

The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach is based at its outset on the assumption that neither wealth and income nor the measurement of the level of subjective satisfaction with one`s life conditions are sufficient as indicators to assess quality of life of individuals, groups, and social categories, since they do not give any information about their living conditions. In this, it distances itself from the commodity approach and utilitarianism within welfare

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[9] Translation by the author. Original text in Italian: "Guardando un'opera d'arte la nostra attenzione è spesso attratta dal messaggio centrale che l'artista intende dare. Il resto è sullo sfondo, alle spalle dei protagonisti, quasi scompare alla vista, eppure potenzialmente richiama scene altrettanto significative. […] Centralità e periferie come esito dei processi percettivi disegnano le nostre mappe mentali e graduano la visione che abbiamo del mondo."

[10] The section 'Children, neighborhood, and city' further elaborates on the meaning of interstices for quality of life.

[11] The importance of the context for participation to social life has been underlined vehemently with reference to the social and school inclusion of people with disabilities. Environmental factors (facilitators or barriers) are one of the 4 pillars constituting the model International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health from 2001.

economics. *Capabilities* can be defined as "the set of concrete possibilities for action and expression, in tune with certain values and opportunities of choice, allowed to individuals" (Nuvolati, 2010), while the states (*beings*) and activities (*doings*) actually performed or achieved by individuals are called *functionings* (Sen, 1985). The Capability Approach sees the individual as a free agent who can choose between different concrete options to "lead different types of life" (Sen, 1993, p. 33), taking into account the diversity of human needs and aspirations (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum, 2011). Sen rejects both objective lists theories, which produce universal catalogs of things which would mechanically increase people`s standard of living and well-being, and ruthless hedonism or libertarian views, as not all capabilities deemed as valuable by individuals should be equally supported by politicians. Far from being boundless, freedom and agency can be exercised among the reduced set of options concretely available, different for each individual, depending on the differential resources and forms of capital owned, as well as on the type of context. To this respect, Nussbaum speaks of 'combined capabilities' as the result of the combination of 'internal capabilities', which consist in individual characteristics and competences; and external socio-political-economic conditions in the living environment (Nussbaum, 2011). According to Nussbaum, capabilities…:

> "…are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment. To make the complexity of capabilities clear, I refer to these "substantial freedoms" as *combined capabilities.*" (Ibidem, p. 20-21).

It may appear audacious to choose the Capability Approach as an interpretive lens to explore the topic of quality of life in a Western city from a sociological point of view, considering that the Capability Approach originates from Amartya Sen's reflections starting from the 1980s on the Indian context from an economic point of view. While studies on quality of life of most of the population in developing countries tend to focus on minimal levels of basic functionings, in Western countries capabilities beyond physical survival gain more relevance. In urban studies, the Capability Approach points out that counting the number of services and infrastructures in a city (for example, counting the number of parks and measuring their surface), according to what Blečić, Cecchini, and Talu ironically call the 'countability approach', does not reveal much about their territorial distribution, nor on whether, how, and which kind of people (can) use them, whether they need them or not. Much more important would be what people can and cannot do with the resources they have and with the provisions they find in the city (Sen, 1993; Robeyns, 2000; Blečić, Cecchini & Talu, 2018, 2013). Beside *availability*, the authors draw attention to *quality* and *accessibility*. Nuvolati underlines the importance of physical components of urban accessibility such as conformation of urban spaces, times, and mobility for urban quality of life. He criticizes traditional sociology of having regarded exclusively socio-economic

accessibility (Nuvolati, 2009). Inspired by the Capability Approach, the scholar maintains that improving the accessibility of services is the main way for improving quality of life in large cities, while increasing the number and variety of services would be the solution to improve quality of life in small- and medium-sized cities and towns (Nuvolati, 2010, 2009). The concept of *urban functionings* refers to the concrete ways of using the city, and *urban capabilities* to the degree of substantial freedom to use the city (*ibidem*). According to the research steam on the CA in urban studies, the consideration of the inhabitants' needs and their active involvement in city planning processes is of crucial importance. The attempts to apply the theoretical framework of the Capability Approach to European contexts and other fields of study than economics – among them also urban studies and sociology – highlighted the difficulty to operationalize the Capability Approach and 'make it work' in practice (Robeyns, 2000; Blečić, Cecchini, & Talu, 2013). Most studies inspired to the Capability Approach appear to merely collect data about functionings, since capabilities also include opportunities which have not been seized and are therefore somewhat 'invisible' (Robeyns, 2000).

> "Given the rich array of functionings that Sen takes to be relevant, given the extent of disagreement among reasonable people about the nature of the good life, and given the unresolved problem of how to value sets, it is natural to ask how far Sen's framework is operational. Is it a realistic alternative to the methods on which economists typically rely - measurement of real income, and the kind of practical cost-benefit analysis which is grounded in Marshallian consumer theory?" (Sugden in Robeyns, 2000, p. 21)

Moreover, who and how should attribute a weight to each functioning in relation to the overall quality of life of a person appears problematic. The Capability Approach is, in the intentions of its creator, rather a framework of thought than a mathematical formula (Robeyns, 2000). In this research project, I integrate a deductive and an inductive approach to exemplify and show the utility of the Capability Approach as theoretical lens to study quality of life of EU-migrants from a sociological and urban perspective; and to enrich the theoretical reflection on the Capability Approach as one of the results of the empirical, open-ended research process.

The relevance of the context within the Capability Approach is evident, if we think that some categories in the society – such as the full-time working mothers and fathers in my sample – might meet differently strong 'group-dependent constraints' (Sen, 1992; Robeyns, 2003, p. 46) to conciliate work and private life in Vienna and previous cities of residence. The founder of the Capability Approach remarks the importance of the context and its compatibility with agency and freedom of choice with these words:

> "Freedom has many aspects. Being free to live the way one would like may be enormously helped by the choice of others, and it would be a mistake to think of

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achievements only in terms of active choice *by oneself*. A person`s ability to achieve various valuable functionings may be greatly enhanced by public action and policy, and these expansions of capability are not unimportant for freedom for that reason." (Sen, 1993, p. 44).

"The Capability Approach is concerned with showing the cogency of a particular space for the evaluation of individual opportunities and successes." (Sen, 1993, p. 50).

Space is here intended not only in its physical components (public goods, infrastructure), but also regarding prevalent social norms and public policies. The results of the empirical research presented in this dissertation shed new light on the role of the context not only in enabling or hindering access and satisfactory use of the city, but also in shaping aspirations, preferences, attitudes, and habits. The Capability Approach attributes two different roles to human diversity and contexts of life. On the one hand, they contribute to shape individual hopes, preferences, and aspirations (diversity as heterogeneity). This means that they orient the process of free choice among the possible options of alternative beings and doings. On the other hand, human diversity and contexts of life also account for the differences in the actual freedom to use goods and services, based on the concrete opportunities to convert them into capabilities and functionings thanks to conversion factors (diversity as inequality) (Robeyns, 2003, Sen 1992). In other words, diversity implies diversity of preferences, also shaped by the present or previous environments of life, but it cannot be overlooked that the quantity and quality of viable options is not the same for all individuals and social groups. In the field of migration studies, the Capability Approach has been applied to analyze migratory choices taking account of individual and contextual factors at the micro- (person and family practices), meso- (migrant networks) and macro- (politics and policy, economy, welfare model) level (Bonfanti, 2014). The Capability Approach proposes itself as an alternative to neoclassical push-pull models, accused of determinism and rationalism. Migration is seen as a capability that gives access to further capabilities. I hence propose to consider migration as a 'meta-capability' or 'capability of second degree'[12]. Similarly, concerning the capabilities related to daily urban mobility, the availability of public transport and the concrete opportunity of being able to use it give access to otherwise partly unreachable places in the city and capabilities related to labor and leisure (Nuvolati, 2009). Similarly, the capability of being able to migrate abroad can give access to other capabilities such as more favorable labor market conditions or a better health system. It is close to the concept of *fertile functionings*, the ones fostering capability-formation, such as having solid relationships as social capital to rely on (Wolff and De-Shalit in Nussbaum, 2011).

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[12] These denominations do not come from Nuvolati`s publication, though, but are mine.

Talking about capabilities with reference to children may appear inappropriate, since children cannot freely choose between different lifestyles and behaviors to adopt. Their degree of freedom and power to influence decisions regarding their lives, as well as the development of precious competences necessary to exercise this freedom, varies depending on the kind educational styles by their parents (Baumrind, 1971), teachers (Lewin, 1939), or other legal guardians, which can in different measure tend towards an authoritarian, authoritative/democratic, or permissive/neglectful/laissez-faire style. Children appear to be passive users of the city, escorted from one institutional 'island', built and managed by adults for them, to the other. However, a city that poses the conditions for children to exercise progressively bigger spaces of autonomy and agency may nurture their desire to use spaces and participate in urban life. Taking children's needs seriously – the diverse needs of real children, not of the stereotypical child in adults` minds (Satta, 2014) – also contributes to the removal of obstacles to access for all users, since it shows the shortcomings of the approach 'one size fits all'. Some interesting examples of the use of the Capability Approach to analyze the use of cities by children and families are two doctoral dissertations. One of them tries to offer an operative tool (questionnaire) to evaluate the effects of territorial public policies on quality of life by way of analyzing and measuring children`s effective use of places, services, and opportunities in a Sardinian city (Talu, 2008). I believe the value of this work lies in the focus on children`s quality of life and in the construction of a tool to assess the quality and accessibility of urban places and services for children. A point of criticism I move to the work is that the researcher did not involve children and families in the construction of the instrument and of its single items. As a result, the filled questionnaires deliver information about the quality and accessibility of *places for children*, but could not shed any light on *children`s places* (Rasmussen, 2004). *Places for children* are those created and managed by adults on the basis of their representations of childhood, of urban space and its safety or dangerousness, and of children`s needs. Adult experts attribute them specific functions, most of the times connected with pedagogical goals, and expect children to behave according to their expectations. *Children`s places* are those discovered or created by children, loaded with their subjective meanings and emotional attachment, transformed creatively during children`s play (multifunctionality), possibly in the empty spaces left by adults` attention and surveillance. They can be informal spaces within *spaces for children* or in residual areas of the city (Satta, 2012; Kogler, 2019). The other doctorate dissertation is a comparative study between Italy and the Netherlands using a deliberative approach based on the Capability Approach. The researcher explored neighborhood quality of life of families in Zone 9 (Milan) and Watergraafsmeer (Amsterdam) by using focus groups, 20 grid-based interviews for each case study, and a neighborhood mapping technique (Guerini, 2012). The strengths of this work consist, in my view, in the

participatory approach and in the geographical consideration on the contextual factors influencing families` agency. The weakness I see is that, in the case of families with children, only adults participated in focus groups and interviews. In my research, the fieldwork alongside children and families, as well as with the area institutions Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, focused of urban conversion factors facilitating or hindering the access to the capabilities which the families in the sample deemed as valuable. It was important for my research goals to encourage the active participation of both parents and children for a longer time period, to use multiple methods in order to increase the validity of the research results, and to involve complementary actors, that is the families and the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung.

Children, neighborhood, and the city

Quality of life is nowadays not only a conceptual tool used in the scientific realm but also a buzzword easily found in laymen discursive practices. It is an adult term which has been deployed about the living conditions of children with diseases and disabilities, as well as with reference to the quality of educational offers. Although the concept of *quality of urban life* has been sometimes deployed to study the living conditions *of children*, it does not correspond to the way children experience the city. This research intends to investigate *with children* how they experience their neighborhood and city of residence, what they can and cannot do there, and what they like and do not like about it (*capabilities*, tastes, preferences). This means trying to get as close as possible to children`s internal perspectives, attentive not only to find or confirm regularities in childhood but also to grasp the singularities and give voice to aspects of children`s engagement with the city which are harder to understand rationally or verbalize. In fact, basing on my developmental psychology knowledge and on my previous hands-on experience with children in schools and free time contexts, I expected children to live space in a holistic way, using their body, senses, and affect, deploying their fantasy and creativity.

Quality of life is not only about macroaspects of a city such as housing, mobility, environment, or urban security. When we talk about spatio-temporal interstices of everyday life, we deal with micro-aspects of quality of life that slip away from the sieves used in quantitative studies using objective and subjective indicators. It requires interpretive approaches to grasp them (Nuvolati, 2019b). Before entering fieldwork, I wondered to what extent an overly organized Western city like Vienna had interstitial spaces and times – interstices require a certain level of chaos –, which meanings these took for migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, and whether these were equally important for adults and children in the sample. Thanks to their plastic mind and their

exclusion from the labor market, I suspected that children might be more creative than adults in using and giving symbolic and affecting meanings to urban objects and spaces. To research interstices, the researcher must leave the office desk and immerse in the chaos of everyday urban life, at a small spatial scale, in the trail of individual and collective meanings for specific groups of people. Before fieldwork, I was convinced that an 'interstitial research approach' might promote the openness towards the field deriving from the awareness that there is no deterministic, mechanical correspondence between the expected and the effective uses people make of urban places and objects, and that meaning-making processes in the city are not quite predictable. However, I was not sure to what extent the children in my sample had the possibility to experience interstitial spaces and times – less controlled, more informal spaces and times leaving more space for creative uses – given that literature tells us that adults nowadays tend to (over)schedule children`s days with educative activities either in 'institutional blocks' (Nuvolati 2019a, 2019b)/ 'islands' (Zeiher & Zeiher, 1998), or at home, and that children would internalize this logic and use it even in the situations where they have more freedom to organize their encounters with peers (Zeiher, 2001).

Despite differences in parental educational styles, children still have to comply with the dos and don`ts set by their parents. Even more, their capabilities in the city, as we will see with the examples of autonomy and conciliation, are complementary and sometimes dependent on those of their parents. The time and quality of children`s engagement with the city largely depends on their degree of autonomy or dependence in moving around. It has been argued that the help of adults is often seen as indispensable for the children to move between the islands and, to different extent depending on the means and pace of movement or transport, the in-between spaces stay mostly unexplored (Kogler, 2015). However, the literature inspired to the New Sociology of Childhood also points out that, on a micro scale, children express their agency in space appropriation processes, for example by way of inventing alternative temporary uses of urban spaces and objects or setting out for missions to conquer secret and forbidden places (Kogler, 2019). Literature on childhood and the city reported about the following ongoing processes, apart from insularization: institutionalization[13], domestication, and individualization (Hengst, 2007; Warming & Kampmann, 2007; Zeiher, 2001). These growing trends refer respectively to the fact that children are entrusted to specialized institutions, often run by educational experts; they spend more and more time at home or in home-like, protected spaces other than the street; middle-class children have an individually tailored and fragmented time

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[13] Also linked to the politicization of childhood, the phenomenon that makes childhood and children objects of adult debates in the name of the future of societies, neglecting the present of children`s everyday life.

schedule, rather than spending several hours every day with batches of other children in their neighborhood, and parents often ask them to express their opinions about the activities they prefer.

Neighborhood of residence and the Covid-19 pandemic

The study of flows and transnationalism in globalization studies in the wake of the 'mobility turn' has proven to be inadequate to give account of the empirical reality of migrants' integration processes in everyday life. These take place mostly in the neighborhoods of residence of which, according to scientific evidence, migrants[14], children[15], and parents with small children are heavy users (Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014). In what is believed to be the 'Age of mobility', neighborhoods are not only a relic of the past but rather the places where the great part of people`s lives still take place, neighborhood organizations work, and policies are enacted (Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014; Andreotti, 2014). Neighborhoods are also the sites where new forms of community are artificially built as 'pedagogical projects' and 'renewable contracts' based on the concerted effort of residents, associations, and local administrators. These seem to be the only possible communities in today's individualistic, fast, and diverse urban societies (Tramma, 2009). For all the reasons presented so far, I decided to analyze EU-migrant families` experience of the city at this territorial level. The neighborhood can be meant in two ways, as administrative unit, or as subjective, highly symbolic, and relational space (Bottini, 2016). The second view was held, among others, by Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1990). Some streams of scientific literature conceive of the neighborhood primarily as a social space, giving prominence to the aspect of social capital and social networks.

Galster (in Bottini, 2016) proposes a conceptualization of neighborhood comprising 10 dimensions which seems particularly useful for the present work because of its operative and comprehensive character:

- Structural features of buildings;
- Infrastructural features (streets, services)
- Demographic structure of resident population (among others age, geographic and ethnic background, family structures)
- Status and social position of resident population (among others educational level, income, occupation)

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[14] Despite the importance of transnational practices supported by ICTs and modern means of transportation, also migrants and mobile people still live locally.

[15] It may be argued that institutional islands for children are at least as important as spaces in their neighborhood of residence but especially kindergarten and primary school, two central institutions in children`s lives, are often located near home.

- Public services (safety, quality of healthcare, schooling, public administrations, parks, leisure services, and so on)
- Environmental quality
- Accessibility
- Political features
- Features of social interaction (social capital, associations)
- Emotional aspects

This research, which had a special eye for accessibility since its outset, revealed that functional aspects of the neighborhood and the city on one side, relational and emotional on the other side both contribute to quality of life.

The German language has a rich terminology to refer to the neighborhood:
- *Wohnumgebung* (living environment/ home environment)/ *Nahraum* (vicinity area) refer to the area surrounding one's home. It is not a geometrical circle with the home as center and a fix radius, but rather a subjective representation of the space of one`s everyday life;
- *Grätzel* (Viennese word) is a portion of the district delimited by subjective borders and identified as the own neighborhood;
- *Nachbarschaft* is the neighborhood in its human and social component, as sociability networks and social capital condensed in neighborly relationships;
- *Bezirk* is a district in administrative sense, *Bezirksteil* a part of it;
- *wohnen* is to reside, *leben* is to unfold different dimensions of one`s life in a place.

The dwelling surroundings (in German *Wohnumgebung*), as physical and social space at the same time, are of central importance for children to experiment and expand their autonomous use of and movement in the city. This is concomitant and concurrent to the use of *urban islands*, that is, specialized places and institutions conceived *for children*, where they can spend clearly defined portions of the day (Kogler, 2015). Neighborhood boundaries and edges vary depending on: urban infrastructural features; personal characteristics of the child, such as age and gender; and the generational power order between children and adults, according to the degree of autonomy given by parents, local community, and society, which in turn depend on the socially and culturally constructed representations of childhood and danger (Satta, 2012). A US quantitative study with 60 couples made up of a 7- to 11-year-old child and one of their parents shows that children build up their own representations of neighborhood, whose extension is correlated with the one attributed by their parents but does not coincide with it. According to the children, the neighborhood had an extension slightly bigger than their home range – the distance from home that children cover to go to places to play and meet up with peers (Spilsbury,

Korbin & Coulton, 2009). The qualitative research project Growing Up in Cities, financed by Unesco, had a first edition coordinated by Kevin Lynch in the Seventies and a second edition in the Nineties. One of its outcomes was the production of a list of indicators of neighborhood quality from children's perspectives[16], including among positive indicators *safety and free movement*, *peer gathering places*, and *safe green spaces* (Chawla & Malone, 2003). Raphaela Kogler (2015) suggests that mobility socialization and spatial appropriation are two ways of studying the same processes according a more or less active role to the children in them, and that the socio-spatial approach – combining the objective and subjective, the individual and collective perspectives – is best suited to study children`s mobility socialization and spatial appropriation, ultimately, to improve children`s quality of life.

In order to understand how research participants experienced and represented their neighborhood, I decided to 'go along' them. In the most critical phases of the Covid-19 crisis, when meeting in person was legal or reasonable only outdoors[17], public and semi-public spaces gained new centrality. The measures taken to limit the spread of the Coronavirus intermittently limited the freedom to move physically, although digital devices and the internet offered surrogates of globalization. However, when not in front of a smartphone or computer screen, Covid-19 made it harder than before to conduct an uprooted and de-territorialized lifestyle. The pandemic not only highlighted the relevance of the local level, but also forced us to redefine our local sphere continuously. According to the contingent, unpredictable situation, it was necessary to reduce one's field of life to a few blocks around own's place of residence, the city, the region, the national State, or the international, regional area (EU or European continent). The families involved in this research redefined the borders of their neighborhood of residence depending on the means of transport available and the alternated phases of opening and closure of schools, after-school activities, and sport clubs. Even in wintertime, they would use spaces such as inner yards, gardens, and parks in the immediate vicinity of their own flat or house, to move and relax, even more than before. Was this a step in the direction of the much-lauded 15-minute city? In line with the Capability Approach, I see the element *choice* as discriminant: if staying in the neighborhood is a choice and all the needs and desires can be fulfilled in the proximity of the own residence, then the 15-minute-city may increase quality of life. However, if the neighborhood does not allow to fulfill needs, desires, and aspirations – and if it is difficult for the family to go out of the neighborhood due to lack of time, economic

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[16] However, the research sample was made up of 10- to 15-year-olds, that is older children and teenagers.

[17] Differently than in Italy, there have never been restrictions of movement open air within the municipality of residence.

resources, social capital, or due to the Covid-19 situation – then the 15-minute-city model widens inequalities and the gap in terms of quality of life.

Family temporalities and the Covid-19 pandemic

Families' needs and temporal organization change over time depending on the children. The label 'child', attributed to individuals ranging from babies to pre-adolescents, conceals the major psycho-physical and cognitive transformations taking place in the short time span corresponding approximately to the first decade of human life, and the huge individual variabilities among children influenced by the intersection of several diversity lines apart from age.

> *"I think that the life of families is always changing, because the children always determine the structure of the family, somehow, and a 7-year-old child is very different and has very different needs than an 11- or 14-year-old, and the tasks you have are also very different."* (Virtual journey with M3)

Childcare has an ambivalent influence on parents` everyday temporalities.

On the one hand, we may think that having children contributes to deceleration, a dimension of temporal well-being connected to slowing down the pace of everyday life (Vitrano, 2017). Childcare encompasses practices connected to taking care of bodies and setting reassuring rituals and routines. Human bodies as inescapable dimension of family practices help understand the persistence of repetition and familiarity in everyday life of families despite the accelerated pace of social life in contemporary Western societies (Leccardi, 2009).

> "Moreover, everyday time is, by definition, «embedded» (embodied). Bodies represent not just the structure within it takes shape, but memorize and create time, making the relationship between subjects' times and social times explicit"[18] (Ibidem, p. 38).

Children's relationship with time is not solely shaped by biology but also, at least in developed countries, by their socially and historically determined exemption from economically productive activities. This may influence family life towards uses of urban space and time that are not merely functional but also relational. All these elements suggest that parenthood may be an occasion to partly free oneself from the demands of the economic market and its pervasive effects on the whole society.

On the other hand, parents are immersed in the social temporality of the market, often in contrast to those of their children and of childcare[19]. Nowadays, parents juggle to carve

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[18] Translation by the author. Original text in Italian: "Inoltre, il tempo del quotidiano è per definizione «incomporato» (*embodied*). I corpi costruiscono non solo l'intelaiatura all'interno della quale esso prende forma, ma memorizzano e *creano* tempo, rendendo esplicita la relazione fra tempi dei soggetti e tempi sociali."

[19] About time conflicts in everyday life, see Zeiher & Zeiher, 1998, p. 37-39.

out time to spend with their children and to accompany them daily, at the right time of the day, to different specialized places and institutions where the children can receive custody and educational stimulation. As a result, they often have a feeling of time pressure. Time conflicts derive both between parents` salaried and non-salaried work (Fraser, 2016; Fraser & Leonard, 2016) and between adult and child temporal perceptions and practices. An example of the second type of conflict is the typical scene of a child walking on the street with his mother. The child finds something on the floor and wants to spend some time manipulating, observing, and playing with it. The parent, who has the goal to reach a certain place in time, pulls the child`s hand and tries to suppress the child`s resistance with explanations and threats (Zeiher & Zeiher, 1998, p. 37-39). As this example illustrates, children are the losers in this conflict, since their temporalities structurally depend upon the decisions taken by their families and relevant institutions in children's lives, first of all the school, in the name of care, protection, and educational stimulation. Scientific literature on the topic outlines the figure of the *hurried child*, always busy with *educational leisure activities* (also defined as *purposive leisure*) aimed at increasing his/her cultural capital after school, at weekends, on holiday etc. (Ennew, 1994) Modern parents would invest "a lot of time, effort, thoughts and attention to all spheres of life of their children, included those of free time"[20] (Satta, 2020, p. 45). So, some adult caregivers are of the opinion that children need to be continuously stimulated and hanging out times banned. Some others warn instead that the busy child would risk feeling stressed, missing opportunities for peer socialization, and not being able to cope with social complexity (Migliore, 2010, p. 181).

For the purposes of this research, the contextual factors influencing conciliation of work, family, and time for oneself are of particular interest. Families' temporal capability is largely dependent upon the temporal configuration of local living contexts in terms of urban provisions (e.g., educational and childcare services), temporal policies, and temporal cultures. Pacemakers, defined as 'metronomes of everyday life' (Mückenberger in Vitrano, 2017), are institutions (like schools or workplaces) and services (like the public transport system) determining the times in which a certain activity can or cannot be performed in coercive ways. They synchronize the schedules of different actors, bringing people to the same place at the same time. Among them we find parents' employment

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[20] Translation by the author. Original text in Italian: "[Per le famiglie contemporanee con figli, il coinvolgimento dei genitori non avviene, come una volta, solo partecipando alla vita dei bambini a scuola o prendendosi cura delle loro prestazioni scolastiche o, più in generale, unicamente assicurando il loro benessere e sviluppo, ma] dedicando molto tempo, impegno, pensieri a attenzioni a tutte le sfere di vita dei figli, comprese quelle del tempo libero."

contracts and working times; educational and care services, for instance regarding the difference full-time vs half-day schools.[21]

Families` temporalities are strongly influenced by spatialities, social networks, and temporal cultures. The location of a family`s home determines advantages and disadvantages regarding the time necessary to reach workplaces or public and semi-public spaces such as schools, parks, and shops. Temporal accessibility varies depending on the extent to which they are reachable within an acceptable time, taking account of the mobility options available to the family and of opening times. Migrant families' social networks make it possible to delegate or share caring duties with extended family members, most typically grandparents, as well as with neighbors or friends. This is particularly important for those parents with long or unusual working hours, and who cannot afford to pay for public (after-school educational and recreational activities) or private (baby-sitting) childcare services. Temporal cultures connected to the representation of childhood as a phase of freedom vs childhood as crucial phase to acquire, through formal and non-formal education, the competences to succeed in adult life, are influenced by the parents` socioeconomic level (Lareau, 2011). Apart from these given factors, individual temporal competences and strategies come into play to cope with the vast freedom of choice between possible alternatives in contemporary metropolitan cities. The growing share of discretional time, e.g., by flexible working times in home office, implies bigger individual responsibility to balance agency goals and well-being goals (Sen, 1993; Sen, 1992, chapter 4; Sen, 1985) – not all goals, according to Sen, involve the freedom to pursue individual well-being – with the risk of dismissing unproductive, interstitial times in favor of more finalized uses of time, oriented towards individual goals. How do children, important actors in this research, experience everyday temporalities in the city? The best way to understand their perspective beyond adult scientific discourse *on children* is to research *with* them, without taking anything for granted.

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[21] About three third of all primary school pupils in Vienna attend morning schools, usually offering afternoon care services on payment. Half-day school still represent the most common model in Vienna.

Quality of life in Vienna and recent Italian and Hungarian migration to Vienna

View of Vienna from the panoramic point Kahlenberg. Photo by the author.

Located between West and East, North and South, Vienna is a *gateway city* and a popular destination for migration from other European countries. From a historical point of view, Austria entered the European Union in 1995, at an intermediate stage between the first core set of the six founding member States, on one side, and the more recent waves of enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007, on the other side. Notably, Italy was among the founders of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and European (Economic) Community in 1958, while Hungary entered the European Union in 2004. Social diversity is nothing new to Vienna, the heart of the Habsburg Empire at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries. The multinational, multireligious and multilingual Empire used to comprise both contemporary Hungary and Northern Italy. The Viennese population in 1840 was composed of 40% "foreigners, similarly to nowadays" (Bischof & Rupnow, 2017, p. 13). After the Second World War, Austria saw the arrival and settlement of guest workers recruited by the State. The next large wave of migration came in the 1990s in the aftermath of the fall of the iron curtain and the Yugoslav wars. Finally, the refugee crisis from 2015 brought several non-EU migrants to Austria. In other words, Austria "did not become a 'migration society' overnight in 2015" (ibidem, p. 13), even if some politicians and laypersons nowadays overlook this historical heritage to foment the myth of a single, culturally homogenous people only recently threatened by sudden waves of migration (ibidem). In 2015, the International Organization for Migration declared that one fifth of migrants worldwide lived in the world's top 20 global cities, including Vienna

(IOM, 2015)[22]. At the beginning of 2019, the year before my fieldwork started, 40,7% of Viennese inhabitants had migrant origin (citizenship and/or national State of birth different than Austria). The vast majority of them, 31,1%, came from other European countries, 9,7% from third non-European countries (Stadt Wien, 2020). In total, 45% of all school pupils and teenagers aged under 18 in Viennese schools, almost the half, had migration background[23] (BIFIE, 2018, p. 43). Of these, 10% directly experienced migration and 35% were born in Vienna from migrant parents. The Municipality of Vienna supports migrant associations and has a department, MA17, specifically dedicated to issues of diversity and integration and committed to achieving equal rights and opportunities for all 'cit(y)zens'.

Before the pandemic, Vienna used to be at the top of some of the lists of cities with the best quality of life worldwide (Mercer, 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). In the Mercer ranking published in 2019, including more than 450 cities worldwide, Vienna was awarded the first place for the tenth time in a row[24]. This ranking is conceived as informational basis to support multinational companies` decisions on where to open offices and plants, and on how to assign compensations premiums for expatriate workers dislocated in cities with different living standards than the ones where they used to live in previously. Similarly, in the case of the Economist it is evident that the ranking is targeted to high-skilled workers and multinational firms, if we reflect that the same agency also produces a Worldwide Cost of Living Survey comparing several global cities. The City of Vienna has a dedicated, publicly available webpage reporting some of the rankings of the last 5 years where Vienna occupies positions from the first to the twenty-fifth (Stadt Wien, website "Vienna in a global context", consulted on 05.04.2023). For each entry, Vienna`s position in the ranking and the number of participant cities, the title and link of the report or its commissioner, the year of reference, and the language are listed. Presumably based on the content of the listed reports, some aspects are adduced as crucial to understand Vienna`s declared success in the international panorama, as far as quality of life and reputation are concerned[25]. Below, Vienna`s praised supremacy in the three sectors "Business and innovation", "Culture and tourism", and "Science and universities" strengthens my hypothesis that city ranking may be used as a marketing strategy to attract and keep talents and investments. Among those who quantify quality of life, there are social and urban scholars who produce quality-of-life indexes and urban comparisons,

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[22]Data from 2014.

[23]Unfortunately, it was not possible to find specific data on Viennese primary schools.

[24] In 2020 and 2021 there was no ranking due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

[25] These are, reporting the content of the bullet list on the website of the City of Vienna, "affordable housing; access to healthcare system and education; infrastructure: water supply, waste management, electricity supply; dense and affordable public transport network; general safety and security; political stability; social stability.

as well as supranational agencies such as the European Commission (European Commission, 2020). However, city rankings constructed or commissioned by private actors from consultancy and banking seem to have the strongest resonance. Policy scholars criticized rankings from the sectors of economics and finance for being very variable depending on the underlying definition of quality of life or livability, on the criteria for the selection of competing cities, on the data used, and on data analysis and weighing systems. The very variable positioning of the same city in different rankings would prove the limited external validity of these tools (Conger, 2015). It has also been warned against the application of firm-oriented approaches to urban politics, as for Mercer advising mayors around the globe on how to improve the quality of life in their cities. In fact, this would set the focus on the goal of increasing business competitiveness, to the advantage of a niche of urban inhabitants whose lifeworlds – influenced by education, income, and class – are very far from those of other categories of urban inhabitants. Other groups of urban scholars advocate for scholarly engagement in practices of critical benchmarking as a condition for exerting influence on the political economy. Differently than the ranking industry, urban scholars would be able to use 'comparative imagination' to support urban equity (Acuto, Pejic, & Briggs, 2021a, 2021b).

My research project intends to integrate these 'objective' assessments with qualitative data produced with migrant families from Italy and Hungary and the neighborhood institutions *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*. While the rankings inform about the existing provisions in cities, my research rather intends to see whether and how they are turned into *functionings* and *capabilities*, without overlooking human diversity from a sociological point of view – diversity of needs and desires, of resources, of personal conversion factors – as well as individual and group-related inequalities (Sen, 1992). The best way to grasp quality of life in a city is to compare it with other comparable cities (for example, cities with similar size, in a similar position in relation to the national economy, et cetera). This study is not properly comparative – the places of provenance of the families in the sample were multiple and too heterogeneous to establish a comparison with Vienna – but constitute a point of reference. National and municipal surveys differentiate migrant populations according to national citizenship status, but generally it is not possible to trace back the exact places of previous residence through official reports. I claim that data and information on the specific local contexts of previous residence (big, middle-sized, or small city; suburban, peri-urban or rural area; exact neighborhood), as well as those on the city and neighborhood of migration, would be necessary to better understand the relationship between provisions (infrastructures, services, opportunities) and 'conversion factors' in the two different contexts, strongly influencing urban accessibility and inclusivity. In my view, living contexts before migration should not be overlooked for at least three reasons:

1. They are the places where personal characteristics, competences and capitals are developed that can, to different extent, be transferred to the place of migration;

2. They are where the decision to migrate originates and matures;

3. Even long after migration, they remain an implicit term of comparison with the migration context. According to the classic study on quality of life by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976, Chapter 4), the explanation for the misfit between subjective and objective appraisals of quality of life, and for the disagreement on subjective aspects is due to diversity of aspirations and tastes. This diversity, in turn, would depend on the standard represented by prior personal experience.

> "Since the set of persons currently operating within what appear to be objectively equivalent circumstances are *likely* to have past experiences which are rather varied with respect to earlier optimal situations, this fact in itself would help to account for much of the dispersion of reactions that we have typically found for such equivalent situations." (Ibidem, p. 484)

Internal migration between federal States is a widespread phenomenon and an integral part of the American dream, whereas international migration within the EU represents a statistically marginal phenomenon: only 3.3% of EU-citizens resided in an EU country other than that of their citizenship in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021[26]). Still, migration within the EU has a highly symbolic meaning as supposed vector of European integration. EU accession and enlargement processes cannot lead to satisfactory results without integration (Sekulić, 2020), also at the level of everyday life.

The EU enlargement of 2004, the biggest in terms of number of included people and countries (10), gave momentum to studies on migration within the EU with focus on the East-West trajectory. Later on, the economic crisis of 2008 and its impact enlarged the focus of scholarly attention towards migration from South to Central and North European countries. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine and their effects on the economy are expected to further strengthen these trends in the next years. The fluxes have been quantified – as accurately as possible, taking account that some migrants do not register in the country of arrival and some others do not de-register from countries of provenance, and therefore have double registration – and socio-demographic profiles of intra-EU migrants are continuously collected and monitored. Still, few studies deal with their integration in the contexts of arrival and the relationship with the contexts of provenance in social and cultural terms (Quassoli e Dimitriadis in Alberio & Berti, 2020), showing the 'human face' of European migrations (Favell, 2014). European citizens have the legal right to move freely, settle and work across the EU. The EU as big space of free movement is often taken

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[26] The percentage was exactly the same before the beginning of my fieldwork (data from 2019 relative to the year 2018).

for granted – until disruptive events like Brexit or Covid-19 happen – but it is something unique in the world. Despite this freedom, it is illusionary to believe that borders exist only for non-EU migrants, or that citizenship within the EU has already become transnational or post-national (Bauböck & Guiraudon, 2009; Delanty, 2007). In the course of fieldwork, an interviewee who had moved to Vienna more than 20 years before shared her belief that the increase of EU-migration was not bringing more openness, but rather the opposite reaction. As an example, at the time she came to Vienna, she could register to the Austrian pharmacist association by simply providing her Italian degree and its translation in German, while two decades later an expensive exam and German language competences at the level C1 were requested.

> *"It was already very multicultural. Now, in my opinion, there are even more foreigners. This has not resulted in a great opening up, but rather the opposite. I mean, instead of opening up to foreigners, it seems to me that they try to close a little bit, to put stakes [hurdles]. […] It seems to me that they're still trying to close themselves off, to be a bit on their own, to protect themselves a bit."* (Interviewee out of sample)

During fieldwork, I realized the advantages of EU-migrants in comparison with those from third countries and their disadvantages in relation to natives. For instance, during a neighborhood walk with a family, I met and heard the story of a friend with non-EU citizenship, who had been waiting for her new residence permit for 4 months and, in the meantime, was stuck in Austria during summer holidays. The situation was very inconvenient because Austria is an expensive place to spend holidays and because she did not have any car, which would have been necessary for forms of tourism within Austria different than city tourism. She could not postpone her holidays either, since she had already communicated the vacation period to her employer and organized her daughter`s attendance of the summer camp by the City of Vienna, which needs to be booked months in advance to get convenient prices (temporal arrangements). The absurdity and injustice of the situation was even more evident, since the woman had spent more than 20 years of her life in EU countries (14 in Italy, without acquiring the Italian citizenship, and 6 or 8 in Vienna) and only 18 in her country of origin.

> Today I touched on the difference between EU migrants, the ones I encountered in this project, and non-EU migrants, even from the European continent, is much more subtle and arbitrary than I thought. Milena speaks Italian like a native speaker, hangs out with Italian moms and children, cooks Italian, and talks about vacations in Cinque Terre. What makes her different in terms of rights and living situation? Only the fact that she was born, and stayed, with the 'wrong' passport. (Ethnographic notes on go-along with MC6, June 2021)

Adrian Favell defines Western and Southern European mobile citizens who move to main cities in other EU-member countries as 'Eurostars' (Favell, 2014). Erroneously believed to be made up solely of an 'élite' of well-educated, good-earning people, this category

includes instead not only 'brains' but also 'hands' and presents highly differentiated realities (Favell, 2014; Pugliese, 2018). Among Eurostars, there is a significant component of upwardly mobile working-class and lower middle-class migrants *often from the South, often women, using international migration in Europe as an escape from career and lifestyle frustrations at home"* (Favell, 2014, p. 12). Another subcategory, identified as 'aspirant élite', is composed of young people, often from Southern and Eastern Europe, who recently migrated to Central-Western and North-Western European countries with the aspiration to get better education or build a prestigious job career. In this case, there is a mismatch between the élite habitus and their current position in the economic stratification (Duru & Trenz, 2016). The founder of the official association and Facebook group of *Italian moms in Vienna* (*Mamme Italiane a Vienna*) – a privileged witness because she had been living in Vienna for 23 years and knew plenty of people from the Italian community in Vienna – was well aware of these internal differences among Eurostars, in her spontaneous sociology. She differentiated Italian migrants to Vienna into 3 categories: 1) Those with prestigious and well-paid jobs at UN, Bank Austria (UniCredit) or similar, living in Vienna temporarily, usually for a couple of years; 2) Those stuck in Vienna (almost) permanently because in mixed couples; 3) The most recent category of "fortune seekers" who, based on chance, can either leave soon or settle down.

Furthermore, it has been documented that these apparently advantaged expats too encounter difficulties and obstacles at the national and local level. Empirical studies show that, especially in the long term, 'Eurostars' are disadvantaged in comparison with the natives in key fields for quality of life, especially if they have children:

> "Over time 'everyday' issues of housing, taxation, health, child-care, schooling and retirement, all require some engagement and negotiation with local social structures that inevitably favour insiders. Failure to master the local rules of the game, in fact, may lead to a subtle exclusion from the benefits of long-term residence." (Favell, 2014, p. 138)

For instance, regarding housing, a woman who desired to buy a flat instead of keeping on renting a too small flat in bad state, argued:

> *"I also don't know whether I can't afford it because I come from abroad, especially if a foreigner has a worse currency or, from Hungary, worse conditions. For example, if my parents help me, for them it's a lot of money, but here the money is not worth so much."* (Virtual journey with M13)

In order to show some of the problems and nuisances encountered by EU migrants, in comparison to Austrian citizens, I report the case of a family in the sample (number 7) where a teenager son needed to take the Austrian citizenship, in addition to the Italian one, as precondition to perform sports at a competitive level in Vienna. In Austria, national citizenship rights are transmitted between generations though a model based on jus

sanguinis. Moreover, Austria is one of the few countries in the world that admits the double citizenship only for children up to 18. The process of acquisition of the Austrian citizenship for the family in my sample lasted about half a year (it would have probably taken much longer for an adult), cost them about 1000 euros, and involved a lot of paperwork. At the age of 18, the boy will have to take the painful decision to give up one of the citizenships, either the one of the country where he grew up and attended schools, or the one from the country of his parents and relatives. The situation is weird and sad both for the boy, who feels his Italian roots, and for his parents, who believe to have raised up their children as 'global citizens'. Another possible disadvantage for EU migrants, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, is discrimination. A Hungarian mother reflected on someone`s visibility vs invisibility as migrant, on her fear to be discriminated, and of belonging to the city and to the society.

> *"I haven't had any bad experiences, but I notice inside myself that I'm always a bit afraid of meeting these prejudices. But then it usually turns out that it's not a realistic fear, but also because I speak good German. […] Well, I can imagine that it's very hard for people from whom you can see that they come from another country, that's probably the most difficult thing. Or if they don't speak the [local] language, or if they come from another culture and you can see that. That's probably a very different experience that you have in a city than if you look and sound like you belong, even if you don't."* (Interview with M3)

At the beginning of the research project, I only partly expected that further disadvantages for EU citizens living in Austria might concern more subtle aspects such as sociability, that is the capability to find, maintain and cultivate friendships. As an Italian woman in the sample put it:

> *"They kind of always see us as the foreigners anyway. Maybe they don't treat us bad, like other 'races' in quotes, but we are still foreigners, anyway."* (Interview with M8)

Among 'Eurostars' we also find 'new Italian migrants' towards Central and Northern European cities. In fact, Italy has become a country of migration again in recent years due to two main drivers: the process of European integration, with cosmopolitan lifestyles and lifestyle migration; the waves of economic crisis, which activate labor migration. Official data report that 130.936 Italian citizens moved abroad in 2019 (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020), more than the inhabitants of Salerno in the same year. In 2019, the average age of these new Italian migrants, who chose to work and build a family abroad, was 33 years for men and 30 for women. One in four held at least a university degree (Istat, 2021). If they already had children and family, they typically took them along to their international destinations. The continuous drain of young men and women from Italy and the severe fall in birth rates need to be read as expressions of a "demographic malaise" with multiple and complex causes. It has been argued that, while 'old' Italian migration was the result

of agreements between States or migratory chains, 'new' migration from Italy would appear rather as individual, private choice led by supposedly personal aspirations and accompanied by a specific project (Burchi in Alberio e Berti, 2020). However, the exercise of Charles Wright Mill's 'sociological imagination' and a look at census data reveal that social phenomena and configurations influence the individual decision to migrate.

> "Since long time, in summary, we face an Italy where the demographic malaise rages ruthlessly and, on the other side, an Italy, the only one to grow, which is the one which set down roots abroad: the only community to grow of a more and more long-lived and depopulated Italy is the one residing abroad!" (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020, p. 6)[27]
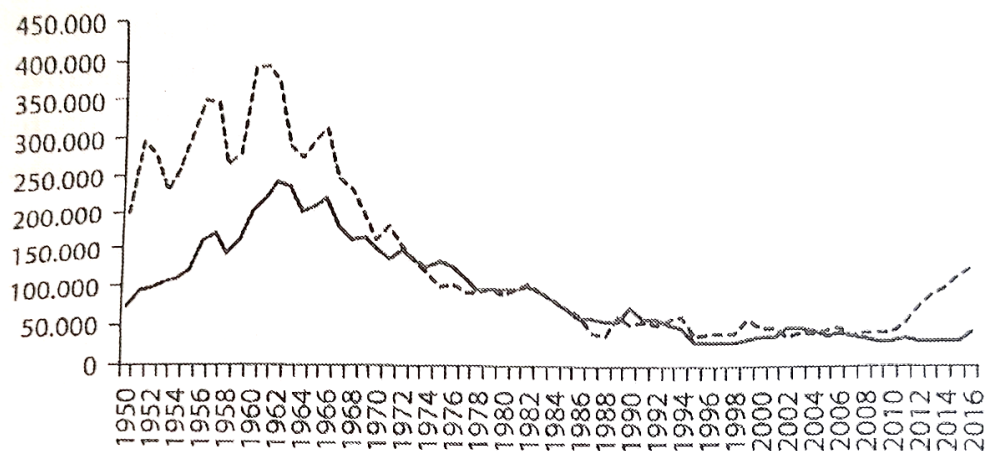
In Pugliese, 2018, p. 34. Statistics on Italian outgoing migration from the postwar period (1950), expatriate (dashed line) and repatriate (continuous line) Italian citizens.

The UK, Germany, Switzerland and France are the main recipients of Italian migrants. Austria is no historic destination but surprisingly – also considering the small size of the country – occupies place number 10 in the world list of the main target countries of outgoing Italian migration. Moreover, the sustained increase in the Italian presence in Austria between 2015 and 2019, comparable with the one registered in Germany and Switzerland in the same period, indicate a growing trend (Istat, 2021). In 2019, 35% of the Italian migrants in Vienna had moved to the city in the previous 4 years (Stadt Wien, 2020). According to Austrian statistics, 34 266 Italian citizens were living in Austria in 2021, most of them in Vienna (Statistik Austria, 2021, p. 29).

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[27] Original Italian text: "Da tempo, in sintesi, ci si trova ad avere a che fare con una Italia in cui il malessere demografico imperversa spietato e, d'altra parte, con una Italia, l'unica a crescere, che è quella che ha messo radici all'estero: l'unica comunità che cresce di un'Italia sempre più longeva e spopolata è quella che risiede all'estero!"

FIGURA 1. EMIGRAZIONI DEI CITTADINI ITALIANI PER I PRINCIPALI PAESI DI DESTINAZIONE.
Anni 2010-2019, valori assoluti in migliaia
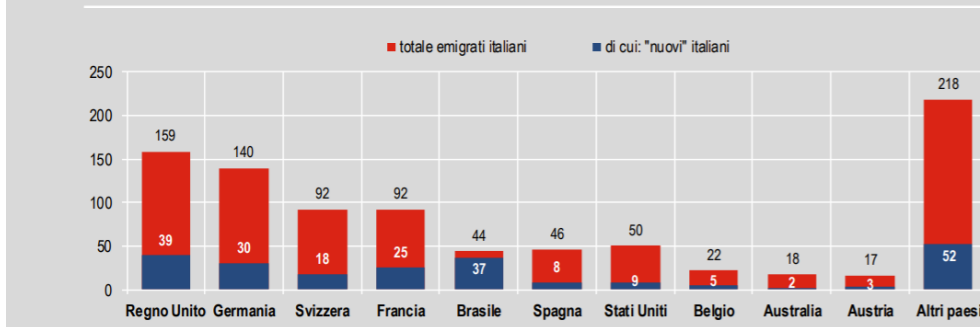
Istat, 2021, p. 3

The third ideal-typical category of migrants in Europe identified by Adrian Favell – next to 'Eurostars' and traditional labor migration from non-EU countries – is that of Central and East European citizens continuously and increasingly moving to Western Europe as a chain reaction triggered by the fall of the Berlin wall and the iron curtain, followed by the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007. Intra-EU migration along the East-West trajectory is numerically more significant than that of 'Eurostars' and could potentially contribute to really 'make Europe', a necessary step after the enlargements. Like Eurostars, Central and East Europeans from newer member States are free-moving European citizens; like traditional non-EU migrants, they are often confined in service jobs and considered as guest workers. As this woman in the sample points out, EU-migrants are not all the same and those from former Soviet Union are more likely to encounter prejudices in Vienna.

> *"The experiences that someone from Italy has are certainly different than those that someone from Eastern Europe and Hungary has, because I think that there is a ranking of foreigners in the eyes of Austrians. I'm not saying that Eastern European people are at the very bottom, because I know there are really a lot in much more difficult situations, unfortunately, who get much more prejudice. […] [If you come from Eastern Europe] they treat you a little bit differently, right away. Not everybody, of course, and not always, but you also meet more prejudices, I think, than if you come from Germany, or from Holland."* (Interview with M3)

Hungarians belong to this category. There have been at least four recognizable waves of Hungarian migration to Austria (Metropole, 2020), especially to Vienna:

- Immediately after the Second World War, before the borders were sealed in 1948, between 40 000 and 50 000 Hungarians settled in Austria;

- In the aftermath of the repression of the Hungarian revolution against the Soviet control in 1956, about 200 000 Hungarians left their country, and the most part of them headed to Austria;

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- After the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, migration to the West was no more prohibited. Nevertheless, Austrian politics of gradual and selective opening of the labor market, lifted only in 2011, mitigated the flow;

- In recent years, under the government of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the outflow gained new momentum. In 2019, 34% of Hungarian migrants in Vienna had moved to the city in the previous 4 years. The Hungarian migrant community was at that time, and still is the seventh most numerous one in Vienna (Stadt Wien, 2020), which makes Vienna appear as a 'second Budapest' to Hungarians. Austrian statistics report that the absolute number of Hungarian citizens living in Austria more than tripled within 10 years, passing from 25 627 in 2011 to 91 395 in 2021 (Statistik Austria, 2021, p. 29)[28].
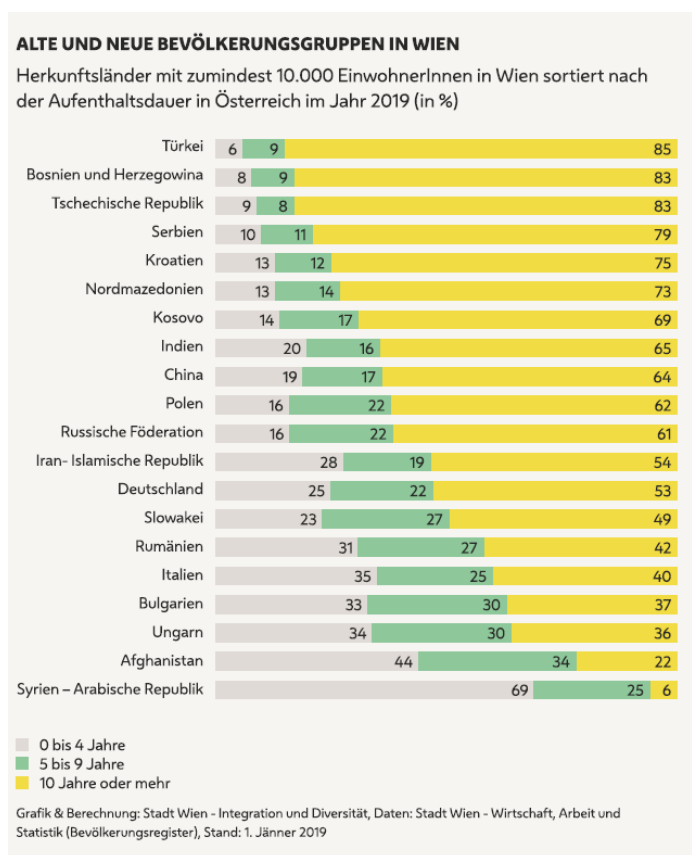
Stadt Wien, 2020, p. 12

The way the Italians and Hungarians in my sample – especially the ones who had been living in Vienna for more than 10 years at the time of data collection – perceive the phenomenon of contemporary migration to Vienna is concordant with official data.

> *"When I arrived here [in Vienna] there were very few Italians, almost nobody. The comparison with nowadays is unbelievable."* (Interview with founder of the group of *Italian moms in Vienna*, living in Vienna since 23 years)

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[28] Official numbers often underestimate the real entity of migratory presence. This is especially true of Hungarian citizens, who often do not cancel their residence in Hungary to avoid bureaucratic problems.

"When we moved [to Vienna], there were Hungarian people, but not as many as now. So, now I hear a lot more Hungarian, both in the streets and elsewhere. For example, Robert was the only one in kindergarten. Later another child came, but now there are practically even more in every group, several children who speak Hungarian, or have a Hungarian parent or two. No surprise, that now this Hungarian class could come into being, because there are really a lot of Hungarian people here. More and more, really, that`s my impression in these 13 years. The traffic has become more, too. When I still used to commute, there was not so much traffic like now! […] But now it`s really like an exodus. Not only Hungarians but also others, I suppose. Anyway, it has increased, and some of my acquaintances say: "Ah, you met a Hungarian again!", "Yes, there are a lot!"" (Virtual journey with M13)

As largely proved by scientific evidence, it is not the most disadvantaged individuals who migrate, but those in positions of relative deprivation, who have the necessary economic and cultural capital to survive and thrive in the target place. Since the risks are limited and reasonable for them, they are also motivated to take them to improve quality of life for themselves and their families (Raffini e Giorgi, 2020). Moreover, migrants are often able to create and mobilize strong or weak community ties with co-nationals and natives, informally or in more formalized ways through migrant associations, to get by everyday life and reach their goals. As already argued, both Italians and Hungarians are, as EU-citizens, privileged migrants. For instance, they do not need any visa to enter the country and can use the European health card. However, the language barrier, the lack of mastery of the 'rules of the game', the lack of formal and informal recognition of educational credentials and, especially for Central and Easter Europeans, and the lack of the 'right social capital' (Adrian Favell, 2014) represent potential obstacles to the access to and use of the possibilities that the city offers, even in big and cosmopolitan centers like Vienna. I will go back to this topic in chapter 4, where I focus on the voids and unfulfilled needs in Vienna according to the families in the sample, and on their strategies for sociability and social capital. To know more about the Italian- and Hungarian-origin families who participated in this research, you can continue your reading with chapter 2. This also reports on the research approach and methods, offering suggestions to conduct ethically sensitive research with children and families.

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2. Methods, methodology, and ethics

Overview of the methods of a hybrid 'hiccup ethnography'

For the purpose of investigating quality of life in Viennese neighborhoods, I used the complementary approaches of ethnography with children and families and institutional ethnography with the urban institutions *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*. Ethnographic research foresees the study of social actors in their natural contexts, as they lead their everyday lives. In comparison to other methods in social sciences, such as surveys, traditional ethnographical research is characterized by a "unique closeness to the research object" (Knoblauch & Vollmer, 2019, p. 599) which allows a direct access to it as a whole, counterposed to the attempt to reconstruct the research object indirectly, starting from specific and fragmentary information, which characterizes other research approaches (Knoblauch & Vollmer, 2019). In this case, the research context was 'unnatural' and unusual, since the empirical research took place between October 2020 und February 2022, a period which included some Covid-19 pandemic peaks. Between November 2020 and May 2021, Vienna was in lockdown almost without interruptions[29]. For this reason, my ethnography was *sui generis*: there was no immersion in traditional sense but phases of nearness and distance. Given that it is its immersive character to differentiate ethnographic research from desk research, I maintain that carrying out ethnographic work merely online, without physical presence and shared experiences, is highly reductive. In my fieldnotes, I reflected on the paradoxes of doing an ethnography during a pandemic, in the same city as my research subjects but in the impossibility of meeting, in these terms:

> I`m too immersed in and, at the same time, too far away from the field. It is a paradox produced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Too immersed because I cannot get out of Vienna to come back with a fresh and critical perspective, capable to get surprised and compare between Vienna and other cities. Concerning the 'too far', I wish I could enter deeper into Vienna, spending more time in streets, museums, public and semi-public places. In this online life, you`re anywhere and nowhere. (Ethnographic log 3.2.2021)

Due to the pandemic and the measures to manage it, the fieldwork was necessarily hybrid, a mix of online and offline mode. This made it sometimes dispersive and distracting, especially because the digital world has no clear boundaries and is flown by big amounts of data in constant change. The online part of the ethnography required a certain discipline and effort on my side.

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[29] The second, third, fourth, and fifth lockdown started respectively in November 2020, December 2020, April 2021, and November 2021. The first one had been in March and April 2020.

> "Unlike conventional fieldwork, it is not geographically constrained, nor does it require clear boundaries. It can be open-ended and dispersed, with the researcher being the binding force of the fieldwork." (Góralska 2020, p. 47).

Comparisons between in-person and online research already existed. If for Susanne Vogl, for instance, it was a choice and the result of a deliberate research design to compare face-to-face and telephone interviews with children (Vogl, 2012), the Covid-19 emergency and then crisis forced researchers to adopt an online-offline mix as strategy to be able to continue their research. Though being a hurdle in many respects, for example regarding the engagement of research participants, the pandemic, as social laboratory and 'quasi-experiment', allowed me to deepen methodological issues by posing new challenges and forcing me to find original solutions. The pandemic context accentuated the reflexive and recursive character of ethnographic research (Knoblauch & Vollmer, 2019). The reflection was necessary to adapt the research design, especially regarding methods, to the development of the health situation and its ethical implications. The alternation of stop- and go-phases imposed by the pandemic facilitated the circular and recursive movement between research and analysis.

Researching with families implies handling multiple, complex relationships across gender and age, reflecting on power distribution and communication strategies. In the 'extreme' condition of doing hybrid (face-to-face and online) fieldwork during a pandemic, it is necessary not only to continuously evaluate research methods *in itinere*, but also to be prepared to change them completely or re-invent them. The children and parents involved in this research were bi-/trilingual, which added further complexity from the methodological point of view. The process of recruiting families, the interviews with parents, and the virtual journeys mainly took part online, while the go-alongs with mothers and child(ren) were in person. The contingent pandemic situation conferred research activities an irregular rhythm with the alternation of phases of 'stop' and 'go'. To avoid temporary inactivity, I decided to intertwine in-person and online research, so that the research progress configured itself as *'hiccup ethnography'[30]*. Another metaphor I use to describe research during a sanitary and social crisis is that of the *immersion blender*, whereby the researcher continuously goes in and out of the research field. In order to observe and reflect on the effects of Covid-19 on the participant families` quality of life, I strove to stay in touch with them also in the hardest periods, despite the mothers` sensitivity to Goffman's *impression management*.

> It is a 'hiccup ethnography' in these times, also because my ethnography is not localized punctually but follows the research participants in their virtual and physical living environments, instead. Will I ever become familiar and 'invisible' to

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[30] Expression created by the author.

the families, despite the many interruptions in our interactions? The families give me a glimpse of their lives, deciding what to show and what to conceal or omit. Their silences and absences are informative too, for example when mothers are too busy during lockdowns or don't answer because, until the latest moment, they don't know when they`ll have free time. Sometimes, when they find a free time slot, they request to switch from a video to a telephone interview to hide their person and body because they would not be 'fit to be seen' after one day of 'home schooling'. (Ethnographic log 28.11.2020)

Graffiti along the Donaukanal (Danube Canal), Vienna. Photo by the author.

The Covid-19 pandemic gave an unprecedented boost to digitalization, making video conferencing tools like Skype or Zoom mainstream. This allowed me to make acquaintance with the parents in the sample, gather some elements of their biography and of their residential situation in Vienna, and inform them about my project by conducting online interviews. I sometimes had the impression that online interviews were less informative than face-to-face ones because of the lack of small talk and common experiences cementing a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Another reason for the limited outcomes of online interviews would be, according to some authors, the scarcity of contextual information, for example on the places where the interviewees live or hang around (Chan, Joosse & Xiaoli Tian, 2020). In my experience, it is only partly true that online interviews would consist almost exclusively of text and that the context is hidden. On my ethnographic log, I noted that:

Contextual information is also the children wearing pajamas at any hour of the day or husbands in home office in the background. It is also the delays in the connection

because the kids must go to bed, or the absences, for example when Giulia[31] didn`t want to turn on her camera because she thought she was unpresentable after a day in distance learning on her sons` side. (Interview notes 10.03.2021, M8)

Moreover, especially if research participants connect through their smartphones, they can easily and spontaneously turn their cameras to show places of daily life. For instance, a mum took her smartphone to the balcony during an online interview to show me a park her child uses daily.

My experience suggests that online research has the advantage of being less time-consuming than traditional research, which lowers the threshold to participation (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014) and allows to overcome the time scarcity of individuals and categories such as, in this case, mothers in salaried work and/or with care duties towards small children. Furthermore, some families gained more free time thanks to the pandemic because the schedules for work and school were flexibilized, travels and children`s extracurricular activities suspended. However, their days became less predictable. For 19 times, mothers asked me to reschedule a previously arranged meeting for a go-along, typically for health reasons, whether reasons, or other sudden appointments. Travel restrictions increased the chance for research-related meetings with the families to take part also on weekends and bank holidays (Christmas week, Epiphany, Easter Monday, Corpus Domini). Moreover, online tools for synchronous interviewing, which have become mainstream nowadays, further stretched the temporal frame for research-related encounters in terms of day and night hours. It is the researcher who needs to adapt her or his schedule according to the time availability of families, making a trade-off between the researcher's well-being on one side (Góralska 2020), and the respect for the research participants and their generosity on the other side. Sometimes, meeting during free time and at unusual times may create an atmosphere of intimacy with research participants, as I noted about an online interview conducted in the evening from about 9 PM, which lasted one and a half hours.

> M12 told me that she feels sorry that people in Vienna come back home from work very early and the evening is devoted always and merely to the domestic sphere. I reflected that, in this case, technologies allowed us: a) To find an appointment to talk despite the many things to do for both of us; b) To spend the evening 'outside' without leaving home. (Interview notes 10.03.2021, M12)

More in general, especially in a pandemic, it takes flexibility to research with families. It is hard and it may turn out to be counterproductive to strive to collect the predefined, systematic, and complete dataset indicated as a goal to pursue for rigorous researchers, also for the ones using the go-along method (Kusenbach, 2018). For instance, a mother

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[31] In order to protect research participants` right to privacy and anonymity, I use arbitrary pseudonyms throughout this dissertation.

of three children could not find any time for a preliminary online interview without the children. When we met for the first time in a big Viennese park by a snow-covered slope, I alternatively interviewed the mother and her daughter while the other one of them was sledding down and climbing back up the snowy slope with the three-year-old brother. If, on one side, the lack of uniformity in the dataset can be seen as a weakness, on the other side, modulating the researcher's presence and absence, as well as the methods, on families' time availability and children's needs and preferences with flexibility and methodological creativity can be seen as a strength when researching with children and families.

> It takes flexibility to research with families: I am getting going thanks to my effort to contrast the self-imposed pressure of the first months in Vienna to be always productive, no matter what. It makes me think of Goffman [Goffman, 1989], when he says that you should stop being the first of the class to make ethnographic work. True research with families starts when you stop worrying about sticking to the plans. Researching with families cannot be a 'hit and run' or 'surgical research'. It takes time, patience, and a tolerance for chaos. (Ethnographic log 22.02.2021)

I also tried to establish first contacts with the children online, but soon I realized that it was better to wait for lockdown breaks, given the shortcomings of online interactions with children I registered:

➢ The media may be distracting for smaller children, who may be more interested in icons and pop-ups on the screen than in taking part in the research project.

➢ Mothers' presence as mediators and interpreters may inhibit the interaction. Some children may become shy and unwilling to talk, especially in case they are supposed to communicate with the researcher in front of their mothers in a language different than the one they habitually use with her.

➢ It may be too verbal, especially for male and bi-/trilingual children who use their non-dominant language with the researcher.

➢ Children are isolated from their contexts of everyday life and are not motivated to recall them verbally.

➢ Peer dynamics, so-called 'peer cultures', are not observable. As the sociologist of childhood William Corsaro (2018) theorized, children always participate in two interwoven cultures at the same time, 'peer cultures' and adult cultures. Therefore, missing the interactions between children means completely overlooking a relevant part of children`s experience.

➢ Some children feel at ease online, either because they feel protected by the screen or because they have extroverted personalities and feel themselves protagonists online; some other children may feel embarrassed online and not be willing to build a relationship with new people, such as the researcher.

I noticed that letting the children show and present one object from their environment to the researcher is useful to create a relaxed atmosphere and build a positive relationship. This works as a transational object, giving the child a sense of comfort and security[32]. This strategy comes very natural offline, especially if the child and the researcher are strolling around together. For instance, during a go-along, a 7-year-old child proposed to me a symbolic play with a toy smartphone where she was a robot and I a human. I accepted the roles she had chosen for us and, in ways appropriate to this new playful setting, tried to discover more about her relationship with the neighborhood of residence. The same strategy may be effective also online.

The initial research design envisaged the use of urban probe kits, which are a specific type of cultural probe kits with activities specifically related to the city. Cultural probe kits are physical or virtual sets of tools and tasks given or sent to research participants to elicit self-reporting (observation, reflection, reporting) on their everyday life. The kits are designed to be esthetically catchy and motivating for their recipients. After completing the tasks in their own time, participants are supposed to send them back to the researcher. However, I discarded the idea of deploying urban probe kits since, in stressful pandemic times, they risked being perceived as further workload burdening children and parents after school, the opposite of participating in their lives 'on tiptoe'. The 'homework effect' was a particularly threatening risk for me, given my education, training, and past experiences as primary school teacher[33]. Moreover, some mothers in the sample reported that they, and their children even more, were growing a certain weariness of digital screens and remote human relationships. Lastly, urban probe kits posed some communication problems: in a few cases, mothers were the ones who could read and write text with confidence, but they did not know the language I had in common with their children, so that I would have needed to address my texts to mothers and rely on the correctness and accuracy of their translation.

The fieldwork had a certain diachronic depth, as I could participate in the families` lives for almost one year and a half. The families showed great generosity to let me into their lives despite the presence of hard moments (divorce, psychological discomfort, unemployment, overwork…). During the research period, 5 families decided to change flat, maybe also because the lockdowns motivated by the viral threat made the lack of space more evident and oppressing for families with children. Besides, 3 mothers changed jobs.

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[32] However, the transational object should be chosen by the speaker freely and not above request. I had an online meeting with a child and her mother about a drawing I had requested her to produce for the research. In this case, the drawing did not work as transational object but, on the contrary, made the child shier and reinforced power imbalances between the child and me.

[33] See paragraph about positionality.

In two of these cases, the job change came after years of stagnation and a long transition phase. I hypothesize that the research represented an occasion for the parents to reflect on their biography, their everyday life in Vienna, needs and future goals. My research may have also influenced the founders and moderators of Italian and Hungarian parental groups, as I indirectly encouraged them by way of showing interest for their activity. Societies can exist and go on also without sociology, but their pace is very fast. Sociology can help people reflect on their lives and find out or build up a sense of events for them, especially in periods of crisis and change.

