ComUnity Study

Contents

Introduction 7

Research report 13

Themes

1. The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries 14

2. Neighborhood relationships 20

3. Common concerns in neighborhoods 28

4. Community involvement at the neighborhood level 34

Conclusion 46

Overview of research participants 50

MAREENA KALUNBA Be International Za hranice vzdělávání GLOBAL 2000 Erasmus+

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

COMMUNITY

Erasmus+ project KA2
Unity in Community
2019-1-SK01-KA204-060783

Introduction

This report presents the findings from the research project 'CommUnity Study', conducted in 2019/2020 as a part of the project 'Unity in Community'. Unity in Community is an international project that is being carried out by four partner organizations: Mareena from Slovakia, Be International from Czech Republic, Kalunba from Hungary, and Global 2000 from Austria. The main aims of the project are to develop methods in adult education that will foster sustainable community projects and empower people to become active citizens, all the while cultivating positive relationships across cultural and social divides.

The CommUnity Study was conducted in four Central European cities in which the project partner organizations carry out their activities: **Bratislava** (SK), **Brno** (CZ), **Budapest** (HU), and **Vienna** (AT). The overarching aim of the research was to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of community life at the neighborhood level and find out what are the common motivations and barriers to community involvement. The research also explored neighborhood relationships, with a specific focus on relationships between the locals and the foreigners, both of which represent target groups of the project. The research addressed four larger themes:

I. **The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries;**
II. **Neighborhood relationships;**
III. **Common concerns in neighborhoods; and**
IV. **Community involvement at the neighborhood level.**

By mapping the experience of research participants with community life at the neighborhood level, the research findings of CommUnity Study should serve as a resource for designing guidelines for community leaders who wish to realize activities in their neighborhoods.

Methodology

CommUnity Study was designed as an explorative research study based on an inductive analytical approach. The main technique of data collection entailed in-depth structured interviews with the residents of Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, and Vienna. The overall research strategy and interview scenarios were designed by an external researcher who was hired to conduct the study. The partner organizations were responsible for selecting and recruiting research participants, conducting interviews, and processing the data. Each partner organization followed somewhat different sampling and recruiting strategies, the choice of which reflected the type of their networks (community members, clients, volunteers), their institutional capacities, and their future plans with respect to the implementation of the project.

MAREENA recruited research participants not only from among the people who are a part of its community (clients, volunteers, participants), but also from among the people who are not familiar with its activities and goals. To obtain contacts for the latter, the organization approached several student organizations and NGOs to refer them to locals and foreigners living in Bratislava. Mareena tried to reach out to both men and women and to involve people of different ages. However, the majority of the sample is represented by young people. The reason for this bias is that the organization has the strongest connection to young people and this age group was also the most willing to participate. The interviews were conducted by three employees of Mareena and two interns. They took place at the Mareena community center as well as other locations in Bratislava, usually cafes. The average time of a single interview was around 30 minutes.

BE INTERNATIONAL recruited research participants from among the people who are in a relatively close contact with the employees of the organization. Additionally, the employees of Be International also utilized their networks (community, neighbors, or contacts at the university) to get in touch with other potential research participants. The organization tried to reach out to research participants in different age categories to capture potentially diverse views, but the biggest proportion of the sample nonetheless consisted of young people. The interviews were conducted by the employees of Be International and a single interview took 1 hour on average.

GLOBAL 2000 recruited research participants from a neighborhood center located in the 3rd district of Vienna, "Landstraße". This part of the city has an ethnically diverse population of both migrants and non-migrants. The organization obtained a consent to join community events and interview people there. All interviews were thus conducted face-to-face during two community events in the district: a local flea market and a language course. Research participants were approached on site and asked whether they lived in the neighborhood and whether they were interested in taking part in the interview. The interviews were conducted by two employees of GLOBAL 2000––a sociologist and an intern–– and a single interview took approximately 20 minutes.

KALUMBA recruited research participants from among the visitors of a community center that is run by the organization. The community center is located on the border of two districts with high population of foreigners. Kalunba also advertised the research on a Facebook page administered by the organization and that has followers among both migrants and Hungarian volunteers. The interviews were conducted by two staff members with a foreign background, one Hungarian staff member and one Hungarian volunteer. Some of the interviews had to be done with the help of an interpreter due to the language barrier between the interviewer and the interviewee. An average duration of a single interview was around 40 minutes.

Given the overall focus of the project on community participation in culturally diverse contexts, approximately half of the research participants recruited by each organization were nationals of the country in which the interview took place while the other half were foreigners residing in the city. For the sake of brevity, we will refer to these two groups in the following analytical sections as 'locals' and 'foreigners', respectively, although we acknowledge the internal diversity of each group and the problematic use of the category "foreigner" to refer to long-term residents with a migratory background. The internal diversity of the sample reflects the differences in demographic profiles of all research participants (gender, age, socio-economic status) and, particularly in the case of foreigners, also differences in their ethnic backgrounds and legal statuses (international students, seasonal workers, long-term residents, asylum seekers).

The overall dataset of CommUnity Study comprises 79 interviews: 20 interviews were conducted in Bratislava, Brno, and Budapest each, and 19 interviews were conducted in Vienna. All interviews were anonymized by receiving a unique code (e.g. BAA01), in which the first two letters represent the abbreviation of the city (BA-Bratislava; BR-Brno; BU-Budapest; VI-Vienna), the third letter the group of respondents (A-locals; B-foreigners) and the digit the unique code of a research participant. The anonymized overview of all research participants based on their demographic data and other relevant information is available in Appendix 1.

The answers given by the research participants were either tape-recorded and later annotated or recorded in the written form during the course of the interview. The level of detail of the data obtained thus varies significantly. While in some instances the responses of research participants were recorded in full length, in other instances the responses were recorded only partially––in the form of a single word, a short word phrase, or a numerical estimate. The variability of data and their general brevity consequently represent two major limitations of this study which have also restricted the choice of the main analytical strategy: instead of utilizing an interpretative approach typical of qualitative methodologies, the data were analyzed through a combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Despite these limitations, however, the research findings are robust enough to meet the intended goals of the research study.

Another important methodological remark is that even though the study entails a number of comparisons that compare the data either with respect to the cities in which they were collected or based on the group of research participants, these comparisons are grounded in descriptive statistics and thus provide findings that are representative only for the population of the research sample. As such, they do not reflect the general trends in community involvement in the four cities or in the group of locals and foreigners per se. To capture such trends, a more systematic research with a greater and more carefully selected sample of research participant would be required.

CommUnity Study: Research Report

Ivana Rapoš Božič

The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries

Research findings

Research findings are divided into four sections that correspond to the four main themes addressed by the research: *I. The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries*; *II. Neighborhood relationships*; *III. Common concerns in neighborhoods*; *and IV. Community involvement at the neighborhood level.* Each section entails a number of subsections that correspond to specific aspects of the theme that were discussed with the research participants in greater detail.

I. The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries

The first thematic part of the research focused on the meaning of neighborhoods. We wanted to know how the research participants understand the concept of a 'neighborhood', what neighborhood means to them, and how broadly or narrowly they define the boundaries of the neighborhood in which they currently live. We also asked them to specify how long they have been living in their current neighborhood. Our analytical interest in relation to this thematic part of the research was to understand the relevance of neighborhoods as organizing units for community life.

The meaning of neighborhoods

There are multiple existing notions of what constitutes a neighborhood and using the concept of a neighborhood without specifying its meaning can thus easily become evasive. From academic literature we know that neighborhood can be defined at least in the following four ways:

1. as an administrative unit drawn by city planners;
2. as a functional unit that supports the residents of a certain area with services and facilities;
3. as a spatial unit that is composed of the built-environment such as streets and buildings; or
4. as a social unit that is composed of networks of social relationships among people who live in close spatial proximity

(Jenks and Dempsey 2007). Each of the above-mentioned definitions corresponds to a specific way in which the term neighborhood can be used in daily life and as such entails a specific set of meanings. These meanings can supplement each other, for instance, when people understand the term neighborhood both in spatial and social terms, but they can also conflict with each other, for instance, when the area which is considered as a neighborhood from the administrative point of view does not correspond to the area that people consider as their neighborhood based on their use of the basic infrastructure or distribution of their social networks. Given the exploratory nature of this study, we thus first wanted to know how the research participants understand the concept of neighborhood. We asked the research participants to explain what neighborhood means to them and what kind of associations they have with this term. We then used the above-mentioned four definitions of the concept as analytical categories to code their answers, all the while searching for new emergent categories. In case the answer of the research participant corresponded to several definitions at once (in most cases it was the combination of the social and the spatial definition), we applied as many codes as needed.

We found out that the largest number of research participants (51) understand the term neighborhood in social terms and they associate the neighborhood with people who live close to them –their neighbors– and the type of social interactions that they either have or would like to have with them: mainly neighborly help, but often also friendships.

> *Basically, just a small group of people living in the same area and maybe helping each other or giving each other the feeling of trust.* (BRB05)

The second most represented (21) understanding of the neighborhood was spatial and had to do with the built environment: the houses in which people live, the streets, the parks, or even nature.

> *It depends on the size of the city or village. It can be a street or a few buildings standing together.* (BAA06)

Surprisingly, **the third most represented (11) understanding of the term neighborhood was strongly linked to feelings** and thus could not be easily categorized with the help of the above- mentioned definitions. While in some cases the feelings articulated by the research participants were clearly linked to the presence of other people and related to the social understanding of the neighborhood, in other cases they were of a more individual nature. The most commonly mentioned feelings were those of being together, being comfortable, being safe, being calm, or being in peace. One research participant also mentioned mixed feelings about the neighborhood to which she has recently relocated (BBA02).

> *Be together and feel comfortable* (VIA08).
> *[Neighborhood is] my flat, the calmness.* (BRB09)

Five research participants associated the neighborhood with services and facilities, emphasizing its functional character. Among the facilities and services that were mentioned were cafés, pubs, and local markets.

> *It's my local market, I love to go there in the mornings and have a coffee, to buy vegetables and to eat lunch, of course.* (BUA05)

Finally, a single research participant associated the neighborhood with an administrative unit by highlighting the embeddedness of her social and work life in a specific district and praising the district and all the infrastructure it offers.

> *I live in the 8th district. I love the 8th District because there is our shop and friends. Everything is very near to me like the metro and tram.* (BUB04)

Two more things require mentioning. First, although the understanding of neighborhoods as administrative units has not come across as particularly prevalent in the answers of research participants to the opening set of questions, the administrative divisions were often mentioned later in the interview. This was particularly the case for research participants from Budapest and Vienna, two cities in which all city districts are numbered and where the district numbers provide a frequently used guideline for orientation. Therefore the importance of the understanding of neighborhoods as administrative units should not be underestimated, even though it likely becomes relevant only in specific contexts.

Second, it has to be noted that in a number of cases research participants defined the term neighborhood by combining several understandings together. To illustrate this entanglement, consider the definition of the neighborhood from a research participant from Budapest, which cuts across social, spatial, and functional understanding of the term.

