Informal Resistance in the Global City

Responses to Socio-Spatial Polarization in Toronto

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Abstract

By drawing on concepts of two sociological fields, urban sociology and social movement theory, I aim to study the emergence of forms of informal resistance which can be interpreted as responses to urban dynamics that have emerged in global cities. Using the concept of resistance allows for taking into account not only mass mobilizations but also practices that can be described as informal and that are part of the city dwellers’ everyday life. I study these practices developed by marginalized urban actors by taking Toronto and, more specifically, the neighbourhood Parkdale as an example. With an ethnographic research design based on participant observation and walking interviews with inhabitants, I seek to better understand how – in connection with their lived experiences, their interpretations of the local changes and their attachment to their place of residence – city dwellers resist against the increased socio-spatial polarization and try to participate in the making of their city. I further investigate if and how small-scale resistance leads to the emergence of new ideas and claims concerning the future of the city. The research project will not only contribute to meet a gap in research on urban mobilizations in Toronto but also deepen theoretical reflections on small-scale urban resistance in global cities.
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1. Introduction

During the last three decades, cities that play a primordial role in the functioning of the contemporary global economy and form a global network have received much attention in the field of urban sociology. The concept of the global city was introduced by the sociologist Saskia Sassen (2001 [1991]) who aims to describe a set of new dynamics that can be observed in cities like New York, Tokyo, or London since the 1980s. In these cities, a growing gap between dominant actors – public and private actors who control city planning as well as high-income groups – and marginalized urban actors can be observed. Sassen argues that global processes have a considerable impact on the social structure of cities (cf. Sassen 2000). Urban margins, defined as marginalized urban groups and their living space, are produced by the representations and exclusionary practices of dominant actors and can be located both in the periphery of the city and in the centre (cf. Erdi Lelandais/Florin 2016: 8). The inhabitants are to different extents deprived of their capacities to appropriate urban space. This undermines their “right to the city” (see Lefebvre 1996); their right to have access to urban space and to participate in the making of the city.

Economic polarization, a process that is intensified in the global city, is intricately linked to spatial polarization. The urban political economy perspective, the dominant paradigm in urban sociology in the 1990s, allows us to see that the transformation of cities is not a quasi-natural process, but the result of a conflict of interest between different actors who seek to control and appropriate urban space. The paradigm illustrates the role of governance structures and political decision-makers that privilege certain urban actors. However, this rather one-sided focus on pull-factors obscures the actions of marginalized urban dwellers, who seem to be in an unfavourable position when it comes to participating in the making of their city by mobilizing confrontational tactics. I thus analyze forms of urban resistance which can be qualified as informal and hardly visible practices, developed by marginalized urban actors in the global city. To analyze this phenomenon, I will integrate concepts of social movement theory that make it possible to go beyond the determinism of economic variables.

Urban researchers draw attention to the political potential of global cities and emphasize the link between social and economic tensions and the emergence of a variety of local initiatives that may acquire supra-local relevance (cf. Sassen 2004: 649). According to S. Sassen, the global city constitutes a meeting point of various marginalized groups who are able to gain visibility and to make their demands heard. Today’s global cities are increasingly seen as transformative sites where the local, the national, and the global converge. A great number of
macro-sociological accounts of the contemporary city emphasize the potential for social change that lies in current urban dynamics.

When turning to the sociology of social movements and protest, a strong focus on organized resistance and, consequently, a neglect of other more informal forms of resistance can be observed. It is therefore not surprising that empirical studies on collective action in megacities often come to the conclusion that the fights for the (re)appropriation of urban space in a time of neoliberal urban restructuring is at present still a rather marginal phenomenon. The absence of contentious politics based on ‘traditional’ forms of action could be interpreted as a lack of action “due to government policies, irreparable social ills, and economic forces beyond local control” (Sennett 2018: 97) that restrict the inhabitants’ agency.

To go beyond this hasty conclusion, it is necessary in a first step to choose an adequate theoretical framework and, based on this, to develop an empirical approach that makes it possible to study ‘quiet’ forms of resistance. I use the concept of resistance to take into account not only mass mobilizations but also practices that can be described as informal and that are part of the city dwellers’ everyday life. In this manner, I aim to challenge the dominant perspective in research on urban mobilizations which states that the absence of urban social movements, visible in public space, insinuates that marginalized groups are politically passive and do not resist against the recent transformations of urban space and city life.

Studying everyday forms of resistance against the dynamics that emerge or are accentuated in cities that are part of the “global grid” (Sassen 1998: XXVII) brings us to explore diverse forms of resistance developed by city dwellers at the urban margins. Given the absence of large scale urban movements, visible on the macro level, I plan to study the less visible resistance practices of those who try to find or preserve their place in the city. Even though informal resistance is observable on the micro level, it can in the context of the global city – understood both as a “partly denationalized platform for global capital” (Sassen 2004: 649) and as a springboard for social, ecological and political transformation – point towards a “political opening” (Sassen 1998: XX) with a potentially supralocal impact. It is therefore important to also explore the transformational power of informal, everyday resistance in the fight against the dominant vision of the city as a site of economic growth, investment, and speculation.
The empirical and theoretical considerations above raise the following question: How do marginalized inhabitants of the global city resist against increasing urban inequalities in their daily lives and to what extent do these informal resistance practices have transformative potential? I will study the resistance of marginalized urban dwellers against the dynamics in the global city by taking the example of Toronto; a Canadian city which can be described both as an economically dynamic city offering a high quality of life and as a “city under pressure” (Joy/Vogel 2015: 35). Joy and Vogel draw attention to the “dysfunctional urban politics, crumbling infrastructure, traffic gridlock and inadequate investment in transit, growing income disparities, and a lack of affordable housing” (2015: 35). In a study which retraces income polarization and the disappearance of the middle class in Toronto over a period of 35 years, David Hulchanski made the following observation: “The middle-income area of the city shrunk dramatically between 1970 and 2005, while the high-income area increased slightly and the low-income area increased substantially.” (2010: 1) This observation is consistent with the hypothesis that “the processes of economic change in [global] cities are leading to a growing polarization of the occupational and income structures whereby there is absolute growth at both the top and bottom ends of the distribution and a decline in the middle of the distribution” (Hamnett 1994: 401).

The situation in Toronto, a city which has become one of the strategic sites of the global economy, illustrates the parallel growth of highly valorized economic sectors and of a flexible and low-wage workforce that the housing crisis in Toronto obliges to leave the centre of the city and the gentrified districts (cf. Rosen/Walks 2015: 291, see also Walks 2001; Kipfer/Keil 2002). This socio-spatial reorganization of the city makes the gap between residents who are part of the dominant urban actors and the comparatively marginalized and powerless actors more visible. Since the disparities in Toronto are more visible than in any other metropolitan region in Canada (cf. Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017), one would expect a high level of mobilization. However, empirical studies and preliminary observations show that the rate of (visible) mobilization is rather low which makes it interesting to look into more informal and individual action forms.

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1 It should be stressed that I concentrate on global cities in the Global North. Although S. Sassen argues that the emergence of global cities and intercity networks renders the old North-South divide less important since stark disparities develop within regions (cf. 1998: XXV), I emphasize that the political and economic context does matter. It would be interesting to evaluate in future research projects how informal resistance emerges and how it enables city dwellers to have a say in the making of the city in other global cities embedded in different national and regional contexts.
To address this question, I provide an insight into the ‘global city’ debate, followed by a brief overview of sociological approaches to the study of social movements. I present the resistance studies paradigm and discuss the contributions of three authors – Michel Foucault, James Scott and Michel de Certeau – whose approaches are considered particularly fruitful for the analysis of informal everyday resistance. Furthermore, I engage in a discussion on the possible links between forms of informal and organized resistance. In the next chapter, I specifically address resistance practices in urban space. From these preliminary theoretical considerations, conclusions are drawn for the empirical investigation of this issue. Chapter 5 constitutes the empirical part of my research. After an introduction to the global city of Toronto, its political context, and current dynamics, I present the neighbourhood Parkdale in more detail. Before describing the empirical results in chapter 5.4, I outline the research design. In chapter 6, I further combine the theoretical and empirical elements, discuss their implications, and re-embed the research outcomes in the broader context.

With this research, I intend to contribute to the debate on resistance in the global city by exploring how the dynamics in the global city – changes on the macro level – affect the daily life of city dwellers, who, far from passively accepting the transformations, resist, adapt, and develop networks of solidarity. The aim of the research is not primarily to study the reasons for and the effects of polarization since there is ample literature on the economic aspects of these transformations in the global city Toronto. Rather, I seek to better understand how – in connection with their lived experiences, their interpretations of the local changes and their attachment to their place of residence – city dwellers resist against the increased socio-spatial polarization and try to participate in the making of their city. The study will not only contribute to meet a gap in research on informal resistance in Toronto but also deepen theoretical reflections on small-scale urban resistance in global cities.
2. The Global City

2.1. Urban Political Economy

The urban political economy perspective, the dominant paradigm in urban sociology in the 1990s, allows us to see that the transformation of cities is not a quasi-natural process but the result of a conflict between the interests of different actors who aim to produce, control and appropriate urban space. Already in the early beginnings of sociological enquiry, urbanization, urban life, and the question “how does the city shape social life” (Nevarez 2007: 5130) led to much discussion. In the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, Nevarez describes the urban political economy paradigm as follows:

“Political economy” generally refers to the scholarly paradigm that examines how material processes of production and exchange shape and are shaped by decisions made in economic and political institutions; with “urban,” this concern centers around material production of and within cities. (Nevarez 2007: 5130)

Urban political economy is an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of sociology, social geography, and political science. Its emergence can be interpreted as a response to and critique of urban ecology, the dominant paradigm in the first half of the twentieth century. An important theoretical base for the urban political economy paradigm is Marxist theory. The neo-Marxist economic geographer David Harvey, building on Henry Lefebvre’s work on urban space, has theorized the importance of cities and urbanization for capitalist development and the “conflicts around the built environment” which are “reflections of the underlying tensions between capital and labor” (Harvey 1976: 289).

The distinction between use and exchange value, already present in Harvey’s work, was taken up by Logan and Molotch in their influential book Urban Fortunes, published in 1987. They try to find a new framework of analysis that leaves behind both urban ecology and Marxist approaches. The authors argue that urban ecologists “too eagerly accepted a free market as a source for explaining – and justifying – how cities develop” and did not see that “key aspects of urban development involve conflicting interests, contested plans, and policy choices – and a special market that can hardly be defined as ‘free’” (Logan/Molotch 2007 [1987]: viii). Although they acknowledge the great influence of Marxist theory on their work, they criticize Marxist approaches for being too deterministic and based on a simplistic distinction between capitalists and the working class which, according to them, does not allow for sufficiently taking into account human agency. They define the city as a “meeting ground of use and exchange values” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 4) and assume the existence of a separate rentier class that pursues exchange values which “does not necessarily result in the maximization of use values
for others” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 2) but can be a source of tension and conflict. They coined the term ‘growth machine,’ defined as “an apparatus of interlocking progrowth associations and governmental units” who “tend to oppose any intervention that might regulate development on behalf of use values” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 32).

There has been much discussion about divisions and growing inequalities in cities. In *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?* (2000), Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen conclude that “[c]ities have always shown functional, cultural and status divisions, but the differentiation between areas has grown and lines between the areas have hardened” (Marcuse/Van Kempen 2000: 250). The resulting spatial divisions reflect existing inequalities, but also reinforce them or create new lines of exclusions. Another important contribution to the divided cities literature and the urban political economy paradigm in general is the ‘dual city’ concept, developed by John H. Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells. In their book *Dual City: Restructuring New York* (1991), they build on the observation that New York has become ‘two cities,’ illustrated by the stark contrast between Wall Street and urban decay in the ghettos. In the post-industrial city, “employment has shifted massively away from manufacturing (and handling goods more generally) toward corporate, public, and non-profit services; occupations have similarly shifted from manual workers to managers, professionals, secretaries, and service workers” (Mollenkopf/Castells 1991: 6). The authors draw attention to the fact that race and gender constitute a frontier when it comes to the distribution of high-income, service, and manufacturing jobs (cf. Mollenkopf/Castells 1991: 8). They recognize the limits of the dual city metaphor because its apparent clarity conceals the complexity of the mechanisms that generate inequality and the resulting fragmentations (cf. Mollenkopf/Castells 1991: 13). However, the concept succeeds in drawing attention to the concomitant dynamics of growth and decline, of inclusion and exclusion that are attributable to the same dynamics: “The ‘two cities’ of New York are not separate and distinct, but rather deeply intertwined products of the same underlying processes.” (Mollenkopf/Castells 1991: 11) Critics have argued that this dualism is only superficial and that the political context and the position of the city in the global economic system play an important role in mitigating or intensifying the effects on urban life.

This brings us to the global dimension of urban sociology. A certain continuity between old approaches and the urban political economy perspective can be observed. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (2009 [1844]), Friedrich Engels considers the city to be a space where the negative effects of industrialization and capitalism are intensified. Similarly, contemporary urban sociology theorists stress that the effects of globalization are more pronounced in today’s cities. In the following, I will therefore present the global city concept,
which was also elaborated in the 1990s and is closely connected to the works in urban political economy presented above.

2.2. What is a Global City?

The sociologist Saskia Sassen coined the term “global city” to describe a new reality – the key role of certain cities for global financial capitalism. The notion raises the question of how the place a city occupies in the economic and political global order can be conceptualized. According to Sassen, global cities – inscribed in a national framework that actively fosters transborder economic activities – dispose of resources that are necessary for the management and coordination of the global economy and thus provide a territorial foothold for global finance. Loosely defined as “centers for servicing and financing of international trade, investment, and headquarter operations” (Sassen 1998: XXIII), global cities are “the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms” (Sassen 1998: XXV). She links the rise of global cities to the ascendance of producer services, defined as “services produced mostly for firms rather than individuals” (Sassen 2001: 91). The umbrella term refers to “financial, legal, and general management matters, innovation, development, design, administration, personnel, production technology, maintenance, transport, communications, wholesale distribution, advertising, cleaning services for firms, security, and storage” (Sassen 2001: 90).

The central role of cities in global financial capitalism described by S. Sassen raises the question of the importance of the nation-state in globalization processes. This question has been the subject of considerable debate in economic and sociological analyses of globalization. The

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2 While not all cities are ‘global cities’ according to Sassen’s definition, all cities can be described as ‘globalizing cities.’ This point was raised by Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kempen, editors of the book Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order? (2000). They view “globalization as a process, not a state, and a process that affects all cities in the world, if to varying degrees and varying ways, not only those at the top of the ‘global hierarchy’” (Marcuse/Van Kempen 2000: xvii). In the present study, I do not concentrate on anti-globalization protests, but on resistance against polarization dynamics that are intensified by global dynamics.

3 According to L. Martell, it is possible to distinguish three waves in globalization theory since the beginning of the 1980s. Each perspective conceptualizes the relationship between globalization and nation-state in a different way. The first works on this topic were characterized by a so-called ‘globalist’ perspective of globalization, seen as an inevitable process that makes boundaries disappear and contributes to the erosion of the nation-state. On the contrary, the ‘skeptical’ perspective rejects the term ‘globalization’ and prefers to speak about ‘internationalization’ with the intention of drawing attention to the continued importance of nation-states. The ‘transformationalists’ try to find a middle way between the two earlier perspectives. They aim to develop a more complex theoretical frame that conceptualizes the nation-state as an actor that remains powerful but that is itself transformed by globalization (cf. Martell 2010).
global city hypothesis postulates that the local and global levels gain greater importance whereas the influence of the national level declines. According to S. Sassen, “[w]ith the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit due to privatization and deregulation and the associated strengthening of globalization come conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units or scales” (Sassen 2005a: 27). This is an interesting point since one could argue that in times of geographically dispersed manufacturing, capital mobility, and information and communication technologies, everything is ‘global’ and that place does not matter anymore. However, Sassen points out that precisely these transformations make new forms of centralization necessary. Global processes have to materialize somewhere: they need what global cities can provide them with. Sassen refuses the simplistic dichotomy between ‘local’ and ‘global’ and posits that much of what we experience as the local is also global because “the local is actually a transformed condition, a localization of global processes” (Sassen 2005b: 73). She illustrates the place-boundness of the new leading industries by taking the highly digitalized global financial market as an example:

Finance is certainly a highly digitized activity; yet it cannot be thought of as exclusively digital. To have electronic financial markets and digitized financial instruments requires enormous amounts of materiel, not to mention human talent (which has its own type of physicality). This materiel includes conventional infrastructure, buildings, airports, and so on. Much of this materiel is, then, inflected by the digital. (Sassen 2005b: 73)

In short, “material conditions, production sites, and place-boundedness [...] are also part of globalization and the information economy” (Sassen 2000: 1). But what about the nation-state? Sassen observes a significant weakening of the nation-state, but does not come to the conclusion that globalization has completely eroded its power. She adopts a transformationalist perspective and posits that “the state itself has been transformed by its role in implementing the global economic system” (Sassen 1998: XXVIII). In this way, she emphasizes the active role of nation-states. Sassen interprets the interventions of the nation-state as responses to claims made by global capital: “The new geography of centrality had to be produced, both in terms of the practices of corporate actors and in terms of the work of the state in producing new legal regimes.” (Sassen 1998: XXVII) This new transnational regime, based on Western economic concepts that had been exported to all corners of the world, focuses on free trade and increases inequalities by strengthening positions of certain economic actors at the expense of other actors who dispose of fewer economic and political resources. According to this perspective, one observes a “denationalization” of national territory. In other words, the transactions which take place in the highly interconnected urban centres are inscribed in a much larger context than the nation-state (cf. Sassen 1998: XXVIIIf.).
In her work, Sassen explicitly shifts the focus from powerful actors – transnational firms and the liking – to *production* and sites of production as unit of analysis. She argues that “[t]he possibility of such centralized control needs to be produced. Central to its development is the production of a vast range of highly specialized services and of top-level management and control functions.” (Sassen 2001: 331) Instead of analyzing the role of powerful urban actors, Sassen focuses on production. Global cities as “sites for the production of global control capability” (Sassen 2001: 331) are indispensable places for the functioning of industries with a high organizational complexity because they provide dense networks of firms and markets, and are desirable places of residence for a growing class of international, mobile, and urban high-income professionals (cf. Sassen 2001: 331). As we will see in the next chapter, looking into the organization of labour in the global city provides interesting insights that help to better understand changes in the socio-economic structure of the city.

The new strategic sites form a global gird that “cuts across national boundaries and across the old North-South divide” (Sassen 1998: XXV) and makes the growing inequalities *within* the Global North and *within* the Global South visible. Indeed, the new interurban networks not only link cities such as New York, London, and Tokyo but also include Sao Paolo, Bombay, Mexico City, and other cities. According to Sassen, even if these cities remain to a certain extent inscribed in their national and regional context, their functions for the global economy bring about a process of relative disconnection. There is a growing discontinuity between global cities and the ‘rest’; former industrial cities which are now in decline and other ‘peripheral’ areas (cf. Sassen 1998: XXVI).

**2.3. The Social and Economic Structure of a Global City**

2.3.1. **Changes in the employment structure**

Global cities have become a “frontier zone” (Sassen 2014) for global capital and show new economic dynamics. In order to understand the process of polarization in global cities, which is at the core of the present study, it is necessary to take into account the changes in the employment structure in these highly interconnected cities. The concentration of financial transactions, leading technologies, and management activities in global cities goes hand in hand with a growing demand not only for highly educated workers but also for low-skilled, low-paid workers who are mainly employed in the service sector (cf. Sassen 2001: 250).
Polarization occurs in both income distribution and occupational distribution. While manufacturing jobs were mainly middle-earning jobs, current major growth industries show increases in jobs both at the high and the low-paying ends of the scale. These sectors have a direct and indirect impact on the employment structure within the city:

[T]he existence of major growth sectors, notably the producer services, generates low-wage jobs directly, through the structure of the work process, and indirectly, through the structure of the high-income life-styles of those therein employed and through the consumption needs of the low-wage workforce. (Sassen 2001: 286)

A large share of jobs is low-paid and manual – to a large extent held by women and immigrants, whose role is hardly ever acknowledged: “Although these types of workers and jobs are never represented as part of the global economy, they are in fact as much a part of globalization as international finance is.” (Sassen 2000: 142)

However, income or wage inequality statistics are not adequate indicators for living conditions. Changes in income patterns have to be analyzed in relation to other transformations, such as the emergence of an international property market, fuelled by new types of transactions that make real estate investment more profitable. This further drives commodification and makes housing in major cities increasingly unaffordable.4 “Buildings become commodities, which can be bought, sold, and resold as commodities, in a market that is autonomous from broader conditions in a national economy.” (Sassen 2001: 193) Sassen argues that the rise of the international property market cannot be understood without taking into consideration “the existence of a multiplicity of other markets, and particularly leading markets, that raises the value of land in the leading financial centers” (Sassen 2001: 192). Unlike Logan and Molotch, Sassen does not concentrate on a separate class of rentiers but takes into account the global financial market that allows for investing money into an increasingly international property market. She observes that “the financial industry is both an owner and a financer of real estate development in city centers” (Sassen 2001: 192f.). With the financialization of housing, the tension between ‘use value’ and ‘exchange value’ is increased and this contradiction embedded in everyday experiences of city dwellers:

Housing has always been a unique commodity, in which the contradiction between its “use value” as a home, and its “exchange value” as a saleable commodity, can lead to tensions in housing markets, policies, and day-to-day experiences of

4 Sassen notes that despite the growing gap between the city centre and the peripheral areas, devalued locations in central districts continue to exist which leads to a “coexistence of abandoned empty spaces and extreme density” (Sassen 2001: 192).
homeowners, landlords, and tenants. With financialization, these tensions are intensified, with housing treated as a purely financial asset at the expense of the people who view it as shelter. (August/Walks 2018: 125)

It can thus be summarized that the transformation of a city into a global city is linked to changes in the labour market and that not only highly paid professional classes are attracted to urban centres, but that a significant number of invisibilized low-income people contribute to the ‘functioning’ of the global city. The housing market, however, is becoming more and more oriented towards the needs of investors and high-income earners, which can cause and reinforce displacement processes. Urban displacement processes are primarily associated with gentrification. I will therefore present and critically examine this well-known, but controversial concept.

2.3.2. Residential and commercial gentrification

The term gentrification was introduced by the British sociologist Ruth Glass in the 1960s to describe changes in working-class neighbourhoods in London. In *London: Aspects of Change* (Glass 2010 [1964]), she describes how “[o]ne by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower” (Glass 2010: 22). These ‘gentrifiers’ significantly change the neighbourhood and many of its long-time residents are obliged to leave the district due to rising housing and living costs. “Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed.” (Glass 2010: 22f.)

Glass draws attention to the role of the ideology of ‘gentrifiers,’ who strive for urban life in ‘authentic’ neighbourhoods. As Logan and Molotch put it, gentrification is the “‘reinvasion’ of the central city by affluent young ‘urban pioneers,’ who displace the less affluent from urban locations” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 115). Glass saw gentrification as a possible consequence of urban renewal projects (cf. Brown-Saracino 2010: 15). The improvement of living conditions in inner-city disinvested neighbourhoods is not to be condemned per se. Rather, what is problematic is that due to non-anticipated or even intended displacement these rehabilitation efforts often do not benefit long-term residents, but the ‘gentrifiers.’

Various cultural and economic approaches were developed to explain the causes and consequences of gentrification. Neil Smith’s rent-gap theory, based on the work of neo-Marxist theorist David Harvey, tries to examine the phenomenon independently from local characteristics from an economic perspective. According to Smith, capital investment in
disinvested, inner-city neighbourhoods is interesting under financial aspects because the rent gap – the disparity between the potential and the actual ground rent – is particularly pronounced in these parts of the city (cf. Smith 1987). His theory draws attention to the role of real estate investors and speculators who ‘flip’ objects – buy houses to quickly resell them with profit – and the role of developers who focus on luxury housing projects as well as of landlords who try to increase rental rates by ‘replacing’ long-term residents with better-paying ones. Again, these phenomena do not happen ‘naturally’ but are made possible and are actively encouraged through national and municipal legislation and financing. R. Glass, who focuses more on consumer preferences and thus highlights the cultural aspects of gentrification, acknowledges as well these interrelations with regard to the situation in London in the 1960s: “[D]evelopment rights have been de-nationalized; development values have been unfrozen; real estate speculation has thus been ‘liberated.’ These measures, together with the relaxation of rent control, have given the green light to the continuing inflation of property prices.” (Glass 2010: 23)

There has been much debate about the consequences of gentrification. Some studies have shown that the transformation of neighbourhoods from low value to high value does not necessarily entail large-scale displacement and some residents, especially homeowners, might also profit from rising housing prices, new business opportunities, and improved infrastructure (see f. ex. Florida 2012 and Freeman 2006). When we talk about gentrification in the global city, and thus in a new urban formation, the question is raised as to whether gentrification today is a different urban phenomenon than in the 1960s. Sassen describes gentrification as a “visible spatial component” of a greater transformation that became evident by the early 1980s, namely “the shift toward the privatization of consumption and service provision” (Sassen 2001: 261). She takes up an argument developed by N. Smith and P. Williams who situate gentrification in a broader discussion on transformations in capitalism:

Underlying all of these changes in the urban landscape are specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies: there is a restructured industrial base, a shift to service employment and a consequent transformation of the working class, and indeed of the class structure in general; and there are shifts in state intervention and political ideology aimed at the privatization of consumption and service provision. Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation. (Smith/Williams 2007 [1986]: 3)

Sassen contrasts the implications of suburbanization – the move of middle-class households out of the inner city – and gentrification – the return of the affluent to the ‘urban’ inner-city neighbourhoods. As opposed to middle-class suburbanization, a capital-intensive phenomenon, residential gentrification requires labour which has an influence on the employment structure...
of the city. As a result, there is a considerably higher demand for goods and services that are not mass-produced. Instead of standardized commodities, high-income gentrification entails a greater demand for customized goods and services, especially associated with reproductive work but also with other service demands of high-income earners:

High-income residential and commercial gentrification is labor intensive and raises the demand for maintenance, cleaning, delivery, and other types of low-wage workers. And the massive array of low-cost service and goods-producing firms selling to the expanded low-wage workforce further contributes to the growth of low-wage jobs. (Sassen 2001: 286)

She describes a geography of paid respectively unpaid work. Reproductive work and paid work are unevenly distributed in the global city. Whereas high-income households are locations where housework is done by paid non-family members, low-income immigrant households are often places for unpaid housework. In addition, Sassen observes that middle-class households increasingly become places for paid housework, but also for paid work that is usually done at an external workplace, since working from home is not an exception anymore in an increasingly casual labour market (cf. Sassen 2001: 261).

Sassen draws a link between the changing employment structure and gentrification. The phenomenon illustrates the rise of a young professional class with high income. “The expansion of the high-income workforce, in conjunction with the emergence of new cultural forms in everyday living, has led to a process of high-income gentrification, which rests, in the last analysis, on the availability of a vast supply of low-wage workers.” (Sassen 2001: 284f.) As the quotation shows, Sassen goes one step further and states that gentrification in turn creates the need for low-paid service jobs. Old houses have to be renovated or demolished, new houses have to be built, and high-income residents require maintenance, cleaning, and delivery services. The expanding low-wage workforce further increases the demand for low-cost service and goods-producing firms and thus fuels the creation of jobs at the bottom end of the income scale (Sassen 2001: 286).

The contemporary gentrification debate can be linked to Luc Boltanski’s and Arnaud Esquerre’s theoretical work on capitalism in the twenty-first century. The authors of *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities* (2020) argue that the socially constructed structures of the commodity have a historical dimension and are thus subject to change. Starting in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a transformation has taken place. Value is not inherent to the object but used to justify prices – their history and uniqueness. Their account on the ‘enrichment economy’ allows us to link Sassen’s description of the increased demand for luxury goods and the desire
to escape standardization and experience ‘authentic urban life’ in ‘authentic’ neighbourhoods (see Zukin 2011) to a broader development. Globalization is often associated with, if not seen as a causal factor for, homogenization. With Boltanski’s and Espquerre’s analysis of a new form of capitalism in the early twenty-first century, the enrichment economy, it can be argued that even if financial centres and waterfront areas in global cities come to resemble each other, there is a counter-tendency to homogenization, driven by an affluent urban class. In gentrified areas, one often observes the privatization of urban space, ‘defensive architecture,’ and other, more subtle exclusionary strategies. As a result, “inhabitants and passers-through are required to embody the habitus of the economically privileged to validate their presence within these neighbourhoods” (Smith/Walters 2018: 2982).

2.4. The Global City – A Polarized City?

The global city theory and the concept of social polarisation are closely linked in Saskia Sassen’s writings and in urban theory approaches of the 1990s in general. The urban political economy paradigm has drawn attention to the dynamics of polarization as a result of urban restructuring (see f. ex. Mollenkopf/Castells 1991). The authors mainly draw on neo-Marxist theories and highlight the conflict between two antagonistic visions of the city – the city as social space or as abstract space, or, to put it simply, as a place to live in or as a commodity. This distinction, already present in H. Lefebvre’s influential work The Production of Space (1991), has been theorized by Logan and Molotch who examine “the conflict between use and exchange values in cities […] [which] closely determines the shape of the city, the distribution of people, and the way they live together” (Logan/Molotch 1987: 2). According to the authors, it is necessary to understand this tension in order to analyze “how inequalities in and between places – a stratification of place as well as of individuals – are established and maintained” (Logan/Molotch 1987: 2).

In the context of the global city, the term ‘polarization’ refers to the high concentration of both global capital and marginalized groups of urban dwellers, often immigrants who form a low-

5 The causal link between globalization and polarization has been put into question by various urban theorists. Ronald van Kempen (2007), for example, challenges the hypothesis that globalization strongly encourages polarization in cities. He argues that taking into account globalization processes can be useful in understanding urban change but that “we should never exaggerate the influence of this process in a city as a whole and in parts of that city” (Van Kempen 2007: 14). This is an important reminder that the emergence of ‘divided cities’ is a complex process that should not be attributed to a single explanatory factor.
cost labour force, *inside* the city. Both, members of the highly paid professional class and of the low-wage service class are increasingly international actors. The reasons for and consequences of immigration in cities have already been subject to sociological enquiry in the urban ecology paradigm and continue to be investigated today. An important aspect of globalization is the “transnationalization of labor” (Sassen 1998: XXX) – Sassen considers this to be a more adequate term than immigration – which concerns both highly skilled employees and (temporary) migrant workers with low incomes. The ‘cosmoplitization’ of global cities was highlighted by several researchers, including Savich and Weinstein who observe “that once local economies go global they require population influxes at both extremes of the income scale” (2013: 246). Despite the fact that the nation-state stays the decisive actor in the elaboration of immigration policies, other levels of government and other actors such as supranational political entities, actors that refer to international human rights codes, and deals negotiated in the framework of free trade agreements play an increasingly important role (cf. Sassen 1998: 5f.).

Sassen sees a clear causal link between the increasingly polarized occupational structure and a polarized income structure in global cities:

> [T]he new conditions of growth have contributed to elements of a new class alignment in global cities. The occupational structure of major growth industries characterized by the locational concentration of major growth sectors in global cities in combination with the polarized occupational structure of these sectors has created and contributed to growth of a high-income stratum and a low-income stratum of workers. (Sassen 2001: 13)

The transformations – the new employment structure dominated by the growing but devalued service sector – encourage socio-economic polarization which is illustrated by the income gap and the differences in living conditions inside the city (cf. Sassen 2001: 338f.; Walks 2001: 408). To put it with Sassen’s words, a “new geography of centrality and marginality” (Sassen 1998: XXVI) has emerged not only between the network of global cities and more peripheral areas but also *inside* the global city – here, the new socio-economic hierarchy becomes visible. As I have already explained, the concentration of financial transactions, leading technologies, and management activities goes hand-in-hand with a growing demand for low-skilled workers, mainly employed in low-paying jobs that are part of the service sector. It seems paradoxical: “A new class alignment is being shaped, and global cities have emerged as one of the main arenas for this development: They contain both the most vigorous economic sectors and the sharpest income polarization.” (Sassen 2001: 343)
Sassen does not equate polarization with the disappearance of middle-income earners, but postulates that the postwar dynamic that led to the expansion of the middle class has been replaced by a new dynamic that implies that growth leads to a more unequal social structure:

When we speak of polarization in the use of land, in the organization of labor markets, in the housing market, and in the consumption structure, we do not necessarily mean that the middle class is disappearing. We are rather referring to a dynamic whereby growth contributes to inequality rather than to expansion of the middle class, as was the case in the two decades after World War II in the United States and the United Kingdom, and into the 1970s in Japan. (Sassen 2000: 136)

She interprets the shrinking of the middle-class as long-term development and acknowledges that “[i]n many of these cities, we continue to see a fairly large middle class […] living at the level of prosperity it gained in the earlier economic phase” (Sassen 2000: xiv).

Increasing inequality often leads to territorial reconfigurations which can in turn further accentuate processes of marginalization. The lines of the socio-spatial fracture are moving constantly, leading to the ‘upgrading’ or ‘revitalization’ of marginalized spaces and the marginalization of new territories (cf. Erdi Lelandais/Florin 2016: 9). The growing disparities that are a necessary consequence of the new employment structure are echoed in spatial segregation tendencies and have become a source of tensions. The centres of global cities are characterized by two extremes: major investments in real estate and infrastructure in the financial centres and residential areas of the high-income professional class on the one hand, and low public spending and investment in those areas of the city centre where low-income households are concentrated. Poor minority neighbourhoods, often inhabited by newly arrived immigrants, are particularly affected by disinvestment which entails lower ‘use values’: “[N]ot only are incomes low but so are capacities to make connections, either within the community or with those outside, that might sustain use value or support efforts to increase it.” (Logan/Molotch 2007: xif.)

2.5. Who ‘Owns’ the City?

The social structure of the global city is characterized by the presence of capital and ‘the other’ and “[t]his joint presence is further brought into focus by the sharpening of the distance between the two” (Sassen 2000: 144). In the polarized city, one might argue, the marginalized urban actors have little influence on the future of their city. In Globalization and its Discontents (1998), a collection of essays on the social consequences of globalization, S. Sassen raises a question which has been a well-discussed subject in urban sociology, namely the question of
who ‘owns’ the city: “The denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims by transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question – whose city is it?” (Sassen 1998: XX) I will address the question of who ‘owns’ the city in this chapter, whereby ‘owning’ does not primarily have the meaning of private property. I understand owning in the sense of producing and appropriating urban space; participating in the making of the city. But even if the word ‘owning’ is taken literally, the rising housing prices in global cities make material appropriation difficult, or even impossible for some. To put it in Henry Lefebvre’s words, who, embedding Heidegger’s ideas into a Marxist take on the city, distinguishes between habiter and habitat, having access to housing (habitat) is only the starting point for dwelling as a social practice (habiter) (cf. Paquot 2005: 51).

Although her research concentrates on economic aspects, Sassen is also interested in the political prerequisites and consequences of the emergence of cities which function as sites for the coordination of producer services that are indispensable for the functioning of the global manufacturing network, such as the financial industry. In these cities, one observes a high concentration of both global capital and marginalized groups in often precarious living conditions, such as new immigrants, women and people of colour (cf. Sassen 1998: XXf.). Low-skilled immigrant workers are overrepresented in the service sector which is, like the sector of finance, part of the main growth sectors because its capacity to generate profit is higher than in more traditional sectors. Despite its importance for the economy, the service sector is comparatively devalued. While the Fordist period, heavily based on the manufacturing sector, has fostered the expansion of the middle classes, the shift to a service economy in the Global North has rather encouraged socio-economic polarization illustrated by the already discussed income gap and the inequalities when it comes to living conditions in the big cities (cf. Sassen 2001: 338). As a result, the global city becomes a meeting place for heterogeneous actors with different socio-economic status, cultures, and identities: “The large Western city of today

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6 The term ‘appropriation of space’ is often associated with the work of Henry Lefebvre. In The Production of Space (1991), Lefebvre contrasts ‘appropriation’ with ‘domination’, and describes the former as the “primacy of use over exchange” (1991: 410).