I employed following qualitative research methods:

➢ On-and offline semi-structured interviews[34];

➢ Go-alongs;

➢ Participant observations;

➢ Virtual journeys.

- 14 with M; 4 with F; 1 with M&C; 1 with C; 11 with GB*; 3 with PG

- with 12 families: 11 with M&C; 6 with M,F, &C; 2 with M

34 interviews

19 go-alongs

7 virtual journeys

Internship at GB* and participant observation of events

- 6 with M, 1 with M&C

- 5-week internship at GB* Mitte
- events by GB* and other
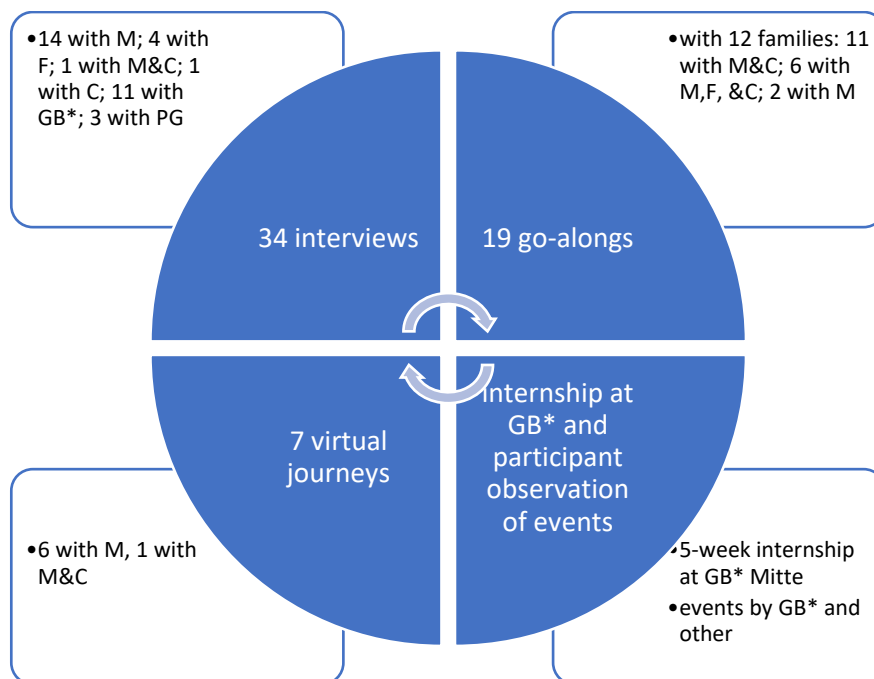
Families with children (M=mothers; F=fathers, C=child/ren); area institutions Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (GB); administrators of online and offline migrant-origin parental groups (PG).*

The semi-structured interviews were structured into several sections. However, I posed the questions according to a flexible order and adapted the formulations to the research

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[34] Two meetings were counted twice, both as interview and go-along, because they included both components.

participants. After the interviews, I asked the interviewees to provide some socio-anagraphic data, either orally or by filling in a Google Form. In the appendices of this dissertation, I attach all interview guides: for parents, children, administrators of culturally connotated groups, and Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung practitioners. The interview guide for mothers and fathers revolves around the topics of migration biography and future plans; pros and cons of living in Vienna; Viennese neighborhoods of residence and changes over time; fathers' relationship with the family and the city; use of groups and associations; the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the next paragraphs, I am going to provide information about the socioeconomic and geographic background of research participants, and on my positionality as researcher. After presenting the most innovative research methods I used, go-alongs and virtual journeys, I am going to thematize institutional ethnography as an approach to analyze institutions and, parallelly, their effects on people`s lives. The last section of this chapter is devoted to research ethics and methods in pandemic times.

Research sample and sampling criteria

I decided to focus on two specific categories of migrants in Vienna, Italians and Hungarians. They are both intra-EU migrants and represent the two different superordinate groups individuated by experts of intra-European migrations and integration: traditional migration from the founder States of the EU, and Southern European States too; and new migration from East to West. The Italian and Hungarian presence in Vienna is numerically significant and increasing over time (see the last section of chapter 1). Italy as country of provenance appears particularly interesting for my study on quality of life according to parents and children, since it has been witnessing a significant decrease in birth rates and an increase of emigration, especially in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. In 2019, before the pandemic hit, the Italian fertility rate of 1.27 children per woman was the second lowest in the EU, followed only by the Spanish one of 1.23 (Eurostat, 2022). In the same year, 130.936 Italian citizens moved abroad (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020). Under the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Hungary is profiting from politics in support of families but at the same time suffering from the very restrictive notion of family and the traditional gender roles imposed by populistic politics glorifying the white, Christian, heterosexual, and patriarchal family. Hungary has an unpopular position in the EU and experiences a severe economic crisis.

The active involvement of children with migration background is a strength of this work, since they represent an important share of young citizens in formation in European cities and schools. Before this empirical research, 45% of all children and teenagers in Viennese schools, that is almost one in two, had migration background (BIFIE, 2018, p. 43).

Remarkably, most students with foreign citizenship (35%) did not experience any migration but were born instead [from migrant parents] in the same national state as their 'native' Austrian classmates. Children`s age was used as sampling criterium for methodological and pragmatic reasons. Given that I was planning to use urban probe kits in the original research design, it appeared convenient to involve children who could already read and write, at least partly.

The sample includes families of Italian and Hungarian origin living in Vienna and with at least one child aged 6-11. The active involvement of children is a strength and a point of originality of this research. Their faint presence in research is partly due to the incompetency and unreliability still attributed to them as research subjects, partly to methodological challenges posed by researching with children. In the first place, the logistic difficulties to access children work as strong inhibitors for studies on childhood. In order to reach children, researchers need to work their way through 'gatekeepers', commonly parents and schools, who guarantee children's safety and schedule their everyday life. Once they have reached children, they should start worrying about how to make children's voices audible, distinguishing them from those of caregivers and institutions. Often, adults act as proxies of children experience, concretely answering questions and completing tasks on children`s behalf. When meeting in parents` presence, especially at the family`s home, the researcher's freedom may be limited by his/her role as discreet and polite guest and the connected expectations. Moreover, parents, siblings and relatives are likely to interfere with the child-researcher interaction (Bushin, 2007).

> "Simply put, sometimes our children-centred methods have failed to empower children, but rather adults." (Barker & Weller, 2003b, p. 220)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, children have often been the object of public and scientific discussions about problematic issues with probably long-lasting consequences for individuals and the society: the closure of schools[35] and other childcare institutions, which caused the parents conciliation problems and decreased their economic productivity; children`s role as potential super-spreaders of the virus; children`s learning loss, educational poverty, psychological distress, and the negation of their right to play in the company of peers (Universität Wien, consulted on 17.01.2023; Zartler, Dafert, & Dirnberger, 2022; Zartler, Suwada, & Kreyenfeld Eds, 2022; Vicari & Di Vara Eds., 2021; Colombo, Rinaldi, & Poliandri, 2020). However, children have been rarely involved directly

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[35] Austrian schools always kept on ensuring the function of child custody during lockdowns for parents with work obligations and no means to externalize care. The offer ended up being used by more families than initially expected. In the Austrian news ORF from 08.01.2021 h 19:30 it was reported that, despite the interruption of didactic activities because of the ongoing lockdown, 22% or primary school pupils were currently physically present in primary schools, in some kindergartens up to 75%. (Ethnographic logbook 08.01.2021).

as active and competent subjects, also due to the impossibility to reach them through usual gatekeepers, schools, which were closed, inaccessible to externs, or anyway busy with coping with old and new tasks related to distance learning. In this scenario, in which most planned research projects with children were postponed or cancelled, I reached children through the other main gatekeeper, families. In this research, both parents` and children`s experiences and opinions were of interest. In my experience, it is very hard to distinguish between the two perspectives online, since it is less common to speak with a parent and a child separately – it is the parent who manages the computer or the smartphone. Especially if the parent or the child also plays the role of translator in the conversation with the researcher, the two perspectives are merged. Moreover, being children at home during lockdowns, they could overhear their parents' interviews with the researcher. Instead, when meeting in person, for example in occasion of go-alongs, the division comes natural, especially if the language spoken with the parent and the child is different. The moments of temporary absence of parents – busy chatting with friends and acquaintances, taking care of younger siblings, working in home office, or shortly entering a shop – were useful to keep the perspectives of adult and children participants separated. Even the researcher herself/ himself can alter children's meanings, imposing adult categories in the interpretation of collected materials (Barker & Weller, 2003a).

The methodological approach used, due to the way of passing from one research phase to the next one, can be defined 'funneling sampling': 16 families (15 mothers and 4 fathers) participated in interviews, 12 of those families participated in the go-alongs (11 go-alongs with mother and child/children; 6 with mother, father and child/children; 2 with mother only), and 7 of the same families participated in virtual journeys (only mothers in 6 cases, mother and daughter in one case).

It was not easy to find the families and to engage them in the research project, since the moment was stressful and the lack of informal contacts – in my experience and in that of other scholars researching during the Covid-19 pandemic – tends to decrease people`s interest and trust, which influences their readiness to help:

> "The pandemic effect – even though the pandemic has locked many people at home, and they may have limited pastime options, it does not mean that they will be eager to talk to you. The pandemic is stressful, and it might be harder, rather than easier, to establish new relationships through digital communication only. Patience is a virtue that every digital ethnographer must possess because the interview refusal rate online seems way higher than it is offline. If you cannot smile at someone, it is harder to make them care about your research, even if it is 'for science' or for 'the common good'." (Góralska, 2020, p. 49)

> *"I don`t know… I mean, I wanted to help as far as I can. I hadn`t understood it was a long-lasting thing. I thought it was a qualitative thing, ok, but let's say maybe two, three times and it was over. Because, considering the situation… Ok, apart*

from the current situation, which is absurd… [nervous laughter]." (Interview with M15)

In search of target families, I turned for help to the personal acquaintances I had in Vienna; to the Facebook groups of the Hungarian and Italian migrant communities, and the specific ones where parents from each community gather; to the owners of an Italian food stores and a pastry shop; to 2 Hungarian teachers, one employed at a primary school and one running an afternoon school; to an Italian teacher; and to some researchers and Professors from University of Vienna.

Due to the pandemic and the regulations adopted to contain it, primary schools – the typical gatekeeper for projects involving children and families – were so busy striving to cope with the situation and to ensure a minimum of teaching, that it was impossible even simply to receive feedback from school principles. Since external people were not allowed to enter school classrooms, it was impossible for me to introduce myself to children (and parents). I had more luck contacting an Italian and a Hungarian primary school teacher working in bilingual classrooms privately through Facebook. The Hungarian teacher sent my leaflet per mail to the families of the pupils in her classroom. A possible gatekeeper, a seller of Italian food products who has several Italian customers and is very popular in the Italian community in Vienna, himself engaged in the Church, proposed me to become a lecturer at the Italian mass in Vienna. This role and activity may have facilitated my entrance in the Italian community and potentially brought closer to research participants. As Erving Goffman taught, finding a small mundane activity you are good at can be the entry ticket to enter and stay in the fieldwork [Goffman, 1989]. However, I decided to refuse his proposal, because I found it unfair to take such a task with ulterior motives. Moreover, I would have approached and attracted the sympathies of a very specific and limited part of the Italian community in Vienna – introducing a bias – and risked diverting and raising suspicion in another part of the Italian community in Vienna (ethnographic log 08.10.2020). The same consideration is valid also for Gebietsbetreuung and Stadtteilmanagement: I did not ask for their help to find research participants because I did not know what kind of experience with them and opinions on them people had (ethnographic log 16.10.2020) and, mindful of Erving Goffman's considerations about power relationships among different groups [Goffman, 1989], I decided not to run the risk that a gatekeeper, while facilitating the access to some subjects, hampered the access to others.

The families in the sample were recruited thanks to the following strategies:
-Help by the founder of the Facebook group and association *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (*Italian moms in Vienna*): 6 families;

-Snowball sampling through mothers already participating in the project: 5 families;

-Snowball sampling through the researcher's friends and acquaintances: 3 families;

-Help by teacher of a German-Hungarian primary school classroom: 1 family;

-Researcher's post on Facebook group of Hungarians in Vienna: 1 family.

In such a difficult situation as a pandemic, when people are not likely to let 'wild strangers' into their family, snowball sampling and the help of trusted gatekeepers (teachers, associations, moderators of Facebook groups), also strategically mobilizing women's solidarity, were crucial to find mothers.

I also decided to talk with 3 mothers which, because of their children`s age, did not fit the sampling criteria. These extemporaneous and partially accidental encounters – such one may make in streets and squares in normal times, online during a pandemic – were very precious to deepen my knowledge of the city and of the Italian and Hungarian communities. I also showed up at a regulars` breakfast organized by the Stadtteilmanagement of the neighborhood Seestadt. However, sometimes, it was harder to get information from online fleeting encounters, which often stay more superficial and have less relational involvement, than it would have been from fleeting offline encounters. Moreover, as already noted in literature, (last-minute) dropouts are more frequent by online research (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014):

> The difference between accidental encounters between half-strangers in person vs online is that in person you find yourself already there, so you may as well engage in the conversation. Online, instead, you can enter the conversation with a click, and equally easily end it […] (See Bauman on the frailty of virtual communities, where relationships request a smaller investment and can be started, ended, and consumed rapidly) (Ethnographic log 08.1.2021)

The risks of drop-out and little informative interviews were more present in interviews with practitioners than in the ones with families, I believe because of the different level of familiarity[36] I had with the two groups or subsamples. Familiarity in online and hybrid research derives from the frequency of contacts, positionality, and power issues. Geographical proximity – for instance, being in the same city – also increases the perception of familiarity with the researcher, even if the research is conducted online, paradoxically.

Most of the mothers, family gatekeepers, were found thanks to social media. In the social media sphere, I advise researchers to be cautious.

> Online, the researcher is both observer and observed subject, follows but also publishes posts. It is important to be cautious and discreet. Moreover, using social

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[36] For an analysis on the role of familiarity in online interviews, see Deakin & Wakefield, 2014.

media in ethnographical research means attempting to analyze (freeze, reflect on, make yours) something which is in continuous flow, that changes all the time. (Ethnographic log 01.12.2020)

16 parents (mothers and fathers) who took part in the first round of interviews filled in the Google Form with socio-anagraphic data I created and sent them, 3 others did not. The data reveals that the families had been living in Vienna on average for 8 years, by the time the empirical research started (2021). The longest period of residence in Vienna was 20 years, the shortest 1 year. Among the parents, 8 had been living in Vienna for 1-5 years, 6 for 6-10, and 5 for more than 10[37]. The 16 parents who filled in the form were aged between 35 and 55, with an average age of 44. 3 of them were in their thirties, 11 in their forties, and 2 in their fifties. Regarding the educational level, 17 interviewed parents held a university degree, 2 a high-school degree. With a few exceptions, it was rather families with a certain stability and security who were able and willing to take part in the project in uncertain and stressful pandemic times. As far as the competences in the local language are concerned, 1 subject declared her German was basic (A2), 5 that their German was intermediate (B1-B2), and 9 that it was advanced (1 person did not fill in the fields about linguistic competences). However, only 6 out of 19 interviewees appraised their German level before migration to Vienna as intermediate or higher. This means that, most of the times, the language competences in German were acquired only after moving to Vienna, which confirms the outcome of this research regarding the importance of learning the local language in Austria – even in the Eurocity Vienna – and the possible initial disadvantage for newly arrived expats. The jobs were diverse, with an overrepresentation of teachers and researchers (5 teachers, mostly language teachers, and 3 researchers). 2 mothers in the sample and 1 mother whom I never met were not in salaried work, mainly because they did not have enough language competences or felt insecure with German. In Vienna, 4 households in the sample lived in cooperative flats with reduced rent (*Genossenschaftswohnungen*) and 2 in flats of property, whereas the others rented from privates. The sample included 5 divorced couples or single mothers, 3 of them from Italy and 2 from Hungary. In one of these cases, the mother was the main caregiver because the father still lived in the city of origin. In another case, the father had moved back to South Italy for some years after divorce and only recently moved back to Vienna. Such information on family arrangements and geographies is relevant in the sense that it can influence capabilities related to conciliation and gender inequalities. Two of the mothers in the sample were sisters and lived a few meters away from each other with

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[37] I gave information also about the 3 parents who did not fill in the forms, since this piece of information emerges from the interviews as well.

their children, so that it was a kind of horizontal multiple family distributed into two households, with interrelated migratory paths and everyday lives.

Since I do not speak Hungarian well enough to have deep conversations on complex topics, I believe that there has been a self-selection of Hungarian mothers in the sample based on foreign language competences. Provided that my contact persons were usually mothers, this bias regarded more in general the Hungarian families. This is also because the conservative Austrian childcare model favors long maternity leaves, after which several women decide not to go back to salaried work in order to spare the costs of professional childcare. In the bubble made mainly of other mothers and children from the same migrant community, there are few occasions to improve foreign language competences.

> *"I used to be able to speak better in English, but because of us... Yes, my German is not so great either, because I spend a lot of time with my children, and also with a lot with Hungarian mothers. So, I speak on the street, at school, but not..."* (Interview with founder of the group *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*)

I asked a Hungarian father in the sample, who was also the contact person in his family, to give me a social network contact of his wife, to interview her too. His answer was very clear and a bit paternalistic: in his opinion, the language barrier made a written exchange with her impossible and the oral one possible with an interpreter (for example, him). His answer surprised me, because the family had been living in Vienna for more than three years at that time. The woman, busy with her three children, had learnt only single words in the local language of the place where she lived (and did not speak English).

> *„Of course, she's learning and now that the smallest child is already in kindergarten too, that's the next big project, that she really learns German properly. That takes a bit... And she also wants to work, of course. And that's okay, I also have patience and I support her in this, to the best of my ability [facilitating the communication between me and his wife when we meet in person], but such a written communication is unfortunately not possible yet."* (Interview with F5)

The participant parents were partly self-selected also in terms of class. Especially in a difficult moment like a pandemic, the ones with existential concerns and extreme time scarcity would not take part. However, I could also include divorced and single parents, as well as mothers not in salaried work, and in rare cases, people in service jobs. If the sample could have been recruited more offline – for example, by taking part to the weekly meetings of *Italian moms in Vienna* in a coffee house, suspended because of the pandemic – I think it would have been more heterogeneous. Besides, we can note that a further self-selection operates upstream, because individuals moving abroad are more likely to have a cosmopolitan and open attitude, as well as more competences and soft skills to act in the world than the average people in the places of provenance (Raffini e Giorgi, 2020).

The interviews with *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* lasted in average 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interviewees included 11 subjects, divided between the 5 physical sites (as illustrated in chapter 5 of this dissertation). I also conducted an immersive 5-week internship at Gebietsbetreuung Mitte. The part of research relative to the Gebietsbetreuung is analyzed separately in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, which also contain some additional methodological considerations.

Positionality or my role as researcher in the field

Researching with children and families in a period of deep crisis and uncertainty brings issues of positionality to the fore and demands reflexivity directed both inwards, to the identity of the researcher; outwards, to the research participants and context (Rose in Barker & Weller, 2003b); in-between, to the mutual relationships. In this paragraph, I raise methodological issues related to my positionality as researcher, anticipating some considerations in the ethics section of this chapter, and propose possible solutions.

Gender emerged in manifold ways in relation to the positionality of the researcher and the research actors, in particular regarding these three aspects:

a. Field access and entrance

b. Relationship and communication with the children

c. Fathers' involvement in the research

a. Field access and entrance

Women fieldworkers are more influenced by safety issues and subjectively perceived risk than their men colleagues (Kusek & Smiley, 2014), also in online and hybrid ethnography. Recruiting families primarily through Facebook groups implies being more active and visible online, with the risk, especially for young women, of experiencing undesired online encounters. Nevertheless, considering that unknown persons may be willing to help with the research, it seems strategic to accept friendship requests and, if necessary, block those who send inappropriate messages. Furthermore, before using private accounts for research reasons, it is advisable to check privacy settings and delete too personal information and shared contents.

b. Relationship and communication with the children

Configurations of gender, age, and power make all research projects with children very demanding from the methodological point of view, even more in a situation of crisis. The

restrictions imposed to contrast the pandemic deeply constrained the possibility to perform shared activities with the children in presence. Oral and written communication mediated by digital media were often unsuitable to replace activities in presence, especially with male children and with male and female bi-/trilingual children who used their non-dominant language with me. Adopting effective communication strategies and devising adequate materials (letters, interactive presentations, urban probe kits) is partly a matter of decentration. As female researcher with two sisters and millennial, it was hard for me to figure out what could be interesting and motivating for male pre-adolescents born in an age when the digital revolution was already in full swing. A possible strategy to increase the chances of successful communication is for the researcher to turn to trusted persons from other genders and possibly age groups, not necessarily academics.

c. Fathers' involvement in the research

Families are often mixed-gender and mixed-age groups. To enter the research field and not be rejected soon afterwards, the ethnographer needs to juggle multiple relationships and interactions with family members. My adult gatekeepers and contact persons in families were all mothers, with one exception. Main performers of care work, domestic work, and learning support, they are also the 'PR managers' of the family.

> *"The group [association and Facebook group Italian Moms in Vienna] was born as Italian mums exactly because, if you need to talk about your son's vaccination, you'll find 10 mums and half a father talking about that. Maybe the times are changing but, you know…"* (Interview with F7)

Besides, women would more openly display their parental role online and are, thus, easier to find online than men and minor children (e.g., through Facebook groups of Italian and Hungarian mothers in Vienna[38]). The fact that majority of the women and mothers in the sample (13 out of 15) were also in salaried work demanded from me as researcher, also online, flexibility and capacity to modulate distance and closeness, also considering that repeated periods of school closure in Austria aiming to tackle the spread of the pandemic made families' everyday lives even more challenging. Being a woman researcher facilitated the processes of recruitment of the families and field access, since it boosted mutual confidence, trust, and identification between me and the women in the sample. Conversely, the interactions with fathers were mostly quite accidental and fleeting, apart from 3 interviews I achieved. It has been hard to involve fathers because of their declared time scarcity. A further possible explanation for the strongly unequal parental participation in the present research project may be that mothers are persistently predominant in care

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[38] The online group *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children* (*Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub*) is private and secret, though, and therefore less easy to track.

issues. It may also have played a role that I, as woman researcher, considered it more appropriate to get in touch with mothers (first) and believed that they are the true experts of children's and family life. Gradually, I discovered that most of the fathers had watched the interactive PowerPoint presentation I had sent to the children through their partners` accounts and knew about me and my project. The announcement of the foundation of a Facebook group *Italian dads in Vienna* during the first months of fieldwork, as well, questioned the hypothesis of faint presence of fathers in their children's lives. The founder declared that the pandemic disruption offered the right opportunity to change the ratio between the time fathers spend working and the time they spent with their offspring. He created the new group as a space for Italian fathers and children in Vienna to experience common leisure activities in a group. His was a 'provocation with feminist value as well'[39], in its founder's intentions. The initial resonance was so big that the initiator was already considering organizing different subgroups according to the children`s age. In response to his Facebook post, a woman suggested him to write in the Facebook group *Italian moms in Vienna* as well, where, in her words, there had been for a long time several fathers 'under cover', accessing through their partners' profiles, too[40]. In my fieldnotes, I reflected on gender roles and gender-related prejudices, starting from mines:

> I have interacted only with the mothers [of the families in my sample] so far, and fathers were only on the background in home office, a voice on the door bell phone, non-mentioned subjects [in mothers` narrations] or the ex-husband, that "I know him, he surely has no time for such things [participation to a research project]. He hardly finds the time for us". Maybe I`m prejudiced, I have a bias that makes me think that fathers not only have less time but are also less interested in issues regarding their children. Shall I put more effort into looking for the fathers and engage them? (Ethnographic log 29.11.2020)

It is not realistic to imagine that sedimented gender inequalities in the distribution of domestic and care work would disappear overnight, but it is worth investigating whether new spaces of participation in children's lives may open for fathers also thanks to the Covid-19 crisis. More active fathering could be boosted, for those fathers who switched to home-office, by new temporal arrangements which are, in some cases, more favourable to the conciliation of work and family, and by the daily exposure to family needs. Moreover, children may use and experience urban spaces – focus of this research – differently with mothers and fathers. Online interviews, being less consuming and able to reduce power imbalance thanks to physical distancing, probably increased the chances of involving the fathers. Finally, some of the fathers expressed a certain suspicion towards qualitative

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[39] I transcribed this statement during my interview with the group founder in April 2021 (the interviewee did not let me record our conversation).
[40] The founder of the association and Facebook group *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (*Italian moms in Vienna*), though, told me that the group is equally open to mothers and fathers, and that there are several fathers registered as group members.

sociological research, especially if carried out by a young woman and apprentice researcher.

> *"So, the big methodological issue you may face - I am an economist, right? – because the economist solves the problem evaluating, monetarily, whether certain urban features are better than others. So, we have this shortcut, because it's enough to ask: "Would you be willing to pay more to have a house in this urban context, or in that other urban context?", right? So, through this, models, you manage to understand what are the factors that determined…, that brought people to do a higher evaluation of urban contexts"* (Interview with F6)

Beside gender, the educational and occupational status of the parents in the sample deeply influenced the relationship with the researcher. The great majority of them held a university degree like me, but they were older and already had more credibility in their job fields. They were not naïve subjects, knew or believed to know what social science research is, and made questions about me and my project. One mother in the sample held a PhD in *Territorial Planning and Public Policies*, another one was the daughter of an established sociologist and sociology professor. As M16 offered me the opportunity to have a chat on qualitative research methods with her husband, a university professor holding lectures on this exact topic, I politely declined, in order to avoid establishing a professor-student relationship with a research participant, which might have caused embarrassment and, on my side, the impression that my methodological rigor was being continuously evaluated[41].Sometimes, I felt the need to justify the credibility of ethnographic research, and the seriousness of its strategy of hanging around, to graduated families with a high socioeconomic status and living in an efficient city[42]. Time pressure is another threat to ethnographic research.

> In the first minutes of our meeting, she [the mother] asks me to tell her what I am interested in exactly, so that she will not talk for hours in a row about things I am not interested in. It is typical of the mothers in my sample to optimize the times and go straight to the point. Almost all of them asked me to make my research focus more explicit, maybe because of their pragmatism and temporal pressure, or because they are all mothers with a high educational level and thus with a strong critical spirit. How shall I explain that I am defining the focus little by little together with them, with a democratic, deliberative, and subject-centered approach, as suitable to the capability approach? (Interview notes M13)

My position as young Italian women abroad brought the Italian and Hungarian families in Vienna – especially before the national borders were reopened after several months in late Spring 2021, for example when we found ourselves almost stuck in Vienna during

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[41] See ethnographic log 20.12.2020.
[42] See notes from the go-along on 23.02.2021, MC9.

Christmas and New Year`s vacations 2021 – to consider me as a relative or a friend on visit to take around on walking tours in their neighborhoods.

A downside of go-alongs is that they often make it necessary for the researcher to clarify her own role to both research participants and their acquaintances who can be met along the way (about go-alongs, see section 4 of this chapter). During go-alongs, mothers would typically introduce me to other people as a personal friend of theirs, sometimes as a family friend; less frequently and by less fleeting encounters, as a PhD student. If mothers` complicity was a pass to stay in the field on one side, sometimes it risked weakening the children`s power to decide whether and how to take part in the research project, as well as to propose places to visit together and common activities[43].

Negotiating my position with the children was even more delicate and crucial. I proposed the children the role of researcher, and I left them free to find an alternative, a not 100% scientific one. Some children decided to treat me as a family friend or relative on visit, as a person of trust who helped them overcome boredom and maybe even pandemic (dis)tress.

> *"I mean, I miss a person to whom I can show stuff, because my friends from Italy should have come here, and I wanted to show them everything."* (C10, 10 years old)

Contrarily to common belief crystallized in expressions like "It's child's play!" (something is trivially easy), it is not easy to establish a dialogue with children about their everyday lives, also because this form of intercultural communication between children and adults requires a cautious translator.

> "The adult researchers who start a dialogue with children about their lifeworlds and choose as topics family, school, play, conflict, punishment, friendships or secrets, do not have a simple research object, but can instead be seen as translators of the child's lifeworld for a wide public." (Heinzel, 2012, p. 83)[44]

In the research presented in this paper, the methodological challenges were even bigger, since also diversity of family cultures must be taken into account for 'translation'. Moreover, given the different languages involved – German, Italian, Hungarian and English, the latter as official language of the URBEUR PhD program – translation processes need to be problematized, not only in the writing phase, as I translate interview recordings and scientific literature to quote, but all the way back to finding research participants and collecting data. I had the impression that the impossibility to use the Hungarian language

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[43] See the notes from the go-along on 16.11.2021, family 6.

[44] Translation by the author. Original text in German: "Die erwachsenen Kindheitsforscherinnen und -forscher, die mit Kindern in einen Dialog über deren Lebenswelt eintreten und Familie, Schule, Spielen, Streit, Strafe, Freundschaften oder Geheimnisse zum Thema werden lassen, erforschen nicht einen einfachen Gegenstand, sondern können als "Übersetzer" der kindlichen Lebenswelt für ein weites Publikum verstanden werden." (Heinzel, 2012, p. 83)

because of my too basic knowledge may have influenced the relationship with the Hungarian-origin families in the sense of more distance than with the Italian families. For the same reason, I could get much more information about the Italian than about the Hungarian community in Vienna through Facebook posts. Sometimes, languages were an issue also with second-generation children with Italian background:

> "Would she have answered me if I had asked her the questions in German? Sometimes I am a bit limited by the fact that I identify with mothers: mothers have to be consistent in speaking only Italian with their children, and I try to do the same, while a code mixing or switching may be more functional to pursue my cognitive research goals... It is a bias due to my positionality of Italian woman (I identify with Italian mothers) and former teacher.[45]" (Go-along with family 12)

When different family members had different languages of preference – Italian or German with Italian families, German or English with Hungarian families – my language choices inevitably reflected my urgence to catch a perspective rather than another and to respect roles and power hierarchies within the families (for instance, my gatekeepers were mothers, not fathers). Moreover, I needed to translate from the language of first- and second-generation migrant-origin children growing up in Vienna in the 2020s to an adult language suitable for a dissertation. It is recommended for ethnographic practice to reduce power imbalances between children and adults, taking on the 'least adult-like role possible' (Saywitz & Camparo, 2014, p. 7), the one of a somewhat atypical adult. This was a delicate point for me, given my educational background and past career. Before starting a PhD in Urban Studies, I studied teacher education for five years and worked in Austrian primary schools for two. When I entered the field, I paid attention to reduce the possible interferences of my previous professional roles and to embrace the role of researcher by taking on a patient and genuinely interested attitude, specifying that I was not there to check on or judge anybody but rather to discover more about their everyday lives and the way they used places in Vienna. In this way, I gained enough trust and acceptance from the children to research alongside them.

Positionality and power dynamics also have a material and physical component. In his ethnographic accounts, William Corsaro (2018) explains that, to be accepted as participant observer by children in US and Italian preschool services, he had to "overcome the children's tendency to see me as a typical adult" (Corsaro, 2018, p. 54). The researcher's physical size, in that case, made the task even harder. He decided to opt for an opposite method than the one used by parents, teachers, and other adults, who actively intervene stepping in play areas to scold, give advice, ask something, regulate conflicts. Instead, Corsaro chose a reactive method – he sat down on a playfield and waited for the children

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[45] I am aware of the approach "One person, one language", very popular to support language acquisitions of multilingual children.

to approach him. I, a 160 cm tall person and a woman, may have looked less intimidating than other researchers. Also, some of my socio-demographic features may have been advantageous in this sense. My migrant background in Austria, my relatively young age, and my position as PhD candidate with a lot to learn attracted children's and families' sympathy, facilitating the access to the field and the active participation in the project. In the relationship with me, a (partial) outsider in Austria and an absolute newcomer in Vienna[46], the children had the power that derives from being experts not only of their own life, but also of the city of Vienna and of the German language (my German is very good, but the Italian accent stays). This contributed to the establishment of a less asymmetrical relationship with me than with other adults. At the beginning of every conversation with the children, I would remind them that I knew relatively little about Vienna, aware of some research results about children's pragmatic competence in developmental psychology: children would be able to adapt the conversation to the level of competence and knowledge of their conversation partner, and more in general to his/her needs. For example, even young children will respond in a more detailed and precise way if told explicitly that the other person lacks relevant background information (Cordo, Saetermoe & Goodman, 2005). Scientific literature on methods of research with children warns that some children tend to think that "adults know better anyway" and that they ask children questions even if they already know the answers (Saywitz & Camparo, 2014, p. 15). This thought can be contrasted by a relationship of trust, the choice of a non-intimidating physical research setting and the explicit statement of basic principles before any research activity together:

> 1. Children are the experts on the research topic, and the researcher wants to learn more from them;
>
> 2. They can ask for explanations any time, for example when a question is not clear;
>
> 3. They are encouraged to correct the researcher, if she/ he says something wrong or inappropriately builds a question on false premises.
>
> (Author's re-elaboration of some of the basic rules to set prior to interviews with children according to Saywitz & Camparo, 2014, p. 18)

Despite all methodological preparation and caution, I think that it was hard for me, an adult and a person with certain preferences and style, to approach children who expressed themselves preferably through kinesthetic rather than verbal language. Children`s intelligences and languages are multiple, as demonstrated respectively by the psychologist Howard Gardner and the pedagogist Loris Malaguzzi. Getting involved in common activities initiated by the children – for example, collecting and throwing stones in rivers and water

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[46] I had never lived in Vienna before but, having spent the previous 4 years in Austria, had some tools (German language skills, knowledge of some elements of bureaucracy and culture) to better orient myself in the city and interpret what I observed, read, heard.

channels, learning how to ride a push scooter or to take panoramic photos with a smartphone, observing their artistic creations carefully and eventually joining them in the drawing of pandas and giraffes – contributes to build the relational basis necessary to co-construct the research with them. Moreover, common activities can work as breaks and thinking time for the children, for instance, if the researcher has posed a question. About a child in the sample teaching me how to take panoramic photos with a smartphone, I annotated in my ethnographic fieldnotes:

> Pierluigi has become the teacher and I the student. Because I had never taken a panoramic photo but, even more, because I knew about this possibility but had never sought the setting on my phone, out of laziness or belief that it was a function exclusive to cool phones. Children lead adults to do new things, to learn new things, to see and experience space differently. (Notes from go-along with MS11)

To conclude, we can argue that the adult research participants had some things in common with me, the researcher: the EU-migrant status in Vienna, the educational level, and at least one language. Our social worlds were not too distant. This may have caused sympathies, but also more diffidence, at times.

> "Since many mainly research in their own society nowadays, we often deal with relatively familiar phenomena. The observed typically speak the same language as us, enjoyed a similar kind of education and besides, in most cases, have an own idea of science. Still, we will meet a lot of new and unfamiliar things."[47] (Knoblauch & Vollmer, 2019, p. 605)

Still, the discovery of Viennese neighborhoods alongside the families and the participation of children in the research opened spaces for the unexpected.

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[47] Translation by the author. Original text in German: „Da heute viele vor allem in der eigenen Gesellschaft forschen, haben wir es häufig mit relativ vertrauten Phänomenen zu tun. Die Beobachteten sprechen typischerweise die gleiche Sprache wie wir, haben eine ähnliche Art von Bildung genossen und darüber hinaus zumeist eine eigene Vorstellung von Wissenschaft. Dennoch werden wir vielem Neuen und Unvertrautem begegnen."

Go-alongs with mothers and children in the neighborhoods of residence
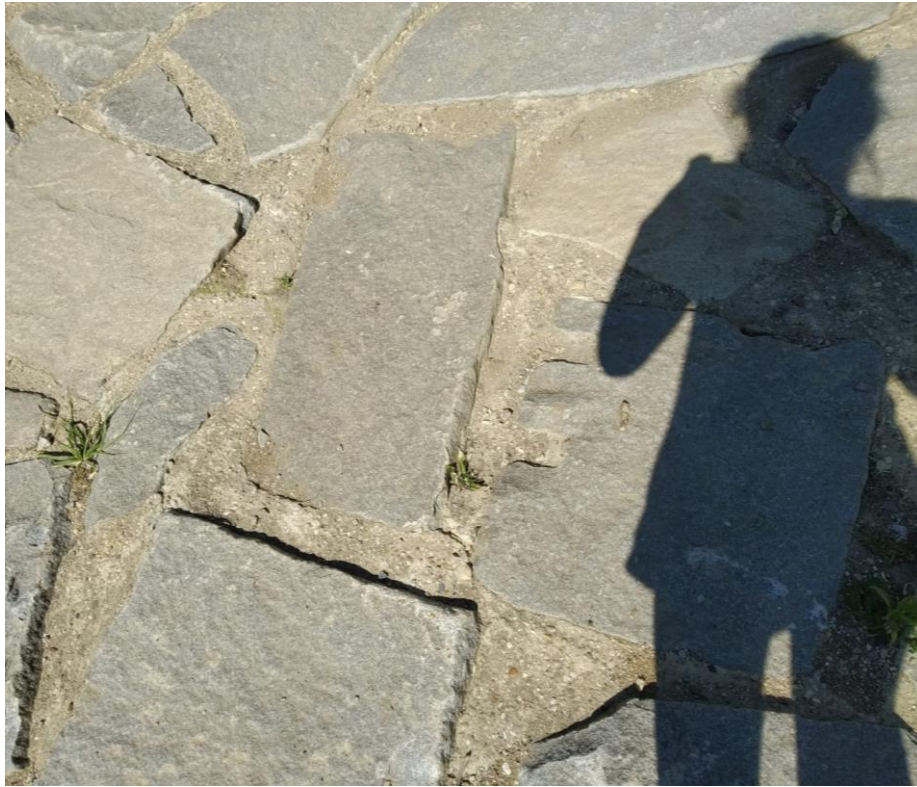
Go-along in the 23. district on 3.6.2021. L., 6 years old, photographs her shadow.

The go-along is a mobile research method invented less than twenty years ago and used to explore the relationship between individuals and places in everyday life. Combining the advantages of participant observation (contextual, dynamic) and interviewing (capable of yielding deeper insights), this research method has proved to be especially suitable for ethnographic research (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 455).

> "A hybrid between participant observation and interviewing, go-alongs carry certain advantages when it comes to exploring the role of place in everyday lived experience. Go-alongs are a more modest, but also a more systematic and outcome-oriented version of 'hanging out' with key informants – an ethnographic practice that is highly recommended in virtually all fieldwork manuals and textbooks." (*Ibidem*, p. 463)

More than space in its physical nature, central to the go-along method are places and their symbolic meanings for research participants. Place is not only the context of the meeting between the researcher and the research subject/s, but also the third participant in a triadic conversation. In concrete terms, salient, striking and even bothering elements become the pretext to elicit extensive and reflexive narrations about the relationship between people and place, shaped by experiences and affects.

> "In sum, everyday places not only provide authentic locations and backdrops for go-along data collection but they allow researchers to consider place and place-

based relationships as integral components and topics of their work." (Kusenbach, 2018, p. 7)

In my research, the go-along turned out to have the advantage of bringing to light the negative aspects of places as well, which are usually blended by the tendency to present a coherent and overly positive picture of the neighborhood of residence and the own life in interview settings. For instance, it was only during go-alongs that I discovered that push scooters had been repeatedly stolen in Bacherpark and that violent baby gangs made children`s autonomous use of the same park without adults almost impossible[48].

The mix of contextualized experience and verbal interaction makes go-alongs the right method to involve both adults and children. Its dynamic nature makes the go-along suitable for researching with children, who often need and want to move rather than just talk with adults. Go-alongs are also less asymmetric than interviews, since the participants are recognized as experts and asked to guide the researcher to the discovery of places and social realms of experience. This method has been used to study children's and adolescents' outdoor activities in public open spaces (Brussoni, Linb, et al., 2020; Chaudhury, Hinckson et al., 2019) and, especially in an era when children`s autonomous movement in the city is reduced, they may represent a precious occasion for them to gain knowledge and awareness of their living environment, for example noticing spaces in the vicinity they usually do not see. To watch places from the perspective of walkers is very different than seeing them dash from the car windowpane or watching them from above from the top of a high condominium or a tower.

Since my sample included children aged 6-11, I asked the mothers to be present and stroll along their children and me in their neighborhood of residence and go to 'their places', the ones they use in everyday life or find meaningful in other ways. In my experience, go-alongs with children and caregivers, especially trails, proved to be a possible solution to inquire parents` opinions and lifeworlds because, not requiring the adults to externalize care for the time of the encounter, they allow the participation of people with time scarcity as well.

> [The three-year-old little child throws a tantrum]
> -I, the researcher: *"No problem, we can talk another time."*
> -M13: *"Yes, but another time it's exactly the same."*
> -I, the researcher: *"Ok."*
> -M13: *"I mean, even if we talked at home over the computer, they would anyway be there and jump around, and I want something from you. So, it's the same. With us it's the same. So, if they don't get 100% of attention, after a while it's like this."*
> (First meeting with M13)

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[48] See notes on go-along on 31.05.2021, family 11.

During 2 go-alongs, I also spent some time only with the children. Doing go-alongs with children without any parent has the benefit of leaving the child more space to communicate with the researcher, if it has previously been built a relationship of trust between them. A possible disadvantage is that it may be hard for the researcher to take on a less directive role, the least adult-like role possible, when she or he knows he or she has been entrusted the role of sole adult in charge of the child`s integrity in the city. The researcher`s responsibility is remarked on by children asking her or him whether they are allowed to do this and that.

> He asks for my permission to move a few meters away to greet a friend. I, of course, give permission. This request for permission emphasizes the fact that I am the adult responsible for him, the child. (Notes from go-along with MC11)

During a go-along with parents and children, I spent some time with the children in the sample and their child friends alone, while parents were chatting with other adults. Once, to my surprise and fear, a friend of a child in the sample began to climb up a tree before my eyes.

> I ask the child whether her parents let her climb, and she answers that they do, if an adult is present. I tell her that next time we will ask her parents, and that I don't count as an adult for now because I haven't talked to her parents. [...] Do I count as an adult in the eyes of other adults? How do the children consider me? If the researcher's role is that of a quasi-adult, how should she or he behave in practice? (Notes on go-along with family 14 on 13.11.2020)

The feeling of responsibility for the children`s safety was sometimes present even during go-alongs with children and parents together, as I realized when two sisters in the sample and two friends of theirs started to move towards a trafficked road to retrieve some chalks which had rolled down from the curbside. Next to me, the children`s mother did not seem alarmed. Nevertheless, I couldn`t help asking all the children to take at least 3 steps back.

> I reflected that, even in the presence of parents, I feel co-responsible for the safety and health of the children. It is surely a legacy of my years of internships and work in schools. Too bad that the streets are still trafficked by cars, so that it`s not possible to turn them into beautiful 'open-air living rooms' for children without worries. (Notes on go-along 15.06.2021)

When walking with mothers and children together, I clearly communicated that the leader, the person entrusted with the task to decide the paths was the child, who could of course ask the mother for help. I noticed that when the child physically stands in the middle between the parent and the researcher while walking, he or she will more likely participate actively in the go-along by giving the researcher information about the visited places and influencing the route. To fellow researchers confronted with tired or bored children, I suggest making the children feel protagonists again by proposing them small 'challenges',

such as timing the path from one node of our tour to the next one or jumping on one foot for a small portion of the path.

Despite my attentions, the presence of mothers surely influenced, sometimes probably also limited, children's possibility to choose the paths and the nodes of our tours, as well as to express their thoughts freely.

> "Whilst striving for the 'idealism' of children centred research, researchers must be 'realists' in their reflexive evaluation of children centred research methods in practice." (Barker & Weller, 2003a, p. 37)

Concerning the downsides I experienced, go-alongs may be:
-Harder to document than online interviews, since para-verbal and non-verbal information is missing. Moreover, documenting through both fieldnotes and photos requires a certain multitasking ability from the researcher[49];
-Rich of action, even hectic, and therefore less intimate. This kind of pace is less likely to boost the participants' reflection;
-Chaotic and unfair. If more participants are involved, it is hard to differentiate between the perspective of each single individual. This may be problematic especially from the point of view of power imbalances, for example, when a child and a parent together accompany the researcher on a neighborhood tour.

Margarethe Kusenbach, initiator of the go-along method, differentiates between trails and tours. The first ones are natural outings when research participants go about their daily lives, for example to the supermarket to shop, whereby the researcher has very little control and simply goes along without knowing in advance what is going to happen and does not have the power to produce standardized, comparable data. The second ones are walks led by research participants on researcher's demand to show her their neighborhood, especially the most relevant places to their everyday life. In this project, 11 go-alongs configured themselves prevalently as tours and 8 rather as trails. In my experience, there are plenty of intermediate and hybrid forms between these two main types. Especially when researching with children and families, an intended tour can easily turn into a trail, for instance, because a family meets with another family[50], suddenly needs to pick up a smaller sibling or to go shopping. Sometimes children want to play, alone or with friends,

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[49] I also did voice recordings of the meetings. I decided not to transcribe them integrally, since they lasted several hours each, but only some portions of them.
[50] The small sample included altogether 16 families of Italian or Hungarian origin, with no aim of representativity. In reality, I also got to know some befriended families during go-alongs, which had following advantages: a) It allowed me to observe the behavior of children in the sample in their neighborhood in a less artificial context; b) It gave me some more information about the worlds of the Italian and Hungarian migrant communities in Vienna.

instead of showing things around to the researcher. This was the case, for example, as we ran into a structure with two fountains and a steamer, for the second time in our tour of a family`s dwelling surroundings.

> While Elisabetta [her mum] is showing me the common rooms in the building, Camilla says she wants to go drinking alone and asks us to wait for her. Seeing her from a distance, we understand why she insisted on going alone: she starts playing with the fresh spray by herself [...]. (Notes from go-along with family 12)

I let the families freely decide the route and the length of the walk but asked them to go on foot instead of using other means of transport. One family would have liked to use a push scooter, but I disagreed because it would have been impossible to talk, photograph, and take telegraphic notes at the same time while driving a push scooter. In one case, a child simply dragged his push scooter around, which he had used on that day to go to school and move from school to the music school for an after-school activity, with a helmet still on his head. Another child, who had dragged her push scooter around during our tour as well, insisted, as we arrived at a park near her home, on teaching me how to ride it. The push scooter became a mediator in the relationship between me, the researcher, and the research participants, mother and daughter, similarly than the transational objects I mentioned about online research with children. The child felt proud and competent to be able to teach me, an adult doing some kind of work for a university, something new.

As far as the documentation of go-alongs is concerned, only in three cases did both I and the children take photos with my smartphone during go-alongs. I usually monopolized the task of taking photos because of a double, subconscious prejudice: 1) The children may destroy my phone, for example by letting it fall down; 2) The children are likely to produce several blurred, or anyway unusable photos. I, as the researcher, am responsible, in the end, for research results.

The photos I took, I realized, are less meaningful for the purpose of my research than the ones the children took themselves. Taking photos myself, most of the times, instead of delegating this task to the children, also meant that I had to divide my attention between four activities – walking, talking, taking notes, and photographing – with the evident limitations of multitasking. Therefore, for future research, I would suggest the researcher to give each child a disposable camera and keep her phone for further photos, just in case[51]. However, not being busy with photographing, the children could pay more attention to and engage more in our verbal interaction and in the playful interaction with places, animals, plants, and human-made objects. In any case, letting the children take photos

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[51] About the advantages and disadvantages of using photos taken by the children as input to research with them, see Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010.

during go-alongs appears as a better solution than asking them to take pictures with one of their relatives` phone in the weeks after the go-along and have the caregivers send them to the researcher. The risks with this kind of organization may be that:

a) The adult does not have time and/or forgets about the request;

b) The adult, not the child, takes the pictures;

c) The child does not feel free to show to the researcher places and activities she or he does not want her or his parents to know about. Especially pre-adolescents are very jealous of their spaces of freedom.

Go-along in the 23. district on 3.6.2021. Collecting stones and leaves, playing along and in the stream Liesingbach with Camilla, 6 years old.

Go-along in the 8. district on 15.06.2021. Rossana's (7 years old) drawing and the original building in Alser Straße

Virtual journeys to the places of provenance

Scientific literature contemplates the option of virtual or simulated go-alongs as a strategy to circumvent physical, spatial, or temporal limitations (Kusenbach, 2018). In this case, since the pandemic, as well as the lack of time and resources, made it hard to do physical

go-alongs with the families in their cities and town of provenance, I decided to develop a creative and interactive research method. As a particular form of photo-elicitation, virtual journeys are a collaborative method. Especially when photos are participant-produced or found by the participant, the involved subjects are the uncontested experts in the interview setting and become fieldworkers too (Williams & Whitehouse, 2015). Exactly because research participants have the lead, a possible disadvantage of virtual journeys is their reduced comparability, similarly than for go-alongs. Research can take unanticipated and surprising turns for the researcher, who follows each subject in her or his world. If necessary, the researcher nudges the conversation in directions relevant to the aims of the study. The participants exercise agency and reflexivity about their own lives (Ammerman & Williams, 2012), which makes the methods suitable for needs assessment (Williams & Whitehouse, 2015), for example, about the quality of public space.

I asked some of the mothers in the sample to guide me on 'virtual journeys' through a videoconferencing tool, leaving their children and husbands/ partners free to join or not. The 7 virtual journeys configured themselves as photo-elicited online interviews with symbolic and emotional narrations about the city or town of provenance. I asked parents to actively construct 'research props' choosing, prior to the virtual journey, personal photos or photos from the internet depicting their city or town of provenance (*participant-produced* or *found images*, according to the classification by Williams & Whitehouse, 2015). The photos acted as bridge between me and research participants, triggering narrations that expanded far beyond the visible content of the pictures (Harper, Hurworth in Frisina, 2016). Pictures can be more effective than words, given the different cultural and, in some cases, linguistic contexts where the interviewee and the interviewer come from (Ammerman & Williams, 2012). The mediation of pictures allowed me to explore in depth the individual and family biography of research participants and comprehend their motives for migration in an auto-driven way (Ammerman & Williams, 2012). Exactly because it was the parents who led the conversations directly and indirectly, through choosing the photos and pictures of the places of provenance, I do not report any interview guide referred to virtual journeys in the appendices of this dissertation. Virtual journeys gave access to subjective meanings associated with space and to a comparison between the spaces in the hometown and those in the Viennese neighborhoods of residence, previously explored together through go-alongs. My preparation to virtual journeys consisted in reading again all interview transcripts, the protocols and the available transcripts from go-alongs, and ethnographic notes to extract relevant topics and questions (apropos the recursivity of ethnographic research). In this way, I was able to elicit and create in my analysis the connections between the present, which I had known through interviews and go-alongs in Vienna, and the past of parents and families. For each

family, I wrote specific questions of clarification and follow-up prior to virtual journeys. By making few comments in a conversation led by the research participants, I tried to obtain information about the places of origin and their changes over time, neighborhood divisions and characteristics of the places of origin, and groups and associations present there. Solicited by the pictures, research participants evoked everyday paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.[52] They had the lead of the narration, and my comments and questions were discreet in order not to create any pressure to show places or tell stories which might have caused distress or a feeling of violation of their private sphere. In addition, in the course of 3 online journeys (out of 7), I or the research participants resorted to Google Maps, sharing screens. In case research participants prepare very few pictures or would not be willing to reveal much starting from them, the researcher can prepare neutral (in the sense of less personal than participant-produced or participant-found pictures) stimulus pictures about the thematic areas of interest as backup to activate narrations about the places of provenance (*researcher-produced images*, Williams & Whitehouse, 2015). As the photos were over, I would ask whether they still had friends or relatives with children of similar age to theirs in the places of origin, and whether these had provided them any information about how it is to be a parent and a son/daughter there these days. Finally, I asked the parents to reflect on whether there was something their children could do or have in Vienna by the time of fieldwork which had been impossible for them to reach as children, and the other way round. At the end of the virtual journey, I asked the participant(s) whether they had something to add about their places of provenance, also in comparison to the Viennese neighborhoods of residence. A more original alternative to close the interview, coming from Ammerman & Williams (2012), would have been to invite participants to talk about one or more photos which they did not include in the set, for example because it had not come to their mind, or because it was impossible to retrieve them. I discussed and fine-tuned the creative method sketched in this section with an employee from *Gebietsbetreeung South* interested in a creative method potentially useful for future GB* projects aimed at exploring migrant biographies with the aim of boosting place belonging and neighborly feelings.

I noticed that two mothers in the sample tended to provide me with touristic information about the history, culture, and architecture of the places of provenance. This may depend on the use of the denomination 'virtual journey'. Researchers willing to use this method may reflect on the possibility of finding another name for it.

The pictures can be shared on the computer screen either by the participant or by the researcher. The advantage of the participant sharing the screen is that she or he can

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[52] These are the five key elements composing, according to Kevin Lynch (1990), the image of the city.

organize the narration and lead the researcher by hand to the places she or he knows best. The interviewee has the role of absolute protagonist. The advantages of the researcher sharing the screen is that the participant is not distracted by the technical tasks to switch from one photo to another and to manage the exploration on Google Maps. Moreover, the researcher can strategically grab the initiative and pass to the next photo in case a topic is not particularly relevant to the research and has been occupying already too much time. However, in this case the narration may be often interrupted because of the necessity for the interviewee to give indications about the order in which the photos should be visualized on the shared screen. I suggest researchers to request their interview partners to send them the pictures at least one day before the interview, so that they can download and save them, possibly trying to sort them – in folders or by giving file names in alphabetic or numerical order – according to geographic, chronological, or thematic criteria. In this way, in case of technical problems, the researcher can share her screen with the participant avoiding dead times and lengthy instructions. This problem is even easier to solve in the case of offline virtual journeys, where the interviewer can scatter printed photos on a table and the interviewee can order them before or, even more interestingly, in the making of the virtual journey.
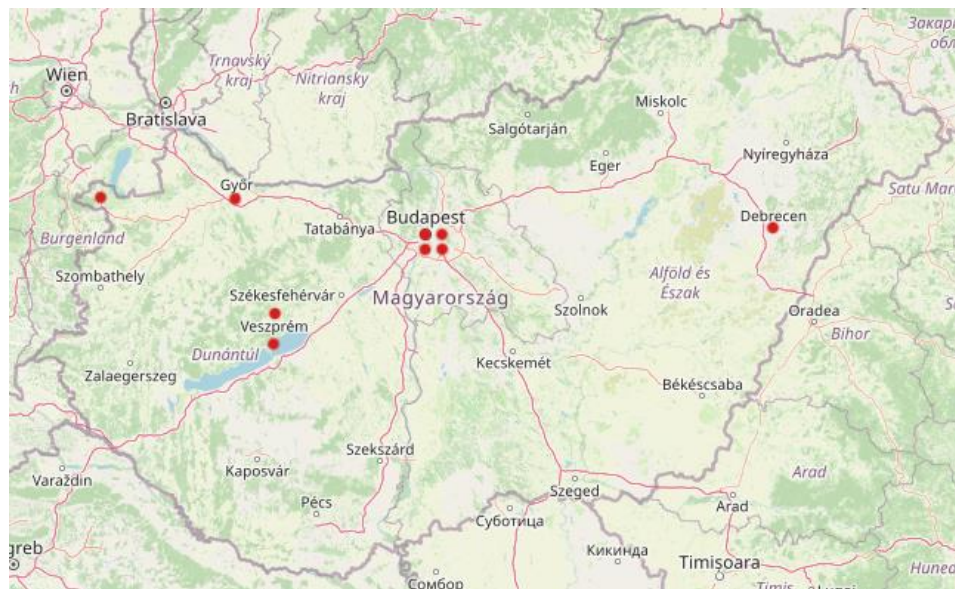
Cities and towns of provenance in Hungary
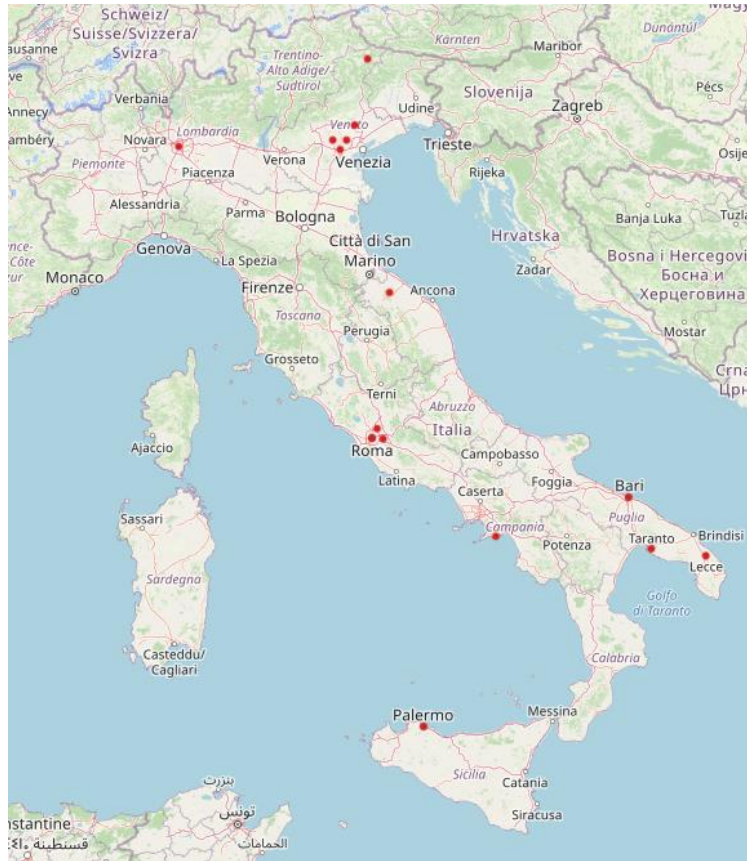
Cities and towns of provenance in Italy

The women in the sample interpreted the virtual journey as intimate setting for biographic narration, opting for their individual participation rather than involving other family members. The length of the meetings, superior to that of the interviews with parents, points out a strong engagement of research participants. Virtual journeys lasted on average 1 hour and 40 minutes, with a minimal duration of 1 hour and 25 minutes and a maximal duration of 2 hours and 10 minutes. The previous interviews with parents had been shorter, with an average duration of 1 h and 2 minutes. I will now illustrate an example of the fact that the virtual journeys seemed to be subjectively signified by the participants as time for themselves. M13 participated in the virtual journey from home. Her 3 children and her husband were in other rooms of the flat and from time to time, would shortly come to her during the videocall, which was experienced as a distraction and a nuisance by the interviewee. In this and other cases, the feedback often given at the end of the interview was that virtual journeys are a pleasant though nostalgic experience, a journey into the past, to places and phases of life left behind, about which one does not think any more in everyday life.

> *"It was nice to go back with my mind to old times. […] It was also funny. Because you reflect… I think it is also a sort of 'therapy' [laughs], because you don`t reflect on these things so often, and it is interesting to sit down and reflect on these issues"*
> (Virtual journey with M3)

The sole case in which both mother and pre-adolescent daughter participated in the virtual journey additionally gave access to a child`s perspective on the place of provenance. However, it also created some little tensions and problems which would require special attention from researchers reading this account and also interested in using virtual journeys.

- Adult and children's attention span is not the same, and the interests are also different. A very long conversation regulated on mothers` attention span (and often monopolized by mothers) may bore their children and bring them to leave the computer for a while or definitively, for instance to eat, drink, rest (they may be tired, even sleepy), or interact with other family members.
- The journey, which brings the mind back to places of provenance, may cause distress to one or more family members, in case of disagreement on migratory choices.
- The children, especially if pre-adolescents or teenagers, may contradict their parents` statements and even start quarreling with parents or siblings present at home in that moment. The research can indirectly create tensions within the family or foment conflict, for instance, in case of disagreement on the place where the family should live.

Institutional ethnography as jigsaw approach: interviews and internship at GB*

Institutional ethnography is a research approach founded by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Edith Smith in the early 1980s and useful to produce situated knowledge on institutions and their effects by way of analyzing the social relations between people working[53] within an institution, with it, or experiencing the effects of the institution, and assembling their complementary perspectives. The inquiry starts from the everyday experience of people working there and proceeds to discover non-evident relationships between people`s activity and putting together, as in a mosaic or a police investigation, different *work knowledge* sets – that is, the knowledge and know-how everybody has about one or more spheres of their lives, for example labor (Smith, 2005; Devault, 2006). Differently than traditional research, institutional ethnography does not abstract and model the world in a way that makes people disappear. People stay throughout the

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[53] Smith, the founder of the approach, clarifies that the notion of work in institutional ethnography extends far beyond salaried activities and includes almost any human everyday activity connected to a role and to a set of work knowledge. It is 'work', for instance, care work performed by mothers or the fruition of a service as client of beneficiary of it.

research project as subjects, not objects. Their sociological attributes are not brought into play all the time to explain the phenomena of interest, and their views are not interesting *per se*. Instead, the deepest insights originate from the connections and from matching reciprocal knowledge (Kearney, Corman, Gormley, Hart, Johnston, & Smith, 2018). The interest of the institutional ethnographer is not only on subjective perspectives, as it is common in traditional ethnographic research, but also on objective aspects: interesting is what people concretely do, the meanings and explanations they attach to what they do, and the map of power relations and inequalities emerging from the inquiry (Billo & Mountz, 2016). Institutional ethnography prefers empirical analysis at micro- and meso-level rather than macro-theories. Rooted in Marxist and feminist research, this approach intends to unveil inequalities to give the tools for change.

Since the 1970s, ethnographic studies have tried to inform a public vaster than a scholarly elite about urban institutions which have effects on their lives but are not commonly accessible, or whose functioning is usually obscure. In this way, they brought forward democratic instances. Geographers use institutional ethnography to study urban institutions as they are, starting from everyday activities to inductively gain knowledge about power relationships within and beyond the institution. On the field, institutions would act in a nonuniform way and adapt to the spatial and time circumstances, instead of being the kind of organizational monoliths theorized by Weber in his works on bureaucracy. The coherence of institutional discourses is absent in lived practices (Billo & Mountz, 2016). Geographers criticized Dorothy Smith`s approach as geographically indetermined: the map is merely a verbal metaphor in Smith *(ibidem)*. They encouraged to perform detailed socio-spatial analysis of institutions as physical settings with different spaces within them and in charge or likewise differentiated areas, for example neighborhoods.[54] In some cases, they proposed multi-sited ethnography to collect and put together information on the institutions and the effects of their work in other sites.

In the project presented in this dissertation, families were the starting point to set off the exploration of the Viennese institutional landscape from below, looking for the connections between the work of institutions and the daily activities of those standing in the complementary position of users of their services, as foreseen by institutional ethnography.

> "Drawing on other's work knowledge of those standing in reciprocal positions is a major resource for the ethnographer [...]" (Smith, 2005, p. 159)

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[54] In chapter 5, especially while presenting the institutional ethnography I carried out with Gebietsbetreuung Mitte, I describe the spatial and physical features of its neighborhood center and discuss the possible meanings behind its spatial organization.

In this case, the two groups of research participants (families and Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung employees) did not know each other:

> "Analytically fundamental to this approach is an ontology that views the social as the concerting of people's activities. […] Smith expands this through the concept of social relations, which, as in Marx, refers to the coordinating of people's activities on a large scale, as this occurs in and across multiple sites, involving the activities of people who are not known to each other and who do not meet face-to-face." (Smith, 2005, p. 16)

As already anticipated earlier on in this section, institutional ethnography originates not primarily from theory but rather from people`s everyday knowledge. Since I was an outsider in Vienna and had never heard nor read of *Gebietsbetreeungen* before the start of my fieldwork, I had very few pre-comprehensions or prejudices towards these institutions, which I got to know through participant observation and direct experience of their daily work on one side, interviews, and informal conversations to grasp the work knowledges of different persons working at *Gebietsbetreeungen* on the other side. The bottom-up approach typical of Institutional Ethnography (Kearney, Corman, Gormley, Hart, Johnston, & Smith, 2018) was strengthened by the sparsity of scientific literature on the topic.

The end-product of an institutional ethnographical investigation is ideally institutional learning. At the end of the enquiry, research results are supposed to become a resource for research participants, who can enrich their work knowledges thanks to the connections with other perspectives and phenomena. So, the research should be useful and easy to use, in Smith`s metaphor like a map, able to inform research participants about their position, let them plan their next goals on the map and how to reach them. The map is a co-production of research participants and researchers, rather than a set of top-down guidelines poured on practitioners basing on the most updated theoretical knowledge on the topic.

Ethics and methods in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic

The ethics of research includes regulatory and legal arrangements but cannot be reduced to these only. Ethical research respects the participants` rights and it aims at not damaging the participants in any possible way. The researcher is not there to extract data like a miner, but to visit unknown territory and learn along the way (Kvale e Brinkmann, 2009). For instance, in this project I decided to take photographs of places without children not only because photographing children would have requested some extra administrative work, but also because I wanted to exclude the event that children might feel ashamed or angry when they look back at my publications, even if they as children and their parents

gave consent. At times, ethnographic research may even seem in contrast to legal regulations, as cultural anthropologists and ethnographers have been pointing out (Piasere, 2020; Chan, Joosse, & Xiaoli Tian, 2020). With the Data Protection Act (1998), ethical standards tailored on biomedical research were imposed on all research branches, including social sciences. Twenty years later the General Data Protection Regulation (2018), conceived to protect people from marketing and social media, the GDPR was imposed on ethnographic fieldworkers as well, with even more important consequences. In this regard, I share with other social scientists the doubts about the feasibility and the sense of having to submit informed consent forms, data treatment forms, and extensive documentation of their research plans *ex-ante*, before the initiation of any fieldwork. In fact, informality and indefiniteness are vital components of ethnographic research, and it would be important to legitimize them, also in the academia – adopting the perspective of substantial vs bureaucratic ethics – to make bottom-up and open-ended research processes still possible (Sleeboom-Faulkner & McMurray, 2018). According to the General Data Protection Regulation, the consent to data collection and treatment cannot be implicit but should necessarily be clearly stated. The standardized bureaucratic language and communication style of consent forms stand in contradiction with the informal approach suitable to enter research participants` lives. To research participants and to the researcher, the requirements posed by ethics and data protection committees may be intimidating or boring:

> "While some anthropologists find the process of filling out a formalized ethics form to be intimidating, especially due to its formalized jargon and alienating language use, others experience it as a meaningless chore, encouraging box-ticking and hindering genuine reflection on ethical issues. It seems, then, that the method used to conduct ethical reviews in anthropology is not in agreement with the kind of critical self-reflection and embedded ethics (Meskell & Pels 2005) that anthropological methodology requires." (Sleeboom-Faulkner & McMurray, 2018, p. 22)

Instead, substantially ethical research demands to gain and deserve research participants' trust throughout the research process thanks to a transparent, respectful, and reflexive behavior. This means also being methodologically flexible: as Cecilia Nessi (2020) shows, research goals, theoretical stance/literature, methods, and ethics are interdependent as the four vertexes of a polygon. If one of these aspects changes, the other three also need to be modified. In the case of this research project, the pandemic added some new considerations on the traditional topic of ethical field access (Chan, Joosse, & Xiaoli Tian, 2020). I decided to protect myself and the research participants from possible contagion with the virus, as far as possible, by suspending or reducing personal meetings, and trying to meet in the open air, when the season and the weather conditions allowed it. To prevent the spread of the disease and reassure research participants, I would do a Covid-19 test

before every personal meeting with the families. In a few cases, I wondered whether the time point and the situation of pandemic were appropriate to meet in person at all.