> *Neighborhood can mean my neighbors, the people who live next to me literally. I live in a house with corridors inside - so neighbors can mean people who live on the same floor with me or the floor beneath (because I live on the top of the building). Or people I run into and we say hello to each other or sometimes do a small talk. These are the things that make the people I consider neighbors and so my neighborhood. In a broader sense neighborhood to me are the streets that surround the house that I live in and the cafés I usually go to. These things come to my mind.* (BUA08)

Understanding of the term neighborhood	Number of mentions
Neighborhood as a social place	51
Neighborhood as a built environment	21
Neighborhood as a place of emotional attachment	11
Neighborhood as a functional place	5
Neighborhood as an administrative unit	1

Table 1 Understanding of the term neighborhood among research participants

Neighborhood boundaries

We further wanted to know what kind of logic research participants use when they draw the boundaries around their neighborhood and decide on which places still belong to their neighborhood and which do not.

We found out that the majority of research participants use either of the two logics when they draw boundaries around their neighborhood: the functional logic or the spatial logic. The research participants who use the functional logic tend to draw the boundaries of their neighborhood in such a manner that they incorporate all the places they visit on a regular basis, including shops, bars, cafés, bus stops, parks, locations of their free-time activities, and, in some cases, also workplaces. Not all of these places are necessarily located in the close proximity to the places where the research participants live, and they often cannot be connected into a logical spatial pattern. Such boundaries thus correspond to the ways the research participants use the city rather than to the ways in which the urban space is organized spatially or administratively divided.

> *I limit my neighborhood according to my activities (shopping behavior, public transport, parks I visit). Due to my peripheral location in the district (Danube Canal), I tend to see parts of the 2nd district as neighbors rather than more distant parts of the 3rd district.* (VIA01)

> *Something between Karlova Ves and Old Town. I live in the first and work in the second one.* (BAB05)

The research participants who use the spatial logic, on the contrary, draw the boundaries of their neighborhood in such a manner that they incorporate only places that are in close proximity to their homes. When determining how big of an area that should be, they often rely on the principle of walkability and include areas that they could reach from their home by walking on foot. Alternatively, some of the research participants provided a fixed estimate (e.g. five hundred meters, one kilometer) or delineated the boundaries of their neighborhood by relating it to major geographical landmarks in the vicinity, such as squares, railway stations, metro stations, or major streets. Such boundaries thus correspond to the way the urban space is organized rather than to the way the research participants actually use it.

> *I consider my neighborhood borders the places within walking distance and where I regularly go or know the street.* (BUA07)

> *About 500 m around my apartment.* (VIB04)

> *A big circle around the house including the park and some streets.* (BRA09)

> *It is a triangle between Raianske mýto, Trnavské mýto and surroundings.* (BAB02)

With respect to the size of the neighborhoods, the smallest area that the research participants demarcated as their neighborhood was a single floor in the dormitory building. The largest area was the whole city.

> *There is one corner and one floor close to the kitchen.* (BUB02)

> *All districts in Vienna, I am at home everywhere.* (VIA05)

The largest number of research participants, nonetheless, defined their neighborhood as an area that encompassed their house and a small region around it, while this "around it" followed either the functional (bus stops, bars, grocery stores), or the spatial logic (streets, neighboring blocks, major landmarks).

> *The building that I live in and the bus stop that I use.* (BRB06)

> *Few houses around, Billa, library, the tram stop Klusáčkova. The park. It is the places that I usually go through.* (BRA07)

> *My surrounding, the people live in the same building, or next building, or a little wider.* (BRB07).

> *It is just my flat and one kilometer around.* (BUB01)

Length of residency in the neighborhood

Finally, we wanted to know for how long the research participants have been living in their current neighborhood. We coded their answers by constructing three categories: short-term (< 3 years), mid-term (> 3 years and < 10 years), and long-term (> 10 years) residents. We first looked at the proportion of the short-term, mid-term, and long-term residents in the entire sample of research participants and then compared the proportions among the four cities and between the locals and foreigners.

More than half (44; 55%) of research participants have been living in their current neighborhood only short-term, for a period no longer than three years. Little less than a fifth (15; 19%), of research participants have been living in their neighborhoods mid-term, for a period longer than three years and shorter than ten years. Finally, a little less than a quarter of research participants have been living in their neighborhood long-term, for a period longer than ten years, with a number of them being life-long residents. It is important to keep this

distribution in mind, because the relative overrepresentation of the short-term residents in our research sample likely impacted the analytical findings of the research: if we accept the premise that it takes time to establish relationships in the neighborhood, short-term residents will likely be less involved in community life than mid-term and long-term residents. We will further explore the relationship between the length of residency in the neighborhood and the relationships in the next section of the report.

The highest share of short-term residents in our research were from Bratislava, the highest share of mid-term residents from Budapest, and the highest share of long-term residents from Vienna.

	Short-term residency (< 3 years)	Mid-term residency > 3 years and < 10 years	Mid-term residency > 3 years and < 10 years	N/A
Bratislava	15	3	2	0
Brno	14	2	3	1
Budapest	9	6	4	1
Vienna	6	5	8	0
All cities	**44**	16	17	2

Table 2 Length of residency in the neighborhood according to the city

When looking at the differences in the length of residency between the two groups of research participants––the locals and the foreigners––it becomes apparent that the vast majority (31; 79%) of all foreigners that took part in the research have been residing in their present neighborhood only short-term. Only one research participant from this group has been residing in the neighborhood long-term, whereas six foreigners have been residing in the neighborhood mid-term. The opposite trend was true for the locals, although there the distribution was much more even. The greatest number of the locals in our research sample (16; 40%) have been residing in their current neighborhood long-term. However, the second most represented group were the short-term residents (13; 32%), followed by the mid-term residents (10; 25%).

	Short-term residency (< 3 years)	Mid-term residency > 3 years and < 10 years	Mid-term residency > 3 years and < 10 years	N/A
Locals	13	10	16	1
Foreigners	31	6	1	1
Both groups	**44**	**16**	**17**	**2**

Table 3 Length of residency in the neighborhood according to the nationality

II.

Neighborhood relationships

The second thematic part of CommUnity Study focused on relationships in the neighborhood. We wanted to know how well the research participants know other people who live in their neighborhood (however they define the neighborhood), how positively or negatively they assess the overall quality of relationships in their neighborhood, where they usually meet their neighbors, and what are the relationships between locals and foreigners in their neighborhood. Our analytical interest in relation to this thematic part of the research was to gain a better picture about the relationships in the neighborhoods in which the research participants reside and to identify the common places of encounters between the neighbors.

Knowing the neighbors

We first wanted to know how well the research participants knew other people who lived in their neighborhood and we explored the possible relationships between the length of residency in the neighborhood and the nationality of research participants with the extent to which they knew their neighbors.

We found out that a half of all research participants (40; 50%) does not know their neighbors at all, approximately one quarter (19; 24%) knows their neighbors on the superficial level (greeting, recognizing faces), while the remaining one quarter (20; 25%) of research participants knows their neighbors well.

The research participants who said they did not know their neighbors at all often explained that it was either because they have moved to the neighborhood only recently or because other people have been moving in and out from their neighborhood too fast. A number of research participants also critically commented on the practice of renting out the apartments through Airbnb that practically replaces neighbors with tourists.

> *It passed very quickly, and I feel that even in those three years I did not manage to get to know people very much.* (BAA06)

> *[Knowing the neighbors] Not that much. Because of this, I said the alienation. There are also a lot of Airbnb's there. I know one old lady quite well. She lent me once a chair and because of that we know each other quite well. Otherwise, I basically don't know anybody else, because they change so quickly. People selling the houses and all the Airbnb's changing so fast.* (BUA03)

In some cases, however, even the research participants who said that they did not know their neighbors at all later admitted that they knew at least someone, typically the building maintenance manager, next-door neighbors, or neighbors who are particularly remarkable, for instance because they have several dogs.

> *"[I do not know] My neighbors, not at all. I know that woman who has 2 huge dogs lives somewhere nearby. And I know my apartment building manager, so I know 2 people."* (BRA03).

The research participants who said they knew their neighbors on a superficial level explained that they usually do not know the names of their neighbors and thus would not say they actually 'know them', but they are at least capable of recognizing their faces and they usually greet each other in the street.

> *"I don't [know the people who live in my neighborhood], some people I know based on how they look"* (BUA01).

One research participant highlighted the paradoxical nature of such visual recognition by describing how her neighbors, with whom they have never introduced themselves to each other, would automatically push for her the correct floor button in the elevator.

> *"I don't really know other people in my neighborhood. Sometimes they know my floor number in the elevator. I don't know their names, I only know their faces* (BUB06).

The research participants who said they knew their neighbors well often explained that this was possible because they have grown up in the neighborhood, have been living there for a long period of time, have been part of locally-based communities, such as a church or baby care groups, or their jobs made it possible for them to get to know the people, for instance by teaching in the local school.

> *I know them very well because that's where I live my whole life, know where they work how many children they have and so on.* (BRA01)

> *I know a lot of people from the church. I think it's easy to connect with your neighbors if you belong to a church. I also know people from the baby care that my children go to. Because the parents meet most often, so it's another way to meet people from the neighborhood. So I say those are the people that I know. But I know some people that I know from the streets, so for example that we meet so many times especially now that we have a child it's easy to become friends if it is another mother, especially at the doctors for example. Have places that you can meet people.* (BUA06)

> *I work as a teacher in that part, so quite a bit. I have also a family there, but we don't communicate very much. I know people from school and parents more.* (BAA02)

Not knowing one's neighbors was, however, far more common among research participants who have been residing in their current neighborhood only short-term, for a period of less than three years. The research participants who have been residing in their neighborhood mid-term or long-term were more likely to say they knew their neighbors at least somehow if not very well. Out of those research participants who said they did not know their neighbors at all, the largest part (27) has been residing in their current neighborhood for only a short period of up to 3 years (and many of them were renting their place), 6 for a mid-term period of 4-10 years, and only 5 were long-term residents who resided in the neighborhood for more than 10 years.

Yet although the length of residency certainly helps the neighbors to get to know each other, it is not the only catalyzer of mutual acquaintance and good neighborly relationships. This becomes obvious once we take a closer look at the answers of people who reported to know their neighbors well and who represented approximately one quarter of all research participants (21). Quite in line with the above described trend, the majority of them (11) have been residing in their current neighborhood long-term, more than 10 years, and some of them even for their entire lives. Research participants belonging to this group mostly described the condition of knowing their neighbors well as a natural consequence of living in the neighborhood for many years.

However, contrary to this trend, the number of people who claimed to know their neighbors well and have been residing in the neighborhood only short-term (up to 3 years) was also relatively high (6). What helped the short-term residents to get to know their neighbors? As it can be observed from the interviews, even the residents who have been residing in the neighborhood only short-term were able to get acquainted with their neighbors relatively quickly when they were involved with them also in ways other than just through sharing the same address: one research participant said she was able to get to know the neighbors quite well because she has been working as a teacher in a school located in the same neighborhood (BAA02), other research participants mentioned dog-walking as an important networking activity (VIB01, BAB02), and one research participant attributed his ability to get to know the neighbors to a presence of a local bar which served as a meeting place for everyone (BRA08).