7 Lefebvre’s focus on habiter – ‘dwelling’ or ‘inhabiting’ – draws attention to everyday life. In The Urban Revolution, Lefebvre describes the “poetry of habiting”: “The ‘human being’ (and not ‘mankind’) cannot do anything but inhabit as poet. If we do not provide him with (as an offering and a gift) the possibility of inhabiting poetically or of inventing a poetry, he will create it as best he can. Even the most derisive everyday existence retains a trace of grandeur and spontaneous poetry, except perhaps when it is nothing more than a form of advertising or the embodiment of a world of commodities, exchange having abolished use or overdetermined it.” (Lefebvre 2003 [2003 [1970] 82f.)
concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities.” (Sassen 2007: 123)

The presence of different actors is not only a potential source of tension and conflict but also of new political opportunities. Marginalized transnational actors with migrant backgrounds and other groups can become political actors despite their relative powerlessness in a context that makes the contradictions of contemporary capitalism visible. The potential of ‘the urban,’ a term which Lefebvre prefers to the term ‘city’ (2003: 45), might lie in the visibility of conflicts – the urban is “a place where conflicts are expressed” (Lefebvre 2003: 175). Sassen highlights the opposition between the ‘new’ urban classes as follows: “The city has indeed emerged as a site for new claims: by global capital which uses the city as an ‘organizational commodity,’ but also by disadvantaged sectors of the urban population, which in large cities are frequently as internationalized a presence as is capital.” (1998: XX) The activities of dominant urban actors who control urban space and who are able to transform it according to their needs are hardly ever called into question by national or municipal politics who aim at creating a framework that is vital for improving the position of the respective city in the global urban hierarchy. However, cities have not only become strategic for global capital; the marginalized and displaced too “have found their voice and are making claims on the city” (Sassen 1998: XXXIV) and are contesting the unequal development which becomes more and more visible inside the big cities. However, Sassen does not explore the transformative potential of the global city in further detail. In order to better understand how city dwellers mobilize, it is essential to look at theoretical concepts and empirical findings from social movement research.
3. From Social Movements to Informal Resistance

3.1. Social Movement Theory

At the beginning of the 20th century, social movements were seen as an indicator of social dysfunction and lack of social integration which threatens society. Inspired by the work of Gustave LeBon, the collective behaviour of crowds was framed as pathological. According to this perspective, social movement actors take part in collective action to fulfill needs that are not met in their private lives. In mass societies, social strain leads to psychological stress, frustration, and distress which fuels contentious politics. Actors were seen as irrational because of the negative effects of being part of a ‘uniform’ and ‘aggressive’ crowd – rational individuals become ‘governed’ by ‘irrational’ crowds. The history of social movement theory is closely linked to changes in forms of collective organization, action repertoires, and the relation of social movements to institutional politics. The collective behaviour theory is based on a strong opposition between rationality and emotion (cf. Goodwin/Jasper/Poletta: 66f.).

It is therefore not surprising that the pathologizing perspective rooted in the work of crowd theorists was not considered to be an adequate perspective to study the widespread political upheavals in the 1960s:

Driven by forces outside their control, whether subconscious forces or the mysterious pull of the crowd, protestors were not rational agents with purposes of their own. The more emotional an individual (or crowd) became, the less rational she (or they) became, ipso facto. The actual stuff of contentious politics – moral principles, stated goals, processes of mobilization, the pleasures of participation – was ignored. Such views would not survive the explosion of non-institutional politics in the 1960s. (Goodwin/Jasper/Poletta 2000: 69)

In the 1970s, the psychologizing approach was put into question and a focus on organization(s) was introduced. In contrast to earlier approaches, the resource mobilization theory conceptualizes social movement actors as rational and strategic actors who aim at maximizing their ‘market share’ by making use of available resources. Until today, the article Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory (1977) by John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald is one of the most influential texts in social movement theory. The authors use terms borrowed from economics such as ‘resources,’ ‘entrepreneurs,’ ‘market,’ and ‘industry.’ They criticize old approaches that “assumed a close link between the frustrations or grievances of a collectivity of actors and the growth and decline of movement activity” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1212) and argue that the link between the level of discontent and the rise and decline of social movements has not in all cases been confirmed empirically. Therefore, they “move from a strong assumption about the centrality of deprivation and grievances to a weak one, which
makes them a component, indeed, sometimes a secondary component in the generation of social movements” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1215). The resource mobilization theory explains the emergence of social movements by referring to the availability of resources. Since there is always discontent in society, the episodic rise of social movements cannot solely be the reflection of relative deprivation. Often, the most marginalized actors are not the ones who mobilize collectively because they are lacking resources to bear the costs – material costs but also time investment. The authors posit that “grievances and discontent may be defined, created and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1215). The focus is more on the modes of organization than on the content – the claims brought forward by the movements. They propose a definition of social movements based on the intention of social change: “A social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.” (McCarthy/Zald 1977: 1217f.)

The resource mobilization approach has been criticized for its vague definition of resources and its reductionist conception of rationality, which does not allow for including concepts such as affect and collective identity in the analysis and which renders the role and dynamic nature of beliefs and ideas invisible. In addition, due to the focus on the social movement sector – seen as outside of the economic sphere, the private sphere and institutional politics – the role of the state and the cultural context has been neglected. Charles Tilly, a US-American historian, sociologist and political scientist, and others thus proposed to study the social, political, and economic factors that influence the geographical and temporal variation of contentious politics. The political opportunities theory, also known as political process theory, tries to systematize the role of the politico-institutional context. Resources matter, but are not sufficient to explain the cycles of social movements. Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam draw attention to the fact that social movements are historically situated. According to Tilly, the emergence of social movements from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards cannot be understood without considering the economic and political context. With the rise of parliamentary democracy, formerly local struggles become national and collective claims now target national public authorities. Actors who are not represented in the political system and whose interests are not taken into account have recourse to a new context-specific repertoire of collective action (cf. Tilly 1984).

According to the political opportunities approach, groups mobilize when new political opportunities emerge. Sydney Tarrow posits that “people join in social movements in response to political opportunities and then, through collective action, create new ones. As a result, the
‘when’ of social movement mobilization – when political opportunities are opening up – goes a long way towards explaining its ‘why.’” (Tarrow 1994, cited in Goodwin/Jasper/Khattra 1999: 30) McAdam, who uses the political process theory to study the civil rights movement in the US, argues that neither relative deprivation nor the availability of resources can explain why social movements emerge at a specific moment. He highlights the role of “cognitive liberation,” facilitated by the opening-up of political opportunities and pre-existing organization:

To summarize, movement emergence implies a transformation of consciousness within a significant segment of the aggrieved population. Before collective protest can get under way, people must collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through group action. The likelihood of this necessary transformation occurring is conditioned, in large measure, by the two facilitating conditions discussed previously. Shifting political conditions supply the necessary “cognitive cues” capable of triggering the process of cognitive liberation while existent organizations afford insurgents the stable group-settings within which that process is most likely to occur. (McAdam 1999: 51)

The theoretical approaches presented above have methodological consequences. Researchers who follow the political opportunities approach mainly use cross-sectional comparisons and longitudinal studies to study the context-contingent emergence and decline of movements over time. A frequently used quantitative method in the sociology of social movements is protest event analysis. Based on text sources, mainly from police archives and the media, the geographical and temporal variation of contentious politics are studied which allows for considering the processual character of social movements (cf. Fillieule 2007: 216). Large scale quantitative studies exist next to qualitative approaches that combine participant observation, interviews, and other textual sources produced by social movements (cf. Combes et al. 2011: III). Combes et al. criticize the methodological routinization of social movement research and question approaches that treat “the fundamental concepts – such as resources, repertoire, incentives, frame, or career” as “black boxes” (Combes et al. 2011: III).

Political process theory was put into question due to the underlying dichotomy between the state and social movements and the assumption that social movements only target the state. Both, the emphasis on formal bureaucratic organizations of the resource mobilization paradigm and the focus on state-centred mass mobilizations in political process theory excludes many forms of noninstitutionalized political action. How can these types of protest be included in the analysis without ‘diluting’ the social movement concept? The resistance paradigm which I will present below offers a broader definition that allows for including practices – individual and collective, non-organized and organized, informal and formal, hidden, and visible – types of action.
3.2. Informal Resistance – Theoretical Approaches

Since the work of James Scott, the notion of ‘daily resistance’ has found its place in research on social movements in the social sciences. Asef Bayat, an Iranian-American scholar who studied mobilization in the Middle-East and Egypt, pointed out the connection between the recent decline of ‘conventional’ collective action in late modern societies and the renewed interest in small-scale or informal types of resistance (cf. 2010: 51). As Baaz, Lilja and Vinthagen note, the study of resistance evolved in a similar way as the sociological study of power. Whilst previously the focus was more on collective, public, and violent forms of resistance, recently researchers moved their focus to more subtle or even hidden forms of resistance (cf. Baaz/Lilja/Vinthagen 2017: 16).

Despite the growing interest in the concept of resistance – some even describe it as proliferation – clear definitions that take into account the theoretical and methodological implications are often lacking in empirical research. In the emerging interdisciplinary field ‘resistance studies,’ however, questions regarding the definition of ‘resistance’ figure among the key discussions of the still “fragmented and heterogeneous” (Baaz et al. 2016: 137) research area. How can we come up with a definition that is broad enough to avoid the reductionisms present in social movement theory but at the same time precise enough to make the concept fruitful for empirical research?

Closely linked to the difficulties of finding a clear definition is the question of which actor has to define an action as an act of resistance in order to label it as such (cf. Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 542). According to Vinthagen and Johansson, it is also necessary to examine the links between power and resistance. The authors enumerate the following questions which will serve as central thread when presenting the different approaches:

(1) How to define “everyday resistance”; (2) If the resistance actors’ intentions or consciousness matter in relation to the definition; (3) The question of whether it is possible to separate power and resistance – not only analytically but also empirically; (4) If resistance is directed against one power relation or several power relations, simultaneously (i.e. the question of “intersectionality”); and lastly, (5) If what counts as “resistance” is a matter of context and discourse, or something universal. (Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 2)

In the following, I will present the contributions of Michel Foucault, James Scott, and Michel de Certeau to show how and why their theoretical considerations have been used in contemporary research works and what methodological consequences arise. I will focus on definitions and the consequences of delimitating what is considered as an object of research for the sociology of social movements.
3.2.1. Michel Foucault - “Where there is power, there is resistance.”

The concept of resistance in the works of Foucault is closely linked to his conception of power, as the following frequently cited passage of the first volume of The History of Sexuality shows: “Where there is power, there is resistance.” (Foucault 1978: 95) Building on a relational conception of power and resistance, Foucault draws attention to the omnipresence of resistance in the network of power relations and thus questions the common understanding that there is a clear opposition between power and resistance: “Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities.” (Foucault 1978: 96) This perspective allows us to divert attention from occasional revolts and revolutions in order to put the focus on the multiple dynamic points of resistance that exist, unequally distributed, in society.

In Foucault’s understanding, resistance is not simply a reaction to power relations endemic to society, because “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978: 95). According to him, resistance should be seen as the “odd term in relations of power; as their “irreducible opposite” (Foucault 1978: 96). In this complex play of power and resistance, Foucault sees the role of discourse as “both an instrument and an effect of power, but also [as] a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (1978: 101). Discourse thus has the double function of transmitting and producing power, but also of providing a possibility for resistance by rendering power fragile and undermining it.

The interplay of power and resistance is a recurring topic in contemporary research. Lilja et al. highlight that a more detailed analysis of different power forms could contribute to a better

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8 Unfortunately, it is not possible to give a more comprehensive view of Foucault’s work here. For the sake of completeness, however, it should be mentioned that between his early and later work, it is possible to trace a transformation, which, in a highly simplified manner, can be described as a shift in focus from disciplinary power to governmentality. In his later phase, Foucault is especially interested in the ‘technologies’ of government – in the mechanisms of guiding the conduct of others and guiding the ‘government of the self,’ i.e. the “conduct of conduct” (Gordon 1991: 2). Governmentality can be defined as “[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security” (Foucault 1991: 102).

9 At this point, however, it is important not to conclude that there is a dominant discourse and a diametrically opposed counter-discourse: “There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.” (Foucault 1978: 101f.)
understanding of the types of resistance that emerge in a given context: “Different forms of resistance are shaped by existing power relations; that is, if power is expressed (or understood) in a particular way, certain forms of resistance will prevail.” (Lilja et al. 2017: 45) The authors add to Foucault’s theoretical considerations that the forms of resistance that are predominant in a specific social and historical context depend also on the interpretation of power relations by the actors, or, in the words of a well-known approach in the sociology of social movements, on the ‘framing.’ The imbrication of power and resistance implies that a shift in the practices of resistance entails a shift in power relations and vice versa; they can thus be described as mutually constitutive (cf. Lilja et al. 2017: 45).

Foucault broke away from the idea that resistances are exceptional, violent, destructive, and overtly endanger the social order. His dynamic way of thinking resistance reflects the way he conceptualizes power; decentred power in its “productive, relational, inescapable nature” (Death 2010: 237). The change of perspective Foucault introduced had a great influence on contemporary research on resistance, which has abandoned the rather pejorative vision of resistance as destructive and dangerous: “[R]esistance could also be productive, plural and fluid, and integrated into everyday social life.” (Baaz/Lilja/Vinthagen 2016: 138) The notion of power introduced by Foucault enables us to see the complexity and omnipresence of power relations. Furthermore, it has contributed to dismissing the powerlessness of marginalized groups as a myth and to take into account their agency. His ground-breaking reflections on power are an important theoretical basis for resistance studies in diverse contexts but also set limits. Asef Bayat and others criticize that Foucault does not sufficiently take into account the class dimension of power and resistance: “[This notion of power] underestimates state power, notably its class dimension, since it fails to see that although power circulates, it does so unevenly – in some places it is far weightier, more concentrated, and ‘thicker,’ so to speak, than in others.” (Bayat 2010: 54) In the next sub-chapter, I discuss the work of James Scott and his influence on resistance studies. Scott focuses more on everyday resistance and takes into consideration the dynamics of class antagonism.

An aspect of Foucault’s later work, the concept of governmentality, has received less attention in the field of resistance studies. However, the concept could be fruitful for explaining why the following two assumptions should be put into question: firstly, the binary between state and non-state actors and, secondly, Tilly’s assumption that contentious action necessarily targets public authorities. The state does not have the monopoly of power; “the shaping or guiding of possible actions and norms” (Death 2010: 238) is present in various institutions – political parties, schools, prisons, but also non-governmental organizations and community groups – and
the actors themselves. Consequently, “the distinction between governmental and non-governmental actors holds little analytical value: actors on both sides of this purported divide are implicated in networks of Governmentality” (Death 2010: 238). Resistance does not necessarily challenge hegemonic discourses and the present order since it is part of the “conduct of conduct” (Gordon 1991: 2). Resistance practices can also perpetuate the status quo: “[L]iberal democracy’s toleration of dissent and protest within certain limits works, paradoxically, to reinforce as well as challenge dominant power relations.” (Death 2010: 239)

3.2.2. James C. Scott – “Weapons of the weak”

In his ethnographic study of peasants and rural class conflict in a Malaysian village, *The Weapons of the Weak* (1985), James C. Scott draws attention to resistance without overt contestation or formal organization. He seeks to show “what we can potentially learn from an analysis that is not centred on the state, on formal organizations, on open protest, on national issues” (Scott 1985: xix). Scott has contributed to the theoretical considerations concerning the notion of resistance by demonstrating that certain practices of resistance are deliberately hidden and that their virtual invisibility does not hinder their political nature. Especially in situations where domination is strong, hidden practices allow the subordinates to resist without directly confronting the dominant class in order to avoid retaliation. The injustice the subordinates experience in their everyday life is expressed in a ‘hidden transcript,’ which is the starting point for different strategies that aim at changing the status quo without directly contesting the dominant actors. The existence of a hidden transcript is not a substitute but rather a condition for resistance (cf. Scott 1990: 191) Scott describes its importance as follows: “The hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation.” (Scott 1990: 188) Conversely, the discourse or hidden transcript is in turn influenced by elements of practical resistance (cf. Scott 1990: 191).

According to Scott, research focusing on ‘the weapons of the weak’ should study the hidden transcripts of different groups to better understand relations of power and the emergence of resistance:

Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and of both hidden transcripts to the
public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination. (Scott 1990: xii)

While Foucault focuses on ‘techniques of the self’ and on ‘auto-disciplinarization,’ Scott emphasizes that ‘infrapolitics’ presuppose “that most subordinates conform and obey not because they have internalized the norms of the dominant, but because a structure of surveillance, reward, and punishment makes it prudent for them to comply” (Scott 1990: 193). He draws attention to “everyday forms of repression” (Scott 1985: 241) which are a key aspect in the emergence of a strategy based on alleged compliance and disguised forms of struggle. The observed consensus does not indicate that the subordinate classes have interiorized the ideology of the powerful, but rather a necessary adjustment that does not inhibit everyday resistance practices that aim at ameliorating their daily life on in the short term (cf. Scott 1985: 247).

Scott investigates what is deliberately hidden and thus defines resistance as an intentional act with which a member of a dominated group aims to counteract the intentions of a dominant class. In *Weapons of the Weak*, he defines the term ‘resistance’ based on the notion of intentionality and the material base of class relations:

> [C]lass resistance includes *any* act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farms, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes. (Scott 1985: 290)

This definition, which is at the same time broad, but, as I will demonstrate, also reductive, covers very heterogenous practices; from organized, large scale, collective action to individual and spontaneous acts. To distinguish between the different forms of resistance, Scott approves of attempts to classify them according to the degree of organization, visibility and action repertoires. By focusing on “infrapolitics,” “the strategic form that the resistance of subjects must assume under conditions of great peril” (Scott 1990: 199), he recognizes the political nature of discreet actions of subordinate actors. Marginalized actors are less likely to transform their individual and ‘quiet’ practices in a public movement than the middle classes, partly due to fear of retaliation. Infrapolitics can thus be described as “the silent partner of a loud form of public resistance” (Scott 1990: 199).

This theoretical perspective and the resulting definition of ‘resistance’ allows us to analyze barely visible practices, which have been largely neglected in the study of social movements. However, the stark opposition between ‘the dominant’ and ‘the dominated’ has been the subject
of criticism. Furthermore, Scott’s hypothesis according to which the resistance of subaltern groups is necessarily hidden and disguised has been put into question. Baaz, Lilja, and Vinthagen also point out that Scott’s definition is based on intentionality. Consequently, Scott does not take into consideration actions by individuals with little political consciousness. This means that Scott excludes a large part of informal, un-institutionalized, and hardly visible forms of resistance (cf. Baaz/Lilja/Vinthagen 2016: 140). If we follow the definition proposed by Scott, certain tactics of everyday life, which arise rather from necessity than from the conscious desire to challenge a relationship of dominance, cannot be counted as infrapolitics (cf. Bayat 2010: 53). Other critics argue that the presumed autonomy of the individuals in the work of Scott shows that the author neglects the web of often ‘disguised’ power relations in which the actors are entangled. Looking more closely at their role would enable us to see “that we have to take the intentions, consciousness and articulations of resistance actors as, at least, partly formed by the powerful discourses in which actors are situated” (Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 15).

3.2.3. Michel de Certeau – Resistance as everyday practice

Like James Scott, who has popularized the notion of ‘everyday resistance,’ the French scholar Michel de Certeau concentrates on the daily life of individuals. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau studies everyday life in an effort to unmask the power of daily practices in the struggle against the oppressive systems of dominant norms. He argues that resistance is an integral part of daily practices that lead to the creation of an autonomous and self-determined sphere of action. His focus on everyday life and the tactics developed by actors who, far from being passive, use the “imposed systems” (de Certeau 1984: 18) in a creative way, allows him to move beyond a deterministic perspective which exaggerates disciplinary power (cf. Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 15f.).

To understand the approach developed by de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, it is necessary to have a closer look at his distinction between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’:

I call a “strategy” the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an “environment.” A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, “clientèles,” “targets,” or “objects” of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model. (De Certeau 1984: xix)
‘Strategy’ is based on a place of power and gives way to systems and discourses with a globalizing vision. The term ‘tactic,’ on the contrary, describes a “calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization)” and which cannot be totalizing. “It must constantly manipulate events to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (De Certeau 1984: xix10) and thus depends on changing circumstances that have to be ‘seized.’ De Certeau describes the tactical as “guileful ruse” (1984: 37). Whereas the strategy is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (De Certeau 1984: 35f.), the tactic is an “art of the weak” (De Certeau 1984: 37) for those who are at the margins of society. “Where dominating powers exploit the order of things, where ideological discourse represses or ignores it, tactics fool this order and make it the field of their art.” (de Certeau 1980: 4) De Certeau argues that subtle resistance practices are not simply a ‘last resort’ for marginalized groups and individuals who are lacking political opportunities, to put it with the terms of social movement theory. The manipulation of the ‘rules of the game’ in everyday life can rather be described as playful and pleasurable (cf. De Certeau 1984: 18).11 The differences between strategy and tactic can be summarized as follows: “Strategies seek to discipline and manage people and institutions, whereas tactics constitute a sort of ‘antidiscipline,’ an ‘art of making’ that proceeds by manipulating imposed knowledge and symbols at propitious moments.” (Escobar 2005: 305)

In the works of de Certeau, the consumers are not passive but capable of making creative use of socio-cultural products. They become producers themselves even though the products are invisible at first sight. Through ordinary, everyday practices, they become “unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (De Certeau 1984: xviii). De Certeau lists several practices which can be qualified as tactics: “Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever

10 This point deserves further elaboration: “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The ‘proper’ is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities.’ The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them.” (De Certeau 1984: xix)

11 “Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game (jouer / déjouer le jeu de l’autre), that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have. In these combatants’ stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one’s blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space.” (De Certeau 1984: 18)
tricks of the ‘weak’ within the order established by the ‘strong.’” (De Certeau 1984: 40) With these creative “ways of operating” (*manières de faire*) (de Certeau 1984: xi), the users – ‘ordinary’ people – aim at reappropriating space, organized by the technics of sociocultural production. In a chapter on Foucault, de Certeau writes that the subjects are inscribed in disciplinary mechanisms which, however, are not able to silence the dispersed and guileful forms of resistance:

If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also “miniscule” and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what “ways of operating” form the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or “dominee’s”?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. (De Certeau 1984: xiv)

De Certeau uses the works of his contemporaries Foucault and Bourdieu to contrast their arguments with his own. He does not put into question Foucault’s observations in *Discipline and Punish* regarding the shift in power technologies. However, de Certeau does not seek to investigate these subtle power mechanisms; “the productive apparatus (which produces the ‘discipline’)” (De Certeau 1984: xiv). Rather, he wants to look at “everyday creativity” (De Certeau 1984: xiv); he wants “to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’” (De Certeau 1984: xivf.).

De Certeau also discusses Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. In his rather deterministic reading of Bourdieu, he criticizes that the practices Bourdieu describes – marriage strategies in his native region Bearn or the building and spatial arrangement of the Kabylian house – are “dominated by […] an economy of the proper place” which takes two forms; the accumulation of capital, and the development of the body (De Certeau 1984: 55). De Certeau argues that Bourdieu thus concentrates on what the former calls strategies and neglects tactics. Referring to the *docta ignorantia*, De Certeau criticizes Bourdieu for considering “the elements of a people and its culture as coherent and unconscious” and, consequently, for returning to an objectifying ethnological argumentation: “With these ‘strategies,’ governed by their place,

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12 “[I]nstead of analyzing the apparatus exercising power (i.e., the localizable, expansionist, repressive, and legal institutions), Foucault analyzes the mechanisms (*dispositifs*) that have sapped the strength of these institutions and surreptitiously reorganized the functioning of power: ‘minuscule’ technical procedures acting on and with details, redistributing a discursive space in order to make it the means of a generalized ‘discipline’ (*surveillance越来越大*).” (De Certeau 1984: xiv)

34
knowledgeable but unknown, the most traditionalist sort of ethnology returns.” (De Certeau 1984: 56) Interestingly, Bourdieu’s theory of practice receives little attention in the growing field of resistance studies. However, confronting de Certeau’s writings with Bourdieu’s theoretical work also uncovers a point of criticism: Bourdieu’s relational sociology rejects the binary “in which the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the weak are set against each other” (Pink 2012: 19).

De Certeau’s approach raises the question of when an action becomes political. Although dominant forms are imposed on users, they dispose of room for action in order to adapt (to) them and to introduce their own ‘rules of the game.’ In this way, de Certeau highlights their agency. However, by defining any kind of action as potentially subversive, de Certeau complicates the operationalizability of the concept and extends the concept of resistance to practices that do not have political potential in that they do not bring about any changes: “It is as if all ways of using the dominant’s products, spaces, systems, etc. becomes resistance, even if they do not have the potential to affect power relations.” (Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 16)

Bourdieu points out the limits of resistance practices by highlighting their ambiguous outcomes: “Resistance can be alienating and submission can be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it.” (Bourdieu 1987: 184, cited by Wacquant in Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 24) Thinking the enabling and the limiting elements together is a key theoretical challenge with far-reaching consequences for empirical approaches.

### 3.3. Towards a Definition of ‘Resistance’

The discussion of the approaches developed by Foucault, Scott, and de Certeau leads us to two insights. On the one hand, I have illustrated the utility of a clear definition of the concept of ‘resistance.’ On the other hand, I have tried to show that precise criteria of definition increase the risk of excluding certain forms of resistance. Consequently, Baaz, Lilja and Vinthagen propose to abandon the idea of searching for a universal definition. Instead, they suggest adapting and operationalizing the concept depending on the research question and the context. The context in which the individual or group is situated plays an important role not only when it comes to the choice of tactics, but also regarding the transformative potential of an action:

[W]hat qualifies as resistance is very much dependent on context, as the aim of various resistance practices also varies very much; so does its different articulations as well as the ability of various activities to challenge political, legal, economic, social and cultural structures in society – ultimately to achieve ‘social change.’ (Baaz/Lilja/Vinthagen 2017: 14)
I concur with Hollander and Einwohner who propose to focus more on the analytical utility of the concept in a given context than on the problem of defining ‘resistance.’ Nevertheless, the theoretical reflections concerning the ambiguities of the concept may not only be useful for empirical research but also contribute to a better understanding of larger sociological questions; especially questions that address power, inequality and social change (cf. Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 534f.).

In order to better understand the key aspects of the concept of ‘resistance’ as well as the difficulties in coming up with a definition, I have presented the contributions of Michel Foucault, James C. Scott, and Michel de Certeau. Even though they share a particular interest in the everyday life and daily practices of subalterns, Scott and de Certeau differ in several respects. De Certeau does not consider resistance as a direct opposition between a class that holds power and the ‘weak’ who intend to resist and develop discreet ‘weapons.’ The dichotomy between dominated and dominating groups is present in many attempts to formulate a definition of resistance. As a result, the heterogeneity within groups and the multiple systems of hierarchy that exist in society are masked. Dividing a population in this manner ignores the fact that one individual can have different statuses in systems of power (cf. Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 555). This brings us to the following question: Who are the actors that develop tactics of resistance in their everyday life? Hollander and Einwohner draw attention to the complex interaction of three groups of actors that may have different interpretations of an action – the person who resists, the target, and the observers. This intersection allows them to outline a typology of resistance.

Resistance is defined not only by resisters’ perceptions of their own behavior, but also by targets’ and/or others’ recognition of and reaction to this behavior. […] Examining the interactional nature of resistance also highlights the central role of power, which is itself an interactional relationship, not a characteristic of individuals or groups. (Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 548)

Departing from this interactionist approach, Johansson and Vinthagen propose the following definition of the resisting actor: “[A]n agent is a social identity constructed in relationships that are not singular or fixed (as in Scott’s peasant/landowner relationship) but perceived as plural, complex, contextual and situational.” (Johansson/Vinthagen 2014: 6) But unlike Hollander and Einwohner, the authors argue that neither the intention to resist nor the recognition by the targets of the resistance is a necessary and sufficient criterion to identify informal resistance (cf. Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 18). They propose to analyze resistance as a practice that is not only a ‘way of operating’ that is different or creative but also a subtle and somewhat hidden way of undermining power relations (cf. Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 23). Tactics, i.e.
subversive practices, are particularly effective when they render categories of thought and dominant discourses conscious and thus make them accessible for change. Bourdieu highlights in particular those categories of thought that concern the perception and evaluation of the prevailing distribution of resources and privileges (cf. 1990: 141). Resistance practices cannot be understood outside of their specific context and can sometimes have unexpected consequences. It is necessary to avoid an essentialization of oppressive practices as well as of resistance because no action is intrinsically resistant – the context must be taken into account.

Using the resistance paradigm in empirical research projects also has political implications. In particular, the researcher should reflect upon the effects of the academic discourse on power relations in the field. On the one hand, by defining an action as resistance, the researcher gives the individual or group validation and legitimacy and thus may influence further mobilizations. It is not surprising that there has been criticism of studies that seem to only aim to ‘unveil’ resistance practices to take their side (cf. Morris 2004: 679). On the other hand, the amalgamation of different practices under the same generic term – without taking into account their heterogeneity – can lead not only to a loss of analytical adequacy of the concept but also to a homogenization that goes against the interests of subordinate groups.

3.4. From Informal to Organized Resistance

In the following, I will look more closely at the link between everyday resistance and organized resistance. In social movement theory, similar concepts to that of resistance are used. Researchers who work with the concept of resistance do not intend to replace this terminology but see resistance as an umbrella term; as a category that includes different practices, from informal resistance to public collective action. As Lilja et al. (2017: 40f.) note, little research has addressed the imbrications between the organizational forms and practices commonly studied in this subfield of sociology – revolts, open protests and demonstrations – and practices that have received less attention due to their less visible or even hidden nature. Given the plurality of forms of resistance, an in-depth consideration of their mutual influences is necessary. In other words, how can organized resistance encourage informal resistance and vice

13 “The specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices and in particular, the categories through which distributions are perceived and appreciated.” (Bourdieu 1990: 141)
versa? Can we observe a shift from less organized practices to organized mass movements with bureaucratic organizations?

I concur with James Scott that the multiple forms of resistance can be placed along a continuum between two ideal-types; everyday resistance and organized resistance (cf. Scott 1989: 34). Many works only concentrate on one of these poles, without theorizing the links between the different forms of resistance. In an attempt to help address this research gap, Lilja et al. discuss the approaches developed by J. Scott and A. Bayat. They emphasize the concept of agency and subjectivation in order to explain the following linkage: “[W]e argue that not only are the practices of everyday resistance often followed by more organized resistance but also that the latter practice in fact can encourage or create the former. […] Neatly put: (organized) resistance encourages (everyday) resistance.” (Lilja et al. 2017: 41) In that respect, the authors show that in order to understand resistance it is necessary to not only study the ‘technologies of power,’ to use Foucault’s terminology, but also the linkages between the various types of resistance.

Scott emphasizes the multiple obstacles to open resistance that marginalized groups have to face. He mentions among other aspects repression, the complexity of the class structure, and ‘flight’ as a strategy to avoid conflict (cf. Scott 1985: 242ff.). Everyday resistance is part of a struggle that Scott describes as “guerrilla warfare” (Scott 1990: 192) – a struggle characterized by an “empirical process of search and probing” (Scott 1990: 193), a perpetual process of evaluation and renegotiation of the relations of production between the classes. He argues that both sides engage in a struggle that aims to “to seize each small advantage and press it home, to probe the limits of the existing relationships, to see precisely what can be gotten away with at the margin, and to include this margin as a part of an accepted, or at least tolerated, territorial claim” (Scott 1985: 255). In the case of strong domination, every resistance starts as a practice grounded in the daily life of individuals. These seemingly small actions can, according to Scott, have a larger impact. Referring to the peasants in a Malaysian village which he names Sedaka,

14 Drawing in particular on Saba Mahmood’s reading of Foucault, the authors “understand agency as a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located. Overall, agency is seen as something made possible by a certain kind of self-reflexivity. […] [W]e argue that membership of different resisting organizations has allowed our respondents to reflect upon themselves, their power relations, and thereafter to formulate ethical considerations and various articulations of resistance. Put differently, the respondents’ resistance against various power relations is the result of their interpretations of the aim and discourses of the organized resistance, and how they recognize themselves in relation to those interpretations. This, in turn, creates particular conceptions of the self, which have allowed our respondents to move outside the boundaries of the resisting organization and make their own everyday resistance. In the end, self-reflection becomes the very base for an individual’s decision to practice everyday resistance.” (Lilja et al. 2017: 47)
Scott observes the possibility of a radical transformation of society based on everyday resistance:

Resistance in Sedaka begins as, I suspect, all historical resistance by subordinate classes begins: close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience. [...] Such resistance, conceived and conducted with no revolutionary end in mind, can, and occasionally does, contribute to revolutionary outcomes. (Scott 1985: 349f.)

A change of power relations that, at first sight, seems insignificant can encourage the dominated group to intensify their non-conforming actions – in the case of the peasants studied by Scott “arson, sabotage, boycotts, disguised strikes, theft” (1985: 241) – which may lead to the change or even erosion of the system in place. The organizational success depends among other things on the cohesion within the group of subordinates and the capacity of the group members to sanction those who do not comply with group norms.

A. Bayat conceptualizes the emergence and potential impact of resistance in a slightly different manner. He introduces the term ‘quiet encroachment’ to describe the flexible practices of marginalized and informal groups who adapt to a certain extent to the circumstances while at the same time constantly trying to ameliorate their living conditions and to obtain the respect of their dignity. He does not have in mind a protest movement of individuals who publicly voice their collective demands but a “quiet, largely atomized, and prolonged mobilization with episodic collective action – open and fleeting struggles without clear leadership, ideology, or structured organization” (Bayat 2010: 56). This “non-movement” is more than a mere strategy to survive or a form of defensive resistance because the individuals expand their space and their access to resources. What cannot be attained overtly becomes subject of a panoply of non-conforming actions which are difficult to detect but of which the cumulative effect exerts a pressure on the dominant actors: “[I]n the long run, the encroachment strategy generates a reality on the ground with which states often find no option but to come to terms. In the end, the poor manage to bring about significant changes in their own lives, the urban structure, and social policy.” (Bayat 2010: 93)

15 “What are the ‘social nonmovements’? In general, nonmovements refers to the collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations. The term movement implies that social nonmovements enjoy significant, consequential elements of social movements; yet they constitute distinct entities.” (Bayat 2010: 14)
Although he focuses on informal politics of the, what he calls, “Third World poor” (Bayat 1997: 157) the conclusions he draws are interesting for studying resistance in the Global North. Bayat draws a link between the current political context, especially the intervention of elites in the daily life of a network of individuals who share a similar position in society and the emergence of visible protests, which episodically make collective demands visible. Thus, he considers that external threats are a key factor in the emergence of resistance practices that come closer to the ideal-type of more ‘traditional’ social movements. Based on existing ‘passive networks,’ individual and hardly visible resistance can episodically transform in public collective struggles. According to the author, the street is an opportune place for the creation of such networks.