> I am hesitant about the research: it is not acceptable, in these times, to be me the first to ask the families to meet. All the more so because it is a primary need for children`s psycho-physical well-being to meet in person with their peers, while meeting with me is not fundamental. (Ethnographic log 31.01.2021)

It was an ethical dilemma which requested from me to balance research interests with public health with, of course, a neat prioritization of the latter and, sometimes, a feeling of frustration for the limited usefulness of social research in such a situation, especially compared to medical and biotechnological research[55]. I oriented my decisions to policy regulations and mothers' opinions.
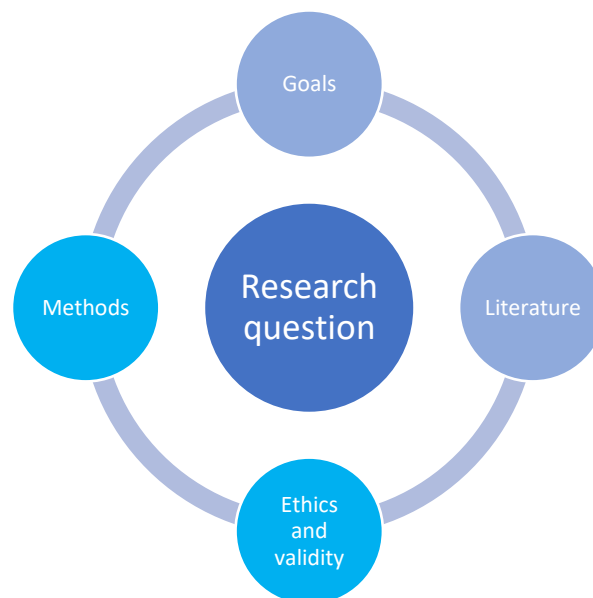
Photo by the author.

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[55] Similar feelings and ethical reflections are report in the article "Ethnography in calamitous times" by Chan, Joosse, & Xiaoli Tian (2020).

Ethical considerations also inform technical and procedural choices such as the ones concerning software and tools for research. For instance, I developed a preference for Skype over Zoom because I believe it is conformer to both bureaucratic and substantial ethics. According to the General Data Protection Regulation, research participants should be able to access interview recordings, listen to them as many times as they want, and withdraw their consent also after the interview, if they feel like it. On Skype, interviews recordings appear automatically in the common chat after the end of the conversation and can be downloaded by all participants for 30 days. On Zoom, instead, the host has the monopoly to view and download the recordings, which stay available on the platform for 90 days. In the specific cases where I conducted a video-interview with a child only using her mother`s Skype account, though, I reflected that the possibility for the mother to theoretically download the recording and 'overhear' what her child had told me in confidentiality was ethically not convenient. Other methodological and ethical aspects of synchronous video-interviews are analyzed later in this chapter.[56]

If ethical considerations are unavoidable when researching with adults, since social research necessarily implies some degree of intrusion in other people's lives, this is even more true of research with families, who are smaller and more intimate groups than school classrooms, for instance.

> The more people there are, the clearer and stronger the spatio-temporal framework, the more the researcher goes unobserved. My presence is much more noticeable and cumbersome in families than in a school classroom. Moreover, in a school classroom, as intern, I could be an 'undercover' researcher. However, in Covid-19 times I cannot enter schools at all. (Ethnographic log 25.10.2020)

Within families the children, who are less powerful than adults, might end up being forced to accept the researcher's or parents' decisions (Barker & Weller, 2003b). From an operational point of view, there are at least four ethical issues I had to consider while researching with children (Hill, 2005, p. 65):

1. Involvement of children in the research;
2. Consent and choice;
3. Possible harm or distress;
4. Privacy and confidentiality.

Given the age of the subjects involved in this project, namely 6-11 years olds, I gained oral consent from parents during interviews, which allowed to get to know each other and

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[56] For a systematic reflection on benefits and drawbacks of Skype interviews, see Deakin & Wakefield (2014).

collect some information on the family, its structure, biography, and neighborhood of residence in Vienna. Afterwards, I informed the children in written and oral form – through an interactive PowerPoint presentation[57] and, in two cases, paper letters – in a way appropriate to their age, as well as to their communicative and cognitive skills, about: the aims of the research project and its public, the amount of time and efforts requested from them, how I as the researcher was going to use information and other materials gathered. Sending paper letters, I decided to indicate the child as main recipient before the address line. The participation in the research was bound to children's consent, or at least assent (Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014). I tried not to settle for adult caregivers' consent only, but rather to produce information materials targeted specifically to the children and to find ways to check, prior to the start of data collection activities or at the latest at our first personal or online meeting, whether they actually wanted to participate (Bushin, 2007; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010[58]). Still, for children who did not master reading yet, I relied on their mothers for passing information about the project. In one case, a mother insisted that it was better that she and not I presented the project to her 8-year-old child.

> *"Well, maybe write some talking points to me, and I can tell them what it's about. Because I'm not sure that they are going to read it, if you write a letter. So yeh, maybe write something more in children's language, and then maybe you can explain to them [in the pointed list to send to the mum] what it's about, so I can tell them."* (Interview with M2)

I tried to reopen the negotiation about privacy and confidentiality during data collection, for example asking children and parents every single time whether I could make vocal recordings of the go-alongs. Some children showed particular interest in the tools to document go-alongs: the audio recording device and my fieldnotes taken on breakfast cereal cardboards. When we met with other families during go-alongs, I stopped the recording for privacy reasons.

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[57] In the accompanying e-mail, I sent a tutorial with simple instructions about how to open and correctly visualize the presentation.
[58] The article offers reflections and practical suggestions about creative ways to present research projects to children and ask them for consent or assent.
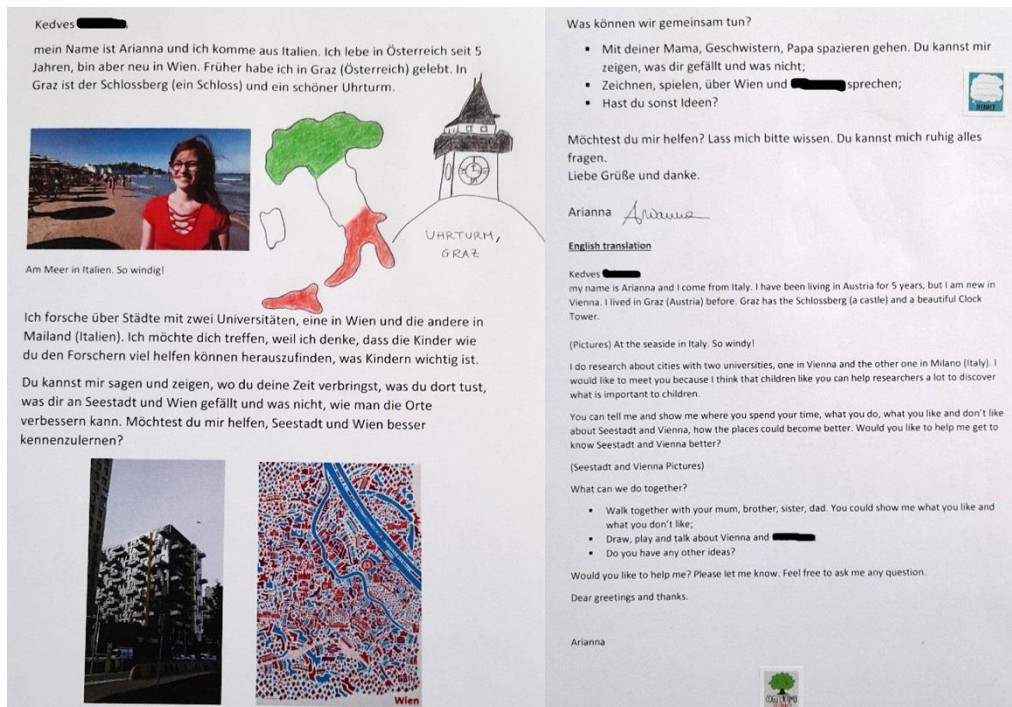
Example of printed letter sent to a child to inform about the project and ask for consent.

In the pandemic crisis, I managed to involve children through their parents. During lockdown phases, my contacts with the children were possible exclusively through the double mediation of technological devices, which became our windows to the outer world and other people, and of mothers, the gatekeepers, who owned them.

> In these 3 weeks of hard lockdown which have been announced (so far), I would like to keep discreetly in touch with the families I have already found. How to listen to children`s voice, though, if the contact I have (Facebook, WhatsApp) is their mother's? (Ethnographic log 17.11.2020)

As I realized that remote research did not work as I expected with the children neither in the form of online videocalls, nor in the form of virtual or physical probe kits, I modified my initial plans – not only for methodological, but also for ethical reasons – and decided to focus more on the perspectives and biographies of mothers. In this way, I respected some children's will or need, as I interpreted it, not to take part in the online part of the research. The only exception was a 10-year-old girl who was enthusiastic about the idea of being interviewed online, of being protagonist like her mum or YouTubers. Therefore, we agreed on a preliminary video-interview between the child and me prior to meeting in person. During our conversation, the child motivated as follows the necessity for me to talk with children about their experience without the mediation of parents:

> *"Because, even if she [my mum] had already told you some stuff that I also told you, the people who really lived things are also able to tell them more intensely, let's say."* (Interview with C10, 10 years old)

On the other side, a ten-year-old boy decided to refuse to take part in the study, despite his mother's interest and readiness to, and a six-year-old child denied her consent to record her voice during a neighborhood walk. Some of the children did not accept my proposal to make a drawing about one of the places visited in our walk. When families and not schools are the gatekeepers, children`s involvement is probably freer and the modes of participation more individualized. The impossibility to give them as much space, as competent actors and subjects with a voice, as I had planned in the initial project proposal, was not necessarily a failure but rather the consequence of my responsibility to respect children's right 'not to have a voice'. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2022), children have a right to be heard in all matters regarding them and to exchange information and express themselves (article 12 and 13). On the other side, children may not want to express their opinions sometimes, or refuse to do it according to the modes planned by adults. In the present research, according to another foundational principle stated in the Convention, that of the best interests of the child (article 3), I respected the specular children`s desire and right not to have a voice – or, better said, the right to choose freely the means to have a voice, for instance, refusing online research – , giving the priority to it over my specific research goals about quality of life in Viennese neighborhoods. In this manner, I indirectly pursued children's well-being, or more modestly tried to avoid causing them any kind of harm or distress. Children should have a say about the modes and circumstances of their participation and be free to draw borders, deciding to hide moments, for example when they play with friends, and places from the researcher`s view. They can also refuse to take part in a research project in the first place.

> A family is not a single block. In M7`s family, each member has large autonomy and time sovereignty. I am happy M7 wanted to meet with me anyway [even if her child, at the last minute, made a different program for the afternoon], and also that C7 was free to choose an alternative program for the afternoon. (Notes on go-along with M7)

> Child-sensitive research? Honest research recognizes children`s need of autonomy, secrecy, and separation from adults. Now I understand better Francesco Tonucci`s plea "Get your hands off children`s play!", which shocked me in its radicality when I heard it at an online conference. It is also true that adult researchers should not force themselves and, despite listening to the children with interest and openness, ready to learn, it is not realistic nor reasonable for them to pretend to be or try to become kids again, even more since today`s children have very different interests than theirs as they were children. (Notes on the go-along on 13.03.2021, MC7)

When doing go-alongs with parents and children together, the researcher needs to be cautious not to uncover the children`s secrets. In this fieldwork, these consisted mainly in the children having larger spaces of autonomy than the parents knew. Especially during

go-alongs, I noticed that the degree of autonomy of movement and the use of digital devices, especially smartphones, were sensitive topics and that, while trying to collect children`s experience and their views in these regards, I risked exposing some small transgressions to parental rules and directives. As already noted by scientific literature on family ethnographies, not only third-party confidentiality but also confidentiality within families is a delicate matter (Hall, 2014). In general, despite her efforts in the direction of child-sensitive research, the fieldworker is immersed in the generational order typical of contemporary Western societies and can hardly take distance from it, for some aspects. I arranged online and personal meetings through the mothers in advance, without knowing whether the day, or the time, or the contingent feelings of the children in that moment were favorable for an encounter. I think that scholars engaging with children and families should look for strategies to involve the children also in scheduling research-related appointments. Mother's presence and contribution during go-alongs with the children sharpened my awareness that the goal to report children's perspectives needs to be approached with modesty and intellectual honesty, trying to clearly differentiate our pre-conceptions and interpretive lens from the children's voices and eyes.

> "Instead of a naïve realistic attitude, presuming that we – the adult researchers – could 'really' take on children's perspective, see their world with 'children's eyes' and speak with 'children's voice', it needs to be indicated much more clearly than hitherto 'who speaks[59]'." (Mey, 2003, p. 23)

Notwithstanding the limitations described in this chapter, children surely had an important role in my research, indirectly through their parents' words and directly through go-alongs.

Especially because the research took place during a pandemic, a time full of stress and worries, I tried not only to avoid causing harm and annoyance, but also to actively return something to research participants through the research process and after it. Following my university's policy aimed at discouraging economically interested participation in research projects, I did not advertise any reward when looking for research participants. After the end of the research, I gave the children small thank you gifts such as stickers, paper sketchbooks, interactive books with activities for children to become explorers of their home surroundings. Once, I gave the whole family a plant. The families often offered me food, and in some cases I even received presents from the parents (a chocolate bar, a paper notebook), which I interpreted as signs of affection. Above all, I opted for immaterial rewards. As a way of thanking and rewarding the families for their participation

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[59] Translation by the author. Original text in German: "Anstelle einer naiv realistischen Haltung, die unterstellt, dass wir – die erwachsenen Forschenden – "wirklich" die Perspektive von Kindern einnehmen, mit den "Augen der Kinder" deren Welt betrachten und mit der "Stimme der Kinder" sprechen könnten, ist viel mehr als bisher kenntlich zu machen, "wer spricht"".

in the research project, I tried to make myself useful for them according to their needs. In this way, I exchanged a very small part of the time they spent on the research project – I became aware of the importance and scarcity of this resource to families – with my time. I compensated and thanked the families for their participation in the study as follows:

- Thanks to go-alongs, parents and children had the opportunity to explore and observe their neighborhood of residence with new eyes, to become more aware of it (*place awareness*).

- Children and parents had an occasion to spend time with each other in an unusual situation, detached from the hectic efficiency of everyday life. The children discovered new things about their family's place of provenance and their parents` childhoods (*identity*).

- The parents received from me some information and suggestions (nudging). For instance, I informed some families about services and events by the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung: free legal rental consultancy; free courtyard greening consultancy; rental of spaces to gather, for free or against payment, at or through the GB*– for instance, for mothers to meet; initiation of infrastructural interventions in public space suggested by the inhabitants and realized with the District Council (*information*).

  > I explain Rita what Gebietsbetreuungen are, what they do, what I am doing with them. She immediately has the idea of making them aware of the traffic light in Leopoldauer Straße at the corner with Siegfriedgasse: it is red for very long time for pedestrians. Rita thinks it is dangerous, because pedestrians sometimes run to cross despite the red light, because it is red for so long, for example to catch the bus. (Notes on go-along with M10)

- Parents and children received small favors to thank them for their participation. I occasionally helped children with their homework or accompanied them to afterschool courses while their parents were still busy with home office (*favors*).

- Mothers and children had a friendly presence in their lives, a person who listened to them and made some virtual and physical company during and after phases of reduced social contacts due to the pandemic.

  > *"In this moment it`s quite an experience for us to have such an afternoon program with you, because you have finally come with the Spring, because we have been not so often outside in recent times."* (Mother, go-along with MC4)

Moreover, the go-alongs and virtual journeys where the mothers decided to take part without any other family member indicate that they considered our meetings pleasant occasions and, to a certain extent, as time for themselves (*affective support*).

> *"I think everybody who, like us, lives abroad, likes to tell of their experience, especially in an environment like this, if you move to Vienna."* (Virtual journey with M7)
>
> *"Thank you too, for letting us participate, for finding us interesting. There are people who find us interesting – wow! – in our gray everydayness [laughs]".* (Virtual journey M13)

After completing the fieldwork, I moved to another city. Putting physical distance from the places and the families, with whom I had built up affective relationships, facilitated the analysis of the collected data. After presenting methodological and ethical issues in depth in this chapter, I move on to expose the main research results.

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3. Vienna 'easy city'? Functional aspects of quality of life

After presenting the theoretical and conceptual framework in chapter 1, research methods and ethical considerations in chapter 2, in this chapter I go into some of the results of the hybrid field research with parents and children. This chapter focuses prevalently on functional and physical aspects of life in the city and reports mainly the parents` perspectives. The chapter opens with an overview of the main capabilities and conversion factors I identified based on the analysis of the fieldwork materials collected through interviews, go-alongs with parents and children in Viennese neighborhoods of residence, and virtual journeys to places of provenance in Italy and Hungary. After that, I critically reconstruct the drivers of migration from the places of provenance in Italy and Hungary to Vienna, the position of women and children in migratory decision-making processes, and the way the parents in the sample represented Vienna and places of provenance at the time of fieldwork. In doing this, I question overtly positive and unproblematic representations of Vienna and try to intercept shadows and voids. Based on thick research materials, I touch upon the *beings* and *doings* the families aimed at getting rid of by leaving the previous places of residence (*negative capabilities*) and outline some of the capabilities they aspired to achieve by moving to Vienna (*positive capabilities*). Drawing from research data, I reflect on *adaptive preferences*, that is on how the context of residence influences subjective preferences and choices. This concept, in my view, draws attention to the role of the neighborhood and urban context not only as facilitator but also as motivator. Later, I zoom in on one of the capabilities which emerged from the fieldwork, children`s autonomy of movement in the city, focusing on the urban conversion factors which make it possible, cultural components influencing it, and its self-reinforcing character. Taking a step back from fieldwork, I show the limits of the ideas of children`s autonomy expressed by the participant parents. I argue that the autonomy described is crippled when it takes on mandatory character. In other words, it often seems like the result of social custom and societal expectations on children and parents rather than a free choice, whereby the Capability Approach is hinged upon and underlines the relevance of agency freedom, alongside well-being freedom. I show the complementarities of children`s autonomy with another capability, parents` conciliation of work and private life, the latter including family time and time for oneself, and consider the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures adopted to contain it on family life.

Fieldwork results: overview on capabilities and conversion factors

As already noted in chapter 1, Vienna has been attributed high positions in quality-of-life rankings using quantitative indicators in the years before the beginning of this research (Mercer, 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019). The present research originates from the interest to critically question and go beyond city ranking practices on quality of life, which refer to standard urban inhabitants and focus on the availability of infrastructures and services. To overcome this so-called 'countability approach' (Blečić, Cecchini & Talu, 2018, 2013), it is relevant to address differences and inequalities in aspirations, preferences, and hurdles (due to individual, group-related, and contextual conversion factors) in accessing the city. I did it with the category EU-migrant families with children, who have disadvantages ('group-dependent constraints', to tell it with the Capability Approach) deriving from their status of non-natives and non-citizens in terms of national citizenship rights. More precisely, in the Austrian context EU-migrants turned out to be disadvantaged from a linguistic and informational point of view. Moreover, families with children may have some disadvantages in their relationship with the city due to the delicate life phases its individuals and the family as a group are going through, characterized by care duties for parents, exploration and competence acquisition for children. By way of analyzing interviews with parents, go-alongs with parents and children, and virtual journeys with the help of the software NVivo, I identified several codes. The illustrations below represent the codes relative to *capabilities* and *conversion factors*. The difference between the indicators in quality-of-life surveys and the entries I propose is that, in this research, the lists of capabilities and conversion factors are one of the results, rather than the starting point of fieldwork. It was a long process of data collection in a little hierarchical context which made it possible to draw up these lists. In other words, I adopted some categories of the Capability Approach (*aspirations and preferences*, *capabilities*, *conversion factors*) *a priori*, as heuristic conceptual tools to orient the research and facilitate the organization of research results, but I subsumed the concrete lists of *capabilities* and *conversion* factors thanks to an inductive method. The categories presented below are context-sensitive but could be useful to reflect on urban accessibility also in other cities and towns. Thereby, the process that brought me to the formulation of the capabilities below is closer to the ideas of Amartya Sen, who inquires the capabilities in their context-dependency, than to Martha Nussbaum's school of thought. Nussbaum endorses the use of a single, universalistic list of capabilities based on the ideals of the good and of justice as starting points. Further elaborations of the list of capabilities can represent merely adaptations and specifications of the universal list in different contexts. In the table below, I refer to capabilities (repertoire of concretely achievable actions and states a specific individual can choose among) rather than to functionings (effectively

performed actions and states) because the second ones represent a subsample of the first ones. Preferences, tastes, and the choices between historically and socially available lifestyles and courses of action are influenced by cultural elements – different patterns emerge between Italians, Hungarians, and Austrians in Vienna – and by structural inequalities, as in the case of women. I expressed capabilities by using verbs in the -ing form – to point to the fact that they are always referred to a (non-isolated) individual, to what she or he can do or be in a certain context – and conversion factors by using nouns.

- capabilities
  - being a free mover in the EU
  - being autonomous (movement, play, encounters
  - being in salaried work
  - capabilities in places of origin
  - conciliating work, family, time for oneself
  - experiencing urban space (children)
  - feeling place attachment
  - feeling safe in the city
  - having contacts with nature
  - having satisfying housing conditions
  - having spaces and occasions for sociability
  - using offers for children
  - using school and schooling of quality

- conversion factors
  - age and life stage
  - being a -stranger-
  - care
  - child- and family-friendly or not
  - city size
  - costs and money
  - Covid-19 pandemic
    - Covid and gender
  - digital world
  - distances (15-minute-city)
  - family
  - gender
  - information
  - language
  - mobility
    - proximity to hometown
  - quality of urban space, use by children
  - social capital
    - associations
    - ethnic social capital
    - of anf through children
    - social capital with locals
    - women as family PRs
  - social inequalities
  - time
  - welfare

I reported this overview with a double aim: to be transparent about the process of analysis of research data and to show the multiplicity of conversion factors that play a role in the access to the city. The use of existing urban resources, infrastructures, and services is not automatic, and a focus on conversion factors allows us to tackle inequalities. The strength of this qualitative study, however, lies in its comprehensive stance in the Weberian sense, rather than in the production of the lists reported above. In the next sections of this chapter, I zoom in on the capabilities:

- *Being autonomous (movement, play, encounters)*
- *Conciliating work, family, and time for oneself*

In chapter 4, I present the research results concerning the capabilities:

- *Experiencing urban space (children)*
- *Having spaces and occasions for sociability*

Having contacts with nature was also among most valued capabilities, especially among the Hungarian subsample, but it is not treated in a dedicated section of this dissertation work.

To explain what facilitates or makes it hard to achieve these capabilities, I take a closer look at conversion factors. From the analysis of collected research materials, these stand out among conversion factors:

- *Quality of urban space and use by children*
- *Social capital*
- *Information*
- *Gender*
- *Covid-19 pandemic*

During the research process I realized that my understanding of the use of the Capability Approach in urban studies, deriving from previous research, was channelizing my attention towards functional aspects of quality of life in Vienna at the beginning. However, productivist and functional interpretations of Sen`s work are to consider incorrect because unilateral and restrictive, whereby the founder of the CA endorses democratic debates on well-being and quality of life. Research materials suggest that relational aspects are equally relevant to quality of life. I am referring not only to relationships among humans but also, especially when it comes to children, with street furniture and other objects, animals, and plants. The way children interact and engage with the city is highly relational. In the next sections of this chapter, I deal mainly with functional aspects of quality of life in the city, in the next chapter more with relational ones.

To explain some of the preferences and desires expressed by EU-migrants in the sample, I resort to the concept of *adaptive preferences* as theorized by Sen and Elster (Nussbaum 2000, p. 137-138; Nussbaum 2011, p. 54-55), which emerged inductively from the analysis of research data. Not only the adaptive nature of preferences can explain the mismatch between objective conditions and declared subjective levels of satisfaction with one's quality of life (Zapf, 1979), or poor aspirations. It also explains, I argue, behavioral changes in migration and thanks to migration. In other words, aspirations are both the starting point and precondition for more than economic migration, and the fruit of the adaptation to the concrete possibilities available in a neighborhood and in a city. Changing context may boost behavioral change, also by means of adaptive preferences. Concretely, parents reported that the existence and good quality of public transport, the presence of bike lanes, and the everydayness of push scooters and bikes in Vienna encouraged them to put aside or even sell their private cars and adopt, at least complementarily to car driving, more sustainable forms of daily mobility. In the sample, 10 families moved to Vienna from towns where having a car was considered as fundamental to cover everyday mobility needs. Treated as a matter of fact, this was reported to forge attitudes and habits. A mother, telling me about mobility in her city of provenance in the Italian region Veneto and in Vienna, implicitly illustrated how adaptive preferences work.

> *"People really use cars a lot and they love cars in everything: so, having it, cleaning it, washing it, using it. Like, if I were in Italy, I would probably use the car in the morning to take my daughter to school for such a long way. It`s another mindset. Here, instead, you walk, you know, and there are a lot of other kids who walk with their parents. So, it's really an environment that helps you do certain things too, probably."* (Interview with M12)

Similarly, this other Italian woman linked capabilities (being able to do something), functionings (effectively doing something), and imaginative capacity (which broadens choice).

> *"It's nice because there's a bike path here, you can go, children ride their bikes to school. I mean, something like this is unimaginable in a city like Milan."* (Interview with M7)

Discovering that one thing is possible nurtures aspirations and the motivation to enlarge the own capability set.

> *"Not to mention with children because I, in Milan, with children on strollers… You just can't move because you can't get on trams, you can't get on buses. I mean, it's crazy… You can't get on sidewalks because they are full of cars. I mean, with the kids I had to go around with a baby carrier, because it's impossible with a stroller in Milan. So, you know, also that. I mean, now here you find out that it`s doable, you find out that there are so many things you can do."* (Virtual journey with M7)

Adaptive preferences also regard the time spent outdoors and in green areas, typically practicing sports and movement (biking, using push scooters, doing water sports, doing some light hiking in the mountains). Some families in the sample reported spending time outdoors and practicing sport more frequently in Vienna than they used to in their cities and towns of provenance. Furthermore, the subsample of Italian parents believed that living in Austria and specifically in Vienna even influenced their reproductive behavior, encouraging them to have children. The excerpts below thematize the contextual nature of the Italian 'demographic malaise' (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020) and its embeddedness in the absence or inefficiency of family, social, and labor market policies for the support of young adults.

> *"There is this very strong family politics, that is of children, "Have children!" I mean, it's as if they were telling you, "Have children! We'll help you", right?"* (Interview with M10)

> -M7: *"I saw that the average here is of at least three children, while in Italy one is already a lot. Here at least three, three children in a family are normal."*
> -I, the interviewer: *"Even among the Italians in Vienna?"*
> -M7: *"For the Italians it`s a little bit more difficult, but maybe two… Having two [children] would not be so easy in Italy. Already two is something, in my opinion."*
> [...]
> -M7: *"But you see that also the environment, the supports... I mean, I had my first child when I was 40 years old so, I mean... before, apart from the fact that the basis was missing, but it's really also financial difficulties: how can you do it, until you find a job, until you settle down a bit yourself, how can you think of it [of having children]?"* (Interview with M7)

This is also true of the changes introduced during the pandemic crisis of 2020-2021: the lockdowns forced to change behaviors in different spheres of life, such as mobility (people`s mobility decreased, smaller distances were covered), the use of public space, and gender relations and care work (see section 5 of this chapter and section 4 of the next one). The memory of this forced experiment might have broadened, at least for some people, the repertoire of capabilities among which we can choose in this current post-crisis phase of quiescence of the virus, when we are getting back to more freedom of choice. In other words, paradoxically the temporary pandemic restrictions, eliciting new behaviors, in the medium term may have the potential to enlarge the palette of options to exercise our freedom. However, an even bigger threat is increasingly pressing, the climate and environmental crisis. Drawing from the parallelism with the pandemic regulations – the pandemic and the environmental crisis have been often linked – we may hypothesize that non-postponable substantial changes, both in the overall economic and social system and in lifestyles, especially in Western countries, may first appear to reduce the set of capabilities of individuals, firms, and States, but in the middle and long term enhance

them. In fact, while trying to contain the damage for the planet and its living beings, including humans, they could possibly also encourage us to look for new options to freely choose from.

Drivers of family migration and parents` representations of Vienna

As we have seen in chapter 1, inter-European citizens have the legal right to move freely, settle and work across the European Union. Very cherished and well-known, this freedom is believed to be a necessary condition for processes of European integration in everyday life. However, the numerical consistency of the phenomenon is small: only 3.3% of EU citizens currently resided in an EU country other than that of their citizenship in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021). Scientific literature reveals that, even in cosmopolitan European capitals, the life of mobile Europeans is not as easy as it may seem. This makes the analysis of motives for migration even more interesting and necessary. I believe that capabilities and contextual conversion factors are fruitful lenses to read the drivers of migration from Italian and Hungarian cities and towns to Vienna.

The interview with the founder of the group and association of *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (*Italian moms in Vienna*) confirms the existence of different ideal-types of intra-European migration: the new waves of Italians moving abroad are made up not only of highly qualified workers, but also of adventure-seekers employed in service jobs, whose motivation to leave often comes from frustrations and economic hardship at home – especially concerning people from South Italy (Favell, 2014; Pugliese, 2018). Moreover, there are several intermediate forms where migration is a vague and indetermined chance, in the double sense of opportunity and of accidental event (see my re-elaboration of the typology by Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019 in chapter 1 of this dissertation).

> *"Nowadays the group is big, and there are different types, different typologies: there are those [Italian mothers in Vienna] who have been here for a long time; those who have just arrived; those who came because they married someone, for example an Austrian, so they rather have the perspective of staying here. Now there are also many of them who arrived with already older children and teenagers because, you know, in the last years, with the Italian problems… a lot of people went away… Well, there are also families who have come [to Vienna] in search of a solution to settle their life, maybe without any job yet, or with a so-so job. And they come, they give it a try and take the challenge, and put their children into Austrian schools. So, very different situations, sometimes also a bit complicated ones. Nowadays they are a lot, with a lot of very different situations."* (Interview with the founder of the group and association *Italian moms in Vienna*, who had been living in Vienna for 23 years at the time of our interview).

The hourglass model is even more evident in the case of families migrating to Vienna from Hungary, where parents are divided between service jobs and highly qualified intellectual jobs.

In my sample, I found some recurring patterns in the narratives about the reasons to leave the places of provenance and some differences between the subsample of Italian and Hungarian families.[60] I report the main reasons in the table below.

Reasons to leave the places of provenance	
Families from Italy	**Families from Hungary**
-Trailing partners and spouses in mixed couples – stable permanence in Vienna (5 families) -Job opportunity in Vienna for the man – stable or birds of passage; high-level or fortune-seekers (4 families) -Desire to live abroad associated with cosmopolitan attitude -Inconvenient working times and conciliation problems in everyday life -Economic crisis of 2008	-Economic situation (low salaries and raising prices, especially in the main cities) -Work conditions (lack of time for family and oneself) -Political situation -Welfare and public services, especially bad quality of schools and schooling -Urban decay (poverty, noisiness, dirtiness) and lack of care for public space, especially in Budapest -Atmosphere in the city and people`s behavior (stress, nervosity, frustration, perspectivelessness, racism) -Feeling of economic instability and unsafety in the city -Desire to live abroad associated with cosmopolitan attitude

We notice that lifestyle elements and situations of need are both present, sometimes even in the decision to migrate from a single family, which converges with research findings on migrations within the EU (Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019). The drivers of migration listed above point out to the fact that quality of life is multiscalar: quality of life in a city is influenced by the national situation and arrangements, as well as by global processes. The Hungarians in the sample, more than the Italians, described their life situation before migration as burdensome.

> *"And I think that a lot of Hungarian families do this [leaving the city and the country] for the same reason, a quality reason, because it's hard now to live in Hungary, I'm afraid."* (Interview with M1)

> *"And here it`s more pleasant, even in a pandemic. That`s why we are actually relatively happy to be here now."* (Interview with M4)

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[60] Representativity is not among the purposes of ethnographic studies. Still, I believe that analyzing the drivers of migration in my small sample of 16 families can be relevant to understand their life in Vienna and in the places of provenance, and the way they use the city.

Some of the Italian research participants addressed temporal conciliation problems in everyday life as a driver of migration. Long working hours, weekend shifts, and scarcity of childcare services made life with children at home hard. Despite the difficulties for women in the Austrian labor market, thematized in several passages of this dissertation, most parents in the sample felt safer in Vienna than in the places of provenance, also from an economical point of view. An Italian lone mother in a service job reconstructed her migratory story that far with the obstacles and, after all, the advantages of being in Vienna rather than in the little Italian town of provenance. In the virtual journey excerpt below, the main points the interviewee highlights about living in Vienna are: the availability of day care services and summer camps, and their affordability; the normality of regular employment contracts; State support in times of crisis.

> *"And as the years went by it became the usual routine here too, but probably better than I would have had down South, even more alone, with a daughter. Because here you can have your daughter in day care until 5 PM, so you can work without stress. […] There are summer camps. There is the opportunity, even for those who are not super rich, to be able to be covered with their children and be able to work. Even for a single mom. Even in a pandemic, with unemployment [money], I always had a steady 'salary', right? Which in Italy, maybe, with the fact that almost nobody gives you contracts, or if they do, they do them to for a minimum, in Italy I would have probably had it worse than I had it here, economically."* (Virtual journey with M8)

The Hungarians were more explicit and accurate than the Italians about the motives for migration – they described their everyday life in the city[61], the noises, the smells, the atmospheres in streets and shops. Rather than causing habituation, the continuous exposure to burdens in everyday life led to their decision to move away.

> *"I think many people are frustrated. Like, when I visit home, I can feel this frustration. for example, I just want to go and buy something in a shop, and all like the cashier, or anybody in the shop are really frustrated, and they are not so friendly. And here I think people are more relaxed, in Vienna. They have a sense of security. Like, okay I have a job, I can pay my rent, and I can pay for my holidays, and I have free time."* (Interview with M2)

> *"And it`s not only the city itself, but also the general atmosphere in a country, the people, the green surfaces, the educational and free time opportunities. It`s very complex. For us, personally, the reason why we moved to Vienna was that we were fed up [laughs] with Hungary. Mainly with the political climate and the whole hopelessness. And, I think, already in these two and a half years the situation has got worse. […]. But you can't [enjoy your life, even if you try to become estranged from the context], because you meet people on the street and you meet more and more racism, more and more... People are nervous, people are stressed, and from this we just wanted to get away."* (Interview with M3)

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[61] Most of the parents in the Hungarian subsample came from the same city, Budapest, while the provenances were more diversified in the Italian subsample.

The Hungarian interviewees also provided more detailed insights into the discussions and negotiations within families prior to and during migration, as well as into the planned length of they stay in Vienna. After a first period of trial, their decision to stay in Vienna included rational considerations on the pros and cons regarding family economy, welfare provisions, schooling, rent costs and cost of living in relation to salaries, and working time. 'Soft' aspects of quality of life – in this case, people`s attitude and the atmosphere of the place, cleanness, and care for public space in the neighborhood of residence – also influenced their decision.

> *"But he's really an Austrian employee, so with all the benefits, and it's different if you are a Hungarian employee. It's just really different. And also, we talked about this and the children's schools are better here, and they have friends here now. […] And also, for not just financial reasons, but the political environment in Hungary is not very good. We were hoping it would change, by the time we wanted to move back, but it hasn't changed."* (Interview with M2)

The Hungarian families typically planned the minimum duration of their stay in Vienna on the basis of the children`s school path. Schooling was one of the main reasons adduced for moving to Vienna, and the parents did not want their children to change school before the due time. The end date of male partners` employment contracts in Vienna and possible future care duties towards the children`s grandparents still living in the Hungarian cities and towns of provenance created uncertainty and conferred indefiniteness to migratory plans.

The category of care emerges from parental narrations, interestingly also referred to cities. In negative, through the descriptions of some memories of Budapest: run-down old buildings, streets smelling like dog`s urine and excrement, unpleasant public transport. More in general, in Hungarian cities and towns of provenance, the lack of care, cleanness, and order in housing, public transport, and hospitals was experienced as frustrating, depressing, and scary.

> *"It was not so good to travel by public transport there [in Budapest], for example. It was not so nice... So, in Vienna I liked it very much because everything was very well-kept[62]. Nice, clean, good usable, and I saw "Okay, I spent the money for this, and you can see that you pay for it". And I saw exactly the opposite in Budapest, that you didn't see that you had paid for it. So, it was very old and filthy and loud and uuhu [sound of disgust]. And the city is completely different. I do love Budapest, but... it would be very hard for me to live there.* (Interview with M14)

Less strongly, Italian parents expressed the opinion that there would be more care for public things in Austria, where they are considered everybody`s, than in Italy, where they

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[62] In the original interview transcript in German, the adjective '*gepflegt*' derives from *Pflege*, which means *care*.

sometimes seem like nobody`s. A frequent example of this is the maintenance of public playgrounds, parks, and gardens, also regarding the state of toys.

> -M10: *"And nearby, you see right in front of our home [in Italy], there was this mini-garden."*
> -C10: *"Awful…"*
> -M10: *"Yeah, it wasn't so..."*
> -C10: *"...I hated that little garden. Then it stank, it was disgusting."*
> -M10: […]
> -C10: *"And I used to take the kitty there, since he wanted to go out."* (Virtual journey with MC10)

In Vienna, people seem to consider and live public spaces as their own backyard, according to some Italian parents in the sample, thus enacting a form of community among strangers based on the practice of taking responsibility for the state of public space (ideas expressed very well by the founder of the group of Italian fathers in Vienna). Some Italians even felt uncomfortable and embarrassed comparing their level of care for public, semi-public, and shared private space with that of the natives. The marginality of care for places, things, and fellow humans in the places and societies of provenance seemed to have caused a partial quiescence of aspirations and agency, in some cases even resignation.

> *"Another thing that made me uncomfortable, but in a good way, is that here, rightly so, the public belongs to everyone, right? […] I see something wrong, and the typical Italian mentality is, "Somebody will take care of it." And instead, I see all our Austrian friends who care and act immediately, to the point where I feel embarrassed and say, "Actually, why am I waiting for somebody else to do it? I can report it too, I can get a minimum of action." […] I see also here, for example, in the apartment building, if there is a light that is broken on the corridor, in short, "Whatever, sooner or later someone will fix it". Instead, as soon as a light breaks, the average Austrian doesn't ask himself "Is someone going to fix it?", he calls and says: "Know that there is this." Maybe he is the tenth person who does that, but we say, "Imagine, it will be the tenth," but no one has done it. Instead, they say, "It'll be the first", even though they've already done 10."* (Interview with F7)

The research participants who moved from Hungarian cities and towns appeared to have, already before migration, more familiarity with and information about the target city, Vienna, than the Italian families. As already illustrated in chapter 1, Vienna was historically and is a gateway city between the West and the East and had an intermediary role during the Cold War, also thanks to Austria`s military neutrality. For most of the Hungarians in the sample, Vienna was only some hundred kilometers away from the place of provenance.

> *"And for me, of course, it`s very enticing that I can be home in one and a half hour/ two hours, isn't it? And when I was in Tübingen I often missed my homeland. Like the smells, the places that were important for me. I was a bit like Heidi, you know…"* (M13)

The same research participant had lived in Vienna for two and a half years during primary school, thanks to her father`s job, before the epochal turning point represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall. When she moved to Vienna again with her family in adult age, she found a flat in the same neighborhood she had known as a child. Among her childhood memories, she described supermarkets full of any kind of products, quantitatively and qualitatively more than in the Eastern bloc.

> *"My mother also used to bring a lot of things home to my grandma, things that you could not buy at all in Hungary. […] She bought a lot, to make my uncle and aunts happy. Like, I had always bought or brought something in big amounts, for example, at that time things like bananas, or oranges, or whatever.*
> *[…]*
> *My parents know this city, Vienna, and they both liked it, they also had a relationship with the city. My father regularly had to come for business reasons at the beginning. So, he was often in Vienna, not only because of me but to meet with people. My mother also liked it, also for her it was a special time in Vienna, she always liked to come back and still likes it. And yes, it was not foreign, and they knew that it`s not so far away and the grandchild would not be far away. So, for them it was ok. […] I mean, there is aways, always, always somewhere farther away, or you can always move farther away, or make it more complicated. So, I think that Vienna is very practical[63] in this sense, and for me it was also like this."*
> (Virtual journey with M13)

The geographical nearness and the good connections to Hungary, Italy, and other European States were regarded as a point in favor of Vienna. This makes it easier to receive visits from and visit relatives and friends in the place of provenance – for example, grandparents or, in the case of divorced couples, fathers – in non-pandemic times. Budapest can be reached in a couple of hours but, still, Vienna allows a completely different quality of life, according to the interviewed parents. All Hungarian families in the sample travelled to Hungary at least once a month in normal conditions (without travel restrictions due to the pandemic), 2 of them also because of work reasons.

> *"Vienna is a very good solution for somebody from Budapest, because it`s only 250 km further away but, still, it`s a totally different world on the other side… When there is no Corona around, we can actually travel to Budapest almost every second weekend, if we want to. And we thought that it is a good solution for a while, that he [her husband] still keeps his projects in Hungary, and commutes pretty easily. […] Before I used to always go and come back, and then we thought that it`s actually better if our base is in Vienna and my husband commutes between here and there, or with somewhere else, and we can live in Vienna."* (Interview with M3)

The Italians were vaguer about the reasons for migration and highlighted the role of opportunities, the combination of chance and an open attitude, for their decision to

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[63] This interview excerpt introduces the topic of Vienna being an 'easy city', presented later in this section.

migrate. In some cases, maternity leaves were used strategically as periods of trial in the new city. Alongside job opportunities – typically for men, most often employed in branches where foreign language proficiency is less relevant – the presence of an Austrian husband or partner was a common reason for women to migrate to Austria. Four Italian families described moving to Vienna as an adventure, a way to 'give it a try'. They had a very superficial knowledge of the city.

> *"My ex-husband had found a job here back then and, I don`t know, a bit so, for a try, we said who knows, let`s go up [move North], let`s see whether it`s a good place to live."* (Interview with M8)

> *"When we moved, it was a choice, it was no escape from Italy. My husband, having lived abroad a lot, felt it a bit narrow about going back to Italy. I`ve traveled a lot, got to know a lot of countries, so I also liked the idea of doing an experience abroad. The children were still small, didn`t go to school, so it was the [right] moment. […] So, we thought yes, let`s do it. My husband had looked for different occasions, and Vienna was not among the cities we had chosen at the beginning. It happened and we said "Why not? Vienna is a beautiful city." So, we gave it a try and grabbed this occasion. I was still in maternity leave, then I tool a sabbatical year to see how we would have likes it, whether we were in the right place."* (Interview with M7)

For both Italians and Hungarians, a period about with Erasmus+ ensured a smooth transition to settling down abroad. Less predictable and riskier was migration for those who brought along children and family in a later life phase and who had to start it all anew, especially if shortly before the pandemic.

> *"We had a really huge house, back in Debrecen, with a garden. And we had our families, we had made friends, we had our friendships, and with the children as well, they had their friends there, and stuff. And my family, we lived 1000 meters away from my parents. And they were like "We'll look after these children, go anywhere you want!" And it was like "Oh my God, this is just so easy". And now we're here, alone, and it is okay, this is a whole new situation, but I really enjoy it, I have to say. We do enjoy it, it was good…"* (Interview with M1)

In this section I have, so far, looked into some of the drivers which led to the decision to leave the cities and towns of previous residence in Italy and Hungary. But why move to Vienna? One of the most recurring explanations, shared both by the Italian and Hungarian subsample and reported by 10 interviewees, including the founder of the group of Italian Fathers in Vienna and a mother out of the sample[64], is that Vienna is not the most beautiful and not the most spectacular city for its residents, but an 'easy' city where things work, a place where residents do not need to invest too many energies or to have a lot of money to access urban places and services. Variants on the same theme are descriptions of Vienna as 'practical', 'pragmatic', 'orderly', 'perfectly organized', 'quiet', 'pleasant', 'comfortable' and 'cozy'. This appearance of order seems to confer a sense of security and

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[64] She is not considered as part of the official sample because her child is aged below 6.

safety. The most frequent point made to support the idea of Vienna being an easy city is its efficient and widespread public transportation system as a particular aspect of physical accessibility. This converges with the latest *Viennese Quality of Life Survey 2018* report (Verwiebe, Haindorfer, Dorner, Liedl, & Riederer, 2020), based on data from 2018, stating that satisfaction with public transportation in Vienna was very high, with 96% of respondents who assigned the scores 1 and 2 to the offer (on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 expressing the maximum level of satisfaction and 4 the minimum). Predictability, coverage, and affordability contributed to this result. Based on representative and comparative data from the „Urban Audit Perception Surveys" by the European Commission, the document reports that 72% of Viennese inhabitants used public transport daily or several times every week in 2018, according to personal statements. Moreover, Vienna had been since 2015, in European comparison, the city where satisfaction with public transport was the highest (Verwiebe, Haindorfer, et al., 2020).[65] The parents participating in the study presented in this dissertation also mentioned, as aspect contributing to make Vienna an easy city to live in and to use, the rich array of public institutions targeting children, teenagers, and families and active in fields such as social work, education, and entertainment. This feature is a part of urban welfare and represents a legacy of the history and political tradition of Red Vienna, which makes Vienna a *unicum* in Austria[66], still preserved nowadays by the Social Democratic Party of Austria, which stably governs the city. I argue that child- and family-friendliness (Buchebner-Ferstl, Kaindl, Schipfer, & Tazi-Preve, 2014) intersects and, to a certain extent, is included into the concept of *easy city*. The table below contains quotations which suggest and illustrate the concept of the *easy city*.

"I find it a very, very practical city." (M9)
-I, the interviewer: "*What do you like about living in Vienna?"* -F6: *"Well, the lack of criminality, the tidiness, the services. The services, I would say."* -I, the interviewer: "*What kind of services?"* -F6: *"Public services. Public transport is punctual to the minute, to perfection. It is a very organized city, that`s it."* (Interview with F6)
I: *"If you had to present the neighborhood where you live to someone who has never been there, who would you describe it in two words?"* F6: *"Functional, practical."* (Interview with F6)
"I find it absolutely wonderful that everything works here! [Laughs] I am not used to it, in Budapest everything mostly doesn`t work or hardly works, or you need to have a look and find cracks [narrow room for maneuver] to make it work. Here I have the feeling that everything is thought out for the Viennese, the people who live here. You notice that behind concepts there are

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[65] It never took me longer than one hour to reach the meeting places of go-alongs, even if I used to live in the 14. district, which is quite peripheral, and sometimes needed to cross the whole city (for instance, to reach the 21., 22. or 23. district).

[66] "Wien ist anders" (meaning: Vienna is different) is a common expression which the lovers and detractors of the Austrian capital city use to underline its supposed dissimilarity from the rest of the country.

people that understand what they do, and I think this is great. From public transport to parks, that people can also use, and use cleverly. And it`s nothing flamboyant, it`s exactly as you want to have it. Parks, playgrounds, everything is figured out relatively simply but thought out for the people who also use it." (M4)

"What I saw is that, from the point of view of technical usability and accessibility, the city is fantastic, of course. At some point I used to have a double buggy, because my children were born with 20 months of distance, and I went around. And such a thing is impossible, for example, in the town [in Southern Italy] where my mother lives, because: one, the pavement is too narrow; two, you find a light pole in the middle of the pavement; three, you find an interrupted of the pavement every five minutes. There are no ramps up and down… So, it`s really impossible, really impossible." (M15)

"Rome is a capital too, it's a big city, but compared to Vienna I who, by the way, don't even drive, am much more autonomous in moving around, even with a child, even when she was little. I mean, I have never had any difficulty going out in the evening, if we had gone for a walk to the Danube and came back at 9 p.m., 10 p.m., 11 p.m. Or when I go out alone, here there is always the possibility to move around easily, and it`s less chaotic than Rome. (Interview with M8)

"Here, instead, you have this ease of getting around. This makes me feel a bit more independent, because with public transport I can go everywhere, whereas in my village [in South Italy] I can't go that far, and I can`t go that far in a short time." (Virtual journey with M8)

"When she [her daughter] was between the age of 6 and 8-9, I would take her to a choir course at the Volksoper, to a guitar course at the music school, to... And for me it's quality of life, that I could go for a walk with her, take a tram and chat while travelling together, rather than having to take my car, drive, stand in a cue and look for a parking slot. This is already quality of life for me. I sit on the tram and chat, play, talk and interact with my daughter. It has a whole other value to me, that I don't drive full of stress in a queue or in a parking place. And, in my opinion, already this gives an extra edge to a city which is well managed." (Interview with M11)

"The city [Vienna] is very livable: the public transport works very well […], there is a really incredible offer of things you can do with children. Wherever you turn there is something, really a lot." (M15)

"What I like the most is that everything is very tidy and clean, but not too clean. I always say that it [Vienna] is maybe not the most beautiful city in the world, maybe not the most spectacular city, but it is the most pleasant for me. It`s simply so pleasant to be here!" (M3)

"Children here have, from a pragmatic point of view, an infinite quantity of offers. They think about children, they think about families, they support financially, there are adequate structures such as kindergarten, after-school childcare, anything. Pragmatic things are infinitely better organized than in Italy." (M11)

"Vienna is very beautiful as city to live because it is people-friendly[67], everything works perfectly, for children it`s heaven, because there is greenery, there are museums, kindergartens work after all, schools work after all. […] It`s good regarding social allowances: if you`re pregnant, you get a lot of benefits. Everything functions perfectly. Bureaucracy functions perfectly." (Mother outside the sample)

She tells me that her brother who, as a young man, dreamed of moving to Bali, now has a young daughter and, so he is staying in Padua. I ask her to explain, and she tells me that when you have children you decide where it is "convenient for you to stay." She tells me for her it is more useful and advantageous, also economically, to stay in Austria, at least until her girls are small. Then they`ll have to see what the children want to do as well, what path they choose to take, for example about their studies. (My notes on go-along with MC12)

In contrast, infrastructures and services were often either not available or not easily accessible in the places of provenance. Mobility was seen as problematic especially by the

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[67] In the Italian original text, 'a misura d`uomo' (literally, 'on a human scale').

Italian sample, surprisingly both in main Italian cities and in middle- and small-sized town in the North-East of Italy, where private means of transport were considered the only possible solution to solve daily mobility needs. Instead, in the Viennese context, where public transport is well-developed, the capability *motility* – the mobility potential of a person, as an interaction of contextual factors and individual resources (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004; Kaufmann, Bergman, Joye in Raffini e Giorgi, 2020) – does not correspond merely with her or his *mobility capital* (Kaufmann in Pratsinakis, King, Himmelstine & Mazzilli, 2019), meant as individual resources and competences. Extending the reading of fieldwork data through the lens of the Capability Approach, we can say that an 'easy' and livable city for the research participants is one that enables and encourages the access to urban capabilities for as many residents as possible, also for those with less advantageous personal conversion factors (Sen, 1993), and without the need for big efforts. Urban conversion factors and personal conversion factors appear, to a certain extent, as inversely proportional: the more organized a city is, the less competences and motivation it demands from its inhabitants to be used.

The concept of 'easy city' grounds, in some respects, on the *foundational economy* – an everyday economy for people, hinged on collectively relevant and public infrastructure and moved by the goal of guaranteeing the fulfilment of fundamental rights for as many people as possible (The Foundational Economy Collective, 2018; website "Foundational Economy", consulted on 08.04.2023). The perspective of the 'easy city', as I re-elaborate it based on research materials, enriches the debate on the foundational economy with a focus on the different and unequal levels of accessibility deriving from the interaction between individual and contextual conditions. However, as I show at the end of this section, on the descriptive instead of on the normative level the 'easy city' presents some incoherences and shortcomings.

Vienna counts about 1.9 million inhabitants, but the opinions about the perceived urban size are discordant. Italian parents who had previously lived in Rome or London defined it as 'a big village', Hungarians from Budapest felt that the size of the two capitals was similar, and Hungarians from smaller towns and villages described Vienna as a very big city. I had the impression that it was especially strong users of their neighborhood of residence in both subsamples who tended to express the feeling of living in a village, not only because of their social ties with friends and acquaintances, but also thanks to absent ties, to *public familiarity* among strangers (Blokland, 2017). The 'village-feeling', odd in a capital city, may be also attributed to the perceived ease of being able to do a lot of things in a small area, similarly as imagined by the theorists of the 15-minute city.

> *"So, in short, this is the overview of our life in Vienna which, hard to imagine perhaps from the outside, looks more like a small town than a big city. And yet, you have all the advantages of the big city."* (Mother, go-along with MC7)

Some of the families particularly appreciated the mix of different land uses and functions in the neighborhood, which made it possible to concretely choose between different activities and lifestyles without need to go far away.

> *"I love this in Seestadt, actually, that you can choose between different types of living. This is – I cannot tell what it is like – it is like you`re closer to nature. And there are some parts which are like a big city feeling, and still, you have the lake. I love living here. At the moment, we say that we don't want to leave the Seestadt, because here we have a lot of choice. If we want, we can separate, if we want, we can be with a lot of people."* (Mother, go-along with MC1)

> *"There are a lot of things, and also a little bit for everyone`s taste. Because the one who likes nature, you have everything you want; those who like art, too; history too. I mean, there`s a lot of variety."* (Go-along with M7)

In case the capability set, that is the aggregate of available options about things to do and alternative ways of life, is not satisfying in the neighborhoods of residence, the capability *motility* (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004) may act as conversion factor and give the families the freedom of doing the things they valued somewhere else. For instance, a participant family which was very dissatisfied with the neighborhood of residence near the Viennese Belt and the Viennese general hospital (*Wiener AKH, Allgemeines Krankenhaus*) because of the lack of green areas, used to reach farther away parks on foot or by car.

In this subchapter, I have presented some of the drivers of migration for the families in the sample. Unlike most research on migration within the EU, I do not seek a single cause to explain migration but consider the different drivers influencing it. Besides, the local focus is a point of originality and strength. In fact, this research aimed at shedding light on the living conditions and aspirations of EU migrant-origin families neither in the national States of provenance and of arrival nor in transnational spaces, but in the neighborhoods, towns, and cities before and after migration. In this way, I show the 'human face(s)' of European migrations (Favell, 2014) through the dimension of everyday life and, based on the basic tenet of urban studies that place matters, give account of social phenomena by considering the influences of the places where they happen.

I maintain that the view of Vienna as an easy city is partial, also because it comes from subjects who have almost all studied at university level, which denotes a certain level of cultural capital. Even if they may have contingent difficulties with the local language, job integration, housing, taxation, and conciliation, these families are endowed with at least the basic conversion factors necessary to move in the urban field to reach their goals. The fact that they migrated without being strictly forced to by violence or existential threats denotes self-initiative and an active attitude.

A further fallacy lies in the underestimation of the level of urban complexity. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the subjective feeling of mastering the city may be in some

measure illusionary, because people may in fact perceive and use only a fragment of the overall urban offer.

Lastly, a city can be easy and comfortable to live in without being just, and easiness may even mask injustice and the deriving conflict potential in it. To this regard, in the next section I analyze gender and generational inequalities in migratory decision-making processes and in the context of migration.

Women and children in migratory decision-making processes

In this research, where I adopt a relational rather than a normative point of view on families, I am interested in internal negotiation processes among family members. Migratory decisions emerged as common agreements between partners for the sake of the children – whose opinions and preferences are usually considered as irrelevant, though – and, overall, the family. Nevertheless, women thematized having to endure additional negative consequences and disadvantages because of migration in comparison with other family members as gender-related 'group-dependent constraints' (Robeyns, 2003). In the vast majority of both Italian and Hungarian families in the sample, 13 out of 16 families, the occasion to move to Vienna came from the husband or male partner, who had either found a job in Vienna or, being Austrian, encouraged or proposed their partners to move to Vienna.

> *"The place turned out to be a right choice. For the family, because anyway the international experience, for the children, for the lifestyle, for the chance to learn another language. Clearly for me it was a little bit more limiting because I thought I`d have better chances, and instead… Well, now a little bit Covid too, a little bit everything, and so I got a little bit lost, that`s it. I thought I`d have less difficulties with the language, having already studied [holding a university degree]. [...] But it was a shared choice, and I don't regret it at all."* (Go-along with M7)

A further example of woman who tried to reconstruct the needs and standpoints of all family members but herself in migration was a woman lacerated between acknowledging the needs of her elder children by returning to Hungary, on one side, and doing the good of her younger children by staying in Vienna, on the other side. Her elder, teenager children had unexpectedly moved back to Hungary after a short period in Vienna because of difficulties at school and because they did not feel at home in Vienna, which made the mother very sad. The passage below is very interesting, I think, because it shows that there may be conflicting needs and aspirations within a family.

> *Well, we had in mind [to live in Vienna for] about 3 to 5 years, basically, but I really didn't know how it would turn out for my elder daughters. And we were really thinking about… I was thinking about moving back to Budapest, but it wasn't*

really… So, it would have been a big change for the smaller children. And also, this job that my husband has, it's better if he's here, and so…" (Interview with M2)

Women played the role of more or less convinced followers, even in 2[68] cases where the man and the woman had the same kind of job and the same position before moving to Vienna.

> *"After two and a half years [of international long-distance relationship], we said no, we can't continue like this, so one of us must quit. And I quit. So, it was me to come here. I started all over again."* (Interview with Italian mother out of sample and gatekeeper)

The men found a job in Vienna, while their partners followed them and spent years of their life in Vienna struggling as freelancers, unable to find jobs that mirrored their qualifications. Paradoxically, working was made not easier but more difficult by the fact of having a qualified job. More in general, 6 women out of 16 thematized the problems and inconveniences deriving from the loss of their jobs and of the possibility to find jobs matching their competences in the first times after migration. M6 admitted that moving to Vienna had "frozen" her career, that is put in standby, and highlighted some points which made the Austrian labor market, in her eyes, little inclusive and little strategic.

> *"Look, I know so many of these stories... It's really depressing that you come here, and they block you [the career]. [...] Because there is a discrimination – but that, I think, there is also a little bit in Italy – to non-native speakers. The native speaker chooses the native speaker. German is an extremely difficult language. [...] It is a strange labor market. First, it`s very little open, in my opinion it`s very little meritocratic, it`s very relational. So, you need to know, and if they don't know you, they don't trust you. Having said that, it's not bad to live here. [...] You don't live of air."* (Mother, go-along 16.11.2021 with MC6)

The German language level of 9 women out of 16 in the sample was, according to their statements, corresponding to A1 or less at the time of moving to Vienna. Since the local language is a must for almost all jobs in Austria, the language strongly penalized their career and economic independence.

> *"The Viennese labor market is, from my point of view, medieval. It's a very closed system, where I've never understood if language really matters so much, or if it's used as a barrier to entry."* (Interview with Italian mother out of sample and gatekeeper)

> *"You need to learn the language to integrate here. If you don't know the language, you live in a 'ghetto' of compatriots. I can think of a lot of examples of moms, also Italian ones, who speak German very badly, hang out with other Italian moms, stay at home. I can think of situations of poor language integration, because the*

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[68] The number of families in this situation increases to 3, if we consider a mother whom I interviewed but whose child was too young to fall in the sample.

language is tough, and especially with young children maybe, clearly the labor entrepreneurship leaves you." (Interview with M6)

In Austria, the access to healthcare provisions and family allowance depends on the employment status, differently than in countries with more universalistic regimes. Therefore, in the first years abroad, or even longer, some migrants, especially new mothers, may need to resort to public services in the country of origin. This is the case of a family which moved to Vienna from Győr with a three-month-old baby.

"I always came here[69] for the checks, because here I had no work, no insurance, and all these compulsory things, and I also received the child monetary benefit from Hungary, at that time, because I had there, here[70], no rights yet, right? I just moved in, already with a child but I had no work, no e-card[71] and nothing, right? That changed only later, when I started to work." (Virtual journey with M13)

For migrant mothers with small children, the real start in the new city comes only when they manage and are willing to externalize childcare, which usually does not happen before kindergarten.

"Because, anyway, with young children then it's hard to find work, it's hard... to start over, you must do so many things. It's hard to integrate in the first place. You manage when they start to go to kindergarten, when they start to enter the social fabric, then we also enter the social fabric, but otherwise it becomes, it is a little bit harder." (Interview with M12)

Near the obstacles that women encounter in the job market, the conservative welfare model works as double-edged sword in Austria. With this expression I mean that, while supporting parents as *receivers*, this kind of welfare model constraints women`s agency in the labor market and their freedom of choosing or *judging* about their lives (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018).

"But even beyond the economic fact, when you study you invest time, money, effort to train yourself, and then you're at home? If you had to be a housewife, you wouldn't have got a degree! It is inconceivable. It's not about the housewife, but there are people who aspire to do something else, and so, not being able to fulfill your aspirations is very frustrating." (Mother, go-along 16.11.2021 with MC6)

The quotation above is very interesting, in my opinion, because it does not normatively postulate that all women should do career, but it asserts instead the importance for the context to let women follow their career aspirations, if they want to. This is exactly the central message of the Capability Approach. That most women follow their partners in

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[69] In Győr. Getting involved in the narration thanks to the pictures supporting virtual journeys, the interviewee shifts between 'here' and 'there' in referring to her town of provenance in Hungary.
[70] The interviewee jumps from one place to another in thought. After recalling another time of life, she goes back to Vienna, which becomes 'here' again.
[71] Health insurance and social security card in Austria.

migration to Vienna, as it emerged from this study, is not an accident but the fruit of the reproduction of structural inequalities and of the cultural manifestation of these.

> I reflect that it is no accident that in most cases it is men, not women, who are selected for job experience abroad in Austria by the private sector. The Austrian [welfare] system, with its maternity benefits and incentives, makes it even more necessary and 'natural' to resort to a traditional gender division of labor. Couples who could potentially be 'dual career couples' thus relapse into traditional role models.[72] Care work is work: there is no call for applications, no selection, no contract, no extra money for overtime. But someone must do it, or else the lives of individuals and families cannot go on. Those in charge, designated mostly automatically by custom and implicit expectations, are women. (Notes on go-along with MC6, 15.6.2021)

Some male interviewees are aware of the socially constructed character of the division of care and housework between men and women partners and of its roots.

> *"It's fortuitous, but not so fortuitous, because the concept is, a bit, that if there's someone who has to quit the job, it tends to be more [often] the woman, right? So, it's a bit related to the Italian issue, that's it. So yes, I don't know..., I would like to be more inclusive."* (Interview with F7)

In fact, migration from Italy and Hungary meant the passage from familist welfare models, where childcare is a private matter with limited support by the State[73], to a conservative model in Austria, where childcare is almost as equally left to women, but with larger monetary benefits and more convenient temporal arrangements. Like in Germany, in Austria paid leave and economic benefits for families are the tools of a 'publicly facilitated, private care model', whereas the State promotes private or informal care patterns next to – in small and mid-sized cities and internal areas, even instead of – public childcare services. Long maternity leaves and the incentive of female part-time make it even harder for women to integrate in the Austrian labor market and to improve their position in it.

> "The pattern that emerges could therefore be described as a publicly facilitated, private care model. Whereas there is a systematic reliance on the family for the provision of care work and services, based on the principle of subsidiarity, the family is actively encouraged to perform this role through receiving state support rather than direct interventions. Parents of small children, in particular, receive support to take care of their children by themselves, with the state willing to share part of the financial burden." (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004, p. 101-102)

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[72] See also the results of Johanna Stadlbauer's research on mobile spouses in Austria (Stadlbauer, 2015).

[73] During the Communist and Socialist periods of Hungarian history, full-time female employment was widespread. With the political and social changes which preceded and followed the Fall of the Berlin Wall, Hungary progressively drifted towards a familistic welfare model. With the current ideological and populist family policy programs, the cultural emphasis on conservative gender models within the family make women the main providers of childcare. On the other hand, because of the poor overall economic situation of the country, the majority of mothers need to work full-time to bring the family the second wage necessary to make the ends meet.

The parents I researched with had at least one child in primary school age. Only 6 of them had still at least one child in kindergarten age or below, and for most of them parental leaves were history. However, I argue that the conservative welfare model at the same time mirrors and reinforces the widespread cultural representation of mothers as main caregivers and keeps a portion of women away from the labor markets also beyond the children`s first years of life. To support my statesments, I report four snippets of data from a recently published United Nations Women report (UN Women, 2022) about social attitudes regarding gender in 20 countries of the world. Basing on at least 1000 interviews conducted in Austria in 2020, the document reports that 33.7% of interviewees agreed with the statement "When a mother works for pay, the children suffer", against a thin 17.9% agreement with the specular "When a father works for pay, the children suffer" (*ibidem*, p. 78). Moreover, 18.4% of research participants in Austria were of the opinion that "A man`s job is to earn money; a woman`s job is to look after the house and the family", and 35.6% maintained that "Women should work less and devote more time to caring for their family" (*ibidem, p. 79*).

Children were present in parental discourses about the circumstances of their migration to Vienna, the pros and cons, and the future, but rather as catalysts of hopes and aspirations than as actors influencing family decisions with their votes and *vetos*. In 3 cases, the children in the sample and/or their elder siblings expressed their disagreement with the decision to leave the cities of provenance through complaints and small acts of rebellion. In particular, a child of divorced parents, whose father stayed on the other side of the border during the Covid-19 crisis, and two couples of siblings who moved to Vienna when they were old enough to have memories of the previous place of residence. Parents` reaction was paternalistic, as of implicitly clarifying generational power relationships: only once you become an adult, you will be able to take decisions regarding your life.