	Knowing people in the neighborhood well	Knowing people in the neighborhood superficially	Not knowing people in the neighborhood at all
Short-term residents	6	12	27
Mid-term residents	4	4	6
Long-term residents	11	4	5
All residencies	21	20	38

Table 4 Knowing people in the neighborhood according to their length of residency

When we relate the extent to which the research participants know their neighbors with their nationality, we find out that the number of locals who know their neighbors well (15) is noticeably higher than the number of foreigners in this category (6). The opposite trend is not observed: the number of locals who do not know their neighbors at all is precisely the same in our sample as the number of foreigners who do not know their neighbors at all. Therefore, while it might be easier for the locals to establish relationships with their neighbors as they usually do not have to face any language or cultural barrier, it certainly does not prevent them from keeping distance and not having a relationship with their neighbors at all.

	Knowing people in the neighborhood well	Knowing people in the neighborhood superficially	Not knowing people in the neighborhood at all
Locals	15	8	19
Foreigners	6	12	19
Both groups	**21**	**20**	**38**

Table 5 Knowing people in the neighborhood according to the nationality

Meeting places in the neighborhood

We then wished to find out what are the typical places or occasions at which the research participants meet their neighbors.

It might not come as a surprise that the most frequently mentioned meeting places were the communal places in and around the housing block, such as elevators, staircases, corridors, entrance doors, gyms, parking lots, or pathwalks in front of the house. Such places serve as natural meeting points among the neighbors, although the type of interaction they produce is often fleeting and superficial.

> *I don't know them, sometimes they are just lost at the corridor.* (BUA05)

> *We don't meet for some specific occasions, since we live in one building we just sometimes catch up in the hall or in common areas, or in a gym.* (BRB04)

Other frequently mentioned meeting places entailed local shops, buses or bus stops (and in wider sense all local transportation), local cafés and bars, playgrounds, parks or gardens, or churches and schools. In terms of occasions, among the most mentioned were cultural events taking place in the neighborhood, followed by residential meetings and occasions when there was a problem that had to be solved.

Interestingly, residential meetings, whose very aim is to bring all neighbors from the same house together, were mentioned only five times. This might be a consequence of the high representation of short-term residents among the research participants, many of whom are also renting their apartments and thus usually do not attend residential meetings.

> Randomly in the building. Since we are not the flat owners, we do not attend the common meetings. (BAB06)

Meeting places in the neighborhood	Number of mentions
In and around the house (elevators, staircases, corridors, entrance doors, etc.)	38
While shopping in the local shop	8
Cultural events taking place in the neighborhood	8
In the bus or on the bus stop	7
In the local cafés and bars	6
At the residential meetings	5
At the playgrounds	5
In the parks or gardens	4
If there is a problem	2
In the local church or school	2

Table 6 Most common meeting places in the neighborhood identified by number of mentions

Relationships in the neighborhood

We further wanted to know what kind of relationships research participants have with their neighbors.

Almost a half (38; 48%) of all research participants assesses their relationships with their neighborhoods positively and considers them to be good, while a smaller proportion (23; 29%) assess their relationships with their neighbors negatively and consider them to be either non-existent or conflictual. However, a closer look at individual answers reveals that there is quite a bit of variability in what kind of relationships the research participants are willing to consider good and bad, making the boundaries between the categories rather fluid and a simple categorization of the relationships into good and bad problematic.

For some of the research participants, good relationships with their neighbors mean simply an absence of open conflicts and some level of tolerance and casual civility (greeting each other) that does not necessarily require knowing each other well.

> *They [relationships] are quite good, but people don't know each other very much.* (BAA03)

One of the research participants described her opinion of good neighbor relationships with the help of the famous saying: 'live and let live' (BUA07), thus emphasizing the importance of tolerance over the involvement in the private lives of others. Another research participant explained that her relationships with her neighbors are 'reserved but nice' (VIA04).

For other research participants, however, calling neighborhood relationships good would have to entail a much greater personal involvement and reciprocity. As one research participant described, she considers her relationships with her neighbors good because they are based on friendships and providing help when needed.

> *[I see my neighborhood relationships] as a friendly and helpful connection - it is good to have them. For example, the neighbor once called me that they forgot some food in the fridge and he asked me if I could take it. Or we are also helping each other with babysitting and we have a 'babysitting swap' (laugh).* (BAB02)

One research participant described neighborhood relationships as something which has to be actively cultivated.

> *I do not think that somebody is actively working on them. There's nothing that connects people - no community garden or something. Relationships are formed rather between smaller groups.* (BAA01)

A number of research participants further pointed out that there are internal divisions in their neighborhoods when it comes to the intensity of relationships. One of the divisions that they identified lies between people who live in the neighborhood long-term and thus know each other well and people who live in the neighborhood only short-term and do not know their neighbors. Other divisions that research participants identified lie between people who have children and can thus bond through children's activities and people who do not have children, as well as between people who have dogs and socialize during dog-walking and people who do not have dogs.

> *There is a generally peaceful atmosphere. We can say that people are divided into those who have lived there for a long time and have families there, and then those who are only there for a while - like me.* (BAB06)

> *Within my micro community they are good. There is a Facebook group where people borrow things to their neighbors. There are many young families who know each other, and they became friends. Sometimes there also share the parking places or lend eggs.* (BAA02)

> *From what I can observe, people seem to be quite close to each other, because every morning I see all the people walking the dogs when I go out of my house talking to each other mothers with children they seem to be quite friendly to each other.* (BRB05)

Some research participants also mentioned the negative impacts of gentrification, Airbnb's, and general touristification of their neighborhood for neighborhood relationships.

> *I would say there is a tension you can feel. In this area used to live a lot of locals and because of this transitioning process they cannot afford to live there anymore, and all of the flats are now Airbnb's or something similar, it's used for business now. They also call it the party district, so elderly people who live there had a lot of problems with this I think. But because they are not willing to move either because they lived there for their whole live. This is a tension I can definitely feel. Also, the tension or the contrast between people living on the street and Western European tourists who are having parties there. You can really see the big differences especially at night when people are out to drink and people who are in need also kind of hang around. For example, tourists throw a lot of food away and then they can have this food. Yeah there are these kinds of tension points.* (BUA03)

Relationships between the locals and the foreigners

Finally, we wanted to know how the research participants assess the relationships between the locals and foreigners in their neighborhood. We asked these two groups of research participants two slightly different sets of questions. We asked the locals, first of all, if there were any foreigners living in their neighborhood and, if yes, how well they knew them and what kind of relationships they had with them. We asked the foreigners about their experience with being accepted by the locals and the type of reactions they would usually get once the locals become aware of the fact that they have come from abroad. This was the only part of the interview where we posed different questions to the locals and to the foreigners.

We found out that the vast majority of locals (35; 88%) lives in ethnically diverse neighborhoods together with people of other nationalities. This proportion might be even higher as the remaining five locals assumed there might be foreigners living in their neighborhood but were not sure--for instance due to a high fluctuation of tourists in the area and the difficulty to determine who lives in the neighborhood and who is a mere traveler. Most locals, nonetheless, had a very clear idea about the presence of foreigners in their neighborhood. A number of research participants also specified that foreigners were their immediate neighbors and lived in the same block of flats. In most cases, the research participants referred to foreigners according to their nationalities, talking about Ukrainians, Afghanis, Chinese, etc.

The number of locals who said they also knew the foreigners who lived in their neighborhood was, however, much lower: only one quarter of the locals (10;25%) said they knew the foreigners well while a fifth (8; 20%) said they knew them at least on a superficial level. In terms of relationships, 15 locals said they had good relationships with foreigners living in their neighborhood while 8 said their relationships were correct but not very deep. Two research participants mentioned they had bad relationships with the foreigners, in one case due to loud music, whereas in the other case the research participant gave a strong negative statement which he did not explain further.

Experience of foreigners with the level of acceptance by the locals and the type of reactions they would typically get was predominantly positive or neutral, although a number of research participants also reported to have had a negative experience. More than half of the foreigners (24; 61%) said the locals typically react to their presence positively, often with a surprise or interest about their culture.

> *Like 'Wow! Why are you here, in Czechia?'. The most common question is why. But they are friendly, really friendly.* (BRB01)

> *They are curious - specifically about my habits and culture.* (BAB04)

The foreigners who assessed the reactions from the locals in neutral terms (9) often mentioned that even though they have never experienced anything negative, they feel that they are being put into boxes by the locals or have to withstand weird looks.

> *Nothing really negative but you notice that some people put you immediately in a box.* (VIB02)

> *Nothing negative, some people looking weird.* (VIB07)

Finally, the foreigners who reported to have had a negative experience (6) explained that the reactions of the locals made them feel unpleasant, for instance when a research participant and his wife experienced what he called 'weird reactions' because she was wearing hijab. One research participant also mentioned that the negative portrayal of refugees and migrations on social media made him feel upset.

> *Weird reactions when they see my wife as she is wearing Hijab.* (BRB09)

> *I can't judge people because people grow up with different backgrounds and beliefs. People here have a bad view on refugees and migrants, I can't judge them, but I know what they think due to social media. It makes me upset sometimes.* (BUB02)

A number of foreigners mentioned the importance of language as either a catalyst of social interactions––for instance, if the foreigners have mastered the language of the country in which they live, or if the locals are excited about speaking their language––or a hindrance, in case the foreigners and the locals are not able to communicate well.

> *Well depends on the situation, some people are pleasantly surprised when I start to speak Czech – they say wow it's cool that you're a foreigner and learn Czech and also study in Czech at University, for them it is something unimaginable, because they don't understand why a foreigner would learn Czech. But some people take it as a normal there, like well just a normal guy a regular member of society but there are no people who would have a bad attitude towards me.* (BRB03)

> *I think they are just a little bit hesitant to start the conversation because of English but they're OK, they're quite open* (BRB05)

Some foreigners also pointed out that it is easier for them to establish relationships with locals who have either previously lived abroad or whose family members have also experienced migration.

> *There is one neighbor, a Hungarian woman, her husband is Arab. We know each other and sometimes we talk to each other. This is a little bit difficult because I don't know Hungarian that well. Sometimes we are talking, and she asks me, why did you leave your country, how is life in Afghanistan, was it difficult to come here, and stuff like this. Just a bit of a conversation. I think she asks because her husband is from Asia, from a Muslim country. It is easier for her to accept foreigners in general, she is the only one I talk to. I just say hi and bye to the others.* (BUB07)

III.

Common concerns in neighborhoods

The third thematic part of the research focused on common concerns at the neighborhood level. We wanted to know what issues research participants considered as problematic in their neighborhood, how they would envision possible improvements, and who should, in their opinion, be the initiator of change.

What should change and how should change look like

We wanted to know what kind of issues the research participants considered as problematic in their neighborhood and how they would envision a change for the better. We first coded their responses descriptively and sorted the codes into broader categories. In case a research participant mentioned several issues, we coded these issues separately.

We identified five categories of issues that research participants found problematic and would want to see changed (Table 5). The most frequently mentioned category of issues was the absence of physical infrastructure in the neighborhood. The most demanded type of infrastructure was green infrastructure, such as parks, picnic places, or urban gardens.

> *There would be more trees, as well as places where people could have a picnic or take a walk.* (BAA03)

> *I would add to our apartment building some small private garden, where only the residents and their visits can go.* (BAA09)

> *If more is planted everything should become greener.* (VIA03)

The second most demanded type of infrastructure were restaurants, bars, and shops. Particularly those research participants who live in neighborhoods at the outskirts of the city articulated a wish for more such infrastructure close to their homes. Such spots should, according to them, not only help satisfy the related needs but also cultivate relationships in the neighborhood.