“Passive network” implies that individuals may be mobilized to act collectively without active or deliberately constructed networks. […] Once the individual actors, the encroachers, are confronted by a threat, their passive network is likely to turn into an active communication and cooperation. (Bayat 2010: 63)

Bayat emphasizes that existing networks make it easier to pass from informal resistance to formal organization. This also raises the question of the role of online networks. Although radically different from a physical space such as the street, the Internet constitutes a virtual space which may fulfill similar functions and facilitate actions that aim to contest power structures: “Internet has emerged as a powerful medium for non-elites to communicate, support each other’s struggles and create the equivalent of insider groups at scales going from the local to the global.” (Sassen 2004: 661) In certain contexts, technology can facilitate the emergence of collective action based on the online work of existing networks and organizations or even make possible self-organization if prior networks are lacking (cf. Bennet/Segerberg 2012).

However, according to Lilja et al., neither Scott, who emphasizes a dynamic of linear development, nor Bayat, who describes the relationship between informal ‘everyday’ forms and organized forms of resistance as oscillatory dynamic, succeed in drafting a theoretical framework that makes it possible to see how the different forms of resistance are influenced and fuelled by already existing forms (cf. Lilja et al. 2017: 44). Drawing on empirical observations in Cambodia, Lilja et al. show how forms of organized resistance can become the origin of more subtle, less visible types that are anchored in the daily life of individuals.

Resistance inspires, provokes, generates, encourages or eventually discourages resistance; depending on contextual factors and other circumstances. […] Individuals’ experiences of organized and public forms of resistance might inspire them, or others, to develop new resistance forms of identities or everyday behaviour. (Lilja et al. 2017: 52)
Formal organizations that develop around a specific issue offer the individuals who are actively involved or who can relate to the organization’s claims interpretations. These interpretations can serve as a basis for reflections. As a result, this process can influence the way they see themselves, their place in society, and how they make sense of their actions. To sum up, increased reflexivity can encourage everyday and individual resistance (cf. Lilja et al. 2017: 51).

This overview of perspectives that propose a way of thinking the linkages between different forms of resistance has demonstrated that resistance does not develop in a vacuum. Rather, they are based on, are parallel to, and encourage other forms of resistance; be it formal or informal, visible or invisible, small-scale or large-scale resistance. In order to understand how these interconnections play out in a given context in the short and in the long run, it is necessary to develop methodological instruments that – unlike, for example, protest event analysis based on newspaper sources or police archives – allow us to look at the realm of the everyday and to study more than just one type of resistance.
4. Urban Resistance – The Urban is Political

When talking about who ‘makes’ the city, we mostly think about urban governance and tend to forget that the city consists of a diversity of actors with different interests, practices, and networks. Sassen argues that it is the city’s complexity and incompleteness that enables the powerless to assert their right to the city and voice demands outside formal political institutions (cf. Sassen 2014). Research on urban mobilizations mainly focuses on participation in institutional urban politics and on mass movements that become a visible presence in urban space. The concept of urban social movements was largely influenced by H. Lefebvre, M. Castells, and other neo-Marxist theorists. Urban social movements can be defined as “politics of protest and of activism concerned with the character, freedoms, and control of urban space” (Tonkiss 2005: 61). Considering the discussion on resistance evoked in the last chapter, this broad definition includes various types of resistance – from subtle and hidden practices to more organized practices – their emergence and interrelations.

In the following, I will analyze how the resistance paradigm has been used in the framework of urban sociology. I will illustrate how the notion of resistance can help to avoid shortcomings in the study of urban mobilizations, such as the focus on state-centred organized resistance. I will furthermore discuss under-theorized elements of the concept, especially the imbrication of resistance and urban space. By giving some examples, I will explore the key aspects that have to be taken into account when studying urban resistance against the effects of global city dynamics among different urban groups. I will demonstrate that resistance not only occurs in urban space but that the latter can become the very object of mobilization.

4.1. Cities and Social Change

Since the intensification of globalization processes, the idea of the city as a source of social change was revisited. Drawing on different theoretical perspectives, the city has been framed as ‘creative’ and as a source of transformation. This was already pointed out by Weber in The City (1986 [1921]).16 His argument can be resumed as follows: “For Weber, the set of social structures in cities inherently encourages innovation, and thus these structures become key

16 The unfinished essay The City became part of Economy and Society, Volume 2, Chapter XVI: “The City (Non-Legitimate Domination)”
instruments of historical change and individual expression.” (Sassen 2012: 88) From a neo-Marxist perspective, transformative forces were highlighted by H. Lefebvre in The Urban Revolution (2003 [1970]) who saw revolutionary potential in the urban class and urban practices. The idea was taken up by M. Castells in The Urban Question (1979) who emphasized the role of urban social movements or, more recently, by D. Harvey in Rebel Cities (2012). Unlike Lefebvre, I do not depart from an analysis of the Fordist city but try to understand the role of cities in the frame of global capitalism and neoliberalism. Following Weber’s argument, Sassen postulates that “[i]n our global era, cities have emerged once again as strategic sites for cultural and institutional change” (2012: 88). The global city with its specific characteristics is seen as a source for greater societal transformation. According to Sassen, cities are complex and incomplete systems. This gives rise to the possibility for the ‘powerless’ to make themselves visible, to gain presence, to develop unconventional tactics, and to ‘make’ the city (cf. Sassen 2014: 1).

I argue that the possibility of urban dwellers to participate in the making of their city is strongly connected to the idea of the city as creative and transformative. In order for a city to become transformative while staying ‘open’ and democratic, city dwellers have to be able to claim the right to the city, defined by David Harvey as “far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (2008: 23). The concept was elaborated by the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henry Lefebvre in 1968. Lacking a clear definition, the right to the city has taken up diverse meanings in various academic and activist contexts. Lefebvre sees the city as a “practice” (1996: 143); according to him “the urban is more or less the oeuvre of its citizens, instead of imposing itself on upon them as a system, as an already closed book” (1996: 117). Focusing on France, Lefebvre retraces

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17 According to S. Sassen’s reading of Weber’s historical overview on the rise and transformations of cities, Weber posited that “cities have the power to effect lasting changes beyond the city itself, in that they can institute larger foundational transformations that can – under certain conditions – encompass society at large” (Sassen 2012: 88).

18 There is much discussion on whether it is now actors in big cities around the globe that address and find innovative solutions for the pressing issues of our time. While nation states seem to be lagging behind, some cities bypass the national level and set new agendas when it comes to environmental policies or measures to reduce socio-economic inequality. Examples range from the growing municipalist movement which gave rise to citizen platforms that govern entire cities to cities that declare climate emergency and commit to climate agreements despite hesitancy on the supra-national and national levels. In neoliberal urban politics, however, the term ‘creative city’ rather refers to a set of measures that aim to improve the city’s position in the global arena. Politics from the ground up do not necessarily match those top down projects that are framed as ‘creative,’ ‘pioneering,’ ‘green,’ or ‘smart.’

19 “[Cities] are centers of social and political life where not only wealth is accumulated, but knowledge (connaissances), techniques, and œuvres (works of art, monuments). This city is itself ‘œuvre’, a feature which contrasts with the irreversible tendency towards money and commerce, towards exchange and products. Indeed, the œuvre is use value and the product is exchange value.” (Lefebvre 1996: 66)
the history of the city since industrialization and urbanization and criticizes recent urban transformations that he interprets as result of capitalist dynamics and authoritarian urban planning. Lefebvre describes the right to the city as follows:

The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban citizen (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged space, instead of being dispersed and stuck in ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the ‘marginal’ and even for the ‘privileged’). (Lefebvre 1996: 34)

Asserting the right to the city means having the possibility to produce, discuss, and put into practice ideas aiming at transforming the city. It also means removing symbolic and physical barriers that seclude certain groups from specific parts of the city and impede their participation. Susser and Tonnelat derive their conceptualization of urban commons from the Lefebvrian right to the city and list three commons that, when they come together, enable the city’s transformative powers: the right to urban everyday life, the right to simultaneity and encounters, and the right to creative activity: “[These urban commons] are not necessarily perceived everywhere, but as they momentarily come together in cities over the world, they give us a glimpse of a city built on the social needs of a population. That is the point when cities become transformative.” (Susser/Tonnelat 2013: 166)

Cities are both sites of agency and sites where multiple power networks and disciplinary mechanisms overlap and intersect. This ambiguity can be summarized as follows: “Cities not only breed contention; they also breed control.” (Uitermark/Nicholls/Loopmans 2012: 2546) They not only enable urban dwellers to come together and voice their demands to produce change, but also perpetuate the status quo due to strategies aimed at maintaining order and power:

The city is a generative space of mobilizations and, because of this, it is also the frontline where states constantly create new governmental methods to protect and produce social and political order, including repression, surveillance, clientelism, corporatism, and participatory and citizenship initiatives, […] making cities not only prime sites for contentious innovation but also the places where new ways of regulating, ordering, and controlling social life are invented. (Uitermark/Nicholls/Loopmans 2012: 2546)

Taking into account these complex and multi-faceted power mechanisms helps us to understand why relative deprivation not necessarily causes urban resistance and why the availability of resources alone does not explain mobilization. With a Foucauldian decentralized notion of
power that does not posit a binary between power and resistance, the concomitance of enabling and constraining dynamics, of progressive and conservative momentum, can be better understood. But, following de Certeau, it can be argued that the disciplinary mechanisms never succeed in capturing city life as a whole due to the creativity of the city ‘users’ in manipulating the imposed order.

4.2. Urban Resistance in the Global City

Despite the political potential that is attributed to ‘the urban,’ empirical evidence shows limits when it comes to the rights of the ‘citadins’ in the post-industrial, neoliberal city.\(^{20}\) Firstly, the complexity of the underlying dynamics makes it difficult to mobilize around concrete issues and to voice clear demands. “Although inequalities may be more striking in the city, their underlying cause or systemic production may be confusing or too complex to grasp. This often makes for an easy indignation but more difficult mobilization, a disempowering of the disadvantaged.” (Susser/Tonnelat 2013: 107) In addition, the governance structures in urban areas have become highly complex because multiple levels of government are involved. Especially the strong presence of economic actors in urban governance schemes makes it difficult to determine the addressee of demands and protest actions. Taking into account the power relations in a given context helps to understand the factors that influence if and how overt resistance emerges. In an effort to make decision-making processes more efficient, urban governing institutions become less democratic, and “the need to remain globally competitive increasingly dictates urban policy decisions” (Purcell 2006: 1922). The importance of the local political context and power relations is often neglected in studies that focus on the global dimensions of contemporary urban dynamics. The low level of citizen participation in

\(^{20}\) In the title of the chapter it was stressed that ‘the urban is political.’ This remark seems redundant at first sight since the city, the ‘polis,’ is often seen as the epitome of the public realm. A relatively recent debate in critical urban studies, however, points out that the connection between urban space and politics or democracy is not (or longer) self-evident. Building on post-political theorists, Erik Swyngedouw argues in *The Post-Political City* (2007) that cities have responded to new globalization dynamics and its implications by implementing a new governance framework that aims to promote competitiveness. According to the author, this leads to a depoliticization of the city. The “late capitalist urban police order […] forecloses (or at least attempts to) politicization and evacuates dissent through the formation of new forms of governmentality, of a particular partition of the sensible that revolves around consensus, participatory negotiation of different interests, and the acceptance of neo-liberal cosmopolitan globalization as the undisputable state of the situation” (Swyngedouw 2007: 64). Focusing on informal resistance in the ‘depoliticized’ city consequently means to look beyond the ‘consensual’ politics based on the neoliberal assumption that ‘there is no other way.’ Even if this consensus is not vociferously questioned, there are – if one looks at the realm of the everyday – “tricks of the ‘weak’ within the order established by the ‘strong.’” (De Certeau 1984: 40)
municipal politics and the lack of large-scale collective action indicates that the residents have the impression that they are unable to have an impact on the future making of their city through institutional politics and ‘conventional’ forms of action.

Depending on the context, urban resistance takes different forms – from subtle or hidden practices, such as those studied by J. Scott, to more organized practices. The focus on social movements that are visible in urban space has far-reaching consequences: In cities and periods where residents that are affected by socio-economic transformations and increasing disparities show little presence in urban space, where mobilizations are fragmented, or where resistance faces obstacles due to the political context, the absence of open confrontation is interpreted as lack of (political) action. However, we must be wary of coming to the hasty and simplistic conclusion that marginalized urban actors are passive and have no scope for action. Even in the absence of state-centred urban social movements that make it to the headlines of the national or international press, city dwellers nevertheless develop new forms of resistance and opposition, adapt to the changes or try to bypass them. This, of course, brings us to the question of why, at present, despite the increasing inequalities in global cities, the rising housing prices, displacement, and the growing divide between global hubs and the periphery, there is little evidence of the emergence of a global movement for urban justice. Is collectivization in individualized, late-capitalist societies a virtual impossibility in the long run? Are the political opportunities too limited? Or are marginalized urban actors simply lacking resources? Or are we simply trying to interpret new realities with outdated categories and concepts?

Saskia Sassen underlines explicitly the tensions emerging in big cities and links the latter to the emergence of new forms of resistance. According to the sociologist, the global city constitutes a meeting place where various actors can increase their visibility and voice their collective demands. In these cities, described as a “terrain for politics and engagement” (Sassen 2005a: 39), those who follow the global city hypothesis see the emergence of new forms of political action that are based in the local but acquire a more global stance.

Those who are traditionally excluded can gain presence in global cities—presence vis-à-vis both power and each other. This signals the possibility of a new type of politics centered around new types of political actors. Access to the city is no longer

21 Beveridge and Koch propose the category ‘urban everyday politics’ to subsume resistance practices that are rooted in the urban everyday and argue for “a view of contemporary urban politics that differs in crucial ways from the conventional understanding of politics centred on the state (as friend or enemy). Urban everyday politics is characterised by a de-centring of, even disregard for, the state and a concern for self-governing spatial practices lodged in but chaffing against the urban everyday.” (Beveridge/Koch 2018: 2)
simply a matter of having or not having power. Urban spaces have become hybrid bases from which to act via an increasingly legitimized informal politics. (Sassen 2012: 86)

However, there is little theoretical consideration when it comes to understanding when, where, and how this ‘new type of politics’ is developed and who the ‘new types of political actors’ are. I argue that the discussion could benefit from a stronger focus on the city as a site of agency also for the marginalized – “a site of agency […] which is never wholly captured in efforts either to model or to manage it” (Tonkiss 2005: 7). In this manner, I not only address the question of agency, but also the importance of urban space for the emergence of resistance. These two aspects receive little attention in the urban political economy paradigm. As I will show in the next chapter, the city is not a ‘container’ for social processes, but ‘the urban’ constitutes a material and symbolic resource. I emphasize the importance of studying resistance in its diversity as well as the linkages between the different forms. In the urban context, research should not solely focus on mass mobilizations, but also explore forms of resistance that come close to the ideal-type of everyday resistance. If the focus is extended to ‘quieter’ forms of urban resistance – subtle urban practices that come to be defined as resistance practices in the given context – the question arises as to what common point can be found. According to Beveridge and Koch, these practices “share the objective of achieving new social and spatial relations through direct intervention in the urban here and now” (2018: 2).

In many cases, informal resistance aims first and foremost to preserve or ameliorate living conditions in a short-term view. However, economic necessity is not the only factor that encourages resistance. As Auyero puts it in his work on the participation of two women in protest movements in Argentina, the material conditions which are highlighted as a key factor to explain the protests should only be a starting point for a deeper analysis which goes beyond the dominant approaches in social movement theory (cf. Auyero 2003: 7). These perspectives often ignore not only the diversity of action types but also the plurality of ways individuals make sense of their resistance practices, the importance of (urban) space and the sense of attachment and belonging to a certain place for the emergence of everyday tactics as well as the links between the different forms of resistance.

The socio-economic tensions have given rise to a variety of local initiatives which also gain a more global scope. Local initiatives that aim at ameliorating urban life and urban environment as well as at including city-dwellers in municipal decision-making processes have multiplied in certain contexts. On a larger scale, certain social movements anchor their protest actions in urban space and occupy places that symbolize capital accumulation and economic power.
According to Sassen, the global city gives those with little resources whose interests are underrepresented in municipal politics the possibility to gain presence and to “emerge as subjects” (Sassen 1998: XXI). She summarizes the ambivalent nature of global cities expressed in the oscillation between disillusionment and mobilization as follows:

The emphasis on the transnational and hypermobile character of capital has contributed to a sense of powerlessness among local actors, a sense of the futility of resistance. But an analysis that emphasizes place suggests that the new global grid of strategic sites is a terrain for politics and engagement. (Sassen 2005a: 38f.)

To analyze these phenomena, the concepts and theories that were developed in the framework of more ‘traditional’ approaches to urban movements are not adequate anymore. It is necessary to take into account the concentration of transnational actors in global cities and the emerging socio-economic tensions which result from increased socio-spatial polarization. These tensions give way to “a type of political opening with unifying capacities across national boundaries and sharpening conflicts within such boundaries” (Sassen 1998: XX). According to this perspective, globalization makes new political forms possible. They can only be analyzed if their transnational character and the importance of place is acknowledged. Sassen therefore argues that place does matter, even if globalization is often associated with the ‘neutralization’ of place.

Sassen posits the potential for a “new type of transnational politics that localizes in these cities” (Sassen 2005a: 39). Local actors can become political players on a global scale by making use of new information and communication technologies. Cities can become places where new transnational, largely virtual political spheres emerge, which also include actors with little resources (cf. Sassen 2004: 649f.). There is a strong link between global economic dynamics and the emergence of ‘imaginaries’ that render the still widely accepted distinction between local and global obsolete:

Going global has been partly facilitated and conditioned by the infrastructure of the global economy, even as the latter is often the object of those oppositional politics. Further, and in my analysis, very importantly, the possibility of global imaginaries has enabled even those who are geographically immobile to become part of global politics. (Sassen 2004: 649)

Even if problems and tensions sparked by globalization processes are global, the effects are undoubtedly local, which makes it often difficult to grasp in how far they are localized global phenomena. As A. Appadurai, a theorist of cultural globalization puts it, the actors which experience the impact of globalization in their daily lives on the local level are limited in their capacities to analyze the complex transformations of their working and living conditions (cf. Appadurai 2001: 17f.).
Sassen does not sufficiently explain how this political opening is translated into concrete actions, how local effects of global dynamics are interpreted, and to what extent the power relations in the global city can be altered. Another element that needs further clarification is the question of how protesting urban actors inscribe their claims in the local, regional, and national political and administrative contexts. Sassen emphasizes that global cities as platforms for global capital bypass the national level. Do urban actors create new intercity platforms of discussion and exchange which enable local responses to pressing issues to ‘go global’? What are the possibilities for participation in municipal politics, for deliberation and democratization of urban space?

4.3. Urban Space

Since the spatial turn in the social sciences, there has been renewed interest in the spatial dimensions of contentious politics (cf. Auyero 2003). It is now widely acknowledged that space is socially constituted. Consequently, urban space in its material and symbolic dimensions not only structures social relations and processes but also galvanizes inequalities via the production of exclusive spaces that reproduce economic, social, and cultural divisions. “[U]rban spaces can be seen as structuring social relations and processes, and in turn as shaped by social action and meanings. […] The organization of space both provides the basis for social relations and offers a reflection of them.” (Tonkiss 2005: 2)

To answer the question of why cities are considered as cradles for transformation, it is important to take into account urban space in its material and symbolic dimension. As I have already shown earlier, global cities are sites where socio-economic fractures and processes of exclusion become visible, where diverse actors work and live together and can organize collectively. As R. Sennett, sociologist and former urbanist, brought to the point, “a city is a human settlement in which strangers are likely to meet” (Sennett 2002: 39). Cities are places of encounter; they provide physical gathering spaces to create ties or mobilize “passive networks” (Bayat 2010:

22 In the following frequently cited quotation, Henry Lefebvre brings it to the point: “(Social) space is a (social) product.” (Lefebvre 1991: 26)

23 For a long time, space was considered a static, unchanging reality; a neutral ‘container’ that does not influence human interactions. It was not until the 1980s that sociology as a discipline started to analyze space as a social category and to understand space as ‘relational’: “Relational spatial theory argues that the social is spatial, and vice versa: when space is understood as relational, it becomes a category of analysis and a lens through which sociologists can look to uncover new insights and deepen understanding of a myriad of research questions.” (Fuller/Löw 2017: 469)
“The lived experience within the spatial organization of cities transforms social relationships among the inhabitants and can contribute to particular social formations.” (Susser/Tonnelat 2013: 107)

Theorists who have shown interest in the link between power and space tend to focus on space as a factor that limits or determines action. However, when studying informal forms of resistance, it is necessary to take into account the importance of space for the emergence of everyday tactics, or, with the words of Bayat, “how particular spatial forms shape, galvanize, and accommodate insurgent sentiments and solidarities” (2010: 162). Urban space in the global city is a powerful resource and strategic site to voice collective claims. Recent social movements have illustrated this through the occupation of public space as a key strategy. Lefebvre’s influential theory of space draws attention to the symbolic aspect of physical urban space. “Urban spaces provide a stage for wider political conflicts, or points of symbolic contest where buildings or monuments stand for more anonymous structures of power.” (Tonkiss 2005: 60f.) Urban sites invested with meaning can thus be a powerful resource for mobilizations. Urban protests go far beyond the city they take place in and can point at economic activities and sites which are, due to the geographic dispersal of activities and the complexity of global value chains ‘out of sight out of mind.’ As Tonkiss observes, “[t]hese spatial practices have sought to connect privileged and very visible sites of exploitation dispersed across innumerable sweat-shops, factory floors, plantations or forests, mostly in the South” (Tonkiss 2005: 65).

Imagining a different kind of city seems to become possible in what Lefebvre calls ‘heterotopic spaces’ before they are “reclaimed by the dominant praxis” (Lefebvre 2003: 129). Lefebvre also uses the term ‘counter-space’ to describe the production of spaces that escape the predatory logic of capital accumulation and where use value supervenes over exchange value.

What runs counter to a society founded on exchange is a primacy of use. What counters quantity is quality. We know what counter-projects consist or what

24 The concept ‘heterotopia’ was also briefly used by Michel Foucault, most famously in a lecture with the title Of Other Spaces [Des espaces autres] (1986 [1967]), to describe specific spaces that are ‘different’ in some way or another but fulfill a precise function in society. In contrast to utopias, which he describes as “sites with no real place” – as “unreal spaces” – heterotopias are “real places […] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1986: 24). He divides these spaces, that, according to him, exist in every culture, into two groups: “Crisis heterotopias […] are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. […] But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.” (Foucault 1986: 24f.) To give an example, he names rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons.
counter-space consists in – because practice demonstrates it. When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing-developments, when it demands ‘amenities’ or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality. (Lefebvre 1991: 381f.)

Through their practices, city dwellers engaged in urban resistance also produce physical, social and symbolic space. Using Lefebvre’s theory of space to analyze housing activism, Ute Lehrer and Andrea Winkler draw attention to the fact that “[s]ocial movements and direct action groups are active producers of these three articulations of space. Through their practices, they make use of, and create, space that has physical, social, and/or symbolic moments.” (Lehrer/Winkler 2006: 145). I argue that this thought can also be extended to informal resistance. Following this line of thought, it can be concluded that for the ‘production’ of counter-spaces, it is necessary to contest the privatization of public spaces as well as urban planning projects which reinforce the idea of the city as a ‘closed system.’ Counter-spaces “open up cracks in the totalizing logic of the capitalist city” and make it possible to “challenge the order of a city given over to capital” (Tonkiss 2005: 63f.).

As Don Mitchell notes, the privatization of public urban space is detrimental to protest efforts, because in open, accessible, public space, political organizations can become visible and “can represent themselves to a larger population. By claiming space in public, by creating public spaces, social groups themselves become public.” (Mitchell 1995: 115)

To sum up, it can be noted that the city offers resources for mobilization: public space as spatial infrastructure for political action, information and mobilization networks, social networks and it fosters the formation of communities of interest (cf. Tonkiss 2005: 65). But space and place should not only be conceptualized as site, medium, or resource but also as an object of mobilization (cf. Auyero 2006). Space can become the very issue of mobilization when city dwellers feel deprived of their access to urban resources. This undermines their “right to the city” (see Lefebvre 1996); their right to have access to urban space in the ‘daily life of the city.’

Robert E. Park – one of the founders of the Chicago School of sociology – posited that shaping the city affects social organization on the whole (cf. 1915: 578). Based on a relational conception of space, it can be argued that social relations are inscribed in space and, vice versa,

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25 Erik Swyngedouw (2007) puts forward a similar argument. In the ‘post-political’ city that he describes as “fragmented and kaleidoscopic” “all manner of frictions, cracks, fissures, gaps, and ‘vacant’ spaces arise. […] These fissures, cracks, and ‘free’ spaces form ‘quilting’ points, nodes for experimentation with new urban possibilities.” (Swyngedouw 2007: 71f.) These spaces that defy the “totalising logic” imposed by global capitalism encourage the emergence “a new hybrid conglomerate of practices, often in the midst of deepening political exclusion and social disempowerment” (Swyngedouw 2007: 72).
spatial structures influence social relations. Consequently, the participation of marginalized city dwellers in the making and re-making of their city can have far-reaching consequences.26

4.4. How to Study Urban Resistance?

After presenting the specificity of urban resistance, I will address the question of how resistance should be studied in an urban context. I will discuss the practical difficulties that arise when studying informal resistance as well as the importance of and the regional and national contexts that continue to play an important role despite the increasing presence of global dynamics.

The increased interest in informal resistance in urban sociology has given rise to reflections and research studies on the different forms of resistance – from subtle and hidden practices to organized mobilizations –, on their emergence and their interrelations. By way of example, I would like to mention Erdi Lelandais and Florin, editors of a volume of *Cultures & Conflits* with the title “Urban Margins and Resistances of City-Dwellers” [Marges urbaines et résistances citadines], who question in a similar manner the “broad consensus in studies on resistances and social movements on the fact that these acts take place in the public sphere, are ostentatious and have precisely defined aims” (2016: 10, translation VR27). The authors use the notion of resistance to describe acts that “negate, ignore or adapt the rules of the game” (Florin 2016: 100, translation VR28) introduced by dominant urban actors in a neoliberal framework.
Erdi Lelandais, in her analysis of the process of politicization in a district in Ankara which is predominantly home to marginalized groups, draws attention to the spatial dimension of resistance. Following the announcement of a rehabilitation project in the district, the residents have developed subversive practices of resistance. She analyzes the way power and resistance are inscribed in space and highlights the “important role [of the district] in the process of identification of the individuals, especially through the meaning that is attributed in the mobilizations and collective resistances” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 155, translation VR29). The author illustrates the importance of the district for the individual identity and the emergence of a sense of belonging. The informal resistance that the author defines by drawing on de Certeau and Scott aim “first and foremost to preserve the place and the social and cultural practices of everyday life that are attached to it” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 157, translation VR30).

The examples presented above illustrate that the importance of meaning and belonging should not be forgotten when studying the emergence of resistance in (global) cities. Despite their focus on economic variables, Logan and Molotch are also aware that the city dwellers’ collective interest in enhancing ‘use value’ fosters a feeling of community and what they call “sentiment” – “the sense that a particular place uniquely fulfills a complex set of needs” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 20) They argue that “[p]laces have a certain preciousness or their users that is not part of the conventional concept of a commodity” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 17). As a result, city dwellers live on and in a commodity that is indispensable for them since it ensures access to additional use values such as education, work, and social networks. In this way, they draw a close link between sentiment and concrete needs and since these needs are endangered by external forces, their individual and collective efforts to enhance ‘use value’ in the neighbourhood cannot be interpreted in isolation from dynamics that emanate from other levels of analysis:

People’s feelings about their daily round, their psychological attachments to place, and their neighborhood ethnic solidarities are very real to them, but these feelings are bound up with forces originating outside residents’ immediate milieus, far beyond the social and geographical boundaries of their routines. (Logan/Molotch 2007: 99)

29 Original text: “Il [le quartier] joue donc un rôle important dans le processus d’identification des individus notamment à travers le sens qu’on lui attribue lors des mobilisations et résistances collectives.” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 155)

30 Original text: “Le quartier et la ville suscitent ici un fort sentiment d’appartenance, et la résistance vise avant tout à préserver le lieu et les pratiques sociales et culturelles de la vie quotidienne qui s’y rattachent.” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 157)
Emerging resistance influences in turn interactions between residents, the feeling of community and the attachment to place. Through everyday resistance and the relationships that are built progressively, the residents call for recognition and experiment with a new collective and individual self-image. Despite a certain level of politicization, or, to use the term of Lilja et al., a form of reflexivity that might facilitate the emergence of a large-scale collective movement, the resistance described by Erdi Lelandais remains informal and outside institutional politics due to the actors’ limited political opportunities. The author concludes that the project of urban transformation, imposed by dominant urban actors, has sparked “the emergence of a ‘subaltern culture’ that is specific for the district, visible and comprehensible only in its core and by its members, that allows constituting an invisible resistance” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 159, translation VR\textsuperscript{31}). The research in a district of Ankara thus also illustrates the role of local political decisions and the local political culture. As Bayat notes, the intervention of urban political elites can give way to episodes of open collective action based on pre-existing informal networks. Following de Certeau, the realm of the everyday is a space that allows for a certain autonomy because individuals have a scope of action regarding the use of ‘cultural products’ and can creatively ‘manipulate’ the urban order. But if one analyzes everyday resistance without paying attention to power relations, there is a risk of obliterating pressures and constraints – openness or closedness of the governance scheme, conflicts between different urban groups based on their different socioeconomic status, gender, race, language, or other factors.

I have argued earlier that the study of resistance always necessitates an examination of power – its “irreducible opposite” (Foucault 1978: 96). “[W]e claim that resistance is not possible to understand or define as an independent category. It has to be analyzed in relation to its ongoing struggle with power(s).” (Vinthagen/Johansson 2013: 36) This raises the question of how to analyze power relations in the \textit{global} city. P. Marcuse criticizes most research on global cities as “apolitical” and calls for a more in-depth analysis of power in and over (global) cities (see Marcuse 2016).\textsuperscript{32} Should we merely concentrate on forces subsumed under the term globalization? Can we reduce the power struggle in the global city to the antagonism between actors pushing for ‘exchange value’ and those interested in ‘use value,’ as Logan and Molotch

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{31} Original text: “On peut donc parler de l’émergence d’une ‘culture subalterne’ spécifique au quartier, visible et compréhensible uniquement en son sein et par ses membres, et qui permet de constituer une résistance invisible.” (Erdi Lelandais 2016: 159)
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{32} In \textit{For the Repoliticization of Global City Research}, Marcuse argues for examining the “drivers” of (undesired) changes in the context of the global city: “‘Drivers’ is a useful term in that it emphasizes human actions, conscious and deliberate, by identifiable actors and the institutions and ideologies and structures they have created, that drive all parts of the urban processes with which policy is concerned, and drive that policy itself.” (Marcuse 2016: 116)
\end{footnotesize}
posit? They argue that “[t]he city is a setting for the achievement of both exchange values and use values; and the neighborhood is the meeting place of the two forces; where each resident faces the challenge of making a life on a real estate commodity” (Logan/Molotch 2007: 99). Is this way of interpreting power relations in the city too simplistic? The authors consider that the distinction is justified because the predominant interest in use value in the case of the one group, respectively the prevailing interest in exchange value of the other group, functions as a unifying force across all differences.

The resistance paradigm draws more on a Foucauldian notion of power. On the one hand, this concept of power recognizes the agency of ‘the urban poor,’ since there is no individual or group that has power but rather points of resistance in a dynamic network. On the other hand, it often fails to see that infrastructural deprivation, violence and marginalization based on class, gender or race lead to unequal access to urban resources and unequal possibilities to participate in mobilizations. Both approaches – Logan and Molotch who identify two rather homogenous groups as well as an approach based on a decentralized notion of power – make it difficult to see the unequal distribution, respectively circulation of power in a given context.

The focus on subversive tactics rooted in everyday life raise an important methodological issue. The fact that these “ways of operating developed by residents in order to protect their way of life, their work or their access to urban resources” (Erdi Lelandais/Florin 2016: 11, translation VR33) are hardly visible makes it more difficult to ‘detect’ them – all the more so as actors might not necessarily define their practices as resistance. This brings us back to the question of intentionality that I have discussed earlier. In research projects that explore informal resistance in an urban context, there is a tendency to use qualitative methods such as participant observation and un- or semi-structured interviews. In an interview-centred study, the sampling process raises the question as to whether an act of resistance has to be intentional and aimed at a specific target – a dominant group – with a specific objective to be qualified as such. A definition based on intentionality, as suggested by Scott, runs the risk of excluding certain practices within the spectrum of informal resistance which do not explicitly aim to counter the interests of a dominant class. It is therefore necessary to concentrate on concrete practices and

33 Original text: “Ainsi, il peut s’agir de stratégies et de tactiques d’intégration urbaine faisant appel aux compétences et arts de faire mises en oeuvre par des habitants afin de protéger leur mode de vie, leur travail ou l’accès aux ressources urbaines.” (Erdi Lelandais/Florin 2016: 11)
to place them in their context of emergence in urban space in its physical and symbolical dimension.

Researching resistance is a constant balancing act. By taking an interest in resistance practices that come close to the ideal-type of everyday resistance, the researcher runs the risk of losing sight of the wider political framework and power relations. With Foucault, it can be said that there can be no analysis of resistance if there is no understanding of power relations. On the other hand, as Scott and de Certeau highlight, one should not overestimate hegemonic and coercive power structures either. In a longitudinal ethnographic study of a rehabilitation project of a neighbourhood in Madrid, Degen concludes that the attempts imposed by dominant urban actors in the context of neoliberal urban governance do not always succeed in transforming urban space in the desired way. She develops the concept of “resistance of place” which refers to the destabilization of spatial control and domination in an urban context. This form of resistance can be understood as “an alternative mode of living and experiencing which happens alongside normative rhythms and expectations – yet thereby fracture a uniform imposition of experience of place” (Degen 2017: 152). In other words, the dominant ‘culture’ cannot control the entire city. The study draws attention to the fact that even if transformations take place that significantly alter the material and social fabric of the city or neighbourhood, it is the city dwellers who creatively deal with these transformations.
5. Urban Resistance in the Global City Toronto

5.1. Toronto in Its Context

5.1.1. Toronto goes global

Cities, or rather urban actors, strive for the label ‘global city’ which is seen as a synonym for a competitive, cosmopolitan, and livable city. As a result, the term is somewhat over-used and it becomes difficult to determine how ‘global’ – according to Sassen’s definition of the term – the city really is. The case of Toronto is particularly worth investigating because the city experienced surprising growth within a short time. Its status as a global metropolitan centre is relatively new and the city is changing rapidly – with ambiguous consequences: “While Toronto’s global connectivity is viewed in an unambiguously positive light by those who are concerned to market the city as a site for transnational capital investment, it also entails certain dangers and vulnerabilities.” (Brenner/Keil 2006: 4) As the following short portrait of the city shows, Toronto shows characteristics that are typical for a global city.