> -C10: *"I'm going back to Italy when I grow up!"*
> -M10: *"Both of them [her children] say that."*
> -C10*: "So…"*
> *[…]*
> -M10: *"So, I think I'll stay here because my husband found a job - I mean, he's happy with the job he's doing – the same for me, so I think that we – at least, me and him – will stay here. The children, then, clearly must go their own way, so…"*
> (Virtual journey with MC10)

As criticized by the sociology of childhood, the rhetoric of childhood as the future of families and societies often precludes children the right and the need to live in the present and postpones their agency (Belotti & La Mendola, 2010).

The places of provenance

Looking back at the places of provenance in Hungary, the parents denounce a mix of neglect and abuse of political power in Budapest, as already described in section 2 of this chapter. A Hungarian father who had grown up and spent most of his life in Budapest believed the city was going through a period of decadence because of the national government.

> "The castle is becoming the main space for the government, which really has this royal touch, this real feeling that "I'm the king, I'm moving to the castle, I'm rebuilding the memories, I'm rebuilding the philosophy and also, in a material way, I'm rebuilding how it was between the two World Wars." [..] And also what's happening now in different spaces of Budapest. […] Probably you know about the museum district, that they don't really care what the Budapest mayor, or what the inhabitants of Budapest think about what they should do with the Városliget, that it should remain a green space with no huge buildings. Now they are trying to build huge museums in this district. […] They just decide and do it, however they want. So, there are a lot of spots around Budapest where you can experience, and where you can see that the government is deciding, and it doesn't really matter what those almost two-million people think about their things. It's really a shame." (Interview with F3)

Moreover, they informed me of wild building development supported by pro-government milieus around the protected natural area of lake Balaton. What was public land in socialistic times has been privatized, sold, and built up.

> -M14: "There has been a mayor there for years, years, and years. He is very close to the government, if I may say so, and of course he gets any possible support. Thus, the whole shore area is being built up and concreted over, and the natural part is already slowly disappearing. Instead, there are lots of residential parks, huge hotels..."
> -I, the researcher: "And how was it when you were a child?"
> -M14: "Very socialistic [laughs], but it was much closer to nature. So, I kind of remember the town as much smaller. And much greener. But the town has been growing, very fast in the last ten years. So, since I don't live there anymore, the town has almost doubled in size." (Interview with M14)

They also witnessed or personally experienced growing unaffordability of housing and living in the main cities Budapest and Debrecen, due to the gap between cost of living and salaries and the weakness of the local currency, the Hungarian Forint.

The Italian mothers saw chaos and neglect in main Italian cities, depopulation in small villages on the coast and in the mountains. Depopulation, due to a mix of falling birth rates and emigration, endangers the same existence of these centers. A mother told me that phenomena of shrinkage and touristification in her town of provenance had contributed to the dismantlement of public transport, in favor of private cars, and of local primary

schools. With these changes, the division into neighborhoods, the neighborhoods` *genii locorum*, the sense of belonging of inhabitants, and walkability had also decreased.

> *"Now there are no more children! When children are born it's an event, and so they put all the elementary schools together in one place, and the same for the other services. Now they don't have all the services divided anymore because the people are much fewer. And when the tourists come, they move around, they don't need the things on hand... They don't experience the city the way we do. So, everything is kind of concentrated and there are no neighborhood divisions anymore. […] Being from one neighborhood rather than another used to be a big thing, you know, for us kids... […]"* (Virtual journey M7)

M8 comes from a small village in Southern Italy which lost approximately 1000 inhabitants in about 2 decades. The local labor market is very weak, the jobs precarious and seasonal. Therefore, young people either emigrate or, if they stay, have few children. The inhabitants left there are the elderly ones, who slowly die, and the few ones employed in jobs in the sectors of the fundamental economy. While about 15-20 children were born in the same year as her daughter less than a decade before, only 3 children were born in 2021. In some years, the village will be confronted with not having enough children to form a school classroom. The three children will probably need to be escorted to school by car by their parents, to the detriment of the environment and of children`s autonomy.

> *"Otherwise, they will have to go to school to XYZ, which is the nearest town, but this means that either they organize a school bus, but for three children I don't think so, or each mom… or dad will have to take the car and drive to school, out of town, already early in the morning, and then come back."* (Virtual journey with M8)

This narration exemplifies the 'demographic tsunami' which is investing Italy, especially internal areas and its *Mezzogiorno*[74], triggering an 'economic-demographic spiral' (Pugliese, 2018, chapter 5). I maintain that outgoing migration to main Northern Italian cities and abroad is not the reason for this situation but rather a symptom of the struggles and of the discontent described in several passages of this monograph.

In common between the two narrations presented and commented above is the reference to two pivotal areas of the *foundational economy* (The Foundational Economy Collective, 2018; website "Foundational Economy", consulted on 08.04.2023), that is to mobility infrastructures and schooling. Based on the qualitative data collected in this doctoral research, I hypothesize that the strategic public investment in fundamental sectors of the economy that impact several people`s quality of life daily can possibly contribute to build

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[74] *Mezzogiorno* is another name for Southern Italy. It is a geographic, historical, and cultural area shaped by several common dominators, starting from the ancient Greeks. Besides, it coincides with an economically slower part of Italy in comparison to the North since before the unification of the country in 1861. While some criticize the inefficiency of the South, some others see it as a place to practice alternative, slower ways of life based on the value of interstices. As a matter of fact, the population of the South is decreasing and aging.

a bulwark against unemployment and depopulation in inner areas, while its dismantlement can act as a catalyzer or even as a concurrent cause for these processes.

Children`s autonomy in the city

The research results deriving from semi-structured interviews, verbal exchanges in go-alongs, and virtual journeys are consistent in suggesting that children`s capability of autonomous movement in the city is larger and happens earlier in Vienna than nowadays in places of provenance. Thanks to family relocation to Vienna, the children could experience more autonomy than their cousins in Italy or Hungary, for instance, but far less than their parents as they were children, especially if the parents grew up in smaller cities and towns.

The level of autonomy of movement, play, and peer encounters allowed by the parents and enacted by the children does not depend solely on parents` and children`s personalities, nor exclusively on educational styles, but also on urban positive and negative conversion factors. In this section, I am going to present some of the urban and culturally influenced features which, according to the parents participating in the research, facilitate or hinder children`s autonomy (conversion factors). I then argue that children`s competence development reinforces their autonomy, in a virtuous circle.

Children`s autonomy in the city and urban conversion factors

The formal freedom for children to move autonomously needs favorable contextual conditions to be a substantial freedom, that is a capability. In other words, the acquisition of autonomy neither happens mechanically as a result of children`s biological maturation nor merely according to parental cultural attitudes, but varies in relation to the places of living and their characteristics. That`s what a family in the sample affirmed about the children going to and coming back from school without adults:

> *- M7: "And there in Italy they don't facilitate, in the sense that you have an obligation to take them to school until they are 14. You can't even do that [give autonomy], even if you wanted to. Here they sign the consent form in the second grade."*
> *- F7: "Of course, to be able to do that you have to have infrastructures, guarantees, security. You have to know that the city is safe and that it works."* (Go-along with MFC7)

The neighborhood of residence was the main context where the children in the sample moved their first steps in the direction of autonomy. I list below the categories corresponding to the most important neighborhood and urban contextual conversion factors which, according to the participants parents, make children`s autonomy concretely

possible and in the first place imaginable. Immediately afterwards, I elaborate on each point.

   a) Efficiency and reliability of the public transport network;
   b) Convenience and nearness of places of everyday life (see the concept of 15-minute city[75]) such as schools, shops, inner yards, and very near public parks;
   c) Parents` widespread feeling of urban safety, also given by the presence of parents` friends and acquaintances, family helpers, and children`s friends in the vicinity area (sociability and social capital);
   d) Numerous offers for children by institutions.

a) In Vienna, the presence of an efficient and widespread public transport network speeds up the path to children`s autonomous movement. Thus, urban mobility appears to be not only a 'meta-capability' or 'capability of second degree'[76], which allows the access to places and services in the city (Nuvolati, 2009), but also a conversion factor which facilitates children`s autonomy. The elderly daughter of a research participant used to go to school autonomously from the age of 8 and, by the age of 12, took buses, trams, and multiple undergrounds to reach free time activities.

> *"I don't know any children of friends [living in Italy] who are as much… I mean, they always look at me with big eyes, when I tell of it in Italy. [...] [This autonomy in Vienna depends] first of all, from the efficiency of public transportation, from the fact that you can count on the fact that this child every 3 minutes jumps on a bus, arrives, does what she has to do, concludes, and in 20 minutes gets to B. On the other hand, if you must wait 40 minutes for the only bus to arrive [laughs], WHENEVER it arrives, it's a whole different organization, isn't it?* (Interview with M11)

According to the parents in the sample, wide sidewalks and bike lanes in Vienna, united with careful drivers made it less dangerous to be a pedestrian, as well as to ride push scooters or bikes. More critical about traffic were the practitioners of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, who spoke of "persisting car dominance" (interview with GB*9) in Vienna despite gradual improvements since the Seventies. The neighborhood Seestadt was lauded both by the family with small children living there and by the local Stadtteilmanagement. The whole neighborhood is a 30 km/h zone and the sidewalks are wide, so that children "just whiz around with their scooters and bikes and can explore

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[75] In Vienna, people tend to use the expression 'Stadt der kurzen Wege' (city of short ways, or short distances). In a survey from 2018, 73% of Viennese inhabitants reported going on foot almost daily (Verwiebe, Haindorfer, Dorner, Liedl, & Riederer, 2020, p. 202).
[76] Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye (2004) use the concept of motility to refer to the capability to be mobile, unequally distributed among individuals and groups.

relatively many parts of the Seestadt autonomously, in a certain sense without any danger" (interview with GB*7).

b) Using preferably the neighborhood of residence for daily activities and contacts with friends and acquaintances is one of the strategies used by the mothers in the sample to optimize times. Autonomy – and also conciliation, as we will see in the next section – configurate themselves as by-products of the organization of one`s life in the neighborhood, as in the 15-minute city model.[77] I will now exemplify this statement by reporting both the perspective of a mother and that of her child. The mother affirmed:

> *"And then the children walk to school [in their new neighborhood of residence]. Because when we lived in the third district my son… I mean, we had to take the tram first, then the underground. And he [her son] would come home completely exhausted. Now, instead, they come back, eat at home, do their things. If they want to go out with friends, they have them here, they don't need to take public transport. For me, this is really a huge thing for quality of life."* (Interview with M10)

About the same topic, the child said:

> *"This is one of the things I like a lot about Vienna. Basically, the elementary school here is near our home. And I, Michela, and my other friend – her name is Lisa, we all meet and go there, I mean alone. [...] And from there we go to school together. And I like this thing a lot because we also talk. [...] Then [in the afternoon], either I invite them home, or they invite me to their home, or we meet there at this skating place."* (Interview with C10, 10 years old)

Beyond the size of the neighborhood of residence and the distances between nodes of interest, the degree of autonomy that parents are keen to give children differs according to the conformation of spaces in the vicinity area and parental representations of the neighborhood of residence, for example regarding dangers.

In half of the families in the sample (8 out of 16), the children used the inner yard of the building of residence weekly and enjoyed spending their time there. Inner yards, very widespread in Vienna for several reasons – for instance, as protection from the Viennese wind and historic legacy of community-oriented municipal housing in Red Vienna – are important places for the children to play and experiment autonomy. They are, according to Arturo Lanzani, a form of non-public collective spaces which keep some traces of community in an era characterized by societal relationships and very sensitive to private property (Lanzani in Nuvolati, 2019a). An exclusive rather than an open community,

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[77] Not infrequently, the parents chose the schools for the children first, and then looked for a flat nearby.

though. In privately rented buildings and cooperative flats[78] in Vienna, the access to inner yards from the inside and from the outside is often restricted to those in possession of the keys. While this reassures parents about security issues, it might also limit children`s autonomy of movement and play.

> *"Today a child who was in the inner yard, when it started to drizzle, had to ask for help from Rita, who has the keys, to re-enter the building [where the child lives] from the inner yard. Keys perhaps limit children's autonomy and bind them to the presence of an adult, not necessarily their parents."* (Go-along MD10)

The Capability Approach drives the attention beyond the availability of urban spaces and services, towards accessibility and quality. I noticed that the conformation and possible uses of inner yards vary depending on the districts, and sometimes even on neighborhood basis. The level of local wealth measured in income does not fully give account of the quality of inner yards. Privately rented flats, both in districts with a high percentage of low-income population and in wealthier dense, inner-city districts often have small inner yards, typically completely paved with concrete. In low-income neighborhoods, I observed that they are little taken care of and may be even used as storage places or dumps. In less dense districts farther away from the city center, inner yards tend instead to be bigger and better furnished, especially in cooperative housing. Differences in the quality of inner yards, and sometimes in their accessibility too, produce inequalities, since inner yards can be convenient in unequal measure for children`s autonomy and the quality of their play which, in turn, has repercussions on their development, learning, and sociability practices. Below, I attach some photos of inner yard and parks in the immediate vicinity of the families` homes.

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[78] Home ownership is less common in Austria than in Italy or Hungary. In 2018, only 21% of Viennese residents owned their own flat or house. 32% of Viennese inhabitants used to live in privately rented flats, 23% in public municipal housing, and 20% in cooperative housing (Verwiebe, Haindorfer, et al., 2020, p. 53).

Inner yard of cooperative flat (Genossenschaftswohnung) in 21. district (Floridsdorf), young district in rapid transformation in the East side of the Danube river. Children are left playing on their own, also thanks to the fact that the inner yard is protected by keys.[79]


21. district (Floridsdorf), Inner yard of another cooperative flat (Genossenschaftswohnung) protected by keys where children are left playing on their own.

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[79] The 21. district is, with its 4 009 inhabitants/km^2, under the average density in Vienna (4 656). Its area is divided as following: 42% of built surface, 15% of traffic area, and 43% of green and water area (Stadt Wien, 2022, https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/bezirke-in-zahlen-21.pdf).

Inner yard in the 8. district, a dense, inner-city area.[80] Half of the yard is covered by concrete, the other half by earth. The sandbox offers the opportunity to play, but the yard is little used.
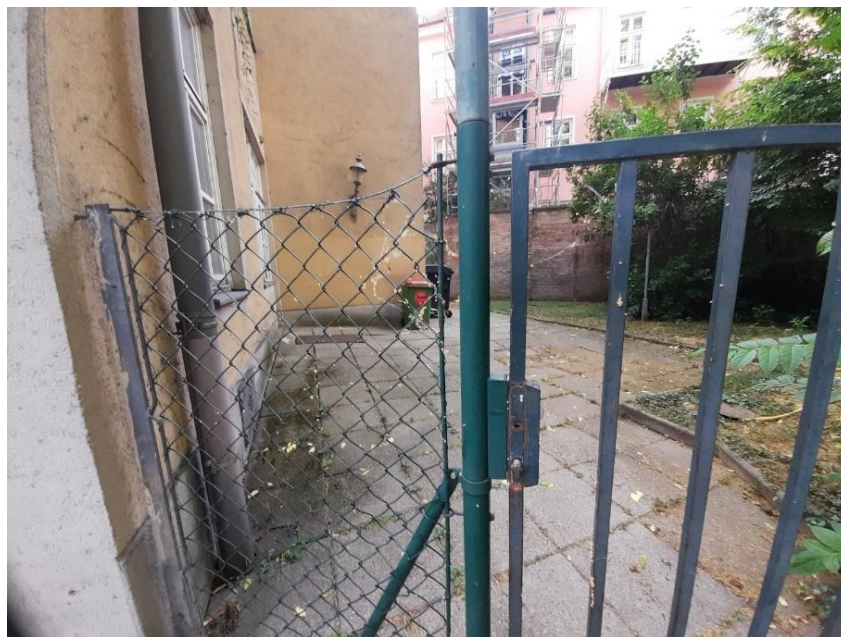
Inner yard in the 6. district and close to the railway station Westbahnhof. It is a dense, inner-city area[81]. Half of the yard is covered by concrete, the other half by earth. Yard as residual space devoted to the rubbish containers.

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[80] The 8. district is, with its 22 193 inhabitants/km^2, one of the three densest districts in Vienna. Its area is divided as following: 70% of built surface, 28% of traffic area, and 2% of green and water area (Stadt Wien, 2022, https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/bezirke-in-zahlen-8.pdf).

[81] The 6. district is, with its 21 276 inhabitants/km^2, one of the three densest districts in Vienna. Its area is divided as following: 66% of built surface, 30% of traffic area, and 4% of green and water area (Stadt Wien, 2022, https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/bezirke-in-zahlen-8.pdf).

20. district. Little used inner yard.

20. district[82]. Oblong inner yard completely paved with concrete. Residual space for rubbish containers. There have been some privatizations: what used to be a community room has been rented to a commercial activity, and a part of the yard has now become a private garden. The bike stand is permanently very full.

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[82] District with a strong migrant component: 40% of the district`s population are non-Austrians, with 8% more of migrants with non-EU citizenship on the total population compared to the Viennese average. Relative housing disadvantage: with an average of $30m^2$ per person, it is under the Viennese average of 35% per person (Stadt Wien, 2022, https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/bezirke-in-zahlen-20.pdf.

18. district near the main Viennese hospital (Allgemeinkrankenhaus)[83]. Raised inner yard, in a space similar to a terrace between buildings. Lack of care and privacy.

c) Five mothers in the sample described Vienna as a 'big village', a place where people know each other. The own neighborhood appears as a compact, safe space where also strangers are familiar to each other when they meet in public space, so that the situations of everyday life are predictable (Blokland, 2017) and there is the possibility to enjoy forms of mutual help. Crossing paths with the same people every day in the block of flats or in the streets of the neighborhood of residence, even in the absence of direct interaction, contributes to the sense of urban safety.

> *"Vienna is a city that still has a neighborhood dimension, right? Anyway, you do a lot of neighborhood life, and you really realize that, I mean, by sight you know everybody. Maybe you don't talk to them, you don't have the occasion, but among my neighbors, there`s people I see regularly. We have the same timing, to give an example. […] So, in my opinion this thing helps a little bit to keep [the neighborhood safe] … And then there is social control, which is in the mentality here."* (Interview with M6)

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[83] The 18. district, Währing, is known for its historical villas and big parks. However, the family in my sample lived in a dense and trafficked neighborhood within the 18. district with little green surfaces.

Opposite to this neighborhood dimension of public familiarity is, according to the research participant, the anonymity and detachment from the context in Milan, one of the cities she lived in before Vienna. Especially those working in full-time would practically live in their offices and completely ignore other people living in their neighborhood, according to this research participant, with the blasé attitude of Simmel`s big-city inhabitants, overloaded by sensorial and intellectual stimulations. Another example of a mother addressing safety aspects is below. Instead, her child seemed more concentrated on the schools he previously attended – it is not the only case where schools confirm their centrality in children`s everyday geographies beyond teaching and learning (Collins & Coleman, 2008). I got a glimpse of the child`s spatial representations, as he described some sporty shortcuts to reach his old kindergarten and after-school center.

> -M11: *"And this [the park we were in] is practically our extended yard, because this is where we come – now I sometimes send the children on their own as well – in the sense that I know that here they meet, 9 times out of 10, classmates either from kindergarten, or after-school, or school."*
> -C11: *"Yes, because the kindergarten is back there. If you climb up the kindergarten garden`s fence, you are in the park. Back there is a fence, you see? There at the back are my old kindergarten and my old after-school center."*
> -M11: *"[…] There`s always someone known. At any time of the day and of the evening, you come here, and you find somebody anyway. It is here that you usually meet half of our block of flats, depending on the hour."* (Go-along with MC11)

It is especially divorced and single mothers who profit from neighborhood ties with other women and families, a specific form of social capital, often ethnically and gender-connotated, based on solidarity and mutual favors regarding childcare.

Some employees from the Gebietsbetreuung were also of the opinion that a dense network of friends and acquaintances physically present in the neighborhood has a positive effect on children`s autonomy of movement.

> -GB*10a: *"This is also what makes the difference in the 6th district, that you go around the corner and meet the children and the acquaintances, the schoolmates, and there the danger is not so big, if the path is halfway safe, so that you can go to the next park alone as a child."*
> -GB*10b: *"Yes, that is certainly so, that everything is nearby, and you can then send the children alone […]"* (Interview with two interviewees GB*10, a and b)

Having friends and acquaintances nearby makes it easy for the children to spend time together after school. The nearer the friends, the less necessary it is to involve adults in the organization of meetings among children.

> *"A few school friends live in the alley where we live, then the cousin - they are also very good friends - he lives here too. So, they can really get together a little clique in 5 minutes on foot. Then they ring the doorbell and ask: "Are you coming down to the park?", "Yes, I'm coming." That's the way it usually goes with us. And then I can open the window, and when lunch is ready, I just call out: "Come back up!"*

[...] And then I must go down and look for them, and then they come." (Interview with M3)

Expectedly, these communities, based on practices and constituted by a mix of ties and absent ties (familiarity), imply some forms of exclusion of categories of people who are in a different life situation, such as people without children. The socio-economic situation and the corresponding Bourdieusian class habitus also constitute discriminants between identifying commonalities and drawing edges.

"So, you meet a dude, and you leave one of the children, you go shopping, you come back. The next time you keep it for her. I mean, this sort of commonality generates." (Interview with M11)

As examples of risks deriving from people, a mother in the 6. district was concerned about the presence of addicted and homeless people, in her eyes potential criminals, close to the Western railway station (*Westbahnhof*). This edge (Lynch, 1990) caused an abrupt and spotty restriction of the child`s freedom in that area. Baby gangs were depicted as deterrents of children`s mobility without adults in the 5. and 20. district. A child went to school and to his Hort *alone* but was always accompanied to the parks in the neighborhood by his parents, sister, or family friends. This differentiated decision is attributable to the fact that in two parks[84] in the 5. district, where the family lives, baby-gangs had hit weaker children and kick-scooters had been stolen. The mother in the sample wished for a stronger police presence in the dangerous parks of her area as a deterrent for the offenders. The presence of several unknown, next to known people, in the neighborhoods of residence marked the difference between small towns of provenance of some families. Fears and division lines made me reflect that the representation of Vienna as a big urban village provided by some parents was partial and incoherent.

"It's true that I wouldn't leave her [my daughter] alone, but there was a situation where she was in a place surrounded by strangers, because that's the big difference. Because here [historical photo of festival in the mother`s home village with a lot of people] I know them all, at least by sight. At least by sight, these are all known faces." (Virtual journey with M6)

The way between home and school was described as much safer in terms of traffic in Vienna than in the places of provenance, especially when the latter were big cities like Budapest or Rome. A father told me about how uncomfortable it was that his son's school in Budapest was far away, so that he had to "cross the city" or "go to the other side of the city and back", in his words. The public transport, which would have been the only alternative for the parents than bringing the children to school by car and picking them up every day, was not really an option because deemed as unsafe.

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[84] The two parks are Bacherpark and Einsiedlerpark.

> *"With car it was maximum 20 minutes, but we had to get into the car every day, which is also annoying. This is amazing in Vienna, that the public transportation is not just very well-built – so, you can reach easily almost every point of the city – but it's also very clean, very safe - that's very important. Unfortunately, in Budapest, although I think they're quite a good public transportation, but we had some really bad experiences in the recent years, like dirty, crazy people, insulting you. So, I didn't really feel like my kids should use the public transportation, while they are very small." (Interview with F3)*

The research revealed not only that the feeling of safety in the city is influenced by public familiarity and social capital, traffic, and other dangers, but also that it reflects the overall assessment parents do of their existential security and stability, influenced by the action of the State and the municipality of residence, for example regarding welfare. A woman exposed her idea of safety as tranquility, relaxed attitude, and feeling of having more time to do things in everyday life, opposed to stress at home in Budapest. Even more:

> *"I mean security like stability, that the country works, that nothing bad can or will happen to me or to my family, that we'll be healed in a hospital if we get sick, that I won't be robbed if I am out on the street at night – that's what I mean. So, the whole, everything you may understand under security, also when you are in the street. That you can sit back and just enjoy life and concentrate on the important things, because everything around is given, and works!"* (Virtual journey M3)

The feelings of urban and existential safety often reinforce each other.

d) In the historical phase between the two World Wars known as Red Vienna, when the Municipality used to take care of its inhabitants in every phase of life from cradle to grave, a lot was done to promote children's and childhood`s health and education. Several institutions targeted to children and with paternalistic attitudes, among them also public libraries and children`s swimming pools, were created back then. Nowadays, the institutions present on the territory[85], through their events targeted to children and teenagers with an emphasis on the child`s centrality and competence rather than on discipline and control, offer occasions for children to leave the domestic sphere, experience some other places in the city, and sometimes move some steps in the direction of autonomy within a safe frame. The Gebietsbetreuungen are among these institutions, even if their focus lies not specifically on children, teenagers, and families. For instance, Gebietsbetreuung North organizes a free toy rental and Gebietsbetreuung West created a small library in its premises. We may imagine that children with all socioeconomic backgrounds would profit from this and other initiatives by public and third-sector bodies to make new experiences, get to know their neighborhood and the city of residence better, and take some freedoms from the adult world together with peers.

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[85] Among the most frequently mentioned were wienXtra, the Summer Camps organized by the City of Vienna and Vienense Music Schools (*Musikschulen*) for children.

Parents of both Italian and Hungarian origin in the sample, especially those who had grown up in small towns, expressed a strong appreciation for the rich offer targeted to children and teenagers in Vienna, its distribution in all districts, and its affordability. Though positive for conciliation and apparently offering additional opportunities to the children, based on parents` elaboration of their childhood memories I argue that institutional events, courses, and programs are a sign and side effect of the fact that cities have become more dangerous and children less free to take decisions on their life and be active. In other words, children`s agency and creativity were substituted with (safer) pre-made packages. As an example, a mother from a South Italian village with less than 3000 inhabitants told me that, as a teenager, she used to rent houses with her friends in Winter to spend free time together and fight boredom. The teenagers also cooked, cleaned, and did their homework autonomously.

> -I, the researcher: *"You were basically, for yourselves, a neighborhood institution. I mean, you created events, things, spaces for yourselves."*
> -M8: *"Yes [laughs], out of necessity. There was nothing. Now, with the passing of time, associations have risen that organize, I don't know, summer games for the children or the living nativity scene, but before there was nothing. I mean, we had to sort it out ourselves, right? […] So, we used to stay here in these houses and had fun like this. Somebody played PlayStation, somebody played cards, somebody read, somebody watched a movie, somebody listened to music."* (Virtual journey with M8)

Another woman, who also grew up in a small village but in North Italy, made the existence of summer camps for children less natural and obvious and clarified the reasons for their existence, by way of referring to her childhood in a small village in the 1970s.

> *"Nowadays there are all the organizations to keep the children of working parents in summer… There were none back then, but there was no need, because children met freely. In meadows, in the woods around there, in squares, in streets. They went, you went outside, you had no dangers, there were no... Yes, there were dangers: children played and got hurt, but not the dangers that there are now - cars, adults to fear... the dangers we imagine now for our children. So, I know it's quite unimaginable, but we were out from morning to evening and we knew that to be back by lunchtime... Sometimes we would get lectured because we came back late and because we didn't listen to my mom and because we were making trouble around the village."* (Virtual journey with M7)

The interview passages above implicitly question whether children really need institutions to organize their time and stimulate them, and whether institutions can promote autonomy as much as the experience of less structured childhoods by several parents in the sample did. Some parental biographies raise the suspicion that the lack of institutions specifically targeted to children had the positive side effect of legitimizing the children`s freedom to

organize their own time and to boost their creativity regarding their goals and the means to reach them.

Cultural components of children`s autonomy in the city

There are also cultural components influencing the degree of autonomy parents are willing to give to their children. These become visible in the comparison between different settings with different prevalent cultural orientations.

> *"The mentality matters a lot, and also the way of educating children. If you think that here only maybe in the first class, not even always, children go to school accompanied, and in Italy you had the OBLIGATION to accompany them until they were 14. [...] My son, who is 14, would laugh at this. He moves around alone better than I have since he was 10. It`s true, maybe kids aren`t all the same, I agree, but if you level them off downwards..."* (Mother, go-along with MC7)

The social representations of children's competences and of how safe cities are vary across cultures. So does the representation of good parents, especially of good mother, and the corresponding expectations in the age of public and *performative parenting* (Satta, 2020a, section 1.5; Satta, 2020b, section 3.3). Nowadays, parents are more aware of the relevance of their role and imbued with expert knowledge on childhood and education than in the past but, at the same time, they increasingly feel inadequate (Satta, 2017). In Hungary and Italy, the good parent is the one who protects children and never leaves them alone, which equates with "abandoning" them; in Austria, it is the one that lets them become autonomous.

> *"We don't have any garden, we cannot leave them outside alone. Because I'm like, I don't want to leave them alone. I'm not that kind of parent [laughs]. We don't, because my husband is the same as well. We don't leave them alone, never.* (Interview with M1)

> *"I mean, okay, it's a small district, they need to walk a few steps, but I`ve never sent them to school alone in elementary school. Maybe in the fourth grade in couple, because the school was around the corner and they didn't have to cross the street, but it seemed a little bit exaggerated to me... I used to see 10-year-olds with a huge backpack maybe going down the whole street, crossing two traffic lights. [...] In first grade, when they are 6 years old!"* (Interview with the founder of the Facebook group and registered association *Italian Moms in Vienna*)

Instead, two Austrian employees from Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung had the impression, based on their holiday experiences in Italy, that the fear of pain, noise, and dirt led Italian parents to overprotect their offspring. From the quotation it seems that the underlying representation of child is that of a little adult (Satta, 2012), but deprived of the freedom of taking responsibilities and of deciding on his time and behavior.

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-B: *"I know relatively a lot of Italian families in Vienna, they are all unbelievable. Do you know the expression 'helicopter parents'?"*

[...]

-A: *"They accompany them until puberty or what?"*

-B: *"In Italy our children – we were around the whole day, of course, and always completely dirty, you know? Then we went to a restaurant, and the kids always had some kind of toy with them: a soccer ball, a frisbee… and played in the square, right? The Italian kids come, super dressed, perfect, and are of course not allowed to get dirty."*

-A: *"Aha aha"*

-B: *"They just sit there, they are given a mobile phone, so that they can play with the phone, so that they're busy. But they were always looking at our kids like that, while they [the speaker`s children] were playing soccer..."*

-A: *"Envious!"*

-B: *"Yes... Or at that time my middle son was 1.5, 2 years old, and he always fell down. Yes, and so what? It`s no problem."*

-A: *"For us, yes."*

-B: *"But here nobody cares, and in Italy it was always "Oh, poor child, poor child!" They're very protected, overprotected."* (Interview with GB*10, a and b)

In Austria, children`s autonomy appears to be not only a specific necessity and prerogative of parents of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but rather a cherished value. Parents` behavior to push autonomy appears to peacefully coexist with the practices of concerted education and intensive parenting theorized by sociologists of education with reference to middle- and upper-class parents in Western societies (Lareau, 2011). In other words, a strong educational and affective investment in the offspring is less united to the tendency to (over)protect the children at all costs – and thus control, limit the freedom – than in other cultural environments, but rather there is a trade-off between protection and support of autonomous experimentation. Italian and Hungarian parents` reactions were of surprise and shock, at first.

> *"My younger child, she is in in the third grade now, and I think yeh, last year she went to school alone. So, she started to go in the second grade. And she has to take a bus and a few stops, so it's about 15 to 20 minutes to get to school. Usually, everybody in her school goes alone. Actually, from the first grade. So, I think it was an exception that I went with the children in the first two grades.* (Interview with M2)

> *"That was an absolute difference for me, and that was also a shock for me. My little one was in the second grade, and all his classmates went to school alone with their school bags, even the ones that had to take the underground or the ones who went by bus. In the beginning, I always went to school with him, but after a while it was embarrassing, and so then they started to be much more independent. That's a very big difference, that was very new for me, that such little kids walk around alone in the city, but by now I got used to it, and the kids are really great at it."* (Interview with M3, whose children went to school on foot on their own and played with their cousin and friends in the public park in front of home)

With the passing of time, the parents` responses to social expectations which derive from the representations of parenting and children`s autonomy in the Austrian 'common sense' can be of happy compliance (with development of adaptive preferences), compliance accompanied by fears about the children`s integrity, or anger and rebellion. Adaptation to the Viennese context, in some cases, appeared to pass also through the assimilation to Austrian stances on the topic of children`s autonomy and the modification of the representation of good parent.

> *"So, it's very new, it [the practice of letting her children go to school and to the park without adult accompaniment] was very new for me, but we've acclimatized [laughs]. And yes, you always worry, of course, but you get used to it, because everybody does it like that here."* (Interview with M3)

> -F7: *"He is not the only one who moves so independently [his son who has been moving within the city since the age of 10]. All our acquaintances, even with Italian moms, who would be more protective, they also move around. For such things they would call you a scatterbrained father and mother in Italy, and anyway there wouldn't even be the possibilities."*
> -M7: *"It's true that it's a different environment, also concerning mobility. It's not so easy to move around, even in a city like Milan."* (Go-along MFC7)

A few voices raised against demanding, almost forcing autonomy by the time children have reached a certain age predefined by adults, without considering the individual development of the child and contextual conditions of autonomy. For example, the widespread practice of making all children go to school and come back home from school autonomously from the age of 6 or 7 in Austria, without considering how far the child lives and the characteristics of the paths to school, received some criticism.

> *"They require the children to grow up, to grow up a lot all of a sudden. Then, already from elementary school, [they require the children] to start going to school on their own. Our school was close to home, very close, it was 50 meters from home, so it was not a problem, but... There are some things here that are done differently [than in the Italian city of provenance]."* (Interview with M15)

> *"Here they let them. And I was like... I am getting in in the morning, and on the bus I see that there are seven-, eight-year-old children alone going to primary school, and it's frightening for me [laughs]. I wouldn't let my daughter alone."* (Interview with M1)

A mother from the Italian part of Switzerland outside the sample, whom I interviewed because she knew several Italian families in Vienna and shared what, in her view, were traits of the 'Italian educational style', told me that she always accompanied her children to school, picked them up at the end of the day, and accompanied the teachers and the classroom as additional responsible adult on educational trips. She criticized bitterly cultural pressures by her daughter`s school in Vienna to make parents send their children to school and back alone since the first grades.

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"Who cares where the child lives, at 8 years old she or he has to make do and take the bus, the tram, the underground, whatever, to get to school and you can't accompany her or him anymore. And that didn't sit well with anybody, especially the Italian parents [...] Everybody would drive them to the corner, so that the child would then go. We were in the 22. district, we had to take, back in the days [...] a bus, an underground, and a bus again. I don't let them travel for three quarters of an hour at the age of 8, not even to Amelia, who is young but can orient herself well. I'm sorry, but no. "Yes, because they have to learn to orient themselves and grow up." Here's this thing about growing up, about becoming independent, about... It's not part of me. I'm more for "I accompany the child until she or he is ready. When she or he is ready she or he goes on her or his own", instead of "You do what I say because I'm the mom, I'm the principal, so you have to grow up when I say so." No!" (Mother out of sample)*

Of the 16 families in the sample, 6 let their children go to school on their own or together with siblings and friends. Of these 6 families, 4 were from Hungary and 2 from Italy.

A further aspect of this line of criticism to children`s larger autonomy of movement in Austria is that children would be free to move on the condition that they behave like little adults, prematurely interiorizing the strict rules of an adult use of the city – for example, they should be quiet not to disturb the adults, to the detriment of their playful approach to urban environments.

"Despite the fact that children are considered[86], as I just said, they are less free, compared to a city like Rome. They have to behave: in public transportation, they must not be too noisy; they have to play, but within very restricted rules. So, this is an aspect I don't like." (Interview with M9)

Moreover, children`s autonomy in Vienna may sometimes appear rather as the result of the execution of adults` request on children which, in turn, mirror the adults` own convenience, depending both on parents` further appointments and on their need to plan everything with plenty of advance to get a feeling of control over their own time and their children`s. A child lamented the impossibility to make an autonomous, maybe off-hand free time program with her friends:

[In the Central Italian town of previous residence] "…We would go for ice cream almost every afternoon, and basically always at the same time, but without taking agreements. […] [About going to each other`s home] We would decide everything ourselves, and then we would say, "Mom, I'm going to Gaia", "Ok, perfect." (laughs) Whereas here [in Vienna], I mean... My friends' moms are a little...a little overprotective. The mom of a child named […] always says, "But you need to make an appointment". So, basically, every time you want to go to a friend, you must fix it two weeks in before!" (Interview with C10, 10 years old)

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[86] Differently than the most part of the interviewees, this mother believes that children in Vienna enjoy big consideration – there is a huge offer of services and events targeted to them – but would be substantially less free in their play because of adult norms and expectations on them.

To sum up, the critics of the idea of larger and broader children`s autonomy in Vienna argument that:

a) It does not take into account the different levels of competence and confidence among children (individual conversion factors, in the language of the Capability Approach). This normative ideal of the competent child forces all children to reach autonomy goals at predefined times. Alternatively, as problematized also in Danish sociology of childhood, it leads to the labelling of some children as 'incompetent', below the standard (Warming & Kampmann, 2007). So, the ideal of competent child, present in the New Sociology of Childhood and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is emptied of its democratic and emancipatory stances and becomes exclusive, non-inclusive;

b) It does not consider the different features of the neighborhoods where the children live (contextual conversion factors, in the language of the Capability Approach), the level of complexity and safety of everyday paths in the city, and other contextual features. As a), this overlooks internal diversity among children`s living conditions and thus produces exclusion;

c) It is hetero-directed and imposed by adults for their own convenience, so that it is only an apparent form of autonomy for the children (the element *individual choice*, central in the Capability Approach, is denied). This kind of objection comes from the perspective of Italians and Hungarians who have interiorized the culturally connoted representation of parenting as specific type of pedagogical relation to the child and of good parent as always present accompanier and 'coach' (Warming & Kampmann, 2007). At times, parents too seem 'victims' of the soft pressure of customs and social expectations in the places of migration, so that the freedom of their decisions and behaviors is also reduced.

I add another point of criticism: that of children in Vienna is often a very limited and domesticated form of autonomy, and thus formal rather than substantial. It would be no more than a different expression of *intensive* or even *obsessive* contemporary parenting cultures (Satta, 2017). This criticism has to do more generally with the life conditions of children living in postmodern Western cities. I had the impression that the numerous initiatives and events for children in Vienna represented an artificial surrogate of that freedom, tamed and adapted to the current representations of childhood as vulnerable and of the city as dangerous. However, and this point deserves our attention, this autonomy is still larger than the one the parents in the sample believed their children could have enjoyed if the families had still lived in Italy and Hungary.

The degree of autonomy children enjoy varies not only across geographical space and cultures, but also in time, it emerged during the 7 virtual journeys with mothers. Almost all parents, especially the Italian subsample[87] and those who grew up in small towns, seemed to agree that they, as children, had larger and earlier margins for autonomy and freedom of movement and play than their children nowadays in the capital city Vienna. These days cities are more dangerous than in the time they were children or, at least, they are perceived as such by adults. The autonomy mothers describe about their children`s life in Vienna regards the possibility for the children to walk specific paths and play in specific places pointed out by the parents, not to dispose of their time and urban space freely. What children experience, then, is not the city in its wholeness, but a *domesticated* version of the neighborhood, sometimes also of a few other islands in the city. This nostalgically recalled freedom in parents` childhoods is related with more spontaneity and less structuredness. A woman reported not letting her child go to school on her own in Central Italy, 10 minutes away from home, and not even letting her go up to a neighbored friend living in the same building. Her degree of freedom as a child in the same geographic area had been much larger.

> *"I mean, these fears didn't exist. I remember I used to go out at 3, I guess at 8 I would come back. My mom had to call me, scream to know where I am[88]. [...] It's a whole different life than it is now. It was the same life I would have wanted for my children, clearly, but nowadays there's this feeling, right?, of fear. [...] I don't know why, what's changed now... Maybe there's a different awareness than at that time, but I don't remember my parents ever worrying, either about me or my siblings, about anything. Maybe they did, but I don't remember it."* (Mother, virtual journey wit MC10)

Place where M10 used to play with other children in her childhood. Picture given by the research participant in preparation for our virtual journey.

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[87] This is because the majority of parents in the Hungarian subsample came from the capital city, Budapest.

[88] Confusion and fast switching between verbal tenses, as in other virtual journeys.

As a child, M6 would not directly walk the 300m separating her from home at the end of the kindergarten day. Instead, she would take a ride on the school bus or loiter alone at the town`s carousel. In primary school, after a few hours spent at school in the before noon, M6 spent most of her time in streets, inner yards, and on a football field with a neighborhood group of mixed-age children. The research participant described children`s activities in her small North Italian town of origin of 5000-6000 inhabitants as "very spontaneous", with "very few organized activities" and an "unstructured routine" (virtual journey M6). The differences with children`s condition in Vienna depends, according to the woman, surely on the urban versus rural context, and partly on the climate, which invites to increase indoor activities in Vienna. Even more, the tendency to organize children`s lives would be a sign of the times.

> *"My friends who still live there, I see that they also make their children do activities. I mean that anyway there is a tendency to organize the children's days more than they used to when we were children. [...] Yes, but the truth is that, in my opinion, it was our moms who used to tell us, "Well, go go!" whereas now, instead of saying, "Go, go!", they organize the guitar class... [...] There`s no longer the lightness and spontaneity that there used to be, because you don`t trust leaving the children in the wild unsupervised anymore. Now it`s something you don`t do!, right?"* (Virtual journey M6)

In a small village in the Alps, M7 used to reach kindergarten and go back home either on foot or by sled, accompanied only by her older brothers and her dog. That was made possible, in her opinion, by the safety of that environment, for example regarding traffic – there used to be few cars, back then – and by the fact that everybody knew each other in her village.

> *"My experience is that I was out all day in the woods, but it was 30 years ago. Now I don't know how it is, even in my village. I mean, back then there weren`t all these big dangers, cars... I mean, we were always outside, my mom didn`t even know where I was and what I was doing. I used to be accompanied to kindergarten by my dog, I used to go by sled when it snowed and with the dog picking me up from kindergarten at 4 o'clock. Now, nobody leaves the child alone."* (Go-along with M7)

From North to South, passing through Central Italy, there seemed to be hardly any difference in this regard. During our virtual journey, M8 reported going to the beach with other children without adults since the age of 7 or 8. The children also used to play with a ball in her village`s squares and streets in South Italy, or to go to a park where there were some carousels.

> *"It was simple. We would call each other by name from the balconies, give each other an appointment and then go out. [...] Yes, because the village is small, everyone knows each other, so... I mean, not in the evening, there was always a parent who had to take us back home, but once we arrived at the village downhill,*

by the sea, we were on our own in the park. [...] Which doesn`t exist here." (Virtual journey with M8)

During our go-along, she showed me a photo of the one-kilometer road which connects her village of origin with the next village, which was even smaller. Since her early teenage years (age 12-13), she used to go to the close village with her friends – it took about 15 minutes on foot – to have a bath in the sea or to stroll in the village. There was also a bar with jukebox and table football, where she and her friends would meet with some classmates of theirs living in the neighboring village. Meeting in the other village loosened adult social control – everybody knew each other in her village of residence – and allowed them to take some freedom to experiment and transgress as teenagers. Reflecting on her past and on the place of provenance during our virtual journey, M8 showed safety concerns about walking in single file or in couple along a main road for motor vehicles only, without pavement. Thinking as a mother of the 2020s, she assessed the practice of going to the next village on foot, which seemed normal and unproblematic to her group of children and teenagers and to their parents back in the past, as very dangerous.

> -M8: *"And we used to go on foot! Like, today I wouldn't send my daughter on foot on that road, because anyway it's a coastal road, there are tourist buses, motorcycles, cars whizzing by, but we always went and came back on foot without fear. Which, I repeat, now I, if my daughter asked me, I wouldn't let her do that, even if she went down [to the mother`s native village] in summer."*
> -I, the researcher: *"Did your parents know that you walked there?"*
> -M8: *"Yes, yes, because for us it`s a normal thing to walk to R."* (Virtual journey with M8)

A Hungarian mother told me about her childhood in socialist Hungary. She used to live in a residential estate composed of a few parallel four-story slab constructions, each of them with its own playground with metal toys. The children met in the vicinity of their home and mixed in the playgrounds. Even more did they love to play in the water channel nearby and amidst reeds. Teams of children from different staircases would play fights with each other until the mothers called them up to dinner from their balconies and, if necessary, came down to drag them home[89]. As preadolescents and teenagers, they would use a common room in their condominium.

> *"The mothers always knew where we were. We got keys, we were the children with keys, kulcsos gyerekek[90], and there were hardly any telephones back then, I can*

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[89] See M14`s narration during go-along with MFC14, 26.02.2021.

[90] *Kulcsos gyerekek*, *children with keys* were children who, in communist and socialist Hungary of the 1970s and 1980s, had high degrees of autonomy after school and during school holidays, while their parents were both working outside home. They were relatively free to decide how to occupy their time beside school and would be visible in groups in public space. Their copy of the flat keys, hanging from their neck, became the symbol of an entire generation and a childhood myth for the following ones.

> *remember, and they didn't know the neighbors' number yet."* (Go-along MFC14, 26.02.2021)

Striking in her storytelling was for me the freedom the research participant and her friends enjoyed, and also some similarities with the things reported by other parents about their children`s life in Vienna: the spaces to play in the vicinity area which were controllable for adults and the common rooms[91] in the building like in Viennese cooperative flats.

Nevertheless, nowadays children in Vienna carve out interstitial spaces and times for themselves within the frame given by adults, enrich functional spaces with relational elements, and even transgress parents` rules. During a go-along, I and M10 discovered that her daughter had done some roller skating (on a sidewalk) on the path we were going along, whereas the mother allowed her to skate only in two specific spots in the neighborhood.

> -C10*: "Mom, but I didn't get hurt."*
> -M10*: "I understand, but I don't want you to. There are cars!"*
> -C10*: "Mom, but they know where to stand. It's not like they get on the sidewalk!"*
> -M10*: "I got it, you never know..."*
> -C10*: "What a bore!"* (Go-along with MC10)

In the course of other two go-alongs, I and the respective mothers similarly discovered that two further children had transgressed their parental directives and taken some more spaces of freedom. A seven-year-old had gone to a park near home on her own, once, and another child had come back home from school by bus, rather than on foot, and looked at his mobile phones while walking on the street.

Learning by Doing: autonomy as self-reinforcing capability

The quality of public transport, the conformation of spaces and, with some *caveats*, the offer by institutions contribute to children`s autonomy both directly, by offering occasions for their participation to the life of their neighborhoods and the city, and indirectly, by supporting children`s urban competences. A virtuous cycle can set, where autonomy fosters competence development, and competence development makes larger and larger spaces of autonomy possible. I maintain that children`s autonomy may be related to the concept of agency, meant as the power and opportunity to fulfil one's potential. In this specific case, learning how to move and behave in the city can be seen as a part of the process of growing up. Autonomy, as an aspect of children`s agency based on interaction and negotiation with adult caregivers, could mitigate the structural generational order of

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[91] In 2018, 23% of survey respondents living in Vienna had common rooms in their apartment building (Verwiebe, Haindorfer, et al., 2020, p. 57).

contemporary Western societies. This would influence both generational power relationships in the present (quotation 1) and the transition to adulthood at a later point (quotation 2), with positive consequences in terms of children`s rights and on the practical organization of families and societies.

> *-M7: "We when we go to Italy, [the son] is the one who takes grandma around in Milan. I mean, he untangles himself better than grandma, who is young, she is 66, 67. [...] I mean, after that you move in any environment differently, more nimbly."*
> *-F7: "Yes, with this fact that you move, they take more opportunities. Before, and more."* (Go-along with MFC7)

> *-F7: "Beyond the convenience [for parents], I feel that it gives an extra edge, a plus. Italian 18-year-olds put their noses out of home two years earlier. When it comes time to go to university, they're still big beans [unexperienced, clumsy, and little dynamic]. Here they are much smarter, one step ahead."*

The research participant M6, living with her husband and her two children in the 8. Viennese district – a dense, elegant inner-city neighborhood with little greenery and heavy traffic – underlined the importance of training the children, in order to combine their autonomy of movement with safety. She praised the traffic education initiatives the police hold in Viennese primary schools. In her child`s school it was no less than the police boss to lead the course, which gives a clue of the expectations and investment on it.

> *"In my opinion, probably this thing, this approach, let's try to keep the neighborhood safe with everyone's help, will eventually bear fruit, because children know how they have to behave. Instead, I've never seen this in Italy. I mean, the responsibility to supervise children is always left to their families, whereas here it seems to me that there's an approach whereby the child her/himself is made to feel responsible to say, "I look around and see if there's a danger, and I dodge it." So, probably this mental and social attitude…"* (Virtual journey with M6)

Another already mentioned mother who grew up in a small mountain village enjoyed the freedom to move around and play in the open air with siblings and peers in a much less anthropized environment than a city. During our meetings, she showed appreciation for the possibility for children in Vienna to experience and experiment the city and their competences more than in Italy, in her opinion. She thinks that the key in Vienna is that the environment (contextual factors) allows the children to experiment safely. She adduced, as an example, that most children in Austria, at the age of 10, take a license to ride bikes, also alone, after attending a course held during school hours and passing a bicycle test. This, together with other favorable contextual elements, enhances their competences and confidence as drivers, reduces the risks on the road and encourages their parents to further extend their autonomy of movement.

> *"Already in the first grade, she had a map from the school about the paths to follow, the points where children should be cautious to cross the road, and the issues.*

They insist a lot on children and the road, children and dangers. In sum, they make them autonomous." (Mother, go-along MFC7)

"Here actually you have a lot of bicycle roads, very wide roads, traffic - yes, now the traffic is starting to be here as well a little bit... – but there's actually a lot of attention to road hazards, for example. […] It's all 'calculated', in the sense that it's not like they just throw you in there and say "Go!"" (Go-along with M7)

According to the woman, cultural differences in educational styles and values also play a role: in Austria, children are brought out to spend time into nature open air since an early age and with any weather. In this way, they get used to it and will be more motivated, growing up, to keep on moving and exploring their living environment, as this other interview passage suggests.

"I didn`t know it before [it is a recent phenomenon], but parents in Budapest are always there in parks. Here [in Vienna] children run around alone in the park. And there can be such, I wouldn't say that they are gangs, but there are a bit these gang fights. That scared me a bit in the beginning. In the meantime, I trust my children, that if they get into a situation like that, they'll come home quickly or call me." (Interview with M3)

Spending time outdoors with more freedom and less parental fears than in Italy, according to some research participants, children in Austria would develop more competences to move around in the city autonomously and confidence in doing it which, in a virtuous circle, reduces dangers in the interaction with the city and facilitates the access to further degrees and forms of autonomy. That freedom, responsibility, and competence development are interdependent is something that some parents both from Italy and Hungary in the sample could experience firsthand in their childhood and teenage. M1 reflects that her husband developed time management competences in his childhood thanks to, rather than despite, long hours of autonomous play with friends.

"He was always down and playing football with the guys after school. Yes, and we were talking about it, and how we came home and what we did, because he was like "I remember I was always on the football pitch", so he was like "I was there all the time", and he knew when he had to go home before the parents, prepare some homework or something like that, but we don't remember how we were familiar with the timing, you know, because we were children, we don't know the clock. But he was home at the right time, always, but playing all the time." (Virtual journey with M1)

Parents` conciliation of work, care, and time for themselves

In this section, I show the relationship between children`s autonomy and parents` conciliation of family, work, and time for themselves. I also reflect on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the families` everyday life and on conciliation.

Children`s autonomy and parents' conciliation as two sides of the same coin

The research revealed that children`s autonomy of movement, play, and peer encounters and parents` - especially mothers`- conciliation of family, work, and time for themselves are two sides of the same coin. They can be seen as complementary capabilities. If parents do not need to accompany their children to after-school activities and pick them up by car, or if children are free to play with their friends without adult supervision and feel confident about it, the caregivers win some time for salaried work, domestic work, or for themselves. Children`s autonomy can even influence mothers` participation in salaried work *tout court*, especially in a conservative welfare model like the Austrian, where the legislation and the local culture favor the permanence of mothers in the role of main performers of childcare (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004). Provided that this does not represent an alternative to the availability, accessibility, and quality of childcare services, children`s small spaces of autonomy may contribute to freeing small portions of women`s time, and even more their affective resources, otherwise occupied by worries. If the extent of children`s autonomy was bigger, some of women`s cognitive resources would be freed from the duty of planning children`s daily activities in detail. Care and conciliation needs are expected to reduce spontaneously and progressively, as the children grow up, gain competences and knowledge of their vicinity area and neighborhood of residence. Three mothers in the sample described explicitly and detailly the advantages for them deriving from the possibility for their children to play in the inner yard or, in one case, in the public park in front of their flat`s window[92]. A difference seems to emerge in the availability, quality, and accessibility of spaces in the vicinity area depending on neighborhood density. In inner-city districts (3., 5., or 8. district) or close to the Viennese belt (18. district), for example, inner yards are smaller and often still paved with asphalt. An Italian mother who grew up in a small town where groups of children played in the streets, in backyards, and on a field, told me that it was very convenient for her to send her daughters in the inner yard of their flat in the 8. district, but also that hers were almost the only children using that common space.

> *"In September, when the days are still long and maybe we go up [from public space to home], and I have this hour when I either have to cook, or to finish work, or to do the laundry, […] and I tell the girls, "You go down to the garden and play," then they go down and spend some time on the sand box. I mean, I'm the one who tells them, "Go out, stay out!" I leave the windows open, so I can hear them – I`ve this indirect supervision, right? – and I tell them, "If you need me, call me, I`ll hear you." And actually, leaving the windows open […], I feel like sending them down. I don't know whether the Austrians do that, but I have done it and it's maybe*

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[92] In spring and summer, as soon as the foliage on trees becomes thicker, parental control and protection from the window becomes weaker and the children get more privacy and responsibility.

something that comes from me having had a backyard [as a child]." (Virtual journey with M6)

In the districts on the East side of the Danube (21. and 22.), there seem to be more public and semi-public spaces for the children to experiment autonomy, to the advantage of their parents, especially mothers. In the following passages, M10 tells me about the 'liberation' from the duty to always accompany her children to playgrounds after tiring working days as mother working in full time.

> *"The quality of life of a parent is also that you don't always have to accompany your child outside. Because going outside is just, I mean, children have to go outside, right?, especially here in Vienna. It's important for children to be outside, but the problem is that parents always have to be behind [in trafficked districts where people do not pay attention]. Parents have a lot, moms have a lot to do. I remember when I lived in the third district, I always had this anxiety that I say, man, we have to go out, the weather is nice, how can you not go out? We must go out, let's go out, but I have to do this, I have to iron, I have to do that, I have to ... Instead, here you either go out in the yard, or you go out with your friends."* (Interview with M10)

> -M10: *"Except when they`re toddlers, of course – but already in elementary school age, when you can leave them outside, here you get a little bit of respite. I have always been looking for a less stressful way of living city life."*
> -I, the interviewer: *"Did you have a yard like this in the 3. district, too?"*
> -M10: *"NO! I mean, there was but you know, one of those ugly ones where there was garbage..."* (Mother, go-along with MC10)

Conciliation, temporalities, and the Covid-19 pandemic

The sphere of labor deeply influences family temporalities and conciliation. Six families in the sample believed that their daily temporalities in Vienna were more advantageous than the ones in the places of provenance, and in two cases family-friendlier working times were among the declared drivers of migration to Vienna. The capability of having spare time from work every day and of being free to opt for longer periods of maternity leave (or for not working outside home) without endangering their family`s economy recurs in different statements.

> *"In Hungary we were really in the middle of the economics, a stable middle, but if I lost my job there, we couldn't live. So, I had to go back full time, but here, with a part-time job it is enough. And the time, the quality time with my children... And if I go back to Hungary with full time, I only have one or two hours with my children, and they must go to bed. And now I'm home, and I pick them up, and we have quality time with each other. And I think this is important, especially in these years, early years. And this is, I wouldn't give it to them [time to the children], and they would never give it back to me [this lost time could never be recovered]. Yes, because I must go to work, come home at 6 and then put them to bed and then, what do I do now? And here, I think, this is the huge difference. I can be with them.*

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And go to the institutes [institutions and activities] I want to go with them, and stuff." (Interview with M1)

A father told me that he could have flexible working times in Vienna and regularly ended his working day at 4 or 5 p.m.

"I think that it [time for the family and oneself] increases a little bit for all the families that come here too, regardless of the family setting, whether one or both [partners] work. I mean, the working hours are different, you start earlier and finish earlier, with big advantages for the kids." (Interview with F7)

Having time allows to cultivate not only family relations but also friendships and leisure.

"A big difference is that in Győr I was only working, only working. […] [in Győr, she used to have two friends] But in Vienna I never worked, but I had small children, and I had a lot of Hungarian friends here, very, very big, bigger than in Győr, because in Győr I was only working the whole time. I didn't have so many girlfriends. FOR ME it is and was a big difference. Because here I always had a mum, or a group. […] But in Győr I could not ask anybody, or not so many mommies whether we go [somewhere] together." (Interview with the administrator of a group of Hungarian mothers and children)

On the other hand, I argue that the other face of more time for family and oneself in Vienna are the labor disadvantages for women already thematized in this chapter. In other words, in Vienna there seem to be more concrete opportunities for parents to take free time from work than in the places of provenance, but less opportunities for migrant women with childcare duties to be in salaried work, if they want to.

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis, unfolding during my fieldwork, also had an impact on temporalities and conciliation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Vienna was locked down 5 times, with differently 'hard' or 'soft' measures to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. The first lockdown started on 16th March 2020. Other four lockdowns followed in the Austrian capital city, starting respectively in November 2020, December 2020, April 2021, and November 2021 (WIFO, 2021, table in appendix). The mothers in the sample reported that the Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions acted as negative conversion factors, refraining the process of access to autonomous mobility and play for their children. In this way, the pandemic caused a decrease in agency and self-empowerment.

"Now, with the pandemic, it has not been possible anymore, but at the beginning of [the] school [year] the youngest [child] had already started to say, "Mom, can I stay alone with my friend now? We go to the park, he wants to use his skateboard and I'll learn."" (Interview with M15)

This aspect also emerged from a big qualitative longitudinal study on the Covid-19 pandemic and families conducted by University of Vienna (Zartler, Dafert, & Dirnberger, 2022). The research team interviewed and collected diary entries from 98 parents of

kindergarten- and school-aged children from all Austria repeatedly, in regular time intervals between March and December 2020.

> "The tremendous changes in children's living situations precipitated a loss of agency and self-empowerment, as children became more dependent on their parents. Before the pandemic, children had significantly more opportunities to determine their own lives (e.g., choosing their friends, going to school unattended, having unaccompanied social activities." (Zartler, Dafert, & Dirnberger, 2022, p. 16)

Also evident was that the Covid-19 pandemic defied family organization of daily life and their balance regarding conciliation. In fact, the performance of childcare and education was transferred back almost exclusively to parents, since the institutions devoted to children`s education and childcare were no longer accessible and the practical help of travelling grandparents from Hungary and Italy fell out. More specifically, the first four lockdowns were accompanied by school closures and distance learning. When going back to school after the most critical weeks of each Covid-19 wave, didactic activities in presence and online were combined, and pupils often divided into shifting groups to make the work less burdensome and support each child`s learning in the best possible way. In the fifth lockdown from November 2021, didactic activities continued taking place in presence for all pupils, notwithstanding the possibility for parents to choose to keep their children at home without presenting any certificate[93]. Researchers have noticed that, in the Covid-19 waves following the first in Winter 2020-2021, Austria was the fourth country in the zone including the EU and Switzerland with the longest (in weeks) school closures due to the pandemic crisis (UNESCO data reported in WIFO, 2021). The data collected so far from pupils, parents, and teachers about the effects of these closures, mostly in term on learning loss, suggest that school closures hit younger pupils and children from families with lower socioeconomic background particularly hard (WIFO, 2021). The parents in my sample confirmed these considerations, expressing strong doubts about the quality of teaching during the Covid-19 crisis. However, differently than other countries of the world, the Austrian State always guaranteed kindergartens' and schools' function of custody during all lockdowns, if parents had no possibility to take care of the children at home[94]. During lockdowns, schools kept providing custody for children of busy parents and learning support for children with special educational needs. Several parents used the offer, and it has been argued that some others abused it. Also in my sample, several mothers (and fathers) chose to send their children to school during the lockdowns following the first one. M6 noticed large differences between the first lockdown and the following ones: during the

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[93] For a clear illustration of lockdown phases and school arrangements in Austria, see the illustration on the very last page after the references of WIFO (2021).
[94] Special concessions were made also for pupils in the last year of primary and secondary school, for whom respectively the preparation to the following school and the final exam were considered as priorities.

first lockdown, employers complied with the *"collective perception that everything had to stop"*, which was *"socially accepted"*. From the second lockdown on, some employers imposed a come back to work in presence and, even when home office was formally admitted, curbed the employees` flexibility in time management. Regarding parents, they ignored the circumstances: *"Even during home office, they [the employers] demanded that one work as if the children were not there."* M6 realized that this phenomenon had not only individual but a collective range by taking notice of the number of pupils at her daughters` schools during lockdowns: only one child in her younger daughter`s kindergarten classroom was there during the first lockdown, almost all during the following lockdowns. From the second lockdown, her elder daughter would go to the primary school 3 days a week for additional German language classes, together with at least two thirds of the classroom (mother, go-along 03.03.2021 with MC6). In light of the conversations with the mothers in the sample, I raise the question about who needs (…and who does not need?) to go to school in presence and why this would need a well-argued justification[95]. The reasons for on-site schooling lie both in children`s and in parents` needs.

> *"At one point in December [or in January?], I think I sent my older child [to school] anyway [despite the lockdown] for some days because she couldn't do her homework at home. […] It's complicated because, I always say it, it's not my job to be a teacher, otherwise I would have been a teacher. And most importantly, I'm the mom […]. First, she wants to have some space, then she wants to play. She's in another situation, she's in another environment."* (Interview with M12)

> *"I work from home, I'm a freelancer, so I send the children to school in the before noon three times a week to have a very minimum of silence and tranquility to do my thing."* (Interview with M6)

For a mother in the sample who was also an employed primary school teacher, life was not easier either. The mothers in the sample who did not send the children to school for custody and had no possibility to externalize care work because of the pandemic, performed childcare and learning support at home during lockdowns. The double burden of salaried work and childcare, triple if we consider 'entertainment' a further task on their agendas, posed unprecedented challenges to conciliation for them. These mothers felt responsible to plan all their children`s activities and to accompany their learning processes (on parental responsibilization, see Satta, 2020a, section 1.5; 2020b, section 3.3). Some mothers called the mode of instruction during lockdowns 'home schooling', and not with

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[95] The offer of school custody during lockdowns ended up being used by more families than initially expected. In the Austrian news ORF from 08.01.2021 h 19:30 it was reported that, despite the interruption of didactic activities because of the ongoing lockdown, 22% or primary school pupils were currently physically present in primary schools, in some kindergartens up to 75%. (Ethnographic logbook 08.01.2021).

the official name 'distance learning'. I believe this expression was neither a mere terminological inaccuracy nor an individual lapsus but a sign of the widespread feeling or being assigned the sole responsibility, as parents, for the children`s learning, and a mirror of their daily struggles.

> *"In the first lockdown, they were completely left to their own devices, in the sense that I was basically my son's teacher, and my daughter made do completely autonomously".* (Interview with M11)

On the phone after a tiring day of 'home schooling' with her children in November 2020, in a cozy evening atmosphere and protected by the anonymity of a phone call without video, M15 vented her frustration for the condition of mother and improvised teacher during a lockdown and expressed a feeling of inescapability from this role:

> *"They're also very traditionalist, so they expect, you know, that there's somebody at home to help them [the children], and that this somebody is predominantly the mother. I mean, that's very...obvious. Then, okay, with the lockdown story it's obvious that whoever is at home with them must...it`s almost home schooling. So, it is necessary."* (Interview with M15)

These considerations on the multiplicity of roles parents took during the Covid-19 crisis, the pressures which especially mothers felt, and their exhaustion is in line with the results of the big qualitative study on families and Covid-19 pandemic mentioned earlier in this chapter (Zartler, Dafert, & Dirnberger, 2022). It surprised me to discover that, in some particular cases, the home office arrangements taken in response to the Covid-19 crisis made the entrance into the job market for women with care duties a bit easier. Even less predictable was this result in relation to migrant women, though from the EU, who often encounter more difficulties to find jobs, because of their oftentimes limited German language competences and the lack of social capital with natives. A mother of three children, the smallest one aged 3 at that time, was unemployed when we first met and started a job about one year afterwards. She explained to me that the fact that her husband was still in home office meant that they could manage everything without need to pay for external care. Another woman in the sample (M6), after working as a freelancer for the 8 years she had been spending in Vienna and experiencing scarcity of projects during the Covid-19 crisis, started looking for dependent employment. She spent several months unsuccessfully trying to be hired by companies based in Vienna and eventually ended up with an employment contract with a company based in another European city. The possibility to work almost exclusively remotely, barely imaginable before the Covid-19 pandemic, offered a new option to a woman with triple disadvantage: with care duties; with a different mother tongue than Austrian German; stuck in what appeared to her as a closed, "corporative" job market.

> *"At least at the beginning, Fiorenza will have to do some back-and-forth with Berlin. She hopes that the Covid situation will still be so critical that travel will be prohibited. I reflect that Covid, paradoxically, in some ways also promotes the personal self-fulfillment and autonomy of women who came as "trailing spouses" as found themselves stuck in the Austrian job market."* (Go-along MC6, 16.11.2021)

Early studies on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in Austria suggest that the time spent daily to fulfill childcare duties increased especially for women during the phases of crisis and that the crisis reinforced traditional gendered care models within the family, with some exceptions regarding fathers who worked in home office and with reduced working hours (Universität Wien, Corona-Blog 33, 08.05.2020; Universität Wien, Corona-Blog 57, 15.06.2020). Still, I believe in the transformative power of reflecting on exceptions. Especially in the first lockdown, when the rundown of the economy was justified by the threat of the new virus, the Covid-19 crisis had a positive impact on working times and conciliation, according to some of the families in my small, non-representative sample. This has partly to do with the composition of the sample, biased towards the middle class, but maybe also with the local temporal cultures in Vienna. In a middle stage of the pandemic in June 2021, I wrote down in my notes:

> *"M7 says that the Austrian 'home office' is very different from the Italian 'smart working', because in Austria the weekend is sacred. After working hours – you usually stop working no later than at 5 P.M. in Austria – you close your PC and go to the Danube or to an openair swimming pool to have a bath."* (Go-along with M7)

In 4 families, I discovered that fathers had started to participate more in family life on weekdays, thanks to the introduction of home office and the consequent loosening of core time and very frequent business missions in Austria and abroad. They started helping pick up the children from school or cook meals for the whole family, releasing women of some burdens.