> *It would be nice to have an alley that would be full of energy and suitable for walk. There would be life and restaurants.* (BAB03)

> *It wouldn't be necessary for us to travel to the center for fun all the time. It could also be the space to create new relationships in the neighborhood.* (BAB07)

The second most frequently mentioned category of issues related to a lack of regulation of urban life. The most demanded type of regulation was rent regulation, whose absence often leads to a skyrocketing of rental costs and the process of gentrification in which the residents who cannot afford to pay the high rents are forced to move out of the neighborhood.

> *Some people can afford the high rents, and this segregate the society, rich people live in one neighborhood and poor ones live in one. Rental market should be more restricted.* (BRA09)

> *It would mean more control of Airbnb or other business like this. It would mean social housing, putting some afford in infrastructure and money in social housing. Of course, the best would be if there would be housing properties, that there are several owners of one place and they live together. I don't even know if there is already such system in Hungary.* (BUA03)

Some of the research participants also articulated a need for better regulation of traffic and car access to the neighborhood, noise and loud behavior, drinking in public spaces, or the movement of dogs.

> *I wouldn't let cars cross that street. Because in my house that is that huge bicycle storage, a lot of people use it in this district and unfortunately that's a bunch of accidents, you know, cars beat people using bicycles. It would be nice, like in Amsterdam, to see people walking or running or using bicycles instead of using their cars, because the island is so close. Nature is so close, and we should keep this safe, I guess.* (BUA02)

> *No nothing it's pretty great but maybe sometimes I would like to change the noise because it's very difficult, for example when you are preparing for exams and some people downstairs have like wedding and party and a lot of people are yelling so it's distracting.* (BRB01)

Cleaning the streets, prohibit drinking outside, make a community garden behind in our backyard. (BRB08)

No dog areas near by children playgrounds. (VIB03)

The third most mentioned category of issues had to do with social relationships and the way people in the neighborhood interact with each other. The most demanded type of change in this category would entail warmer behavior among neighbors and more opportunities for socialization and getting to know each other.

Well I would be happy if it was more American style neighborhood, where people say hi to each other and visit each other. It's nice when people know each other, can have a little chat. It's better to meet someone and say hi how are you doing instead of just ignoring and passing by. (BRA03)

If there could be a community event that we can learn and get to know each other better. (BUB02)

A number of foreigners also articulated a wish for greater ethnic diversity in their neighborhoods, emphasizing the downsides of being the only 'visibly different' foreigners that their neighbors have ever seen. Greater ethnic diversity could, in their view, lead to greater tolerance, since people who grow up in ethnically mixed neighborhoods have more opportunities to become accustomed to ethnic and racial differences.

Well, maybe I would invite more foreigners to live there. So people get used to seeing people who are different. I like the way children are growing up there, seeing different kinds of people. Because the old ones didn't get to see it and when they see all of them coming they are quite shocked. I understand them sometimes in some ways. Then they express it like anger. It is mostly my flat mate who tells me those stories. I never experience something like that. But she always has an old lady who is shouting at her. I think it is some adjustment as well. So if there are more people from different places, we can adjust with each other. I just remember I was walking on the street and there was this family a father and two kids and the boy was like "oh wow". You are shocked now, but would you grow up seeing people like me, you are not shocked anymore. I just like the fact that they can grow up and are used to seeing chocolate skin. (BUB01)

The fourth most mentioned category of issues related to insufficient access to public transportation. Research participants articulated a need for denser infrastructure of public transportation lines and stations, denser schedules, and their greater reliability.

Lines of transportation maybe, should be literally on my street or somewhere closer so I don't have to walk like 15 minutes to get the tram in the cold weather I don't like it and if it's the bus 2 minutes from my home, but it goes in circles, so I would be twice late. (BRB02)

I would add more connections to my stop, because there is just one tram going every 10 minutes. (BRA04)

Transportation without any delays and so it's accessible for everybody around not only the people who live in the city center. (BRB02)

A number of research participants also demanded alternatives to conventional means of public transportation, particularly in the form of cycling lanes.

[...] I understand that they [people] want everything to be better for example more parking spots, but people want cycling lanes for example I do want cycling lanes. (BRB03)

[...] It would be nice, like in Amsterdam, to see people walking or running or using bicycles instead of using their cars, because the island is so close. Nature is so close, and we should keep this safe, I guess. (BUA02)

Finally, the fifth and final category of issues that we identified had to do with civic passivity of people and a need for political change. Research participants articulated a need for citizens to become more actively involved in public matters and communal politics. Some of them also openly spoke about the need for change of the political representation on the local level, for instance by having the young generation bring new agendas, particularly the agenda of climate change.

A good state provision and proactive public voice, which would care about the schools. (BAB02)

I would put the new generation in the city government – people who are starting to grow now on which the future depends on, because the people who are in government now are quite old fashioned. There is this transition and I understood it when Greta talked about climate change and the government absolutely doesn't care about those things, but the new generation who will be touched by all the effects is starting to think about it, so I think there is a change needed so those problems could be solved right now. (BRB03)

Problematic issues in the neighborhood	Number of mentions
Infrastructure is missing (green areas, parking, pubs, benches, grocery stores, etc.)	32
Regulation is missing (rents, Airbnb, drinking in public spaces, dogs, noise, etc.)	15
Social relationships are not working (alienation, exclusion, lack of tolerance, etc.)	14
Public transportation is not working (lines and stations, reliability, lack of bike lanes)	11
Civic passivity and a need for political change	6

Table 7 Problematic issues in the neighborhood by number of mentions

The largest number of research participants who demanded improvement of infrastructure was based in Bratislava, the largest number of research participants who demanded stricter regulation of urban life was based in Budapest, the largest number of research participants who mentioned the need for improvement of social relationships was based in Budapest, and the largest number of research participants who demanded the improvement of public transportation was based in Brno. The demand for better political representation and greater civic involvement was mentioned in equal manner by research participants from Bratislava, Brno, and Vienna, while it was not mentioned by research participants from Budapest at all.

	Infrastructure	Regulations Infrastructure	Social relationships	Public transportation	Political representation
Bratislava	11	1	1	3	2
Brno	7	5	4	4	2
Budapest	5	6	5	3	0
Vienna	9	3	4	1	2
All cities	**32**	**15**	**14**	**11**	**6**

Table 8 Demands for change according to the city

When the two groups of research participants are compared, we can observe that the locals demanded improvement of infrastructure, stricter regulations, and better public transportation in greater extent than foreigners. On the other hand, foreigners articulated the need for improvement of social relationships and political representation. The biggest difference between the two groups was in the demand for improvement of social relationships: the number of foreigners who mentioned this demand was more than twice higher than the number of locals. One of the possible explanations of this difference could be the impaired capacity of foreigners to establish social relationships in the neighborhood, for instance due to the language barrier or perception of cultural otherness.

	Infrastructure	Regulations Infrastructure	Social relationships	Public transportation	Political representation
Locals	18	10	4	6	2
Foreigners	14	5	10	5	4
Both groups	**32**	**15**	**14**	**11**	**6**

Table 9 Demands for change according to nationality

Initiating the change

Once we knew what the research participants would like to see changed, we also wanted to know who should, in their view, be the initiator of the change.

We found out that a bit more than a third (27; 34%) of research participants assumes the initiative should come from above and that it is mainly the political representatives of the city such as the mayor, the MPs, or the municipal or district government who should initiate improvements in the neighborhood. In some cases, however, the research participants also expressed their doubts about the plausibility of such a scenario.

> *The municipality. I think it's obvious that the area needs more greenery.* (BRB05)

> *Would be good if the local government do something but this won't really happen.* (BUA05)

A bit more than a fifth of research participants (17; 21%) assumes the initiative should be bottom up and that it is mainly the citizens who should initiate the change. Among possible ways of initiating the change by the citizens, the research participants mentioned writing a petition addressed to the city representatives or a starting a project.

> *The people who want to do it and have an idea.* (VIA02)

> *People would have to write a petition and give it to the city representatives.* (BAA07)

> *Ideal would be citizens themselves, but who decides to do so, perhaps by initiating initiatives or projects?* (VIA01)

A number of research participants (10; 12%) further thinks that the initiative could be successful only if it was a joint effort of both citizens and the city.

> *City, but based on initiative of the citizens.* (BAA03)

> *Perhaps the individual who comes with the project and the raise some funding for that. But it would be good if such projects had the support of the city or state.* (BAB03)

Some research participants (9; 11%) also admitted that it could also be them who could start improving things for the better in their neighborhood.

> *I think possibly me and my neighbors.* (BRB04)

> *I would stick some papers on the walls of the building. If somebody wants to help me we can do it together, it's funnier and more enjoyable, and we can share ideas. But if nobody is coming I will still plant some trees and flowers.* (BUB11)

Among potential initiators of change mentioned by the research participants (7; 8%) were also local authorities of different kind: mainly the building owners and the local entrepreneurs. The reason why the research participants assume they can be the initiators of change is because they see them as someone who has power and resources.

> *Well someone who has responsibility for the apartment complex.* (BRA03)
> *Head of the building, but also everyone else. But I realize that there are also people who do not have the time or do not often spend time there.* (BAB05)

Who should initiate the change	Number of mentions
The city (mayor, MPs, district government, etc.)	31
Citizens	17
The city and citizens	10
Myself	9
Authorities	7

Table 10 "Who should initiate the change" by number of mentions

IV.

Community involvement at the neighborhood level

The fourth and final thematic part of the research focused on community involvement at the neighborhood level. We first wanted to know how the research participants assess the overall level of community involvement in their neighborhood, how they assess the level of their own involvement in community life, if they have any experience with involvement in community initiatives, and until what extent they consider community involvement as a value. We also wanted to know what would motivate them to get more involved in community life and what would, on the other hand, act as a barrier to such involvement. With respect to the overall aims of the Unity in Community project, this part of the research represented the focal point and we thus present the related research findings in greater detail than in the previous three parts.

Community life in the neighborhood

We first wanted to know how the research participants assess the extent to which people living in their neighborhood get involved in community life. We wanted to know if there is a community life in their neighborhood at all and if yes, who and to what extent participates in it.

A bit more than a third (29; 36%) of all research participants consider their neighbors to be involved in community life at least to an extent. A number of research participants further pointed out that usually not all people in their neighborhood are involved in community life in an equal manner, but specific groups of people tend to get involved more. Among such groups mentioned were retirees, young families with children, and young people in general.

> Older people get involved more. Of younger people the ones who live in the surrounding students' accommodations do get involved. Other people don't - or they meet people from other districts. (BUA08)

> *The families with children I think [do get involved] a lot, but otherwise I think people mostly keep to themselves they don't participate in events all the time so it's mostly families with children.* (BRA02)

> *Certain people are very committed. However, these often-voluntary activities can often be too much to do in addition to a full-time job, so younger people are more likely to be involved. For example, if the initiative of a community garden or other projects related to children.* (VIA01)

A roughly similar number of research participants (31; 39%) had a different experience and they do not consider their neighbors to be involved in the community life. Some of the research participants see an explanation of such passivity in the fact that people focus on their lives and lives of their families only: "We just live in our own bubbles" (BUA01). Others associate the passivity with a lack of organized community events in the neighborhood that could incubate the community life. As a research participant from Budapest interestingly pointed out, not all events have equal potential in bringing the community together: "There are not many community activities organized in this area. There are mainly various events in bars" (BAB08).