With 2.7 million inhabitants, Toronto is one of the most populous cities in North America and the city keeps growing at a fast pace. Eight percent of the Canadian population and 46 percent of the population of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) live in Toronto. In the course of the last years, the city has undergone an intensification of residential construction, especially in Downtown and Central Waterfront (cf. Toronto 2018a). Toronto is among the world’s most ethnically diverse cities – 51 percent of its inhabitants were not born in Canada (cf. Toronto 2018b: 42). Selective policies aiming to encourage ‘qualified’ immigration increase the presence of human capital in the city. Due to the importance of knowledge-based industries, this is indispensable for the city’s economy. The highest growth sectors and key employment sectors are the financial services sector, the biotechnology cluster, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, and the technology cluster (cf. Toronto 2018b: 29). “The GTA is one of the largest regional economies in North America, characterized by concentrated and fast-growing finance-related industries and highly specialized knowledge-based jobs.” (Toronto 2018b: 28)

Among the recent transformations that indicate that Toronto has become a global city are the decline of the goods-producing sector and the growth of employment in the service sector. From

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35 The Greater Toronto Area consists of the City of Toronto, the Regional Municipality of Halton, the Regional Municipality of Peel, the Regional Municipality of York, and the Regional Municipality of Durham.
2008 to 2016, more than 35,700 jobs in the manufacturing sector have disappeared (cf. Toronto 2017a: 3). Economic restructuring, following trade liberalization after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), changed the organization of work and also entailed a socio-spatial reorganization of the city. The increase of jobs created in high-skilled and creative occupations, in education and research coincides with a decline of employment in manufacturing-based businesses. With 44 percent of the workforce of the GTA working in Toronto, the city constitutes the economic heart of the metropolitan area and the number of residents in the centre of Toronto is growing steadily. This phenomenon is illustrated by the real estate boom as shown by the mushrooming of condominiums in downtown and beyond (cf. Joy/Vogel 2015: 38f.).

As Brenner and Keil emphasize in the introduction to The Global Cities Reader (2005), processes of globalizing and localizing – the way globalization dynamics take form in the local – go hand in hand. In Toronto, the literal ‘rise’ of the financial centre illustrated by highrises that symbolize economic power is the other side of the coin of sprawling residential areas that are shaped and reshaped by its diverse inhabitants who contribute to the ‘upgrading’ or ‘downgrading’ of the neighbourhoods. While in the core of the city globalization processes are expressed in the verticality of its towers, “the materialization of these processes in people’s everyday lives is expressed in the horizontality of the sprawling urban region, an extraordinarily diverse social, cultural and political space” (Brenner/Keil 2006: 4) There is an increasing demand for residential condominiums in vicinity of the main business district, because many international high-income employees prefer to live in the urban centre than in the (former) suburbs. This is partly due to public transit infrastructure problems that make commuting less desirable.

5.1.2. Metropolitanization

In the After-World War II era, the province of Ontario enjoyed considerable economic stability and growth. This economic dynamism fueled by the importance of the manufacturing sector went hand in hand with the expansion of the middle classes; a trend reinforced by Keynesian policies and social protection provided by the state. From the early 1980s onwards, the province has experienced a phase of economic restructuring induced by increased exposure to globalization. This restructuring implied the implementation of neoliberal policies by the provincial and federal governments. In particular, the economic landscape of Ontario was transformed by the conclusion of free trade agreements and the resulting intensification of
international commercial contacts, especially with the United States (cf. Evans/Smith 2015: 162f.).

In this context, Toronto was subject to political restructuring which transformed the links and exchanges between citizens and institutions in the elaboration of measures concerning urban development. In 1997, the amalgamation of the City of Toronto, today referred to as Old Toronto, with East York, Scarborough, North York, York, and Etobicoke was decided by the provincial government despite protests brought forward by citizens, especially in the centre (cf. Boudreau et al. 2007: 33). This brought about the megacity Toronto in 1998 (see appendix: Illustration 1). The conservative government who defended a neoliberal ideology highlighted the necessity to merge the six municipalities in order to increase efficiency and to lower expenses. The amalgamation entailed the creation of new institutions and the strengthening of cooperation regarding transport and taxes between the former municipalities. As Boudreau et al. Put it, “[m]etropolitanization also means an internal reconstitution of the political sphere and its articulation with civil society” (Boudreau et al. 2007: 33f.). After the amalgamation, local responsibilities and activities have diversified, especially concerning the more active role of the municipality when it comes to economic development. The metropolitanization can also be seen as a possibility to gain more power vis-à-vis the province and to strengthen the relations between the federal state and the municipality (cf. Boudreau et al. 2007: 40).

Political restructuration, among other things the amalgamation in 1997, had considerable effects on the organization of local and provincial services and the province has transferred the costs for certain social and material infrastructures to the city. The amalgamation of Toronto was part of a larger political and economic strategy: “Amalgamation was a response to a number of political and ideological issues, including a desire to suburbanize Toronto politics, reduce the scope of government in social service provision, and to make the city government more responsive to business influence.” (Joy/Vogel 2015: 40) For more than twenty years, the federal level as well as the provincial and urban levels of government have leaned towards neoliberalism which favours privatization, reduction of government interventions, and new techniques and approaches to public management (cf. Joy/Vogel 2015: 35f.).

Boudreau et al. point out that the new challenges and the political responses proposed raise the question of how cooperation between various urban actors should be reconfigured: “In this state of institutional and political flux, the main challenge of public policy-making is to stabilize a place for exchanges between institutions and citizens.” (Boudreau et al. 2007: 34) In the ‘competitive city’ Toronto, what is the place granted to citizens in decision-making processes?
According to Boudreau et al., Toronto “has an actively neoliberalized governance apparatus, which pushes into the urban region and aggressively involves state, business, and civil society actors in building a new regional consensus around growth” (2007: 50). In the following, I will present the current political framework of the city with its several levels of government.

5.1.3. **Current political framework**

The City of Toronto, which exists in its current form since the amalgamation in the 1990s, is governed by a mayor and a municipal council whose members are elected for four years. The Municipal Council has delegated several responsibilities and activities to commissions and municipal agencies. Recently, the provincial government under Doug Ford has reduced the size of the council. The new law which modifies the City of Toronto Act of 2006 reduces the number of wards and thus city councillors from 47 to 25. This measure was strongly criticized for being anti-democratic.

With four other municipalities, Toronto is part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in the heart of the highly urbanized region referred to as Greater Golden Horseshoe. In the course of the last decades, the city region has become increasingly important in the urban planning strategies of the provincial government. The GTA has become a strong entity in environmental politics, questions regarding economic growth, and the governance of public transport. Similar to the development of European cities, the centre of the metropolitan area continues to function as urban ‘heart.’ However, political actors on the provincial and federal levels mainly focus on issues that concern the city region as a whole. In the 2000s, Ontario has introduced several laws and programmes to inscribe the City of Toronto in a larger framework, the Greater Golden Horseshoe (cf. Bourdeau et al. 2007: 39). The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* aims to promote high-density planning and to ameliorate the public transport system of the Golden Horseshoe. In addition, the plan defines several urban growth centres among which downtown Toronto is the largest. Urban growth centres are defined as high-density employment centres and focal areas for investment as well as population and employment growth (cf. Ontario 2020). The plan does not replace municipal plans but all decisions taken on the municipal level have to be compatible with provincial plans (cf. Boudreau et al. 2007: 38f.). Unlike other large Canadian cities such as Montreal, Toronto does not have a system of formal institutions on the metropolitan scale. This vacuum is one of the reasons why civil society activities increase on the metropolitan level: “Toronto’s absence of formal metropolitan
institutions has generated a significant rescaling of civil society activity filling up the void at the city-regional scale.” (Boudreau et al. 2007: 41)

Despite the fact that Toronto has become a fast-growing global city, the governance system is still largely based on the national framework and is only slowly adapting to the new challenges of the international urban system. Boudreau et al. argue that the restructuring of urban governance is closely linked to more general transformations on the federal level and raise the following question: “[H]ow do global cities fit into a system of metropolitan governance, which was ostensibly structured to fit the consecutive periods of colonial, semi-peripheral, national, and continental histories of the country over the past 150 years?” (Boudreau et al. 2007: 36)

Property taxes constitute the main source of income for Canadian cities that are not capable of self-financing and depend on funding by the provincial government. As ‘creatures of the province,’ Canadian cities do not have the authorization to work with a budgetary deficit to implement large scale infrastructure projects. The federal state only intervenes to finance selected projects and programs in certain cities without resorting to the intermediate level of the province. The Canadian Global Cities Council (CGCC) draws attention to the two structural shortcomings that result in the following unstable situation: “[I]ncreased expectations of local government have not been matched by growth in tax authority, transfers or legal authority for those governments to compensate.” (CGCC 2018: 8) Firstly, in order to reduce the public deficit, the federal government has decreased transfer payments to the provinces in the course of the 1990s. The latter have in turn transferred responsibilities to the local governments (see also Quesnel 2000: 315; Lehrer/Winkler 2006: 146). Secondly, the municipalities are confronted with increased financial burdens due to the model according to which the three levels of government – federal, provincial and local – all finance a third of major projects (cf. CGCC 2018: 8).

The report published in February 2018 by the CGCC marks a considerable change in the approach of federal politics. The CGCC is a coalition of presidents and CEOs of chambers of commerce and boards of trade of the eight biggest urban regions in Canada. These cities – Brampton, Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg – not only represent 50 percent of the GDP but also accommodate half of the Canadian population (cf. CGCC 2018: 32).

The last report highlights the need for a national urban strategy to strengthen and make more efficient federal support. The elaboration of a coherent long-term strategy for every large Canadian city, adapted to the social and economic infrastructure needs and embedded in larger
national objectives, could help alleviate current challenges (cf. CGCC 2018). In that respect, the CGCC recommends giving greater autonomy and flexibility to Canadian cities by taking into account their inscription in a framework that goes beyond the nation-state.

The report detects several urgent needs for intervention. According to the council, Toronto and other large Canadian cities do not have sufficient financial margin to invest in infrastructures and their maintenance. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), the City agency which provides public transport services, has difficulty catching up with shortcomings concerning the repair of ageing infrastructures despite an increase in investments and the allocation of a federal fund for maintenance. The limits of local governments concerning the sources of income constitute a big challenge. In general, the provinces do not allow cities to introduce new taxes to diversify their income sources and to gain greater budgetary stability. In 2008, however, the province of Ontario has taken steps to ameliorate the financial situation of the municipality. The City of Toronto has been authorized to introduce a Municipal Land Transfer Tax which is considered as a highly successful measure (cf. CGCC 2018: 11).

The planning strategies for Toronto on the national, provincial, metropolitan and municipal level converge on an essential point which hints at the status of the city in the economic network of big cities in Canada and beyond: The discourse focuses on commerce, economic growth and maintaining or increasing competitiveness. After amalgamation, the city was formed in a continuous effort to increase competitiveness. To describe this consensus in government strategies, the use of the term ‘competitive city’ seems justified:

In Toronto, competitive city governance must be seen as a new form of managing and regulating the longer process of restructuring by which the Toronto region was transformed from the core city of the Canadian political economy into a second-tier global city for transnational finance capital and the most diverse destination point for non-European immigration in North America. (Kipfer/Keil 2002: 230)

Urban decision makers respond to this supposed ‘imperative’ and ‘translate’ historically grown global dynamics into municipal policies that bring about noticeable changes in the city. After describing the rise of Toronto to an influential economic and financial centre and giving a brief overview of the neoliberalized urban governance context, I now turn to the question of how global city dynamics in Toronto affect the social and economic structure of the city.

5.1.4. Social and economic structure

At the beginning of the 1990s, Toronto was considered as a city capable of addressing the numerous challenges that rapid demographic growth and the transformations of a globalizing
economy bring about. Two decades after amalgamation, Joy and Vogel consider that this has changed dramatically. They draw attention to the increased polarization in a city which, as of now, is considered as “in crisis” (Joy/Vogel 2015: 35). They base their criticism above all on “a dysfunctional urban politics, crumbling infrastructure, traffic gridlock and inadequate investment in transit, growing income disparities, and a lack of affordable housing” (Joy/Vogel 2015: 35). The authors identify three main causes for this difficult situation which has become problematic due to the city’s incapacity to tackle the instability in a long-term perspective. Besides political restructuring and neoliberalization, the authors focus on the rise of Toronto to global city status and posit that this transformation entailed a widening gap between socio-economic groups in the city: “Economic restructuring has reduced manufacturing and linked the city’s urban fortunes more and more to the world economy, with significant spatial consequences and greater inequality among residents.” (Joy/Vogel 2015: 35) In that respect, the authors concur with the argument made by S. Sassen, who states that the global city becomes a site where those who profit from economic globalization and those who are indispensable for globalization but are at the bottom of the income scale meet.

These developments are inscribed in a set of dynamics, referred to as polarization, that is characteristic for global cities. Despite the fact that Toronto differs from other important large Canadian cities by its economic dynamism, poverty rates have increased significantly during the last years (cf. Boudreau et al. 2007: 40). According to recent analyses based on data produced by Statistics Canada, income inequality among residents of Toronto is increasing: “Wages paid to city residents are less equal than for other Canadians, and they became even less equal between 2008 and 2016.” (Toronto 2017a: 4) Overall, the unemployment rate has decreased in comparison with previous years but certain sectors and social groups are more affected than others. New immigrants are harder hit by unemployment than city residents born in Canada or already established immigrants (cf. Toronto 2017a: 6). According to the 2016 census, 47 percent of households in Toronto spend 30 percent of their income or more on housing and are thus considered as affected by the housing crisis (cf. Toronto 2017b: 1). The high housing prices affect first and foremost disadvantaged groups such as immigrants, low-skilled workers, and women. A study published in 2008 concludes that in the Canadian metropolises Toronto and Vancouver, there is a positive correlation between the share of immigrant households and poverty, indicating a spatial concentration of immigrant poverty (cf. Smith/Ley 2008).
In a report\(^\text{36}\) that traces income polarization in Toronto over a period of 35 years, David Hulchanski observes the following: “The middle-income area of the city shrank dramatically between 1970 and 2005, while the high income area increased slightly and the low-income area increased substantially.” (Hulchanski 2010: 1) In the 70s, the effects of middle-class suburbanization were clearly visible: While what is now called Old Toronto, the inner city, was mostly inhabited by low-income residents, areas that are now in the middle of the City of Toronto were home to residents with high individual income and the east and west – the majority of neighbourhoods – was home to middle-income residents (see appendix: Illustration 2). In 2005, the distribution is much more complex with residents of all income classes in the inner city, less middle-income neighbourhoods, and a concentration of low-income residents in the northwestern and northeastern parts (see appendix: Illustration 3). Increasing income inequality goes hand in hand with a socio-spatial reorganization of the city due to the fact that low-income households are being forced to leave the city centre with a high standard of public infrastructure and employment opportunities. Several central neighbourhoods have – or are in the process of becoming – gentrified. Whereas in 1970, most of the city’s neighbourhoods were home to residents with average incomes (66%), in 2005 only 29% of the census tracts were middle-income neighbourhoods (cf. Hulchanski 2010: 19).\(^\text{37}\) This comparatively sudden and dramatic change has led to the emergence of three separate ‘cities.’ The three different groups of neighbourhoods that Hulchanski identifies based on the socio-economic status of the residents can be described as follows: In City #1 individual incomes increased by 20%, in City #2 incomes fell or increased by less than 20% and in City #3 they decreased by 20%\(^\text{38}\) (cf. 36 The 2010 report is an update of the research bulletin *The Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization among Toronto’s Neighbourhoods, 1970 – 2000* which was published in 2007 by the Cities Centre (former Centre for Urban and Community Studies). It uses census data from the 2006 census. 37 In the interview, I asked Prof. David Hulchanski how the transformation of neighbourhoods from middle-income to low-income neighbourhoods can be explained. Does the composition of residents change due to people moving to or leaving the neighbourhood? Or does the financial situation of long-term residents change due to labour-market dynamics? David Hulchanski: “The more money you have the more choice of neighbourhoods you have. So, what this is saying is that people with choice, with more choice, meaning they have more money, are not choosing the red areas on the map. So the areas that switched from yellow to red, it could be the same people there but they lost their factory job, the factory moved away, they were getting 30 dollars an hour and now they are getting 15 dollars an hour in the service sector. So there is a mixture of things going on; from the exact same people still living there, like the homeowners, but they don’t have the same income any longer and that due to retirement, due to losing a good paying job, and then if you want to buy into an area, you need a lot of money, if you have choice, you chose to be near the subway, for example! And you chose not to go to other places.” (Quote corrected linguistically) 38 David Hulchanski draws attention to the fact that Toronto is not only increasingly segregated by income, but also by race. It can be concluded that race intersects with income: “Social mobility isn’t what it used to be, we are now in the City of Toronto half white and half racialized, but then when you look at the city map, you see fifty percent of the city is poor and most racialized people live in poor areas.”
Hulchanski 2010: 6; see appendix: Illustration 4). In a projection of the “Three Cities” in Toronto to the year 2025, the report estimates that “the ‘Three Cities’ model is approaching a ‘Two Cities’ model, in which neighbourhoods are sharply divided between those in which average individual incomes have increased dramatically over the 1970 to 2025 period and neighbourhoods where the opposite has occurred” (Hulchanski 2010: 27). This observation has many analogies with the dual city concept by John H. Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells.

An update of the trends in the “Three Cities” report has been published based on data from the 2016 census. The report with the title The Opportunity Equation in the Greater Toronto Area: An update on neighbourhood income inequality and polarization39 (Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017) partly confirms the hypotheses presented in the earlier report.40 The gap between the rich and poor has widened, however, the 2015 census data shows that middle-income census tracts have not completely disappeared, as predicted in the ‘Two Cities’ model and that the number of neighbourhoods that are ‘trending down’ has not increased. Nevertheless, in comparison with other metropolitan areas in Canada, Toronto is the most unequal provincial capital (see appendix: Illustration 5): More middle-income areas have disappeared since 2005 and “a majority of all neighbourhoods in the GTA are now segregated into high- and low-income” (Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017: 5). Income polarization in Toronto is higher than in other municipalities of the GTA, however, the dynamic is spreading to municipalities outside Toronto, which previously used to have no low-income areas, as well.

The reports show that income inequalities and polarization are expressed geographically, which is captured by the terms ‘socio-spatial inequalities’ and ‘socio-spatial polarization.’ This means that neighbourhoods not only change because some of its residents leave the area and others move there, but also because the changes become inscribed in the neighbourhood, its design and management. “Growing socio-spatial income inequality and polarization are problematic

39 The report is a collaboration of United Way Toronto and York Region, a non-governmental supporter of social services, and The Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership (NCRP) at the University of Toronto. In the report, income inequality is described as “a situation in which income is distributed unevenly in a region or a country” (Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017: 38). Income polarization is defined as “a process in which income concentrates into two separate groups – the rich and the poor – creating a hollowed-out middle” (Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017: 38).
40 David Hulchanski explained in the interview that poor areas in Toronto are not becoming more numerous, middle-income areas are “hanging in” and the number of high-income areas increases. “So the city is becoming more expensive, even the poor areas.” As a result, low-income people ‘choose’ to live in the still relatively affordable inner suburbs, such as Scarborough and Northern Etobicoke, or in other areas of the GTA, such as Peel or York.
Together with changes in labour market dynamics, discrimination, and public policy, the housing market is often regarded as an important cause of growing urban inequalities. It is argued that polarization could be mitigated or even reversed if the City invested more in affordable housing. In the following, I will present the current housing situation in Toronto and link it to gentrification processes.

5.1.5. Housing crisis and gentrification in Toronto

One of the most debated issues in Toronto is the so-called ‘housing crisis,’ often referred to as the ‘affordable housing problem.’ The situation is characterized by rising housing prices, low vacancy rates, homelessness, and overcrowded shelter systems. The Canadian Rental Housing Index (RHI), which includes various data for renter households, provides interesting information: The average share of the income spent to pay rent and utilities amounts to 25%; 47% of households in Toronto spend over 30% of their income on rent and utilities, and 19% of renter households live in overcrowded conditions (Canadian Rental Housing Index 2019). The Toronto Housing Market Analysis, which is like the RHI based on data from the 2016 Census, comes to the conclusion that almost 90% of households with an income of $30,000 or lower do not have access to affordable housing, meaning that they spend more than 30% of their income for housing on the private rental market (cf. Toronto 2019a: 36). Units are overcrowded, it has become more difficult for middle-income households to have access to the ownership housing market, the waiting times for social housing are increasing and the number of households on the waitlist is higher than the number of existing units. Low-income households and other vulnerable population groups, such as lone-parent households, Indigenous people, and immigrants, are particularly affected by rising housing costs. Only a small percentage of city residents have access to subsidized housing: “Canada stands out as one of the few Western nations that rely almost completely on the market mechanism to supply, allocate, and maintain its housing stock.” (Hulchanski 2005: 1) The lack of affordable housing is linked to the “withdrawal of both the state and the private sector from rental housing production” (August/Walks 2018: 126), and to measures introduced by the Ontarian Government to deregulate the rental market. Recently, the City of Toronto has urged the Ontarian government to reinstall rent control to protect tenants from rent increases. The motion was a response to provincial reforms which exempted new rental units from rent control (cf.
Toronto City Clerc 2019). This illustrates the importance of the province when it comes to tackling issues linked to global city dynamics since the City of Toronto itself cannot implement rent control.

Most inner-city neighbourhoods in Toronto have been subject to gentrification. Especially since the end of the financial crisis, ‘financialized landlords’ – real estate investment trusts, financial asset management firms, private equity funds – have increasingly become key actors, indicating the financialization of rental housing. Several empirical studies draw attention to the correlation between financialization, in particular the rise of private equity investment, and decreasing affordability (see f. ex. Fields 2016; Fields/Uffer 2016; Fehlberg/Mießner 2015). A recent study by August and Walks (2018) provides a detailed overview of gentrification and financialization dynamics in Toronto. Financialisation can be defined as “the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies, firms (including financial institutions), states and house-holds” (Aalbers 2019: 3).

This shift has had significant consequences for tenants: building-wide renovations and new asset management strategies lead to rent increases and displacement. The latest stage of gentrification in Toronto affects tenants in low-rent apartment buildings which can be described as “a final frontier for gentrification”; as “last bastions of affordability” (August/Walks 2018: 124). The interest in this type of ‘upgrading,’ which consists in replacing low-income tenants with tenants who are able to pay higher rents, was “driven by the availability of cheap financing, strong local demand for rental housing, and rent control deregulation in the 1990s enabling ‘vacancy decontrol’, in which landlords can dramatically increase rents upon unit turnover” (August/Walks 2018: 125).

However, despite the high demand, some areas do not gentrify, on the contrary, some formerly middle-income neighbourhoods have become low-income neighbourhoods which goes hand in hand with the loss of opportunities for new generations. Especially the older suburbs are trending down and the dynamic D. Hulchanski described is spreading to other areas of the GTA (cf. Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017). Unappealing housing stock is one of the factors inhibiting gentrification in more central neighbourhoods of which some continue to be fairly mixed areas (cf. Walks/August 2008).
“Why Toronto?”, one might ask. As R. Florida41 would say, Toronto has the three T’s – talent, technology, and tolerance – or, as S. Sassen would put it, Toronto is part of the global grid, rapidly leaving behind other Canadian cities. Provincial rent regulations have been relaxed by the Ford government and international investors become part of the ‘growth machine.’ This raises the question of how the city deals with the issue. Building on the first housing plan (2010-2020), the city has approved the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan which aims to remedy the shortage of affordable housing by creating “40,000 affordable rental and supportive homes through a public/private/non-profit land banking strategy” (Toronto 2019b: 5), by enhancing tenant protection and other measures.

5.2. The Parkdale Neighbourhood

As Sarah Pink – an anthropologist whose methodological reflections I will introduce later – argues, place is “something that is not fixed or enclosed, that is constituted as much through the flows that link it to other locations, persons and things, as it is through what goes on ‘inside’ it” (2015: 33). In the following, I will introduce the neighbourhood by situating its history and its inhabitants in the Torontonian context and by pointing at national and international transformations and their impact on life in Parkdale. Parkdale is an inner-city neighbourhood situated west of downtown between Roncesvalles Avenue in the west, the CP rail line in the north, and Dufferin Street in the east. The neighbourhood is bounded on the south by the Gardiner, a municipal expressway, and Lake Ontario (see appendix: Illustration 6). Parkdale used to be part of Ward 14; Parkdale-Highpark. In 2018, the number of wards was reduced, and Parkdale is now part of the much larger Ward 4 with the same name. The neighbourhood can be subdivided into South Parkdale – the area south of Queen Street, the main commercial street in the neighbourhood – and North Parkdale – the area north of Queen Street. According to the 2016 census, South Parkdale has 21,850 inhabitants, 43.2% of which are immigrants; 8.2% recent immigrants. The median household income is $41,761 (compared to $65,829 in Toronto). Following the Market Basket Measure (MBM) of low income, 33.9% of South

41 Richard Florida discusses the ‘three T’s’ of economic development in his ambivalent book The Rise of the Creative Class: “The key to understanding the new economic geography of creativity and its positive effects on economic outcomes is what I call the 3T’s of economic development: technology, talent, and tolerance. Each is a necessary but by itself insufficient condition for prosperity; for real innovation and sustained economic growth a place must offer all three.” (Florida 2012: 228) He uses this ‘Creativity Index’ to analyze and compare metropolitan areas in the US.
Parkdale residents live below the threshold of poverty (compared to 21.9% in Toronto) (cf. Toronto 2018c). In 2005, the average individual income relative to the Toronto average was low to very low (cf. Hulchanski 2010: 5). In 2015, South Parkdale residents mostly had low incomes, while the more central districts right next to Parkdale were high-income areas. The neighbourhood Liberty Village, for example, a neighbourhood east of Dufferin Street that used to have many factories, is now a gentrified area with an increasing density of condominiums. The development projects seem to move closer to Parkdale; a phenomenon which is referred to as ‘condo creep.’

The neighbourhood in Toronto’s west end has an interesting history that becomes evident in its material appearance – architectural styles, types of buildings, signs, and colours – but also in the composition of its residents. The neighbourhood is well known for the diverse ethnic origins of its inhabitants, especially its Tibetan community. Due to the above-average share of rental housing, Parkdale constitutes a transient neighbourhood for newly arrived immigrants (cf. Epstein 2018; Lehrer 2009; see also Horgan 2018). According to the Neighbourhood Guide, “Parkdale’s eclectic mix of real estate options ranges from grand Victorian mansions to high-rise low rent apartment buildings. This plethora of housing options has resulted in Parkdale having one of the most diverse demographics of any Toronto neighbourhood.”

This has not always been like that. Parkdale used to be home to a mostly elite and upper-middle-class population due to its location close to the lake and – at that time – outside the bustling city. The mansions in Victorian and Edwardian style and the large tree-lined streets still bear witness to that time. The big houses were later, during its phase of decay, repurposed into rooming houses; multiple single-room dwellings. In the late nineteenth century, Parkdale

42 There are different opinions on whether the remaining low-income neighbourhoods or census tracts in the inner city will disappear. According to David Hulchanski, this largely depends on the existence of public housing and the characteristics of the rental and ownership housing stock in the area: “Different ethnic groups are settling [in Parkdale], so that wont change because of the public housing and because of some of the crappy existing rental housing and crappy ownership housing that is there that gentrifiers don’t want, so it’s just a more nicely mixed area, frankly, and it just isn’t going down in income and socio-economic status and opportunities unlike, what we call, the inner suburbs, Scarborough and Northern Etobicoke. Those areas, they have nothing going for them.” (Quote corrected linguistically) While he acknowledges that Parkdale residents “are under a lot of pressure from new kinds of investors buying up rental buildings,” he draws attention to the fact that Parkdale is not ‘trending down’ like the ‘old’ suburbs, that are increasingly disinvested areas: “See, we have a name for it, we call it gentrification and most people agree on the definition, but we don’t have a name for the other kinds of change, areas that were middle-income are now low-income. They are not slums, but they are low-income and there is a loss of opportunities, because life chances, life opportunities come not only from community services and from the school and stuff, but also from the resources of the household!” (Quote corrected linguistically)
experienced rapid population growth and became one of the city’s first commuter suburbs (cf. Slater 2004: 307).

In the 1960s, the area changed dramatically due to the construction of the Gardiner Expressway, an elevated municipal expressway that runs close to the shore of Lake Ontario. As a result, parts of South Parkdale were cleared, and the neighbourhood was cut off from the lake. For those displaced by the construction project, high-rise apartment buildings were built in the neighbourhood, but most elite and middle-class residents preferred to move to other neighbourhoods or the suburbs. In addition to the construction of the Gardiner Expressway, the vicinity to the Queen Street Centre for Addiction and Mental Health contributed to Parkdale’s transformation from a desirable residential neighbourhood to a disinvested area. “Discharged patients suffered from a shortage of affordable housing options, and many ended up in substandard rooming houses and bachelorettes, of which South Parkdale has a disproportionate share in Toronto.” (Slater 2004: 303) In the 1970s and 1980s, Parkdale became a ‘problem’; a ‘dangerous area’ due to its higher share of marginalized and stigmatized residents and “[a] powerful discourse of decline and decay emerged that cloaked South Parkdale’s disadvantaged population in the most negative way imaginable” (Slater 2004: 310). The presence of people with a mental health diagnosis, drug users, sex workers, and other stigmatized groups on the streets transformed the former ‘Flowery Suburb’ into an undesirable neighbourhood. As Slater points out, in this context, gentrification would seem rather unlikely (cf. Slater 2004: 310). For a long time, the neighbourhood stayed one of the last areas in the inner-city were rent was affordable which prompted many recent immigrants to settle in Parkdale, reviving Parkdale by opening restaurants and grocery stores.

Nevertheless, the neighbourhood “has experienced some slow yet continuing middle-class resettlement since the mid-1980s, quickening in pace (though not yet rampant) since the mid-1990s” (Slater 2004: 310). In the qualitative study, Slater investigates gentrification in South Parkdale, situated between the Gardiner Expressway, Queen Street, and Atlantic Avenue. The ‘gentrifiers’ argued that the neighbourhood’s attractiveness lies, among other things, in its proximity to downtown and the large but affordable Victorian houses. Another factor was the presence of artists who ‘primed’ the neighbourhood for the real estate industry (cf. Slater 2004: 312). Slater describes gentrification in South Parkdale as a “municipally managed” form of gentrification, echoing the call of urban political economy theorists to take into account the role of policymakers and other members of the ‘growth coalition’:

The neighbourhood’s sporadic gentrification since the mid-1980s has intensified in recent years, as the City of Toronto is regularising and licensing the
neighbourhood’s low-income housing – a major concern for tenants who fear that landlords will use recent provincial legislation on tenancy to attract wealthier residents into their improved buildings. (Slater 2004: 303)

To justify the gentrification of the neighbourhood Parkdale through private developers and urban planning decisions, “historical narratives of past harmony, present decline, and future regeneration” (Whitzman/Slater 2006: 673) were created. Discriminatory housing policies were based on the construction of labels placed on the neighbourhood which did not adequately represent the actual social conditions in Parkdale. According to the authors, redevelopment and revitalization efforts “use mythic narratives to justify a policy-led transformation of a (mythic) ghetto back into a (mythic) village of the past” (Whitzman/Slater 2006: 693).

As a more recent ethnographic study (Epstein 2018) shows, the neighbourhood Parkdale has – at least in certain areas – been subject to gentrification while at the same time remaining an immigrant-reception area housing a low-income community. G. Epstein describes how the change in narratives was accompanied by exclusionary architecture and policing in an effort to ‘remove’ “intolerable bodies” (Epstein 2018: 723) from public space in the neighbourhood (cf. Epstein 2018: 716ff.). This is not only true for ‘deviant groups,’ such as drug dealers and sex workers, but also for the poor: There are less and less spaces for the poor in the neighbourhood, benches on the main street have been removed and affordable shops are increasingly under pressure (cf. Epstein 2018: 722ff.). Although Parkdale has been considered more ‘resilient’ than other neighbourhoods, international real estate investment firms have moved in and commercial gentrification has changed Queen Street significantly. Declining high-density residential buildings are being renovated – and thus become more expensive – and local, mostly immigrant-owned mom-and-pop stores are being replaced by chain stores, restaurants, and coffee shops of which some still resemble the old shops but attract different customers.

Over the last years, neighbourhood organizations, agencies and initiatives have put effort into producing community-based research on Parkdale to map and understand current changes and to influence policy decisions that impact the future of the neighbourhood. The Parkdale Community Planning Study, published in 2016 by representatives of various Parkdale organizations, is a stark example of these efforts: “The project combines community action

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43 G. Epstein, activist and researcher in Parkdale, draws attention to the centrality of race and gender in studying persisting inequalities and displacement despite anti-gentrification efforts: “[I]n neglecting to center race and gender in our anti-gentrification work, myself and other white middle-class activists had perhaps always inadvertently reinscribed those structures of domination we hoped to oppose.” (Epstein 2018: 709)
research, stakeholder engagement, and participatory planning to develop future visions of Parkdale, and community strategies to realize them.” (PCED 2016: 4) Those involved in the study want to have a say in the future of the neighbourhood and its residents and are also convinced that urban development processes can be influenced: “We know that change happens, but we also know that how change happens is not inevitable.” (PCED 2016: 5)

5.3. Methods

5.3.1. Overall approach

To explore how residents respond to increasing polarization, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the neighbourhood Parkdale with ‘walking interviews’ as a key data-gathering tool. I have chosen a qualitative approach because, as I have argued in the theoretical part, a quantitative approach based on an analysis of the socio-economic status of actors that are involved in urban resistance cannot in itself answer the question of how resistance emerges. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to be attentive to the subjective meaning attached to the practices of research participants and to the way the latter appropriate their neighbourhood and city. The informal resistance of city dwellers in connection with the way they interpret and make sense of the recent transformations of the city thus constitutes the sphere of analysis of the present study. Ethnographic field notes were taken in July and August 2019 and in January and February 2020. The interviews – a mix of ‘sedentary’ and ‘walking’ interviews – were conducted in January and February 2020.

Ethnography can be described as a form of “iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study)” (O’Reilly 2005: 3). Ethnography is thus a very flexible approach that can be adapted to the context during the field stay. Especially the first phase of my field stay was centred on observation and informal conversations with people I met in Parkdale. Small talk plays an important, but undertheorized role in participant observation. Informal conversations can be considered an important source of information that is difficult to access (see Driessen/Janssen 2013). It can even be argued that in a spontaneous in situ conversations certain distortions present in the interview situation – especially the tendency to give answers interpreted as desired and to suppress emotions – are less pronounced. In addition to participant observation, I conducted ‘sedentary’ and ‘walking’ interviews. As interview partners, I chose people who either live in Parkdale or who focus on issues that are important for my understanding of the neighbourhood in their work or activism.
Due to the fact that the walking interview, which places the interview situation in the physical and social environment of the individual, is situated between interview and participant observation, the researcher co-produces the material but approaches to a certain extent less artificial types of data (cf. Kusenbach 2016). This data-gathering method, which I will present in a more detailed manner below, makes it possible to take into account the inscription of resistance in urban space and is thus susceptible to provide congruent answers to the questions asked. In addition to my field notes and interviews, other material emerged during my ethnographic stay; mainly artistic works by residents of the neighbourhood who also became interview partners, such as, among other things, a short-film project, a theatre play, and a song.

In my preliminary research design, I focused mainly on walking interviews and treated ethnographic field notes as preparation or secondary material. However, I quickly realized that walking through the neighbourhood and observing people in different settings and situations was not only a precondition for conducting walking interviews but also fruitful in terms of my own sensorial experiences. This made me reflect on the question of how ethnographic knowledge is produced and on the role of the researcher in this process:

Ethnography involves spending time with the people being studied which implies that the researcher comes to learn about their understandings not only through observing what they say and do, but also through the researcher's own (sensorial) experiences. Doing research, in this perspective, is thus also a corporeal process. (Pink 2015: 12)

At first glance, the chosen qualitative method that focuses on micro-level resistance practices and aspects of everyday life seems to be inconsistent with the macro-sociological framework concerning the global city. However, I argue that it is necessary to embed everyday experiences of local urban changes and the way local actors respond to, adapt to, or resist them in broader global dynamics. Conversely, the presented thoughts on the role of cities in the economic and political global order and the resulting transformations of the urban would profit from a micro-sociological approach to better understand the way these changes are lived by urban dwellers and trigger manifold responses. The importance of the smaller scale which tends to be obliviated in the global city debate should not be underestimated, but focusing solely on the local bears the danger of falling into the “local trap” – “the tendency to assume that the local scale is preferable to other scales” (Purcell 2006: 1921). As J. Acker, K. Barry, J. Esseveld put it with regard to feminist research, it is necessary to “locate individual experience in society and history, embedded within a set of social relations which produce both the possibilities and limitations of that experience” (1983: 425). The approach has parallels to M. Burawoy’s
reflexive model of science which explores “broad historical patterns and macrostructures without relinquishing either ethnography or science” (1998: 6).