> *"But with the older [child] I had to, or actually I still have to learn. That means that I actually became a full-time teacher! And, of course, that also means I can't do my job and yes, that's difficult. Fortunately, my husband has learned to cook in the meantime, and cooks delicious food for us."* (Interview with M3)

> *"After a few minutes of us walking all together, he [the father] takes his leave and goes back home carrying some bags, musical instruments, and other encumbrances that Fiorenza [his wife] gives up for him to bring back home, so that we can go to the park lighter. The Covid crisis allows fathers to be more present: they have fewer business trips, the possibility to take short breaks from work, and to work from home. This allows fathers to take part in their children's lives in unprecedented ways. Fiorenza hopes it will remain so also after Covid."* (Go-along MCF6, 03.03.2021)

These cases of fathers` wider and novel ways of participating in family life suggest that more flexibility and balance in the division of paid and unpaid work make families more resilient to unexpected events such as a pandemic.

> She tells me that her husband has always helped her with domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, tidying up, and so on, and is helping even more during this Covid time. [...] Covid led them to loosen the informal specialization of tasks they had within the couple because she was overloaded of work, so he took over to help her. In another family of the sample, the father found himself temporarily jobless because of Covid and took the chance to engage more with domestic work. I reflect that it is a matter of changing balances: men`s openness for 'female' tasks makes it possible for families to maintain the same capabilities and functionings, and thus the same quality of life, even in stressful situations such as Covid. Couples with a more flexible and possibly balanced division of work withstand a large stress test like Covid better than the others, because they can better reorganize to meet external perturbations (negative contextual conversion factors). (Ethnographic notes on go-along with MC11)

These examples suggest that there was a gap between fathers` functionings in 'normal' times before the Covid-19 crisis (what they did and did not do, how they behaved) on one side, and their agency and well-being goals (preferred and desired behavior) on the other side (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Therefore, the still prevalent traditional gendered division of paid and unpaid work in Austria appears – in the light of the increased participation of fathers in family life (behavioral change) during the pandemic (by changed contextual circumstances) – more as the product of welfare, socio-cultural and workplace-related contextual factors than as the product of alleged (inborn) women`s predisposition to take care of children or men`s predisposition to build up careers. In negative, fathers` participation in family life during the pandemic shows that agency inequalities in conciliation and (the risks of) temporal and economic poverty, or at least reduced temporal sovereignty, regard both men and women.

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4. Beyond availability and accessibility: relational and informal aspects of urban quality of life

The previous chapter analyzed prevalently functional aspects of urban quality of life in Vienna, whereas this chapter deals with relational aspects, focusing on fulfilled and unfulfilled wishes of EU migrant-origin families. The fieldwork revealed that the children and, to a lesser extent, parents in the sample greatly appreciated and even contributed to the creation of urban interstices. Even in a well-organized, functional city like Vienna, through interstices they looked for small margins of informality, belonging, and agency, and maybe of memory of their past life before migration as well.

> "The interstice is the mirror of those who inhabit it or simply perceive it as part of their present or past, but also future lives. The interstice responds to the unconscious, but it is not only an unconscious that originates from the past, but it rather turns to the future, to what, as Jaques Lacan states, "is not yet realized."" (Nuvolati, 2019a, p. 41)

Interstices represent the affective and creative, rather the rational part of the relationship with the city and are particularly relevant during childhood or in memory of it. They are bound with routines but have limited persistence, since urban changes can sweep them away (Nuvolati, 2019a). This chapter is devoted to Vienna and the places of provenance reconstructed in their physical, relational, and affective components.

The chapter starts with the reconstruction of the paths of go-alongs and of the objective and subjective characteristics of the neighborhoods of residence. Later, I try to grasp the ways the children in the sample experience their neighborhood of residence in Vienna, and to translate it into adult words. In this section, I state not only what I could observe and experience alongside child research participants, but also what remains unclear to me about the relationship between children and the city and the meaning of quality of life for children. In the third section, I analyze the online and offline places and forms of sociability (intrinsic value of social ties) and the articulation of social capital (functional value of social ties). I highlight possible difficulties that migrant families, especially women and children, may encounter to access the city because of the lack of social capital and information, the strategies they enact to reach their goals anyway, and the role of informality even in a very organized city like Vienna. I propose a reading of social capital as conversion factor that, through the transmission of information, opens the doors to the use of urban spaces and institutions. I then thematize the pandemic and its effects on families' sociability and social capital, which question the view of intra-EU migrants as highly mobile, privileged *élite* with transnational lifestyles by definition and reveal their disadvantages as migrants.

I also describe new impulses generated by the pandemic, which contributed to break routines and modify spatial and mobility-related behaviors.

Paths and significant places in Viennese neighborhoods of residence

1. Innere Stadt
2. Leopoldstadt
3. Landstrasse
4. Wieden
5. Margareten
6. Mariahilf
7. Neubau
8. Josefstadt
9. Alsergrund
10. Favoriten
11. Simmering
12. Meidling
13. Hietzing
14. Penzing
15. Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus
16. Ottakring
17. Hernals
18. Währing
19. Döbling
20; Brigittenau
21. Florisdorf
22. Donaustadt
23. Liesing
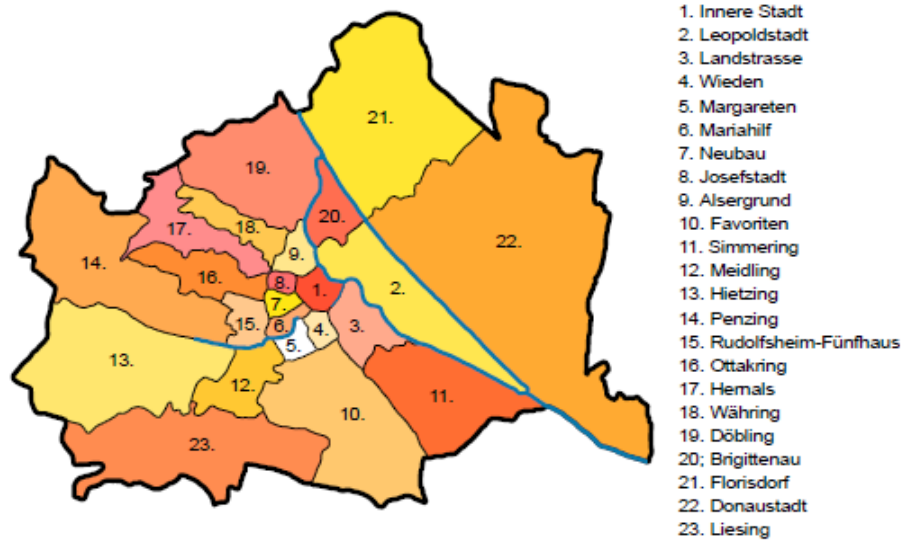
Viennese districts, Creative Commons license[96]
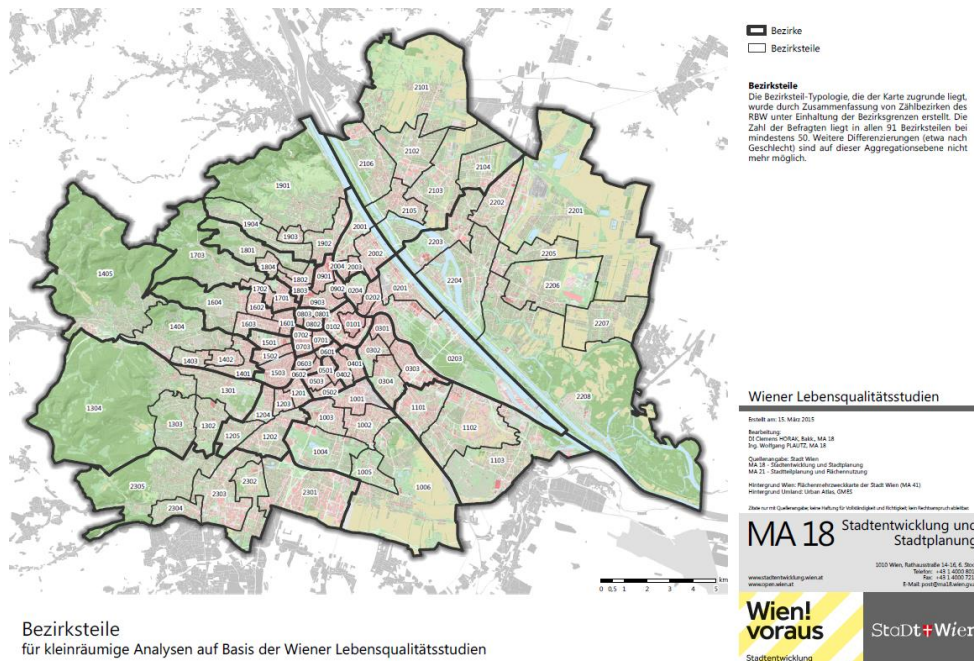
The borders in bold indicate administrative districts, whereas finer lines mark the 91 district parts/neighborhoods proposed by the City of Vienna based on the *Viennese study on quality of life[97]*.

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[96] Retrieved on 17.10.2022 under https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wien_Bezirke.svg
[97] Stadt Wien, MA18. Retrieved on 31.10.2022 under
https://www.wien.gv.at/stadtentwicklung/grundlagen/stadtforschung/karten/pdf/lebensqualitaet-bezirksteile.pdf

The originality of this research consists in the adoption of non-canonic, 'different' gazes on the city, those of migrant women and children. Coherently, I refer to the neighborhoods from a subjective standpoint (called *Grätzel,* in Vienna) which reflects the cognitive and emotional maps held by the mothers and the children, and in some cases also by the fathers who participated in the research (Bottini, 2016; Lynch, 1990). These partly overlap with the maps of neighborly relationships and public familiarity (*Nachbarschaft*). In the table in section 1 of this chapter, drawing inspiration from Kevin Lynch`s classic studies close to environmental psychology (Lynch, 1990), I present how family members characterize their neighborhoods of residence and report paths and focal points. Even if I was aware that administrative borders need to be relativized and questioned critically (Bottini, 2016), above I reported maps depicting top-down administrative divisions into districts and district parts in Vienna because I believed it necessary to give rough indications about Viennese geography. Besides, a shared reference represents a good starting point and improves the intelligibility and communicability of discourses on space. I find the two interview excerpts below very interesting because, showing internal differences within an administrative district, they point out the possible divergences between collective representation and reputation of a neighborhood on one side, cognitive and emotional maps and everyday life of those who live there on the other side.

> -M11: *"Here, here let's say that we are in the deepest point, let's say in the 5. district which is more..."*
> -C11: *"In the cruel[98] 5.!"*
> -M11: *"...more mixed."*
> *[...]*
> -M11: *"There is both the multicultural and multiethnic, beautiful and global aspect; and the aspect of disorder – it is dirtier, objectively, if you look on the ground – and it is more chaotic, more unruly.*
> -I, the researcher: *"Maybe it's also more the 5. district which is in people's minds.*
> -M11: *"Yes yes, it's more of what you imagine. Now let's go towards our house, which is more like the 4. district and closer to the reality of the city center, both architecturally and from the point of view of the people who live there."* (Go-along with MC11)

> -M13: *"And then there's also this other part [of the district] with the villas and so."*
> -I, the researcher: *"Yes, that`s more well-known, the part with the villas."*
> -M13: *"With the villas, just here near the park, these beautiful apartments, houses too. So, I would also see it as a very big contrast, because it's really... So, we don't live in the 18. district which is in people`s minds. What is good is that I get out very often."* (Go-along MC13a)

The second of the passages above, as well as the one below, also spark a reflection on the importance of personal and contextual conversion factors as conditions to be able to fulfill

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[98] I think the child meant crude, wild, savage.

in other parts of the city what is not achievable, in terms of capabilities, in the neighborhood of residence.
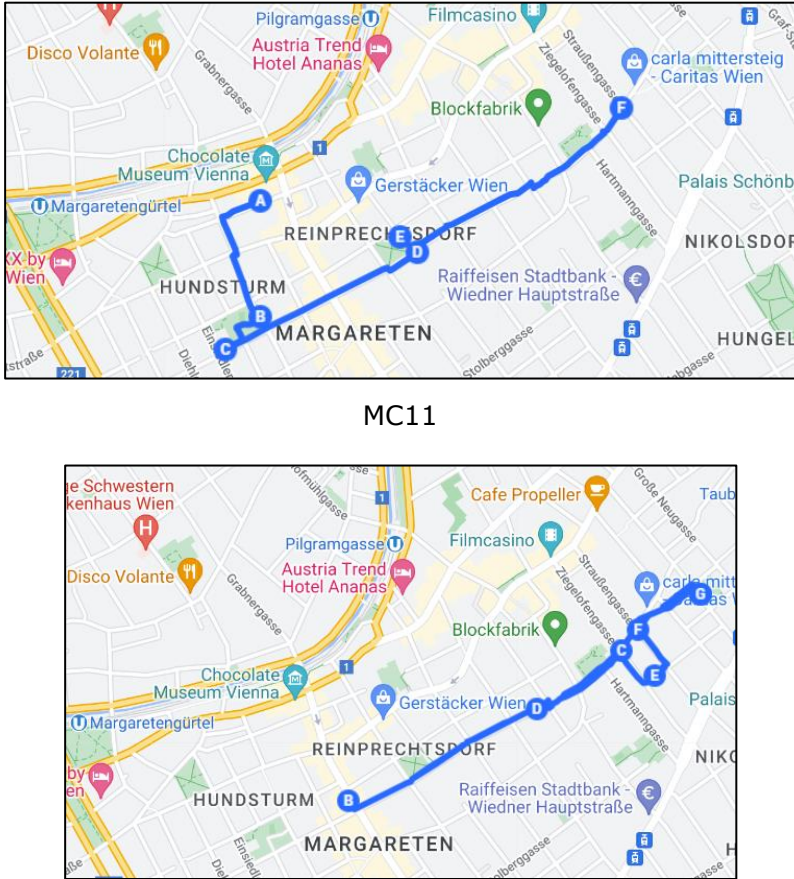
> *"If I were rich, I would not be here! That's why I look for such oases [small area of wilderness in a public park in Vienna], which make me happy or refuel my energy. And I want that also for the children. I don't need to walk much, I must take a few more steps. But a lot of people don't take those steps, I think..."* (Mother, go-along with MC13, 13.10.2021)"

Considering the differences and divergencies between administrative divisions on one side, represented and lived neighborhoods on the other side, I also report nodes and landmarks which the families consider as part of their neighborhoods even if they belong to other districts, from an administrative point of view. The descriptions of the neighborhoods of residence and the nodes, edges, and landmarks (Lynch, 1990) listed later in this section reveal that the families` geographies, especially children`s, include not only institutional and formal spaces such as schools and parks, but also consume and interstitial spaces. As visible from the illustrations, because of the subjective perspective of pedestrians, the paths tended to cover smaller areas in dense, inner-city neighborhoods. Instead, the mental maps of what was considered as neighborhood included broader areas in the big, less dense neighborhoods East of the Danube, as well as in less central districts such as the 14. or the 23.[99] Neighborhoods of residence seemed to stay central in the participant families` everyday lives, as found out also by previous studies (Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014), notwithstanding the fact that they occasionally used other urban islands for educational, recreational, or functional purposes.

Walk-alongs in the families` neighborhoods of residence under their lead represented the core of fieldwork and saw the participation of children alongside their parents, and in a few cases also on their own. For most go-alongs, below I report the illustrations of the paths, which I created with the digital tool Google My Maps. In 5 cases, because of contingent situations or children`s desires, tours evolved into trails (Kusenbach, 2018), which means that I and research participants stopped at one place or moved limitedly and then spent some time in a single place. For these 5 cases, I do not report the illustrations of the paths because it makes more sense to simply list the one or two places we visited, rather than to show their position. The omission of these illustrations is also influenced by privacy considerations, given that one of these points was typically the family home and its yard, or the school attended by the children. Ethical reasons also guided my decisions to exclude the important urban nodes constituted by family homes from the depiction of the paths, and to list the relevant places in the neighborhood in shuffled order.

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[99] All the maps use the same scale (15 on Google Maps).

The illustrations and textual entries in the table below convey specific information about the neighborhoods of residence, which may be of interest for the Gebietsbetreuung, the City of Vienna, and other public institutions and third sector organizations operating in Vienna and with local focus on specific neighborhoods and districts. More in general, it has the function of situating the opinions and discourses on quality of life in physical space, showing local specificities and internal differences between Viennese neighborhoods.

District (and neighborhood)	The families describe it so...	Relevant places for the families (paths, nodes, edges)	Illustration of the paths of the go-alongs
5., Margareten	**Mother**: Where they live is the 'good part' of the district, similar to the city center. The neighborhood where they live as small town made of homeowners and families with children. Prevalence of Austrians, otherwise multiculturalism tempered by high educational levels (vs migrants from third countries and with low socioeconomic and cultural level in the other part of the neighborhood). Contacts with the other half of the district through schools and institutions for after-school activities. Solidarity among mothers and mutual help with childcare. Sense of public familiarity in parks (vs sense of insecurity and fear in the other, more chaotic and dirty part of the 5. district). My reflection: her cognitive and emotional map of the	Visited with mother and child: Einsiedlerpark (1. "cruel"[100] park); Bacher Park (2. "cruel" park); Schütte-Lihotzky Park ("second living room") primary school; Hort; music school Visited with child only: ice-cream shop, pizzeria, Rubenspark, Wanda-Lanzer-Park ('mixed-age park')	 MC11 C11[101]

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[100] Denomination given by the child.

[101] As the label C11 suggests, this go-along took place without the presence of any parent. As the mother needed to go back to home office, the child guided me on a small continuation and supplement of the neighborhood tour we had just done together with his mother.

	neighborhood of residence is built in contrast with the feeling of insecurity and fear in the other district part. **Child**: Fear and avoidance of the "cruel" parks. It is the friends who make the place. -I, the researcher: "Is there anything you would change about the neighborhood where you live, the places you hang out?" -C11: "Yes, that all my friends live closer to me." (Go-along C11) "Friends are important to us [his sister and him]." (Go-along C11)		 *The child draws his neighborhood nodes and himself moving from one to the other by push scooter* *Wanda-Lanzer-Park (mixed-age park)[102]*
6., Mariahilf	**Mother:** "So, I live very close to the Mariahilfer Strasse, which anyway is a chaotic, lived-in street, but I have the luck to be in a side street, and there is	Places visited together: Minna-Lachs-Park; gallery with street art Sonnenuhrgasse-	

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[102] *Go-along in the 5. district on 31.05.2021. Photo taken by C11 in the Wanda-Lanzer-Park, which he presented to me as a multiage park. Pierluigi taught me how to take good panoramic photos with a smartphone.*

total peace here. Really, you don't hear cars, people, anything. It seems to be in another world than the Mariahilfer. So, I have everything at my fingertips, fortunately, because really walking 4 minutes I am on the Maria, and yet in tranquility. […] More or less, I always see the same people, because here where I live there are also many schools, kindergartens, so we always hang out with the same moms, dads, grandparents in the morning." (Interview with M8) "This is a double-edged sword for me, because anyway normally, when life is all normal, I work, my work is stressful, and I mean, whatever I've done over the years, even a beer with my friend, I was like "Let's go on the Maria!", right? Because I have everything here, at my fingertips, I don't have to stress because the underground, the bus… So, knowing that it's all so close has kind of penalized me in discovering Vienna. I've been focusing only on	Liniengasse; Vinzenz-von-Paul-Park (which the mum calls 'park of the 7 steps'); school; after-school activities (Italian and gymnastic course) Relevant especially to the child: shops, ice-cream dealer, and fast-food restaurants on the Mariahilfer Straße; fountains and vaporizers; insider shortcuts, galleries, and passages	 MC8

the Mariahilfer and on what I have here. Why going far away, if I have everything here?" (Interview with M8)

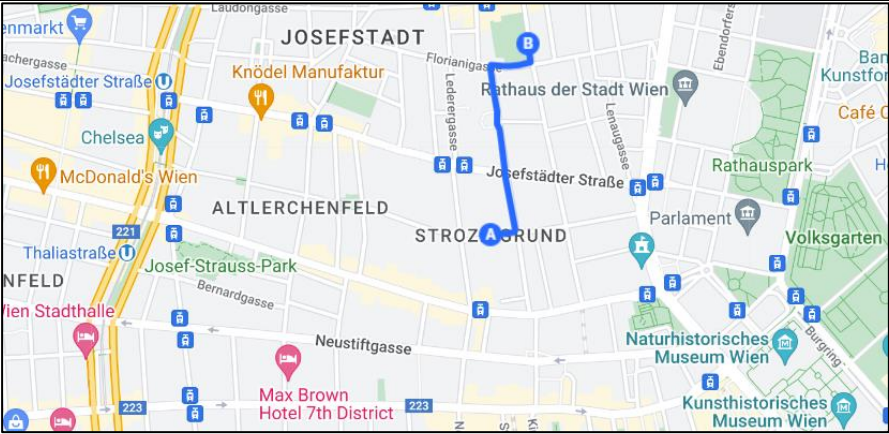Public familiarity but it is difficult to establish relationships:
- "Sometimes I have the feeling that I`m back in the village." (Interview with M8)
- "Here it`s a little bit more like a village now, for me." (Interview with M8)

Child: She loves moving around by push scooter; taking shortcuts by using side streets and passages; going shopping in shops in the main street and taking part in artistic and leisure outdoor events (lure of consume).

Gallery with street art Sonnenuhrgasse-Liniengasse

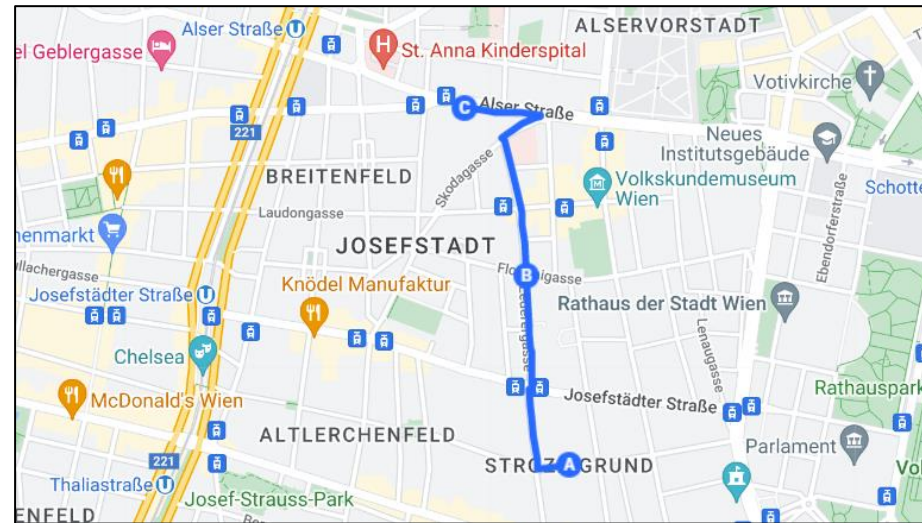| 8., Josefstadt | **Mother:** "In my opinion, good here is the fact that – which is why I was telling you that in my opinion Vienna is not a big city – I mean, it's a big city but it's not a metropolis – because you can really do everything in your neighborhood. And I realize that I have very little downtime, because the school is 10 minutes away, the kindergarten is around the corner. I mean, if one organizes one's existence in a way... I mean, without picking the school on the other side of Vienna, you have the possibility to do everything really on your doorstep, which is not possible in Italy. I mean, you must take the car to do activities and so on." (Interview with M6)

Bikeable district

Father: "functional, practical"; inconvenience of renovation and | Schönbornpark, mixed-age park and "the Italians` park", and a pizza restaurant nearby[103]; Altes Akh in Alßer Strasse; Hamerlingpark; Tigerpark; primary school and kindergarten; ice-cream shop in Alser Straße and informal space for sociability with benches next to it; painting course and music course; 'indoor-playground' JoJo and WIENEXTRA-Spielebox (game room) |
MC6 a

Schönbornpark |

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[103] Many interviewees noticed a concentration of Italians in the 8. district. Official data reveal that Italians are the third most numerous migrant community in the district (Stadt Wien, 2022, https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/pdf/bezirke-in-zahlen-8.pdf) Some people see the danger of auto-segregation in this (upper-class) Italian bubble: "There you find the world of Italians in Vienna, all the pizzerias, the [Italian] gynecologist. So, you start there and there you stay, because it's all there. The Italian pediatrician... Everything is there." (Mother out of sample)

|		
construction works (streets, underground, buildings); problems with car parking. (Interview with F6) **Children:** Need for movement (they jump, run); appropriation of public space with other children (chalk drawing on the sidewalk); use of their mother`s old analog camera in the city. They notice objects along the way and transform them through their imagination.		 *Schönbornpark* MC6 b
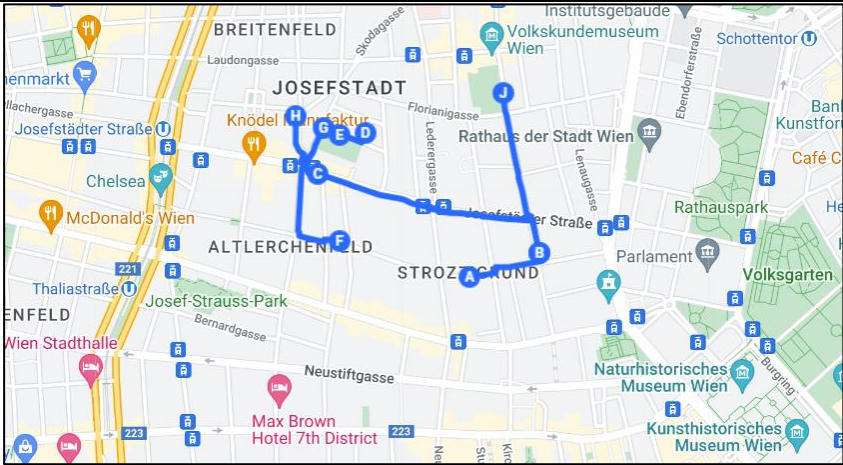
			MC6 c *Tigerpark*
14., Penzing	**Mother:** Green and quiet Neighborhood as village – 'slippers neighborship' (*Patschennachbarschaft*, in German)	Primary school; inner yard; Ferdinand Wolf Park; Dehnepark; Paradies Gründe (wood with playground);	MC14 a, MC14 b

	Small conflicts between families with children and elderly neighbors Well-connected by public transport "We missed nature a lot. So, we wanted to move out of the 9. district, that was a small apartment, and by then we had already planned to have children. We thought "Okay, then we want to move farther, towards the green, so that we can on the one hand have a larger apartment, on the other hand be a little closer to nature." And this [the flat they found] was not so far from the center, but the building had a huge, green courtyard, and that was very nice. At first, we thought "Ok, but then it takes so long until we are in the central city". We were not so sure that we would be fine in the 14., because we used to be party people before and needed pubs, drinking beer, and action. And then we found out that we don't miss anything here in the outer part of the city. […] And here we concluded:	swimming pool Hütteldorferbad; Wienfluss, emissary channel of the Danube (where to walk or bike on the bike lane); shopping center Auhofcenter, where they go shopping and use an indoor playground; sports centers spread around in Vienna (e.g., in the 1. and 22. district)	

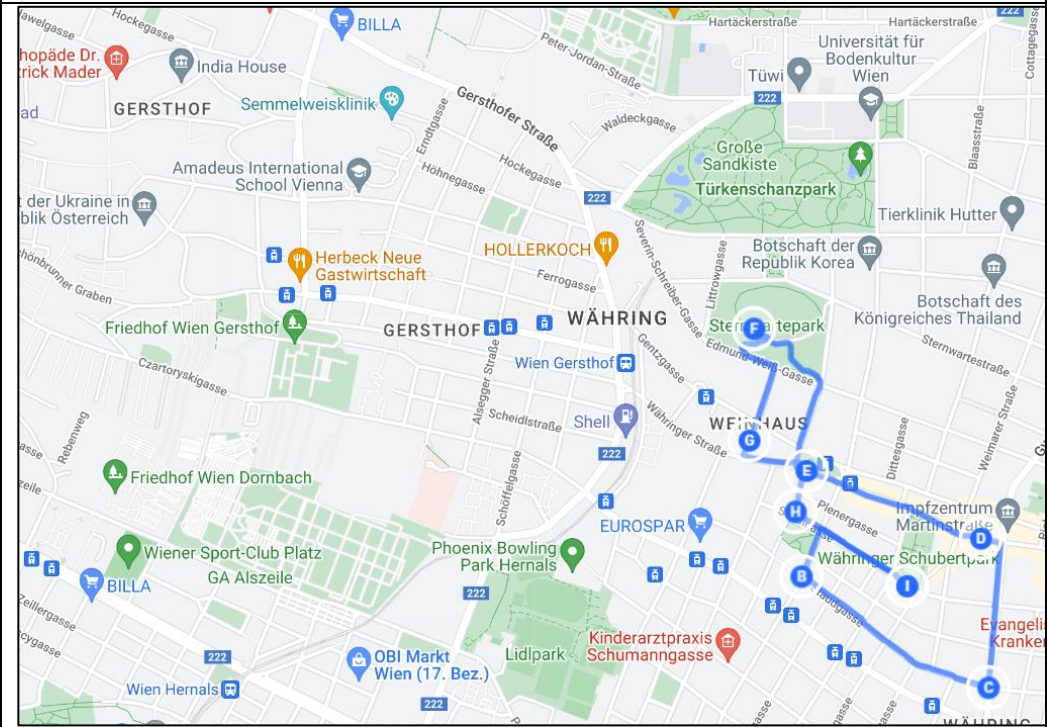|			
	"Ok, we can always go farther away from the central city". […] And [from the place they currently live] within half an hour, three quarters of an hour, you`re actually everywhere. (Interview with M14) **Children:** Friends from the condominium. Intensive use of the courtyard. Play with natural objects (stones, branches) and contact with animals (insects, snails).		
16., Ottakring	**Mother:** Perceived numerosity of people with migrant background and families with children. Neighborhood as community "I really like the 16th district. Having a family helps a lot to have contacts with the area, because after school we meet with the other moms, who stay at least for an hour or so in the little park. Now, in the lockdown period, we met with the kids anyway. […] And it's also a neighborhood with a big immigration background. That also makes it interesting for me. […] I	Playground Schmelz, Ottakringer Bräuerei Second pole of everyday activities spatially far away from neighborhood of residence (near kindergarten of smaller sibling): Campus of Universität Wien/ Altes Akh, Schönbonnpark	 *Playground Schmelz with oblong shape. The children observe passers by walking their dogs.*

think you experience this aspect, just perfect for a family, of a small community. [...] For example, we are 80% of families with small children in my building. And we have an inner garden, so the children also play by themselves downstairs. And we meet mostly with families, so there is the park, there are the two parks near the school." (Interview with M9)

Children: The playground Schmelz is oddly shaped, oblong, like a strip. It borders with sports fields (still closed due to Covid-19 regulations, at the time) and athletics tracks on both sides and is fenced all around. Next to the play area there is a sidewalk where many dogs pass. This 'dog parade' is a huge attraction for children, who comment, laugh, draw their moms' attention to one or the other dog. Children's use of this space is surprising: they show a marked preference not for the large area with plastic toys, but for the small 'woodland' area including small trees that the

The children`s favorite place was neither the equipped playground nor the sand box (places for children), but an empty space with trees at the margins of the park, farther away from their mothers (children`s place).

	children climb on and a small empty space near the fence from which they can watch people pass by on the sidewalk, many of them with their dogs, and do symbolic play (e.g., the family, the butterfly and other plays). (Ethnographic log about go-along MC9)		
18., Währing	**Mother:** Mixed district with green part with prevalence of Austrians and gray part with prevalence of migrants. The Währinger Straße is perceived as an edge dividing the 'proletarian', ugly, and depressing part of the district from the green, healthier, richer, and snobbish one. The neighborhood where they live is perceived as gray, ugly, labyrinthine, and depressing. Anonymous and sad streets near their home. The mother does not go for walks there because it makes her sad but seeks nature elsewhere. Feeling of constriction „You are embedded in concrete here." (Go-along MC13, 13.10.2021)	Währinger Schubertpark with common garden Beethafen; primary school; Martinstraße and Währingerstraße; Sternwartepark ('small green oasis', 'island' nearby); Pötzleinsdorfer Schlosspark (called 'Ötzipower' by the eldest sibling); restaurant; general hospital (AKH-Allgemeines Krankenhaus)	 MC13

The general hospital "is visible also from Mars". Element of the daily landscape but avoided place of fear and sadness, alone for its physical appearance.

The streets nearby are gray and without a single shop, desolate. The shopping streets are loud, trafficked, too expensive for them. Dislike of this strict division between boring residential and chaotic commercial area. The parents do not bring the children there because they would insist on buying expensive stuff. The mother quickly goes alone when she needs to buy something. (Mother, go-along with MC13)

The woman needs nature, her husband likes urban liveliness and sociability. Neither lively as a city nor close to nature as a village. "He likes the 18. district less, because for him it's all lifeless. Only on the main street there are always stores, for example, but on the side streets it's barren,

The children look for colorful objects in less colorful streets

nothing. For example, in Palermo he's used that in every street, no matter where you go, there's always a little store, there's always someone who doesn't always go there because he or she lives there, but because there's also a reason to go there, or it's just lively." (Woman tells of her husband, go-along MC13, 06.01.2021)

Sternwartepark as a small oasis of nature and beauty within walkable distance for the everyday. No classic park (e.g., there are no benches), and thus quieter. They reach Pötzleinsdorfer Park by car more than once weekly.

Child: A map of the Schubertpark and the common garden Beethafen looks like a treasure map to her; attentive to the few colorful elements (motorbikes, cars) in the gray streets close to the hospital; attracted by the shops in Währinger Straße. In Sternwartepark, the child collects leaves and stones and sniffs the 'snail smell'.

Sternwartepark, oasis or island in the neighborhood

Temporary natural collections in Sternwartepark

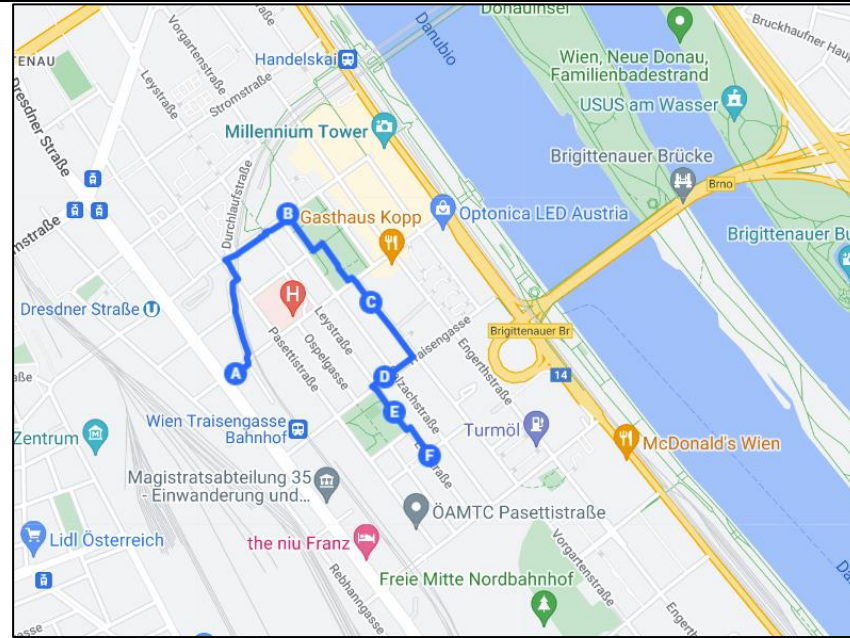| 20., Brigittenau | **Mothers:** The Danube is only 10 minutes away and they often go there. Good walkability and close to the city center. Feeling that "everything" can be reached within 15-20 minutes by public transport.

Quiet, not too trafficked

A lot of migrants from third countries, which makes the neighborhood lively and not too snobbishly chic, but also dirtier and less taken care of. "But, on the other hand, it's good, because the people who live here are much more flexible. I hear that in more elegant neighborhoods you can't play ball and you can't be loud or such, and here they're a little more relaxed. It has both sides." (Mother, go-along with MC3)

Place of passage:
- „But in the long term, I don`t think that I will not grow old here."
- "But I can imagine that we will move away in 1-2 years, and maybe want to go a bit more into the | Mortarapark, Allerheiligenplatz and Allerheiligenpark, Millennium City (shopping center), Romawiese (recreational place along the danube), Donauinsel (Danube island), primary school, ice-cream place, Turkish shop where they buy candies and sweets, Vorgartenstraße (very liked because of front yards), Am Rollerdamm, Treppelweg, Spielplatz bei Brigittenauer Brücke II |
MC3
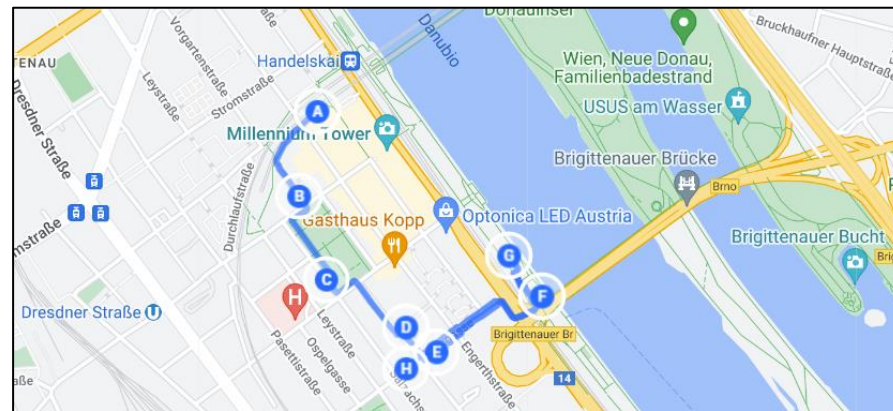
MC4 |

green […]. (Interview with M4)

"It`s not a typical Viennese district. So, it's not like the central city, there is little Art Nouveau and less old buildings. It's a very mixed district. There are many, many people of all nationalities, I find it great, also at my son's school. There are parts that are also very cozy, a bit Nestroyplatz and nearby, where there are cafés that are closed now, of course [due to the pandemic]. So, we can't go to cafés. It's great that the Danube island is around the corner here. So, that's wonderful. […] Here the atmosphere is a bit simpler, but we like living here. [...] But we had little time for that, so we didn't get to know the real Brigittenauer flair, we don't know that. We know the school, we know the stores, and that's it. That's really a pity. But from the architectural point of view, for example, it's quite uninteresting, I think. So, there are these residential housing blocks from the
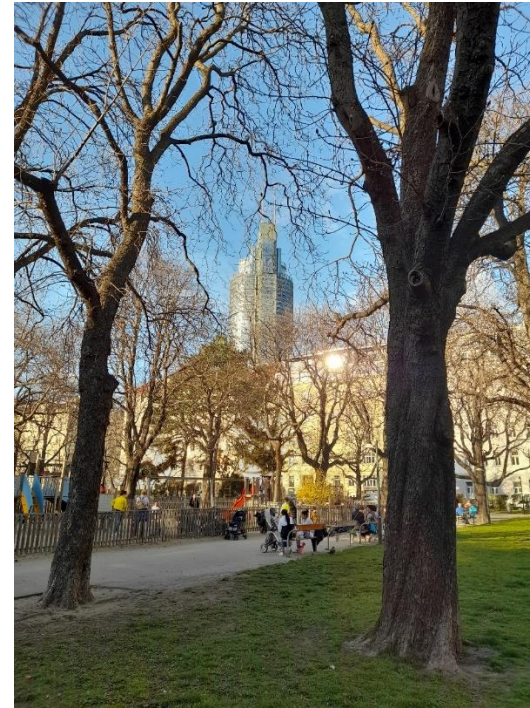
Allerheiligenpark with the shopping center Millennium City in the background

60s and 70s." (Interview with M4)

(About the meadow Romawiese, along the Danube)
-M3: "This is one of the favorite places for us."
-C3: "Not just for us, almost for everyone."
-M3: "For everyone here, yeah. We always meet people from school there, friends. We also go together with..."
-C3: "Even when it's not planned."
-M3: "Even when it's not planned, exactly."
[...]
-M3: "And you don't have to pay there. It's totally free but still always very clean." (Go-along with MC3)

Children: Attraction for the shopping center Millennium City, place of consume. One of the children goes treasure hunting in the neighborhood, alone or with a friend. This means that he looks for interesting objects.

The shopping center Millennium City, point of reference in the neighborhood and place of desire and consume for the children
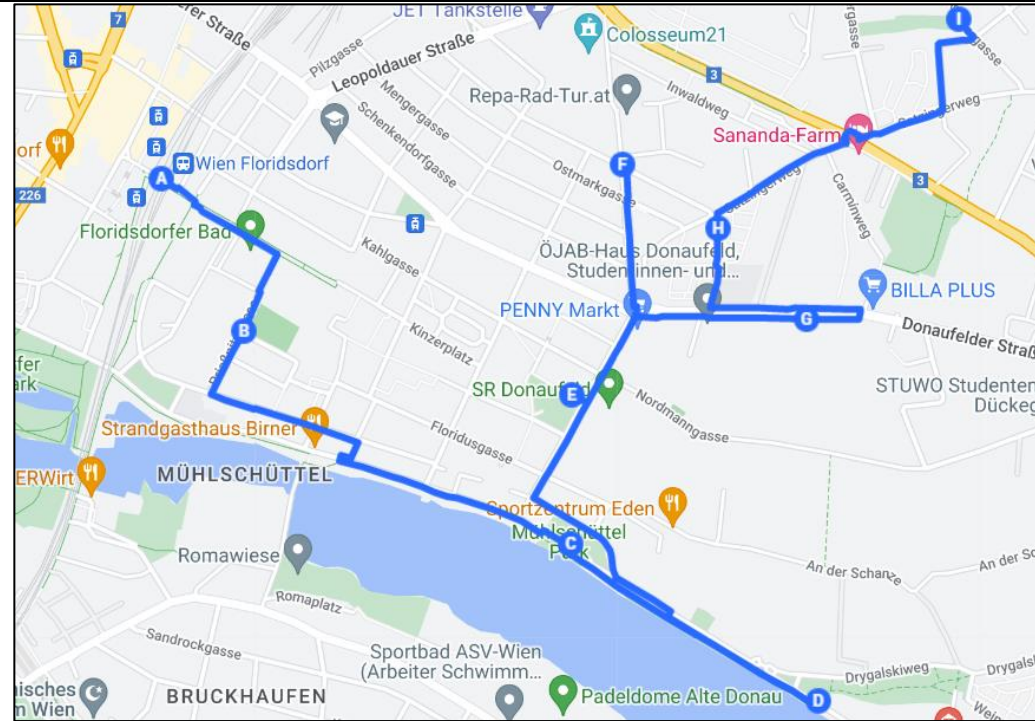

Treppelweg and area along the Danube near the bridge Brigittenauer Brücke

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21., Floridsdorf; 1 family in Donaufeld, 1 closer to the Old Danube	**Parents:** Nature and relative autonomy from the rest of the city, but also good connectivity: "I live in a rural city [laughs], in a way, because we're in the middle of the countryside and still there are the services of a big city. It could be a city in itself, this whole part on the other side of the Danube. It's a city of about fifty thousand inhabitants, or even more, of its own, which has a lot of countryside around it, it's like on the lakeshore, because in a stone's throw you can get your feet soaked in the Danube. [...] It's a beautiful city, not the cities that are called cities just because they have a certain number of inhabitants, but one of those which have services, personality, a little bit of history, a little bit of culture – maybe not necessarily historical culture, but at least culture to use. In the end, here in 20 minutes you can go to the theater, you can go to the opera, if you want, and in as many minutes you're in the middle of Wiesenberg or with your	Vetmeduni (to watch horses and ponies); Florisdorf Bahnhof; playground Krebsgasse; Mühlschüttelgasse (playground where they go with the school); gardening school with animals (peacocks, sheep, ponies and horses); small garden close to the home of child`s friends; Franklinstraße (Florisdorfer Bad, smoth pedestrian zone to roller-skate); Danube promenade An der Oberen Alten Donau, where both children are taken also by their schools; allotment garden with parcels Selbsternte Parzellen Biohof	MC7*Donaufeld is a rapidly growing area. The big empty surfaces are buing built up.*

|		
feet soaking in the Danube." (Interview with F7) Green, bikeable, quiet, with animals "It is almost a place out of this world, but we are 10 minutes from the city center" (Interview with M7) Modern area in rapid expansion with plenty of new buildings, buildings under construction, some big, trafficked streets – they are building a lot, but impression that they are doing it properly, leaving green spaces and taking care of the needs of inhabitants. Less dense district with mixed population with prevalence of the working class. Thus, it is seen as not so favorable for sociability, and the father would not suggest the district to the 'typical' Italian family, which wants to find acquaintances and friends. Affordable housing (cooperative housing). "Microcity," "integration in	Radl; playground with metal toys Satzingerweg 8; primary school; Donaupark; Wasserpark; Angelibad; Danube Island	*Both pictures above: view from the family`s balcony, respectively drawing by C7 and photo.*

the small" (interview with M7) - mix of ages, provenances, social backgrounds in their street (cooperative housing)

Child 7: New constructions means more friends and more private inner yards to play.

Mother 10: Young and sporty. Walkable and relatively safe, despite its bad reputation.

Viennese neighborhood as 15-minute city, differently than the central neighborhoods of the Italian town of provenance: "On weekends, we don't move from here, because we have everything right here. Before, we used to take the car and go shopping here, go there, whereas now we have everything here." (Interview with M10)

Paradox of Vienna, a big city, being less hectic than some medium-sized towns, at least regarding the neighborhood where they live with residential

M7
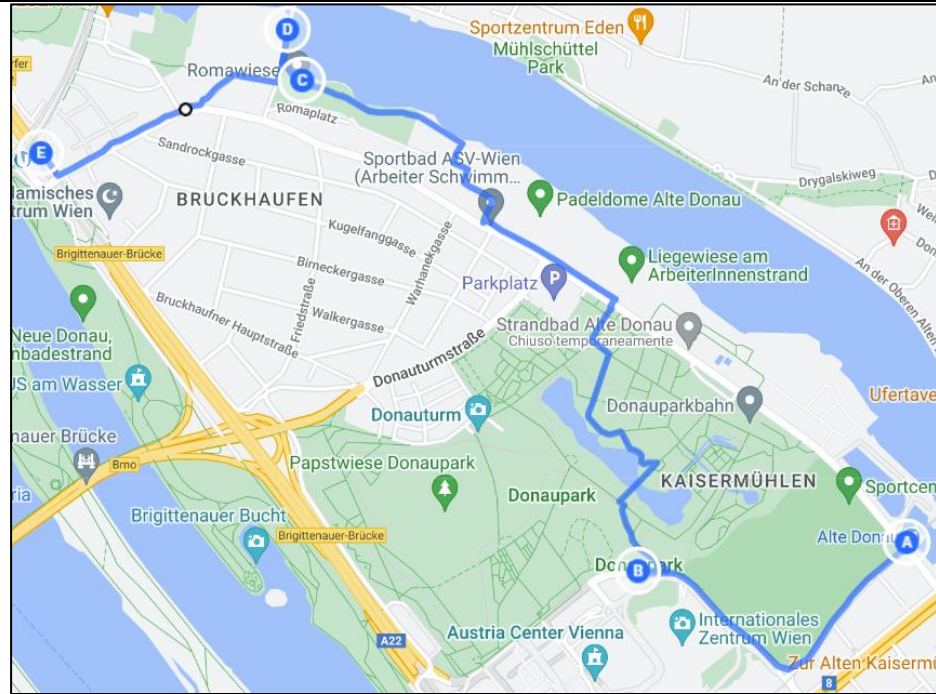
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character. In Central Italy, they used to know more people, so they had more things to do.
-C10: "Here basically there is a shop, then there are a lot of houses, then there is another shop. There, instead, all the shops are next to each other there: the candy store, the bookstore...all attached."
-M10: "You see, it's all residential here." (Go-along with MC10)

Child 10
-I, the interviewer: "Do you like this area?"
-C10: "In general, I don't like Vienna that much. I find it too 'city-like' (in Italian "cittadosa", invented word). I like it either super modern like New York, or just countryside. Instead, so the city is kind of boring." (Go-along MC10)

"For me they are two completely different worlds, Vienna and Urbino. Urbino is just different from Vienna, because Urbino is quieter, and they're all a little bit friendlier, and they talk a little bit more with you,

People bathing in the Danube. Go-along with MC7, June 2021.
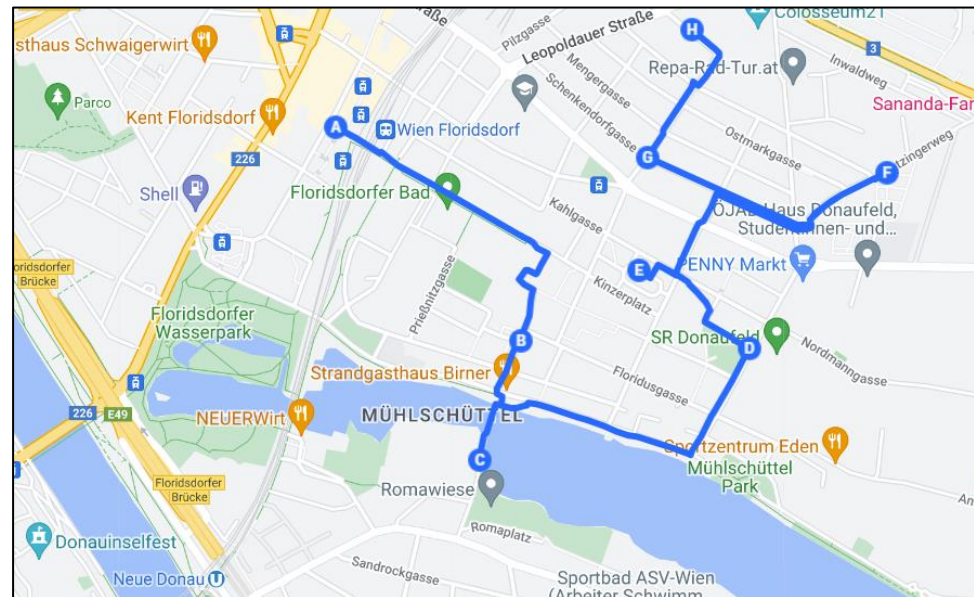
MC10

and it's always sunny, and you know everybody, it's small. Whereas in Vienna it's big, always rowdy, it's always raining. But even like there at the checkout [in supermarkets], in Italy they would start talking, whereas here "Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello." (Online interview with C10)

In Urbino she knew everybody, while in Vienna she knows few people but has some good friends.

In Vienna, she loves to dance and roller skate in her inner yard and in the empty space in front of the building where a friend of hers lives. She also loves going to school autonomously with two friends. Sometimes, she has the feeling that her friends` mums demand organization too much in advance. In Urbino, she was the one to organize afternoon meetings with her friends with little or no advance.

She loved ice-cream shops, pizza restaurants, and a candy shop in Urbino. In her

Area along the Danube where the child often goes to with her school classroom, even more since, or during, the Covid-19 crisis.

	neighborhood in Vienna, she has found a very good Italian ice-cream shop. One of her favorite places in Urbino was a meadow on a hill close to a fortress where she could sit down and enjoy the beautiful panorama of the city. She used to go there with her mum and friends to eat pizza, paint, and play.		
22., Donaustadt, neighborhood Seestadt	**Mother:** "I love this in Seestadt, that you can choose between different types of living. This is – I cannot tell what it is like – it is like you`re closer to nature. And there are some parts which are like a big city feeling, and still, you have the lake. I love living here. At the moment, we say that we don't want to leave the Seestadt, because here we have a lot of choice. If we want, we can separate, if we want, we can be with a lot of people." (Go-along MC1) "Every building has its personality."	Seestadt lake (beaches, "beehive playground[104]", pier); flower garden Hischstetten; temporary Summer carousel; "wooden playground"/ "obstacles playground", "theater playground" (inner yard of Ilse-Arlt-Straße… Maria-Tusch-Straße 6); swimming pool	 MC1

[104] I denominate the playgrounds with the names invented by mother and daughter. In general, inventing nicknames for places and objects is a widespread habit among the families in the sample.

In Summer it becomes like a seaside resort. They feel like being at the Hungarian holiday place Lake Balaton. "This is like when you`re on holiday, but you`re at home. […] It`s a much closer feeling for us, like we are living in Debrecen. We don`t have the feeling that we would be living in a huge, huge capital city." (Notes from go-along with MC1)

Less density, which makes the district seem small: "But this district is all like Debrecen [laughs]. This is not too big for us, this is not too many people for us, not like the city center where there are all those people walking around, and I don't know where to watch my children, how to go around there. So, this is good for us, this is a family-friendly district, I think." (Interview with M1)

Safe neighborhood because of limitations for cars: "This area is family-friendly because cars are not allowed on the streets. They are just on that ring, and where we live, they don't use cars. And I'm

and sandy playground (Que[e]rbau Aspern D22, Agnes-Primocic-Gasse); "airplane playground" in Hannah-Arendt-Platz; "superswing playground" for the child, "socialist building playground" for the mum (Susanne-Schmida-Gasse); open-air waiting room of medical office with benches on the street (Maria-Tusch-Straße); bakery where a friend works; ice cream shop; community garden Madame-d'Ora-Park

Baths and cranes in the Seestadt

calm, "Ok, guys, let's go to the playground alone." I mean, with me but not holding my hand. They can go. So, I love living here." (Interview with M1)

Easy to live in the district without exploring the rest of the city: "Because when you live in these districts, you don't know too far. I think you should know this, because of your studies, that where we live, we know this, and where you don't live, you don't know." (Interview with M1)

A local cat is allowed to go out alone in the evening and everybody in the district knows that he is not lost. This exemplifies the existence of a sense of public familiarity and community.
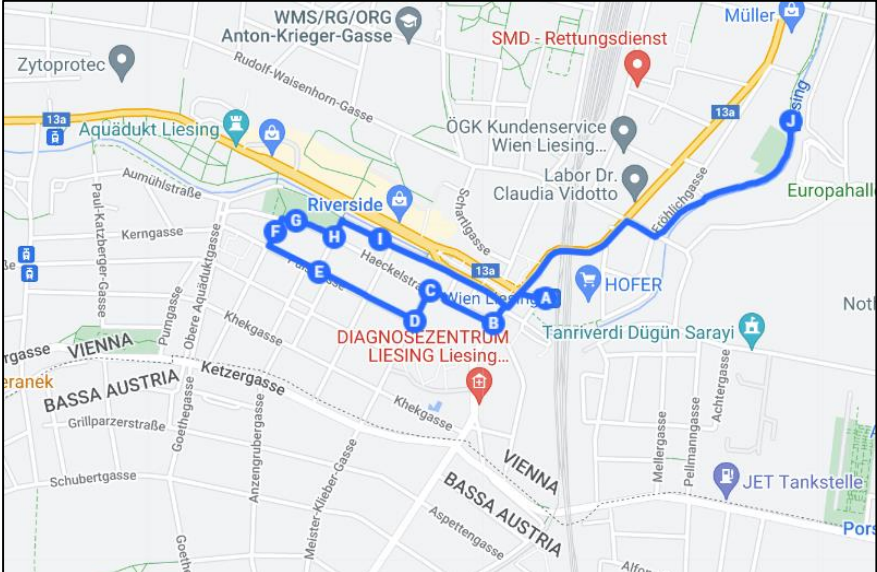
Child: During our go-along, she chooses to move from one shady place to the other, to counter the extreme heat in the neighborhood – the trees are still small and there is a lot of asphalt. Plenty of places to play. She loves to throw stones

Our child tour guide makes us jump around from one shadow to another

Cavities where to hide in the 'wooden playground'/ 'obstacles playground', 'theater playground' (inner yard of Ilse-Arlt-Straße… Maria-Tusch-Straße 6)

	in the lake and to taste fruits at an urban gardening parcel.		
23., Liesing	**Mother**: Still under construction, and thus loud. Peripheral: "We now still live inside Vienna but in the last outskirt." (Interview with M12) Green like Niederösterreich but cheaper and easier/ more convenient for people working in Vienna from the point of view of the cost of public transport: "It is much greener and there is also a different kind of energy, compared to the 5. district, for example, where we were before." (She explained to me that children would be less agitated in the 23. than in central districts, according to her) (Interview with M12) "In front of the train station it's very chaotic, dirty, like all stations. Behind it, instead, there's a lot of green, it's like protected. It's a former industrial area that they reclaimed, I mean, they're regenerating. Near our	Train station, Herbert-Mayr-Park (for mixed ages), shopping center Riverside, playground Ölzetpark (with lots of non-equipped green space, which allows free play), playground in front of home, water channel Liesingbach	 MC12

home there's for example […] a water channel that goes by, and they're improving it, they want to naturalize it. Because before it was all straight, so now they're breaking everything to make it take the natural course, as if it were natural. Actually, they did everything new, also the roads have already been resurfaced, there are a lot of spaces closed to traffic, regarding the internal area between the big buildings. We have a playground between the big buildings, so right in front of home." (Interview with M12) **Child**: Great joy in contact with water – the water channel Liesingbach and the fountain with vaporizer called Brunnhilde.		

Children`s engagement with the city

Since children would not talk about *quality of life* but rather live postverbal, enacted relationships with other children and adults, plants, animals, objects, 'treasures', and places in the neighborhood, I did not label this section with the adult term "quality of life". Children have different ways of conceiving the city and living in it than adults. Children`s participation in this research directed my attention more towards relational than functional and technical aspects of the city: for them, 'with whom' can be more relevant than 'where' and 'what'. Children`s representations and ways of acting in the city vary considerably according to several elements. The kind of neighborhood of residence, the historical and social situation of the pandemic, and children`s age are the main elements my research needed to devote particular attention to. The parents of 6- to 11-year-olds in the sample seemed to agree that children strongly influence the organization and pace of family life, and that the children`s needs and desires change over time. From the research, I learn that children`s behavior in the city is often not straightforward to an adult`s eye, also because it is influenced by the contingent situation and by the way a child feels in that moment of the day. For instance, it sometimes happened that the children in my sample suddenly felt the need to rest, drink, eat, or take a break from uncomfortable shoes, and this influenced the course of the ongoing go-along. As the two narrative cameos below show, children can use the city in playful ways and find new functions for objects and spaces. In other cases, the children would show a surprising sensitivity for technical issues.

It is a sunny afternoon in June. Elisabetta and her 7-year-old daughter Camilla are guiding me on a tour in the neighborhood where they live, Liesing, in the South part of Vienna at the border with Lower Austria.

In the course of our afternoon, I realize that Camilla does not seem to like conversing much, at least not with me, who am still a semi-stranger to her. She answers in monosyllables to my questions. Her mom backs me up and raises, elaborates, mediates my questions, but with little result. However, she seems to love to jump, climb, roll, and get dirty. During our neighborhood walk, she jumps, as if playing hopscotch on an invisible field, and climbs a small public gate. My impression is that she is a kinesthetic rather than a verbal type, referring to Howard Gardner's intelligence types.

Especially when we arrive at the water channel, she enters the world of play. Throughout the rest of the meeting, she continues to play on her own or with us. Camilla puts her feet in the Liesingbach (water channel), splashes herself, rolls herself in gravel and sand, and digs sand and river pebbles. Not 7 years old yet, she is still in the phase of symbolic play: she picks a twig from the riverside and curves it to let it become a fishing rod; she digs a large stone out of the water channel and makes a telephone out of it, which we use to have a brief conversation with each other; she then turns a seaweed into Nutella, which she uses as icing to decorate the top of her rock-cake. When it`s time to leave the river, she runs up the smooth and steep part of the ramp, instead of using the steps, to reach the sidewalk.

Mother and daughter show me an object with two drinking fountains and a steamer, installed by the City of Vienna and located near their home, which bears what sounds like a person`s name to me, Brunnhilde. The child loves it because it cools and because the "spray" of vaporized water seems to move, maybe under the effect of the Viennese wind, and is anyway located at a higher level than the child, who thus needs to "chase" it. We pass it twice during our tour today. On the second time, Camilla insists on going drinking alone and asks her mother and me to wait for her. From a distance, we see her playing with the cool spray on her own.

Camilla experiences the city with all senses, going barefoot in the river channel, on grass, sand, and gravel. She wrinkles her nose when she smells the stench of sewage water. Kinesthetic style and biophilia go hand in hand: Camilla seems a keen and curious observer of the details of the natural world including animals, plants, and objects. For example, in a big street she notices a huge spider on a wall. Along the way, she picks first a daisy, then a green stem like an ear of wheat, then twigs, then stones. While we are hanging

around by the water channel, she notices that one of the big rocks on the riverside bears the teeth marks of an excavating machine. (Adaptation of the ethnographic notes about the go-along with MC12)

Water channel Liesingbach on a festive day. Photo taken during go-along with MC12

It is a warm, sunny afternoon in June and I have an appointment for a neighborhood tour of the 8. district with a mum and her two children. Before going for it, we decide to eat an ice-cream together. The unexpected encounter with two befriended mums and two other children in front of the ice-cream shop turns the plan for the afternoon from a tour into a trail, the second one being a more natural and unpredictable situation.

While we adults sit in the area with benches in front of the ice cream shop, the 4 girls notice and occupy a small green strip placed next to a flowerbed and the benches where the adults are sitting. There are also a hole from construction work – they are probably putting new water pipes – and a trafficked street nearby. A couple of trees make shadow and delimit the space, ensuring some privacy. In this way, the children temporarily appropriate a residual, interstitial urban space that the adults hadn`t even noticed and use it to create their own informal second 'living room' near and parallel to that of us adults but autonomous, in a space not thought of by adults for that function.

The children bring some croutons as snacks to their 'living room' and start drawing on paper sheets and, using chalks, on the street asphalt. A hopscotch grid and a colorful mandala appear on the asphalt. When her mother and I approach Rossana, we discover that she has made a beautiful drawing on paper depicting the facade of a historic building which stands on the other side of the street and before our eyes. We adults hadn`t noticed that beautiful building and see it for the first time through the child`s drawing. Sometimes, I have the impression that children are much more aware of beauty, of the aesthetic aspects of urban space, and more in general of non-functionalistic ones, than adults. A little later, the children jump off the bench and use the bike sharing poles for push-ups. They are building what William Corsaro calls peer cultures, playful practices among children but in communication with the world of adults.[105]

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[105] William Bill Corsaro takes distance from individualistic theories, such as the classics of developmental psychology, studying universal processes of adaptation and interiorization regarding all children as singular and isolated individuals and points out to the importance of collective processes. According to Corsaro, children participate at the same time in peer cultures and in adults` cultures, which are interwoven. Far from being mere imperfect imitators of the adult world and passive objects of socialization, meant as

Their interstice of play in the city is suddenly threatened by the closeness of the street, as some chalks roll down the curbside towards the road and the girls move towards the street to retrieve them, causing the intervention of us adults. Until streets are dominated by car traffic, beautiful, worry-free 'open-air living rooms for children' are a short-lived parenthesis of transgression to the generational spatial order in the city.

At one point, the 3 youngest girls get off the sidewalk and stand behind a parked car. The mother Fiorenza and I approach them, while another mum shouts to get away from there, that it is dangerous. Finally, we notice that the girls are looking at an insect on the ground, another example of children`s biophilia. They follow the insect with excited shrieks. The tension is gone and Fiorenza exclaims cheerfully "Long live nature!" (2. go-along with MC6)
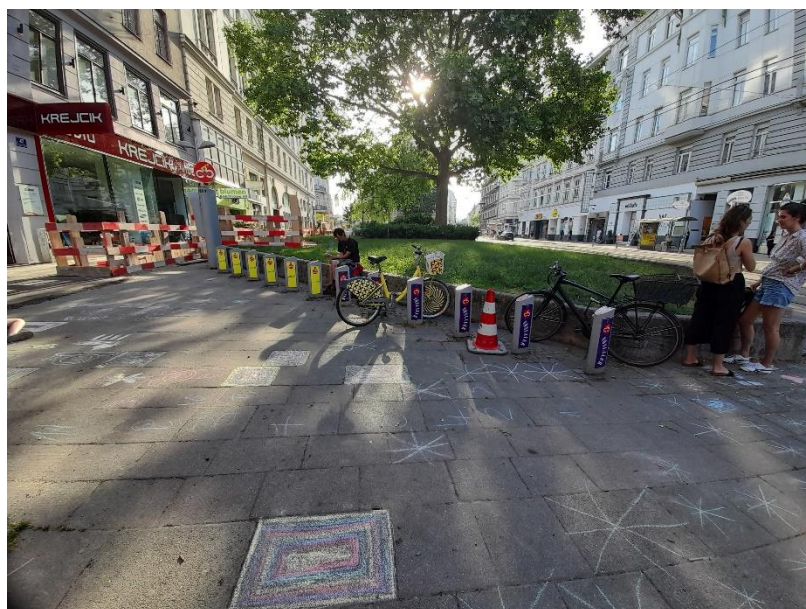
Improvised living room near the street

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preparation for future adult life, children are active actors able to enact processes of *interpretative reproduction* of the cultures they participate in (Corsaro, 2018).

Smaller children in the sample showed themselves as active and playful in their use of the city and its objects, keen to use their senses and affects. During go-alongs, the children would use random objects in the city to create their personal open-air gym or playground. They were particularly sensitive to sensory aspects such as lighting conditions and temperatures (sun and shadows, water), tastes and smells. So, they would smell and taste during go-alongs and look for shadow on sunny summer days. The paths they preferred for our neighborhood walks were not always the shortest, and they noticed several details thanks to their floating attention and their non-functional goals. In Vienna, like in other parts of Western countries, this approach towards the city is partly explained by the fact that children are normally exempted from the labor market and other duties. Their role is affective rather than productive, their value unquantifiable (Satta, 2020b, chapter 3). Children have their own agency and peculiar ways of living the city, sometimes also their jealously safeguarded secrets and small transgressions to their parents` rules and directives. It would be naïve and incorrect to consider children`s agency in the city as direct manifestation of their alleged original nature, overlooking the influences of adult and peer cultures, advertisement, and media. As I discovered, children can be very fond of consumes.