The rest of the research participants (19; 24%) either expressed reservation to assess the level of community involvement in their neighborhood or did not answer this question at all. A number of research participants felt they did not know the relationships and activities in the neighborhood well enough to make an assessment: "I don't know. I would know if I would have a conversation with them [neighbors] and talk with them" (BUB09). Another research participant refused to make an assessment on account of feeling unsure if to consider certain activities––such as chatting among the neighbors or friendships of dog-owners––a part of community life or not.

I don't really know about community life to be honest. I'm not good at this. But most elderly people love to chat. We have a lot of dogs in this district, I see that people that have dogs are friends now, perhaps it's a community life. (BUA02)

The biggest share of research participants who reported that their neighbors were involved in community life were from Vienna (9), whereas the biggest share of research participants who reported that their neighbors were not involved in community life were from Brno (10) (Table 10).

	People in the neighborhood are involved in community activities	People in the neighborhood are not involved in community activities	N/A or could not asses
Bratislava	5	9	6
Brno	8	10	2
Budapest	7	7	6
Vienna	9	5	5
All cities	**29**	**31**	**19**

Table 11 Perception of the community involvement at the neighborhood level

Personal involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level

We also wanted to know how the research participants assess the extent of their own personal involvement in the community life in their neighborhood. The question was of an open nature, and the research participants had a relative freedom in deciding what they consider as 'involvement'––possibly considering both less formal (such as helping the neighbors) and more formal forms of involvement (such as membership in neighborhood organizations or volunteer groups).

We found out that a little less than one third of all research participants (25; 31%) said they would consider themselves involved in the community life, while a little more than two thirds of research participants (53; 67%) consider themselves not to be involved at all.

	Research participant involved in community life	Research participant not involved in community life	N/A
Bratislava	6	14	0
Brno	4	16	0
Budapest	2	17	1
Vienna	13	6	0
All cities	**25**	**53**	**1**

Table 12 Subjective assessment of personal involvement in community life at the neighborhood level according to cities

As indicated in Table 11, the largest number of research participants who assessed their personal involvement in community life positively was from Vienna, whereas the largest number of research participants who assessed their involvement negatively was from Budapest, closely followed by Brno and Bratislava. These differences likely mirror the basic profiles of research participants from each city: more research participants from Vienna belonged to higher age groups (40-50, 50-60, 60-70, 70+) than research participants from the other three cities and they were also more often long-term residents of their neighborhoods.

A number of research participants talked about their involvement in community life in connection to specific civic organizations such as Caritas or neighborhood centers, public institutions such as local schools, kindergartens, church, or various volunteer groups. The role of these organizations and institutions in cultivating the community life at the neighborhood level thus clearly remains important.

I can mention one example of good practice. There's a family center whose director is a real leader. But we would need more active people to organize community activities. For example, we are trying to do this kind of activities at school. (BAA02)

I am part of the agenda group Neighborhood in Green and a member of a community garden. The members overlap to some extent. I would not describe myself as a leader in these initiatives at all, but rather as "I like to be there and help". (VIA01)

I read to kindergarten children. (VIA05)

I am helping the Caritas. (VIA07)

Some of the research participants who said they were currently not involved in community life in any way admitted that they used to be involved more, but due to changing life circumstances––such as a transition from a high school to a university, relocation to another city or country, or loss of the dog the person would regularly walk in the neighborhood––they lost the time or opportunity for involvement. These answers indicate that community involvement at the neighborhood level is not a static activity and can change during the life of an individual.

I was more involved during high school. I'm currently studying medicine and it takes almost all of my time. (BAA08)
Where I have grown up it was different - here and almost no public events and I don't have capacity to participate that much or to search for events. (BAB02)

I was, but nowadays I'm a little bit lazy. I have some problems due to my university life, due to the immigration office, so some private things. And because of these I am not too social. Right now, I prefer to be shy. (BUB11)

Well, I'm not too involved. I had a dog and had the same experience as the other dogs owners, but now I have no dogs, so I don't feel like I'm involved. (BUA02)

Some of the research participants also pointed out that even though they consider themselves to be involved in community life in general, they are not involved at the neighborhood level––signaling that the neighborhood might not automatically be perceived by its residents as a unit at the level of which community life should be cultivated.

I try to be active and interested in civil society. But I never saw it that way, I had to carry out these activities in my neighborhood. (BAA03)

I try to be active, but more within other parts - especially Old Town. (BAB03)

I find it very important. But in my view, city life is mobile. You can't bind it to the narrow neighborhood. So I find it very important to get involved in the community life of Budapest, and I do get involved as I do volunteering. I'd like to help people who live in the same city with me. Yeah, this is my answer. (BUA08)

The number of research participants who said they were involved in community life was almost two times higher among the locals than the foreigners, which is not a surprising fact given that the vast majority of foreigners who were interviewed in this research were short-term residents of their neighborhoods (31 out of 38).

	Locals	Foreigners	Total for each city
Bratislava	4	2	6
Brno	2	2	4
Budapest	1	1	2
Vienna	9	4	13
All cities	**16**	**9**	**25**

Table 13 Involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level according to city and nationality

The foreigners were, moreover, much more likely to explain the lack of their involvement in the community life by highlighting structural barriers that prevent them from being involved, most commonly a language barrier, but also a lack of understanding of the local context and civic matters.

I am not really involved, because of the language barrier. (BUB07)

Not really. We are a little bit isolated, because of the language barrier. If they don't speak English, they are not aware of us. So, I don't really know if there are any initiatives. (BUB01)

It is difficult for me to orient myself in your environment, in your civic matters. I have to focus on my health, food, and languages that I am learning (...). (BAB01)

Previous experience with participation in community initiatives

We further asked the research participants to specify their previous experiences with involvement in the community life. We wanted to know if they had ever been a part of an initiative whose aim would be to improve some aspects of life in the neighborhood. This question mapped more formal forms of involvement requiring wider public coordination or institutional structure.

We found out that the number of research participants who answered positively was even lower than in the case of the previous question: less than one quarter of all research participants reported to have had a former direct experience with involvement in initiatives at the neighborhood level (18; 22%). The largest number (9) of research participants who said they had a direct experience was again from Vienna, the smallest number (1) from Budapest.

	Locals	Foreigners	Total for each city
Bratislava	3	1	4
Brno	2	2	4
Budapest	0	1	1
Vienna	5	4	9
All cities	**10**	**8**	**18**

Table 14 Direct experience with involvement in community initiatives according to city and nationality

When asked about the type of initiatives in which they had been involved, research participants mentioned mainly four types of initiatives: **social initiatives** such as helping the neighbors (VIA01, VIB01, VIB06, VIA03) or being engaged in the activities of a neighborhood center (VIA10); **cultural initiatives** such as organization of neighborhood festivals (VIB01) or cultural evenings (BAB04); **educational initiatives** such as creation of a public presentation on volunteering (BRA08) or organizing community activities for children at school (BAA02), **neighborhood maintenance initiatives** such as cleaning the neighborhood (BAA01), planting trees (BRB04), or taking care of a community garden (VIA01).

Social initiatives	Cultural initiatives	Educational initiatives	Neighborhood maintenance initiatives
Helping the neighbors	Organizing neighborhood festivals	Making a public presentation on volunteering	Cleaning the neighborhood
Being a member of the neighborhood center	Organizing cultural evenings	Organizing community activities for children at school	Planting trees
			Taking care of the community garden

Table 15 Examples of community initiatives at the neighborhood level mentioned by research participants

Perceived importance of involvement in community life at the neighborhood level

Given the generally negative assessment of the personal involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level and a relatively small number of research participants who reported to have had a direct experience with involvement in community initiatives, it might appear as a surprising fact that the **vast majority (65, 81%) of all research participants consider involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level as an important value.** Most research participants consider community involvement important because they believe that it can be mutually beneficial, bringing benefits both to the person involved as well as to the community at large.

> *I consider it important. It benefits both the environment and the person who invests his time in exchange for experience.* (BAA09)

> *Very important for individuals and society. For individuals can be very useful to do manual work, because it can help them to turn off, but it can also be something else what develop their soft skills.* (BAA01

The question about the importance of community involvement at the neighborhood level further brought many interesting reflections, some of which that also help to explain the discrepancy between the low level of personal community involvement, as subjectively assessed by research participants, and their strong positive perception of community involvement as a value. Some of the research participants see involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level as a form of engagement which is generally good, but only comes to people at specific stages of life: once they start a family and settle down.

> *Very important, but especially for people who live longer in the same community and plan to stay there.* (BAB06)

> *I do find it important, but in the next phase of life when you have children family, somewhere in the house in the village. So there you will probably have something with your neighbors going, some grilling party or an event where you would get familiar, but right now when I'm young doesn't seem that crucial.* (BRA06)

> *Well if someone lives somewhere a long term and builds the life there, it is important. So it's important to know your neighbors. In my hometown, where I used to live when I was young, we used to know all about each other, go to each other celebrations, birthdays. When you met someone, you would talk to them and it's very nice. So it's cute to know your neighbors and chat to them sometimes also it showed too that it was important when there was a nonstop shop opened in front of our house. We had the fence and then this store so people who were getting drunk at night there would throw up in our yard and on the fence. So all the neighbors have united and the store was moved.* (BRA03)

Some of the research participants further contrasted the life in a city with the life in a village and pointed out that to build a community life in the city is more difficult because the relationships are more distant.

> *I think it would be very important. But most people who live here have moved here, and this is not their primary neighborhood. I grew up in a village where the concept of a neighborhood meant something completely different and it worked in a different way. The common affairs were taken care of and were central. Here, they are not taken care of. I don't know if I can give a good answer to this question.* (BUA09)

> *In Brno I don't even perceive it like that, because I see Brno as a transfer stop in my life. I know that in future I don't want to live in Brno. So I don't have the tendency to get extra involved sometimes I participate in some event, but not very actively. But in the future if I lived in some village, I think communities way more important there, so it's very important to participate in events there and be a member of the community.* (BRA04)

Involvement in community life can be particularly important for foreigners, who can find themselves more easily in a situation of social isolation. Being cut from the networks in their country of origin, community involvement in the neighborhood could help them establish new networks of support and friendships.

> *It's really important. Because in my situation for example I just need someone to knock on my door and say hello. I think in this time people need happiness and love without any reason.* (BUB11)

> *I think it's important, because we are not self-sufficient. I don't know if this is the case for everybody, but there was always a voice inside of me, that there is somebody who needs my help. So I can just go out and give it and maybe I get help too if I need it. It is good to know that you have somebody's back.* (BUB01)

> *I already explained, I think it is very important. Most of the time I feel lonely in my home. So I just want to talk to someone and share how I feel. I have two kids and it could be helpful if we supported each other and I can find someone I trust to take care of one of my kids.* (BUB07)

Motivations and barriers to involvement in community life at the neighborhood level

Finally, we wanted to know what would motivate research participants to get involved in the community life at the neighborhood level and what would, on the other hand, prevent them from it. In both cases, the answers were first coded inductively and then categorized into larger clusters according to thematic closeness of codes. If the research participants mentioned several unrelated motivations or barriers, all of them were coded separately.