5.3.2. (Multisensory) Ethnography

While ethnography is a common approach in urban sociology, it is not widely used in social movement research as a method even though many insights in this field build to some extent on participant observation (cf. Balsiger/Lambelet 2014: 144). Like many qualitative methods, participant observation is something we do every day, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the method we use in our daily lives and the scientific method. Ethnographers should therefore conduct “methodologically controlled participation and observation,” or, in other words, participate and observe “with reflexivity” (Balsiger/Lambelet 2014: 146). In this way, the advantages of this method come into play and the field slowly discloses its characteristics, tensions, and contradictions. Participant observation gives room for acknowledging the researcher’s subjectivity in the research process as a contribution to knowledge gain. The active participation of ethnographers and the reflection of sensorial experiences, which are not simply seen as distortion but as enrichment for the analysis, has been discussed and endorsed by the design anthropologist Sarah Pink in Doing Sensory Ethnography (2015). The interest in reflexive approaches and the broader definition of what can be counted as a data-gathering method is closely linked to the emergence of multi-sensory methods, which see the researcher’s self as a sensually experiencing ‘means’ to gain knowledge about the social world.

In recent years, multisensory methods have received much attention in sociological and ethnographic enquiries. Multisensory methods put the “multisensoriality of methodological process” in the centre of attention, based on an understanding of senses as interconnected and inseparable (Pink 2012: 3). Doing ethnography and walking interviews implies the confrontation with a broader array of sensual experiences, especially visual, auditory and also olfactory impressions. Writing field notes thus constitutes a challenge, since sensory data has to be transformed into textual representations. What changes when you change the space of research; when you leave the interview room and you walk the paths of those who live in the neighbourhood, who experience it in their everyday lives and who are the only ones to notice changes in the soundscape, in the smells and colours of the neighbourhood?

In Situating Everyday Life, Sarah Pink links the concepts of place and practice which she considers to be important for analyzing “how processes of renewal and change are lived,
experienced and represented” (2012: 1). As Pink’s reflections on the work of urban visual ethnographers show, (the making of) place is important on several levels of research:

[F]irst we investigate how the participants in our research make place themselves; second we reflect on how we collaboratively make place with research participants through research practice; third we consider how in representing our research we reconstitute place; and finally we anticipate how audiences/readers of our work in turn create place as they follow and add to its narratives. (Pink 2008a: 2)

Researching practices presents certain difficulties since “[t]hey do not stand still in time and are subject to constant innovation and revision as they are performed” (Pink 2012: 41). Practices are sometimes not immediately visible or verbalized, “they are concerned with things people just do – multisensory embodied practices – rather than things they normally discuss verbally in any explicit or reflexive way” (Pink 2012: 40). These practices should not be studied as isolated actions but “as part of wider environments and activities” (Pink 2012: 28f.). Pink calls for a theory of place that “allows us to situate the practices of everyday life in such a way that recognizes their interwovenness with and contingency on other processes, materialities and representations” (Pink 2012: 29).

In my ethnographic fieldwork, I focused not only on my encounters with people and the physical environment but also with local literature, images, (online) texts and “art forms that form part of the cultural knowledge that is inextricable from everyday practice and local ideologies” (Pink 2015: 55). Doing Sensory Ethnography was an important inspiration for my research because it provides a way to account for the “sensoriality of urban experience” and the role of “embodied and affective relationships to locality” (Pink 2015: 53) in the emergence of responses to urban inequalities.

This methodological approach is close to what Les Back and Nirmal Puwar call ‘live methods.’ In A manifesto for live methods: provocations and capacities, the authors summarize their main arguments. The authors call for a creative way of doing research that acknowledges that “the sensory has always been constitutive of the social texture of life” (Back/Puwar 2012: 11). As researchers, we have to develop our attentiveness not only to linguistic utterances but to all types of sensorial information. ‘Live sociology’ should challenge dominant research conceptions and leave the ‘beaten tracks’ also when it comes to the place of research. Referring to de Certeau’s idle walker in “Walking in the City,” a chapter in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), they argue that “[w]e need to take our research tools and devices for a walk”:

As the idle walker evades the disciplinary grids of being in the city, they present us with a prototype that prompts unexpected relationalities with the environment, the
body and the senses. Presented with strange encounters, alternative ways of categorizing and knowing the world emerge. (Back/Puwar 2012: 10)

For de Certeau, walkers in the city are practitioners “down below”, in the streets, who make use of space without being aware of it and who in doing so, write and rewrite the city in their everyday lives. He explicitly looks at “how individuals routinely negotiate these urban spaces which contain both concrete social relationships and abstract institutional forces” (Smith/Walters 2018: 2981). By taking the research outside of the university, by walking alongside others in the city, the researcher becomes part of these practitioners and contributes to the fleeting making of the city:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. (De Certeau 1984: 93)

De Certeau compares walking to a speech act; a comparison that has also been taken up by Jo Lee Vergunst and Tim Ingold, editors of Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot (2016), who claim that „[l]ife itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live” (2016: 1). Like writers weave words, pedestrians “weave places together” by creating – ‘writing’ – ephemeral networks of movements and alterations of space that form one of the systems that make up the city (De Certeau 1984: 97). Like talking, walking is social and “social life is walked” (Vergunst/Ingold 2016: 2). In addition, to take up once again the comparison, walking, like speech, is socially learned and, as Bourdieu argues in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977), becomes part of our habitus. As ‘structure structurante,’ it not only expresses but also generates cultural forms.

5.3.3. Walking and talking

Since the spatial turn in social sciences, space and place have increasingly become subject to not only theoretical but also methodological considerations. Combes et al criticize social movement theory as being “space-blind” and highlight that double importance of space for the study of social movements: “not only is it a constraint and a resource for the activists, the authorities, and the organizations involved, but it may also represent the very issue of the mobilization” (Combes et al. 2011: XIII). I conceptualize urban resistance as taking place in urban space and for the appropriation of the latter. Space is not only an instrumental resource but should be reintroduced “as a central dimension in collective action by disadvantaged groups […] by examining the mechanisms by which individuals and groups both play with and disrespect the space and places they create, manage, and occupy” (Hmed 2008: IV).
Given the centrality of urban space as seen and ‘lived’ by its inhabitants, I have chosen a data-gathering method that allows to incorporate the spatial dimension of urban resistance. The walking interview constitutes a research instrument that aims at gathering data by taking into account the link which exists between “self and place” (Kinney 2017: 1). The method can be defined as follows: “A walking interview is when the researcher walks alongside the participant during an interview in a given location.” (Kinney 2017: 1) The approach has to take into account that the researcher and the research participants might have different physical capabilities in terms of movement and might require technical assistance or have different abilities regarding vision and hearing. Researchers who use walking interviews should also bear in mind that walking is an activity that is shaped and circumscribed by inequalities and hierarchies and that “walking must be contextualised in terms of […] how class, national/regional/city, ethnic and race, age, gender, and sexual identities are positioned within the definition and regulation of public/private spaces” (O’Neill/Roberts 2020: 8).

The data collected through this method has the potential to be richer than data generated through ‘sedentary’ interviews because the movement facilitates conversation and the expert knowledge of the interviewed person on the space the latter inhabits is valorized (cf. Evans/Jones 2011; Kusenbach 2016). The interviews are inscribed in their context of production and enable the researcher not only to listen to the accounts of the interviewees but also to observe how the interview partners situate themselves in urban space, how they interact with the physical and social environment and how they interpret the concrete changes which have taken or are taking place in the neighbourhood. Walking interviews are thus close to ethnographic approaches and an interesting complement to participant observation.

An example that illustrates how walking can be used as a means of exploring questions related to belonging and emplacement is a study by Maggie O’Neill and Phil Hubbard (2010). The researchers wanted “to explore and represent the experiences of living in a new environment” and organized, in cooperation with community arts organizations and activists, “coordinated walking events” with asylum seekers in England (O’Neill/Hubbard 2010: 48). The walks “encouraged a reflection on the details of place that evoked feelings and resonances with past environments” (O’Neill/Hubbard 2010: 49). Despite the fact that in this research project these ‘past environments’ were far away from the places where the walks took place, walking through a neighbourhood in Toronto can have similar effects. Here, the ‘past environments’ are not in a different geographical area but in a different time – What has changed in the neighbourhood? In how far has their way of moving around in the neighbourhood been affected? The authors argue that “[t]he performative nature of the walks facilitate talk, dialogue, biographical
remembering and relational engagement” (O’Neill/Hubbard 2010: 50). Walking through the city “is to become involved in the doings and becomings that produce space and make place” (O’Neill/Hubbard 2010: 50).

There are various types of interviews that involve walking. Before starting the research, it has to be determined whether the route is to be set by the interviewer or by the interviewee. As Evans and Jones note, “[t]he drawbacks of imposing a predetermined route are that they contrive to make the interviewee do something beyond their normal routine” (2011: 850). To avoid this distortion, Kusenbach proposes to accompany the interviewee on his or her ‘daily round’; a method which she describes as go-along (cf. Kusenbach 2016). In the present study, the routes were chosen by the interviewees.

5.3.4. Getting to know the field

The latest quantitative empirical studies on polarization in Toronto (Hulchanski 2010; Dinca-Panaiteescu et al. 2017) have provided the necessary background information to choose a relatively central low-income neighbourhood. As I have described earlier, Parkdale, also called ‘Parkdale Village,’ is a neighbourhood west of downtown where the confrontation between dominant urban actors and economically weaker groups becomes highly visible. This indicates that a significant change of dynamics has taken place and that tensions have intensified, especially since the neighbourhood is close to districts which are among the richest in Toronto. My research analyzes the emergence of resistance practices that have developed in this neighbourhood and that have led to more visible forms of resistance such as rent strikes, protests against evictions, the creation of a land trust to limit real estate speculation as well as local food networks. Before entering a field, it is necessary to define what and who is part of the field. I decided to concentrate on one neighbourhood to ensure consistency and to be able to present the context and history of the neighbourhood in a detailed manner. While the physical boundaries of the neighbourhood are rather easy to define, ethnographic research that is interested in mobilizations also needs to think about the role of social media. Arora (2015) shows that parallels can be drawn between the appropriation of public spaces designed for leisure, such as city parks, and of cyberspaces as sites of resistance. Consequently, I decided to do participant observation not only in the neighbourhood, but also online: I read blog entries and online newspaper articles and I followed several social media accounts that were related to Parkdale.
‘Gaining access to the field’ is a rather technical term for building relations with people. Getting in contact with the field takes time, in which one can gain the trust of the participants and create constructive research relationships. Spending time in Parkdale during the summer months in 2019 and six weeks in January and February 2020 is a relatively short period of time for ethnographic research. Therefore, I decided to get in touch with people in various ways. I contacted formal structures, such as neighbourhood centres, community organizations, and individuals who work for or are active members of organizations that touch upon the research topic. I also attended events and spent time in ‘busy’ areas of the neighbourhood to get into conversations with people. Finding interview partners for a study on ‘informal resistance’ raises a question which I have already briefly mentioned; the question of intentionality. Does an act of resistance have to be intentional and have to have a clear target and objective to be labelled as such? I bypassed this issue by concentrating on the concrete practices: I established contact with individuals who have adopted these tactics in order to learn more about their actions and the meaning they attribute to them. Especially in this early phase, it is important to constantly reflect on whom you contact and whom you do not, how you present yourself and your research project, and what role you take on or are assigned (cf. Balsiger/Lambelet 2014: 154). Due to various reasons, a large proportion of people I talked to in the neighbourhood were non-racialized men over fifty. One possible explanation for this is that this group is overrepresented in places that I visited often, such as the public library, or the drop-in. This bias has to be kept in mind during the process of analysis.

I conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain further information on the situation in the neighbourhood and managed to build relationships with several Parkdale residents who introduced me to other people. Building on existing networks to ‘recruit’ research participants is often referred to as snowball sampling. Snowball samples are known to be subject to numerous biases. For instance, most research participants knew each other, which either indicates that the participants are part of a rather homogeneous group – and, consequently, that my research outcomes might be biased – or leads to tentative hypotheses about the neighbourhood: People who are politically active in one way or another are more likely to be well integrated into neighbourhood relations. Or, viewed from another perspective, being part of social networks in the neighbourhood increases commitment to resistant practices. Either way, this observation sensitized me to the thought that there might be a connection between community and the emergence of resistance practices already at an early stage of my research.

In qualitative research designs, maximum ‘objectivity’ can only be achieved through personal relationships. Good relationships and trust were not only important for being able to participate
in situations of the daily life of Parkdalians but also to find interview partners for the walking interviews. I learned that for conducting walking interviews it is helpful to get to know people first before they agree to guide you through their neighbourhood. The fact that the interviews were in some cases preceded by lengthy conversations and walks also presented a challenge. The recording device and the framing of the walk as ‘interview’ introduced a seemingly artificial distinction between informal conversations and a more ‘formal’ walking interview. During a long-term stay in the field, the relationships that are created go beyond the mere collection of data. In the field of resistance studies, it is particularly important to reflect on the participants’ attributions – do they see the ethnographer as a researcher, an observer, a sympathizer, a supporter or even as a ‘comrade-in-arms’? Especially if there are certain affinities or dislikes with the movement or group to be researched, it is important to consider the potential effects on the relationships with the research participants.

My aim was to get insight into a diversity of cases in order to explore the array of informal resistance practices that are less visible in public space. Marginalized city residents are to different extents deprived of their capacities to appropriate urban space and to make their voices heard. It is therefore important to consider that there is a plurality of social situations that can reinforce marginalization through the intersection of economic vulnerability, race, gender, religion, language, age et cetera. Although I put emphasis on the notion of polarization which implies a transformation over time, I have also tried to get to know the perspectives of persons who have just moved to the city or neighbourhood. They are likely to interpret the situation differently and to have a different relationship with other residents as well as to urban space in general and the neighbourhood in particular.

In addition to the question of who to contact how, it is necessary to be self-reflective about one’s role in the field. To put it with S. Pink’s works, “we should think not only about how the subjects of ethnographic research are emplaced” but also about “how researchers themselves are emplaced in ethnographic contexts” (2008b: 179). Like ‘traditional’ ethnographers, I came from the outside, was neither Parkdalian nor Canadian, and my habitus – be it my clothing style or my preferred choice of coffee – is probably not so far from the ‘gentrifiers’ who move into Parkdale. Class differences do matter in interview situations and ethnographic encounters and
can be a source of symbolic violence. This tension was present in many situations during my field stay. I put special attention on this topic by writing in my field notes how I felt in specific situations and by reflecting on why certain actions, comments, or misunderstandings made me feel uncomfortable.

5.3.5. Ethical considerations

In the framework of a qualitative research project, it is necessary to reflect on ethical norms and on the potential negative impacts for research participants and the researcher. In conformity with the guidelines of the European Commission (2018) for research in social science and humanities, I have identified several key issues that are relevant for the project.

One aspect of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants is the question of whether, when, and how one presents oneself as a researcher. This question is easy to answer in interview-based research projects. In an ethnographic study, more differentiation is needed. While the question of ‘covert research’ tends to take a back seat in participant observation in public space and in conversations that are limited to brief informal exchanges of words, this question must be reflected more strongly when the researcher participates in events, enters the spaces of institutions, organizations, and associations or becomes involved in more lengthy conversations. In such situations, I tried to present myself as a researcher as early as possible in order to inform people that the conversation or the event might become part of my research.

During the research process, free, informed and continued consent was sought from participants before and during data collection. The interview partners had the possibility to withdraw consent at any time and were be able to ask for the withdrawal of their data. All interview partners agreed with the audio recording of the interview and gave me verbal permission to use their name. I therefore refrained from pseudonymization but was careful to use only those

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44 Bourdieu illustrated the influence of the unequal distribution of capital – especially cultural capital – on the interview situation in a short essay on interview techniques in *The Weight of the World* [*La misère du monde*] (1999). “It is the investigator who starts the game and sets up its rules, and is usually the one who, unilaterally and without any preliminary negotiations, assigns the interview its objectives and uses. (These, on occasion, may be poorly specified – at least for the respondent.) This asymmetry is reinforced by a social symmetry every time the investigator occupies a higher place in the social hierarchy of different types of capital, cultural capital in particular.” (Bourdieu 1999b: 609) He emphasizes that a research relationship is always a social relationship and thus impacts the research outcomes. The resulting distortions have to be controlled: “Only the reflexivity synonymous with method, but a reflex reflexivity based on a craft, on a sociological ‘feel’ or ‘eye,’ allows one to perceive and monitor on the spot, as the interview is actually taking place, the effects of the social structure within which it is occurring.” (Bourdieu 1999b: 608)
personal details from their lives that were relevant for the research topic. Nevertheless, I tried to give a detailed presentation of those persons who made this research project possible and who became ‘the main characters’ of the present study. The so-called ‘researched’ are not simply research ‘objects’ or ‘numbers’ without names and unique biographies. As Mitchell Duneier, an American sociologist and ethnographer, says in conversation with the sociologist Les Back: “If you are going to get at the humanity of people, you can’t just have a bunch of disembodied thoughts that come out of subjects’ mouths in interviews without ever developing characters and trying to show people as full human beings.” (Duneier/Back 2006: 554)

5.3.6. Data collection

Ethnographic research designs use a variety of data collection methods, adapted to the specific context. During my field stay, I gathered a variety of materials – field notes, interview transcripts, official documents, pictures, a theatre play, short stories, a song text, and a short movie. Writing field notes is an essential part of ethnographic research. The field notes were originally intended as preparation for the interviews. However, it quickly became clear that writing down my observations and informal conversations played a much more important role in the process of data collection and analysis than I had expected. Field notes are never an objective representation of events, but already interpretations. Instead of pretending to increase objectivity by removing any subjective aspects from the field notes, I have added analytical notes that include ideas for interpretation, feelings, and personal notes. Most field notes were written in the evening after leaving the site. I confronted my interview partners with questions and preliminary hypotheses that arose from my field notes. The large corpus of artistic products was not something that I had consciously collected from the beginning. Rather, I ‘stumbled’ upon it because participants told me about their current art projects. By participating in a short-film project, planned and carried out by two of my interview partners, I accepted introducing personal bias in the data.

The following table gives an overview of my interview partners and the type of interview. I also specify if the interviewee is a Parkdale resident. Walking interviews were conducted with research participants who live in Parkdale and whom I had the opportunity to get to know better during my field stay. With one exception, the sedentary interviews were conducted at the workplace of the interview partner. Especially the interview with David Hulchanski, professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, was designed as a semi-structured expert interview. Insights from this interview were incorporated into the description
of the situation in Toronto and Parkdale and served as background for the other interviews. In the walking interviews, some questions were based on an interview guide with open-ended questions but most questions emerged in the situation. Buildings, passers-by, smells, and other visual or other sensorial inputs served as cues for discussion. After the interviews, both sedentary and walking interviews, I wrote down how I established contact with the person and described the interview situation. For the walking interviews, the route and our stops were marked in a map of the neighbourhood after the interview (see appendix: Illustration 7).

**Table 1: Interview Partners and Type of Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview partner</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>Parkdale resident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Walking Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cole</td>
<td>Sedentary Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Walking Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>Walking Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>Sedentary Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>Walking Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Hulchanski</td>
<td>Sedentary Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4. Analysis

Methodological reflections on ethnographic research mainly focus on the challenges of gaining access to and reflecting the researcher’s role in the field. Less attention has been paid to the question of how ethnographic data should be analyzed and how the different types of (mostly narrative) data should be brought together. The dominant approach for data analysis is grounded theory; a recursive approach that relies on coding to develop theory (cf. Lüders 2019: 399). As suggested by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, who developed the grounded theory methodology as an attempt to further “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser/Strauss 2000 [1967]: 1), data collection and data analysis were not clearly separated in the present research design. Strictly speaking, the analysis did not begin after the transcription of the interviews. During the field stay, data collection and analysis alternated constantly, so that initial considerations and conclusions became the basis for further observations and interviews. This corresponds to the recursive nature of the grounded theory approach. Already the writing of field notes implies a certain degree of analysis, even if the main focus is on the description. R. Emerson, R. Fretz and L. Shaw speak of ethnographic writing as “analysis-in-description” (2011: 126). Fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and most artistic materials are data in text form. However, it has to be noted that interviews go beyond talk. Keeping this fact in mind is particularly important for the analysis of walking interviews. S. Pink views the narrative of all types of interviews “as a process through which verbal, experiential, emotional, sensory, material, social and other encounters are brought together” (Pink 2015: 95).

Although the inductive methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss has clear strengths, it was decided to refrain from the classic multilevel coding process of grounded theory for two reasons. Firstly, coding would have implied that all types of data material – including creative writings – would be treated equally and that the codes created in the open coding phase would be compared at the same level. Secondly, the ‘discovery’ of theory would have been an extensive undertaking, for which the possibility of theoretical sampling, i.e. re-entering the field, would have had to be given. Although description plays an important role in this work, the detection of underlying mechanisms should not be neglected. Therefore, a more focussed approach for the analysis was developed. The process of analysis consisted of several closely interrelated steps that are loosely based on a framing analysis approach developed to explain the emergence of social movements. Building on Goffman’s frame analytic perspective, Snow et al. (1986), and Snow and Benford (1988) developed the concept of ‘frame alignment’ and ‘frame resonance.’ In 2000, Benford and Snow observed that since the middle of the 1980s, there has been “a pronounced proliferation of scholarship on collective action frames and
framing processes in relation to social movements” (612) which has shed light on “the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing meanings” (613). Movements – and their participants – are seen here as “signifying agents,” who are actively involved in producing meaning and overriding dominant interpretations, or in re-evaluating and reassessing events. Framing is an active and dynamic process, a constant negotiation between the various actors involved, which draws attention to internal and external conflicts. The “collective action frames” resulting from this negotiation process are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford/Snow 2000: 614). According to Snow and Benford, there are three tasks: “(1) a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration; (2) a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done; and (3) a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action” (1988: 199). The framing tasks can be summarized as ‘diagnostic,’ ‘prognostic,’ and ‘motivational’ framing. Although I do not look into the question of how social movements organizations strategically use collective action frames to mobilize members or delegitimize critics, I use the framing approach as an analytical tool to analyze how individuals define “what is going on” and what “should be going on” (Benford/Snow 2000: 614) in order to link this individual or shared definition to the emergence of various practices that can be seen as responses to what is interpreted as a problematic situation. I understand the three types of framing not as tasks, but as auxiliary categories that helped me to break down the data and to make explicit and analyze the different levels of meaning that guide the research participant’s actions.

In the first step, the material was screened, organized, and sorted. Carefully rereading the field notes and interview transcripts makes it possible to become familiar with the data and to ‘relive’ the events and conversations. After data familiarization, recurring and important themes were identified. I also highlighted surprising events or statements in memos. The identified themes made it easier to compare the material. The next step consisted in analyzing in a more detailed manner how the identified themes were framed by the interview partners and other people I met in Parkdale. I concentrated on selected parts of the interviews and field notes and looked at the themes which emerged from the first screening with regard to the diagnostic (1), prognostic (2), and motivational (3) framing by posing the following sensitizing questions: (1) What do the participants identify as neighbourhood changes in a very broad sense, and how do they make sense of them? When they describe their everyday life, do they link certain aspects of it to the changes they describe? Do they frame changes in their neighbourhood as causal factors for certain aspects of their lives that are viewed as problematic? (2) What needs to be done to
ameliorate their personal situation and the overall situation in the neighbourhood and which actors and institutions need to be part of the solution? (3) How do they react to changes or aspects of their daily lives that they identify as problematic? To what extent can these responses be described as resistance practices? And, most importantly, what is the motivational ‘impetus’? In this manner, I aimed to understand how Parkdale residents experience macro changes in their everyday lives, and how they frame these experiences and their reactions to them. The research participants explicitly or implicitly give meaning to their own actions in reference to and in contrast to the interpretations offered by activist groups and organizations, as well as other urban actors and institutions. During this process of organizing, comparing, and condensing the material, guided by the above-mentioned questions, patterns emerged and were brought into connection with structural aspects of the life situation of the research participants, their self-positioning, and the global city dynamics presented earlier.

For the presentation of the research outcomes, I have decided to begin with a reworked and condensed version of field notes written after my first visits in Parkdale in summer 2019 to provide an account of the sensory experience of the neighbourhood. Secondly, I will introduce the main research participants. In the remaining subchapters, I will give a more detailed account of the key points and themes to gradually draw a comprehensive picture, which, with reference to the theoretical considerations, shows paths to answer the research question.

5.4.1. Walking in the city

Walking through the neighbourhood, alone or with research participants, was an essential part of my research. I went for many walks with the persons I met in Parkdale, some of them framed as interviews with a recorder, others framed as conversations, although the difference was sometimes not that clear. With de Certeau it can be said that walking is a way of writing. Parkdale’s inhabitants, people who work here and people who come here for other reasons such as I – families, ‘gentrifiers,’ homeless people, psychiatric survivors, researchers, police officers, social workers – walk differently as if they wrote different types of ‘text’: a woman dances on the sidewalk; a man gallops on the sidewalk with a pink plush unicorn; a woman stops in the middle of the street, laughing loudly, ignoring the cars that stop; a man walks up and down the sidewalk with two sticks in his hand, moving them as if he was a conductor or magician; a man walking down the street with an almost life-size plastic figure in his hands, followed by a man with a camera – what might be unusual in other neighbourhoods of Toronto, where people walk fast to their destination and tend less to stop at the sidewalk, observing people or chatting with
somebody they meet, does not seem to astonish other passers-by in Parkdale. Following de Certeau, ‘tactical’ walking can be seen as a practice that runs counter to urban disciplinary strategies, surveillance and control.

As a preparation for my empirical research, I explored several neighbourhoods of Toronto during the summer of 2019 and, after the decision to study resistance practices in Parkdale, spent many hours walking around in this neighbourhood. The following text is based on my field notes written in summer 2019 after my first observational walks through the neighbourhood. The text is intended to give a first impression of the neighbourhood that goes beyond the mere description of its physical materiality and the presentation of statistical data.

When I first arrived in Parkdale, I crossed the Gardiner and walked up Jameson Avenue to Queen Street. Jameson is lined on both sides by brownish mid-rises, with a small stripe of lawn in front where signs with the names of corporate landlords show undisputedly who owns the place. On many balconies, Tibetan flags flutter in the wind; dashes of colour on concrete walls. Attached to concrete plant pots, homes to thin trees that do not give much shade and some tufts of grass, I discovered portraits of Parkdale residents. When you enter the street, a sign informs you about the art project “Impressions” that stretches from Queen Street West to Springhurst Avenue and “showcases over 500 images and portraits of this vibrant Parkdale community.” I did not know how to interpret the next lines on the board: “Though old faces may leave as quickly as new faces arrive, a part of each will always remain.” Was this sentence intended to be comforting or does it illustrate a feeling of resignation; an attempt to ‘preserve’ the ‘old’ Parkdale despite the current transformations at least in an outdoor photography installation? I saw close-ups of Parkdale residents before seeing anybody on the streets. I wondered if the persons who had been photographed for the installation still lived in Parkdale. Later I learned that one of my interview partners, David, was on one of the pictures with a sign he used to carry around in the neighbourhood that said “What is love?”

I walked right on King Street and took one of the smaller streets to go to Queen Street. The built environment in Parkdale is so diverse that one cannot help but be surprised when one walks around a corner and the architectural style of the buildings change completely. I was astonished to see old Victorian brick houses with stained-glass windows, flowers and blossoming trees in the front yard. Later that day, I saw on the Internet that one of these houses had been sold for 1.5 million Dollars shortly before my visit in Parkdale. As in other parts of the city, Queen Street – an important east-west thoroughfare with a length of more than 14 kilometres – is buzzing with sounds, smells and flavours. Indian restaurants advertise the best
roti in town, Tibetan restaurants promise authentic cuisine, small vintage clothing stores attract the young and ‘hip.’ I passed small ‘hipster’ cafés, a Dollarama, a design store, a Tim Hortons and an organic market. The sweet perfume of fruits and vegetables, warmed by the sun, lingered in front of the small grocery stores.

When I came back the following week, I decided to buy food at a roti place. I looked obviously confused at the menu. The owner noticed that and asked me if it was my first time here. I said yes. „Oh I like first-timers,” he said and smiled. He helped me to compose my roti and asked me if I lived in the neighbourhood. He told me that he did not live here, but that he liked Parkdale: “It’s very vibrant, you’ve got many restaurants, bars, not too expensive”. He wanted to know if I liked spicy food. I said yes. My answer seemed to amuse him; he asked me “Yeah, but how spicy?,” knowing that our definitions of the word were significantly different. I realized that it was impossible to translate into words what for me would be a pleasant spicy taste. The restaurant had opened six months ago. He asked me, almost in a reproachful tone, why I hadn’t come earlier, gave me a sample of Indian-style Poutine and a voucher for the next time. “See you soon”, he said before I left the restaurant. Poutine – French fries topped with cheese and gravy – is a specialty from the province of Québec. They had replaced the brown gravy with curried gravy, another example of what one might call ‘fusion (fast-)food’ which seems to be very popular in Toronto: Korean pizza, Shawarma pizza, Jamaican style pasta, Indo-Chinese dishes, Korean burgers, Korean/Mexican tacos do not seem to surprise or shock anymore. Interestingly, it is this fusion, reflecting the migrant journeys of restaurant owners and chefs, that creates Toronto’s food identity and that is described as ‘authentic.’

I sat down in a small park on King Street where a girl and her mother were playing in the small water puddles that were installed for the hot summer days. It was a very humid day and beads of sweat formed on my forehead although the sun had already disappeared behind dark clouds. Three Tibetan women in colourful traditional clothes entered the park and, although all the other benches were free, they asked me, speaking with their hands and facial expressions rather than verbally, if they could sit down next to me. Without saying a word, the three women sat down and started to recite mantras. While moving their lips, their fingers routinely touched the wooden beads of their Tibetan malas. I stopped eating, it felt too banal. After a few minutes, it started to rain and the oldest of the three women pointed at the sky, then looked at me and smiled. They left without saying anything. After a few minutes, I left too because the rain was too heavy. I found shelter in a café that seemed to be relatively new but imitated the look of an old diner, with rows of old wooden booths next to the brick walls. The walls showcased paintings and a sign presented the choice of craft beer. I enjoyed a big mug of drip coffee.
On another day, I looked for signs of activism in Parkdale. On streetlamps and utility poles I discovered yellowed paper sheets that informed the passersby about community meetings, rallies and demonstrations in Parkdale. I also found a poster that drew attention to a planned eviction in another neighbourhood, on Sherbourne Street, printed by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). The poster shows a photo of John Tory, Mayor of Toronto since 2014, with a speech bubble, quoting a tweet he posted during his re-election campaign in 2018: “...an emerging global city needs leadership that works...” They added a second speech bubble in a different colour, adding what they thought he really meant: “to enrich developers!” In contrast to this poster with a colourful and eye-catching layout, other posters were plain and printed on thin Letter size paper. A poster informed about a community meeting and rally to protest against budget cuts to the Parkdale Community Legal Services: “This will affect legal services and community organizing in Parkdale. Let’s come together to protect our community legal clinic.” Three pictures show demonstrators holding placards with the message: “Parkdale fights back”. Another poster also used this slogan to draw attention to a demonstration that had taken place in June 2019, more than a month before I visited Parkdale. On Twitter, Parkdale Organize explained the reasons for the protest: “To fight for the food terminal! To fight for our schools! To fight for our legal clinic! To fight for OW/ODSP! To fight for tenants! Because our struggles are connected, so we should be too!”

During my walks in Parkdale, I see many families, but these families seem to be ‘different’ than those in Leslieville, an already gentrified area east of downtown where I lived during my stays in Toronto. A participant in a panel with the title Refusing Gentrification: Community Arts & Practice(s) joked about the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. She apologetically confessed in front of the audience that she had moved from Regent Park, a neighbourhood built as a public housing project in the 1940s, across the Don Valley to Leslieville. Despite being a ‘Leslievillian’ now, she distanced herself from the other residents, especially from other young families: “Every time I walk through the neighbourhood, I see families with baby strollers that cost more than my car.” The audience laughed.

While in other neighbourhoods measures to ‘remove’ ‘deviant’ people from the streets by introducing legislation outlawing begging and restricting the use of public spaces have been more or less successful, homeless people and the mentally ill are still visible in the streets of

45 ODSP, the Ontario Disability Support Program, and OW, Ontario Works, are important pillars of the social assistance system of the province of Ontario. Many Parkdale residents live on a fixed income.
Parkdale. Their presence manifests itself in the sometimes unconventional or – given the criminalization of activities that are live-sustaining for people who are sleeping rough – even unauthorized use of urban space. The casualness with which they occupy and inscribe their bodies in urban space in an unconventional way could already be described as defiance of exclusionary urban dynamics.

5.4.2. Portraits

Before I introduce the main research participants, it is necessary to give an overview of the dense network of institutions, social-work agencies, associations, and grassroots organizations that exist in Parkdale. As I will show later, social agencies and other institutions in the neighbourhood not only provide services for low-income community members but also leverage activism. The following table is by no means exhaustive but aims to give an overview of agencies and organizations that were mentioned frequently by research participants. The keywords or names of working groups are based on the self-description of the respective group, organization, or agency.

Table 2: Overview Groups/Organizations/Agencies in Parkdale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Organization/Agency</th>
<th>Founded in</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Keywords/working groups/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale Eviction Resistance Network (PERN)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>The network educates people about their rights as tenants and fights illegal evictions.</td>
<td>housing struggle; fight against evictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale Organize (PO)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>“PO is a membership-based group of working-class people who organize to build working class power in Parkdale.” The group fights rent-increases and evictions and organized a rent strike in several buildings in 2017.</td>
<td>housing struggle; working-class power; fight against evictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46 See website of Parkdale Organize: [http://parkdaleorganize.ca/principles/](http://parkdaleorganize.ca/principles/) [01.09.2020]
47 In 2017, over 300 tenants of several apartment buildings owned by the corporate landlord MetCap Living Management Inc. went on a three-month rent strike to fight above-guideline rent increases and disrepair. It was the biggest rent strike in the history of Parkdale. The tenants succeeded in reducing the rent increases through withholding their payments, organizing marches through the neighbourhood, and protesting in front of the MetCap office. The short documentary *This is Parkdale* (sub.Media/Parkdale Organize 2017), available on the Parkdale Organize website, summarizes the history of the protest. URL: [http://parkdaleorganize.ca/2017/11/05/this-is-parkdale-documentary/](http://parkdaleorganize.ca/2017/11/05/this-is-parkdale-documentary/) [27.09.2020]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>PNLT is a non-profit organization run by Parkdale residents and organizations that aims at acquiring and managing land to ensure affordability and diversity in the neighbourhood.</td>
<td>housing struggle; community ownership of land;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale People’s Economy (PPE)</td>
<td>Start in 2010</td>
<td>The PPE was founded with the intention of drawing together groups that are working to make Parkdale more affordable, accessible and inclusive through work in a variety of sectors.</td>
<td>affordable housing; community finance; community health; cultural development; decent work; food security; participatory democracy; social infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC)</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>PARC is a multi-service agency focusing on people with mental health histories. “PARC is a community where people rebuild their lives. The simple act of walking through our doors is what makes a person a PARC member.”</td>
<td>drop-in centre; supportive housing; peer-support program; outreach program; mental health; recovery;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS)</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>The PCLS aims “to tackle poverty law issues through a combination of community development, organizing and action facilitated by legal representation, summary legal advice and community legal education.”</td>
<td>workers’ rights; housing rights; immigration; social assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will give a more detailed description of the organizations and agencies below as part of the participants’ portraits. The research participants I interviewed assured me that I can use their names, partly because they are used to being interviewed and consider sharing their knowledge as part of their role as activists in the community and partly because it was important for them to know that their story would be told.  