The children seemed to search for spatiotemporal *interstices of everyday life*, as they produced and negotiated the use of *children`s places and times*, counterposed to spaces *and time for children* (Kogler, 2019; Rasmussen, 2004; Satta, 2012). C*hildren`s places and times* are created or appropriated by children individually and collectively in the empty spaces of freedom that the adult world accords to them. They carry symbolic and affective meanings and can sometimes be seen as a form of resistance to the generationally connoted spatial order. As an example of spatial interstices to play with peers and reclaim autonomy, I had the impression that the children in the sample especially appreciated those inner yards which offered them the opportunity to retreat from adults` control, when they wanted to.

> *All apartments in the complex, as far as I could see, have balconies from which the apartment dwellers can look out. In this way, parents can check on their children`s play. Today, I saw two fathers on balconies. However, there are several spaces not visible from the balconies, especially stairs and ramps with green strips of lawn on either side, where the children love to run around and play undisturbedly.* (Ethnographic notes on go-along MCF14, 26.02.2021)

Counterposed to *children`s places and times, spaces and times for children* are instead external adult products of parents, educators and guardians fulfilling their responsibilities towards children. *Spaces for children* are islands artificially created in the city by adults exclusively for children with the goal of educating them and organizing their free time in a constructive way, from an adult point of view (schools, music schools, sports centers for children, playgrounds etc.). Analogously, *time for children* is the one parents manage to put aside and carve from salaried and domestic work, making efforts and feeling guilty of being bad parents if it does not succeed in the measure they deem as appropriate. *Children`s times*, instead, are the small unregulated timeslots during the day which children can use as they want.

In a trafficked street full of stimulations, the children noticed a 'hidden face' formed by glasses left on a hydrant. Go-along with MC6 in November 2021.

Older child research participants, especially boys, found and created additional places in virtual worlds, even more since the pandemic. Both the drastic reduction of time spent outdoors and the kind of environment the children met and created online raised worries in the parents. For example, the mother M15 repeatedly remarked that the children`s use of the city would depend on their age. She explained that she used to spend 2 or 3 hours every day at parks near home with her children, when they were smaller. While expressing her perplexities about the possibility that her ten-year old son participated in the research, M15 revealed me that his use of the neighborhood of residence was extremely limited and "friend-dependent" by the time of the research, as he had become 'older'. She also shared her belief that the online channel was the only possible one for me to research with her son.

> *"I mean, one thing is me, another thing is them. Even simply to get them out for a walk I must yes [laughs] do quite a lot... I mean, when they were younger it was a different story. [...] Yes, they walk to reach school, one goes through a park. So, this walk could be done, but beyond that, other than going to the park we, I mean, I don't know..."* (Interview with M15)

Another mother wished for didactic activities to restart in presence at school soon, so that her son would need to leave his bed and unwire the cables of his devices.

> -M10: *"She actually does a lot of things compared to Giorgio [teenage son and C10`s brother], who is always on top of his bed with his cell phone and headphones. Oh, man! In fact, I can't wait for school to start again."*
> -C10: *"In fact, his hair will be taking the shape of the headphones soon."* (Go-along with MC10)

During the go-along with MC4, as we passed through a shopping center, the child insisted on visiting MediaMarkt. He wanted to buy, or at least have a look at, the objects of desire: tablets, computers and more. His mother pointed out that the shops were closed due to a lockdown and, since the child was getting tired of walking together, we went to the family`s home. There, the child received a phone call from a friend, who pressured him to buy an ARG virtual game, which caused a discussion between C4 and his mom. Soon afterwards, with our permission, the child started playing on some kind of Gameboy while being on a video call with his friend, who was also playing from his own home.

To recapitulate, the research revealed that smaller children enjoyed playing in parks and inner yards, as well as using institutional free time offers targeted to them, whereas pre-adolescent (from about the age of 9), especially boys, tended to progressively lose interest in spending time in public and semi-public spaces in the neighborhood and gain interest in playing and encountering peers online, each from his or her home. The reduction of social contacts imposed to counter the Covid-19 pandemic probably played a role in this withdrawal. Especially during the pandemic crisis, pre-teens tended to associate friendships with media purchase and consume.

Sociability and social capital between formality and informality

This section is devoted to relationships with people outside the family which vary in their degree of intimacy from public familiarity to friendship, passing through acquaintanceship. I operate a distinction between the two capabilities *sociability* and *social capital*. With sociability, I refer to the concrete opportunity for encounters with other people to satisfy the human need for company, affiliation and, especially for children, play. This capability is valuable in itself, regardless of the benefits which may possibly derive from it, and is influenced by the availability, accessibility, and quality of urban spaces, as well as by time availability. With social capital, I refer to the access to relationships which, in turn, give access to advantages such as practical and emotional support or information to use the city, with focus on the functional and instrumental sides of relationships. As already noted, the Capability Approach shows the difference and the gap between the existence and the effective possibility to use urban spaces and services. Social capital is a conversion factor which emerged as fundamental to covering this gap in Vienna. Therefore, I propose to view social capital as 'meta-capability' or 'capability of second degree' (see chapter 1). I propose this terminological differentiation between sociability and social capital for analytical purposes. Nevertheless, the borders between the two are often blurred, whereby the same relationship can be expression of both capabilities. In this section, I will first present the main offline and online places of sociability, then reflect on the influence of social capital on the families` capabilities regarding the use of the city of Vienna.

Offline and online places for sociability

The research reveals that in Vienna, similarly than it has already been observed in other European cities (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014), migrant mothers have the role of family referents for public relations. What, to each family, seems to be an accidental consequence of partners` personality traits and individual inclinations appears, in my view, as a systematic effect of the most common kind of gendered division of work, whereby relational work is a specific form of care work (Magaraggia, 2020, section 2.4 on care work).

> *"But, actually, there were some [parental groups], also some interesting ones, and I'm really grateful to Flóra, that she handles this part of getting in touch with other people, somehow."* (Interview with F3)

> *"After the go-along, as we speak over the phone in the evening, Alba says: "Let's say it's*

a natural division, by specific skills and aptitudes". Her husband takes care of banking, bureaucratic and technical stuff; she cooks, keeps in touch with friends, teachers, and other people they know (sociability, social capital, and relations with institutions), takes communicative and organizational tasks. In Alba's words, "I hold the strings of the family." Her husband does not even have the phone numbers of teachers and other parents, she admits." (Ethnographic notes about go-along with M11)

The interview excerpt below shows how women can put their relational competences at the service of their family and (re)modulate their own social networks according to the age and the lifeworld of their children. These, as seen in the previous section of this chapter, influence the lifestyle and practical organization of the family.

> *"And then you look for moms, you don't look for a person who's not a mom, because without kids there's no point. You know, you look mainly for the children to play together as well, to hear Italian as well, right? […] And with the little one I`ll probably start all over again a little bit because you go to kindergarten, you get to know other people, then she goes to school, you get to know other people."* (Interview with Italian mother out of sample and gatekeeper)

A mother with international friendships and keen to cover long distances in the city told me that the fact that her children always insisted on meeting with their school friends, who also lived in the family`s neighborhood of residence, led her to live a much more local life, since the time her children entered kindergarten, and to interact prevalently with the mothers of her children`s friends (Interview with M15).

Whereas mothers handle the relationships of the whole family with the outer world, children provide occasions for sociability in the first place, on one side through the institutions responsible for their education and educational leisure, on the other side through fleeting, but still, sustained encounters in the area of residence fostered by the children`s presence. Being parents represents a powerful commonality to start interacting and building relationships.

> *"But they are always friendships related to kindergarten or school. It's incredible how much our [parents`] socialization[106] went through their [children`s] socialization. I mean, I really met a lot of people at the playground. [...] In London, for example, I had a lot of friends who already lived there, and if I have to think about the new people I met... A few former colleagues, otherwise no one. I mean, I couldn't expand that much. Instead, here I didn't know anybody, when I moved in. So, it's thanks to them [the children] that we built good circles, because otherwise ... [laughs] my husband and me would have just stood there like this [laughs]"* (Interview with M6)

> *"If you go on the street with a child, you strike up conversation if there is another family with children, but not if there are no other children. If the bridge of communication between children is missing, it is out of question."* (Interview with M11)

However, often not even the presence of children manages to break the isolation of these EU-migrant families. It is especially the Italian component of the sample to voice their suffering for

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[106] Erroneous, layman`s use of the word 'socialization' which, in sociology and educational sciences, refers to the processes that lead children and newcomers to become part of a society or one of its specific spheres through formal, informal, and non-formal learning and active participation. This interviewee uses the term instead about finding friends and acquaintances.

the lack of relationships (with locals) in Vienna, attributed to the alleged Austrian coldness and mistrust. Being physically co-present in the same space or having paths that cross each other daily does not automatically mean interacting, and interaction is not the same as friendship. In daily life, places like bars, gyms, and schools, that have the potential of bringing people together, according to the Italian parents, are often the sites of missed opportunities for sociability. Some of the parents seemed stunned that even their children – who were growing up in Austria and, in some cases, had been born there too – struggled with making friends.

> *"It was me, my daughter and my husband at the time, so it was also difficult to find friends, circles. And anyway, the friends I have are Italian, I didn't make friends with any Austrian. Even now that the child goes to school, you can't get a relationship like in Italy. The children always meet after school [at structured after-school activities], at birthdays the friends [schoolmates] are invited... Here, nothing. With a child who is half Austrian! Now she starts to make arrangements for the weekend [to meet with classmates]. But out of 26 children, only with one we managed… I mean, SHE [her child] managed to make friends."* (Interview with M8)

I was impressed to discover that a family that had left Vienna when the children were aged 4 and 8 never visited it in the 4 years when they lived abroad in Italy, with the explanation that they had no relevant relationships to cultivate in Vienna. The Hungarians, instead, mentioned more the lack of spendable social capital in the place of migration as a problematic issue[107].

What about the children? As already mentioned in section 2 of this chapter, I noticed that for the children in the sample places were inextricably bound with their relationships with animals and people there. Sometimes the two things were even overlapping for them (Kogler, 2015). I did not expect "the friends" to be a possible answer to the question about what a child liked in the neighborhood where he or she lived. Nor did I imagine a child to rejoice of the intense construction activity in the neighborhood Donaufeld, which gave her mother some concerns, because in her eyes it meant potentially more child friends in the area and the access to further condominium gardens and inner yards where to play together. In response to the perceived lack of contacts, some families deliberately opted for cooperative housing flats, typically located in districts which are less dense and trafficked than central ones but offer more spaces and opportunities of encounter.

> *"It`s also nice because they grow up together [she had just told me that there are a lot of children in cooperative housing]. And we wanted this because, actually, in the place where we were in the 3rd district, we didn't know anybody. They were all building blocks, but no one knew anyone in the neighborhood. It was a bad thing. Everybody went to work elsewhere, even to school elsewhere. Instead, here it's more that everyone stays here, and goes to school here, does everything here. […] And in my opinion the [city] center, a very busy district downtown […] doesn't give these possibilities of getting together too, I think. At least, it didn't for us."* (Go-along with MC10)

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[107] The Hungarian subsample, more than the Italian one, attributed very high importance to the capability of having contacts with nature.

Moreover, partly as a response to the difficulties they encountered in approaching the natives, that is the Austrians, most of the families in the sample sought the company of co-nationals in the physical or virtual world.

> *"There are a lot of Hungarians here, living here. In our building there are six families all together and two of them, they are really close now, I can say almost friends. Actually, one of the ladies is here [laughs] [was working at the bakery where we were]. And there is a group, Facebook group, for Hungarian mommies in Austria, and they started to meet. One of the girls started to organize mommy workouts, she's now having her fitness trainer education, so she's going to be a trainer, and she organizes these mummy workouts, and from them - we are, there are a few families, we are making friends."* (Interview with M1)

> *"Having said that, the national community is so dense and ubiquitous that we have been able to establish relationships with other Italian moms. So, there is a little bit this aspect, which I think is there a little bit in all foreign communities, which is hanging out with fellow countrymen because you eat the same things, trivially. So, you get invited to dinner, you cook Italian. Or you have the same approach to sociability. You arrive half an hour late and nothing happens."* (Interview with M6)

The families often miss the way of living sociability in the places of provenance, with margins of informality and interstices, and try to find strategies to partially recreate it in Vienna. A woman of South Italian origin in the sample told me a story that shows how culturally influenced ways of sociability characterize the use of public spaces in the city.

> They tell me that once Letizia [the mother] celebrated her birthday in that little park. At about 9 or 9:30 p.m., the janitor of the little park went over to send them away – he wanted to close the gate. Letizia and her friends tried to "befriend him" by offering him a piece of cake and a glass of champagne. The guy was not convinced and said disdainfully that he didn`t drink on duty. I recall that already in the interview Letizia had told me that the relationship with Austrians is a sore point. This episode makes me reflect that Italians in Vienna may sometimes have, in the eyes of Austrians, a sociability similar to that of Filipinos or Peruvians in Milan in the eyes of Italians. (Ethnographic notes about go-along with MC8)

The Facebook and physical groups of Italian and Hungarian mothers in Vienna were points of reference not only for information and help (social capital), but also to feel less lonely (sociability).

The group *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (*Italian moms in Vienna*) was founded in 2007 with the goal of bringing together parents and children of Italian origin in Vienna through regular monthly and weekly meetings, as well as organizing cultural and leisure activities. Getting to know each other and enjoying each other`s company were its main goals, since there were still few Italians in Vienna, back then, and the era of social media had not started yet. In 2011, the group entered Facebook, and in 2014 it became an official registered association. An Italian school was created for the children. In its initial stage, the group included between 20 or 30 mothers who all knew each other and more or less always the same people attended the events. With the passing of time – and the cosmopolitan enthusiasm for Europe of free movement was accompanied by hardship due to the economic crisis – the group became increasingly large and diverse in its

composition and in the drivers of migration. Organizing face-to-face meetings became more complex and demanding and the main focus shifted from place of sociability to platform for information and problem solving. Already before Covid-19, and especially during the pandemic, the online mode took over and the Facebook group became the most active place of interaction for the group.

The group of reference for Hungarian mothers in Vienna, the so-called *Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub* (*Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*), was founded in 2016 and counted 1037 members on 26.02.2021. Most meetings were organized in the 22. district, by the time of fieldwork, a district in rapid transformation on the East side of the Danube. Sometimes, meetings were also organized in the 14. district, which is on the opposite side of the city respective to the 22., where a lot of families lived too. Unfortunately, I could not conduct any participant observation from within as member, since the group is private and secret, namely hidden from non-members.

The two groups differ greatly along the lines:

1) Public versus private;

2) instrumental versus relational;

3) inclusive versus exclusive.

I will now explain the differentiations introduced above.

1) The Italian group was officialized and became a formal association in 2014, while the Hungarian group is not recognized officially and, even more, secret. The publicity of the Italian group is motivated by the will to be found potentially by all Italian mothers (and fathers, as explained later under point 3) living in Vienna or interested to move there. This publicity also allows the group to take advantage of institutional support, for instance, to obtain from a community center by the Municipality of Vienna a free space where to hold monthly meetings to get to know each other.

The group of *Hungarian moms, babies, and children*, instead, is not only closed but also secret. The information about its existence and nature, as well as the inclusion of new members, is left to word of mouth. There is no interest in making the group public, not even to get support from the Municipality of Vienna in terms of free of charge spaces to gather. At my perplexed question about how potentially interested people found the group, the founder explained me that this is made possible by the strong presence and communicativeness of Hungarians in Vienna. It would be easy to find the group, for the ones who really want to.

> "I think it's easy, because... Why? Because there is always a Hungarian woman, at the doctor as an assistant, at Merkur [supermarket], on the subway, everywhere. And I recommended our group also on the subway. [...] If you want to find or search an Austrian group of Hungarian mommies, I think it's easy because there is always a

Hungarian woman who will help you." (Interview with the administrator of the group *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*)

2) Being prevalently based on at least one face-to-face interaction – that with the person who suggests you entering the group – but more often on friendship or acquaintanceship, the group of Hungarian mothers and children in Vienna seems more cohesive and personal than the Italian one. Its aims appear to be primarily affiliative and only in second stance functional. I discovered that the group was also used to share objects (circular economy), but this seemed a side aspect of enjoying mutual company and creating a solidarity network among and for women who had their position as Hungarian mothers in Vienna in common but wanted to get space for themselves as individuals as well, though within the frame of traditional gender roles.

> *"Thanks to internet and also Facebook, I had a lot of other moms as new friends […]. We could talk about everything, I didn't feel alone."* (Interview with the current administrator of the group Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children)

The publicity of the Italian group is justified by the fact that, though the group was born as a more structured way of organizing leisure meetings among an initial core of Italian mothers in Vienna, its prevalent function has become instrumental and close to a public service. With the passing of time, the group has become a point of reference for the fast-growing and increasingly heterogeneous group of Italians in Vienna, during but also in the phase preceding migration to Vienna. The Consular Office knows the group and has already suggested it.

> *"Imagine that there was a period – it still happens to me, but nowadays a little bit less – that the […] consulate and the embassy – at the beginning, when maybe someone would say "Eh, but isn't there a…?", they would give my phone number! […] Once I was there at the consulate, and there was the consul and this man asking for some information for the little girl, who was at school here, and I was there and they said: "Go to Silvia, who…" So, this man came to me, who was there doing some things of my own, he sent him to me. I mean, I used to be, we used to be, we are very well-known also officially. Because yes, I think we often helped, maybe more than they did, for some things."* (Interview with founder of *Italian moms in Vienna*)

A mother in the sample who had been part of the group in the past explained me that, with its presence on Facebook the group had become, by the time of fieldwork, a lighthouse helping the Italians find their way in the city of Vienna. Beside facilitating the use of the city thanks to the distribution of information, active group membership transmitted, from an affective point of view, a sense of being at home and part of a community, which attenuated the anxiety and insecurity of newcomers. The shift in the group marked a shift in the experience of Italians in Vienna, too.

> *"Now you come and integrate more easily, in my opinion. You integrate more easily because there are these social media that already make you feel like you're already part of a community, which is there if you need it, whereas before you had to kind of go in search, kind of move on your own, be a little more proactive. It was a little more anxiety-provoking. Now my impression is that here newcomers immediately have a vast overview of what you can do, where you can go, who you can turn to. It makes a big difference, in my opinion."* (Interview with M7)

3) The Facebook group *Italian moms in Vienna* and the events it organizes are open to fathers as well, whereas the group of Hungarian mothers excludes fathers *a priori*. The founder motivated this exclusion with the opinion, taken for granted as part of 'common sense' and fruit of stereotypical social representations of gender roles, that fathers would not be interested in 'children`s stuff'.

> -Group administrator: *"I think that men don't need this. Dads don't need something like this group, I think."*
> -I, the interviewer: *"Why don't dads, fathers need a group like this?*
> -Group administrator: *"WHY? They have other... other… I don't know... I heard... Interesting, because the mommies, we have a lot of mommies, we have parties, but the men haven't said yet that they wanted a party too."*
> -I, the interviewer: *"Uhm, that's interesting!"* (Interview with the administrator of the *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*)

The group of Hungarian mothers and children is selective and exclusive concerning gender, geographic location, and informational basis. The founder and the group members I spoke with mentioned that the group was useful to share specific local information relative to a precise group of women (and children) with specific interests and problems. The informal mechanisms of entry derive from the will to exclude men and strictly reduce the geographic extension of the group solely to Hungarian mothers living in Vienna`s urban area[108]. Moreover, keeping the group small facilitates the action of control and the organization of events, as well as limiting conflicts. Lastly, data from the interviews and go-alongs suggest that this exclusion is also a result of the will to defend a space of evasion from roles, where women can be among themselves with no partners nor children.

I think the Capability Approach represents a precious tool to read the exclusion or inclusion of fathers in mother groups. The possibility for Italian fathers to be members of the Facebook group and participate in the events of *Italian moms in Vienna* legitimates their role of co-providers of education and care. Even if, in fact or from the point of view of functionings, men still have a less strong role in education and care than women, the openness of mothers` groups facilitates and motivates a more sustained engagement by fathers (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009).

The value of social capital to use the city

The research revealed that social capital is a crucial conversion factor to access information for the EU-migrant families in the sample, and that the access to information through informal and non-formal channels often represented a turning point in the life of mothers and of the whole family. The research suggests that the capabilities in Vienna depend largely on the people you know and the information they provide you with. It was an unexpected outcome, considering that the parents in the sample had presented Vienna quite unproblematically as an 'easy city', to discover that its use was often not direct and immediate but passed through the help of third sector associations and, even more, informal acquaintances. The city`s easiness and transparence of use is partly apparent, which makes information crucial, not only for newcomers.

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[108] Not even the Viennese metropolitan area, including for example Wiener Neustadt, is targeted.

Vienna`s long tradition of dense and strong institutional networks, involving both the public and the third sector, could have been expected to make word of mouth and informal support superfluous. Instead, face to face exchange and less formal groups, often not (yet) institutionalized into registered associations, seemed to cover the remaining voids, meant as the needs not (completely) fulfilled by and through official channels. Bottom-up, ethnically connotated groups such as the already introduced *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (Italian moms in Vienna) or *Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub* (Viennese mother-baby-child club) are among the most mentioned references. The main point is probably that the parents in the sample wanted to be active in the search for information and support, rather than receive it in a systematic and official way from the outside, also because they had the feeling that the most important information in Vienna is the one you hear incidentally.

> *"Instead in Vienna everything is very structured. The problem with Vienna for us foreigners, in my opinion, can be to KNOW that there are such things, the access to information channels. And I realize that the language may be a barrier for some people. [...] I mean, beyond social policies, all that... The city of Vienna offers an endless array of services, but I assure you, in all spheres. [...] I mean, it's not that things are not there – things are there, but they are so many that to access, you need to be the one who knows that they exist. And from this point of view, parent chats, talking with other moms are valuable. I'm not a big fan of Facebook […], but I won't hide from you that the group Mamme italiane was very precious in my first years in Vienna, for example. You share not only the contacts of the baby-sitters but a whole range of information."* (Virtual journey with M6)

Instead, less relevant for the families in the sample were more formal and universalistic institutions with a focus on the socially and economically weakest ones. For instance, the *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, under the authority of the City of Vienna, and the *Stadtmenschen Wien*[109], financially supported by the City of Vienna – 'institutions of second degree' famous for having among their tasks that of helping people orient themselves in the large Viennese institutional offer and interact with other institutions – were not used and hardly mentioned by the families in the sample.

All narrations and opinions converge regarding the reasons why social capital would be so important for EU-migrants in Vienna. On one side, this is due to the central role that the local language, Austrian German, has in Austria, even in its internationally open capital city. The knowledge of other languages is less spendable and Austrian German language competences work as determinant of inclusion and exclusion and mark a linguistic disadvantage of EU-origin migrants compared to natives since, for instance, big amounts of information is not available in English and, in the case of translated text, important parts get lost in translation. Social capital helps overcome the language barrier. The other reason for the widespread subjective feeling of being disadvantaged in the use of the city compared to people who grew up in Vienna and, to a lesser extent, to those from other parts of Austria is the relative closure to outsiders in Vienna, expressed in omission of information, as well as selective preferences and favors. These are the situations in which EU migrant-origin families feel the disadvantage in comparison with natives:

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[109] https://www.stadtmenschen.wien/

trying to get their children into a certain school; looking for a house to rent/ buy, and inquiring the procedures necessary for different housing forms, for example for cooperative housing, which is less mainstream in Italy and Hungary; looking for and getting a job.

> *"You're just…, you know, you're no one. In Hungary, we are really deeply rooted, you know, in Budapest. Also, if you think of the friends, if you think of the families, if you think of our jobs, if you think of our career. Everywhere you go, you find some friends. It's really easy to… If you have any problems or any issues, you know who to call, you know where to go, you know… You know, it's just, it's your mother language, the city. So, if you move to a new city, that's an issue, that's a problem, that you have no clues where to start and who to get in touch with, whatever."* (Interview with F3)

Half of the families in the sample thematized living far away from the grandparents as a disadvantage of the condition of EU-migrant with children. A Hungarian woman with four children, who could count on her mother`s help in Budapest, reported about her first year in Vienna without the children`s grandmother:

> *"So, I had to take them everywhere, even if I went shopping, or went, you know, somewhere to get something done, something official. So, I had to take the children everywhere. It was really hard. And my son didn't like to stay home alone, he was really afraid of it, because everything was new."* (Interview with M2)

Another research participant implicitly made a distinction between leaving the children at home alone, externalizing care against money, and entrusting the children to relatives. Even in the cases where the first two options are viable – respectively, thanks to the facts that the children are old enough and the family can afford the expense, she felt that the grandparents were the only option to avoid a sense of guilt. I hypothesize that this feeling may mirror the socially widespread representation of care as affective work and mothers (of mothers) as designated responsible.

> *"Actually, what's missing is that [grandparents]. Now I don't need them anymore because they [her children] stay at home alone as well. I also leave them alone, it's not a problem. But back then [when they used to live in Italy] yes, they would pick them up for me; they often slept over. I mean, my husband and I never went out alone as much as in these 3 years when we were in Italy, because there was the possibility. Here, when we can go out again, we`ll do it, but to think that they are alone... Instead, when you know that they are with family..."* (Go-along MC10)

This nostalgia for grandparents and their help seems not to find compensation in the (free) offers by several Viennese institutions, such as the *emergency Family-Buddies* organized by the local Stadtteilmanagement in the neighborhood Seestadt[110]. With this initiative, a network of volunteers living in the area help strangers living in the same area solve unexpected childcare problems (see interview with GB*7). The limited response to such services by the families in the sample partly depends on the fact that parents accord higher levels of trust to friends, in the absence of the children's grandparents, than to volunteering and professional strangers. In this, they seem to reproduce and adapt culturally influenced patterns of childcare, already

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[110] More information on the emergency Family-Buddies in the neighborhood Seestadt can be found under the link https://www.aspern-seestadt.at/city-news/notfall_family-buddies_in_der_seestadt

experienced in the places of provenance, marked by familism and informality in the organization of daily life. Lastly, the urban offer is so broad that the information parents put together is often incomplete and fragmentary. I now present different forms of social capital in Vienna:

a. Social capital with locals. The kind of social capital deriving from acquaintances and friendships with locals, rarer than the one acquired through networks with co-nationals, is potentially very precious. Having an Austrian husband or partner is the strongest and less problematized form of immediately usable social capital. After telling me that her family has neither had contacts with the Gebietsbetreuung, nor with any other local institution or association, M10 explains:

> *"Maybe it's because, since I am married to an Austrian, who knows how to live here, maybe it's easier for me, I think, from this point of view. Also the language - I mean, he understands everything - if there is something, he knows how it works... If something happens, he is the one who inquires how to do it. […] Maybe everybody speaks Hochdeutsch [standard, formal German], but then when you must have certain conversations, they relapse to dialect, and if you don`t understand them you`re out, it`s useless. Even at work it`s like that."* (Mother, go-along with MC10)

A Hungarian woman expressed her opinion about the power of kinship and language in Austria through the exemplary story of how her children managed to get into the school they preferred in Vienna, thanks to the help of an Austrian colleague and friend of hers who had talked to the school principal.

> *"If you don't have any good contacts and can't say "Aaah, my mother was in high school with you. And you know, exactly in this neighborhood" […]. It seems to matter so much where you come from, whether you really belong or not. As an outsider, I really must work hard so that I belong one day, if this time ever comes. I also notice that if you phone somewhere, especially if you have an accent or you don't speak German that well. My husband can speak German, he's learning, but he doesn't speak German that well yet. For him it's always different to do something over the phone or at an administrative office. You notice that they're helpful and help you, but not as if you were one of us."* (Interview with M3)

b. Social capital based on proximity. The second most immediate ideal type of social capital is that based on proximity. In the sample, 4 Italian and 1 Hungarian mother told me that neighborly acquaintances and friends helped them out with childcare, and that they often exchanged the favor, providing childcare in turn. M14, who lived in a cooperative flat with reduced price with her family, spoke of 'slippers neighborship', meaning proximity relationships with other families which, through the exchange of favors regarding childcare, allowed her more temporal freedom. Research results suggest that cooperative housing with common spaces and homogeneity – primarily of socioeconomic and cultural level, only in the second place of provenance – boosts this kind of neighborly relationships.

> *"We are almost all about the same age: couples with young or middle children. [...] There's a very fertile exchange, the feeling that you ask your neighbor for sugar, you pick up the other child from kindergarten, you take care of him at the park to give a favor to the third one, with the other one you agree to build the garden. […] There is a higher cultural and educational depth, and thus maybe also this habit of multiculturalism, multilingualism, fertile integration of different approaches. [...] Really, there is always*

someone and among us we help each other out. So, you meet a guy, and you leave him one of the kids, you go shopping, you come back. The next time you keep it for him. I mean, this commonality generates." (Interview with M11)

c. Social capital with other migrants. A third form of social capital - beyond that with locals (Viennese and Austrians) and that based on residential proximity – is social capital through groups and associations of co-nationals and other international migrants. These are active both online and offline and offer information and support even before migration. To consult them are also people who still live in Italian and Hungarian cities and wonder whether to concretize their intention to move to Vienna or not, how to move the first steps in the new city, and how to solve the problems and small emergencies of the new start.

The most cited group on the topic of social capital is the already mentioned online and offline group *Mamme italiane a Vienna* (Italian moms in Vienna). At its outset, it used to be a small group with face-to-face relationships and shared leisure time activities (with children). The big increase in the number of Italians in Vienna, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, and the introduction of social media – Facebook soon became the main communication channel – led to changes in the demands and modes of the group, which became a point of reference for present and future Italian mothers (and fathers) in Vienna in need of information and clues for mundane problem solving, for instance in the fields of law and administration, education and schooling, healthcare and medicine, and regarding issues such as baby food or vaccinations. A graduated woman received from Facebook groups of co-nationals (*Italians in Vienna*, *Italian Moms in Vienna*) some help to find a small job as cleaning lady to make a living for some months, as her child was still very little and she was struggling with the job search. Not only weak ties once again proved to be crucial to solving a fundamental matter, but her employer soon became a friend, also because their children were about the same age. The border between instrumental social networks on the one hand, and intrinsically valuable, affective relationships on the other hand – or, in other words, between sociability and social capital – is fuzzy, and border crossing in both directions easy.

Regarding another group and association, in the interview passages below, M15 tells the story of her initial isolation in Vienna deriving from her being a trailing spouse with no previous social networks in Austria, time-consuming caring duties towards her two small children, and insufficient knowledge of the local language. Even when she started having daily contacts with people through the educational institutions her children attended, she found it very hard to make friendships with locals. So, the turning point came when she joined an association of international families and the association of *Italian moms in Vienna*.

> *"There is such a huge offer, and if you are in one of these groups, whether German-speaking or English-speaking, the fruition of the city opens to you in a relevant way. In fact, the first nine months that I was alone with my elder son, eh... I was very isolated because I didn't speak the language. I would go out to the park, and I made friends with a couple of people, one of whom spoke Italian. […] But otherwise, it was very difficult for me to integrate. Even in kindergarten, Austrian moms have their own circles. They've known each other for a lifetime, since they were themselves in kindergarten. So, so they don't even have the interest, let's say, in getting you into their circle. So, at first, you're*

isolated, actually. Then I discovered these associations, the Italian one and this international one, and a different world opened, made of different possibilities. (Interview with M15)

Through the channel of a network for international families in Vienna, she accessed organized information and suggestions, for example about where to go with children, in a language she understood.

> *"How a person uses the city depends on the friendships you make, because then it kind of goes by word of mouth. The activities you do, the things you do are recommended, especially if you are an outsider, a foreigner here. It depends on how you integrate. And then, keep in mind that there are very big associations here. [About the association "Vienna Family Network," which she attended] I entered that my son was already almost a year old, and it was a total life changer. Because before I used to search on the internet and find things in German, and I got a bit discouraged. So, I would ask friends and neighbors where to go, what to do. The moment I entered this Vienna Family Network - this Vienna Family network is all in English – there's the language. It's all international, there are all international families, so where at least one parent is international, let's say, not Austrian. […] Everything is different, everything becomes much easier in quotes, because then you talk to each other. [...] There were groups based on children's age, district groups, social media groups."* (Interview with M15)

Among the Hungarian women in the sample, 2 told me extensively about the group of Hungarian mothers and children *Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub* but – as already explained – rather in relational (sociability) than in instrumental (social capital) terms. They turned to this group for emotional support, as well as for information and company for leisure activities.

Urban life and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic had effects in all spheres of life during fieldwork, and its effects are very likely to extend also afterwards. As negative conversion factor, the pandemic reduced the participant families' capabilities in the city, since it was politically deliberated that the individual freedom of choice – at the base of the Capability Approach – needed to be temporarily reduced, or even suspended, for the sake of the common good, and more specifically to relieve hospitals and contain the number of deaths caused by the new virus. During lockdowns, the capabilities of most of urban inhabitants were reduced to a core of fundamental actions to cover primary needs, those at the bottom of Maslow`s pyramid. In the following pages, I am going to show the research results on the areas which underwent changes due to the pandemic, according to the families in the sample[111]: 1) Use of public and semi-public spaces; 2) Sociability practices; 3) Self-perception and positioning of migrants with EU-origin.

1) Public space use. The pandemic modified the way families use public and semi-public spaces, especially in the cases in which the private space of the home proved inadequate. The pandemic crisis put the home to the test, as it made it the only available place to learn, work, and spend free time. In the sample, 6 families changed home between 2020 and 2022 because they were

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[111] The effects of the pandemic on temporalities and conciliation are presented in chapter 3.

not satisfied with their housing conditions. The small size of the flat and the lack of balconies were among the main reasons adduced for moving. A mother told me of their (housing) difficulties during the first lockdown and of the small transgressions in the use of public space they made to safeguard her children`s health.

> *"In the first lockdown we were in a flat with no way out, with no balconies and no good view, so it was a little bit oppressive. On top of that, we experienced the first lockdown very much inside home. […] My oldest daughter, I say she is an acrobat. She does anything, she climbs, does stuff. I mean, you couldn't even go to the playground last year in the first lockdown, so it was a bit challenging. So, you would go to the playground anyway and I would make her do like gymnastics exercises. [...] So, we tried to use the outdoors like that. [...] So, we moved here. We had a balcony, so it wasn't so dramatic, and you could go downstairs, anyway."* (Interview with M12)

The pandemic broke the usual routine, and in response families looked for new solutions and adopted new behaviors. Specifically, the families spent less time in 'institutional islands' targeted to children. These voids left were filled with contacts with nature on one side, digital activities on the other side. The families started spending more time in parks, woods, and along the Danube river.

> *"The thing that we started seriously going out to the nature, that's a great gift of Covid, for sure."* (Interview with F3)

> *"We go hiking quite often now, because you can't do anything else, but I have to say that we owe the hiking to Covid. So, we started to go hiking once a weekend, actually all the time, except when it is really terrible weather, but when there is nice weather, we go. [...] This targeted real hiking is now a new and very good and positive development that this less positive time has yielded us."* (Go-along with MC4)

If a family felt well and could fulfil all its needs in the own neighborhood of residence, then they tended to intensify its use compared to the pre-pandemic age. The reduction of the pace of life, at least in the first lockdown, opened spaces to experiment with new forms of mobility on foot, by bike, and by push scooter. Since the sidewalks are narrow in the area around the flat where they live, in the Viennese 8th District, and the park Schonbornpark was taken by storm during lockdowns, family number 6 looked for solutions to be able to keep the prescribed one-meter distance between people. They started to go to the Town Hall Park [Rathauspark] which, in normal times, had been constantly in preparation of weekend events on working days, with stage building and construction sites. During lockdowns, when only gardeners were there, the family would take up biking and skating there, two new outdoor activities for them[112].

> *"We kind of had to reinvent activities, but it was good because it broke a routine."* (Go-along with M6, 03.03.2021)

> *"So, this thing forced us – but in the end this turned out to be a good thing - to look for more open spaces. [...] We discovered another way of living the city [...]. We also changed a lot the way we move in the city. Also, I move around by bike a lot more now."* (Go-along with M6, 15.06.2021)

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[112] See go-along with M6 on 03.03.2021.

2) Sociability practices by children and parents. During the Covid-19 crisis, child-related issues were the object of discussions and decisions in the adult world. Very rarely, however, have children had the chance to express their opinions about Covid-19 regulations in the first person, against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states children`s right to be heard and taken seriously with respect to all matters affecting them. In this research, some children expressed nostalgic appreciation for their schools, closed because of lockdowns, and a child even indicated the school as her favorite place in the neighborhood. Other children, with their words, reminded me that physical and relational space are a single thing in children`s cognitive and affective geographies, and that this needs to be considered while taking such drastic measures as Covid-19 regulations.

> - M11: *"Are there other things you want us to show you in the area, or have you had enough? We don't have to go. If that's enough for you, we'll stay here."*
> -I, the researcher: *"Well, it depends if there is something that is important to you, that you want me…"*
> -C11: *"Yes, my friend. My friends are important to me, that must be said!"*
> -I, the researcher: *"And do you see your friends at your friends' homes, at your home...?"*
> -C11: *"To tell you the truth, I haven't gone to children's homes, friends' homes for a year and a half. To tell you the truth, I see my friends at the park, or so..."* (C11, go-along with MC11)

Being sustained face-to-face contacts with peers fundamental for children`s development and health, almost all parents in the sample, except two couples, decided to take on a relaxed attitude towards Covid-19 regulations and make small concessions for their children`s good. The mothers in the sample sought informal solutions to make a trade-off between containing the spread of the pandemic and sustaining the children`s mental health and growth. The research participant M2 decided to send her children to after-school programs because the contacts they were having with other children at that time – exchanges on distance learning platforms during online school breaks and chatting in written form on a WhatsApp peer group – were not enough to satisfy their need for sociability. For instance, conciliation and learning needs were not the only reasons why some parents decided to send their children to school and afterschool childcare during lockdowns. In family number 2, the parents decided to send their daughter to an after-school childcare and recreational institution (in German, *Hort*) – which kept being available for the children of working parents during lockdowns – twice a week to let her meet and play with other children, especially with a certain friend. The moms of the two friends agreed on the days and times.

> *"And I think that's better. […] I also feel that they are very reclusive, so like it's very hard for them to meet someone, because they have been a lot at home with like no contact. And I think it would be good for them to have more contacts, eventually. To go back to the same, you know, their everyday life."* (Interview with M2)

During a conversation I witnessed to, M9 and other moms recalled the children`s birthday parties they had organized in Winter 2020 and, in particular, a party in a park with pizza delivery in the unconventional month of November. Despite the efforts and small infractions of the rules by the mothers, acquaintance and friendship networks shrunk to a few people already known to the mums, who had children and normally lived in proximity of the flat of residence. Besides, some

of the mothers in the sample complained that some parents of their children`s playmates would not accept meeting during hard and soft lockdowns, not even outdoors. Sticking to national and federal State regulations, children were supposed to spend the whole time with their parents. In accordance with the Austria-wide study by Ulrike Zartler and others (Zartler, Dafert, & Dirnberger, 2022), the study presented in this dissertation shows that parents had to acknowledge their impossibility to replace their children's friends and peers. The three quotations below exemplify the burdens of lockdowns for recently arrived migrant families, families with an only child and with pre-teenager children.

> *"My daughter, the biggest one, said: "I really hate Corona because we cannot make friends, and this is ridiculous, to stay two steps between each other, and we cannot make friends with each other." Because she's very open, she's very communicative, […] Because you know, it was only me. And the little brother and the little sister, they're not the same age, and she cannot do anything with them."* (Interview with M1)

> *"The second and third lockdowns were a little easier for us. We chose to meet the same people all the time, so that we would stay in the circle, but we were neither locked down inside, like the first time because of the scare, nor alone at home, because we said let's go out, also just you and me, or let`s go visit a friend of us, but we have to live it a little bit, otherwise we go out of our minds. Because anyway she as an only child felt very lonely and I, despite all I can play, read, watch a movie with her, but I am not her friend, so it was tough."* (Interview with M8)

> *"And the friends, the kids miss them a lot. […] And yeah, you also realize that this loneliness... On one side loneliness, and on the other side that we're always together. That's actually not normal for teenagers to spend so much time with their parents, and that also becomes too much. So, a lot of things changed for us. And I hope that this time will be over soon, because otherwise we will go crazy, all of us."* (Interview with M3)

Non-traditional and extended families interpreted the regulations, which were calibrated on traditional nuclear families and did not consider cases of different family structures, in a looser way and adapted them on their living conditions by their own initiative. It was not a lighthearted decision based on the underestimation of the gravity of the situation, but rather a necessity to be able to go through the crisis.

> *"But we have actually always taken it [the pandemic] and the regulations pretty seriously. So, when we were told that we had to go into quarantine, we have always met with my sister and her son, because we said that we are a household. We are not, but never mind. And on top of that maybe we sometimes met one or two friends in the park. Otherwise, we have tried to comply with the rules as much as possible and yes, the little one was sometimes also in school in between, because he could no longer stand it at all."* (Interview with M3)

My interviewees from the area institutions Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung also acknowledged the need for sociability, and occasionally initiated spatial interventions in neighborhoods to meet it. An interviewee working at Gebietsbetreuung North told me of that they had arranged some tables and benches in the arcade in front of their district office, since the beginning of 2021. They were used daily not only to rest for a while, but also to meet and exchange.

> *"I mean, it's clear that we must keep the distance to prevent the transmission of the virus, but at the same time there is an all too human need and also a socially important*

need to meet and exchange, a need for humanity. [...] And also this "They are not all gone!" People are still there, even if they are in their homes. So, that's important that there are still people in public space, also that it`s visible. And for certain groups it's especially important that they still see each other and that they don't disappear in their apartments." (Interview with GB*3)

While some children increased their use of public space together with parents, pre-teenagers and teenagers in the sample would rather withdraw into the digital realm. The parents, though worried, made more concessions than usual concerning the time and circumstances of children`s digital activity, because they recognized the underlying need for sociability[113].

"Unfortunately, now... They [her children] weren't like that, but now they are older, and they are exposed to a different kind... They didn't even have telephones until a year ago. […] However, he had it a little earlier because there was the pandemic, and it was a means of... He used mine, and I had all apps, my phone was pretty much full of his stuff. […] So, during the lockdown the first one got it to stay in touch with friends." (Interview M15)

Parents` sociability was easier to move to the virtual sphere with less immediate negative effects on their mental and physical health. Some parents in the sample recalled reducing their contacts in presence to their children`s friends and classmates and the respective parents. Since the children regularly met in school, in these cases, meeting also after school at the parents` presence did not significantly increase the risk of contagion.

"You know, I had a lot of spontaneous friendships, but with the distancing thing and the fact of not seeing each other, this year we all limited ourselves to hanging out with families in the neighborhood or related to the school and the kindergarten. Because you know that the kids hang out anyway. So, this year has produced a self-selection of interactions." (Go-along with M6, 03.03.2021)

3) Self-perception and self-positioning of migrants with EU-origin in Vienna. The isolation from families and friends in the countries of provenance due to repeated lockdowns made the parents aware of their unfulfilled need to cultivate relationships and receive support of various kind from family, friends, and acquaintances in the places of residence before Vienna. The suspension of the right of free movement, at the core of the European project, demonstrated once again that those who may be labeled as 'expats' and 'free movers' are migrants too (Favell, 2014), and that not only geographical distances but also the power and deliberations of national States can create and erase barriers due to contingent necessities.

"This is frightening about this whole Corona situation, I think: when it all started, we planned that we go back to Hungary in every month. And then this whole started, so we couldn't […]. And then they opened the borders, and then we could have that visit, so we 'escaped' for three days! […] And I was thinking about how this whole life changed, because of this. My parents wanted to visit us in April, in August, in September, and they couldn't." (Interview with M1)

After a period when they tried to cross the Austro-Hungarian border despite lockdowns by way of keeping their old residence address in Hungary and using a cross-border commuter permit provided by their employer, one of the families I had initially recruited decided to move back to

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[113] For instance, see the ethnographic notes on go-along with MC4.

Budapest after Christmas 2020. In an interview at the beginning of December, M16 confessed me that she and her children had been spending some weeks at home in Hungary, where they could enjoy the company of family, friends, and neighbors, who also provided practical support with childcare, as well as more spacious housing than their rented flat in Vienna and a private garden. The mother was still in Hungary at the time of our online interview, while the children had been picked up by their father and taken to Vienna in a haste, after the announcement that schools were about to reopen.

> *"We have a little bit of life, a little bit handier. We are not locked inside the Viennese apartment. And there [in Vienna] we would probably have met nobody, because everybody is locked down inside their homes. So, [in Budapest] it wasn't as traumatic".* (Interview with M16)

After Christmas, the same family dropped out of the sample, since they decided not to return to Vienna but to move back to Budapest instead, where they believed they could live the pandemic period better than in the city of migration. As both Hungarian and Italian research participants explained to me, the life of migrant-origin families from the EU is made of a subtle balance between local everyday life and the need to revive and strengthen the bond with the place(s) of provenance, not only to get practical advantages but also for the sense of belonging and identity fundamental to a good life.

> *"We expats live in a balance whereby we normally stay here, and now and then we need to escape. [...] Paradoxically, with the distancing the origins, we felt the bond with the families even more, because you are deprived of them. I mean, all the Italians I know, apart from a couple who have teenage children with friends here, but those who have children of this age, they run away as much as they can. I don't know if it depends whether the grandparents are still alive..."* (Go-along with M6, 03.03.2021)

Where adults' and children's quality of life meet

Urban sociology of childhood may seem like a very small disciplinary *niche* cultivated by a few people interested in critical discourses on childhood and children`s education and development in contemporary cities. Children`s life in the city and their perspective on it are often postulated to be completely different from adults`, either purer to protect or unrulier to contain (Satta, 2014). They may be believed to be so different, that somebody may object that it does not make sense to study quality of life with a mixed sample of parents and children, in the attempt to assemble their perspectives. In this paragraph, on the contrary, drawing from fieldwork results, I argument that parents' and children's quality of life are closely intertwined. In chapter 3, I presented the margins of autonomy for the children in the sample in Vienna, and the factors influencing it (conversion factors). The impression is that the children in Vienna would have more autonomy that their cousins and family friends in Italy and Hungary, but less than their parents – especially the ones who had grown up in small towns internal areas – used to as they were children and teenagers. From parents' perspective, children`s autonomy may facilitate conciliation of work, care duties, and time for themselves. As we saw in this chapter, from children's perspective, autonomy means the possibility to explore and co-create the city in a playful way. We also saw that childhoods are very differentiated, and that some children often

withdrew from the city to find stimulation and, paradoxically, sociability in the digital sphere and in consumer products. I propose to read the Covid-19 pandemic and digitalization as conversion factors that accelerated such a process of losing interest in public and semi-public spaces of the city in favor of the home as hub to pop up in different virtual worlds. A persisting and increasing trend in this direction is likely to produce negative consequences for children and their parents. As the Covid-19 pandemic showed, social relationships are crucial for bodily and psychological health and well-being, as well as for learning. Cities and societies could learn (anew) from children the importance for quality of life not only of the mind but also of body, affects, and sensitivity, to use in relationship with the urban context of living. Relationships include not only humans but also plants, animals, and objects. Children`s acute competences of observation and imagination make them good allies to imagine alternatives to urban spaces as they are now, as already noted by the Sociology of Childhood, which proposes to make research *with* rather than *on* children. Adults can and should of course support, select, and implement, but without overlooking children`s input. Even clearer from this research was that children`s use of the city draws attention to the need to leave empty, non-planned spaces in the urban fabric – even in Western, very organized cities – as interstices for play and sociability. Finally, in this chapter I argued that children value the esthetics of buildings, squares, inner yards etc., but also the possibility to effectively use them to move, climb, jump, play with balls. As the Capability Approach stimulates to reflect, the value of a city and its spaces lies in what people can concretely do with it, taking account of their desires, preferences, and needs, and of the chances of success given by different and unequal initial conditions. Amartya Sen argues that the promotion of well-being freedom, or the capability to pursue one's well-being, is an issue of public policy and it regards tackling inequalities. Agency freedom would be equally relevant, but harder to accept and implement in practice for policy makers and administrators, since it brings along unpredictability (Sen, 1992, chapter 4). Despite these difficulties, it is important to ensure that each urban inhabitant is not only a *receiver* of infrastructures, services, and benefits conceived by others for the well-being of the population, but also an active *doer* and a *judge* who can take decisions on his or her life (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018). From another angle, an inclusive city should go arm in arm with a city that leaves spaces for people to also do things themselves and decide what they want to do or be, choosing from the repertoire of effectively achievable options.

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5. The area institution Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung as an institutional conversion factor

In the previous chapters, I presented the main results of the research I conducted with migrant-origin parents and children from Hungary and Italy in Viennese neighborhoods, analyzing the micro-level constituted by their daily lives. In this chapter, I analyze the work of an urban institution called Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, working at the meso-level between urban politics and the inhabitants. Under the mandate of the City of Vienna, the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung takes care of the quality of physical space and of neighborly relationships in all Viennese neighborhoods, including the ones where the families in the sample live. From this position, it may potentially contribute to creating the conditions that allow smaller or bigger margins of autonomy for the children, for instance, or influence spaces and occasions for parents` and children`s sociability. This complementary part of the research is especially appropriate in Vienna, since its dense and very active institutional infrastructure – composed of a well-organized, ramified public sector of social-democratic political orientation and of a strong third sector including associations, community groups, and cooperatives – is one of the peculiarities of the city and is believed to still influence the lives of its inhabitants more than in other cities. The subject of this chapter, the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, is a fundamental element of this comprehensive institutional network. Born in the 1970s as an institution specialized in housing issues, its focus has enlarged to public space in neighborhoods. Nowadays, the main functions of the GB* are, according to its website and to the information I collected firsthand:

-To inform inhabitants about the neighborhoods, their spaces and services;

-To give free legal consultancy about private rental issues;

-To organize events to strengthen the neighborship;

-To moderate participatory planning processes and communicate their results to politicians and planners;

-To activate inhabitants to self-help and participation in their neighborhood's life in different forms;

-To accompany greening initiatives and other interventions to make climate change more endurable.

A distinctive feature of the GB* is its intermediary position and its work in the interstices as 'zip' or 'bridge', which makes networking one of its main functions. Some of the expressions GB* employees used to define the institution in the course of fieldwork are: *potter's wheel*, *connector*, *gateway*, *intermediary institution*, *do the splits*, *first contact point* or *first place to go*, *service institution*[114]. On the vertical ax, the GB* passes down information from local politics to the inhabitants and brings inhabitants' stances to district administrations. On the horizontal ax, the GB* creates networks between individual and collective, public and private actors physically present in the district.

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[114] In the German original: *Drehscheibe, Bindeglied, Schnittstelle, Zwischenstelle/ intermediäre Institution, den Spagat machen, erste Anlaufstelle, Servicestelle.*

10.11.2021, North Station Meeting. The Stadtteilmanagement has invited a construction manager as guest to inform the inhabitants about the construction plans and progress in the area of the North and North-West Station. Photo by the author[115].

The name "Gebietsbetreuung" refers to the idea of support and assistance, whereas the name "Stadtteilmanagement" refers to the idea of managerial work. The practitioners of GB* Mitte[116] I spend more time with, to whom both names sound suboptimal or even unfortunate, prefer to refer to the institution alternatively as 'neighborhood center of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung' or 'neighborhood office of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung'. The first denomination underlines its being open to the neighborhood and made for and by the inhabitants, the second one its being a place where qualified people work on clearly defined goals. A common element between these two very different names and conceptions of the work is that both refer to a concrete physical place – an office or a center. Each of the 5 teams, all together covering the entire surface of Vienna, is responsible for a variable number of districts (the 5 areas of competence are illustrated below). The physical places of work and contact with the inhabitants are 5 neighborhood centers (*Grätzelzentren*), and 10 neighborhood management points (*Stadtteilmanagements*).

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[115] Another example of the GB*`s role as intermediary institution was a neighborhood tour of all institutions promoting health in the neighborhood Volkert- und Alliertenvirtel, organized by the Stadtteilbüro in Nordbahnstrasse 14 on 21.10.2021 as networking event.

[116] In German, *Mitte* means *Center*. GB* Mitte is responsible of geographically central Viennese neighborhoods.
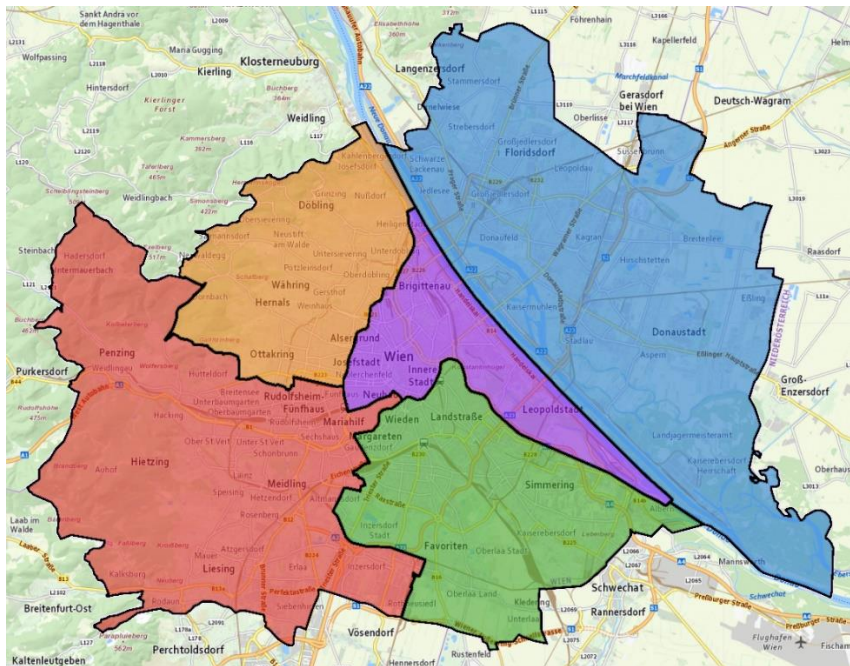
- ● GB* North: Districts 21-22 – 4 interviews
- ● GB* South: Districts 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 23 – 1 interview with 2 persons
- ● GB* West: Districts 16, 17, 18, 19 – 2 interviews
- ● GB* East: Districts 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 – 1 interview
- ● GB* Center: Districts 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 20 – 2 interviews + internship

Illustration by the author

I had neither heard nor read about the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung before moving to Vienna. The analysis of its work was not part of the initial research design but resulted from fortuitous encounters which, in my early weeks in Vienna, awoke my interest. At the beginning, I wanted to profit from their expertise to investigate the 'anatomy' and the 'physiology' of Viennese neighborhoods and of the city in general. The Gebietsbetreuung is worth an analysis in the context of this dissertation because it is entrusted with the task of improving the quality of life of all urban inhabitants, including children and their parents, by way of working directly with the inhabitants or intervening indirectly on their living spaces. Moreover, through the participatory planning projects and other formats supported by the GB*, local politicians are supposed to gain awareness of the different desires and, even more important, needs of the inhabitants. Although the Gebietsbetreuung does not primarily target children and families, and it is not specifically devoted to their needs and issues either, I discovered that there are complementarities and occasions for encounters between the two. Even more, children and parents may be among the categories which benefit the most from the GB*, as they are often strongly bound to the local level and, in the case of mothers in maternity leave or part-time, have more free time. Therefore, the families I target and the Gebietsbetreuung can be seen as actors standing in reciprocal positions and with complementary work knowledge sets, in the sense of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005). As far as the projects and events organized by the Gebietsbetreuung are concerned, where children and parents are the protagonists, I propose a classification of the roles which I believe are implicitly attributed to the children by the institution and raise a critical reflection on it. During fieldwork, my interest deepened and shifted to the Gebietsbetreuung as institutional actor that – striving to facilitate for the inhabitants the physical and social access to spaces, services, and opportunities in the city – acts as a conversion factor. The conceptual tools from the Capability Approach helped me read the institution and its work under a new light and, in this chapter, I argue why the agency of GB*s should be considered as an urban conversion factor.

The data presented in this chapter derive from the institutional ethnography I conducted partly online, partly in person. In their review of geographical studies deploying institutional ethnography, Billo and Mountz (2016) propose a typology of 5 different possible approaches. In this project, I combined the approach 'getting at the inside: interviews with organizational actors' with 'time on the inside', since I did an internship at a neighborhood center from the Gebietsbetreuung. More specifically, I did:

  -10 interviews with 11 people working in all 5 GB* sites between March and May 2021;

  -A 5-week internship at GB* Mitte between October and November 2021[117].

The graphic below shows the disciplinary fields of reference of interviewed GB* practitioners and the year when they started working at the Gebietsbetreuung.
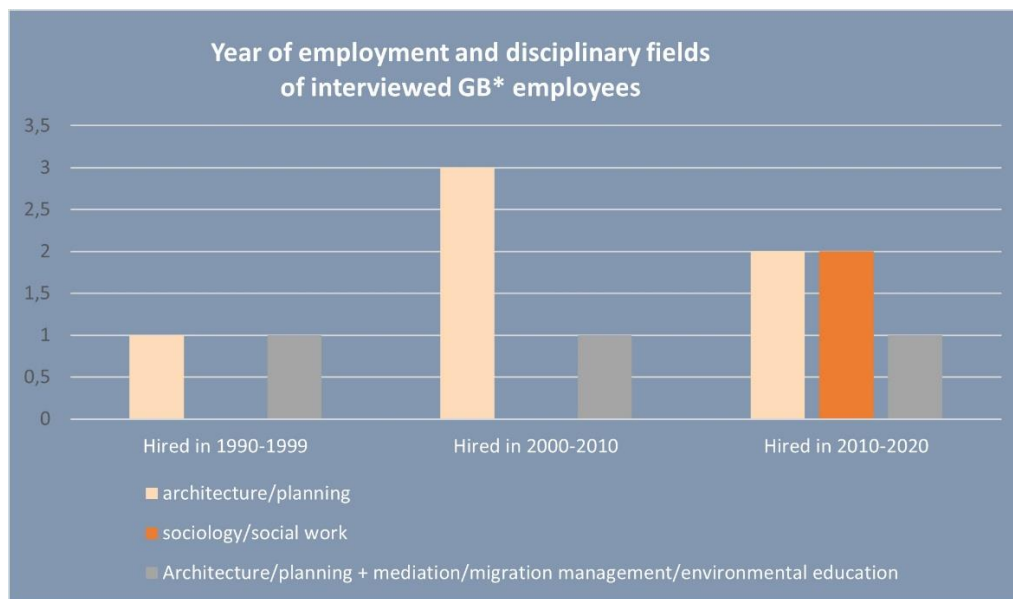
I also did some 'following', as I accompanied employees from GB* Mitte on their outings in the mandated area, and some 'event ethnography', as I informally took part to events organized by all 5 sites. A mixture of observation, active participation in daily work, and formal and informal conversations helped me grasp what Dorothy E. Smith calls 'working knowledge' (Smith, 2005) of different professionals working at Gebietsbetreuungen. The founder of institutional ethnography calls *institutional capture* the tendency of people working in institutions to answer and act in an automatic and uniform way, as the result of the interiorization of the institutional language and culture. This manifests in the generalized use of standard explanations, set sentences, and abused words in the language of the same team. My externality to the field – my position was that of a PhD candidate at an Italian university and a new presence in Vienna – revealed by Italian accent when speaking German and by some naïve questions I posed, paradoxically seemed to elicit more complete and interesting answers than a 'native' researcher would have been able to collect, eluding *institutional capture*.

With this contribution, I aim to critically thematize the role and the work of the Gebietsbetreuung in the attempt to remedy the deficiencies and blind spots of the literature on this institution,

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[117] Just in time! Only one week after the end of my internship, a three-week National lockdown was announced in Austria.

which has been criticized as: inadvertently or deliberately biased, as largely produced directly by GB* practitioners or organs of the City of Vienna; too practice-oriented, lacking theoretical tools for reflection; focused on specific single projects and thus missing an overall consideration of the GB*`s work. Other scholars have criticized the lack of critical public discourse on GB*s (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012). The Gebietsbetreuung is located in the middle of a conflicted field of forces including the political and administrative system, the market, and the inhabitants as individuals and groups (Sommer, 1992, p. 104-105). Among the most ambiguous, controversial, and criticized aspects of the role of GB*s in the last decades of urban development and neoliberal restructuring, there are: the possible instrumentalization by economic and political actors and forces; the alleged complicity in promoting gentrification instead of better quality of life *for all*; the limitedly democratic nature of participatory processes they initiated or promoted at local level (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012). In this chapter, however, rather than analyzing GB*`s responses to macroscopic social, economic, and urban transformations, I analyze the daily work of the people who embody the institution, which I reframe with the help of the theoretical and conceptual tools offered by the Capability Approach and at the light of the results conveyed by the part of research carried out with a specific kind of inhabitants, EU migrant-origin families with children. I believe this read may be of interest not only for the Viennese public.

The chapter opens with a presentation of the institution and its functions, continues with an analysis of the effects of the reduction in the number of physical sites over time, with reference to the latest developments regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. A critical reflection on the target groups of the work of the Gebietbsbetreuung constitutes the core of the chapter. I analyze the offer for children and families, the protagonists of this monograph, and the different conceptions of child involvement behind. Then, I narrate ethnographically my experiences at the neighborhood center in the Viennese 2. district, and take up some points made before. The chapter ends with a few conclusive remarks, which recontextualize the argumentations and findings within the broader scope of this work.

## "Nowadays we do almost anything, right?": history and functions of the GB*

In this section, I give some historical coordinates about important phases and turning points in the history of GB*s and use them as frame for reflections on the role and functions of the Gebietsbetreuung in contemporary times[118].

The first Gebietsbetreuung was founded in 1974 as an experiment and soon became an institutionalized arm to promote the politics of soft urban renewal (*sanfte Stadterneuerung*) adopted by the City of Vienna. This aimed at the gradual renovation of old municipal housing stock rather than its demolition with the double goal of ensuring affordable housing and of preventing speculation. The first site was responsible for a few housing blocks with approximately 2000 inhabitants in total, which made it possible to establish and keep personal

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[118] For an overview of the history and organization of the Gebietsbetreuung, see Grandel (2021), Feigelfeld (2000), Rechnungshof (2013), and Sommer (1992).

contact with all of them. Their tasks specifically regarded housing issues. Since the job was conceived in a merely technical sense, team members came from technical fields like civil engineering, urban planning, and architecture. Between 1977 und 1989, 13 new sites were founded; between 1991 and 1994, a further 4 were added. At their point of maximal expansion, there were 20 sites (including the mobile team), almost as many as Viennese districts.

Abbildung 1: Historischer Überblick über die Gebietsbetreuungen Stadterneuerung
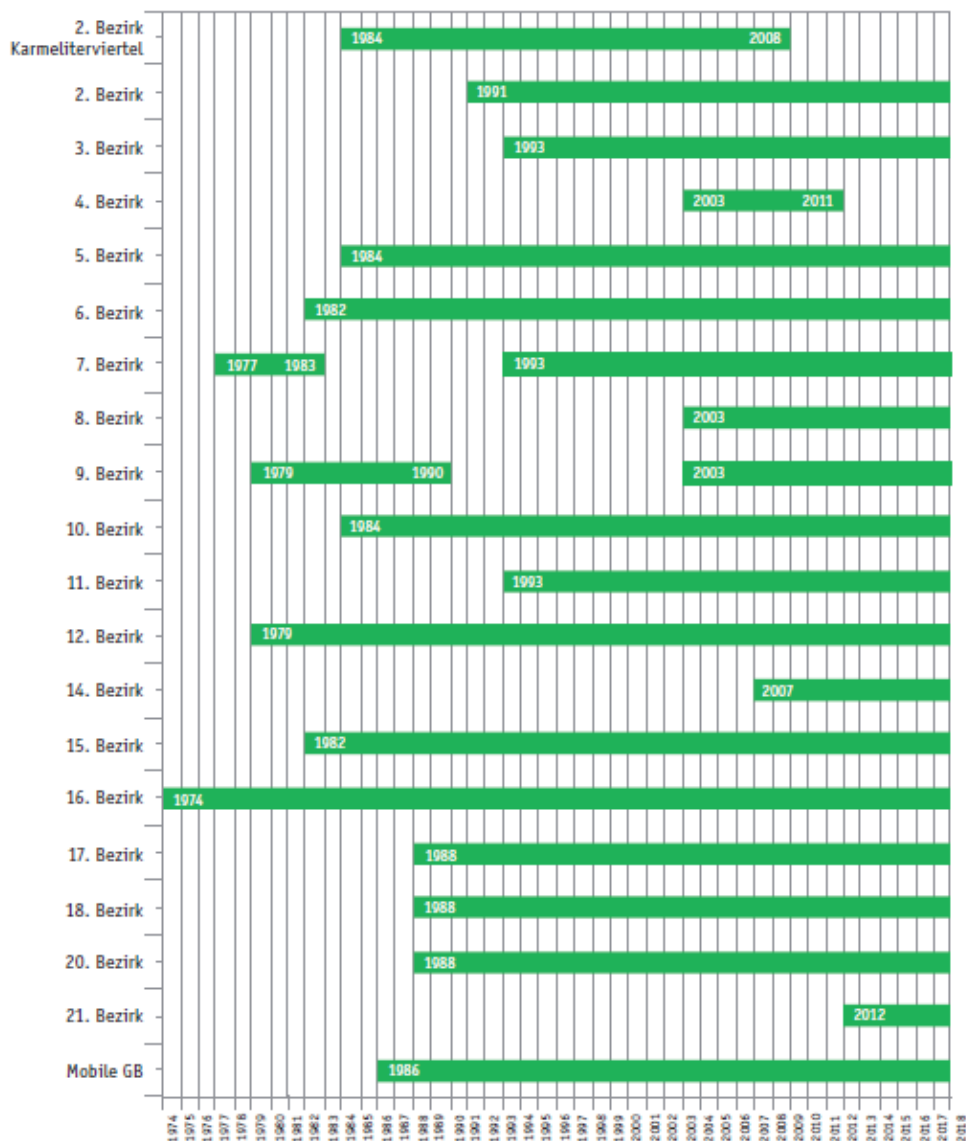
Mobile GB: Gebietsbereuung Stadterneuerung Mobil
Quelle: MA 25, Darstellung RH

Bericht des Rechnungshofes (report by the Austrian Court of Audit), 2013, p. 132

Ten years later, in 2004, the GB*s were still 17 (Haller, 2004). Since the Eighties, the creation of several sites spread around the city, plus a mobile Gebietsbetreuung active in the areas with no site of reference, contributed to its being a truly public service. Gradually, the focus expanded from housing renovation to the housing surroundings first (*Wohnumgebung*), then to public space *tout court*. In the Nineties, as the Gebietsbetreuung started to collaborate with local actors

from the spheres of economy, arts and culture, the range of projects and tasks performed expanded qualitatively and quantitively, not without contradictions.