Nine categories of motivations for community involvement at the neighborhood level were identified altogether (Figure 1). The findings reveal that the largest number of research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community life if they felt that such an involvement would help them to cultivate social relationships or if they could benefit from the community involvement personally. We thus termed these two dominant categories of motivations 'social relationships' and 'personal benefit'. Each of these two categories of motivations was mentioned by 22 research participants, surpassing the remaining seven categories in the number of mentions by far.

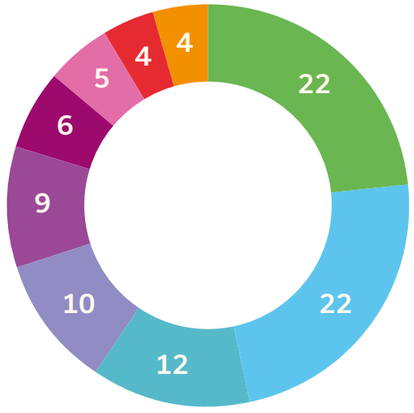

Figure 1 Overview of categories of motivations for community involvement based on the number of mentions

22 Social relationships

22 Personal benefit

12 Goal attainment

10 Altruism

9 Easy access

6 Personal capacities

5 Role models

4 Long-term perspective

4 Crossing cultural boundaries

With respect to motivation in the form of social relationships, research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community life mainly if they felt that such an involvement could help them find friends, establish connections in their neighborhood, and gain a sense of belonging to a larger social community.

> *[…] to have more friends that last for life time, to create stories and memories.* (BRA07)

> *It is very important to make connections with other people and find friends.* (BUB04)

> *Would be nice to know someone here.* (BAB10)

> *I think the belonging into the community, that is very motivating.* (BRA04)

Research participants with families and young children also pointed out that for them it would be important to be able to join the community activities together with their children, both because they cannot leave them alone if they are still small and they also want them to benefit from community involvement in terms of finding friends.

> *If also children could be involved in those activities. I can't do similar projects when I need to take care of my daughter.* (BAA04)

> *Kids, I want them to have more friends.* (BRB09)

> *If there are kids, so my kids have more friends and enjoy their time.* (BRB10)

Furthermore, it is not only the prospect of finding new friends that can be motivating, but also a prospect of spending time with friends that one already has. Research participants would feel motivated to get involved in community activities also based on personal recommendation from a friend or if their friends asked them to come along.

> *If I would have my friends joining, if the idea would make sense.* (BRA08)

> *When I can work with friends.* (VIA08)

> *When a friend asks me to go with.* (BRB08)

With respect to motivation in the form of personal benefits, research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community life if they felt that they could personally profit from their involvement.

> *When it will be something that would benefit me personally. When I will have some profits out of it then sure.* (BRA01)

> *Time and the idea that what I'm working on will also help improve my life. I know it sounds a bit selfish, but that's what people are.* (BAB07)

> *If I get anything in return.* (VIA06)

Such personal benefits do not necessarily have to be material––although some of the research participants mentioned also money or small rewards as a desired benefit––but can be also immaterial and have the form of an interesting experience, opportunity for self-development, new contacts, or a chance to further develop interests that one already has.

> *Definitely money. If it was some part time job, but voluntarily I would not do much. Maybe it would be nice if people of the apartment building cleaned up together, but as well I'm not the owner of the place so why should I care. I don't think it would help much.* (BRA06)

> *Some are also motivated by a smaller gift or reward.* (BAA02)

> *Even if it does not sound nice, it is important for people to see what it will bring them. For example, what they learn or what kind of contacts they gain.* (BAA01)

> *It has benefits both for the environment and the person who invests his time in exchange for experience.* (BAA09)

> *If there were some projects which would benefit my health or free time then I could consider it, it doesn't even have to be a free project. I would consider if it benefits on something, it cannot be just a waste of time or just to get to know some people - if it would benefit somebody can be directly me or somebody else, then sure.* (BRB02)

The third most mentioned category of motivations is related to the level of certainty whether the goal of a community initiative can be attained. Therefore, we called it 'goal attainment'. Research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community life if they felt that the goals of community initiatives were feasible and could be attained within reasonable time-frame and with reasonable investment of resources, such as energy and money.

> *If I see that there is a real chance to solve the problem.* (BUA09)

> *A good idea with a purpose. Also, the activity should not be very time and money consuming.* (BAA09)

> *Chance to influence something which is in my zone of control, to see results of my energy investment.* (BAA10)
> *When they see a problem that is not solved, it could be corrected quite easily.* (BAB08)

The fourth most mentioned category of motivations relates to deeper feelings of fulfillment and moral satisfaction from doing good. Therefore, we labelled it 'altruism'. Altruism is a personal attitude that puts the common good of a community before personal interest and allows an individual to gain deep moral satisfaction from helping the community and acting in the name of a common interest. This category of motivations can thus be seen as a counterpoint to the motivation of personal benefit. In the answers of research participants, it was mostly present in the form of references to a sense of higher purpose of feeling of fulfillment that community involvement could potentially bring.

If I saw some higher purpose in that event, for example the municipality or for the neighborhood, for the community. If that event would contribute to overall improvement of relationship or it would increase the interest about overall happenings in the neighborhood. (BRA02)

Nothing much if I could do it I would just go and do it. It would give me a feeling of fulfilment, I would be happy to do something for the local community. (BRB05)

The fifth most mentioned category of motivations related to the access to information about community activities and the ability to join the already existing activities without the necessity to start something new. Therefore, we named this category 'easy access'. A number of research participants commented that they would, in fact, like to become more involved in the community life in their neighborhood, but they lack information about activities and initiatives that are going on. What would motivate them to get involved is thus mainly sufficient communication among the neighbors and access to information about what is going on.

More events in the district where everyone is invited and also without personal invitation. (VIB03)

It is important, to know what's going on, to get all the important information, to be in contact and participate in the community. (BUB08)
I think that if you have something already established you can just join it, you don't need to create anything from the new. (BUA05)

If there would be some activities, where I could join. I don't have the capacity to spend a lot of time and work unfortunately. For example, a street festival, I could just go there and meet some people. (BUB10)

The sixth most mentioned category of motivations is related to the actual capacities of research participants to get involved, often understood in terms of time or energy. We thus called it 'personal capacities'. The research participants would feel motivated to join the community activities only if they had the time and energy for them.

Everybody is motivated by something else... personally I need to have time and energy, which is not very often. (BAA05)

I would be motivated if I had more time. When I am organizing something alone I still have a lack of energy, even though I'm an extrovert. (BAB03)

The seventh most mentioned category of motivations related to the presence of people in the community who are already active and can thus motivate the others. We called this category of motivations 'role models'. Research participants would feel motivated to become part of community initiatives if they saw that other people around them are taking initiative and setting a good example.

If the people around me showed the initiative and cared I would find it motivating. (BRB06)

If other people would do that too because it's not the kind of thing that you do alone. (BUA01)

The eight most mentioned category of motivations is related to the long-term perspective of staying in the neighborhood. We called this category 'long-term perspective'. Research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community life if they knew that they were going to stay in the neighborhood for a longer period of time or even start their families there, and their involvement would thus represent a long-term investment into the improvement of the quality of life.

If I lived there long-term, I would for sure contribute to community life. Now I don't really have the motivation because I know I will be gone soon, I would move abroad, or I will just move places, so it's quite demotivating. (BRA03)

I do find it important, but in the next phase of life when you have children family, somewhere in the house in the village. So there you will probably have something with your neighbors going, some grilling party or an event where you would get familiar, but right now when I'm young doesn't seem that crucial. (BRA06)

The ninth and last category of motivations was mentioned only by research participants with a migratory background and related to language and intercultural communication. We thus called it 'crossing cultural boundaries'. Research participants would feel motivated to get involved in the community activities if they felt they were accepted, if the locals showed interest in them, and if the locals were willing to speak to them in English or in other languages they could understand.

If they speak more English with me. Good attitude and respect the neighbors. (BRB07)

It is difficult because I doń t speak Hungarian. So if somebody is interested and asks me questions it would be motivating, but without the language this is difficult. (BUB09)

I think we just need communication. I don't need much of Hungarian to understand certain things and they wouldn't need much of English that we understand each other. I think most of them have not understood that. Mainly because they haven't been in a country where they don't understand everybody. We all have to reflect on our behavior and it would help if we communicate sometimes. (BUB01)

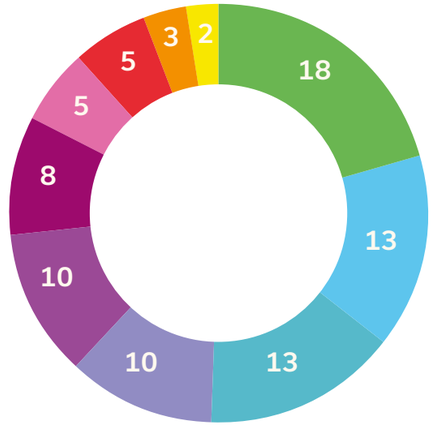

Figure 2 Overview of categories of barriers to community involvement based on the number of mentions

Ten main categories of barriers to community involvement were identified altogether (see Figure 2), approximately half of which correspond to already discussed motivations but in the opposite direction. Most research participants would feel discouraged from involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level if they had bad relationships with their neighbors and would thus not spend their time with them. We called this barrier 'bad social relationships'. The second most represented categories of barriers related to 'other priorities' and 'lack of personal capacities'. Research participants would not want to take part in community activities if they were currently preoccupied with other things or if they simply did not have time. It has to be noted that these two categories of barriers are related but they do not necessarily overlap––one might have time but not see community involvement as a priority and vice versa.

18 Bad social relationships
13 Other priorities
13 Lack of personal capacities
10 Not knowing how to start
10 Language and cultural barriers
8 Passivity of others
5 No personal interest
5 Lack of long-term perspective
3 Avoiding conflict
2 Not a value

In terms of bad social relationships, research participants would not want to get involved in community activities if they perceived that the social atmosphere in the neighborhood was bad, if there were neighbors with whom they previously had conflicts and would not want to be in their presence, or if they felt they do not belong to the community, for instance because they could not agree with their neighbors on basic things.

And not friendly neighborhood and people who would discourage me and hinder my initiatives and unfriendly atmosphere in the neighborhood. (BRB04)

People's disinterest in meeting other people [would discourage me] and if they are already having some bad relationships established, for example loud neighbor. So I think I wouldn't be willing to participate in the same event where people I don't like will participate too. (BRA02)

If someone in the community was very unpleasant to towards me, Who I don't want to see so I would not go there. (BRA04)

The community can also be a hindrance if I can't get involved in it or don't feel like I'm part of it or we can't agree on a basic level. (BUA08)

In terms of other priorities, research participants would not want to get involved in the community life if they had other obligations or activities that were more important for them.

Probably other priorities - one cannot devote himself/herself to everything at once. (BAA03)

I go home at 9pm at night, and I have school all day. So when I go home I don't want to speak about the streets or start a conversation. I want to live with my family, do my homework, so this is a less important thing. (BUA01)

For example, I don't really have time for this right now. It's time to go to University so I'm very busy. So I just don't have time and it's not a priority. (BRB01)

Similar reasoning was offered also by research participants who said that a lack of personal capacities is the main barrier that prevents them from involvement in the community life.