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48 See website of Parkdale Community Legal Services: [https://www.parkdalelegal.org/about/vision/](https://www.parkdalelegal.org/about/vision/) [01.09.2020]

49 Pierre Bourdieu summarized the particularities of the interview situation from the interview partner’s perspective as follows: “[C]ertain respondents, especially the most disadvantaged, seem to grasp this situation as an exceptional opportunity offered to them to testify, to make themselves heard, to carry their experience over from the private to the public sphere; an opportunity also to explain themselves in the fullest sense of the term, that is, to construct their own point of view both about themselves and about the world and to bring into the open the point within this world from which they see themselves and the world, become comprehensible, and justified, not least for themselves.” (Bourdieu 1999b: 615)
Cole, the legal clinic worker and housing activist

Cole was the first person I interviewed in Parkdale. I had contacted him via email because his name was mentioned in a discussion on the housing struggle in Parkdale. Cole is a caseworker at the Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) and also a member of Parkdale Organize. He warned me in an email that his workplace, the new location of the PCLS, was hard to find. The legal clinic was forced to move to a basement in a small building behind an Anglican church close to the library. Bob commented on this while we were walking down Queen Street: “They’re one of the victims of displacement, eh? What better strategy can we have, than to get rid of the legal services. […] I was ready to get arrested over that one. But it just never got there.” On the small entrance door was a sheet of paper with the PCLS logo. A sign asked visitors to ring the bell. I rang twice, but nobody answered. Two people came and seemed surprised that I was standing in front of the door. “Come in, come in,” the man said and opened the door. A small stairway led down to another door in the basement. Behind the door, there was a large room that had been transformed into an office space. Cole took me to the back of the room: “We are a little bit short of rooms, we had to leave our old location, this is just our temporary office. Do you mind if we stay here in the aisle and we just take some chairs?” After the interview, he told me that they were planning on moving to a new location in 2021.

Cole is well informed about the history and composition of the neighbourhood. When I asked him to describe Parkdale, he emphasized that it is “a working-class district characterized by struggles around housing” with a large percentage of renters. He used to live close to Parkdale after coming to Toronto to work for PCLS eight years ago. Since then, he has “fled for cheaper rent” and moved to a former suburb that had become part of Toronto at the end of the 1990s. His work in the legal clinic is centred around four areas, housing, income security, immigration and employment rights. He told me that in the past year, the legal clinic had assisted 800 individual tenants, either by representing them or by providing them legal advice.

Cole is also involved in the grassroots activist group Parkdale Organize. Parkdale Organize, a neighbourhood-based organization, was formed in 2014 after the Scandinavian-based firm Akelius bought up four residential buildings in Parkdale “and immediately set about trying to displace the tenants and reducing the level of service.” This prompted the tenants to form committees and to wage a campaign against Akelius. People involved in supporting the tenants

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50 See chapter 5.1.2. Metropolitanization
as well as members of the tenant committees continued to meet and started to publicize the victories, such as beating an above guideline rent increase in one of the buildings, through a neighbourhood newsletter and meetings at the public library. “It sort of built up a cadre of working-class people in the neighbourhood, who were able to go and assist others in developing their own organizations.” (Cole) Parkdale Organize was the result of these efforts.

David, the ‘Unknown Philosopher’

I met David at an event he organized at the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC). The invitation for the event was posted on Facebook by the Parkdale Neighbourhood Landtrust: “David […], a local writer, activist, is back with more extended pieces of writing that contribute to the building of a necessary social movement for a post-capitalist world, with the aim of provoking critical thinking and future action.” It was the second event of the Parkdale Free School series “Evening With the Unknown Philosopher”. The Parkdale Free School is an initiative founded by the Parkdale Neighbourhood Landtrust.

After the event, David walked with me for a few minutes. He asked me if he could send me some of his theoretical work in which he tries to find a new language for the critique of capitalism. He distances himself both from the right and the left because, according to him, both political positions lack a real vision and are only reactionary. With his work, he wants not only to criticize, but also to create something. His work is based on Kant, Hegel, Deleuze and „of course you can’t forget Marx.” According to him, people delve too much in their pain, they tend to reduce their identity to their status as a victim. “Life is pain! So what? You can’t pity yourself and complain all the time!” He told me that he had spent time in homeless shelters, that he was frustrated because nobody understood his work. “But look at me now, I have created something, brought together great intelligent people, they have become my friends.”

David enjoys teaching. For a short period of time, he taught sociology at a university abroad. He describes the day he got fired as a very dark moment of his life. He jokes about once having been part of the “petty bourgeoisie” that he “despises,” mainly because they had rejected him. David came to Parkdale a few years ago after living in a large homeless shelter for men in another part of Toronto. It was “fate” that decided. At the homeless shelter, they found an apartment for him in Parkdale. He told me that he remembers his father, who ran a small business, saying that one day he would end up on the streets: “He was almost right and I DID almost end up on the streets, if I hadn’t been in a homeless shelter, I would have!” He now lives in a supportive housing program. He described living there as an “adventure” and told me about
aggressive neighbours, loud music, smell, and trash in the hallway. “There are rough edges to
that place, there are definitely rough edges, people who uh are rough, uh had rough lives. […]
So, I developed a BIT of a rough side.” He explained to me that he does not have a lot in
common with the people in the building, who are mostly seniors like him, and that he does not
have any desire to interact with them. “I’d say the most I want from the current building is just
I can sleep at night, relatively clean space and I don’t bother people and people don’t bother
me, that’s all I expect, I don’t expect a community. They are just my physical neighbours.”

A few days after the Free School event, I met David again in a Tibetan restaurant. He was
having lunch with Jared. They told me about a creative project they were working on; a short
movie shot in Parkdale, a critique of capitalism and consumerism with David as a researcher
and Jared as a man who transforms into plastic. Jared told me that he had already prepared a
plastic ‘statue.’ In the movie, David would find ‘Plastic Man’ somewhere in Parkdale, and he
would wander around the streets to learn more about his identity. They invited me to participate
in the making of the film. David also proposed that I could interview him. We agreed to meet
a few days later at St Francis Table, a “restaurant for the poor” that was established in 1987.
The restaurant has a seating capacity of 40 people and serves about 250 meals per day. People
pay one dollar for the meal. In the entrance area, an elderly man David knew tried to sell a token
that can be used for public transport. He explained that he wanted to have lunch here but that
he did not have a dollar. David decided to pay for him and the three of us sat down at a table.

After lunch, we started our walk through Parkdale. He proposed to start at Masaryk Park, close
to the library, where the demonstration that he had co-organized with Bob in 2018 started. After
that, we retraced the path of the demo and walked to the former LCBO building on Brock
Avenue. The demonstration was organized by the Parkdale Eviction Resistance Network
(PERN) to fuel discussions about transforming a former LCBO into a site for affordable
housing. As we walked west on Queen Street, we made a stop at PARC, on the other side of
the street and talked about David’s experiences with PARC. We walked further down on Queen
Street, the neighbourhood’s main artery. When we reached Roncesvalles Avenue, David

51 The topic of the film was slightly altered after the film shoot to link it to the COVID-19 pandemic. The film was
published on YouTube with the title Ectoplastic: A film from the future. A Covid-19 Conspiracy Theory. The
project is described as follows: “A short mockumentary about a Covid-19 Conspiracy Theory. The rise of Homo
Plasticus in the time of Covid-19. The beginning of total virtual reality during the dramatic increase of time spent
online. Shot in Parkdale, Toronto, between February and May 2020. Part of a project on ethnographic fictional
film making.” URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXBBJXQ9mJo [06.10.2020]
52 LCBO stands for Liquor Control Board of Ontario, a Crown corporation with the licence to sell alcohol in
Ontario. LCBO is the main retailer of beer, wine, and liquor in the province.
suggested going to the McDonalds on the other side of the street to have coffee. A sign said: “Time limit: 20 min. No loitering.” David proposed to sit down at a table in the back of the room in order not to be seen if we stay longer. We continued our conversation and David told me that I should use his name in my thesis because he is “not a modest man” and he has “nothing to hide.”

Bob, the storyteller

I met Bob for the first time in front of the PARC drop-in, where he was smoking a cigarette in the cold before attending an event organized by the Unknown Philosopher. Bob is known in the community as a storyteller, an activist, and as a music lover. He describes himself as an ‘anti-social worker’ because he did not receive a ‘classical’ training as a social worker. Bob has been living in Parkdale for 40 years and had worked at PARC for more than 30 years until his retirement. As PARC programme director and director of housing and outreach, he got to know the neighbourhood and its residents like no other. He described Parkdale as a community and emphasizes that people treat each other with respect. Among other things, he was involved with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC), a housing advocacy group, and was also organizer for the Parkdale Eviction Resistance Network (PERN). Even though he is retired now, he continues his activist work, is active in various groups, and still works with vulnerable persons in the neighbourhood.

David suggested that I should interview Bob because he has the reputation of knowing everything and everyone in the neighbourhood: “Oh yes, he knows Parkdale, he IS Parkdale!” (David) When I asked Bob if he wanted to do a walking interview with me, he agreed and sent me a link to a YouTube video with the title Bob’s Story: Bending the Map (Back Lane Studios 2019). In the video, Bob tells his story – from his childhood in Nova Scotia to his career at PARC. He talks openly about experiencing a mental breakdown due to work-related stress. A few days later, we met at the PARC drop-in for the interview. He wanted to start at PARC because he wanted to tell me the history of PARC, which, in a way, is also his life story. Many people greeted Bob when he entered the drop-in. Although he doesn’t work at PARC anymore, he seems to be known by PARC members. “I probably have my fingerprints on (laughs) just about every aspect of this place. The little programs, the bigger programs, the stage thing. Everything.” (Bob)

He had already thought about the route. Our first stop was Edmond Place, right next to the drop-in, which has the motto “There is a place in the world for me.” Bob came up with this motto
after the shooting of Edmond Yu, whom he knew well. The building used to be one of the largest rooming houses in the neighbourhood. After a building fire, it was expropriated by the city and transformed into a supportive housing project, run by PARC and Habitat Services. After a quick chat with a resident of Edmond Place, we turned south and Bob pointed out several rooming houses to me of which some are about to be closed and sold, telling me stories about current or former residents. When we reached King Street, we turned left and walked back to Queen Street on Jameson Avenue, a wide street lined with mid-rises. He showed me how Queen Street is changing, especially the storefronts close to Dufferin, the eastern end of the neighbourhood. We made a stop at the LCBO where Bob bought a bottle of Whiskey. Before the train bridge, we turned north to the former LCBO site, where he described the demonstration that David had already told me about. He then took me on a tour through North Parkdale. Many places evoked memories of experiences or people he knew. We continued our conversation in his apartment with a glass of red wine. I commented on his record collection and his musical equipment. He told me that writing songs was his vocation. I met him again shortly before leaving Canada in the Salvation Army thrift store. Together with Jared, he walked through the neighbourhood with a recorder to record the Parkdale soundscape and to “look for the quietest spot in Parkdale.” (Bob)

*Jared, the ethnographer*

Jared is an ethnographer who came to the neighbourhood to grasp “the spirit of Parkdale.” The doctoral student moved to Parkdale with his family in September 2019. He had visited Parkdale before and had decided to do his research project here because he thinks that “there is something interesting about Parkdale.” He has become involved in several (creative) projects with Parkdale residents and attends many events in the neighbourhood to meet people. When I met him, he was working on a film project with David, was part of the theatre group at PARC that was rehearsing a play written by David and collected pieces of glass and other ‘found instruments’ for a musical art installation with Skye, whom I will introduce later. He wants to blur the line between ethnography and art in his PhD thesis and believes that art is a good way of making everybody participate and of disseminating ideas.

Jared also participates in the Parkdale Free School events held by David to present his project and to gather points of view of other Parkdale residents. The discussions are also a way for him to collect data and advance his project. He emphasized that he did not know the area as well as other people in the room who had been living in the neighbourhood for many more years. For his research project, he does not want to formally interview people but prefers to “hang out”
with them. David emphasized in our conversations that he enjoys hanging out with Jared: “I mean like with Jared well, first of all, he is who he is, I mean, he’s just/nothing faces Jared (laughs) this guy/I can talk about all sorts of crazy things and he’ll say ‘That’s interesting!’ and he’ll be sincere about it too.” David also pointed out that Jared has a lot of time, like him, because, as a PhD student, “he’s paid to do what he wants to do.” I accompanied Jared and David when they shot the short movie in Parkdale. Jared filmed David who was carrying ‘Plastic Man’ through the neighbourhood, wearing his bicycle helmet covered in tin foil. Plastic Man was made of garbage and plastic foil, wrapped with one and a half rolls of translucent tape.

At first, people did not seem to notice us. “Well, we are in Parkdale, people are used to seeing crazy stuff!” Jared said. While filming a short, improvised dialogue with a man we had met on the sidewalk, a woman approached us, pointing at the plastic figure and asking loudly: “Oh man! What is this thing?” She was visibly surprised and laughed loudly, showing her missing front teeth. “This is nuts! We are all nuts,” she said, “but not all of us are crazy.”

About a week later, we met in front of the library for the walking interview. We went to a coffee shop and drank espresso before starting our walk through Parkdale. Jared suggested walking west on Queen Street to Roncesvalles Avenue, where we turned left to cross the Gardiner and walk to the lake. “This would be my walk,” he told me. Whenever he has enough time, he would walk along Queen Street and go down to the lake to “look around, think, look for cool stuff.” He took pictures of several things that captured his attention, such as food discarded on the sidewalk or a man painting a storefront. We also went to the place where he found objects for an art project with Skye. While looking at the objects left on the street and putting some of them in a small bag he always carries with him, he explained what guides his research: “It’s like ‘Oh what do I study? I don’t really know, but here is everything I have learned. [...] It’s like almost like Parkdale as a participant in my research is sort of like every day disclosing more things to me that I haven’t necessarily asked it.”

After a stop at the lake, we walked back to Queen street and observed three policemen and a nurse talking to a homeless woman sitting inside a streetcar stop. On the other side of the street, a man was walking down the street, wearing a dragon hat. I had seen him before in the neighbourhood. He would sit down on the sidewalk with two sticks in his hands and wave them like wands. Suddenly, the man crossed the street without looking and the streetcar had to brake abruptly and honked. “This is one of the most heavy corners of Parkdale,” Jared commented.
Skye, the dumpster diver

Skye is a dumpster diver, karaoke singer on Wednesdays at the drop-in, and DIY enthusiast. I met Skye at an event in West Queen West, she was smoking a cigarette in front of the building and we started to talk about music. Skye has a low voice and seems to hide behind her long fringe. She told me that she sometimes does karaoke but that it had taken her a long time to find the courage to sing in front of people. Until she was 18, she had been unable to look somebody in the eye. The 40-year-old woman suffers from anxiety and takes medication. Skye often changes the topic of conversation. She told me about her childhood and youth in British Columbia, that she was adopted and that she experienced violence because she was the only non-Caucasian in her immediate social environment. She does not like Toronto and has had a hard time getting used to the mentality which she describes as materialistic. She likes to dumpster dive, especially for clothes and food, and to transform the things she finds in a creative way. She wants to use things that others consider to be useless, to give them a second life. “I was thrown in the trash when I was a baby so there are good things to be found in trash, you know. Sorry, I’m being silly.” She told me that she had recently found interesting things at a shop that sells chandeliers and that she wanted to use it for an art project. I remembered that Jared had told me about this project and the woman he wanted to do it with. “Are you Skye?” I asked her. She nodded and I explained that I had met Jared and that he had told me about her. On our way towards Dufferin Street, I told her that I was doing a research project and that I was planning on doing walking interviews in Parkdale and she asked Jared “Wouldn’t I be the best Parkdale guide?”

We saw each other again at the PARC drop-in, shortly before my interview with Bob. While I was waiting outside, she came out of the building with a tea mug in her hands to smoke a cigarette. “Parkdale is a bad place,” she said, because sometimes people are aggressive and call her names. She told me that she had been a victim to all sorts of violence and that she could not stand it when she witnesses someone being treated badly. She told me that on Wednesdays, there is live music and karaoke at PARC. She invited me to come by the following week. “You could be my dancer. Do you wanna be my dancer?” The week after, I came to the drop-in to the music event. Many people were lining up in front of the building with shopping carts and bags to get food from the food bank. I smoked a cigarette in front of the building. A man came towards me, pointing at the joint in his hand. “Wanna smoke with me”? I thank him and say no. “Come on, smoke with me. You’re my friend!” Skye was already inside, visibly nervous, thinking about which songs to choose. Skye sang without looking at the audience; she focused
on her phone screen to read the lyrics and danced on the stage. When she jumped, the keys attached to her trousers made an interesting sound.

After lunch, Skye invited Jared and me to her place. She lives in an apartment in a small brick house in South Parkdale. Skye is unable to work due to her illness and lives on a fixed income. In order to be able to pay the rent, she helps around the house. Before we arrived, she warned us that her apartment is messy: “I’m a hoarder!” We sat down on a yoga mattress on the floor of her bedroom which was covered with clothes. Skye put on some music, walked through the room, danced to the music and showed us all sorts of decorative objects she had found at a thrift store, clothes she had dumpstered, homemade kombucha, and beauty products. After Jared left, she accompanied me to the streetcar stop. “Jared thinks I’m weird,” she told me. “It’s true, I am diagnosed weird (chuckles). You know, I am disorganized schizophrenic.”

Skye agreed on doing a walking interview with me. It was a cold and windy day. I pick her up at her apartment. She took her dumpster bag; a large bag that can be opened on the top, like a box. She filled a little bit of wine in a small bottle and took it with her. She excused herself repeatedly for being “so disorganized this morning.” As we wandered through the neighbourhood, Skye showed me places where she had found interesting things and places where she likes to shop. She found a small chocolate bar in the snow, picked it up and put it in her bag. We stopped at PARC to have lunch and went to the food bank next to the drop-in.

Jeremy, the urban planning expert

When Jeremy came to Toronto five years ago to do his PhD, he became involved with the PNLT and decided to focus on housing “because I think it’s an example of a sector that’s particularly shitty at producing like cheap goods and services if you rely on capitalists to do it.” The choice of his PhD topic and his activism in Parkdale were thus closely interrelated. The student in Urban Studies is currently Chair of the Affordable Housing Committee of the Parkdale People’s Economy, “a network of over 30 community-based organizations and hundreds of community members collaborating to build decent work, shared wealth, and equitable development in Parkdale.”53 The committee discusses policy options and strategies to retain affordable housing in Parkdale and to improve tenant rights.

53 See website of the Parkdale People’s Economy: http://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/ [19.08.2020]
He learned about the PNLT through a fellow graduate student who had done research on community economic development initiatives in Toronto and had founded the land trust. Jeremy started to go to meetings and became part of a research committee that studied community land trusts in Canada and the reasons for their success or failure. He has been involved in several committees and coalitions in Parkdale for about four years now.

We met for the interview in a café called “The Common”. Before he arrived, I saw the following sentence written on the wall in the washrooms: “Why do landlords get more and more money every year for providing the same services?” I told Jeremy, jokingly, that I understand now why he had chosen this coffee shop, but he told me that he was not aware of this message on the wall. We talked about his work as Chair of the PPE Affordable Housing Committee and his role in the Parkdale activist community.

The presentation of the interview partners in chronological order of the interviews served to facilitate the understanding of their interpretations and practices, which will be presented in more detail in the following chapters. Before delving deeper into the analysis of the interviews and field notes, the following table gives an overview of the main research participants.

**Table 3: Overview Interview Partners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>PERN activist; former PARC programme director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cole</td>
<td>legal clinic worker at the PCLS; member of Parkdale Organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>former PERN activist; art projects at PARC and with other Parkdale residents; teacher at the Parkdale Free School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>ethnographic research on Parkdale; art projects at PARC and with other Parkdale residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>chair of the Affordable Housing Committee of the PPE; research on housing policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skye</td>
<td>dumpster diving; PARC member; PARC programme user</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.3. Changes in the neighbourhood

How do you write about increasing polarization, neighbourhood change and displacement after a short field stay in the framework of an ethnographic research project? Since polarization implies change over time, this was an important question that I had already grappled with before going into the field. However, the main purpose of this thesis is not to study change as such but to find out how recent changes are perceived and framed by residents and in how far they lead to the emergence of resistance practices. In my conversations with residents, changes in Parkdale were often addressed without me asking targeted questions. The words gentrification and displacement are not unfamiliar to the people I met in Parkdale and are often used by them to point out that their own situation or that of their neighbours is not an isolated incident. This might be due to the work of the great variety of activist organizations in Parkdale that foster, as Bob put it, “political literacy,” and the omnipresence of these terms in flyers, and posters that are distributed or fixed to walls and power poles in Parkdale.

While some neighbourhood organizations do not denounce change per se, but rather focus on the question of which changes have which consequences for the residents, others frame recent changes more clearly as a threat. In the May 2019 issue of This is Parkdale, the newsletter published by Parkdale Organize, Parkdale is described as a neighbourhood “under attack” and “in danger.” According to the authors, the only effective response to these threats is to fight back together, as a community:

> It can sometimes feel like we’re surrounded. It feels like we’re under attack. In a lot of ways we are. Every week (even every day) brings a new threat to our homes, our schools, our jobs or the services we rely on. There’s no easy way to put it: Parkdale is in danger. It’s important we understand the level of danger we’re in but also the ways we can fight back and defeat these threats – TOGETHER. (Parkdale Organize 2019)

In conversations with research participants, the most frequently mentioned neighbourhood changes concerned the housing market and the deterioration of the neighbourhood infrastructure. Many Parkdale residents face pressure due to rising housing prices. During my field stay, there was an ongoing discussion about new developments proposed in the neighbourhood. Parkdale residents assume that if the announced development plans were approved without including affordable units for low-income residents, “that’s gonna dramatically change the neighbourhood” (Jared). As I will show in a more detailed manner in a later chapter, low-income residents and residents who live on a fixed income, like Skye, know that they may not be able to remain in their current housing situation in the long term. In order to be able to pay her rent, Skye has negotiated with her landlord. She pays a slightly reduced
rent; in return, she does small jobs around the house, like sweeping the front porch and taking care of the back yard, where she grows vegetables in summer. She tries not to think about having to leave her apartment because she knows that she might not be able to find affordable housing in the neighbourhood.

Skye: Yeah, it’s all expensive. I’m very fortunate to not be homeless right now. But my landlord is like ninety. The kids don’t/they have their own properties and that house is so old and they keep talking about ren- like renovating, yeah, so.

Veronika: So you’re afraid that you might have to leave?

Skye: Oh that day that daaay is in the back of my mind. But I gotta get my other stuff ordered, cause cause every time I look in the renters’ news it’s like sort of depressing, you know?

Skye described Parkdale as a “gentrified ghetto.” When I asked her what she thinks about the neighbourhood she told me that overall, she liked it. However, she also pointed out some problems and explained that due to her mental illness it can be hard for her to cope and interact with people in the neighbourhood: “It’s just I get too much anxiety and people are very hostile to me, right, so like sometimes I think there is too much trash and dog shit all all around and I get angry. But sometimes it’s like, when I see people trying hard and you know like very/it’s just like the subtleties of it I like.”

Not only rising housing prices but also the decreasing offer of small-scale businesses on Queen Street are interpreted as a threat. Bob pointed out Tibetan businesses and small-scale grocery stores that play an important role for the food security of low-income residents. These businesses are considered as an illustration of diversity in the neighbourhood. Although, as Bob said, “the funky aspects of Parkdale” are still there, storefronts are changing, especially in the part of Queen Street that is closer to downtown. “The gentrification effect is coming this way, down Queen Street, into Parkdale” (Bob). He explained that many new storefronts have appeared in the last two or three years because commercial businesses in Parkdale cannot afford to pay the rent anymore.

Parkdale residents are not only concerned about the disappearance of ‘Mom and Pop’ style businesses, but also the vanishing of fast-food chains that offer much more than just affordable food. During my stay in Parkdale, the Coffee Time franchise on Queen Street closed. In the morning, when I walked past it, it still looked normal. A few hours later, they had already removed the sign in the front and two men on ladders were about to remove the letters on the wall. It did not look like a coffee shop anymore, rather like another commercial space soon to be put up for lease. A user on Reddit wrote under a meme that says: “If its late at night and the
only place in sight is coffee time You’re gonna have a bad time” the following hypothesis: Coffee Time closing is the signal a neighbourhood has been gentrified. In the thread, Coffee Time is associated with sketchiness and is described as the “slum version of Tims.” Cole, whom I interviewed the very same day, emphasized that the vanishing of businesses like Coffee Time is detrimental for the community:

One of the dynamics that’s really troubling is that a lot of the businesses like coffee shops or bars and restaurants where/that have been kind of like places where working-class and poor people hang out uhm have been shutting down because of rents going up, commercial rents going up and so there is fewer and fewer places where people are able to just like congregate and eat and have a coffee and socialize and that kind of thing so that uhm that sucks. There’s a coffee shop on Queen Street called Coffee Time, it’s a chain and that’s/their last day is today, so that’s a bummer, right? It’s literally like a community centre, it’s like people who’re living there almost like and different groups of different kinds use the space for meetings, like Parkdale Organize meets there, there are like Bible study groups that meet there, like all kinds of people use the space. (Cole)

Repeatedly, the Coffee Time on Queen Street, the McDonalds on King Street that had closed recently as well as the Tim Hortons were referred to as ‘community centres.’ In this context, Cole highlighted the role of the public library in Parkdale, located on Queen Street. The public library and other ‘open’ spaces that are accessible for free are considered to be important for the neighbourhood’s residents and might have become even more important with commercial gentrification replacing cheap coffee shops and fast-food restaurants. Places like the library are used as public washrooms, to keep warm, meet people, and have access to free WIFI and other resources. Parkdale residents know exactly which places they can visit even with limited financial resources and which places they should rather avoid. One day I met David at the McDonalds on Roncesvalles Avenue. He wanted to find a quieter space and proposed to go to another coffee shop. He told me that he was a “rich man” because he had received his monthly payment and that we could go to a “nicer coffee place.” He proposed to go to Capital Espresso, a more high-end coffee-shop with exposed brick walls and rustic wooden tables that offers a large choice in coffee and pastries. The coffee shop situated on Queen Street close to the library opened in 2009.

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54 Tims – Tim Hortons – is the most well-known fast-food restaurant chain specializing in coffee in Canada
55 Spending time in Parkdale in winter, without living in the neighbourhood, meant that I had to ensure access to infrastructure. During my research stay, I came to the library almost every day to observe, to get to know people, and to write field notes, but also to warm up after walking through the neighbourhood in the cold, and to use the washroom, WIFI, and other services and resources. I thus used this space in a very similar way to many Parkdale residents I met.
Not all the people I met in Parkdale like to employ the word gentrification. During our walk through Parkdale, Bob took me to Queen Street to “point out how the main street is changing, without using the word gentrification, which I refuse to use anymore.” He told me that he considers the term a “whitewash”; a euphemism used by certain actors to downplay the consequences that the changes framed as gentrification bring about.

It used to have some meaning, it’s social displacement, it’s corporatization and displacement, that’s those things. Gentrification is gradual, it’s about change with an upscaling, that’s true, it comes with an upscaling component. […] But there’s an undercurrent, deadly, you know, that is taking place here. And people wouldn’t necessarily see that. (Bob)

The “deadly” consequences of urban poverty are a recurrent theme in our conversations. In the more than three decades in which he worked at PARC and even now in his retirement, Bob has seen the extraordinary toll poverty takes on Parkdale residents: people killed in a building fire due to poor safety standards, a man with a mental health diagnosis shot by the police in public transport, homeless people frozen to death on the streets, a man who died in a fire he set to keep himself warm on a winter night, people dying after being worn out by poverty and illness. Bob remembers them all. While he worked at PARC, the staff would organize a memorial service for every PARC member who died. “Because for many people, like just having the time to process, just the NEWS that somebody whom you talked to last week is now dead, is traumatizing for people. Because people are dying, you know, well before their time.” (Bob)

The service was held at the drop-in, with candle lighting and an open mic to give those who knew the deceased – and also those who did not know him or her – the opportunity to speak.

In summary, changes can be observed on various levels: changes in the neighbourhood ‘atmosphere’ due to the disappearance of stores and restaurants, changes in the composition of the residents, changes in the challenges that the residents face in their everyday lives. As Jared pointed out, the framing of these changes varies. He talked to people at the drop-in at PARC who argued that maybe Parkdale has not really changed and still maintains its ‘unique character.’ “So how do people who are marginalized still say their neighbourhood is the same and yet other people are saying ‘Oh no, it’s gentrifying, Parkdale is dead!’?”, Jared wondered. On the one hand, some voices emphasize change. While most low-income residents define these changes as a threat, external actors see the ‘gentrification’ of the neighbourhood as an upgrading of a previously run-down and dangerous area. On the other hand, others highlight that Parkdale, unlike other neighbourhoods in Toronto, continues to resist the dynamics of gentrification and remains an ‘authentic’ neighbourhood with an ‘intact community.’ Both narratives exist in parallel and are in some cases defended by one and the same person. This constant process of
definition and redefinition that guides residents to become meticulous observers of their
neighbourhood can perhaps be broken down to the following phrase: Parkdale is dead, long live
Parkdale!

5.4.4. Resistance practices in Parkdale

In Parkdale, various practices on the spectrum between informal and formal resistance can be
observed. As I discussed in the theoretical part of the paper, I describe not only organized
resistance, but also everyday practices that, as de Certeau would put it, transform the passive
Parkdale resident into a ‘producer’ – a producer that slightly alters the imposed norms and
definitions. Through everyday tactical practices – embodied practices such as walking, as well
as verbal practices and art – people at the urban margins can contest the ‘urban order’ and the
multiple strategies that seek to shape and reproduce it. In this manner, city dwellers produce
and re-signify urban space. Cole, legal clinic worker and member of Parkdale Organize,
emphasized that even though Parkdale residents at the margins are not in a position of power,
they have a scope for action when it comes to how they deal with changes viewed as
problematic: “We’re not the ones in power, so we don’t have/we don’t control what happens.
But uh what we can have an impact on is sort of like how people respond to what’s happening.
And so that’s what we’re trying to do.” Although, as Cole put it, the situation is “grim,” many
research participants are convinced that their individual and, more importantly, their collective
response can have an impact:

It’s grim out there, right? There are a lot of bad things happening and ah it’s
overwhelming I think for people uhm but at the same time like uhm there’s a lot of
intelligence and strength and capacity uhm among working-class people who live
in that neighbourhood so when that’s organized and tabbed it’s ah it’s very powerful
so that’s/I think the highest expression of that that I was part of was that that rent
strike in 2017 uhm where hundreds of people ah in the neighbourhood were
involved and so I think that’s just like a GLIMPSE of what’s possible. (Cole)

In the following, I will describe practices that at first glance have little in common, but, as I will
show in a later subchapter, are closely interrelated. How do Parkdale residents navigate poverty
and displacement dynamics in the global city Toronto? What are the ‘weapons of the urban
weak,’ to put it in J. Scott’s terms? As Cole pointed out, many initiatives focus on housing. The
housing struggle in the neighbourhood has prompted residents to develop a wide array of tactics
to fight rent increases, illegal evictions and ‘renovictions’: a delegation of tenants from a
building going to the landlord’s office or home to deliver a letter stating their demands, rent
strikes that involved several buildings, phone and email zaps. “The tactics vary, depending on
the situation and the scale of the struggle.” (Cole) The housing struggle and the role of art in activism, another aspect that deserves further elaboration in the Parkdale context, will be discussed in separate subchapters.

*More than basic needs*

The feeling of being deprived of essential resources is not the only factor that drives non-conforming actions and the creation of counter-spaces in the neighbourhood. Although for many Parkdale residents, having access to affordable housing and food is a matter of survival, the various resistance practices illustrate that they also strive to be part of a community and to have a say in what happens to their neighbourhood. Material needs are at the forefront of their struggles, however, the number of artistic practices shows that the need for creative expression should not be downplayed.

Bob highlighted repeatedly that PARC is a space that first and foremost provides safety. Many Parkdale residents who live below the poverty threshold come to PARC to satisfy their basic needs – a safe space to sit in, protection from rain and cold, food. However, it is also important to participate in the making of aspects that concern their daily lives – the programs at PARC, their living space or, on a larger scale, their neighbourhood. While Bob worked at Edmond Place, he let future tenants choose between several units and let residents decide which colour they wanted for walls that needed to be painted. In this manner, he tried to give residents the possibility to make the unit they live in ‘theirs.’ “People don’t just want housing, they want homes, something that could BE a home, right? People don’t even know how to MAKE a home.” With De Certeau, we can argue that, generally speaking, renters are urged to be mere ‘consumers’ of residential space. Here a parallel to Henri Lefebvre’s work and his distinction between *habiter* and *habitat* becomes apparent. Living in shelters or assigned apartments without the possibility to fully inhabit and adapt the space and being uncertain of whether one can stay in the apartment in the long term can be experienced as alienating. The presumption may be raised that if the possibility of ‘making one’s home one’s own’ is not given, other spaces in the neighbourhood – open, accessible and accommodating counter-spaces – play a more important role. Not only physical places outside the home but also imaginary, ‘unreal’ places are ‘visited;’ utopias that offer an imaginary escape from reality. Skye often described her dwelling practices and talked about what it would be like to live in her own house and how she would furnish it: “If I had a house I’d have different/like my bathroom would be like 1940s, 50s, but like other rooms/I’d have a natural cave room, my bedroom would probably be the cave, you know? I’d have all kinds of different rooms.”
Marginalized Parkdale residents try to expand their access to (urban) resources while at the same time regaining or defending their dignity. For many participants, leading a ‘good life’ implies having the possibility to participate in recreational activities that are often costly. Bob argues that no matter your socio-economic position, everybody should also have access to art, personal development and expression. Among other things, he emphasized the connecting force of music. He had asked for funding to buy musical instruments for PARC, which was difficult to get because, in his opinion, people focus too much on basic needs or have a definition of basic needs that is too narrow. He told me the story of a man who was living on the streets and was unable to interact with anybody without being violent. However, through music he little by little started to interact with people in the drop-in – still violent sometimes, but he found a way to connect with people. “And he is still housed,” concluded Bob, “and this is the main objective of PARC, to keep people housed!” During his work as PARC programme director, he tried to create an environment where artistic forms of expression, and identity and community building are encouraged – “that’s why people proudly say they are PARC members, you know, it’s identity!”