> *"The Gebietsbetreuungen were founded as merely technical division, in the past. […] Only much later in the course of the years it was said: Yes, but soft urban renewal is about more than just the house. We also need to arrange free time facilities and streets anew, we need infrastructure, we need lively shopping streets, we need from participation formats to care and support for new neighborhoods such as that of the North Station. So, that all arrived later, right? Nowadays we do almost everything, don't we? [laughs]"* (Interview with GB*2)

> *"So, we as Gebietsbetreuung are somehow responsible a bit for everything."* (Interview with GB*8)

The structural conditions of the Viennese housing market, changing towards a neoliberal deregulation, contributed to weaken the impact of the GB* as organ of soft urban renewal for affordable housing, if not to instrumentalize their work to the benefit of gentrification (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012). Moreover, mainly because of globalization and intra-European migration from Central and Eastern European countries, the demographic landscape changed towards and increase and diversification of Viennese population. A turning point came around the years 2000, as the composition of the GB* team became diversified in terms of professional backgrounds, with a gradual expansion towards the domain of social work and communication. The superordinate authority, the Municipal Department MA25 of the City of Vienna, made it compulsory for each team to include also different professional figures such as social workers, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and alike. Already busy with negotiating diversities within the team and with the inhabitants, the Gebietsbetreuung was confronted with progressive reductions in the number of physical sites and concomitant expansion of each area under their responsibility. In the space of 6 years, the number of GB*s was more than halved: in 2012, it was reduced from 12 to 8; in 2018, from 8 to 5. From the 2010s, with the creation of area management offices in expansion areas, the Stadtteilmanagements, a new responsibility was added to the traditional role in old areas. The spin-offs Stadtteilmanagent were created, as physical and institutional presence, to accompany processes of urban development in clearly defined areas sometimes built from scratch, as in the case of Seestadt, sometimes renovated from within, as in the case of the Nordwestbahnhof. The position of the GB* assumed ambiguous tones, with the foundation of Stadtteilmanagements, as ambiguous is the line that separates socially just 'revitalization' from gentrification, inhabitants' interests from the market's interests. The shift from *Betreuung*, which means supervision and care, in the name *Gebietsbetreuung*, to management in *Stadtteilmanagement* is more than a linguistic note, and signals the growing importance of networking and, according to some voices, the partial embracement of neoliberal logics. Progressively, more and more attention and resources were redirected towards these fast-growing areas.

To sum up, from their foundation in the 1970s until today, the requests on the GB* progressively increased quantitatively and qualitatively. Therefore, in the new integrated area-based approach, uniting community work and planning, GB*s also have the role of funneling, sorting,

and passing to other institutions everyday problems in the immediate vicinity of residential environment. The reticular, multiplying knowledge about who to turn to for different topics is an integral part of the job. These horizontal and vertical networks are even more precious in the face of the chronic work overload. Even in their areas of expertise, Gebietsbetreuungen tend to do an informal *triage* that results in: directly helping those who need it more; re-directing some people to other institutions; supporting those with more resources with "help to self-help".

Nowadays, the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung takes care mainly of public space and neighborly relationships, both in old and new neighborhoods. It is tendered by the Municipal Department MA25 of the City of Vienna, responsible for Technical Urban Renewal (Technische Stadterneuerung), to private offices and companies. Among the contractors there are architecture and engineering offices, but also big organizations such as Caritas. As far as I could understand from my research, this position between the public and the private sector is not unproblematic.

> Ci-Plan[119] is a firm and, as such, must compete on the market; on the other side, the office [the GB*] is assigned by the City of Vienna, which makes them providers of a public service. This contrast seems to make some team members feel more like public officials, some others more like career men and women with high challenges to be up to. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021, 1. team meeting I witnessed)

The most numerous team currently includes 19 employees, the less numerous 12. Employees within the same team may have different employers, contracts, and number of working hours to spend at GB* on the total of their working hours per week. This patchwork of working arrangements adds to the complexity of the institution GB*. Although there is still a prevalence of technical profiles – architects, engineers, planners – the professional backgrounds within each team also include social workers, sociologists, mediators, cultural scientists, graphic designers, law experts, and administrative profiles[120]. This variety is justified and made necessary by the increasingly heterogeneous and composite host of functions the GB*s progressively absorbed. It resulted partly from informal processes to intercept local needs, partly in response to policies. It is not trivial to explain what the roles and functions of the Gebietsbetreuung nowadays are. Even if the GB* is a consolidated presence in the Viennese institutional landscape, as already by the time of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2000, it is often taken for granted and ignored.

> "In the course of 25 years the Viennese way of soft urban renewal has become famous and recognized across Austria and internationally, but in Vienna it could not have become more self-evident than this. The role of Gebietsbetreuungen in it would not need to be highlighted any more". (Feigelfeld, 2000)

Not only a critical scientific discourse on the new role of the GB*s is still dawning (Grandel 2021; Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012), but also common people among the inhabitants of the mandated areas are often unaware of the existence of GB*s, or confused about what it is and what it does.

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[119] Pseudonym.
[120] One of the employees had a degree in *Social Design*, university studies with a strong practical component and, from a disciplinary point of view, located at the crossroads between arts and design on one side, sociology and social work on the other side.

"They [some inhabitants] are somehow often a bit critical, when we do something. Well, when we arrived to the Schlingelmarkt it was not quite easy for many people to grasp what we do, I think." (Interview with GB*6)

"I believe that many people maybe still don't know what we can actually offer to them, what benefit they could get from our work.
(Interview with GB*3)

During my 5-week internship at the Gebietsbetreuung Mitte, I noticed that team members would introduce themselves anew at every event with the public, even on more informal occasions. This is not (only) due to a fast turnover of team members and inhabitants in the mandated neighborhoods, I discovered, but rather to the fact that the identity of the institution is in continuous transformation, since almost 50 years, and that its work is often 'under the radars', which means not consciously known to the inhabitants. The GB* itself finds it challenging to explain clearly what they do, especially because they have several different tasks.
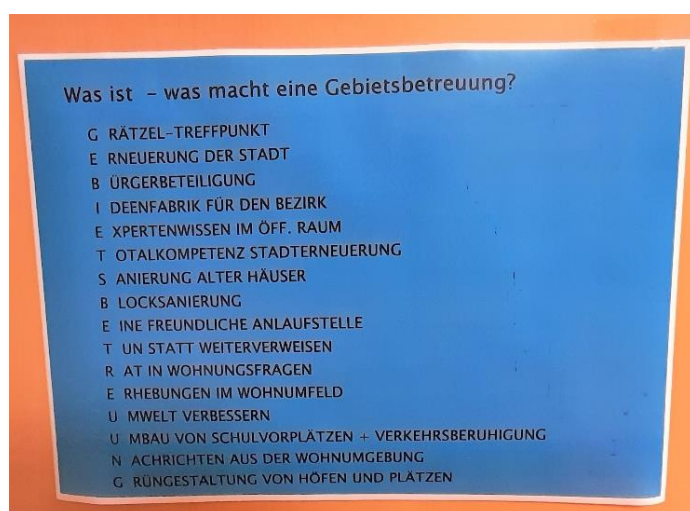
This acronym of the word 'Gebietsbetreuung', stuck on a closet in the office of GB* Mitte, summarizes some of the functions of GB*s back then. It was made when GB* Mitte was still under the leadership of Dipl. Ing. Peter Mlczoch. Nowadays the range of thematic areas covered by the GB* is even broader. Photo by the author

Indeed, those who work at GB*s are the first ones to find the mandate blurred and subjectively interpretable in many different, even concurrent ways. In the interviews, I noticed the frequent recurrence of the expression "(a bit of/ almost) everything" to describe the own job and the effort to draw lines and establish their repertoire also "in negative", that is, by defining what they do not or cannot do.

"And we have to do everything in there [in the mandated area], and this doesn`t work. So, we simply need to draw borders and say: "Well, we simply don`t manage to do this and this"" (Interview with GB*8)

Most of the practitioners working at GB*s, despite often being very busy, expressed satisfaction with the many-sidedness of their jobs.

"We juggle. It`s hard to explain. What is the Gebietsbetreuung? What do you do, actually? What are you responsible for here? It cannot be explained in one sentence, I think." (Interview with GB*10b)

The confusion on the role and positioning of GB* sometimes generates misunderstandings. In my internship, I participated in a tenant assembly on a case of real estate speculation. A housing

company was attempting to push out the tenants with undetermined contracts to renovate and sell the flats for astronomic prices. In this sensitive case, the tenants were confused about the role of the GB*, although GB* representatives had introduced the institution at the beginning of the meeting. They believed it to be on the side of the speculator, which made them suspicious and even oppositive. The misunderstanding persisted and led to some wrestling to grab the word. Paradoxically, the two GB* members who participated in the assembly later highlighted that their position was not only neutral, but on the side of the tenants. In order to make the GB* recognizable and significant to the inhabitants, the employees try to establish personal connections and relationships of trust. Giving a 'human face' is also part of the strategy pursued by the public relations experts who launched a project to gradually introduce GB* team members and their activities in the neighborhood "on a very personal level" (interview with GB*3). For this purpose, photos and text were hung on the display windows of neighborhood centers and online. The GB*`s website became especially significant during the Covid-19 pandemic, when nobody went into the offices.

*Window of Gebietsbetreuung North at Schlingerhof on 12.06.2021. The GB*s strive to be human-faced and low-threshold institutions. In this picture, a team member presents herself and her work with the aim of reducing the distance to the inhabitants. Photo by the author.*

The personal connection is especially important if we consider that each job in the GB* resembles a theater role, in my supervisor`s words, in the sense that it leaves big room for maneuver and depends on how each team member interprets it. The proportion of office work and contact with the public depends on professional competences, but also on individual attitudes and choices. Based on interviews and participant observation during my internship at GB* Mitte, I constructed three different ideal-typical categories about the ways of conceiving the functions of the GB* and everyday work of the GB*.

1. Technical job: Focus on public space. Free market competitiveness and importance of tangible outcomes of GB* work such as maps, renderings, reports, external communication. Attention to vertical connections with administrations and politics. The

quality of life of inhabitants is believed to depend on the quality of public space and be directly proportional to the efforts by competent workers. This position is still hegemonic.

2. New generation social job: Focus on inhabitants in space. Strong component of social work for and with people with the goal of promoting participation, empowerment, and self-help. Re-elaboration of the tradition of Red Vienna[121] in a less passive and less paternalistic direction. Quality of life as a product of interpersonal and neighborly relationships to promote through institutional networking with politics, associations, and inhabitants. Still minoritarian but competing position.

3. Fundamental job: Focus on the fundamental right to housing. Assistential conception of the job, where specialists in housing issues help inhabitants with their competences. Quality of life as fulfilment of housing rights. Minoritarian and less recognized position, even if it reflects the first historical core of GB*, in line with the tradition of Red Vienna.

Despite the flat hierarchy within each team[122], the different prevalence of one or the other ideal type among team members orients the priorities and actual everyday work. These models sometimes cooperate, sometimes ignore each other, sometimes even compete for material resources and the recognition of the importance of the tasks (economic and symbolic capital). I believe it is important to build in new functions to the original core of the institution, and not instead of it, and to consider the various functions as complementary rather than competing. Housing consultancy, which used to be the main and almost exclusive task of GB* in the past, has been progressively pushed back over time. However, in the 5 weeks I spent at GB* Mitte as an intern, the most incoming phone calls concerned free housing consultancy. The single person from the team specialized in this subject could hardly keep up with the numerous requests, also considering that she worked part-time in the GB* (20 hours weekly). She would have wished that my research focused on private rather than public space in relation to quality of life, since housing is at the core of human needs, and she was concerned about the surge in housing prices in Vienna – a phenomenon that has been thematized also in recent publications which question whether Vienna is still a just city (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2022). High rental prices would have been a threat, especially in the near future, for socioeconomically weaker categories of the population, who had been relying on the public Covid-19 benefits until that point. The housing expert objected that it was *bobo* persons and families who cultivated tree pits and the community garden at GB*, participated in planning consultations and other projects on public space by the

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[121] Red Vienna (in German *Rotes Wien*) is the name of the historical period between the two World Wars (1918-1934) when the City of Vienna was governed by the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (SDAP), which focused its political action on affordable municipal housing and urban welfare in education, healthcare, and hygiene. The city of Vienna took care of its inhabitants in a paternalistic and comprehensive way, from cradle to grave, within a non-dictatorial frame. Concerning children and families, schooling was democratized and complemented by childcare services. Libraries, public swimming pools, and other sporting places were built to reduce disparities in the access to health and education based on family origin. Nowadays, the Viennese public and third sector still carry the heritage of Red Vienna. (To discover more about Red Vienna, see Konrad, 2008)

[122] For example, in yearly planning meetings the main person responsible for each work package is referred to as 'cheerleader' or 'coordinator', but never as 'leader' (see ethnographic log from 19.10.2022).

GB*s. The others were too busy paying the rent and keeping their heads above water to participate in GB*`s initiatives and projects, in her opinion (see ethnographic log 12.10.2021).

On another occasion, the same housing consultant told me that until 4 years before, when her colleague retired, there had been 2 people working each 35 hours per week on housing consultancy. By the time of fieldwork, she had remained alone and with only 18 hours per week. What is more, the mandated districts passed from 1 to 6. So, the passage was from:

2 people x 35 hours x 1 district

to

1 person x 18 hours x 6 districts

My conversation partner had been working for the GB* for thirty years. As soon as she retired, a few years later, rental consultancy provided directly by the GB* would be dismantled, she reflected on the near future. She told me that the same service would be provided at the same place – a physical office ensures accessibility/ low threshold, and the neighborhood center is very convenient – but the person supplying it would be external to the GB* team, from the organization "Renters help" (*Mieterhilfe*). The interviewee felt that the rental consultancy service was not taken seriously by the GB*.

> "For the person [seeking consultancy] is the same, but do they want to take it seriously?" (Ethnographic log 02.11.2021)

In other moments of my internship, I had the impression that the housing consultant felt that her work was not fully recognized.

> Katharina asks to make a rough estimation: "Do we manage it with the capacity and qualifications that we have?" She explains, for example, that greening consultancy or public relations are very specific areas, and therefore "it is about capacity" (implicit: therefore, it is important that the people with the relative competences plan enough hours for them). I whisper to Chesna that rental consultancy is also very specific. She laughs bitterly. I think she feels understood and appreciated by me, also because I reported to her that the most part of the phone calls I get are exactly for rental consultancy, whereas her contribution sometimes seems to pass unseen in the team. (Ethnographic log 02.11.2021, 3. meeting to plan the work for the following year)

She expressed a feeling of being already de facto external to the GB* team, as she was the only one doing legal rental consultancy, with barely any intersections with the work of the rest of the team. She missed the exchange with a colleague with the same competences and tasks within the team, which made her feel closer to her colleagues in the same role in other GB*s, even if they were sometimes far from her geographically, and to other institutions such as Mieterhilfe and Caritas.

"Our mandated area has more inhabitants than Graz": the effects of the progressive reduction in number of GB*s over time

The political decisions which brought, historically, to the expansion of the presence of GB*s from the Seventies to the Nineties and to its contraction from the first decades of the XXI century – in the form of reduction of sites and expansion of the areas to take care of – have been hardly

discussed in public debate and scientific literature, with few exceptions (Sommer, 1992, p. 35-36), sometimes coming from researchers who are also practitioners in the GB* (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012).

> "In the face of the numerous interdisciplinary tasks that the Gebietsbetreuungen currently undertake or are supposed to undertake, it is even questionable whether the tool by now is not overloaded with unfulfillable and unrealistic expectations and whether it is possible to cope with the plentiful responsibilities with the available resources.[123]" (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012)

However, it emerged as central in the interviews I conducted with the GB* and in my ethnographic observations during the 5-week internship at GB* Mitte. Central from the endogenous perspective of interviewees, but also in the sense that it affects several aspects of the GB*`s work. In this section, drawing from empirical materials, I illustrate far-ranging direct and indirect consequences of this structural change, which also has implications on the target groups of the Gebietsbetreuung.

Firstly, it may be relevant to specify that a GB* mandate lasts 3 years, extendable up to a maximum of 6 years. The preparation for each competition brings additional workload and stress (Feigelfeld, 2000). The outcome can potentially imply changes about the area to take care of and its size, as well as about the team`s size and composition.

> *"And, of course, teams change constantly with new calls for tenders, and these are stressful situations, of course, I mean, because you need to prove your worth over and over. And this is according to the business principle, so it is on one side about the quality of the work, but also about costs, right? […] So, it causes stress, of course every time that these period end, so to say, because these are very time-consuming and laborious procedures, very long and complicated procedures that also demand really a lot of resources. I mean, to candidate oneself anew."* (Interview with GB*3)

Despite the stable Viennese political landscape, dominated by the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) since several decades, which confers the work of the GB* a certain stability and continuity, the variable and ever decreasing number of GB*s determined that single employees and even entire teams lost their jobs, when their sites were cut of merged. This is surely a sad situation for the individuals, but also has negative effects on the institution, since technical and informal knowledge, competences, know-how, experience, and networks with individuals and institutions in the areas get lost.

> "The recent award of contract shows, among others, how professional continuity and local expertise are lost, when not only single employees but whole teams of workers are no longer active on site. To be able to break this development, it needs clear (socio)political guidelines, a professionally based agenda and possibly also other structures and framework conditions."[124] (Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012)

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[123] Translation by the author. Original text in German: „Angesichts der zahlreichen interdisziplinären Aufgaben, die Gebietsbetreuungen derzeit übernehmen bzw. übernehmen sollen, ist auch zu hinterfragen, ob das Instrument inzwischen nicht mit unerfüllbaren und unrealistischen Erwartungen überladen ist und ob die Fülle der Aufgaben im Rahmen der vorhandenen Ressourcen tatsächlich bewältigbar ist."

[124] Translation by the author. Original text in German: "Die aktuelle Vergabe zeigt u. a. auch, wie fachliche Kontinuität und lokale Expertise tatsächlich verloren gehen, wenn nicht nur AuftragnehmerInnen, sondern ganze Teams von MitarbeiterInnen nicht mehr vor Ort tätig sind. Um diese Entwicklungen durchbrechen zu

"This is the key issue: there have been more sites, by large more. It has been cut down to 5 sites in the wake of the last contract award. Many districts were very sad, of course, since not all contractors hopped on the train. Certainly, experiential knowledge also went wasted, definitely. Also the inhabitants lost something: «Who can I turn to now?»" (Interview with GB*1)

The ones who stayed often had to cope with huge mandated areas.

"The money and material resources such as offices and so on, this is all ok, isn't it? What makes it hard are these huge areas. I think it`s a challenge to keep the overview and always to be up to date, a big one I would say." (Interview with GB*1)

On top of that, they typically worked for the GB* part time (20 or 30 hours per week), and parallelly had another occupation. The prevalence of part-time is due to the fact that the GB* is run by consortia of private and third-sector actors with different shares, and that low shares translate into few working hours. Whereas most of the interviewees considered the physical spaces and the resources to cover material costs generously sufficient – in pandemic years, there had resulted even a leftover to save for the following years – working hours were seen as a scarce good by 7 interviewees out of 11.

"When it comes to time, the question always comes up, how much time one has in comparison to the things one should achieve [laughs]. So, we get a lot of hours yearly, but conversely the question is, how high the demands are about all the things we should do in this time. And there I would say that it has become harder in the last years. […] And in proportion, of course, we have much less per inhabitant we are responsible of. For a comparison, our mandated area in Vienna, we like to say, we are responsible for the second biggest city in Austria, because the districts we are responsible for have in total about 500 000 inhabitants." (Interview with GB*8)

At their outset, the GB*s went out and around the neighborhood to keep up to date about developments in the area and to build up and keep their role of local experts. The unfavorable ratio between working hours and area to cover makes it impossible to maintain the historical concept of the GB* and compels to reshape its role. Quantitative changes in the structural conditions of work make qualitative changes unavoidable.

"I mean, it`s ok, but what we cannot fulfill anymore is to really be the institution who knows best locally, but this is the true concept of Gebietsbetreuungen, that the Gebietsbetreuung is the one that simply knows what happens in neighborhoods, knows all people, all institutions, has good networks – that was the original idea, and it doesn`t work anymore, because there are 5 districts, we have 5 District Councils, a lot of municipal departments, a lot of associations, initiatives. We absolutely cannot know all, and it`s simply a pity, isn't it?" (Interview with GB*8)

I think that time scarcity also explains a set of different behaviors I observed at GB* Mitte: it was not uncommon for single employees to stand up and walk away of the meeting room during weekly team meetings, to withdraw in the office part of the neighborhood center. At the beginning, I interpreted it as a sign of boredom and need of a break. Later, I realized that they

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können, braucht es klare (sozial)politische Vorgaben, eine fachlich begründete Programmatik und möglicherweise auch andere Strukturen und Rahmenbedingungen."

were busy with phone calls (outside office times), writing, and researching. Typically, it was rental consultants who needed to use any time splits to catch up with their backlog. Sometimes, the organizers did not show up at GB* events for inhabitants or left in the middle. One of the reasons for such frantic behaviors (multitasking, activity switching) was banally the need to carve time to work on other tasks. During the Ladies' Coffee (*Frauencafé*) – a regular event when women meet up to chat and do something together, which is related every time to a different topic – one of the organizers from the local GB* disappeared after bringing a coffee jug into the room and greeting the participants. The other one, who had started the session together with us participants, went away as well towards the middle. I suppose they needed to get some other work done. In that occasion, I reflected that the GB*`s shift from paternalism to activation and facilitation of the inhabitants` initiatives can be partly seen as a way of turning a need into a virtue.

> "On the other hand, the function and the spirit of GB* in the events is that of scaffolding: to encourage the inhabitants to become themselves active and propose something; to offer them a place, the Neighborhood Center (Grätzelzentrum), and organizational help; to 'open the dances'; to fade until disappearing, when things are getting going and proceeding. (Ethnographic log 24.02.2022).

The elements of social work introduced in the 1990s made it even more necessary to take time for each interaction with the residents, to listen carefully, to inform and even chitchat – in short, to forget about the watch – as strategies to build relationships of trust and let messages go through. However, the lots of things to do and the scarcity of available resources impose an efficient and measured organization of time. This temporal dilemma is part of GB*s` daily work and becomes stronger with every mandate. During an appointment at GB* South to discuss and fine-tune with an employee the method for virtual journeys, I was surprised by the relaxed start with preliminary tea and small talk. In fact, my internship at another site, especially team meetings, had taught me that the GB*s leave their time use by no means to chance, and that every single hour is planned, registered, and possibly checked upon. Thus, I understood the soft start as a premeditated, deliberate strategy to approach people and bring them to collaborate.

The huge workload seems to contribute to the feeling of individualization and risks putting distance between team members, also according to the different ways of conceiving the job presented in the previous section.

> Petra [my mentor] tells me and Lena [the other intern], while we are putting the dishware from the Ladies Café in the dishwasher, that each one in the GB* thinks that his or her sector/focus ("his/her thing", in my mentor`s words) is the only one or the truly important one. A picture of internal divisions within the team emerges, not (so much) in the relationships among colleagues but rather in the way of conceiving the job and in world views. (Ethnographic log 04.11.2021)

In has been argued in literature that the many-sided work of the GB* be only partially quantifiable.

> "Most of the areas of activity elude meaningful quantification based on their same nature. The many unarguably positive effects are hardly definable in numbers. Due to most differently structured data and to the lack of comparable statistics, it is also not possible

to include in the interpretation, in some way, measurable quantities such as the volume of and the time needed for care duties, or also concerned persons, houses, flats or activated investments." (Feigelfeld, 2000)

However, it is realistic to imagine that the workload is even bigger than registered on planning and evaluation papers, where the relational and informal parts of the job do not appear. Moreover, alone the feeling of being overwhelmed by things to do and out of time, beyond the objective workload, deserves attentive consideration, since it influences the daily work at the Gebietsbetreuung. As the Thomas theorem teaches, the way we act is influenced by our beliefs and the way we frame things which, no matter whether 'real' or not, are real in their consequences. The enlargement of the areas of competence conferred informality a prominent role and produced evident effects during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Informality and working knowledge

It may be unexpected, given the institutional role of the GB*, but informality and a 'realist', pragmatic attitude have a very important place in their work and are in common among team members across disciplinary backgrounds and *foci*. I could observe that these tend to be contraposed to theory-orientation of the academia, bureaucracy of funding mechanisms, and idealism of some positions such as those of tenants who turn to them for rental consultancy. Especially more experienced team members conceive the work of GB*s as practical in its nature and see the need to compromise between different actors and discern what is reasonably possible and what is not. This pragmatic attitude leads the GB*, for instance, to differentiate between what needs to be told to win the competitions for financing and what is pragmatically feasible and can be told to inhabitants. For example, the number of hours foreseen by project plans may not correspond perfectly to that declared to potential volunteers who may take part in participatory projects, since these may be put off by not having as much time to devote to the cause as indicated in planning documents. This conduct is also influenced by the fact that GB*s` power of decision and action is reduced.

> At 11:30, Petra ends a two-hour call with the 'upper floors'. She says that – without answering nor taking the word – she went through a very long call about a strategy on which the GB* has very little power to be able to intervene. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021)

In the next paragraphs, I am going to discuss how the reduction of physical sites over time, and the consequent increase of workload, potentiates informality. This phenomenon can be explained if we see informality as a "survival strategy" and pragmatic solution to keep on working towards the goals in the mandate despite unfavorable conditions.

The exchange among GB*s is perceived as unsatisfactory and much weaker than in the past, mostly because each site is confronted with too much work to do internally, but also because the official networking performed by the coordination team does not seem to fully reach its goals. Therefore, single employees spontaneously organize informal networking initiatives, sometimes even outside working hours, to share ideas and competences among different teams. An

interviewee described the initiatives of organizing tours in the mandated areas for the employees of another site as "leisurely". It has been experimented to share competences and know-how among different GB*s by way of occasionally 'lending and borrowing' employees to solve contingent problems. However, the current situation of huge workload and time scarcity makes it hardly feasible anymore.

> *"Well, de facto it`s not easy at all, because they are also snowed under with work, so to speak. […] It`s a nice thought, we had it also for the languages and, in that case, we also lent our two colleagues, a Turkish woman architect and a Slovenian one who also speaks BCS [Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian], but we also need people for projects. So, in exceptional cases it`s ok, but it is actually not really for trade, because we are also tight with resources."* (Interview with GB*5)

In addition, the fast turnover caused by the reduction in the number of sites obstacles the slow process of transmission of knowledge between experienced employees and newcomers. If we consider that most team members are in part-time, forced to search for a second job to perform simultaneously and parallel to the occupation at the GB* to sustain themselves, we realize that this is not only stressful for the employees, but also has negative implications for the organization. Having few little working hours means that the employees can collect less technical knowledge and expertise and cannot have an immersive knowledge of the area. An employee who, by the time of the interview, was working for the GB* and somewhere else in marketing, while doing her master, acknowledged with relief at the end of our interview:

> *"I was afraid, I could say not so much, because I don`t have so many [working] hours at the GB* but a little bit, something [to say] is there instead, from observing."* (Interview with GB*6)

The literature indicates that the broad range of tasks expected from the GB* leads to very different interpretations of the job by different teams, since the *foci* are laid where it is pragmatically more convenient.

> "The comprehensive mandate brings the institutions themselves to lay focal points depending on the conditions and possibilities in the district and determines that there is no uniform competence profile." (Haller, 2004)

My research shows that also the insufficiency of communication between sites and, even more, the big size of the mandated areas, require pragmatic judgements and lead to different outcomes. A systematic action of care is structurally impossible because of the unfavorable ratio between the urban area under their responsibility and the available resources in terms of working hours. The dilemma of choice derives from the impossibility of knowing every inhabitant and institutional actor in the area, and of tackling all open matters. This opens spaces for informal and personal relationships, sometimes already institutionalized as networks, to influence the spatial focus on one neighborhood or district rather than another, the topics treated, the target groups of events and interventions. Letting informality and chance, less predictable and accountable elements, lead decisions and action is in this case, paradoxically, a rational and pragmatic strategy.

> *"This focus also partly depends on us. So, where we have good contacts, where there are things which we find interesting […]. It means that it also depends a bit on chance, on*

where somebody knows somebody, or where somebody gets to know about something exciting, and can then build good contacts. To make an example, we have very good contacts with the police in the 5. district [...]. This means that I know that every time that there are topics regarding the police, I can call him on the phone, and I have the personal contact – and I dare to phone too, because there is always a certain inhibition threshold to call the police. [...] Instead in the 11. district, for example, for which we are also responsible, we don't know the police agents, because it has not come to any personal contact there so far. Therefore, we contact the police there much less in case of problems, because we don`t know them, and they also don`t know us, and if we phoned there, they don`t know us and thus one gets a different treatment." (Interview with GB*8)

The top-down political decision of reducing the number of offices, by overloading employees with work, pushes them to embrace a more neoliberal working ethos as an indirect, pragmatic by-product, to be "realistic" and "efficient". This more efficient and impersonal working ethos, whereby inhabitants to support and take care of (*betreuen*) become "customers", is problematized in terms of justice by some of the interviewees. Working under conditions of permanent time pressure and with the ghost of a new competition after every third year of work, the GB*s ration their energies and let them flow in the most promising directions in terms of success and feedback. What is feasible? What is going to work? Such questions are the starting point of the selection and personal interpretation of the work of the GB* by most of its employees. The downside of this strategy is that it is unfair towards the inhabitants, since it does not intentionally orientate the efforts towards the areas that need them the most, reinforcing territorial disadvantages.

> -GB*8: "Depending on where it works well, it comes to focal points. Of course, if I know that I can work very well with the Municipal Garden Authority in the 5. district, then I will much more likely realize a revegetation project there as in the 10. district, where I know that it`s hard. And this also influences our work, where we are active. So, there are also these pragmatic reasons: we become more active where we have had good experiences, where it`s possible to cooperate well with other institutions and authorities. And this is actually indeed comprehensible, but for the inhabitants of these districts it is luck of unluck, they cannot do anything about it."
> -I, the interviewer: "*That`s true.*"
> -GB*8: "So, it`s also problematic. It`s actually not just, not fair, because we lay the focal points not according to where it would be the most important, but rather according to where we see more success chances, chances to reach something." (Interview with GB*8)

The same dilemma is valid also for target groups, since the easiest-to-reach – those with medium and high levels of cultural capital – do not necessarily correspond to the ones who would need the GB* the most.

The Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic limited some parts of the work of GB*s. For instance, it froze the collaborations and already planned projects with classrooms, since schools were very busy with coping with the totally new challenges posed by distance learning, integrated learning, and Covid-19 testing. Nevertheless, the overall activity of the GB* did not reduce but rather diversified, since it became strategically necessary to create online formats to reach inhabitants during lockdowns and, in the good season, to potentiate events and visibility outdoors through

going outs. Not only the responsible person for public relations and communication within each team, but the whole team had to spend time conceiving new ways to fulfil the mandate, and to maintain social networks with individual and collective actors in the area through a time-consuming, continuous presence online. Online formats were perceived, in a sense, as more democratic because they make it possible for more people to participate than classic participation formats. For instance, when collecting inhabitants` voices about revitalization plans for a park, an online pool can reach more people than street interviewing, because the latter requires more resources in terms of number of working hours by the interviewers. It also offers more opportunities for busy inhabitants with little time – typically working adults, especially those with family obligations – to participate.

> *"We even converted [to online formats] participatory projects in the middle of the participation phase and did not only a citizens' assembly in the district but also a bigger one online with 100 people. And it even worked very well."* (Interview with GB*10b)

> *"At the beginning it was quite shocking, because we got, so to say, in panic because we thought that we could not fulfil our mandate at all."* (Interview with GB*5)

The same interviewee explained that a turning point came when the participatory planning project for the transformation on the boulevard Thaliastraße, originally planned as face-to-face consultation process, needed to be moved online. In that occasion, GB* employees noticed that the amount and kind of participant inhabitants varies a lot between off- and online.

> *"I think almost 3000 questionnaires have been filled in, a ratio which we do not even nearly reach when we do it in analogue. I believe this is a really big change, that we realized, that some things are possible over the internet and that different people get involved right now. What means 'different'? That the people are younger, and we find it good that it`s like this, because it`s the future, it`s the new generation. And in analogue participatory formats white, old men are there and vote that they want to go to the supermarket by car."* (Interview with GB*5)

Time scarcity, fear of contagion, the consideration of individuals with reduced mobility or care responsibilities are among the reasons which guided the decision to keep some events online also outside lockdown periods.

Art exhibition about the Covid-19 pandemic at GB* Mitte. Photo by the author.

However, moving the activities to online channels increases the risk to miss out vulnerable categories such as migrants or elderly people, who need the GB*`s services the most, especially concerning those which enable the fulfilment of fundamental needs[125], such as the free rental consultancy. For this reason, the pandemic also caused the intensification of GB\*`s mobile activities in the open air, in public space ('going-out' formats). As a GB* practitioner with experience of street work explained:

> *"Yes, we also have a cool homepage, I think, which transmits a lot of content, where people can get informed well. […] But those, who are not so affine, you can reach them well if you go out, place yourself somewhere and have an exciting program, or try to give interesting information…"* (Interview with GB*1)

A typical example are the outings with the special orange, branded GB* cargo bike, aimed at making the GB* visible and informing inhabitants about its offer. This dislocated work has, among others, the advantage of remedying the big size of the areas to cover, given that the visibility and influence of physical offices is limited to a small radius.

> *"Even if now a lot of things run through e-mail, phone, online – also because of Covid – consultancies or further projects, we realize that here in the 15. district, for example, there is also high demand from people that like to come personally. No matter whether it is about gardening or some kind of consultancy, we realize that most people here come from the surroundings or from places where our site is reachable [easily], and that it reduces significantly, the farther it is from our site, and fewer and fewer people come."* (Interview with GB*10a)

Finally, in some cases, the suspension of in-presence events due to lockdowns brought more office work and potentiated the vertical connections with local administrations, rather than the horizontal and hands-on work with inhabitants.

In this paragraph we have seen, so far, that the pandemic brough new strategies and raised some dilemmas. A dilemma is whether to broaden participation or specifically target more disadvantaged categories among inhabitants. Another one is whether to focus on office work to strengthen the connections with local administrations and politics (vertical level) – an easier solution in Winter months with high numbers of Covid-19 infections and deaths – or to embark in experimental projects online or in presence in squares and parks, in good weather and the pandemic situation seemed under control, to reach inhabitants (horizontal level). One thing appears clear from the data I collected: the workload for GB* employees became bigger and increasingly scattered on different fronts during the pandemic. The dilemmas point out the necessity to take decisions and prioritize, which was anyway already present in the work of GB*s, given their wide range of functions and the huge areas in their mandate. The new and unexpected challenges posed by the pandemic, with the consequent extension and diversification

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[125] Amartya Sen defines them *basic capabilities*, while other scholars such as Bernard Williams or Ingrid Robeyns prefer the term *fundamental capabilities* (Robeyns, 2000).

of GB*'s work, make it even more urgent to increase the number of teams and physical posts on the territory.

All or no one: what are the target groups of GB*s?

Each GB* is formally responsible for all inhabitants living in their mandated area. From its traditional engagement in consultancy and renter support to recent developments towards area-based social work, the GB* is supposed to have a special eye for the most vulnerable categories. Despite this broad and almost undifferentiated mandate, in this section I argue that, *de facto*, informal and pragmatic principles guide the selection of target groups due to limited time availability. In practice, it is often people with more resources, who do not need to fight for daily survival, who actively get in touch and engage themselves.

> *"I would even say that in these districts, the 7., 8., and 9., there is more work for us, because people have more financial security, often more time and thus, in accordance with Maslow`s pyramid of needs, often also fancy and enjoy committing for their surroundings."* (Interview with GB*1)

Often, because of the mechanisms described in the previous section, the people who get in touch with GB*s are the ones who, by chance, happen to live in the areas where the neighborhood centers are located or where informal networking between local institutions works the best. The GB* appeared aware of the impossibility of reaching everybody, and sometimes even thematized it, exercising self-criticism. Time resources and qualified employees – possibly with linguistic competence in relevant foreign languages and intercultural competence – were acknowledged to be the crucial points.

> *"Of course, we ask ourselves this question over and over [How to reach disadvantaged groups?], how to manage. On one side, when there is no pandemic crisis going on, through really a lot of presence on site and by approaching people, and also with good projects either with discussion tables or with signs in park of with small parties, but…you also need a lot or employees who approach people, this is the essential. In ideal case of course also with suitable mother tongue."* (Interview with GB*9)

> A lady interested in gardening for herself and a friend calls in. She has a foreign accent and speaks in an unclear way. I pass the phone to Sarah. The lady – who seems young, from her voice – doesn`t have any e-mail address! Finally, they decide that the lady will come round to the neighborhood center Maxi and that Sarah will print a paper with all places and possibilities to garden on it. "You know, if I have to inform 20 people, I cannot talk over the phone or personally with each of them", Sarah comments with stressed tone. (Ethnographic log 27.10.2021)

Finding volunteer helpers to circumvent the language barrier with inhabitants with migrant background is one of the strategies to overcome the problem of target groups.

> *"We recently recognized, in a workshop, that maybe we often rather address the same target group. […] Always unwittingly, we reach a bit always the same group, somehow. And we also noticed that maybe we should communicate a bit more multilingual. If the information is really important, we need to take care of getting the translation."* (Interview with GB*6)

Some practitioners mentioned the existence of a guest book where the names of all people who receive different kinds of consultancy from GB*s are noted. Unfortunately, they could not tell

me whether and when these are analyzed and classified, which would provide information on the socio-demographic profiles of the people who use GB* services.
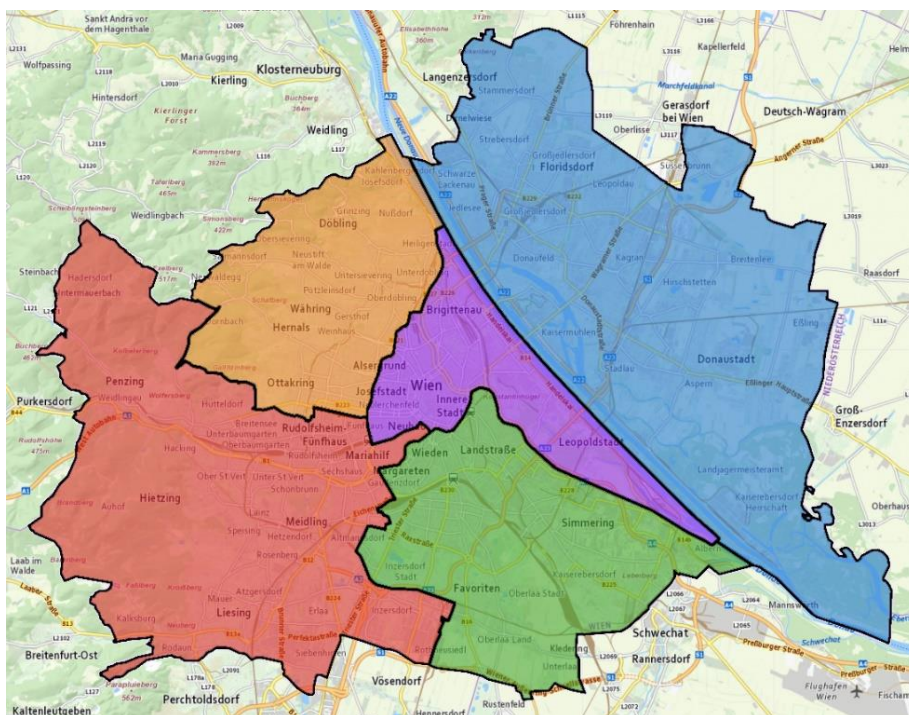
● **GB* North (districts 21, 22) = 363 198 inhabitants**
● **GB*South (districts 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 23) = 463 680 inhabitants**
● **GB*West (districts 16, 17, 18, 19) = 285 542 inhabitants**
● **GB* East (districts 3, 4, 5, 10, 11) = 491 642 inhabitants**
● **GB*Center (districts 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 20) = 307 129 inhabitants**
12-19 members per team!

Niederschwelligkeit (literally 'low threshold'), a noun which could be translated into the English *accessibility*, is a recurring concept in the institutional vocabulary of GB*s and the goal pursued to reach as many inhabitants as possible, also vulnerable ones. It is also what makes Vienna an 'easy city' according to the families in my sample. It means removing the barriers of social nature connected to language, educational level, gender and so on to guarantee substantial freedom to access GB*s` offer. Even more, it means creating the conditions for people to access, participate, and become active in a simple way, without having to invest too many resources.

> "In the contacts with population, it should be laid attention especially to further reduce entrance barriers of social nature (due to language, educational level, gender roles…)." (Feigelfeld, 2000)

Nothing new for practitioners of the GB*, but a tough nut to crack. New is that I am posing the issue within the conceptual frame of the Capability Approach, which suggests that where contextual conversion factors are given, people need to invest less resources to access the capabilities they value. 'Low threshold' generates more equity, since the less resources and competences individuals have, the most important it is that GB*s makes it easy for them to access the offer. Moreover, a 'low threshold' fuels aspirations, since the easier it is to participate in events or take the initiative, the more inhabitants will be motivated to do it. This consideration may help overcome the conflicts – explicit and implicit, pragmatic about the allocation of resources, and identitarian – among GB* employees about the supposed different relevance of

the different old and new functions of the institution. *Niederschwelligkeit* makes us reflect on the relationship between different layers of the job. To be able to turn to GB*s in case of need, people need to know that they exist and possibly have a relationship of sympathy, still better of trust, with one or two of its employees. Events give a human face to the institution and allow people to store the information 'in the back of their heads', *im Hinterkopf*. It is true that people with existential worries are less keen to actively engage in volunteering and free time activities, but through public space it is potentially possible to reach 'by chance' a broader and more differentiated public. The GB* strives to allow the counterflow and less 'natural' movement from more superficial to deeper layers of the pyramid of human needs. "Soft", funny aspects of quality of life and of practitioners` work in the GB*, addressed through events, represent the iceberg top of GB*s` work and are used as bait. Through these channels, people are brought to dare, trust and be motivated to turn to "harder" services provided by the GB*, such as housing consultancy or the social work services, the latter only partially contained in the GB*`s mandate, but *de facto* integrated in the job.

> *"We try to always have such a mix. Often, we do really funny events, which look so, that my friends say: "What do you actually do in your job?" But these events serve to invite people and are simply EASY to take part to – a Café or cooking together or similar things – but through these events you can clarify a lot of questions, pass a lot of knowledge, you can also make a lot of exchange possible among people, that are for example new neighbors and suddenly realize that they all have the same questions, the same paths and don`t know exactly which bike lanes they should take, or just moved to the same district and wonder what happens with the new kindergarten."* (Interview with GB*4)

> As I told Petra that the Ladies café allows to put everyday troubles aside, she suggested that it also allows to go much deeper, to arrive to existential problems and bring basic aspects to the surface. Some metaphors come up to my mind about this function of the GB*: a sounder, a fishing net, a hook. (Ethnographic log 28.10.2021)

Niederschwelligkeit (accessibility) of GB*s` offers encompasses different aspects: being free of charge; without registration; at the right time and not too time-consuming, which is relevant especially for adults already busy with work and family obligations. The physical presence on the territory – with close and easily reachable (on foot or by public transport) physical offices – is the one aspect of *Niederschwelligkeit* I want to underline. In the past, the physical presence of a GB* in (almost) each and every district made this institution a truly public service. Being physically present in the neighborhood means being able to reach and engage with diverse categories of inhabitants, as diverse as the office surroundings and their people. Nowadays, the difference within the mandated area between those who can reach the office of reference easily – on the basis of distance and of their motility, meant as capability to be mobile (Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004) – and those who can`t represents a form of inequality that also influences the degree of motivation to get in touch with the GB*. This form of inequality adds up to other social inequalities between inhabitants.

> It has been demonstrated that neighborhood effects are truer for certain categories than for others. So is also the effect of GB*s: those who needed them the most, who are also less easy to include, would have the most benefit from attending the GB*. GB*`s 'power of capture' is maximum in the vicinity of physical sites, especially regarding the subjects to reach. Those who manage to interact with the GB* despite their living far are the ones

who are good with digital technologies, have time and cultural tools to get informed and show interest. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021)

Making participation easy for all inhabitants, or at least for as many as possible, would require, as precondition, huge resources in terms of working hours. This is especially true for *going outs* which, for their idea of "hanging around" (purposefully) and opening to unforeseen encounters, are potentially very suitable to reach hard-to-reach categories, which are typically 'at home outdoors' (GB*4) and include, for instance, families with children, people who live in small flats, and elderly people.

> *"With this mandate we are peripheral. We are an office for 6 districts here, nobody knows us out there. To make the Gebietsbetreuung known, we simply go out."* (Interview with GB*10a)

I am going to illustrate some aspects of accessibility by way of reporting on the going-out initiative named City Café (Stadtcafé) of the 13. (Hietzing) and 14. (Penzing) district on 14.09.2021. The GB* South found a spot at the margins of Hadikpark and brought a bar cart on wheels, sun umbrellas, deck chairs, and some more furniture there. The main goals of the event, which lasted one day, were: to make the inhabitants aware of GB*; to provide them with information and have an open ear for their questions, proposals, complaints; to entertain. A very lively part of the event area was occupied by the kids` corner, with a carpet on the ground, a table with paper and pencils on it, some materials and toys spread around. An island with two pieces of display furniture allowed inhabitants passing by to participate and tell their opinions about their neighborhood through physical interaction with objects rather than words. In my role as researcher, and of resident of the 14. district, I decided to go there and have a look around. Some months later, one of the organizers asked me for feedback to discuss with her colleagues in the team meeting of the day afterwards. I underlined three different components of accessibility: physical accessibility; linguistic accessibility; 'care' or 'conciliation' accessibility.

> I found it really strategical that a person was always at the margin of the Café area and acted as 'crowd-puller', to make people exclude the hypothesis that it was about advertisement or a public event, legitimizing the act of entering the area of the City Café (trespassing the threshold). The pieces of furniture with maps hanging from them, on which people could mark the places they liked, disliked, feared, recommended, met with friends at etc. , was an alternative way of expressing one`s opinion without talking, precious for those who do not speak good German or do not want to speak with others for diverse reasons (it is inclusive towards foreigners and people with visual cognitive styles or learning disabilities). The space for the kids to play allowed their parents to stay long (conciliation). (Ethnographic log 18.10.2021)

About visibility, my conversant admitted that the crowd-puller had been more of a spontaneous initiative on individual basis than a concerted strategy. She thanked me, saying that the new awareness could help them make it systematic. As also later during the internship at GB* Mitte, I noticed that evaluation and auto-evaluation are common practices for GB*s.

Neighborhood Café of the 13. and 14 district. Organized by the Gebietsbetreuung in Hadikpark on 14.09.2021 h 14-18. Chill-out area for information exchange and children`s corner. Photos by the author.

Neighborhood Café of the 13. and 14 district. Passers-by are invited to mark 'their places' in the neighborhood on the board with different colors: "Here I meet with my friends", "I like to be here!", "Here there is something to change!", "Here I do not feel comfortable", "You should absolutely come here!". Photo by the author.

As also evident from the part of this research project carried out with EU-migrant families, time is a crucial conversion factor to enable the participation of families in the events. For example, in my internship I participated in a discussion about the planning of a neighborhood week when it was insisted on the necessity to plan events at a daytime when children had already gone out of school, in order to ensure a larger participation than only a couple of inhabitants. An employee

told me that, monitoring the statistics about the attendees at their events, they noticed that there are more mothers with children at morning[126] or early afternoon events. She continued:

> *"And now we adapted our opening times a bit, so that we go out sometimes in the before noon and sometimes in the afternoon and, also, always take care to do the events a bit before in the afternoon, depending on the season. We adapt it a bit, it`s a bit a learning process, we have a look when it works the best. Depending on the daytime different people come."* (Interview with GB*6)

Language is another relevant aspect of accessibility. The presence of persons with migration background among team members can be advantageous to reach inhabitants with migrant background, not only because of the linguistic competences and common cultural codes, but also because of the similarity in life experience and set of problems to tackle. GB* employees with migrant background, similarly to teachers with migrant background working in schools (Cavaliere, 2019), might have a specific kind of sensibility to recognize problems and the underlying needs. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that positive effects of the presence of employees with migrant background to cater to the needs of inhabitants with migrant background have been noticed even when the nations of provenance and mother tongues are different (Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, 2007). In this regard, a special project initiated by the GB* in collaboration with Caritas in 2012 and later taken over by Caritas has been mentioned several times during the interviews with GB* employees and leaders. I think it is worth to present it to further illustrate the role of languages as conversion factor and the concept of multipliers, which can also be seen as a strategy to remedy the scarcity of available working hours and to promote the inhabitants' capabilities and quality of life. The project 'neighborhood parents', in German *Grätzeleltern*, consisted in the recruitment of volunteers among inhabitants, who were instructed in matters of housing and living together in the neighborhood. The pilot project was initiated by the Gebietsbetreuung in collaboration with Caritas in the Western belt-areas (*Westgürtel*) of the 6. and 15. Viennese districts, featured by high migrant rates and poor housing conditions, in 2012. In the pilot phase, 8 couples of 'neighborhood parents' aimed at reaching 100-120 households. The initial successes gave the opportunity to extend it to 7 Viennese districts. The 'neighborhood parents' – who had different origin, gender, age, educational background, and job occupation – were then sent back to their communities to bring knowledge and know-how, starting from their personal network of family, friends, and acquaintances. In couple, they would visit abodes of modest and poor households. This was expected to lead to the development of competences and empower disadvantaged individuals and categories – for example, giving them tips and tricks about how to spare energy or plant greenery in their inner courtyard – through the direct contact between a couple of 'neighborhood parents' and a household. The main problematic areas targeted by the intervention were the improvement of living conditions and of energy efficiency to tackle poverty and promote healthy housing. The Grätzeleltern looked for low-threshold channels to 'hook' their targets, such as approaching them in physical spaces in the neighborhood and during everyday mundane activities such as walking the dog (go-along). They also used their individual networks, (migrant)

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[126] The Austrian welfare system foresees maternity leaves up to three years. Overall, women`s participation to the job market is low.

communities, and associations. Presenting themselves not as professionals but as community members and neighbors, they acted as multipliers of knowledge and competences, according to the tenet 'help to self-help'. Moreover, the effects of their interventions on each household were expected to amplify themselves to more households according to a 'snowball system'. However, the volunteers were first and foremost supposed to play the key role of "missing link" between the large offer of technical and social institutions to turn to in case of problems in Vienna on one side, and people immersed in problematic living conditions on the other side. In other words, they took on a bridging function between the institutional landscape and its designated users that did not have the possibility to reach or be reached by the institutions.

> "Past experiences – for example, those of local Gebietsbetreuungen on site – show, however, that exactly especially affected people (such as, for instance, socially disadvantaged migrants), due to the lack of knowledge about the offers, linguistic and cultural barriers or uncertainties and fears towards institutions and authorities rarely get reached. The consultancy in the institutions upon prior telephonic appointment represents for some concerned people an offer with relatively high threshold. Therefore, lower threshold intermediation initiatives are needed to create the "missing links" between existing professional consultancy offers and concerned households."[127] (Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2013, p. 10-6)

> "The project Neighborhood Parents support the building of "linking social capital", so the access to (public) institutions. The Gebietsbetreuung, that is in several cases the first consultancy institution that mediates, becomes indeed more easily accessible for and through the neighborhood parents."[128] (*Ibidem*)

Children and families

In this research, some conversations with the parents in the sample gave me the impression that they had pre-conceived notions to debunk about public and third-sector institutions:

-That they are meant merely for people in need or for cases of emergency;

-That they have merely leisure purposes and are a plus which families can allow themselves once that more fundamental issues are solved. They occupy and suck time, rather than freeing time by solving the inhabitants` problems. Therefore, it is mostly people with a lot of spare time who can turn to them.

Only three families in the sample knew the GB*s. One of them could recognize the local Stadtteilmanagement by name and knew where their office was located. For the other two it was an almost 'invisible actor' which, from time to time, left traces such as magazines and leaflets

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[127] Translation by the author. Original text in German: "Bisherige Erfahrungen – z.B. seitens der vor Ort angesiedelten Gebietsbetreuungen – zeigen allerdings, dass gerade bestimmte besonders betroffene Menschen (wie z.B. sozial benachteiligte MigrantInnen) aufgrund fehlenden Wissens über die Angebote, aufgrund sprachlicher und kultureller Barrieren oder aufgrund von Unsicherheiten und Ängsten gegenüber Institutionen und Behörden dennoch schwer erreicht werden. Die Beratung in der Einrichtung nach vorheriger telefonischer Terminvereinbarung stellt für manche Betroffene ein relativ hochschwelliges Angebot dar. Es bedarf daher niederschwelligerer Vermittlungsinitiativen, um die „Missing Links" zwischen bestehenden professionellen Beratungsangeboten und betroffenen Haushalten herzustellen."

[128] Translation by the author. Original text in German: „Das Projekt „Grätzeleltern" unterstützt die Bildung von „linking social capital" (siehe Karstedt 2004), also den Zugang zu (öffentlichen) Institutionen. Gerade die Gebietsbetreuung, die in vielen Fällen die erste vermittelte Beratungseinrichtung ist, wird für und durch die Grätzeleltern tatsächlich niederschwelliger zugänglich."

delivered to their postboxes. The mother of one of these last two families was confused about the size and the organizational structure of the Gebietsbetreuung and knew only about the part of the job which consists in organizing events. She excluded *a priori* the possibility to be able to take part in these events because her impression was that they were prevalently held on Saturdays, when she was busy working.

> *"In my district, there's a group from the sixth district that often sends us home information about all the events that are going to take place in the sixth district. But they only… I don't know if it's a small association that's only dealing with this district, and maybe they organize either summer Saturdays, special days at the park for kids, or when it was possible [before the pandemic] the markets under that basement or in that park. And maybe if there was a discussion on the topic of violence on women, or the Mariahilfer women's race."* (Interview with M8)

Children and families are no specific target of the GB*. However, most of the individuals who take part in rental legal consultancy, neighborhood gardening, and events happen to be persons with children. This tallies with the literature pointing out that families with children in school age often belong to the category of 'heavy users' of their neighbourhood of residence (Barberis, Angelucci, Jepson & Kazepov, 2017), also due to their reduced autonomous mobility. The GB* interviewee number 4 believed that addressing the most locally bound categories was a specificity of the GB* in comparison to other institution.

> *"For example, people who have children are in a certain phase of life simply not fully mobile in the city. I mean, of course not all, but many, because maybe they have the kindergarten and the primary school nearby and they have their paths, or if somebody is elderly and doesn`t need to cross half of the city to meet his friends anymore, but is rather settled down there, and maybe also has more free time during the day and wants to spend it nearby."* (Interview with GB*4)

The presence of playgrounds near the offices – for instance, of a water playground behind the Neighborhood Center of Gebietsbetreuung Mitte (see last paragraph of this chapter) and a playground in front of the Neighborhood Management of the neighborhood Neu Leopoldau – is a factor of attraction for children and their families.

Water playground in Max-Winter-Park. In the background, the rear part of Gebietsbetreuung Mitte's office. The building used to be a public, municipal open-air swimming pool for kids until 2007 and became the site of the neighborhood center Stuwerviertel in 2008. Photo by the author.

Even if offers for children are not strictly requested by GB*s` mandate, single GB*s sometimes target children on their own initiative, through: projects with school classrooms; particularly attractive events for families in public space (street festivals, book festivals, toy rental, children playgrounds, thematic urban rallies for children – all for free for the families); the creation of a mini library as safe place for children to access also autonomously, without parents, to spend 'uncompressed' time. Street festivals attract, among others, children, who "are at home outdoors" (GB*4), and parents after them. As far as my study revealed, in the pursue of its mandate the GB* views and treats children in four different ways:

1. As abstract subjects in the intersection of institutional networks;
2. As subjects-objects in tow and problem to solve to facilitate their parents` participation to events;
3. As multipliers and amplifiers of the visibility of the GB* (instrumental role), since parents go along their children and often end up in the places where their children want to go;
4. As proper inhabitants of the mandated areas, equally than adults, and therefore part of GB*s target.

It is only an analytical division since, most of the time, the categories are intertwined. Especially regarding points 3 and 4, it may not be clear to what extent an offer is for children or for their parents. Below, I explain and elaborate on the typology I presented.

1. Coordinator of networks. Concerning indirect contacts with children, the GB* knows and connects possibly all political and institutional players working with children and youth in the districts, to the advantage of schools and families.[129]

> *"We get a lot of what is currently important for children and youth in the district because we are in touch, for example, with Parkbetreuung [Park Attendants], Jugendzentren [Youth Centers], streetworkers, and of course they get it. So, they are out in public space, they have offers in parks and then if there are conflicts, for example, or the need to rearrange [in architectural and planning sense] something, we get it through these institutions. So, we have much more contacts with these multipliers, who themselves deal with children and youth than we personally do with them [directly with children and youth]. And this actually fits well to our role, it is very consonant."* (Interview with GB*8)

On top of that, the GB* actively supports institutional networks of all educational agencies on the territory called *Bildungsgrätzel*. Because of this position at the crossroads between different institutions dealing with childhood, they are supposed to be up-to date about the offer for children in the neighborhoods and possible issues. The extensive networking and the investments of the City of Vienna into social work help explain how Vienna became a pioneer and an affirmed authority in matters of social work with children and youth. According to one leader of the organization *Jugendtreff* and to the GB* employees I conversed with, from the Nineties, already existing informal networking was institutionalized and sealed by the Stadt Wien through official arrangements.

> The City of Vienna created the structure *Bildungsgrätzel*, gave it a name and the recognition due, but no money nor personnel. Petra says that the City of Vienna simply

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[129] Among the institutions explicitly targeting children and youth in Vienna there are, for instance, *Jugendtreff*, *Wiener Parkbetreuung*, *Fair-Play-Team*, *Cult.kids*, and *Kinderfreunde*. Families are targeted, for instance, by *NachbarInnen in Wien* or *Lenz Concordia*.

put a 'bow tie' to what illuminated and engaged people like Annelise and herself had already been doing, informally, for years. (Ethnographic log 15.10.2021, Jugendtreff am Volkertplatz)

It seems plausible that physical presence facilitates networking. For example, the fact that GB* Mitte had a site in the square Volkertplatz facilitated the collaboration with the organization Jugendtreff, located in the same square, for the construction of a youth center (Jugendzentzrum) next to a dying market. This raises the question whether the GB* could possibly have a role in the lives of the families in my sample, if they still had as many sites as at their peak.

2. Subjects in tow. The GB* takes care of ensuring parents` participation by offering the possibility to bring children along to any meeting. I observed the situation of an individual rental consultancy when a child was brought along to a GB* office not equipped to offer him any occupation beside staring the wall. At events, it is more common to provide materials for the children to play and keep busy. In this case, children are considered as subjects in tow and issue to solve to facilitate parents` participation.

> *"We get in touch with families in the sense that when somebody comes to us, it is often families. The children are often also present. We offer no childcare in classical sense at our events, but it is always possible to bring the children along, no matter at what time, and there is always the possibility for the children to choose something they want to engage themselves with while the adults maybe talk or want to do something else."* (Interview with GB*7)

3. Projects addressing children as proxies for their parents (instrumental role of children). For example, the cargo bike mentioned before in this chapter, described as a 'magnet for children' (GB*4), also induces their parents to exchange a few words with the GB*. About a conversation during a team meeting, I wrote down:

> There is some talking about how to attract children, if I understood well to give them the building site pixie book made by the GB* for children. Shall they hang air balloons or give them as present? No, it would be antienvironmental, Sarah objects. Shall they give goodies? Shall they give a little bag with seeds to plant? Or a voucher to buy an ice cream? Katharina, the chief, says it is about attracting the children to let their families get to know the work of GB*s. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021, 1. team meeting)

4. Initiatives addressing children as inhabitants of the mandated area (the children are effectively the first and last addressees, with no second means). To exemplify this category, I present a project conducted by a Gebietsbetreuung team in 2008 in collaboration with the primary school *Galileigasse* and the local district council of the 9. Viennese district and aimed at investigating children`s relation with urban public spaces in the neighborhood *Himmelpfortgrund*, where their school was located and most of the children lived. 40 pupils from 2 school classrooms of the third grade took part in it. The project, described in a book published by the Gebietsbetreuung (2008), consisted of 3 main activities. The children:
- made drawings about how they went to school and urban elements on the way from home to school, then commented them with text;
- read city maps under the guidance of GB* experts and marked the places they liked, disliked, and feared with happy and sad smileys;

- went on guided tours in the neighborhood with GB* experts and classroom teachers, played along the way under the observation of the adults, and documented them by taking photos with disposable cameras.

GB* employees, together with an urban psychologist, an urban planner, and an urban sociologist discussed research outcomes in a final expert roundtable. The research revealed that the big array of prescriptions and regulations to avoid dangers would limit children`s use of the city of Vienna even if, since the Eighties, a new trend towards the opening and loosening of these constraints had been set. This result of the discussion is interesting because Vienna, in comparison with the Hungarian and Italian cities and towns of provenance of the families in my sample, would allow children more and earlier autonomy. Interesting for my research, which reads the relation between children and city spaces in terms of capabilities and conversion factors, is also the discussion proposed about the need to take into account not only children`s *desires* (as utilitarists would do, according to Amartya Sen), but also their *needs*[130], conciliating participative planning and planners` ideas, whereby the latter can sometimes be in contrast with the preferences expressed by the users[131]. Finally, the Gebietsbetreuung reflected that the work with target groups such as children can give impulses to include in the planning of the same spaces also other groups of residents with complementary, or at least compatible needs. So far, concerning the outcomes of the research as distilled by adult professionals. Equally valuable are the copious raw materials attached to the report, such as drawings and maps with smileys, where children express their opinions about their daily lives and their settings.[132]

Another example of a project where children are the protagonists is the Playing City Ottakring (*Spielstadt Ottakring*) in *Garage Grande.* The project Garage Grande consists of the temporary use of a 2500 m^2, 4-storey garage in the middle of a densely built-up area in Vienna for gardening, meeting neighbors, tinkering, arts, and culture. The GB* West, like in the Bildungsgrätzel, took a role of coordination and support, used the space to inform inhabitants and institutional actors, and motivated them to become active and use the huge empty surface. In the Garage Grande, the Gebietsbetreuung West had a part, alongside the educational and cultural foundation A.R.E.A.L., in the organization of *Spielstadt Ottakring*, a summer camp for children and teenagers aged 7-15 free of charge and without registration. During Spielstadt Ottakring 2021, it also organized a one-week urban laboratory for children.

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[130] Sen and Nussbaum criticize both views, the first held by utilitarism and subjective welfarism, the second characterized by paternalism.

[131] See Sen's and Nussbaum criticism to utilitarism, preference-based approach.

[132] Another example of GB* participative project with school classrooms is the participatory planning initiative to reshape the forecourt of a primary school in the 14. Viennese district called Volksschule Märzstraße. The forecourt was particularly important to counterbalance the reduced size of the school courtyard. In collaboration with the district council and the responsible departments of the municipality of Vienna, the local Gebietsbetreuung aimed to involve the children, as users, in the planning. The implementation of the interventions is expected to be completed in time for the beginning of the new school year 2023-2024.

"Spielstadt Ottakring" (Play City Ottakring), 5.-16. July 2021 h 10-17. Free offer by the educational and cultural association Areal in cooperation with institutions from the Municipality of Vienna, the district administration, and Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung. Photo by the author.

GB* Mitte

Between October and November 2021, I did a 5-week internship at GB* Mitte. I chose exactly the site Gebietsbetreuung Mitte, among the total of 5 covering all Vienna, because it was an avantgarde for the introduction of social work elements into GB*s` work. Between 2002 and 2006, Gebietsbetreuung Mitte launched the pilot project neighborhood management (*Grätzelmanagement*), which enriched the established technical approach of soft urban renewal with elements coming from community work such as activation, participation, and networking (Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, 2007). The experiment was about improving the capabilities and the quality of life of inhabitants by 'activating' them, typically by using the tool of the activating survey. A key role to making people get to know the project was that of so-called 'multiplicators', that is, already known and established institutions in the neighborhood, among them also schools and kindergartens. In the evaluation, the need for more personnel, smaller areas "seeable at a glance", and more involvement of migrants through low-threshold formats were expressed. The excerpt below shows a deep reflection on the topic of target groups.

> "The sense of the integrated approach of Neighborhood Management [Grätzelmanagement] is the involvement of all population groups from the district. This means that the Neighborhood Management was open to all social groups and developed projects together with them. It didn`t succeed, however, to activate and involve all groups in the same measure. In some cases, there was not enough capacity for the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups." (Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, 2007)

At the end of the project, a *caveat* was added to the evaluation of the results: for positive developments in the neighborhood to be sustainable, it was necessary that municipal institutions kept on continuously supporting local cooperative relationships between different individual and collective actors by way of investing money in material and personnel costs. The success of the

project led to the inclusion of the new area of social work-oriented neighborhood management in the new GB* mandate. In the following sections, I provide thick descriptions and reflections about GB* Mitte and my internship there, illustrating and deepening some of the argumentations introduced in previous paragraphs.