Motivation is there but no time. (VIA11)

Paradoxically, I think they are similar to motivation. Lack of time and the fact that people are more focused on their own problems. (BAB07)

Lack of time is a hindrance for sure. (BUA08)

The fourth mentioned category of barriers relates to a lack of information about activities that one can join or, alternatively, with a lack of ideas for projects that could be realized and contacts on people who could help. Therefore, we named this category **'not knowing how to start'.**

If there is no community life already established, it's hard to start. (BUA05)

We don't know who to go to with the issues we have in the community. (BUA06)

I just feel myself alone in reforming something, because I need more people to reach something in that area or in that district in my neighborhood. It's very hard when you have an idea and it's very hard to create and then see it. I don't know what kind of people I should talk to about it, or how much money I should need. It seems super complicated and people have a lot of stuff on theirs, and it's hard to take part in this kind of thing. (BUA02)

The fifth mentioned category of barriers was specific to research participants with a migratory background and related to language, cultural differences, and ethnicity and race. Research participants would not want to get involved in the community life if they could not communicate well due to a language barrier or, even more importantly, if they felt that their status of a foreigner serves as a reason for othering or even racism.

Language can be sometimes [a barrier], but not so much language as people being critical about my language and ignoring that it's hard for me. Basically, their attitude about foreigners could be quite discouraging, if the project is not accessible to foreigners it would be discouraging. (BRB02)

I don't really get to know my neighbors that much, maybe because of the language barrier. (BRB05)

If they say something bad about refugees or foreigners. Sometimes they could be racist. If they judge me, I don't feel not comfortable communicating, because if somebody doesn't like me I also don't like him. (BUB04)

The sixth mentioned category of barriers relates to the general perception of passivity in the society and we therefore termed it **'passivity of others'.** Research participants who mentioned this barrier feel discouraged by what they see as societal apathy, individualism, a lack of interest in common matters, or even selfishness of other people. The logic behind this barrier is clear: if others do not want to get involved in the community life, one should not try to fight the windmills.

Apathetic set-up of society and apathetic culture, where everyone looks only at their own interest. (BAA02)

Other neighbors who are not interested and their lack of motivation. (BUB03)

Passivity of people. (BAB09)

The seventh mentioned category of barriers is related to a lack of personal interest in community activities that are taking place. We thus called it **'no personal interest'.** Research participants pointed out that they would not feel motivated to get involved in the community activities if the topic of such activities did not match their personal interests or if it was not directly relevant to them.

If it is an apparent or not interesting project. (VIA09)

if the topic is not good or you are basically just doing work for others. (VIB03)

The eighth mentioned category of barriers related to a lack of long-term perspective of staying in the neighborhood, an aspect which has already been discussed previously and could also be paired with motivations. We called this category 'lack of long-term perspective' and it was mentioned mainly by research participants who were living in their neighborhoods only temporarily, for instance during their university studies, and renting the apartments instead of owning them. To this group of research participants community involvement at the neighborhood level did not seem an appealing idea as they knew that in a couple of months or years they would move somewhere else and they thus did not feel motivated to invest their time and energy in community involvement.

Not at all, I'm not an owner so I just come and go. Of course, we tried to keep the place clean and sort the trash and I try to be polite to the people living there. (BRA06)

Finally, the last two categories of barriers received comparatively few mentions but it still is important to elaborate on them as they help to complete the overall picture of potential barriers. **The ninth category of barriers mentioned by research participants relates to the perception of conflict and one's personal willingness to enter conflictual situations.** Hence, we called this category **'avoiding conflict'.** Some of the research participants would feel discouraged from community involvement if they perceived that such involvement could lead to conflict or even politicization of the activities.

Maybe conflicts, when there's no communication, when we aren't friends, we can have conflicts. It makes me feel afraid, because I think if someone stays in your corner maybe it's better. (BUB06)

The much involvement of politics. (BUA07)

The tenth category of barriers related to the rejection of the importance of community involvement as such, and we thus called it 'not a value'. Some of the research participants made it clear that the main barrier that prevents them from taking part at the community life is their own mental set-up and personal philosophy in which community involvement is not an integral part.

I definitely discourage by overlay judge and overlay committed people, I feel that you can't focus on yourself or whatever reason, so you try to, I don't know, find a meaning in the community life and organize community life. That's something that is scary for me. (BUA04)

CommUnity Study thus helped to identify different categories of motivations and barriers that could either promote or inhibit community involvement at the neighborhood level. The overall summary of identified motivations and barriers can be seen in Table 12. Their actual distribution in the population of research participants reflects the methods of sampling as well as the overall demography of research participants (Appendix 2) and has thus only an informative character. Further research would be needed to explore the real distribution of these categories of motivations and barriers among the populations of specific neighborhoods or cities.

Motivations for community involvement		Barriers to community involvement	
Categories of motivations	Number of mentions	Categories of barriers	Number of mentions
Social relationships	22	Bad social relationships	18
Personal benefit	22	Other priorities	13
Goal attainment	12	Lack of personal capacities	13
Altruism	10	Not knowing how to start	10
Easy access	9	Language and cultural barriers	10
Personal capacities	6	Passivity of others	8
Role models	5	No personal interest	5
Long-term perspective	4	Lack of long-term perspective	5
Crossing cultural boundaries	4	Avoiding conflict	3
		Not a value	2

Table 16 Summary of all motivations and barriers mentioned by research participants

Conclusions

In the CommUnity Study, we conducted 79 in-depth structured interviews with locals and foreigners from four Central European cities: Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, and Vienna. The research covered four larger thematic areas including I. The meaning of neighborhoods and neighborhood boundaries; II. Neighborhood relationships; III. Common concerns in neighborhoods; and IV. Community involvement at the neighborhood level. We presented the findings in four sections, each of them covering one thematic area of the research.

With respect to the first thematic area of the research, we found out that the largest number of research participants understand the term neighborhood in social terms and they associate the neighborhood with people who live close to them--their neighbors--and the type of social interactions that they either have or would like to have with them, mainly neighborly help, but often also friendship. The spatial, functional, or administrative understanding of the neighborhood was less common among the research participants. We also identified a new understanding of the neighborhood that was strongly linked to feelings that the research participants had about their neighborhoods, such as feelings of safety, comfort, calmness, or peace. We also found out that when deciding on how to draw the boundaries of the neighborhood, research participants utilize either functional logic and adjust the boundaries of the neighborhood to places that they frequently visit, or spatial logic and adjust the boundaries of the neighborhood to the built infrastructure and the way how public space is organized.

With respect to the second thematic area of the research, we found out that half of all research participants (40; 50%) does not know their neighbors at all, approximately one quarter (19; 24%) knows their neighbors on the superficial level (greeting, recognizing faces), while the remaining quarter (20; 25%) of research participants knows their neighbors well. We further found out that there is quite a bit of variability among the research participants when it comes to deciding on what kind of neighborhood relationships they are willing to consider as good. While some research participants are satisfied with casual civility, such as greeting the neighbors on the street, others would prefer closer interpersonal contact.
We further explored the relationships between the locals and the foreigners and found out that the vast majority of locals (35; 88%) lives in ethnically diverse neighborhoods together with people of other nationalities. However, despite the presence of ethnic diversity the number of locals who said they also knew the foreigners who live in their neighborhood was much lower: only one quarter of the locals (10; 25%) said they knew the foreigners well while another fifth (8; 20%) said they knew them at least on a superficial level. The experience of foreigners with the level of acceptance by the locals and the type of reactions they would typically get were predominantly positive or neutral, although a number of research participants reported to also have had a negative experience. More than half of foreigners (24; 61%) said the locals typically react to their presence positively, often with a surprise or interest about their culture, while less than a fifth of foreigners (6; 15%) said they had a negative experience, mainly by getting unpleasant reactions to their appearance or facing negative portrayal of migrants and refugees in media.

With respect to the third thematic area of the research, we found out that the research participants were most commonly concerned about the lack of infrastructure in their neighborhood, particularly the green infrastructure such as parks, picnic places, or urban gardens. Among other commonly mentioned problematic issues were lack of regulations (such as lack of rental regulations), malfunctioning social relationships, insufficiently developed public transportation, or civic passivity and a need for political change. We found out that a bit more than a third (27; 34%s) of research participants assumes the initiative should come from above and it is mainly the political representatives of the city, such as the mayor, the MPs, or the municipal or district government who should initiate improvements in the neighborhood. A bit more than one fifth of research participants (17; 21%) on the other hand assumes the initiative should be bottom up and it is mainly the citizens who should initiate the change. Some research participants (10; 12%) further think that the initiative could be successful only if it was a joint effort of both citizens and the city.

With respect to the fourth thematic area of the research, we discovered an interesting paradox: although the vast majority (65; 81%) of all research participants consider involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level as an important value, a comparatively much smaller part of them (25; 31%) considers themselves to be involved in the community life in their neighborhood and an even smaller part of research participants (18; 22%) has a direct experience with participating in community initiatives. We further focused on identifying common motivations and barriers to community involvement and we found out that the major three motivations that would encourage research participants to get involved in community life at the neighborhood level relate to a perspective of establishing social relationships, personally benefiting from the involvement, and perceiving the goal of the community initiative as attainable. With respect to major barriers to community involvement we found out that the three major barriers that would prevent research participants from getting involved in the community life relate to bad interpersonal relationships in the neighborhood, other life priorities, and a lack of personal capacities, particularly time.

These research findings should provide a basis for the formulation of guidelines and recommendations for community leaders who would wish to organize community activities at the neighborhood level. The findings presented in this research should not be generalized to patterns of community involvement at the city level in any of the four cities or generally among the population of locals and foreigners as such--further research would be needed to explore both of these areas in greater depth. Future research could thus proceed in two possible directions. In order to get a better picture of the general trends in community involvement in the four cities, we can recommend a survey-based study with a representative sample of research participants for each of the four cities. In order to get a better picture of the state of community involvement and related issues in specific neighborhoods, for instance before any implementation of upcoming project activities, we can recommend further ethnographic or interview-based research with local residents only.

Recommendations for community leaders

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the CommUnity Study and should help the emerging community leaders to better target people in their neighborhoods and engage them in community initiatives.

1. Define the boundaries of the neighborhood

People tend to imagine the boundaries of their neighborhoods in different ways, ranging from as narrow as a single floor in an apartment building or as wide as all the places in a city that one visits on an everyday basis. Therefore, prior to the beginning of any community initiative at the neighborhood level it is recommended that the community leaders reflect on their own understanding of the neighborhood in which they want to organize community activities and create a provisional neighborhood map by marking its imagined boundaries. In case there are several community leaders who plan on working together, it is recommended that they do such a reflection together and compare and contrast their ideas. The neighborhood map can serve as an aid for identification of people who might be interested in taking part in the initiative and of institutions which are located in the neighborhood, or for determining the area where the community initiative will have an impact.

2. Create a list of all actors with links to the neighborhood

Although most people associate their neighborhood with people who reside next to them––their neighbors––one does not have to be a resident of the neighborhood to be potentially interested in taking part in the local community activities. People can be bound to a neighborhood also by their professional networks or a workplace (business owners or employees of local infrastructure), institutional capacities (teachers in the local school or employees of the municipality), or by family ties (family members). It is therefore recommended that the community leaders make a list of all actors and institutions located in the neighborhood that might be potentially interested in taking part in community initiatives.