Skye only started to come to PARC in 2019. “I always knew about PARC, it’s just/I was just a little bit intimated to come inside, you know, ‘cause it’s kind of rough, around the edges.” She told me that one has to be careful and be able to assess situations well. She has made the experience that some people appeared to be “nice” only because they wanted something from her. She repeatedly told me about a man who harasses her and others and has also destroyed her bike. Her story is a reminder that it is necessary to take into account gender aspects in the urban context. While most male PARC members consider PARC as a safe space, she highlighted that women might not always feel at ease. This shows that in order to understand how space is perceived, it is necessary to consider the social context of the perceiver. Nevertheless, coming to PARC and using the programmes, such as taking part in the art group and the writing group, helped her to recover and to overcome her anxiety. People encouraged her to participate in karaoke, which takes place on Wednesdays on the small stage in the drop-in. Skye invited me to a karaoke event at PARC, where she sang a song “dedicated to that guy who smashed my bike.” She feels accepted in the drop-in, even on stage, due to the fact that many PARC members also have a mental health diagnosis. “It’s not the greatest but it’s like/it’s it’s like an expression and when it’s hard to express yourself, it’s it’s good to have like, you know, a community of people who struggle too, right?” (Skye) Although not everybody in the drop-in struggles with the same thing, she feels that the hardships and daily challenges PARC members experience contribute to creating a community, or even a substitute family: “For the
most part, it’s just like kind of like a sense of like brother, sister, you know? An orphanage, you know? It’s like an adult group home orphanage!” (Skye) Bob also pointed out that most people who come to the drop-in do not have a network ready to step up and support them whenever “things get too tough.” He told me that he would help to recreate this network to some extent. “It wouldn’t be necessarily quite the same measure of intimacy as family and so on, but that’s probably just as well because people’s families were so fucked up and even the mere MENTION of the word ‘family’ is is a trauma experience.” (Bob)

PARC is only one example of a counter-space; a place to escape a logic that invisibilizes the needs of marginalized city-dwellers, many of which are psychiatric survivors and/or low-income residents. PARC is a place of encounter where inequalities temporarily lose their significance, at least to a certain extent. Unlike other ‘public’ places outside the home and workplace that are affected by privatization and subtle disciplinary strategies, money is not a prerequisite for visiting PARC. However, as has already been mentioned, not everyone feels equally at ease in the drop-in.

Knowledge and power

Many initiatives in Parkdale aim at raising awareness for (tenant) rights among marginalized and vulnerable Parkdale residents. They provide an interpretative frame that allows residents to link lived experiences to dynamics and power structures that exist beyond their neighbourhood. According to Cole, this knowledge is the prerequisite for initiatives that want to prevent people from having to leave the neighbourhood and thus losing their social environment and support network: “The organizing by tenants and working-class people in this neighbourhood has largely been about trying to CREATE the conditions under which people have the confidence and determination to stay in the neighbourhood.” (Cole) Organizations such as Parkdale Organize and the PNLT aim at disseminating knowledge about tenant rights, eviction rules, and about actions that can be taken. Referring to low-income people living in rooming houses that are at risk, Jeremy argued for “building an awareness of rights and like a sense of solidarity among those communities” and explained that organizations in Parkdale try to fund ambassadors within these buildings to inform and mobilize other residents and help organize events.

This knowledge about rights and effective tactics is embedded in assumptions about power structures and policies. Parkdale Organize frames the underlying dynamics of the difficult housing situation in Parkdale as class struggle. In the interview, Cole repeatedly contrasted the
situation of working-class tenants in Parkdale and the demands of landlords. He not only delegitimized price hikes and evictions on illegitimate grounds but put into question the role of landlords as such. Jeremy, who is an active member of the PPE, described this narrative as an effective tactic when it comes to bringing people together for a common cause, even though the PPE takes a different approach in many respects: “The class antagonism narrative is both true and it like/it’s effective in bringing people together, right, cause it’s us against/yeah it IS us against them, but it’s like they [Parkdale Organize] are doing really good work for making people politically mobilized.” (Jeremy) When describing social housing in Toronto and more generally in Canada, Cole also referred to the political climate in a globalized context, describing the changing role of the state in the context of housing:

Parkdale has very little social housing […] Canada was told by international financial masters back in the 90s that if it wanted to be competitive on the global market it has to turn over this real estate and housing provision role to private capital and that sort of thing so it doesn’t seem like there is ah/there isn’t much of a political uhm/much political will for getting back into the whole thing. (Cole)

In the quotation, the member of Parkdale Organize makes a connection between the housing situation of Parkdale residents and neoliberal restructuring, thus linking macro-political forces to local changes. Participants who are less involved in organized resistance hardly ever make that connection. The power structures that they criticize are often only vaguely defined and explanations vary according to the subject matter. In the context of the struggle for affordable housing, the targets are often landlords; either private individuals or financialized landlords who deliver returns to shareholders and investors.

In addition to providing interpretations that aim to explain certain dynamics in the neighbourhood, organizations and initiatives with different degrees of formalization transmit knowledge on how to organize collectively and on what tactics can be used to reach the group’s aims. Cole highlighted that having an awareness of rights and knowing that, collectively, marginalized residents can ameliorate certain aspects of their everyday life can be helpful in other contexts: “[I]n participating in these types of struggles, working-class people have developed their politics and taken that/those lessons out into other aspects of their daily lives.” (Cole) He gave the example of how experiences in the housing struggle were used to improve working conditions at the Ontario Food Terminal, a big warehouse terminal which is a major employer for Parkdalians, especially Tibetan men. A family member of an organizer in a building that fought against a rent increase during the Akelius campaign had told him that he had taken the lessons he learned during the campaign into his workplace, the food terminal. Over the last few years, there was a wave of unionization and workers have won higher wages.
“[S]o I think the organizing does have kind of a spill over effect in terms of how people, you know, understand their their interests and and struggle for it.” (Cole)

*It’s a sign!*

For people who feel that they have little influence on developments in their home environment, the symbolic reappropriation of urban space can be a means of taking an active stance. In this context, signs can come to be regarded as an indicator of neighbourhood change. When Bob and I walked towards Dufferin on Queen Street, we passed a block that had become known as “Vegandale,” consisting of four storefronts – “a mecca for the ethically minded.” On the Vegandale website, Parkdale is described as a “vibrant neighbourhood.” Parkdale residents responded to Vegandale branding by organizing an event with the title “Parkdale isn’t Vegandale” in August 2018. According to Bob, “the community got pretty worked up.” Vegandale was interpreted as an aggressive attempt to change the neighbourhood character which angered and mobilized many people, including Bob. He was particularly angry about the sign of Vegandale Brewery: “When I saw that I just said I need somebody to carry the ladder and uh be a lookout because it says/there was a black sign that says ‘Morality on tap.’” After crossing the street, we found out that the sign was still here. “Fuck that!” he shouted, “I should have ripped that off!”

Removing or defacing signs or advertising posters can be interpreted as a resistance practice aiming at symbolically reappropriating urban space. It can be understood as an opportunity to take action against external actors, and to show that one does not agree with the changes in the neighbourhood that are framed as being imposed from the ‘outside.’ In this way, a certain degree of agency is symbolically regained. In the case of the controversial condo project in South Parkdale at King and Dufferin, Bob put his ideas into practice. He defaced a sign attached to the fences that enclosed the pile of rubble that used to be a McDonalds, where the XO Condos were about to be built. The following conversation between Bob and a man we met during our walk illustrates that they are appalled by the fact that the condo project was called XO Condos (“hugs and kisses”) but does not offer affordable housing for people who are underhoused. The man, who lives in a shelter, observes the mushrooming of condos in the city, knowing that the

57 The event took place in Milky Way Garden, close to Queen Street, at the east end of the neighbourhood. The PNLT and Greenest City had acquired 87 Milky Way in 2017 for the purposes of making it a community garden, especially for newcomers.
apartments are not being built for homeless people like him and that the growing number of
homeless people in Toronto is not necessarily the result of a housing shortage.

Bob: So many people homeless in this city right now. 12000 people!
Man: And there’s condos going up everywhere.
Bob: I know!
Man: That old McDonalds, it’s gone.
Bob: I know! It’s the Love Condos going up there, did you know that?
Man: Oh, I hope they show us some love and put some of us in there.
Bob: We defaced their sign (laughs) turned it in a/it wasn’t so lovely when we
finished!

Both broke out in laughter when Bob told him that he had expressed his anger and defaced a
sign attached to the fence of the site. The shared laughter eased the tense situation. Before
walking in the opposite direction, the man thanked him for his help and said: “See you, Bob!
You’re one of our heroes, eh.” Painting over a sign, leaving a message in public space, visible
to all, gives the feeling of being able to make an impact. It is a way to express one’s opinion
publicly for those who feel underrepresented in local political institutions.

The “Parkdale state of mind” online

Reactions to gentrification and displacement processes become not only visible in urban space,
but also online. The satirical Instagram account Parkdale Life shows pictures to illustrate the
“Parkdale state of mind” – pictures he/she takes on the streets of illicit things that one
supposedly could only see in Parkdale, thus emphasizing the ‘unique character’ of the
neighbourhood. In the blog with the same name blog entries on various subjects, mainly critical
posts concerning the situation in Parkdale or in Toronto in general, are uploaded, such as posts
about the recent closure of the McDonalds in Parkdale, the Toronto Life magazine, or plunging
property values in rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods. “Yes, a McDonald’s is a community
centre – though it probably shouldn’t be” is the title of a post published in January 2020. The
poster does not intend to “defend a mega corporation like McDonald’s” but argues that fast-
food restaurants tend to be more inclusive (Parkdale Life 2020/01/15). The blog post refers to
an Instagram post published a few months earlier with the title. The picture shows a demolished
building – the building on King and Dufferin where the McDonalds used to be and where the
XO Condos are to be built. The poster sarcastically writes: “Hello, officer? Yes, a CONDO is
excited to meet me. It’s sending me hugs and kisses.” Other users commented: “Walked past
tonight with my friends, saw the last of what’s left, reflected back on the days when I was a kid
going to dons getting breakfast with my grandma, it’s an end of an era :(” and “Parkdaledeath.”

The comments reveal that people feel nostalgic about the disappearance of a place with which they associate memories. The social media platform is used to express criticism about the production of exclusive residential space in lieu of a formerly inclusive place.

*Parkdale Life* posts are often used in local newspapers to report on Parkdale. In this way, the Instagram account becomes a voice that influences the formation of the discourse on the neighbourhood. Therefore, it also has an impact on the perception of the neighbourhood. Does the representation of Parkdale as a ‘quirky’ neighbourhood play into presenting the neighbourhood as authentic and thus attractive for the highly paid professional classes? Or is it rather a resistance to the representation of Parkdale as an already gentrified neighbourhood? This question requires further research and cannot be answered at this point. Nevertheless, extending ethnographic analysis to the virtual field is an interesting addition to observations in urban space. In the age of the internet, it is also important to note that email newsletters and social media platforms, especially Twitter, play an important role in the dissemination of information. In addition, Parkdale Organize has repeatedly invited residents of the neighbourhood to participate in phone and e-mail zaps to pressure landlords and others. Internet features can thus also become tools for protest.

*Between necessity and anti-consumerism*

Over the years, long-term residents of the neighbourhood acquire knowledge and develop tactics that help them to meet their needs in spite of limited resources. Skye’s accounts in particular show that these activities, although time-consuming, can be perceived as creative activities. While walking through Parkdale, Skye showed me places that are significant in her ‘daily round’: the PARC drop-in, grocery stores, the Salvation Army, the food bank. These places are essential for her being able to stay in Parkdale. She shared her knowledge about where to find affordable groceries and clothes with me. She visibly enjoys her ‘scavenger hunts’ through the neighbourhood. She tries to make sure that her diet is healthy and buys food in several small grocery stores in the neighbourhood because she knows which products are cheaper where. “I go to the other store cause it’s only like three something [dollars] for a big big big bag [...] That’s just one of the luxuries you get here in Parkdale you get choice of like anything whatever.” Leaving the neighbourhood would also mean that she would lose access to these resources. It can be presumed that the importance of these resources increases neighbourhood attachment; the sense of belonging to a place that Logan and Molotch termed “sentiment” (2007: 20). Once a day, Skye comes to the PARC drop-in to have lunch or dinner.
“I have to feed myself, you know?” We go there after our walk. All the seats were already taken when we arrived at noon and we sat down on the wooden steps of the stairs. On another day, I accompanied her to the food bank next to the drop-in, where she fills her dumpster bag with groceries. The food bank is an important resource for low-income residents in the neighbourhood.

In addition to using social assistance programmes, such as the drop-in and the food bank, and buying things in thrift stores and affordable shops, Skye has made urban foraging – collecting food, clothing, and other things that are defined as ‘waste’ – a habit. To describe this practice, Skye uses the term ‘dumpster diving’ with a very broad definition: “Just finding random things, even if people give me things, you know, fellow dumpster artists, or like regular friends, I’ll either find a home for it, or hold on to it, cause I always find useful things, you know?” She also collects food in the wild and cooks and preserves it. When she walks through the neighbourhood, she routinely keeps an eye open for things on the streets. Skye sees dumpster diving not only as response to food insecurity; it can also be interpreted as a playful way of appropriating urban space and resisting the increasing privatization of public space in the global city. In the interview, she linked the practice to her anti-consumerist attitude; emphasizing the link between ‘virtue’ and ‘necessity’:

Skye: Cash is like a currency, but I try to use my brain as a currency and like dumpster dive and yeah.

Veronika: How did you start dumpster diving?

Skye: I don’t know, curiosity and necessity and like, you know, also because it’s like, you know, anti-consumerism and like I certainly have a lot of stuff, but it’s like, I just feel like collecting and all, you know.

Skye decided to take me to a place where she had found a dumpster filled with glass pieces next to a store that mainly sold chandeliers and was about to close. Together with Jared, she wants to create an art installation somewhere in the neighbourhood, using the class pieces in a way that the construction can be used as a musical instrument. The dumpster had already gone when we arrived. She told me that the owner did not want them to take things out of the dumpster and tried to make them pay for the things they took. She, however, is convinced that dumpster diving is not stealing, but “rescuing” things or “giving things a second home”; a resistance against consumerism. “It’s like a virtue ticket, dumpster diving, right? […] There just needs to be a system where every/like everything is shared, you know, but then greedy people don’t like that.” Skye likes to share or give away the recovered items and transforms urban foraging in a social practice.
In the following, I will turn to more organized forms of resistance and will situate their development in a larger context. The groups and organizations that emerged in Parkdale over the last decade, such as Parkdale Organize, the Parkdale People’s Economy and the PNLT, have different histories, focal points, and action repertoires. Their presence in the neighbourhood encourages the formation of loose coalitions between low-income people experiencing housing deprivation and displacement, activists who are interested in the subject due to their profession or field of study, and researchers.

According to David, there are two ‘waves’ of activism in Parkdale, tackling inequalities and poverty in the neighbourhood: On the one hand, there was a wave of social work organizations in the 1980s, when PARC and other centres opened, aiming to help the poor, the mentally ill and the homeless. In his opinion, Bob is a representative of this ‘wave of social workers.’ On the other hand, he identifies a new wave of activism that has developed over the last years and is mainly driven by young people among which many have university education whom he describes as ‘activists.’ If this is true, these developments might be linked to the results of the already mentioned report on neighbourhood income inequality and polarization, in which Dinca-Panaiteșcu et al. describe a significant increase in polarization in the 1980s and 1990s due to neoliberal restructuring (2017: 6). Since the increase is more drastic in Toronto than in any other Canadian city, the following presumption can be made: Polarization dynamics were more extreme in Toronto due to the fact that neoliberal policies coincided with and fuelled global city dynamics. The emergence of social work centres in Parkdale could be interpreted as a response to increasing inequalities and the concentration of poor households in the neighbourhood that was and still is home to particularly vulnerable groups such as mentally ill people and recent immigrants. This raises the question of what prompted the more recent wave of activism. In the context of housing, the increasing influence of ‘financialized’ landlords such as Akelius can be cited as an important catalyst. Akelius came to the neighbourhood in 2013; Parkdale Organize and the PNLT developed shortly after. According to Sassen, the presence of international real estate investors in central areas in Toronto is illustrative of its global city status (cf. 2001: 192). I will therefore discuss the role of the housing struggle in Parkdale.
Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the fight for affordable housing was a constant battleground in Parkdale. However, recent dynamics have aggravated the situation for low-income residents in the neighbourhood and in Toronto in general. Toronto’s housing crisis, which is reflected by a shortage of available rental housing and decreasing access to homeownership, as well as the increasing number of homeless people is very present in the local media. Parkdale is often seen as the last affordable housing stock in the inner city due to its high percentage of rental housing. Initiatives in Parkdale mainly aim at protecting existing affordable housing in the neighbourhood and preventing evictions that have increased in number after the influx of ‘financialized’ landlords. Cole described the situation as follows:

The ownership of the rental housing has been consolidated into fewer and fewer interests so for example NOW there are three major corporate landlords which own and control about 30% of all rental units in the neighbourhood and so it’s less so a situation of sort of like individual, small-time landlords and more a situation where international finance capital is being invested into the rental housing stock in the neighbourhood. (Cole)

The high proportion of rental housing makes Parkdale attractive for real-estate investment: “There is a ton of apartment buildings in the neighbourhood, so that’s attractive ah to ah to capital, in terms of the long-term plan of getting rid of those tenants, raising the rent, changing the character of the neighbourhood.” (Cole) According to Cole, these changes in the housing market have created incentives for activism. The effects of financialization, the “increasing penetration of financial practices, logics, and strategies into non-financial sectors” (August/Walks 2018: 125), have among other things led to the formation of Parkdale Organize.

On our tour through the neighbourhood, Bob took me to Jameson Avenue, also called ‘Jameson Corridor’ due to the fact that the street is known as a portal for immigrants coming into the city. Signs in front of the mid-rises with names of real-estate investment firms draw attention to available apartments. “Rent today!”, Bob read out loud. “Akelius was the first big investment firm doing business in Parkdale. […] Swedish-German. Came to Canada to buy a hundred thousand units. And started in Parkdale (laughs)! He told me about their strategies to “get rid of tenants” such as firing the superintendents, not answering the phone for repair requests and above-guideline rent increases. Bachelorette buildings and boarding or rooming houses are important for Parkdale’s low-income residents. However, as Bob explained, recent dynamics have made these types of housing increasingly unaffordable, partly due to upscaling and redevelopment aiming at replacing current tenants with higher-paying ones:
The bachelorettes, that’s a, you know, a primary source of housing for PARC members and other people who are low-income, right, because they are very small, little bachelorettes. But they would go for 650, 670 was standard a couple of years ago. And that’s expensive for somebody on social assistance but doable. You know, if your check is 1046 a month and you’re paying 670 or 700, well, you know, it’s doable. But uh now they’re 1100 bucks, 1200 bucks, 1600 bucks. (Bob)

The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust initiated a study that aimed at taking stock of rooming houses in the neighbourhood and evaluating which rooming houses are ‘at-risk’. The Parkdale Rooming House Study (2017) counted 198 rooming houses in the neighbourhood in 2016 among which about 30% are at risk of being upscaled or converted which implies the eviction of existing tenants. Jeremy put it bluntly: “The people who live in those dwelling rooms, if they get kicked out, they’ll be homeless. There’s NOwhere left in that community.” Bob and I passed a boarding house where he used to bring people in need of housing while he worked at PARC. Spontaneously, he decided to knock on the door to ask if the owner, whom he had not seen in more than twenty years, was still there. He explained to me that it was one of the very few boarding houses that had single rooms: “This boarding house is one of the better ones.” (Bob)

As I have already illustrated, for many Parkdale residents staying in Parkdale signifies staying close to vital resources such as social work agencies, affordable food, and their social network. The Parkdale Neighbourhood Landlord tries to tackle the problem by focusing on community ownership of land. The non-profit organization aims at removing residential properties from the real estate market to preserve affordable housing in the neighbourhood. In 2019, the PNLT acquired a bachelorette building in South Parkdale with 15 units, funded by the City of Toronto, foundations and donors and managed by PARC. The PNLT also owns a vacant property that has been used as a community garden for many years. The importance of the housing issue in the neighbourhood, particularly its resurgence in the last years, points to the fact that the consequences of polarisation dynamics become clearly noticeable in the everyday lives of many residents. But, as I will show in the next subchapter, collective organizing is not the only response to this and other pressing issues.

5.4.6. Art in activism

During my stay in Parkdale, I came across many artistic practises and products. It is possible to roughly distinguish between art as a form of expression and processing of experiences and the strategic use of art in the context of organized events, meetings and demonstrations. Here again, the distinction is rather blurry. I have already mentioned programs at PARC that encourage creative expression, such as the art and writing group and the karaoke events at the drop-in.
Beyond these activities organized by agencies in the neighbourhood, participants told me about their personal projects that deal with the situation in Parkdale.

Through his short stories and songs, Bob tries on the one hand to process experiences and on the other hand to send a message to others. At the end of the interview, Bob showed me the lyrics of a song he wrote about the fire in the building that is now called Edmond Place. He played the song at the funeral. The song is a conversation between ‘fire’ and an inhabitant of the building. In the first verse of the song, the fire talks to the person and describes his or her fond hope: “You were living on the third floor / High above sacred ground / You hoped for something better / Hope is good to keep around.” Bob explained that despite the tragic circumstances he tried to send a positive message in the chorus by not only presenting fire as a destructive force but also as a light that gives hope.

Some of the words, “have courage,” right, “there must be love in this land,” right, it's like, it is, you know, kind of a statement of we hope there is love, sometimes we don’t think there is, cause there’s so much going on, you know, and uh well fire, you know, is symbolic too, it is a cleanser and a destroyer. (Bob)

In the next example too, the idea for the project roots in lived experiences. David was encouraged by the PARC theatre group founder, a staff member who used to be a professional actor but quit his job to become a social worker, to write a play. David told me that he was inspired by the theatre group participants’ personalities and experiences. A member of the group had told him that she had seen two cops “beating up a guy on the sidewalk” and David had the idea that that guy on the sidewalk could be him, a 21st-century communist. In the play – a conversation between Master Soundman, the 21st-century-communist, Officer Batman, Officer Robin, an empathetic bystander, and a new old liberal democratic candidate – David addressed several topics: the housing struggle, institutional politics, the failings of democracy, hope, and belonging.

Master Soundman: Join the resistance against corporate capitalist real estate. Listen to Nirvana on Free Parkdale Now or NFP. Ah, we’re working on that acronym, folks. Oh, by the way, don’t forget to vote today in Canada’s 2 millionth Godzillion election since Confederation. Strange people will be running around today asking you to vote for them. Me, I’d rather vote for an invisible dog.

In the Parkdale context, art is also linked to organized resistance since it is deliberately used as a tactic to mobilize people and raise awareness. On our walk, David took me to Masaryk Park, a green space close to the library in South Parkdale with a community garden that is also used as a gathering spot for demonstrations. Together with a staff worker at PARC, he wrote and performed a puppet theatre as part of a demonstration “which [was] something NEW.” They
dramatized the play of homelessness and affordable housing with an effigy of Doug Ford, premier of Ontario since June 2018, that they destroyed during the play by throwing it on the sidewalk and stamping on it. “People tend to get into very fixed non-imaginative modes of interaction,” David criticized, “you walk down the street with signs, that’s the only form of creativity.” He believes that the inclusion of art forms in activism increases the effectiveness of contentious action: “You have to be creative to do anything effective.” The reaction to the short theatre interlude before the actual start of the demo confirmed his expectations: “It was something different. They’d never seen ANY theatre done in the in the context of political protest, it’s very stale and boring and that’s ineffective.” (David)

In a conversation with David and Jared, they argued that art as a creative way of dealing with experiences and engaging with others has the potential to change the status quo. Creativity and imagination are often mentioned in connection with activism: “Imagination is very important, having some imagination and uh, so you know, you make some choices about uh, you know, what you do, when you do it, how you do it, who does it. (Bob) Interestingly, when they say ‘effective,’ they do not solely refer to the outcome of the actions in terms of reactions by decision-makers and in terms of improvement of living and housing conditions. An effective action also implies making sure that people who participated will participate in future events, that the Parkdale community is strengthened, and that more residents become aware of the issue and consider participating. However, not everybody defines the success of resistance in that way – as we will see in the next chapter, some focus more on institutional politics and pressuring decision-makers to bring about change in small steps.

5.4.7. Between informal resistance, organizations, and institutional politics

In the theoretical part of the work, I have discussed the question of whether different informal and formal forms of resistance have a mutual influence on each other. In the Parkdale context, it can be concluded that informal practices can become formalized and episodic actions can lead to the development of long-term initiatives. The group Parkdale Organize, for example, emerged as a response to a specific situation lived by tenants in several residential buildings. The analysis has shown that participation in organized resistance can vice versa encourage informal resistance due to increased access to resources, networks, and information. The assumption that resistance is productive of further resistance (cf. Lilja et al. 2017) can therefore be confirmed. The following points deal with the tensions between informal practices, organized resistance and institutional politics. I will discuss how efforts are being made to
increase participation in groups and organizations in Parkdale. Furthermore, I will look into the question of whether demands are made on political institutions at the municipal, provincial and national levels. Finally, I will highlight the role of the existing ‘activist infrastructure’ in the neighbourhood.

**Inclusion/exclusion**

The tension between the self-definition of groups and organizations in Parkdale as inclusive and the difficulty of including the most marginalized residents is a recurring theme. Jeremy is enthusiastic about the fact that a very diverse group of people come to the meetings and events – from people experiencing homelessness to, as he said jokingly, “people with lived experience of being a rich gentrifier.” The Parkdale People’s Economy also funds translators for the Tibetan community. However, Jeremy sees this heterogeneity, the different expectations with which people come to those meetings, and the fact that it is a very transient group not only as positive but also as a challenge for organizers. As the lead on the affordable housing committee of the PPE, he has already facilitated many meetings. He tries to make sure that people feel supported and that their experiences and problems are taken seriously while at the same time ensuring that the group makes progress in planning events to raise awareness of people’s rights and to support new coalitions that are forming.

> Because they are really really really stressed out and upset about the fact that their landlord is trying to kick them out and they wanna talk about that and they want katharsis and they want like people to hear them out and like absolutely, you know, we’re there to be supportive and and this is a group that cares about that but there comes a point where it’s like “Ok, what are we gonna do about it?” (Jeremy)

He believes that for the participation of residents in the planning and negotiation processes it is necessary to educate people on housing policies that are being reviewed in City Hall, on the progress of inclusionary zoning and the current phase of consultation. This knowledge is necessary to motivate people from the Parkdale community to come to the meetings of the affordable housing committee and maybe also come to City Hall to voice their demands.

According to Bob, inviting low-income people who experience poverty and housing deprivation is not sufficient. He argues that a lot more could be done in the neighbourhood to further include people who are at the margins in organized resistance against increasing poverty and homelessness in the neighbourhood. “Uhm take a look at what you’re doing politically and ask yourself the question/or first of ‘Who’s in the room?’ If it’s just people from the agencies? Fuck that!” (Bob) Like Jeremy, he acknowledges that organizing actions in the neighbourhood around specific issues or participating in organized resistance is not as low-threshold as one
might think. Shortly after leaving the drop-in, we met a resident of Edmond Place. He introduced me to the elderly man by saying “He is an activist, he went on many actions with me!” After a quick chat, the man asked him to let him know “if anything’s going on.” Later in the interview, he brought up this encounter to point out that for many PARC members, putting ideas into practice can be “scary”: “It’s like ‘I can’t do it, I can’t do it!’ It’s like ‘Well you don’t have to do it yourself, let’s do it together!’ You remember [name of the Edmond Place resident]? ‘Anything going on, Bob, action-wise?’ (laughs) Yeah!” He argues for the active inclusion of PARC members through continuous initiatives that encourage political literacy:

Working with the members around political literacy and involvement is not something that should be/it should be ONGOING, you know? It shouldn’t be just about “Oh there’s an action coming up, you wanna come?” No. There should be a group that meets every week, like an ongoing group, a discussion, bring in speakers, whatever, you know. That’s all literacy stuff, just people just being able to discuss things. (Bob)

He also highlights the importance of making gatherings and demonstrations “memorable” and giving the participants the feeling that they can be proud of themselves by telling the story of the PERN demonstration. The demonstration took place on November 22, 2018, which is National Housing Day in Toronto, a day created by the homelessness advocacy group Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) in 1998. Bob described in a detailed manner what they had planned for the demonstration. They had removed the pins to open the panels that separated the LCBO lot from the street and fixed a banner to the roof of the former LCBO. They used the panels to build a ‘house’ on the lot, covered it with paper and wrote “Fight the housing crisis” on it. “And then the panels were closed with blankets, different coloured blankets. So it looked really great. In fact, we had two homeless people wanting to spend the night. Sad to say.” (Bob)

For Bob, the action was not finished after the demonstration:

About three weeks later, I had everybody come over here have supper, have stew. But mostly to give them their party favours, which are the pins from the fence. […] I said ‘Keep that,’ you know, ‘cause you need to get more!’ […] There has to be some recognition and uh reward, if you’re gonna have involvement, you know, people gotta wanna come back, you know, and that’s how you build uhm I think that’s how you build things, build activist organizations. (Bob)

In his opinion, “things are pretty weak on the ground.” He argues that those people who are interested in the issue but have never taken part in political mobilizations could participate in the organization of an action by coming up with and producing ‘creative effects.’ “So you come

58 Two interview partners, Bob and David Hulchanski, were members of the TDRC steering committee.
in, make a contribution, and then go. It’s an interesting idea cause that that can make a
difference, right. Sort of trying to make an experience for people.” As an example, he described
the preparation for an action organized by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), an
anti-poverty organization. Together with other OCAP members – the “cutters group” – he cut
out countless black human silhouettes and wrote down the names of homeless people who died
in Toronto for a memorial service at the Toronto Homeless Memorial, located right behind a
shopping mall in one of the busiest areas in downtown.

Institutional politics

Grassroots organizations and community coalitions in Parkdale differ in their approach to
political institutions. It is interesting to take a closer look at whether the city government or the
state are the addressees of residents’ demands. On the one hand, some groups and actors try to
put pressure on municipal decision-makers. On the other hand, many research participants are
critical of institutional politics and choose different tactics to reach similar aims. The approach
advocated by Jeremy and the activities of Parkdale Organize, as described by Cole, serve as
ideal-typical examples. In the interview, Jeremy contrasted his stance with the work of Parkdale
Organize while at the same time recognizing that both approaches have their justification:

Parkdale Organize is like just awesome and like it’s very important to like drive the
class consciousness of tenants against (laughs) against like aggressive landlords and
make them aware of their rights and how to fight for them, to make them like willing
to, you know, to dream big. [...] I just think that politics/we’re not gonna overthrow
the state any day soon, so we better work within it as well as we can while also
making people aware of it’s disgusting shortcomings. (Jeremy)

The question of where he should put his energy is an issue that occupies him very much. Jeremy
considers his role in the Parkdale community as being a mediator between Parkdale residents
and policymakers. He thus uses the opportunities for consultation and participation provided
by the political institutions to draw attention to the fact that “what’s getting built is not meeting
our needs and it’s bringing in, you know, investors and like gentrifiers, who, you know, aren’t
uh/we’re ONLY creating spaces for those people.” (Jeremy) Due to his university background,
he is familiar with certain concepts and policy approaches. In particular, he is involved in the
debate on extending the rental replacement policy to rooming houses. Together with other
actors from Parkdale, he has attended deputations in City Hall and has met with city planners
to discuss the issue, trying to negotiate to “protect what little deeply affordable stock we have
in this city.” He argued that in order to protect tenants and make sure that new developments in
Parkdale also offer community benefits, it is not only important to educate tenants about their
rights, but also to participate in the making of the rights they rely on. According to him, this work is tedious when it comes to negotiating compromises and to present the outcome of these “technocratic discussions” (Jeremy) to the community.

Cole, on the other hand, doubts that the situation can be improved through official political channels. He explains that Parkdale Organize chose a different way by pressuring landlords through self-organization and direct action:

What’s been important has been sort of the principle of independent organization. The tenants are sort of doing it for themselves, with their neighbours, not relying on, sort of, the existing establishment of uhm social agencies or non-profit organizations, and NOT relying on politicians uhm and sort of pushing the agenda themselves ah directly with the/with the landlords. (Cole)

He considers the involvement of urban political actors to be a time-consuming strategy, which in his opinion is rarely successful because “those established channels of recourse are really set up in the interests of the landlords.” According to him, institutional channels designed to mediate between tenants and landlords are dead ends because they tie people up in legal processes and rarely lead to the desired outcome. In his opinion, the work of Parkdale Organize, a group that aims at supporting tenants and publicizing the victories tenants have won through organizing, is empowering, precisely because it advocates resistance to the deteriorating housing conditions in the neighbourhood without relying on political institutions and actors. In that sense, the loss of institutional trust is framed as a precondition for the elaboration of resistance practices.

[It] has sort of developed the conditions under which, you know, people have come to see organizing and direct action as sort of like a a a sensible and uh appropriate response to the situation. Instead of just being like “Oh well, we should like ask our member of parliament to help us!” or you know “We should call the City!” or/Instead of just always relying on on those things, people are kind of taking things in their own hands more and more, so I think that’s positive. (Cole)

The idea that citizen participation is disempowering because it is to a certain extent tolerated or even encouraged by the neoliberal logic. Since discontent can be channelled and more widespread resistance prevented, urban resistance not automatically challenges the status quo but can also perpetuate it. The loss of trust in democratic, representative institutions is also reflected in how the Canadian state is viewed by many research participants. Comparisons are often made between Canada and Europe, with the emphasis on the fact that the education and health systems, in particular, are more developed in Europe. Many participants feel that they are left alone by the state, which is why the Canadian state is hardly ever an addressee for their
demands. As can be seen in the following conversation, government support is considered as too limited with regard to education, but also other issues such as health care and housing.

Skye: You’re younger and you’re educated, and you come from a country where they take care of you, you know, like your education, so you can take care of yourself, you know?
Veronika: You don’t feel that Canada does that?
Skye: No, I I had to strip to like pay for college. And it didn’t get me anywhere (laughs) right?

It became clear in our conversations that Skye feels tolerated by the state, but not sufficiently supported. Many Parkdale residents are low-income or no-income individuals and are dependent on income assistance. Although they receive financial support, there is little trust in the state and the provincial government. They feel insufficiently represented in the political system and have the feeling that their concerns and problems are not taken seriously.

**Activist infrastructure**

Understanding resistance practices in Parkdale is not possible without taking into account the network of non-profit agencies in the neighbourhood. When David told me about his collaboration with Jared in various projects, for example, the theatre group, he explained that PARC plays an important supportive role “cause it’s an institution and it’s a friendly institution.” PARC not only makes its space and equipment available for various events, meetings, rehearsals and the like but also makes it possible or easier to apply for funding. The Parkdale Free School classes and workshops, such as the “Evening with the Unknown Philosopher,” where I met David, took place in a room at PARC. “So [PARC] acts as a sort of amplifier of what we could do just on our own, which is I think pretty interesting, but having that, you know, organization makes it even more interesting, it gets a much more collective broader base.” (David) He sees services and resources provided by PARC and other agencies as an offer but emphasizes that individual initiative is important. Another example, perhaps less of an ‘amplifier’ than a ‘supporter,’ is the legal clinic. According to Cole, the need for advice and legal assistance on a variety of issues is high and the legal clinic tries to make resources available and provides legal services to people free of charge. In connection with his activism as a member of Parkdale Organize, he cited the legal clinic as an important support for tenants whose rights have been violated. “There’ve been cases where tenants have asked us specifically for help on certain things. I mean sometimes people need a lawyer too in terms of like their landlord’s taken them to the Landlord and Tenant Board to evict them and they need representation.” (Cole)
5.4.8. Motivations

In the first section, I have shown that the space between the ‘objective situation’ – increasing polarization in the global city – and the act of resistance is often treated as a ‘black box.’ Although Sassen explicitly mentions the political potential of contemporary urban inequalities and contradictions, she does not go into detail about how marginalized actors respond to them. Concepts of classical movement research that focus on social movement organizations and mass mobilizations are hardly suitable for analyzing contemporary urban resistance, since in many cases there is little reason to assume that the marginalized actors of the global city, as emphasized by Sassen, will resort to ‘traditional’ political forms. I therefore try to shed light on the conditions that govern the possibility of responding to increasing polarization in the urban context. When does resistance to displacement become thinkable in the first place? As Jeremy pointed out, people realize “how much they have to lose” when they see their neighbours and friends moving to low-income boroughs in the northwest and northeast of Toronto such as Scarborough.