The spaces of Maxi

The neighborhood center in Max-Winter-Platz 23, for all GB* employees and for the readers of this chapter, from now on, 'Maxi', is located in the part of the Viennese 2. district known as Stuwerviertel. The Gebietsbetreuung responsible for the 2. district used to have an office in Mayergasse 3 but to work for other parts of the district, called Stuwerviertel and Volkert- and Alliertenviertel. Since the distance played against the effectiveness of their work, they looked for a new site closer to the inhabitants and their issues and found it in Max-Winter-Platz 23. It was located only 16 minutes on foot from the old neighborhood center and 5 by bike or car, but it was already an improvement according to the GB* team. The old municipal bath still standing in Max-Winter-Platz at that time opened for no more than a few weeks in Summer and was otherwise a place of transgression for teenagers at night. The construction was in a bad state and renovating it would have been more expensive than building it anew. The GB* managed to take over the building and massively renovate it. In the space behind it, one of the few water parks in Vienna was created as a place for children and families, in the space where the swimming pool had once been. On the rear part of the GB* building, by the water park, there is a public toilet. The inhabitants of the area were initially suspicious and nostalgic for the old swimming pool. A worker from the GB* told me that the first events were very challenging for them, but then people started realizing that that space was (also) for them and theirs. The story of the moving to the current site in Max-Winter-Platz tells us about the importance of physical presence on the territory to reach the inhabitants, also confirmed by this episode during my internship:

> Sarah sees that I am going out and asks me a favor: to check the tree pit at civic number 29 of Ybbstraße, in the immediate vicinity of the neighborhood center, to see whether there are branches, and in case document with pictures. They got a call. […] She calls the responsible municipal department and invites them to remove the heap of branches from the pavement. What an advantage to be on site and be able to control the territory in a simple and quick manner! If the GB* did not have a neighborhood center in Max-Winter-Platz, it would be necessary to send somebody from a central site and this would take a lot of time. (Ethnographic log 11.11.2021)

The outdoor areas – consisting in the area in front of the fence gate, the community garden, and the water park for children – have a fundamental liminal function. The GB* team knows it and takes care of these spaces to use them as magnets to attract inhabitants: they keep the fence open during opening times; hang posters about the events and bags for book-crossing along it; put benches in the garden for people to sit and chat among each other and with GB* employees. All this because "some target groups can be reached through the (inter)net, some others through a fence", as an employee told me on my first days of internship. The team is aware that direct contact with inhabitants allows to reach the groups not reached by newsletters, posters, and official communication channels, typically the most disadvantaged ones, too. Word

of mouth and informal contacts are very effective, but not always pursuable by the GB* with the available time resources: *"It would be necessary to count and include also the time to 'lose'!"* (Ethnographic log 20.10.2021). Some people probably keep off either because they think that they are not entitled to get in, or because they mix the proposals with advertisements, especially when presented by the official communication channels of the institution. Some others simply ignore it, sometimes even based on false inferences about its nature. During my internship, Maxi was once taken for a kindergarten, once for a recreational center for women.

Maxi, the Neighborhood Center of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung Mitte in the square Max-Winter-Platz 23. The entrance gate. Photo by the author.

Maxi. A bench and the community garden. Photo by the author.

Maxi. The community garden. Photo by the author.

The interiors of Maxi consist of:

-A big room for events, expositions, and other forms of contact with inhabitants in the right wing respective to the entrance;

-A big, single office room on the left wing;

-Connecting the two wings, a foyer with kitchen and, when Covid-19 restrictions were in place, Green Pass check and registration of visitors.

The use of the big room for neighbors strongly varies depending on the time and day of the week: as place for recurring GB* events, such as the Ladies Café of the Active Café; as room for courses held by externs for paying and non-paying people; as place to rent to hold house meetings and other private events; as office extension for GB* team meetings.

Maxi, the Neighborhood Center of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung Mitte in the square Max-Winter-Platz 23. Big room for neighborhood events and team meetings. Photo by the author.

The foyer connecting the two wings is a middle land between private and public, office and public service, practitioners and inhabitants. It is above all a place of passage, but it was also the setting of some important conversations with the colleagues during the internship.

Maxi, the Neighborhood Center of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung Mitte in the square Max-Winter-Platz 23. The foyer or entrance hall. Photo by the author.

The GB* office consists of one single room and a semi-detached legal consultancy office. This leads to tensions or even conflicts between different space uses and ways to interpret the job. For example, when one employee actively takes part in online events – which can be very noisy at times, as once during an online body percussion workshop for inhabitants – while the colleague next to her needs to do office or research work. In my internship at GB* Mitte, I witnessed some territorial disputes within the team: Are the inhabitants allowed to enter the office part or does that area belong exclusively to GB* employees? Can consultancy meetings take place in the foyer next to the kitchen at the same time as the Ladies Café, making all event participants passing through the kitchen feel that they are bothering? These controversies, brought to the attention of the whole team during weekly meetings I assisted at, exemplify some of the division lines within the GB*. The first one exemplifies the dilemma neighborhood center vs office. The second one regards the conflict to establish which functions of the GB* and views of the job prevail.

I now report two excerpts of my ethnographic log that contain reflections on the ways of working at Maxi in comparison with the Neighborhood Management (Stadtteilmanagement) by the Nordwestbahnhof, the second physical site run by the same time of GB* Mitte. About the geography of the Neighborhood Management office in Nordbahnstrasse 14:

> I find Florian`s position 'in the first row', close to the entrance door, notable (versus at Maxi, where there is nobody at the entrance). Florian tells me that it was his decision to stay there – since he is a social worker, it appeared coherent to him to stay close to and in contact with people. […] Those who work in the 2 office rooms in the back side don`t have any company phone (and no "contacts with customer", as Mirek calls it). This makes me hypothesize that the work be more technical and with less front office than at Maxi. (Ethnographic log 14.10.2021)

> Lena [the other intern] tells me that she likes the Neighborhood Management more, as far as the location is concerned, because GB* spaces would not facilitate contacts with the public. In fact, there is an empty space at the entrance, and it is necessary to ring a bell to let somebody come. Lena brings to my mind something I was thinking subconsciously: the chair, the table and the plexiglass sheet placed in the entrance

because of Covid make this room look like a waiting room, or a bank counter, or a barricade. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021)

Stadtteilbüro in Nordbahnstrasse 14. A GB* team member is ready to receive inhabitants at the entrance. Photo by the author

My position as intern

My physical position as an intern was the interns` desk, at the entrance of the office room. All other colleagues were behind my back so that, to be able to see them, I needed to turn. Moreover, there was a sort of room divider in the form of a notice board on wheels which separated me from my colleagues. This spatial arrangement was in contrast with the team`s very open and friendly attitude towards me and probably motivated by their will to bring me close to visitors.

From the very first day, they gave me some small tasks such as answering the phone; printing, laminating, and hanging posters; creating posters for some events with a computer software; accompanying the colleagues to a housing consultancy and to a meeting at the district council. Soon, I could contribute to writing an application to raise some funds for a yoga and movement course, and write an article for a neighborhood magazine. My internship was a truly immersive experience, other than the hiccup ethnography with families. New to the institution, in my active role as intern I was sometimes tempted to demonstrate I could be a good practitioner and felt that I had too little time to 'do researcher-like things' like reading official documents from the GB* library and from the shared server. On the other hand, I could learn the most from the experience of GB* team members and by getting to know the work of Gebietsbetreuungen firsthand on site. Being an intern also allowed me to blend in with the environment and be assimilated to the other intern for role and tasks. She was a social worker to be and had no technical profile in architecture, planning, or engineering, like me. The other intern, who had arrived before me, helped me access some of the team`s working knowledge indirectly, through a shortcut.

> Today I spoke a lot with Lena, the other intern, who is also a shortcut to get publicly available information and also hidden information (like the 'hidden curriculum' in school) and that practical knowledge, metaknowledge on the way the wind is blowing, or things

work. Moreover, Lena is less in a hurry and has more time than others. (Ethnographic log 14.10.2021, Ladies Café about Syrian dances)

During my internship, I discovered that the presence of interns is very usual for GB* Mitte, almost constant. In 2021, GB* Mitte had one or two interns per month, no month without. This not only proves that there is strong interest for GB*`s work by universities and the technical tertiary institutions Fachhochschulen, but it also suggests that the intern is a key figure for the GB* to cope with the workload. I interpreted the insistent request to register my presence in the office on the shared and synchronized electronic calendars with due advance and the appreciation for my presence during weeks when most part of the team was on holiday as a clue that the GB* counts on the presence of volunteer interns to assure the physical presence of somebody to receive visitors and answer the phone during office hours. Even when planning projects, the GB* relies on volunteer interns to pop up and help realize them. On the first day of internship, I wrote in my ethnographic log:

> As soon as Annika comes back and I tell her that I missed the phone call, she tells me that I can answer the phone and teaches me how to forward calls to the colleagues by using some codes. Manfred and the colleagues let me feel that my presence counts: I need to register it in advance in the shared Google Calendars and it is of help if I`m available in the holiday week. (Ethnographic log 11.10.2021)

Without making any formal arrangement about it, Petra – a team member who had been working for the GB* for 30 years, who has architectural background but turned to social work over the decades – became *de facto* my supervisor. However, my internship never took the shape of shadowing one single practitioner. Apart from the few tasks assigned to me, I was quite free to interact with different team members and move between Maxi and the Neighborhood Management.

Team meetings

In my internship, I learnt that jobs at GB* are many-sided and demand high multitasking skills, especially at the neighborhood center, where not even office work is quiet, but rather continuously mixed with telephone calls and the visits of inhabitants. Next to ordinary work within GB*`s public mandate, there are projects agreed on separately between the engineering office which manages the GB* Mitte and different contractors. Working for the GB* requires great flexibility: you can be sent to different places in the city during the same day and you may occasionally have busy evenings and free mornings due to evening events. This may be very tiring for GB* workers and create desynchronization of times with family members and friends. In this paragraph, I am going to illustrate what I learnt about the everyday job in the GB* referring mainly to the weekly team meetings I attended. Team meetings are used to plan and monitor the work of the team. For me, they were important occasions to get an overview of all the work going on at GB* and to see the coordination between the work of different employees in the making, as well as the lines of division and disagreement.

> The GB* has several lines of work, which confuses me: preparing project proposals for call for bids (requesting funding), organizing events, writing final reports and articles for neighborhood magazines, doing door-to-door surveys. […] Florian says that the area they

take care of is huge, and therefore the work to do is a lot. (Ethnographic log 12.10.2021, 1. team meeting)

During some sessions of planning for the following year, I had the confirmation of something which had already emerged from the interviews: the material costs covered by the City of Vienna are more than abundant, while the working hours foreseen by the mandate are perceived as insufficient.

> I took part in the second of two intense meetings to plan the work for the following year, 2022. Over three and a half hours, the team defined and quantified work packages, material costs and personnel hours. For 2022, the team of GB* Mitte had 11 440 working hours and 15 000 euros available. Since material costs were lower and the number of working hours needed higher than expected in previous years, the team leader had already decided to convert half of the amount of money assigned for material costs into working hours in the program for the following year. (Ethnographic log 19.10.2022)

It was often during or after team meetings that the colleagues would open up and reveal to me important information I was missing. An employee working for the GB* 15 hours a week and raising up 2 children in school age had accumulated 50 hours of overtime by October 2021. Immediately after a weekly meeting she stated, on the topics of time pressure and the need for more working hours to pursue the goal of involving more and new inhabitants into GB*`s events: *"Hard to have quality, if you have so little time!"*

The Ladies Café

The Ladies Café is a weekly appointment offered by Gebietsbetreuung Mitte. It is an occasion for women with different backgrounds (regarding migrant background, age, health condition, wealth etc.), prevalently but not necessarily living in the neighborhood, to meet, exchange, and do common activities. Every meeting has a topic – during my internship, the topics where Syrian dances, body percussion, shiatsu massage, and Carnival party – often suggested by the participants, who also take an active role as conductors or participants. During Covid-19 lockdowns, the Ladies Café was moved online. Even if the Gebietsbetreuung offered some training about how to use Zoom on smartphones, participation rates dropped during the most critical phases of the pandemic. It is imaginable that several women, especially those who could not speak German very well, stopped participating because the online Ladies Café meetings had turned too verbal and too little interactive in holistic sense.

The Ladies Café is a typical example of how events often constitute the starting point to uncover and start solving complex problems. The meeting about Syrian dances, for example, became the occasion to give educational consultancy to a 16-year-old Syrian-origin girl and her mother and to provide them with the contact of the German local institution for a friend of them, victim of domestic violence, to turn to.

> The events of the Ladies Café are like a hook. The admission follows (as in hospital, problems are conveyed and sorted to the various resolution centers). Some participants bring along a tangle of problems, and the GB* grabs them at their intersection. Of course, the institution may seem intimidating, even threatening. The events of the Ladies Café – where not only and not quite words are used but also gestures and actions, which make them attractive also for migrant women – build trust because the entry point to the

institution are singular persons. So, it is later accepted that these people, already people of trust, not cold-hearted technicians, help with problem solving, in cooperation with other institutions in the district. (Ethnographic log 14.10.2021, Ladies Café about Syrian dances)

14.10.2021, Ladies Café Syrian Dances at Maxi

Not all team members agree that the Ladies Café fully fits in with the GB*`s mandate.

„It is only who is there who knows what comes together with it, what it brings". Seeing it from outside, «It is equated with coffee and cake»". (Organizer of the Ladies Café, ethnographic log 14.10.2021, appointment about Syrian dances)

The Ladies Café can be louder than chit-chats. Some workshops may involve singing, body percussion, dancing and similar. GB* team members in the office room and inhabitants of the buildings around the neighborhood center there may be disturbed and annoyed by this hustle and bustle and prefer merely verbal activities.

However, Petra says, only who needs it the least is hooked through verbal language: they perfectly speak German, have a high cultural level and are typically retired architects or engineers. […] I think that sometimes engineers` and architects` competences, with an ill-concealed prejudice, are reckoned more than those of social workers, sociologists, and so on. It is hard to make the colleagues and the 'upper floors' understand the value of her proposal because it leaves space for the uncertain and the 'more' brought by other people, by inhabitants. […] Everything, from the topic to the content of the meeting, are brought by participants. […] The GB* nudges, nurtures aspirations, prepares something to do as backup if the person who volunteered to animate and manage the meeting eventually doesn't show up. (Ethnographic log 14.10.2021, Ladies Café about Syrian dances)

In this paragraph, I shortly presented the Ladies Café as one of the initiatives to reach a specific target group, adult women of all age groups and with diverse geographic backgrounds.

4.11.2021, Ladies Café Shiatsu Latte. During a shiatsu session, the organizer of the Ladies Café invites the participants who are waiting for their turn to write down some possible topics for the meetings of the Ladies Café in the following year. What can they offer? What would they like to find? Photo by the author.

Conclusive remarks

In this chapter, I presented an important institution called Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, tendered by the city of Vienna. I picked it among the Viennese institutional landscape because of its peculiarity of having spatial focus and its efforts to improve quality of life through the double focus on quality of physical spaces and of neighborly relationships. I argued that, although children and families are not its primary targets, Gebietsbetreuung intersect these groups in many ways. The chapter suggests that the GB*, with its work, may be interpreted as a conversion factor in the sense of the Capability Approach, since it may make the city easier and more enjoyable to use, and a multiplier of the work of other welfare-oriented institutions. In fact, it provides information and services free of charge which, in turn, facilitate the achievement of urban capabilities such as 'having satisfying housing conditions' or 'having spaces and occasions for sociability' (see the overview about the capabilities in chapter 3).

At the light of the overall aims and results of this study, I show that, even if several offers by the Gebietsbetreuung are seized by families, both the families in my sample and the Gebietsbetreuung had little awareness of each other. It is an important result, which reveals a gap between the existence and quality of the offer, on one side, and the effective possibility of using it, on the other side. This gap, particularly evident for me thanks to the lenses of the Capability Approach, was due to the lack of information and motivation for the encounter. I tried to fill this gap by way of informing the parents in my sample of GB*`s offer through nudging, and interrogating GB* employees about the "For whom?", "With whom?", and "How?" of their daily work. I believe that the key point is the representation of the other: until children are seen as mere appendix of their parents and Gebietsbetreuungen as hipster den for few, encounters are likely to stay rare.

The fieldwork highlighted divergences and small conflicts among employees about the way of conceiving the job, hierarchizing and prioritizing one or the other aspect. The opinions on and representations of the job held by GB* practitioners, which I reconstructed through an institutional ethnographic approach, influence the focus both in terms of categories of inhabitants in their target and of treated topics. In consideration of the new tasks and projects, I see the challenge of keeping together 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of quality of life, without forgetting the historical mandate of the Gebietsbetreuung as protector of housing rights and institution aware of the problems and needs of more vulnerable groups in the city and in the society.

I hope that reading this chapter may be useful for GB* practitioners to see their work from the outside, its strengths and weaknesses, and the empty spaces still uncovered. This could elicit their reflexivity far from the hectic of everyday work. The systematic reflection on target groups and on the accessibility of the Gebietsbetreuung may involve, apart from practitioners, also the level of urban politics. From reading this chapter, the City of Vienna may get impulses to reconsider the overall framework of political decisions that enable or constrain the capabilities of the GB* in their daily work which, in turn, can contribute to enhance inhabitants' capabilities. More concretely, I underlined how a largely overlooked structural aspect, the size of the mandated areas, strongly influences the daily work of GB* practitioners, forcing them to take decisions based on pragmatism rather than on equality goals. This pragmatic attitude, the preeminence given to feasibility over 'perfect' justness is a point in common with Sen`s Capability Approach (Blečić, Cecchini, & Talu, 2018). This chapter suggests the necessity for policies to improve the ratio between working hours and number of employees on one side, and extension of the mandated area on the other side. Similar area-based institutions with elements of social work based in other cities of Europe and the world could find information or even inspiration from GB`s concrete offers and way of working, despite its limitations, or could re-read their own work critically by way of applying my proposal to consider institutions as conversion factors.

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Final discussion

This dissertation is an attempt to give an understandable and possibly durable shape to conversations, walks, and common activities I experienced with families and area institutions in Vienna between 2020 and 2022. The research process in its making may have stimulated (institutional) learning processes in the participants and, concerning the parents, activated reflection on their migratory paths and on future decisions. After data collection, with the help of scientific theoretical tools and in discussion with previous research results, I intended to produce novel knowledge and meanings to enrich the scholarly debate on the topic of quality of life in the neighborhood and city of residence, with specific reference to families in migration within the EU and children. At this point of the dissertation, I report an overview of the work for current and aspirant readers, reframing and amplifying the issues treated and the empirical results gained, in order to include also other practitioners, scholars, and policymakers in the debate.

This work derives from an empirical study on urban quality of life carried out between October 2020 and February 2022 in Vienna, a city which has often led the rankings on quality of life using urban indicators. My research intended to activate complementary processes of discovery in order to understand the topic of quality of life in its complexity and plurality, ethnographically. Migrant-origin parents from Italy and Hungary and 6- to 11-year-old children shared information and opinions about their migration biographies and daily lives in the neighborhoods of residence in Vienna and on the neighborhoods, cities, and towns of provenance. Italian and Hungarian migration to Vienna, a specific process within the larger ongoing trend of intra-EU migrations from Southern and Central-Eastern member States, has been steadily increasing in the past decades (Favell, 2014). This has been interpreted in terms of generalized crisis at supranational and national level. The focus on the local, instead of national or transnational spaces is a point of originality of this research. The direct involvement of children, particularly in a period of crisis triggered by the pandemic, is a further strength of the study. Child perspectives on the city are still rare in urban studies, partly due to stereotypical representations of childhood and children, partly to methodological and ethical obstacles of research with children. For the purpose of understanding what capabilities are relevant to the quality of life of the families in the sample and what characteristics of the city facilitate and hinder their accomplishment, according to their subjective views, I drew from daily life, memories of places of provenance, and narratives about the reasons for moving to Vienna. The family lens allowed me to deepen the topics of migration and quality of life beyond the sphere of human life which often canalizes the attention of scholars, that is economics. Complementarily to the ethnography with families, I adopted the institutional ethnographic approach to analyze the contribution to urban life of the area institution *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, which has a public mandate from the Municipality of Vienna.

The premises and theoretical tools of the Capability Approach (Blečić, Cecchini, & Talu, 2018, 2013; Nussbaum, 2011, 2000; Nuvolati, 2019b, 2010, 2009; Robeyns, 2003, 2000; Sen, 1993, 1992, 1985) were not a cage but a springboard to set out to explore and discover, based on

empirical materials. In urban studies, the CA highlights the crucial importance of accessibility of places and services, delves into the personal and environmental conditions which facilitate or hinder it – herein analyzing the processes of formation of inequalities between individuals and groups – and focuses on human diversity of aspirations and preferences.

In my experience, the Capability Approach is less sensitive to minute aspects of quality of life, such as interstices and human relations, fundamental to the quality of life of children and adults. Using concepts from the Capability Approach to deepen the knowledge on children`s quality of life implies that I treated them not only as recipients of care and precepts, but as human subjects capable of agency and of voicing their own aspirations and preferences, instead of simply adhering to the decisions taken by adults on their behalf. The CA was also useful to shed light on Geibetsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, which I innovatively framed as an institutional conversion factor. This means that I critically analyzed to what extent GB* practitioners manage to facilitate the inhabitants` access to urban capabilities, their strategies to reach the inhabitants, and the limitations of their work.

I claim that the selection of a sample of EU migrant families increases the visibility of urban conversion factors, because intra-EU migrants use the city from an intermediate position between natives and extra-EU migrants. I need to explain my statement, and to add the disclaimer that categorizations may help orient in the social world but have significant limitations due to individual diversities. Having said that, native Austrians, over-proportionally endowed with advantageous forms of capital – since they play in the field that they know the best, telling it with Bourdieu – are usually less dependent on urban services and institutions and, in case of need, can resort to them in a relatively easy way. Extra-EU migrants appear as the most disadvantaged in their use of the city due to administrative and bureaucratic barriers, often also accompanied by phenomena of discrimination. Depending on the position of their States and territories of provenance on a global scale, their personal conversion factors may be less immediately effective in a European city, needing a translation and adaptation to the different context. I refer, for instance, to the money owned in a weaker currency, language competences, the kind of education received, professional networks and reputation. However, the partiality of this reasoning lies in the internal diversity of both natives and migrants from third States in terms of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Overall, we can assume that they, more often than natives and EU migrants, need to bridge a significant gap to be free to be *receivers*, *doers*, and *judges* in the city where they live (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018). The third category, intra-EU migrants, is composed of subjects whose well-being and agency freedom is close to the natives`, but who are less likely to take the city and their capabilities in the city for granted, since they have experienced living in at least another place. Their life experience allows them, at times, to question their own preferences and habits, which are partly culturally influenced. We can assume, also based on the collected narratives, that these individuals with migration background from the EU are more likely than the natives to encounter and clash with different kinds of obstacles in the sphere of daily life and in the institutional sphere. From the empirical study presented in this dissertation, it turned out that these concern among others the local language and access to information. Intra-EU migrants with children need to cope with additional challenges posed by the necessity to interact with schools, free time institutions, pediatricians,

dedicated municipal offices. In the gap between the availability and accessibility of urban spaces and services, the facilitating role of the city is at least as important for granting the access to capabilities as individual aspirations, competences, and motivation.

The empirical part of this research has a diachronic dimension, provided that I spent approximately one and a half years working with the families in the sample. Due to the methodological and ethical complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the relative regulations, the research was hybrid, that is, conducted partly in person and partly online. I analyzed the weak points and possible factors of failure of researching with children through the digital channel, highlighting especially parental interferences and the impossibility of living embodied, shared experiences. To successfully conduct online and offline research with children, I suggest using transactional objects and common activities, better if initiated or taught by the children. The restricted participation of children, especially in comparison to that of their mothers, can be seen as a limitation of the study. On the other hand, it is partly justified by unfavorable external circumstances of the pandemic and by my commitment to substantial research ethics.

I deployed diverse qualitative research methods: interviews (34 in total, divided between parents from 16 families and GB* practitioners from all 5 teams), go-alongs with children and parents (19 with 12 families), virtual journeys (7 with 7 families), participant observation, and ethnographic immersion. Go-alongs consisted in walks accompanied by conversations with parents and children in the neighborhoods of residence. Virtual journeys consisted in photo-elicited online interviews on the places of provenance. In the methodological chapter, I give some recommendations about technical arrangements before and during virtual journeys, as far as picture management and screen sharing are concerned. I also pondered advantages and disadvantages of children`s participation in virtual journeys and thematized the risk of getting generic information on the history and culture of the places.

As I tried to identify the drivers of family migration to Vienna, I bumped into the representation of Vienna as an 'easy' and orderly city where everything 'works', starting with public transport and the landscape of educational and welfare institutions characteristic of the city. This perceived easiness of the urban seems to be affected by the site-specific Viennese tradition of investment in the *foundational economy* sector (The Foundational Economy Collective, 2018; website "Foundational Economy", consulted on 08.04.2023), which manifested most evidently in the season known as Red Vienna. The description of Vienna as an easy city suggests a non-obvious level of accessibility, safety, and security for a capital city, and seems to contradict the *optimal city size theory*, formulated within the framework of urban quality-of-life studies, which recognizes in middle-sized cities the optimal dimension regarding the trade-off between the advantages and disadvantages of living in an urban context (Nuvolati 2009, 2010). I argue that it is a political challenge, with the limitations of controllability posed by the complexity of the urban, to keep on ensuring the high level of accessibility perceived by the research participants also in the future, even if the city is growing. Moreover, as the Capability Approach suggests,

aspirations and wishes are diverse and a special eye needs to be laid on the most disadvantaged categories of inhabitants, in the legacy of Red Vienna.

In the representations shared by the participant EU migrant parents, the category of *care*, which I would have expected more in the context of conversations on children`s custody and education, is often applied to space and to a way of behaving in the city. According to the parents participating in this research, the marked care for public spaces and street furniture in Vienna would contribute to create a sense of community and safety, of public familiarity among strangers (Blokland, 2017). Interviewees often speak of 'village feeling' in the neighborhoods of residence. Future research projects could explore the meaning of neighborhood and neighborship in cooperative housing, an increasingly popular housing form which seems particularly interesting. Child- and family-friendliness of the city appears, in summary, as a specific aspect of relaxed efficiency and care for places. Rethinking this result in light of the Capability Approach, a city may be seen as an 'easy' when it supports the capabilities of as many inhabitants as possible, mitigating the effects of inequalities, and with no need for big efforts on their side. This means that individual and contextual conversion factors are inversely related.

Another explanation the participant parents adduced to rationally explain their presence in Vienna included, as far as the Hungarian subsample is concerned, political decadence, economic hardship, overwork, and conciliation problems. The generalized sense of frustration and lack of future back in the places of provenance, a sort of collective loss of the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), was evident in the city of Budapest, as it emerged in numerous interview passages about the streets, buildings, supermarkets, schools, and public means of transport. Neglect in the capital city and wild construction works in towns, at times regardless of protected natural areas, were reasons for disappointment. The closeness to Budapest and other West-Hungarian towns, and well as the piece of history in common, made Vienna a well-known place and an almost obvious way out of the situation in Hungary.

The Italian parents recalled chaos, lack of care, depopulation, and conciliation problems posed by a precarious and little regulated labor market in the Italian cities and towns of provenance. Having less knowledge of and familiarity with Vienna before migration than the ones from Hungary, they highlighted the role of chance and the will to grab an opportunity – as they said, to 'give it a try' – in their decision to move to Vienna.

The motives for migration declared by the families are multiple and pertain to different spheres of life. However, I claim, rational explanations of migratory decisions shed light only on some of the capabilities which family members value. Moreover, I suspect that the representation of Vienna as an 'easy city' is partly the product of the illusion of having an overview of the whole city and how to behave in it based on one's goals. In a complex capital city like Vienna, the substantial freedoms to do and be, compared to the theoretical ones considering the host of urban provisions, are limited by the lack of knowledge and other discriminants of access.

I was interested in the aspirations that brought the families to migrate to Vienna and, hypothesizing the dynamic interdependency of family members on the basis of everyday life, rather than on fixed roles within the family system, I tried to grasp negotiation processes and lines of division within the families. In the decision-making process that led to migration, most

of the women in the sample seemed to be flexible and to take care of the interest of other family members more than of their own. To express it differently, they accepted disadvantageous compromises in the short term for the 'sake of the family'. Deprived of the help and company of their family and friends, in some cases they were initially isolated and confined to the sphere of childcare. Labor disadvantage took the shape of women`s downward mobility or (temporary) retreat from salaried work. I point out that the conservative Austrian welfare model, still largely based on a traditional gendered division of care work, may have influenced this situation and what appears as a quiet compliance with it. The inadequacy of local language competences in Austrian German may also be accounted for women`s labor disadvantage. These are considered as inescapable in Austria both according to employers and collective representations, especially since women most frequently choose job positions with contacts with the public, for instance in offices, shops, and schools. Official Austrian statistics show wide gender differences in job occupations in the year 2021, when 85.9% of employed women were active in the service sector versus 58.4% of employed men. Conversely, 40.5% of employed men worked in industry and trade versus only 13.1% of employed women (Statistik Austria, 2022, p. 25). Having said that, some women in the sample continued to cultivate their capacity to aspire until the children grew up enough for them to seek and grab some job occasion. Moreover, the analysis of the migratory and career paths of two subcategories of women – former internationally mobile university students on one side, divorced and single mothers on the other side – nuance the research results about gender differences inequalities and gendered agency gap among EU-migrants in Vienna.

The following capabilities and conversion factors stand out from the lists subsumed on the basis of the collected fieldwork material:

- *Being autonomous (movement, play, encounters)*
- *Conciliating work, family, and time for oneself*
- *Experiencing urban space (children)*
- *Having spaces and occasions for sociability*
- *Having contacts with nature*

Based on observation and on their statements, I could identify some differences between the two subsamples of Italian- and Hungarian-origin families. With some exceptions, the Italians seemed more focused on human relationships, the Hungarians on accessing and spending time in contact with nature in the city. For nearly all families, parks in the own neighborhood of residence and, oftentimes, the Danube represented important nodes in daily life and in their image of the city.

The most significant conversion factors which facilitate or hinder the access to capabilities in the city are, according to this research:

- *Quality of urban space and use by children*
- *Social capital*
- *Information*
- *Gender*
- *Covid-19 pandemic*

As far as the capability *being autonomous* (in movement, play, encounters) is concerned, in the eyes of the participant parents, their children can be more autonomous concerning movement, play, and peer encounters in Vienna than they could have been in the places of provenance of the families nowadays. This result may seem surprising, if we consider that Hungary is the place of *kulcsos gyerekek*, children with keys[133], and Italy is, with large internal differences, a Mediterranean country with milder weather and less organization than Austria. However, the parents in the sample believe that their freedom as children was even bigger. Avoiding normative positionings about whether children should or should not start doing the one or the other thing autonomously at what age, I analyze the urban and cultural elements that make children autonomy possible, accordingly with the children`s desires and preferences. The characteristics of the environment which the parents deem as facilitators of children`s autonomy are: the efficient Viennese public transport; the nearness and quality of urban spaces such as inner yards, parks, shops, and schools; the sense of safety given by relationships of public familiarity and mutual help among mothers. Instead, in my view, it should be the object of further discussion to what extent (educational) free time formats for children proposed by public and publicly supported institutions authentically boost children`s autonomy, or rather bridle and substitute it with surrogates. In common between the childhoods in Vienna and in the places of provenance of the parents are the places to play in the vicinity area and controllable by adults, such as inner yards and common rooms. I reflected that practicing autonomy allows children to develop competences that, in turn, make a further enlargement of their autonomy concretely viable and appealing. The autonomy allowed by parents also depends on culturally influenced representations of the neighborhood and the city, of children`s competences, and of good parent. The families and GB* practitioners participating in this study perceive autonomy as a highly regarded value in Vienna – where the good parent in the social imaginary would be one who accompanies and even pushes in that direction – and the city as quite safe. Italian and Hungarian parents reacted to local customs in this regard at times with happy compliance and the development of adaptive preferences. For example, they let their children go to school and come back home alone or with other children starting from the first grades of primary school, as is customary in Vienna. In other cases, they criticized a way of acting that ignored differences and inequalities in individual and contextual conversion factors, pushed children to behave like little adults from an early age, and was hetero-directed rather than the fruit of the children`s free choice. More in general, reflecting on prevalent culturally-influenced representations of parents, children, and urban spaces in the Italian and Hungarian places of provenance and in Vienna, I argue that allowing (parents) and exercising (children) spaces for autonomy is valuable, no matter how large the range of it, in the measure in which: the spatial and social environment makes it possible, and people are free to choose. Instead, autonomy cannot be considered as a capability when it is the result of explicit or implicit external pressures with little

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[133] *Kulcsos gyerekek*, *children with keys* were children who, in communist and socialist Hungary of the 1970s and 1980s, had high degrees of autonomy after school and during school holidays, while their parents were both working outside home. They were relatively free to decide how to occupy their time beside school and would be visible in groups in public space. Their copy of the flat keys, hanging from their neck, became the symbol of an entire generation and a childhood myth for the following ones.

sensitivity to environmental conditions. These pressures bend and invalidate the freedom of choice central to the Capability Approach. The same is true also for scarce margins for children`s autonomy: if they are based on the assessment of environmental conditions, children`s competences and desires, it is one thing; if they are ways to prevent general disapproval, then they are the product of constraint. There seem to be some complementarities between the capabilities relative to children`s autonomy and parents` conciliation of work, care, and recreational time.

The Covid-19 crisis was a challenging period for conciliation, although the participant parents believed that working times were friendlier in Vienna than in the places of provenance. As the recurrent use of the expression 'home schooling' during interviews points out, parents often felt left alone and accountable for their children`s learning outcomes and overall development. It turned out that several parents in the sample kept on sending the children to school in the face of lockdowns. In Vienna, schools did never completely shut down during lockdowns but were usually open for custody only, to support parents in fundamental jobs and children with specific learning needs. I argue that the declared conditions of legitimacy for sending children to school should have been more flexible, to avoid inequalities. In broader terms, should similar situations of crisis occur again in the future, I underline the importance of differentiating rules and decrees to a greater extent on the basis of the needs voiced by different social categories and different categories of urban populations. In this regard, the present research shows that the regulations were only partly aware of and sensitive to the peculiar needs of children and families. However, the gray zones in the Austrian Covid-19 regulations allowed necessary leeway which, by degrees, safeguarded parents` needs of conciliation and children`s physical and mental health.

Some fathers who could work remotely started participating more, in quantitative and qualitative terms, in childcare and domestic work. This induced me to hypothesize the existence of a gap, in 'normal times', between desires related to childcare on the one hand, and behaviors on the other hand (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). The unprecedented opening to home office and changes in fathers` behavior made it easier for some women in the sample to navigate the Austrian labor market. Reflecting on fieldwork data, I claim that not only the pandemic had the potential to bring more flexibility in the division of work between men and women, but also that this flexibility confers families more resilience to other unexpected and disruptive events.

A possible objection to the significance of this study is that it was conducted under exceptional circumstances and, thus, fails to give account of daily lives and views of migrant-origin parents and children in Vienna in 'normal' times. I respond that the pandemic surely restrained participation and influenced the results, even if it is difficult to appraise to what extent and in what sense. Probably, it also produced remarkably different outcomes than if the study had taken place in different times. However, exactly this made the research unique and allowed to reflect better on contextual conversion factors, freedom of choice, and preference formation processes. The Covid-19 crisis, which posed new challenges to individuals, families, and cities, was an original background to investigate and rethink quality of life. It constrained individual

freedom of choice on what behaviors to enact, pivotal to the Capability Approach. Having said that, I glimpsed the opportunity for these temporary restrictions to enlarge the capability set in the long term, since families called into question their usual *functionings* before the pandemic and discovered for the first time, or were reminded, that different options existed and were practicable. The fact that the Covid-19 crisis was not only an obstacle to the capabilities of families (negative conversion factor), but also a spur to change behaviors and relations with people and places, countered my expectations[134]. The pandemic boosted reflexivity on consolidated habits, as migration to Vienna had also done, whereby some subjects in the sample reorganized their preferences and behaviors regarding gender relations and care work, use of public spaces, and mobility behaviors. By increasing dissatisfaction with housing conditions and making educational, childcare, and leisurely institutions temporarily unavailable, the Covid-19 crisis induced the children and parents in the sample to spend more time in nature and in digital worlds. The use of public and semi-public spaces (inner yards also belong to the latter category) usually increased and some families reported trying slower forms of mobility. By limiting urban mobility, the period of crisis increased the importance of the neighborhoods of residence and their potential to facilitate and hinder the attainment of capabilities. In this sense, I could see the weak points of the 15-minute city model in the cases of families who resided in neighborhoods with spaces and services not fulfilling their needs and preferences, and on top badly connected to other relevant places and services suitable to satisfy them. In other terms, leading a local life may increase quality of life on the condition that the own neighborhood of residence has an adequate quantity and quality of infrastructures and services, these are accessible, and it is a free choice to spend time in the area, given that it is possible and not too costly to leave it.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, family relocation contributed to changing behaviors and shape adaptive preferences (Nussbaum 2000, p. 137-138; Nussbaum 2011, p. 54-55). For instance, regarding mobility, the availability of bike lanes, of more time than in the places of provenance, and of a diffuse, culturally influenced propensity to spend time outdoors and be sportively active (at least, the research participants perceived it so) encouraged some families to prefer the combination of bike and public transport to the private car. Past research on adaptive preferences focused on adaptation to poor environments and accommodation of one's expectation to get by the difficult living situation (Zapf, 1979). I argue that there are two other ideal-typical categories which may help interpret adaptive preferences: assimilation to the prevalent behaviors and lifestyles in a certain environment under explicit and implicit pressures, as already seen about children`s autonomy; adaptive preference as individual choice of a behavior which would not have been possible nor conceivable before, but it is made possible by relevant changes of setting such as the ones introduced by migration or by disruptive events such as a pandemic.

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[134] Like Covid-19, migration was ambivalent in the sense that, on one side, it gave access to new behavioral repertoires and freedoms *to be and do*, on the other side it posed difficulties and new barriers, for instance, regarding women`s participation in salaried work.

As far as sociability practices are concerned, as the regulations against the spread of the Coronavirus deprived children of the company of peers in school and other institutional islands, parents realized that they could not replace children`s friends and playmates. Most parents in the sample 'emended' the shortcomings of the regulations by finding informal solutions which were pragmatic trade-offs between containing the spread of the pandemic, on the one hand, and safeguarding their children`s development and health, on the other hand. Such looser interpretations or small infractions of the decrees also allowed members of non-standard family forms to spend lockdown periods together. Especially regarding pre-teens and teenagers, the parents often became less strict about the use of digital devices, which I interpreted as a sign that they were aware of the underlying need for sociability.

The pandemic, which caused the temporary suspensions of the right of free movement within the EU, reaffirmed the power of national States independently from geographical closeness and the globalized character of contemporary Western societies. This contributed to making the (potential) downsides of being a 'free mover' within Europe visible (Favell, 2014), changing the self-perception and positioning of intra-EU migrants. The ones who would be hetero-defined 'expats' or unreflexively denominate themselves as such, as to clarify the difference with migrants from 'third countries', discovered that, in the end, they were migrants too. This is especially true of families with children who, being forced to more contacts with the spaces and institutions of the cities and societies of migration, were already used to stumble against additional barriers.

The Capability Approach and parental reasonings were canalizing my attention towards functional and technical aspects of urban QoL, whereas researching with children – who are in Vienna, as in other Western cities, exempted by law from salaried work – highlighted the importance of relationships with other humans, plants, animals, objects, and places. For children, spaces are often primarily identified with the opportunity to meet with friends and playmates. Reasoning with the support of the Capability Approach, I argue that children value the availability and esthetics of buildings, squares, inner yards etc., but also the possibility to effectively use them to move and play. I noticed that the participant children would experience the city with all senses, create and cultivate playful interstices in it as *children`s spaces and times*, counterposed to spaces and times appointed for children by the adults and the society (Kogler, 2019; Rasmussen, 2004; Satta, 2012). Empty or reappropriated spaces in the urban fabric are important for children to be active. It is necessary to note that there are relevant differences related to age. The parents of 6- to 11-year-olds in the sample seemed to agree that children strongly influence the organization and pace of family life, and that the children`s needs and desires change over time. The research revealed that smaller children enjoyed playing in parks and inner yards, as well as using free time offers targeted to them and organized by institutions. On the other side, pre-adolescents (from about the age of 9), especially boys, tended to progressively lose interest in spending time in public and semi-public spaces in the neighborhood and gain interest in playing and encountering peers online, each from his or her home. The Covid-19 pandemic had been accelerating the process, according to the parents, who

were worried both that their children did not spend enough time outdoors and that they hung around in virtual environments.

I provided specific information about the families` neighborhoods of residence (maps of the paths of go-along, subjective neighborhood descriptions, and textual lists of nodes and edges) which reflect the daily use of spaces by research participants and their cognitive and emotional/affective maps, instead of administrative neighborhoods. The mapping also included interstitial spaces and spaces of consumption, used mainly by the children. This contribution situated the opinions and discourses on quality of life in physical space, shedding light on local specificities and differences between Viennese neighborhoods. It may be also of interest for the Gebietsbetreuung, the City of Vienna, and other public institutions and third sector organizations operating in Vienna and with focus on specific neighborhoods and districts.

Being free to cultivate relationships with other people is one of the capabilities most recurrently cited by the parents and children in the sample, together with having contact with nature. The fact that mothers cultivate relationships for the whole family is considered by the parents in the sample as the natural result of personal propensities. Conversely, I propose to consider relational work as part of the broader concept of *care*, whereby care practices are still largely affected by gender roles and stereotypes. Creating and maintaining social ties, women not only cater to affective needs, but also facilitate the access to information, support, and services for all family members. Living with children was indicated as a factor potentially able to enhance the chances of both fleeting encounters in public space and encounters mediated by institutions specialized in child education and leisure. What is more, EU migrant parents in the sample seemed to count on their children to look for a way out of social individualization and anonymity, easy to experience in big cities. Still, especially for the subsample of Italian origin, sociability and social capital are among the partly unfulfilled wishes and weak points about living in Vienna. Some of the Italians and, to a lesser extent, Hungarians in the sample state that they long for informality and interstices in sociability, like in the places of origin. Particularly in case of difficulties to approach the local Viennese and Austrian population, they seek the company of co-nationals. I collected information on the two groups of Italian and Hungarian mothers living in Vienna, called respectively *Italian moms in Vienna* and *Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub* (*Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*). They are active both online and offline. *Italian moms in Vienna* has a public Facebook group also open to fathers and to families who do not live in Vienna yet, or not any more. Born as a small group to get to know each other and organize leisurely meetings among Italians (sociability), with the Italians migration waves to Vienna after the 2008 economic crisis, it became a point of reference to receive information and help to solve emerging problems (social capital). The Covid-19 pandemic accentuated the already existing trend towards the progressive prevalence of the online Facebook channel over meetings in person.

Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub (*Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*) is hidden from non-members, on Facebook, and grows only thanks to word of mouth. The Hungarian migrant community in Vienna – result of the stratification of different migration waves, especially the one which originated from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the one in the aftermath of EU enlargements towards Central and Eastern Europe – is the seventh most numerous one in

Vienna (Stadt Wien, 2020). The participants conceive the group as a relational space and time where women are free from duties as partners, mothers, and workers. Differently than the Italian group, the Hungarian group excludes parents living in other cities than Vienna and fathers, believed to be indifferent to childcare issues. Reflecting through the lens of the CA, though, we can hypothesize that the openness to fathers would not only facilitate their stronger engagement in childcare, but also motivate this behavioral change.

The borders between sociability and social capital are often blurred. I learnt that social capital is particularly relevant in Vienna to be able to fill the gap between the existence and quality of spaces and services on one side, and the effective freedom to use them on the other side. It is a 'meta-capability' or 'capability of second degree'. Against my initial research hypothesis, information passed through word of mouth and informal support fills the voids left by institutions, exactly in the city known for its public and third-sector institutions.

Moreover, in the absence of regular help from grandparents, the participant parents resort not only to institutional offers to succeed in conciliation, but also to informal networks of parents from the children`s schools or the vicinity of their residence address. This tendency towards informality may be a result of the fact that the information parents manage to put together about the very broad urban offers is often incomplete and fragmentary. It can be also interpreted as a way of reproducing and adapting culturally influenced patterns of childcare, already experienced in the places of provenance, marked by familism and informality in welfare regimes and in the organization of daily life.

It emerged that the reasons why social capital is so crucial for urban life in Vienna is the importance and difficulty of the local language and the relative closure to outsiders in Vienna, in the eyes of the participant parents, expressed through the omission of information and the existence of selective preferences and favors in situations such as school admission, housing, and job search. Social capital with locals, starting with Austrian partners in the case of mixed couples is, for this reason, the most precious. Social capital based on proximity, especially in cooperative housing, and social capital within the online or offline relationships with other migrants, often but not necessarily co-nationals, are also channels which help receive information and support, contrasting the initial isolation and the supposed closure of Austrians.

The research brought to light the paradoxical strong desire for informality in a Central-Western city known for the numerosity, connectedness, and vitality of its institutions. Informality and socio-temporal interstices of daily life are important not only for children, but also for adults, because they fulfil the need to revive past life before migration and, even more, allow to express one`s agency, rather than merely benefiting from given urban provisions. Amartya Sen argues that politicians and administrators should fight inequalities and enable ideally everybody to pursue their well-being. However, individuals do not only aspire to well-being, but also to agency. Agency freedom is not the same as the freedom to pursue a good life, since human goals may not contemplate or even clash with well-being considerations (Sen, 1992, chapter 4; Sen, 1985). This is the case, for example, of those who risk their jobs, freedoms, and even their lives by living under a dictatorship because of their political ideals and the will to defend them actively. On a smaller scale, in a democratic European context like Austria, this may mean that individuals aspire to be more than *receivers* or beneficiaries of infrastructures, services, and benefits

conceived by the State and the urban government for the well-being of the general population. They also want to initiate relationships and projects and decide for themselves, both in the long term and on daily basis, what is worth to do and be in their lives. This is a possible key to interpret the outcomes of this research regarding relational and informal aspects of quality of life in Vienna.

The Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (in short, GB*) is an institution founded in the 1970s which, by order of the city of Vienna, aims to support the quality of public space and neighborly relationships. In this way, it is intended to contribute to quality of life directly through interactions with the inhabitants, on one side, and indirectly through interventions on spaces, on the other side. It is an intermediary institution between politicians/administrators and inhabitants, which coordinates and mediates between ideally all institutional and individual actors present in a district. There are 5 teams, all together responsible for the whole Viennese urban area and physically distributed between 5 neighborhood centers and 10 neighborhood management points. Although I had never heard of the Gebietsbetreuung before moving to Vienna and only three families in the sample knew them, they are supposed to be experts and points of reference to help and activate inhabitants at the local level. Families – who are strongly embedded and, by unfavorable conditions, even 'trapped' in their vicinity area and neighborhood of residence – are likely to be among the categories which profit the most from the GB*`s work. I propose an innovative reading of the work of Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung as an institutional conversion factor in the sense of the Capability Approach since, by way of informing and supporting inhabitants, it has the potential, with the limitations thematized in next paragraphs, to facilitate their use of the city and enhance their capabilities. It can also be regarded as an institution of second degree, because it is included in its role to mediate the inhabitants` use of other institutions in the neighborhoods of residence.

In my experience of institutional ethnography, aimed at grasping the working knowledge of GB* team members, I discovered that the practitioners working in the GB* consider the mandate broad and indefinite, and thus interpretable in different, occasionally divergent ways. Some employees concentrated more on the technical aspects of the job and on the quality of physical urban space, some others on social aspects such as neighborly relationships. The third ideal-typical category I delineated is the minority constituted by those team members who focused on the basics, on housing rights of most vulnerable inhabitants. Housing is the historical core of the GB*`s mandate and the service responding to most basic human needs. I stress the importance that the three focal components and the practitioners who stand for them work in a synergic way, instead of competing for material resources and recognition.

Over the decades, the geographical extension of the areas where the Gebietsbetreuung works and the variety of tasks in the mandate increased, whereas the number of physical sites was progressively trimmed (Rechnungshof, 2013; Sommer, 1992; Stoik & Kirsch-Soriano da Silva, 2012). This reduction in the number of sites (neighborhood centers), together with the fast turnover of employees and the high frequency of part-time, is accounted by research participants for the loss of competences and networks, the impossibility to be local experts – as the GB* used to be – and the feasibility of approaches towards the inhabitants inspired to social work only on a limited scale. Based on what I observed during my internship at GB* Mitte, time

scarcity also sharpens individualization and divergences between different conceptions of the job. Concerning target groups, the unfavorable structural conditions impose a pragmatic selection of more easily implementable and potentially successful initiatives, according to research participants. I claim that this may reinforce disadvantages between neighborhoods/districts and target groups.

The Covid-19 crisis emphasized this shortcoming, as it caused a further diversification and intensification of the workload: the online presence increased, and so did the mobile formats called *going outs*, as safer alternatives to indoor meetings. GB* employees discovered that they could reach more inhabitants through online channels, including people divided between salaried work and childcare and youngsters. On the flip side, vulnerable categories of less educated and elderly ones seem harder to reach online. Mobile formats were praised as a strategy to keep reaching the vulnerable ones too, and to remedy the big size of the areas in the mandate of the institution. Reading through the collected research materials, the Covid-19 crisis confronted GB* employees with the ethical dilemmas regarding whether to give priority to reaching more inhabitants (online) or also disadvantaged ones (offline).

Target groups are the pivotal point of my inquiry on the GB*, whose mandate theoretically contains the duty for each team to cater for all inhabitants of the area under their responsibility. GB* participants showed awareness of the necessity to pursue accessibility through low-threshold occasions, which corresponds to the idea of 'easy city' according to the Capability Approach. This concretely implies promoting physical access to neighborhood centers and paying attention to the diversity of languages, cultures, and life experiences among GB* team members. The diversification of times for services and events, together with the possibility to conciliate contacts with the GB* with labor and family are further aspects of accessibility. Getting back to the articulation of different layers of the job, area-based social work shows the human face of the institution and sets it at the interface with the inhabitants. At a more internal level there is housing consultancy, which addresses a deep human need. In spite of projects aimed at improving its accessibility, such as the *Neighborhood parents*, there seem to still be missing links between the GB* and some categories of inhabitants. As I already mentioned, only three families in the sample knew about the Gebietsbetreuung. More in general, the participant families believed that institutions such as the Gebietsbetreuung were rather for needy people/ people in emergency situations or, on the contrary, for people with plenty of time looking for a pastime. Drawing from the analysis of GB* activities, I outlined four different categories corresponding to the ways in which this institution views and treats children: as abstract subjects in the intersection of political and institutional networks; as subjects-objects in tow and a problem to be solved to facilitate their parents` participation to events; as multipliers and amplifiers of the visibility of the GB* (instrumental role), since parents go along their children and often go where their children want to go; as proper inhabitants of the mandated areas, which includes them among the addressees of the GB*`s work. I argue that the invisible and partly unaware representations that families with children and GB* employees have of one another, presented

above, may not promote encounters. In my role as researcher, I provided both parties with information, did nudging, and fostered reflection.

I chose deliberately the GB* Mitte for an internship because it was pioneering, among GB* sites, in the introduction of social and community work (Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, 2007). During my internship I experienced firsthand that the job has many facets and demands the employees to work in different places and at different times. Under this background, it is understandable that GB* Mitte relies on the constant presence of interns – there is a sustained turnover of them – to cope with the workload. I observed that the community garden of the neighborhood center from GB* Mitte at the address Max-Winter-Platz 23, the fence, and the water playground just outside the building have a liminal function and are used to reach out to inhabitants. The weekly meetings from the Ladies Café and the Active Café, close to social work, have a similar function. In the inner part of the neighborhood center, the small territorial disputes which occasionally emerged mirror and exemplify the divergences between team members who consider the place alternatively rather as neighborhood center or office, and between different ways of conceiving the job. Team meetings were weekly occasions to gain an overview of the job, to see the interactions and coordination between the job of different employees, and to touch with hand the lines of division.

For scholars interested in start new studies on Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung inspired by institutional ethnography, I suggest extending the reflection by applying critical discourse analysis methods to internal and external reports on its work and policy documents on its mandate.

According to J.-M. Bonvin and F. Laruffa (2018), one of the central messages of the Capability Approach to design and evaluate social policies is that individuals should be at the same time *receivers*, *doers*, and *judges*. This means that, firstly, they should be given the resources and services they need to be able to live the kind of life they value (receiver dimension). Secondly, they should have the possibility to exercise their agency (doer dimension). Thirdly, they should be free to participate in social life and to express their voice (judge dimension). In the context of everyday life in the city, at the light of the results of this research, I would say that the enabling city is one that makes it possible for individuals to act as *receivers*, *doers*, and *judges.* The receiver dimension corresponds, in this research, to the concept of 'easy city' and inclusive city, a place where contextual conversion factors support the capability set of individuals. The dimension of the doer, in Vienna, regarding EU migrants, largely corresponded to the representation of the interstitial city and to the striving for informality. The dimension of the judge regards the fact that migration, as capability of second order, gave access to further substantial options in terms of possible and culturally contemplated ways of life, use of public spaces, mobility behaviors. I hope that the participation in this project represented for the participant children and parents a form of voice and that they, together with all other readers, will recognize the livelihood of their experience in this work.

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Appendices

1. Interview guide for mothers and fathers

Introduction
- How long have you been living in Vienna?
- What do you like about living in Vienna, especially with your family?
- What don't you like about living in Vienna with your family?
- Did you meet any kind of difficulty or obstacle in your first years after moving to Vienna, or later? If yes, which ones?
- Is there anything you can't or don`t manage to do in Vienna?
- How long do you intend to live in Vienna?

Context of provenance
- Where (cities, towns) did you live in your life before moving to Vienna?
- Is there something missing in Vienna compared to X (context of previous residence in Italy/Hungary), in your view?
- I would like to go for a trip or a travel to X, when it becomes possible[135]. Where did you spend your time there as a child and as a teenager?
- (Which places did you use with your kids there?)
- What else should I visit, as a PhD candidate in urban study interested in how children and families live (in) the city?

Neighborhood spaces and changes over time
- How would you describe the neighborhood where you live in Vienna to somebody who has never been there (physical spaces: buildings, streets, natural elements; population: age, geographical provenance, family structures)?
- Which spaces of the neighborhood and the city are more relevant for you?
- And for your children?
- Where do your children meet with other children (places of encounter)?
- Where do you meet with friends and acquaintances (places of encounter)?
- Are there any common spaces, indoors and outdoors, in the condominium where you live? And in the immediate vicinity of your home?
- Have you also lived in other districts or neighborhoods in Vienna?
- Can you describe each area and the differences between them?

Fathers' relationship with the family and the city
- Are there any differences in the way fathers and mothers live the city with the children (in terms of living spaces and times? If yes, what are they?
- What, in your opinion, would foster greater participation of fathers in the lives of their children, especially in Vienna and X (context of provenance)?
- Do you see any differences in attitudes and experiences between Italian/Hungarian and Austrian fathers?

Groups and associations
- Do you use any online or offline groups or association in your neighborhood?
- And, in general, in Vienna?
- What about your children? What groups and associations are they in?
- Do you use any Facebook groups at neighborhood level? And at city level?
- Do you know the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung? And the Stadtteilmanagement?

Nudging: I tell them about the Gebietsbetreuungen, if they don`t know them.

Networks of fathers (only in the interview guide for fathers)
- Are you in touch with other fathers in Vienna?
- Have you ever exchanged with other fathers online?

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[135] Covid-19 restrictions were still in place at the time of the interviews.

- There are groups of Italian/Hungarian mothers in Vienna. Are there also specific groups for fathers?
- Do you see any obstacles to the fact thar fathers connect and build up a group or an association? If yes, which ones?

Nudging for Italian fathers: I inform them of the upcoming foundation of the group Italian dads in Vienna.

The Covid-19 pandemic

There is much talk about the effects of Covid-19 and home office, or the impossibility to practice home office, on mothers' daily lives. (Only in the interview guide for fathers: "Much less is said about fathers.")
- How has Covid-19 been modifying your living spaces?
- What about your times and routines, the way your everyday life is organized?
- What about the relationships with your partner and children?
- Have you taken on new tasks at home or in your children`s education and care since the Covid-19 crises started?

Socio-anagraphic data (to collect through an online Google Form)
- Year of birth
- Year you moved to Vienna
- Composition of your family (number of children, other cohabitants beside father/mother and child/ren)

Job occupation
- Yours
- Your partner's
- Your mother's
- Your father's

Educational level (highest degree)
- Yours
- Your partner's
- Your mother's
- Your father's

2. Interview guide for C10 (10 years old at that time)

General questions
- What do you like about living in Vienna?
- What don't you like about living in Vienna?
- Is there anything you would like to do but cannot do in Vienna?

- Where do you like to spend your time in the neighborhood where you live?
- What places do you dislike?
- Where do you meet up with your friends?
- Have you stayed in touch with friends also during lockdowns? How?
- Where do you spend time with your dad?

Comparison
- Where did you spend your time in XYZ (name of the place of previous residence)?
- I am interested in understanding what places and features of cities are important for children, and how children can live well in cities. If I take a trip to XYZ, what should I see?
- Is there something that was in XYZ that you think is missing in Vienna? What is it?[136]
- You also attended schools in Italy. What are the differences? (For example, regarding the time spent in the classroom and outdoors in elementary school in XYZ and Vienna?

Covid-19
- How are you doing during this Covid-19 period? (For example, regarding school.)
- Have your afternoon commitments changed (e.g., regarding various courses, afternoon childcare services)?
- In which places of the home do you study when there is distance learning?

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[136] I did not formulate the question in terms of things she might miss because it could have caused psychological distress.

3. Interview guide for the administrators of the groups: *Italian moms in Vienna*; *Club of Viennese babies, moms, and children*; and *Italian dads in Vienna*

Migration biography
- When did you move to Vienna?
- What brought you here?
- Where did you live before Vienna?
- (How old are your children?)
- Did you encounter any difficulties in your early years in Vienna, or also later? If so, what kind of?
- Is there anything that you think Vienna lacks compared to XYZ (Italian/Hungarian context of previous residence), or that Vienna could improve by taking example from XYZ?

Neighborhood spaces and changes over time
- What Viennese districts and neighborhoods have you lived in?
- Can you describe each area a bit?
- What neighborhood spaces were important when your sons and daughters were children? / What spaces are important for you in the neighborhood and district?
- Have you observed any changes in these areas over the years in terms of physical spaces (buildings, streets, natural elements)? If yes, what kind of?
- Have you observed any changes in these areas over the years, as far as the population (age, geographic origin, family structures) is concerned? If yes, what kind of?

Fathers, family, and the city
- What were the moments you spent with your children when they were children? Where? (Only for the founder of Italian dads in Vienna)
- Do you think there are differences in the way mothers and fathers experience the city with their children in terms of living spaces and times? If so, what are they?
- (Do you see differences between the experience of Italian/Hungarian fathers on the one hand, and Austrian or other national groups you may have come into contact with in Vienna on the other?)
- In your opinion, what may encourage greater participation of fathers in the lives of their daughters and sons?

The groups (*Italian moms in Vienna*, Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub)
- How did the idea of founding a group of Italian/Hungarian moms in Vienna come about?
- Is it an informal group or a registered association?
- What are, or were, the main activities of the group? What does the group do?
- Is there any division into smaller groups on the basis of the districts of residence or of specific common interests?
- What about the Facebook group?
- How come is the Facebook group private? (Only for the administrator of *Bécsi baba-mama-gyerek klub*)
- How has the group changed over time?
- Do you notice or have you ever noticed any obstacles to networking among mothers? If so, what are they?

The group (Italian dads in Vienna)
- How did the idea of founding a group of Italian fathers in Vienna come about?
- (Has Covid-19 influenced your decision in any way)?
- What was the feedback to your proposal?
- Do you already know some of the fathers? Have you exchanged with any of them?
- Have you noticed or do you foresee any obstacles to networking among fathers? If so, what are they?

The Covid-19 pandemic (To the founder of *Italian moms in Vienna*)
There is much talk about the effects of Covid-19 on the daily lives of parents. Feel free to answer by referring both to your own experience and to that of other mothers and fathers you are in contact with.
- How has Covid-19 affected and is affecting mothers'/ fathers' lives in terms of living spaces?

- How has Covid-19 affected and is affecting mothers'/ fathers' lives in terms of living times?
- How has Covid-19 affected and is affecting mothers'/ fathers' lives in terms of their relationships with partners and sons/daughters?
- (Have you been noticing any changes in the way of sharing household work and childcare with your partner)?

Socio-anagraphic data (to collect through an online Google Form)
- Year of birth
- Year you moved to Vienna
- Composition of your family (number of children, other cohabitants beside father/mother and child/ren)

Job occupation
- Yours
- Your partner's
- Your mother's
- Your father's

Educational level (highest degree)
- Yours
- Your partner's
- Your mother's
- Your father's

4. Interviews guide for Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, author`s translation into English

Employees` tasks and profiles
1. What are your personal role and tasks at Gebietsbetreuung XYZ?
2. What is your background in terms of education and previous work experience?
3. Is there someone with migration background in your team?
4. To what extent and under which circumstances do you meet with GB* teams responsible for other areas?
5. How satisfied are you with the funding and other resources provided to GB*?
6. What are the differences between the GB* and other institutions, for example the neighborhood centers of the Wiener Hilfswerk?
7. How does your work look like in times of Covid-19?

Values and vision
8. Two points on the GB* website (https://www.gbstern.at/ueber-uns/was-wir-tun/die-gebietsbetreuungen-stadterneuerung/) caught my attention. Can you explain them a bit?
   - *"We are committed to good neighborship and a good living together in the district."*
   - *"We support initiatives and projects in public spaces - for a livable living environment."*
9. Otherwise, what are your values and vision in your job?

City area you serve
10. How would you describe XYZ (district part(s) in your target area where the family/-ies in my sample reside(s)) in terms of physical space and residents?
11. (What would you like to see happen to the areas you serve in the next years?)
12. Try to put yourself in the parents' shoes. What are the benefits of living in the area?
13. And for the children?
14. What are the disadvantages or difficulties that the parents who live in the area (might) encounter?
15. And the children?

Interactions with families
16. How often do you and your colleagues interact with families in your job?
17. How does the contact take place? (They contact you themselves in person or virtually, you contact them, or other).
18. For what reason or about what do you interact with families?
19. Do you have a targeted offer for children and families?
20. Do you have a targeted offer for migrants?
21. And for migrant families or families with migrant background?

Opportunities and difficulties for children and families in the area
22. What are the best meeting spaces or occasions for children in the area (interactions with other children)?
23. (Are there also spaces or occasions where children are able and allowed to be without adult supervision?)
24. What are the institutions and services for children in the area?
25. What are the best meeting spaces and occasions for parents in the area?
26. What are the institutions and services for families in the area?

Anagraphic data (to be written down):
1) Year of birth:
2) How long have you been working at Gebietsbetreuung (in years)?
3) Hours worked per week currently:
4) Your educational level, type of education and training:
5) Where did you grow up (big city, suburban area, periurban area, medium city, small town, village)?

5. Interview guide for Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, original in German

Aufgaben und Profil der Angestellten
1. Was sind Ihre persönliche Rolle und Aufgaben bei der Gebietsbetreuung XYZ?
2. Was ist Ihr Hintergrund in Hinsicht auf Bildung und vorige Berufserfahrungen?
3. Ist jemand mit Migrationshintergrund bei euch im Team?
4. In welchem Ausmaß und unter welchen Umständen trefft ihr mit GB* Teams, die für andere Gebiete zuständig sind?
5. Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der Finanzierung und mit den übrigen Ressourcen, die der GB* zur Verfügung gestellt werden?
6. Was sind die Unterschiede zwischen der GB* und anderen Einrichtungen, zum Beispiel den Nachbarschaftszentren des Wiener Hilfswerks?
7. Wie schaut eure Arbeit in Zeiten von Covid-19 aus?

Werte und Vision
8. Zwei Punkte auf der Webseite der Gebietsbetreuungen (https://www.gbstern.at/ueber-uns/was-wir-tun/die-gebietsbetreuungen-stadterneuerung/) haben meine Aufmerksamkeit geweckt. Können Sie sie ein bisschen erläutern?
   - *„Wir setzen uns für eine gute Nachbarschaft und ein gutes Zusammenleben im Stadtteil ein."*
   - *"Wir unterstützen Initiativen und Projekte im öffentlichen Raum - für ein lebenswertes Wohnumfeld."*
9. Was sind sonst Ihre Werte und Ihre Vision im Beruf?

Stadtgebiet, die Sie betreuen
10. Wie würden Sie XYZ beschreiben (Bezirksteil(e) in Ihrem Zielgebiet, wo die Familie(n) in meiner Stichprobe wohnt/-en) hinsichtlich des physischen Raums und der Einwohner?
11. (Was würden Sie sich für die die Gebiete, die Sie betreuen in den nächsten Jahren wünschen?)
12. Versuchen Sie, sich in die Eltern hineinzuversetzen. Was sind die Vorteile, im Gebiet zu leben?
13. Und für die Kinder?
14. Was sind die Nachteile oder Schwierigkeiten, worauf die Eltern, die im Gebiet wohnen, stoßen (könnten)?
15. Und die Kinder?

Interaktion mit Familien
16. Wie oft tretet Sie und Ihre Kolleg*innen beruflich in Kontakt mit Familien?
17. Wie erfolgt der Kontakt? (Sie melden sich selbst persönlich oder virtuell bei Ihnen, Sie kontaktieren sie, oder Sonstiges.)
18. Aus welchem Grund oder über was interagieren Sie mit Familien?
19. Habt ihr ein gezieltes Angebot für Kinder und Familien?
20. Habt ihr ein gezieltes Angebot für Migrant*innen?
21. Und für Migrantenfamilien bzw. Familien mit Migrationshintergrund?

Chancen und Schwierigkeiten für Kinder und Familien im Gebiet
22. Was sind die besten Begegnungsräume bzw. -anlässe für Kinder im Gebiet (Interaktionen mit anderen Kindern)?
23. (Gibt es auch Räume bzw. Anlässe, wo die Kinder ohne Aufsicht der Erwachsenen sein können und dürfen?)
24. Was sind die Einrichtungen und Dienste für Kinder im Gebiet?
25. Was sind die besten Begegnungsräume bzw. -anlässe für die Eltern im Gebiet?
26. Und die Einrichtungen und Dienste für Familien im Gebiet?

Anagrafische Daten (schriftlich auszufüllen):
1) Geburtsjahr:
2) Seit wann arbeiten Sie bei der Gebietsbetreuung (Jahr)?
3) Arbeitsstunden pro Woche derzeit:
4) Ihr Bildungsniveau und Art von Ausbildung:
5) Wo sind Sie aufgewachsen (Großstadt, suburbaner Raum, periurbaner Raum, mittelgroße Stadt, kleine Stadt, Dorf)?