3. Identify long-term residents of the neighborhood

Although all people with links to the neighborhood might be potentially interested in taking part in community initiatives at the neighborhood level, people who have been residing or plan to reside in the neighborhood long-term might be interested in such initiatives more than the short-term residents. The reason for it is that they might see community involvement as a long-term investment in social relationships with their neighbors and an overall improvement of the quality of life. Other categories of residents who might have greater interest in taking part in community activities are families with children, young people, and seniors. It is therefore recommended to identify such residents and make sure that information about the possibility of community involvement will reach them.

4. Find out more about relationships in the neighborhood

The quality of relationships in neighborhoods can differ significantly and range from open hostility through casual civility to strong community networks. Regardless of which pattern of neighborhood relationships is typical for the neighborhood in which the community activities should take place, it is good to be aware of it. Therefore, prior to the beginning of any community initiative it is recommended that the local community leaders familiarize themselves with the types and the quality of relationships in the neighborhood. This can be done via informal conversations with people who have links to the neighborhood or even through short interviews. The focus of such conversations or interviews should be on the understanding of how well the people in the neighborhood know each other and on the identification of potential hostilities or conflicts.

5. Identify main centers of neighborhood social life

Places such as local cafés and bars, schools, churches, or community centers usually serve as
centers of social life in the neighborhood. It is therefore recommended that the community leaders identify such places in their neighborhood and establish connections with people who work there. Such connections could later be used not only for spreading information about community initiatives and recruiting potential participants but also to get access to facilities, such as meeting places.

6. Find out more about the needs in the neighborhood

People have different needs and are usually interested in taking part mainly in the initiatives that correspond to their needs. It is therefore recommended that the community leaders familiarize themselves with the most common needs in the neighborhood and consider making them the target of community initiatives. Examples of needs include a need for better infrastructure (benches, community garden, local café), a need for a better regulation of urban life (noise regulation, or regulation of rents), a need for better public transportation, a need for improvement of social relationships, or a need for better political representation and more active civic involvement of the local residents. A good way of finding out more about the needs in the neighborhood are informal conversations, short interviews, or facilitated group meetings.

7. Propose an initiative that corresponds to the local needs

Although the proposed community initiative should not aim to address all the needs identified in the neighborhood, it is recommended that it tries to address at least some of them. Aligning the goals of the community initiative with the needs of the community is an important precondition for ensuring that the people with links to the neighborhood will be willing to participate.

8. Make sure that the information about the planned community initiative reaches everyone

Some groups of residents might not have access to information about what is going on in the neighborhood. Such groups can include foreigners who do not speak the local language, people with disabilities whose mobility and social networks might be restricted, or elderly people who might not have access to modern technologies. All these groups of people might be potentially interested in taking part in community initiatives, but special measures have to be taken if their participation is to be ensured. A basic measure includes identifying such people in the neighborhood and making sure that the information about the planned community initiative reaches them in a suitable manner (e.g. in foreign language in case of foreigners) and that they feel welcome.

9. Keep in mind potential motivations for community involvement

People can have different motivations for taking part in community initiatives. Five most common motivations identified by the CommUnity Study include a prospect of establishing new social relationships, a prospect of a personal profit (in terms of acquiring new skills or something in return), feasibility of the initiative (that the goal of the initiative will be attained), good feeling and a sense of meaning, and easy access to the initiative. In order to extend the reach of the community initiative to many people, it is recommended that the initiative try to address all five of these common motivations and emphasize the social dimension of the participation, new knowledge or skills that can be acquired, the feasibility of the initiative, the type of common good that it speaks to, and the measures that will be taken so that the participation becomes easy.

10. Keep in mind potential barrier to community involvement

People can also perceive different barriers when it comes to community involvement. Five most common barriers identified by the CommUnity Study include bad social relationships in the neighborhood, other life priorities, lack of personal capacities (time and energy), not knowing how to start, and language and cultural barriers (specifically in the case of foreigners). While not all of these barriers can be mitigated easily, it is recommended that the community leaders try to address them by, for instance, creating a safe and respectful environment for the community participation, dividing the initiative into smaller steps that will not be overly time-consuming, making participation possible also for people who do not have previous experience with community involvement, and ensuring that also foreigners or other vulnerable groups will feel comfortable in the community setting and will obtain all necessary information in the language that they understand.

Appendix 1. Overview of research participants

Table 13 shows an overview of all 79 research participants based on the city in which they live, their gender and age category, neighborhood in which they live, length of residency in the neighborhood, and self-assessment of their level of community involvement.

City	Nationality	Code	Gender	Age	Neighbourhood	Lenght of residency	Community involvement
Budapest (HU)	Locals	BUA01	F	15-20	Zuglo (XIV.)	mid-term	-
		BUA02	F	20-30	Újlipótváros (XIII.)	long-term	-
		BUA03	F	20-30	Lövölde tér (VII.)	short-term	-
		BUA04	F	20-30	N/A (Buda side)	mid-term	-
		BUA05	M	20-30	N/A	N/A	-
		BUA06	F	N/A	N/A (Buda side)	long-term	+
		BUA07	M	20-30	Kosztolányi Dezső	long-term	-
		BUA08	F	20-30	Lágymányos (XI.)	mid-term	-
		BUA09	M	30-40	Óbuda (III.)	mid-term	-
	Foreigners	BUB01	F	20-30	N/A (XIV.)	short-term	-
		BUB02	M	30-40	N/A	short-term	+
		BUB03	M	40-50	Zuglo (XIV.)	mid-term	-
		BUB04	N/A	N/A	N/A (VIII.)	short-term	-
		BUB05	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A
		BUB06	F	20-30	Örs vezér tere (X./XIV.)	short-term	-
		BUB07	F	20-30	Blaha lujza tér (VIII.)	mid-term	-
		BUB08	M	20-30	N/A	short-term	-
		BUB09	N/A	N/A	N/A	short-term	-
		BUB10	N/A	N/A	Viziváros (I.)	short-term	-
		BUB11	F	20-30	N/A (IX.)	short-term	-
Vienna (AT)	Locals	VIA01	F	20-30	Weißgerber (III.)	mid-term	+
		VIA02	F	20-30	Weißgerber (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA03	F	60-70	Erdberg (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA04	F	50-60	N/A (III.)	long-term	-
		VIA05	F	70+	N/A (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA06	F	60-70	Botschaftsviertel (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA07	M	60-70	N/A (III.)	short-term	+
		VIA08	F	20-30	Rochus (III.)	short-term	-
		VIA09	F	50-60	Weißgerber (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA10	F	60-70	N/A (III.)	long-term	+
		VIA11	F	40-50	Rochus (III.)	long-term	+
	Foreigners	VIB01	F	40-50	N/A (III.)	short-term	+
		VIB02	M	20-30	N/A (III.)	short-term	-
		VIB03	F	30-40	N/A (III.)	long-term	-
		VIB04	M	20-30	N/A (III.)	short-term	-
		VIB05	F	30-40	N/A (III.)	short-term	-
		VIB06	F	20-30	N/A (III.)	short-term	+
		VIB07	F	30-40	Landstraße (III.)	mid-term	+
		VIB08	M	60-70	N/A (III.)	mid-term	+

References

Jenks, Mike, and Nicola Dempsey. "Defining the neighbourhood: Challenges for empirical research." *Town Planning Review* 78.2 (2007): 153–177.

City	Nationality	Code	Gender	Age	Neighbourhood	Lenght of residency	Community involvement
Bratislava (SK)	Locals	BAA01	F	20-30	Petržalka	short-term	+
		BAA02	F	20-30	Dúbravka	short-term	+
		BAA03	F	20-30	Staré Mesto	short-term	+
		BAA04	F	30-40	Petržalka	mid-term	-
		BAA05	F	30-40	Staré Mesto	long-term	-
		BAA06	F	20-30	Nové Mesto	short-term	-
		BAA07	M	20-30	Petržalka	long-term	-
		BAA08	F	20-30	Ružinov	mid-term	-
		BAA09	F	20-30	Staré Mesto	mid-term	+
		BAA10	M	20-30	Staré Mesto	mid-term	-
	Foreigners	BAB01	F	30-40	Petržalka	mid-term	-
		BAB02	F	30-40	Nové Mesto	short-term	-
		BAB03	F	20-30	Petržalka	short-term	-
		BAB04	M	30-40	Ružinov	long-term	+
		BAB05	F	20-30	Karlova Ves	short-term	-
		BAB06	M	15-20	Nové Mesto	short-term	-
		BAB07	M	20-30	Nové Mesto	short-term	-
		BAB08	F	30-40	Karlova Ves	short-term	-
		BAB09	M	20-30	Karlova Ves	short-term	+
		BAB10	F	20-30	Karlova Ves	short-term	-
Brno (CZ)	Locals	BRA01	F	20-30	Dolní Heršpice	long-term	-
		BRA02	M	20-30	Žebetín	long-term	-
		BRA03	F	20-30	Střed	short-term	-
		BRA04	F	20-30	Žabovřesky	short-term	-
		BRA05	M	20-30	Sever	long-term	+
		BRA06	F	20-30	Střed	mid-term	-
		BRA07	M	20-30	Královo Pole	short-term	-
		BRA08	F	20-30	Štýřice	short-term	+
		BRA09	M	40-50	Sever	short-term	-
		BRA10	M	40-50	Starý Lískovec	N/A	-
	Foreigners	BRB01	F	20-30	Střed	short-term	-
		BRB02	F	20-30	Komín	short-term	-
		BRB03	M	20-30	Královo Pole	short-term	-
		BRB04	F	20-30	Střed	short-term	+
		BRB05	F	20-30	Královo Pole	short-term	-
		BRB06	F	20-30	Střed	short-term	-
		BRB07	F	20-30	Střed	short-term	-
		BRB08	M	20-30	N/A	short-term	-
		BRB09	M	30-40	Sever	mid-term	+
		BRB10	F	30-40	N/A	mid-term	-

Explanation of categories and abbreviations used

- 'Locals' stands for nationals of the country in which the interview took place
- 'Foreigners' stands for nationals of other country than the country in which the interview took place
- 'F' stands for female
- 'M' stands for male
- 'short-term' stands for residency in the current neighborhood with the overall length of less than 3 years
- 'mid-term' stands for residency in the current neighborhood with the overall length of more than 3 years and less than 10 years
- 'long-term' stands for residency in the current neighborhood with the overall length of more than 10 years
- '+' stands for active involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level as assessed by the research participant
- '–' stands for a lack of active involvement in the community life at the neighborhood level as assessed by the research participant

The information and views set out in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Commission. Neither the European Union institutions, Commission nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Author:

Ivana Rapoš Božič

Project team:

Michaela Pobudová (Mareena)
Petra Jankovská (Mareena)

Eva Gänsdorfer (GLOBAL 2000)
Benedikt Wohlfahrt (GLOBAL 2000)

Anastasiia Bondar (Be International)
Taher Kebab (Be International)

Dóra Kanizsai-Nagy (Kalunba)
Eszter Katona (Kalunba)

2020