They don’t have any you know communities out there and they’re having to start anew at the age of, I don’t know, sixty or something and it’s just like a fucking nightmare. And so I think a lot of people see that coming and they’re like “Oh that’s garbage!” and I like that there are people uhm using a diversity of tactics to expose how garbage that is and fight for something different.” (Jeremy)

I argue that the fear of losing access to urban resources is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of informal and formal practices of resistance. In the following, I will discuss the role of neighbourhood attachment, present some examples of how research participants frame and explain their activism, and describe what outcomes they expect.

Neighbourhood attachment: “We” and “They”

Parkdale residents underline the ‘spirit of Parkdale’ and the fact that the neighbourhood differs greatly from any other central Toronto neighbourhood. The wish to preserve that ‘spirit’ is an important incentive for informal resistance practices and to become engaged in activist organizations. Life in Parkdale is described as an antipode to capitalism and consumer society. People experiencing the effects of the inhumane dynamics of increasing poverty and the housing crisis, highlight the solidarity and the mutual support in the Parkdale community. In various situations, people pointed out that “things like this don’t happen in [other parts of] Toronto.” Most Torontonians living in central districts outside Parkdale have a lifestyle most Parkdale residents would not be able to afford – and they would argue that they do not want to live like ‘them’ either. After shooting the short movie on a sunny afternoon in the streets of
Parkdale, David reflected upon the reactions of passers-by when they saw him walking through the streets, carrying the almost life-size plastic figure Jared had made.

Imagine, like further on Queen Street West near downtown, like there are too many, you know, high-end boutique stores, people are SHOPPING, really shopping. [...] They are the consumers, right, they are plastic, they wouldn’t/That’s precisely the point (laughs) of the of the whole shot, right. So there is that sort of vibrant energy that’s sort of in Parkdale and it sort of attracts characters like me. And ah (...) that’s where the energy comes from, that sort of odd mix. (David)

By emphasizing the ‘spirit’ or ‘energy’ of the neighbourhood and highlighting the differences with other neighbourhoods, Parkdale’s residents undermine hegemonic interpretations of the neighbourhood as a run-down ghetto or as an already gentrified and thus attractive residential area, imposed by local newspapers and various political and economic actors. Neighbourhood reputation can drive neighbourhood change by impacting the choice of potential buyers and renters. By emphasizing the strong community in Parkdale, an attempt is made to define Parkdale not by looking at economic criteria regarding the composition of its residents, i.e. the question of who lives here, but by the way these people live together, i.e. the question how they live. According to the narrative, everybody should feel accepted as they are, regardless of age, origins or mental health. Describing Parkdale as a community ‘under attack’ and highlighting the necessity to respond collectively in turn reinforces the community aspect. Resistance in Parkdale can thus also be understood as a means to protect a shared identity that is not only closely connected to space but also to an ‘oppositional attitude.’

Parkdale residents fear that if the neighbourhood becomes like ‘the rest of Toronto,’ community solidarity will become weaker. A woman I met in the library told me that Parkdale is the only reason why she still lives in Toronto. “But it’s changing!” According to her, people have realized that Parkdale has “something special” which fuels the influx of wealthier residents from other parts of Toronto and brings about neighbourhood change. I asked her in what ways

59 G. Erdi Lelandais studied resistance against neoliberal urbanism in two neighbourhoods in Istanbul and engaged in a discussion on the role of space and identity. The author argues that “[i]n an urban space conceived in a neoliberal logic based on market value of place and without a participative process taking into account the needs and desires of inhabitants, neighbourhood becomes the place where any social groups (minorities, political and/or religious groups, and so on) create enclaves within which their identity is recognized without repression, and these environments enhance the development of a relatively shared identity, connected to the neighbourhood, within the community” (Erdi Lelandais 2014: 1787). Although the neighbourhood Parkdale is inscribed in a different political context and is not an informal settlement, like the neighbourhoods analyzed by Erdi Lelandais, a similar process of identity-building can be observed. Regarding the emergence of resistance in connection to space and identity, the author concludes that “struggles and resistance [against neoliberal restructuring] tend to emerge in neighbourhoods and cities with a particularly strong group identity” (Erdi Lelandais 2014: 1795). In Parkdale, too, it can be presumed that the strong identity that, according to the residents, needs to be ‘protected’ contributes to the emergence of resistance practices at the individual and the collective level.
the change becomes tangible. She told me that if something happens, for example, if somebody gets hurt in an accident, people would not react and if you asked the injured person if everything was alright, the person might feel that you have crossed the boundaries and that you are imposing yourself. “I’m just trying to help, I don’t want to be your best friend you know?” Although Parkdale is in some contexts still referred to as a ‘dangerous’ neighbourhood, she rather emphasized that there is a strong community, mutual support and that people know and count on each other.

The clear symbolic boundary between Parkdale and the neighbouring districts is reinforced by spatial aspects. Leaving West Queen West, a very ‘trendy’ neighbourhood, and entering Parkdale through the railway tunnel increases the feeling that you are about to enter a different neighbourhood. Jared pointed out this phenomenon while we were walking down Queen Street: “On that side of the neighbourhood, it’s literally cut off by the train tracks and Dufferin. […] There is such a demarcation of place on that side that you’re literally you’re stepping into a different/you know, there is this massive threshold.” Jared’s description once again makes it clear that the emotional level, i.e. the question of how urban space is perceived sensorially, should not be neglected. It may thus be said that spatial aspects that make the gradual differences between the neighbourhoods more visible can encourage the emergence of a shared identity.

**Bob: “I had no choice”**

Bob is a fierce critic of what he describes as “ideological rigidity” and does not think that his activism was ever drawn from an ideological place, unlike other activists he met in various political gatherings in and outside of Parkdale. “I don’t have any kind of academic foundation,” he emphasized, although “you know, I read some books.” He frames his life story as a story of activism; as a story of standing up for himself and others: “I’ve always hated bullies and I’ve always stood up for myself. When I was a kid, I got into a lot of fights, you know, I would not be bullied. And I would get into fights to defend other people who were getting bullied, you know?” He feels responsible for ‘his people’ and wants to protect those whose life he sees in danger.

When I first started doing the homeless stuff, it was like homelessness and poverty and health, that’s/those are the three big ones, ‘cause they are killing my people, you know! You know, I don’t wanna be sitting down with my staff, who’s found somebody frozen to death on Westlodge, you know, and has been traumatized by this. (Bob)
When he told me the story of Edmond, after whom Edmond Place, the affordable housing project next to the PARC drop-in was named, he emphasized that he had ‘no other choice’ than becoming an activist, and working to ensure access to or preserve affordable housing in the neighbourhood. He tried to find long-term accommodation for Edmond but after a few months, the young homeless man was shot by the police. The death of Edmond prompted Bob to write a short story about him. “It was a desperate time in 97,” he remembered while we were standing in front of the renewed heritage property. “We’ll talk more about that, this is about activism and homelessness, I was really engaged in that stuff, I had no CHOICE, right! No choice!” He interprets the dramatic – and often traumatic – experiences of vulnerable Parkdale residents as unacceptable injustice. As the following conversation with a PARC member illustrates, he does not consider activism as part of his job as a social worker, but rather the other way round:

PARC member: How is retirement?
Bob: It’s great, it’s good yeah.
PARC member: Are you still doing activism?
Bob: Oh yeah yeah, I’m doing activism. I would never/I can’t stop doing that!

His ‘action repertoire’ ranges from organizing demonstrations over defacing signs to throwing dirt on the City of Toronto model in the lobby of City Hall. His rather unconventional ways of expressing his opinion can be linked to various experiences of not being taken seriously and not being ‘heard’ by decision-makers. When he went to City Hall with other OCAP members, the mayor did not leave the office to hear them out or to read the demands they had printed. “We’re in this world where nobody wants to talk to you and nobody wants to listen to you. And you can’t even give ‘em something in writing!” (Bob) To express his discontent, he ‘vandalized’ the city model in the lobby. Here again, he argues that he had ‘no other choice.’

**David: Collaboration, friendship, and leadership**

Loneliness is part of the daily life of many Parkdale residents, especially the elderly and people living alone. PARC and other centres are trying to remedy this. Participating in resistance can also help to get in touch with other residents and to develop projects together. Since moving to Parkdale, David has been in search for collaborators, trying to find his place in the community. When he first walked into the PARC drop-in – “I needed cheap food” (David) – he had a hard time connecting with PARC members. “They were all so interested in me, right, because, you know, PhD and disenfranchised petty bourgeois, ex classé, right, ex classé, defranchized, defraught, whatever. […] I just I just didn’t really have ANY sense of affinity with ANYone there.” (David) During his first year in Parkdale, he did not interact with many Parkdale
 Residents due to the perceived class differences and the fact that he did not feel that his ideas were understood and accepted. In a play he wrote for the theatre group, he used the wordplay “Parkdalian – parked alien” – “Parkdale, a lot of parked aliens, people with no hope.” During our walking interview, I asked him whether he felt like a parked alien. “Well I was when I came here. And I I suppose that’s always the shadow right, the shadow of the Parkdalian is being a parked alien. Sounds similar right (laughs)?” It was not until he met people who were involved in the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust that he felt more ‘at home’ in the community and became politically involved:

I started seeing the second layer of people. OH, FELLOW ACADEMICALLY ENCLINED PEOPLE! OH, MAs AND PhDs! [...] OH! THAT’S INTERESTING! And they are interested in what I have to say, and I sort of became interested in in them. So then things became much more interesting and that’s when I began participating politically and so uh I was active in Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust. (David)

He suggested organizing a free school and his idea was accepted and put into practice. “It seems to me that the only place where I’d be able to teach is some university I have to actually FOUND.” Later, Bob whom he met at PARC and who regularly attends David’s sessions at the Free School ‘recruited’ him for PERN, the Parkdale Eviction Resistance Network. He took part in a PERN demonstration and wrote and performed a puppet theatre. The city eventually bought the former LCBO site, and will build affordable housing. David told me that it surprised him “that there are actually some sort of results of political action.” He doubts that political action can bring about change because he does not think that he had a very successful life and tends to project that sense over things that he participates in. When I asked him why he had nevertheless taken part in this and numerous other demonstrations and events, he emphasized that the social aspect in particular – getting to know and interacting with other residents of the neighbourhood – was an important motivation.

Well, I guess you know you always hope you can make a difference and uhm and in this time it was different, a bit different because I actually was growing to sort of like these these folks and I wanted to get to know them better. So it was a more personal interest in the persons, it wasn't just simply the abstract ideas, which I support, obviously, I was more about/I was connected for the first time really with people that I’d known and that lived in the same neighbourhood. So things converged, there was a convergence of, you know, neighbours, friends, political activism and the ideas. And it all sort of condensed and solidified, crystallized at one point. So that was something new, that conjuncture. (David)

Since then, he broke to a certain extent with organized resistance and is now concentrating on building up a “revolutionary café” with “fellow thinkers” at the Parkdale Free School. David took part in many demonstrations and other events organized in Parkdale. However, he is
disappointed by what he calls the “second-class struggle” because it is lacking a vision of the ‘good’ and the ‘truthful.’ He does not feel accepted since his ideas are considered as too philosophical and not sufficiently pragmatic. A decisive experience was an event where he wanted to present his ideas, but he was told that “we can’t talk about that right now, we are not there yet.” He quoted a well-known sentence from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” to summarize the opinion of most activists he knows. According to him, the limit of ‘second-class struggle’ is equality and the limit of what he calls ‘first-class struggle’ is excellency. Although the second-class struggle is necessary, one should not stop there but one should ask the “big questions about the good.” He described many initiatives in the neighbourhood as too “reformist.” Nevertheless, he thinks that they are doing important things, for example, the protest against illegal evictions at the former Queen’s Hotel at 1521 Queen St. W. The building served as a rooming house, providing affordable rooms for low-income residents. Following Plato, David sees himself as a philosophical leader and is now determined to devote his time and energy to developing his theories and to sharing them with others, which is why he teaches at the Parkdale Free School. He feels respected by the participants, whom he considers his friends and respects them and their ideas. He sees the role of a philosophic leader in encouraging thought and discussion.

“What is art?”, I asked him. “What I do!”, he answered without hesitating and laughed. During our walks through the neighbourhood, he pointed out several art galleries where he used to go to find “fellow artists” but “there wasn’t much chance for a collaboration, everyone seemed to be just sort of separated and isolated and alone and not really willing to go past that.” He has finally found a collaborator in Jared and other people. However, he acknowledged that his past involvement in activist organizations was helpful in “building things up”; in developing his current projects, such as, for example, the theatre group at PARC.

*Research in Parkdale*

It is not a coincidence that many researchers, including myself, feel attracted to the neighbourhood. The reasons for this are manifold. Certainly, it is always more tempting to do research in places where ‘things happen’ than in seemingly ‘quieter’ places. Investigating why things don’t happen can be just as interesting and insightful as investigating why things happen. The question of why there is little evidence of resistant practices in other parts of Toronto is always resonating between the lines when trying to think of Parkdale in relation to the ‘rest’ of the city.
The presence of university knowledge and contacts with researchers lead to new coalitions and synergies. In many cases, the line between activism and research becomes blurred – unconsciously or intentionally. Among my interview partners where two PhD students, Jeremy and Jared. When I asked Jeremy about his connection to Parkdale and how he became involved with the PPE, he explained: “It’s both related to my research interests as a PhD student but it’s also just a pretty lively group of activists that I felt at home with over the course of a few years, uhm and yeah the two intersected.” As I have already described, he has found his role in the activist community in Parkdale and sees his work as a formative experience.

Jared, on the other hand, is less involved in organized resistance. After doing social work, he moved to the neighbourhood to, originally, explore “public madness” and how marginalized individuals that come to be described as ‘mad’ interact with the physical world around them. “I’d visited here over the years […] and decided it was a cool neighbourhood, it’s kind of like my real connection to Toronto was through here.” Parkdale is well suited for research on this topic. He is interested in the tensions that emerge in a gentrifying neighbourhood that – due to its history – constitutes “a space where people could be publicly mad.” He asked himself, “if it HAS that space and if it’s also gentrifying as people say, how do these worlds mix?” The ethnographer tries to spend as much time with Parkdale residents as possible and participates in several (art) projects that he co-develops with Parkdale residents, who are in general interested in his research or even have come to see him as a friend and collaborator, like David: “When I talk about kind of the spirit of the neighbourhood and stuff, people kinda think that’s a neat idea. That’s how David really kinda connected, he liked that idea right away, and we sort of hit it off.” As I have already briefly discussed in the theoretical part, researchers studying resistance impact the field by legitimating actions and increasing their visibility. As the example of David and Jared shows, the presence of researchers in the field can also be a motivation for people to take action in the first place. Although advocates of innovative qualitative methods are increasingly distancing themselves from the idea that the researcher

60 Although this is certainly more accurate in Parkdale than in other neighbourhoods, the statement must be somewhat relativized. As Epstein points out, there is a comparatively high tolerance of low-income residents with a mental health diagnosis. However, several events in the history of the neighbourhood show that ‘mad’ residents were and continue to be subject to increased surveillance, police violence and stigmatization: “A major outcome of Parkdale’s change has been the middle-class acceptance of poor psychiatrized residents, many of whom live in local bachelorettes and boarding houses. Interviewees from the BIA and other mainstream bodies tell me that the neighborhood ‘celebrates’ its mad residents. But a close examination of Parkdale’s history tells a different story. In 1997, as the ‘Common Front’ was forming, Toronto police murdered 36-year-old Hong Kong immigrant Edmond Yu on a public bus for behaving erratically. […] Events of this nature continue in Parkdale, even as madness has presumably gone mainstream.” (Epstein 2018: 719)
should not intervene in the field in any way, research relations and resulting ‘distortions’ should be reflected thoroughly.
6. Discussion

Walking through the global city alongside its residents, becoming a thread in the urban fabric, and passing buildings and places laden with symbolic meanings makes it possible to grasp the frictions and cracks of the open and ongoing historical process of city-making. Globalization does not influence cities in the same way. The political economy literature has shown that even if similar dynamics are at work, the local political context and power constellations must be included. In the global city Toronto, the politicization of space to combat the financialization of housing, the privatization of public space urban space, and other issues that can be linked to global city dynamics is still a marginal phenomenon today. The city is at a crossroads between a vision that sees the city as a place of economic growth and a vision that defines the city first and foremost as a place to live; a “space-in-use” (Mitchell 1995: 115).

I have argued that the relative deprivation approach, as well as the assumption, often insufficiently reflected upon in urban sociology, that visible inequalities inscribed in urban space inevitably lead to contentious action, have too little explanatory potential. While relative deprivation – being increasingly deprived of housing, important infrastructure, municipal political participation, and other resources – explains to some extent the ‘content’ of the struggle, it does not sufficiently explain what happens between the worsening of the ‘objective’ situation and the decision to participate – individually or collectively – in practices that aim to challenge, undermine, and change the status quo. The socio-economic conditions and changes that have been summarized in this paper under the term ‘global city dynamics’ have an impact on the everyday life of city dwellers. These everyday experiences must first be problematized, causes must be attributed, and alternatives must be discussed. This process happens in exchange with others. In other words, quantitatively measurable inequalities – such as increasing polarization – must first be interpreted as injustice.

If the analysis of objective circumstances to understand and explain urban protest is not sufficient, what can be done to answer the question of how urban resistance emerges? Since I did not want to concentrate on urban social movements, i.e. organized resistance, because there is, at first glance, little empirical evidence in this direction, I took a closer look at the concept of (informal) resistance and discussed various definitions. By focusing on the everyday life of city residents and by framing the city as a site of agency, it becomes possible to look at the subtle, ‘quiet’ resistance practices of the ‘ordinary’ city dweller. The term ‘resistance’ is frequently used, especially in English-speaking sociology, but often without a deeper theoretical examination. Based on theoretical inputs by Michel Foucault, James Scott, and
Michel de Certeau, I situate resistance practices on a continuum between informal and organized resistance, whereby the various forms interact. Following Scott, I argue that analyzing state-centred mobilizations – organized resistance – is not sufficient; one has to take into account the ‘realm of the everyday.’ Foucault’s decentred notion of power and resistance allows us to shift our focus to the “swarm of points of resistance” (Foucault 1978: 96) that circulate through urban hierarchies. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau examines everyday life in an attempt to expose the potential of everyday practices in the struggle against prevailing norms. Going beyond a deterministic perspective, he argues that resistance is an integral part of everyday practices that lead to the creation of an autonomous and self-determined space for action. Actors develop subtle tactics and manipulate the “imposed systems” (de Certeau 1984: 18).

De Certeau’s approach in particular shifts the focus from social movement organizations to informal resistance practices. A qualitative inductive research design was chosen that takes as its starting point the daily life of ‘city users.’ It looks at how they try to change certain aspects that they identify as problematic and how they develop tactics and creatively produce spaces of opportunity. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate how these informal resistance practices interact with organized initiatives, and if and how small-scale resistance leads to the emergence of new ideas and demands regarding the future design of the neighbourhood and the city in general. The empirical study is based on walking interviews embedded in an ethnographic research design. The relative openness in data collection and analysis allowed for the exploration of various aspects of the topic. Inspired by and in contrast to the grounded theory methodology, a method of analysis was designed building on the framing approach used in social movement research (cf. Snow et al. 1986; Snow/Benford 1988; Benford/Snow 2000). The questions that were posed to ‘make sense’ of the heterogeneous data material aimed to identify and compare the problem diagnoses, alternative approaches and motivations for action of the research participants. Although the results of the analysis are largely descriptive in nature, an attempt was made to understand how the different aspects interact in the specific Parkdale context, and to re-embed the research results in the theoretical context.

This empirical approach is a result of the theoretical considerations presented in the first chapters. It has been argued that by focusing on everyday, informal practices and their connection to organized resistance, responses to urban dynamics that would not have been visible with a ‘classical’ social movement theory approach come into focus. The present study treats quantitative empirical data, interpreted by using concepts of the urban political economy paradigm and most importantly the global city concept, as a starting point for the analysis. This
shift in focus proved to be empirically fruitful. During my research stay in Toronto, I came across initiatives that are directed against displacement processes, the financialization of housing, and the disappearance of infrastructures that are important for the residents, such as affordable grocery stores, community centres, and consumption-free places to spend time and socialize. The fear to be pushed out can be a considerable stress factor, but it is not only the housing opportunities that are at stake. Leaving the neighbourhood implies losing a network of relationships, routines, and resources built up over time. Parkdale has a high density of community centres, social work agencies, and activist groups. Participating in the activities of neighbourhood activist groups, many of which focus on housing, but also processing lived experiences of the consequences of marginalization through art is for many Parkdale residents a way of connecting with other community members and imagining oneself as an individual with the capacity to act.

The resistance practices are not solely directed against neighbourhood changes but take a broader scope. In many of the examples mentioned, resistance practices are embedded in a counter-discourse to what is described as ‘capitalist consumer society.’ Values such as solidarity are emphasized. Parkdale residents are proud of their neighbourhood and highlight the differences to other parts of Toronto. While some research participants seem to have a rather idealistic or even romanticizing representation of the neighbourhood, others also point at negative aspects. In most cases, change is not automatically framed as ‘bad,’ however, marginalized Parkdale residents are afraid that they will be excluded from the benefits of the ‘renewal’ or ‘upgrading’ of the neighbourhood. The new condo developments illustrate that this fear is justified because they do not offer deeply affordable units for low-income Parkdale residents but are rather designed to satisfy the demands of the highly-paid professional classes of the global city. The often idealized representation of the neighbourhood, especially of the community aspect, and the desire to defend the neighbourhood from ‘external’ influences can quickly create the impression that Parkdale is a ‘closed community.’ This is only partly true. Due to living in a neighbourhood that serves as an entry point for immigrants, Parkdale residents are used to people from ‘the outside.’ Migration transforms the abstract concept of globalization into a lived experience in the everyday life of urban residents.

If one follows the relative deprivation perspective, the logical consequence would be that the success of an action is measured by the resulting changes that are perceived as improvements. But, as the analysis showed, other criteria such as strengthening the community, raising awareness, and getting the feeling of being heard and of making an impact also play a role in evaluating the outcome of an action. This shifts the focus from the Foucauldian ‘art of
government’ to ‘the art of expanding the room for action,’ the art of creating counter-spaces where marginalized Parkdale residents can become ‘producers’ in the de Certeauian sense of the term. While Foucault is interested in the regime of subjectivation as such, I was interested in the question of how the inhabitants of this neighbourhood exert agency; how they deal with material and discursive constraints, and what tactics they develop. The struggle not only concerns economic distribution but, on the symbolic-discursive level, also definitions and interpretations, the negotiation of identities and the reorganization of power relations. Parkdale residents are part of a web of intersecting discourses about their neighbourhood and its desirability or undesirability. Defining Parkdale as a ‘ghetto’ or as a ‘trendy’ neighbourhood is linked to diverging interests. The neighbourhood’s reputation can impact the decisions of those in search of residential or commercial space and thus change the composition of the neighbourhood – and impact the future of long-term residents.

If we take a closer look at what happens in the ‘black box’ – between relative deprivation and the emergence of visible, organized protest – we must examine what motivates silent, informal practices of resistance and the participation in initiatives that are closer to the ideal-type ‘organized resistance.’ While some practices specifically aim to expand access to (urban) resources, such as public space and housing, other practices focus more on symbolically reappropriating urban space and having a say in the making of the neighbourhood. Strong identification with the neighbourhood, the discursive creation of a ‘we-group,’ and the emergence of ‘oppositional identities’ were mentioned as factors that foster the emergence of resistance practices. Related to the role of neighbourhood attachment is the community aspect of activism – participating in organizing is also a way of creating and sustaining friendships and of finding collaborators for further projects. However, as one research participant pointed out, the threshold for participating in political events and gatherings is high, especially for the most vulnerable. In addition, several research participants were highly critical of organized political activism due to the perceived ideological inflexibility of certain groups, exclusionary dynamics, and lacking creativity. The rejection of organized resistance can in some ways be a motivation for informal practices of resistance. One research participant assigns a significant role in his life story to resistance practices and retrospectively interpreted his involvement and his dedication to ameliorate the situation of people whom he considers as the most vulnerable as a logical and even inevitable consequence of his observations and experiences.

There are different views and approaches to the question of whether demands are made on institutional political actors and channels. Particularly among those research participants who find themselves on the margins of society and are not only fighting for being able to stay in the
neighbourhood but are also concerned with the question of their place in society, a strong skepticism, not to say rejection, of political institutions can be observed. The feeling of not being sufficiently represented and the complexity of the political and administrative system can lead them to reject consensual municipal consultation and participation offers and to choose other ways of expressing discontent. These include not only ‘traditional’ possibilities for social movements, such as demonstrations, but also artistic forms of expression and the squatting or defacing of symbolically charged objects and places. These tactics temporarily create spaces that run counter the dominant logic of the global, competitive city and have the potential to nourish “divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future urban possibilities and assemblages” (Swyngedouw 2007: 66).

The initiatives and organizations that have emerged over the last decade in Parkdale, supported by older neighbourhood centres and social work agencies, provide education and explanations on how to interpret the current situation and what can be done about it. Experiences that Parkdalians make in their everyday life are thus embedded in a larger context and made comprehensible. This knowledge informs informal, individual resistance practices and thus links organized resistance with informal resistance, as argued by Lilja et al. (2017). The residents do not passively ‘absorb’ these offers of interpretation but act based on their own interpretations of these framings, which they link to experiences of their own everyday life. How the neighbourhood space is perceived and lived is linked to the social context of the ‘user.’

The ‘diagnostic’ framings produced by neighbourhood activist groups also include reflections on how power functions in an urban context and how inequalities are reproduced. As a result, residents link the struggle for access to housing to other aspects, such as the role of funding for schools in the neighbourhood. However, power differentials exist not only between local actors and ‘the growth coalition’ but also within the community. Not everyone has the time and economic resources to deal with their situation in this way. Gender aspects and racial inequalities have to be taken into account when studying urban transformations in a more systematic manner. The fact that most of the research participants in the present study belong to the non-racialized, male population already points at existing imbalances.

To sum up, it can be noted that in Parkdale, various aspects come together: the history of activism in the neighbourhood, the high density of community centres and activist networks, the diverse composition and socioeconomic status of its inhabitants. The emergence of resistance practices is influenced by the way city dwellers interpret the concrete and local effects of the polarizing dynamics of the global city. In other words, the political potential that Sassen describes can be transformed into resistance if the lived experiences of marginalized
city dwellers are framed as injustice. The representations of these changes influence which issues become the source for resistance and also which tactics are chosen. Among the responses to contemporary urban dynamics, one observes evasive strategies, adaptation, playful reappropriation and manipulation of urban space, and organizing. When looking at organized resistance, the way of interpreting and making sense of recent changes also has an impact on the interpretation of political opportunities, the formulation of objectives of action, and the development of new solidarities. Although the number of Parkdale residents who are active in organizations and groups over a longer period of time is limited, the existence of a large passive network that can be mobilized and the diversity of individual non-conforming actions lead to the cautious conclusion that resistance in Parkdale can be described as a ‘nonmovement’ as defined by Asef Bayat (2010: 14). Even though some of the ‘quiet’ practices described earlier are not part of ‘traditional’ action repertoires of social movements, they nonetheless can be political in the Parkdale context. The non-conforming use of urban space and artistic forms of thinking about and appropriating the city resist those “subtle filtering mechanisms” described by N. Smith and P. Walters (2018) that aim to ‘discipline’ marginalized urban groups and to regulate access to urban space and resources. The privatization of urban space and the proliferation of ‘defensive’ urban architecture that aims to exclude certain social groups leads to the vanishing of spaces of social encounter. Drawing on de Certeau and Deleuze, they argue that the city residents “have agency and the capacity to resist and navigate defensive architecture in its myriad forms” (Smith/Walters 2018: 2986). In the present study, I also connected concepts drawn from the political economy paradigm and an agency-focused approach based on theoretical inputs from de Certeau and the resistance studies literature. Global city dynamics limit access to (urban) resources for marginalized city dwellers who belong to the low-wage workforce that is vital for the functioning of the global city. But they also limit the walkers’ – the city users’ – possibilities to “weave places together” (de Certeau 1984: 97). However, as the empirical analysis has confirmed, the city never seizes to be a site of agency, since the spatial order is manipulated by the practices of the “unrecognized producers” (de Certeau 1984: xviii) of the city: “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them.” (de Certeau 1984: 101)

Finally, the question arises whether the resistance practices presented here have the potential to affect urban power relations. To avoid misunderstandings, it should be emphasized that the practices described earlier are not inherently resistant. Their status is dynamic and temporary
and can only be understood in the specific local context with reference to power relations. As I have already briefly mentioned, resistance can be co-opted directly or indirectly. Emphasizing that Parkdale is a ‘unique’ and ‘authentic’ neighbourhood, less anonymous than other parts of the city, can play into the hands of dominant urban actors since it makes the neighbourhood more attractive for the profiteers of the global city. As this example shows, the link between resistance and change is complex and calls for further theoretical debates and empirical research. Studying the potential of cities as ‘cradles of transformation’ means, first of all, exploring how the dynamics in the global city – changes on the macro level – affect the daily life of city dwellers, who resist, adapt, develop networks of solidarity and introduce new practices which in turn have the potential to affect macro dynamics. Initiatives in Parkdale are primarily designed to make the possibility of staying in the neighbourhood ‘thinkable.’ In official group meetings, informal conversations, and online posts and discussions, collective agency is imagined, which leads to the creation of a “passive network” (cf. Bayat 2010) that can be activated when necessary, thus making episodic larger mobilizations possible. ‘Winning’ is important, because it implies expanding access to vital resources. But, as stated earlier, in many cases, the main incentive is not the outcome, but the practice itself that helps against the feeling of powerlessness and that strengthens the community. Informal resistance practices are seen as a possibility to ‘do something’ against the feeling of being pushed to the margins symbolically – through being excluded from decision-making processes – and spatially – through losing access to inner-city housing by being priced out. This leads to increased self-confidence and the belief that, collectively, Parkdale residents can have an impact on dominant urban actors. However, the “new type of politics centered around new types of political actors” (Sassen 2012: 86) that S. Sassen sees germinating cannot ignore the existing institutional framework to translate the demands of marginalized city dwellers into institutional reforms at the local and provincial levels.

The empirical study in Parkdale, Toronto, demonstrated that the city is a site of agency even for the most marginalized inhabitants. But since power circulates unevenly, the tactics of city dwellers, their artful attempts to manipulate the ‘rules of the game’ and imposed meanings and to temporarily ‘bend’ the “grid of ‘discipline’” (De Certeau 1984: xiv) have different potential to bring about change. It appears that individuals who occupy a higher position in the social space, which is always linked to the position in urban space, are more successful in mobilizing others and producing collective outcomes. Infrastructural deprivation, violence and marginalization based on class, gender, or race lead to unequal access to urban resources and unequal possibilities to participate in mobilizations. When it comes to institutional politics,
numerous limiting factors, such as the neoliberal policy framework and the increased political and administrative complexity, constitute a challenge for those who aim at challenging the legal basis of inequality. Despite the presence of similar dynamics in large cities and city-regions all over the world, the national context continues to play an important role and influences what tactics city dwellers develop to claim the right to the city. Urban counter-spaces can encourage the emergence of new ideas to respond to pressing local challenges. In addition, they can help to transform episodic resistance into organized mobilization. This implies that the making of the future city ought to be a process that allows for discussion and conflict. Life in the city as a site of agency can never be fully determined – despite top-down initiatives to ‘improve’ city life for certain groups via increased surveillance and displacement.

Finally, I would like to share some methodological reflections. The field stay was preceded by an intensive phase of preparation. Conducting walking interviews, combined with sedentary interviews, proved to be a suitable data-gathering method in many respects. Walking through the neighbourhood with research participants, or, as one interview partner called it, going for a ‘walk-and-talk,’ transforms the researcher for a short time into a co-producer of space who follows the paths of city residents that can be routinized and disrupt the spatial logic at the same time. In this way, hidden meanings of places become visible: an ‘ordinary’ park is recognized as a gathering place for demonstrations, a garbage container in a back alley turns out to be a treasure chest for art projects, an inconspicuous door deserves a second look after the hint that behind this door 250 meals are served every day. Walking through urban environments triggers memories – about events and people but also about changes in the material realities of urban space. As S. Pink emphasizes, ethnography is always a “place-making process” that should be reflected upon as such. Following the research participants’ routes through the neighbourhoods – paths that they walk on an almost daily basis – gives a deeper understanding of their everyday life, and how they situate themselves in the material and social fabric of the neighbourhood. These aspects were vital for understanding their motivation for resistance practices. However, the walking interviews also presented some challenges. The audio quality of the recordings was dependent on the weather conditions and the noise level on the streets. Consequently, the transcription of the interviews took more time. In order to find interview partners for walking interviews, it is beneficial to already know people in the field – or be known by people.

Ethnographic research implies an oscillation between data gathering and interpretation; participant observation makes it possible to discover new aspects about the field that in turn help to adapt interview guides and to ask more targeted questions in informal conversations. Field notes and interviews were thus not only complementary but closely integrated. Taking
into account the multi-sensorial nature of doing ethnography and of ‘shared walking’ was an interesting component of my research. By walking, eating and spending time with research participants, “by following their routes and attuning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more to theirs,” we can get a glimpse of their “ways of being in the world” (Pink 2008b: 193) through our own embodied experiences. Writing down sensorial experiences in my field notes was an interesting and insightful component of my research. For a more comprehensive view of the topic and for more in-depth answers to the research question, it would be advisable to consider a longitudinal ethnography. A longer field-stay could contribute to gaining new theoretical insights on the question of agency at the margins of the global city. Furthermore, the dynamic relationship between the local and the global level could be examined more closely to view neighbourhood change and responses to urban inequalities in a global context.
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Appendix

Illustration 1: Map of Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

Source: Map of Toronto: https://map-of-toronto.com/city-maps/toronto-map [06.10.2020]
Illustration 2: Average Individual Income 1970

Source: Hulchanski 2010: 4

Illustration 3: Average Individual Income 2005

Source: Hulchanski 2010: 5
Illustration 4: Change in Individual Income 1970-2005

Source: Hulchanski 2010: 2
**Illustration 5:** Relative Increase in Income Inequality (Montréal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver)

*Figure 1: Income Inequality Between Census Tracts, Four Census Metropolitan Areas, 1970-2015*

A Gini coefficient value of 0.0 represents perfect equality. All census tracts would have the exact same proportion of income relative to their share of the population. A Gini coefficient value of 1.0 represents perfect inequality. All of the income would be taken by one single census tract while others take none.

Notes: Calculated from census tract average individual income from all sources, before-tax. Income 1970-2005 and 2015 is from the Census. Income for 2010 is Canada Revenue Agency T1FF taxfiler data.

**Source:** Dinca-Panaitescu et al. 2017: 6

**Illustration 6:** Map of Parkdale

Illustration 7: Map of Parkdale (with important stops during walking interviews)

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