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Article

The Interweaving of Everyday and Structural Perspectives: Exploring Suburban Struggles of Everyday Life

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Abstract

Everyday life is a central element for understanding the (sub)urban. Broader forces shape the (sub)urban and manifest in both its geographical structures and everyday life. These forces also shape globalized and complex urban contexts. Recent debates have addressed the question of which research designs best decipher this interplay. We argue that the struggles of everyday life could be a fruitful starting point for (sub)urban studies. Our research on socio-spatial changes in suburbia shows that these struggles emerge in a multidimensional field of tension. The concept of struggles of everyday life simultaneously acknowledges the relevance of the everyday and the impact of structural forces. We demonstrate this with our research design, the essential elements of which are literature work, narrative-episodic interviews, expert interviews, vignettes, and a hermeneutic, iterative research process. Conceptually, our research is based on the epistemological framework of planetary urbanization and Henri Lefebvre's perspective on everyday life. We outline which conceptual and methodical approaches are useful for deciphering the interweaving of everyday life and structural forces, through the example of a suburb of the City of Cologne, Germany. Thereby, we provide remarks on recent questions of comparative urbanism in conceptual and methodological terms.

Keywords

everyday life; everyday struggles; planetary urbanization; socio-spatial; suburbs; urban theory

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Between the ‘Structural’ and the ‘Everyday’: Bridging Macro and Micro Perspectives in Comparative Urban Research” edited by Nadine Appelhans (TU Berlin) and Sophie Schramm (TU Dortmund).

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1. Introduction

Cities are places that are particularly well suited for the observation and study of social change. Therefore, in urban research, a variety of different approaches are being used to explain social changes. Practices of everyday life are the central elements for understanding the (sub)urban. At the same time, broader forces are shaping the (sub)urban, manifesting in its geographic structures and everyday life, and producing globalized, wide-ranging, and complex urban contexts. In order to analyze the structural configurations, dynamics, and local practices of transformations in urban life, it makes sense to bridge the gap between approaches that focus on the “structural” and approaches that focus on the

“everyday” while simultaneously combining micro and macro approaches.

These transformations can be brought together through the perspectives of postmodern urban development and regional urbanization (Soja, 2000, 2011, 2013). In recent years, there has been a substantial focus on urban peripheries, resulting in notions of planetary/extended urbanization, and much consideration of our planet as a suburban planet (Brenner, 2013; Keil, 2018). The suburban can be understood through three different approaches: first, from a perspective that emphasizes physical-territorial entities and in which the term is used as a descriptor for bounded, physical entities or places, for example, political-administrative boundaries; second, from a processual perspective that focuses

on the dynamics of urbanization and suburbanization; and third, from a more socio-cultural perspective, in which the qualities and characteristics of suburban forms of life come into focus (Mlejnek & Lütke, 2022). Using this perspective, we are able to decouple the suburban from spatial “containerizations.” This seems particularly relevant given the apparent boundaries between urban and suburban are increasingly dissolving and that the urban and the suburban can become visible anywhere in the urban context, the suburban being a part of the urban. However, any view of the suburban would be incomplete without considering the spatial context. Therefore, the approaches are not mutually exclusive, but productive, mutually influential perspectives.

According to Keil (2022, p. 407), “the periphery, which had heretofore been described as unalterable and stable, is the place where change is most profound and where urban society experiences a redefinition.” As our planet is a suburban planet, it seems necessary to move away from focusing only on certain spatial units, such as the urban, when studying socio-spatial changes. Broader forces and processes, such as demographic changes, individualization, changes in migration and the housing market, the flexibilization of working environments, and recent crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, do not stop at specific spatial categorizations. Furthermore, debates about suburbia running out of personnel (Häußermann, 2009), the suburban being found in urban areas (e.g., Frank, 2018), and the urban expanding into suburban areas (e.g., Mlejnek et al., 2020) have already articulated the need for research into socio-spatial changes focused on the suburban. If the suburban “had heretofore been described as unalterable and stable” (Keil, 2022, p. 407), it seems even more interesting to explore why that is. Following this argument, it seems to be a worthwhile task to put the urban context in perspective by starting with the suburban (see, e.g., Phelps, 2021; Phelps et al., 2023).

In this article, we address the need for a more in-depth study of the suburban and suggest a way to analyze socio-spatial change on the everyday level by focusing on the struggles of everyday life. The article, therefore, deals with socio-spatial change from a methodological-conceptual point of view and contributes to the wide-ranging research being undertaken on the suburban in present years—see, for example, the Global Suburbanisms project (<https://suburbs.info.yorku.ca>)—by providing a qualitative, exploratory study on Widdersdorf, Cologne, in Germany. Thereby, we aim to explore the dynamic interplay between broader forces and daily life by exploring the struggles of everyday life. The widely discussed theory of planetary urbanization (Brenner & Schmid, 2011) offers a fruitful approach for this purpose that we have applied to our research on German-speaking suburbia. Expanding these thoughts, we argue that understanding the context of everyday struggles is at the heart of observing transformations of social change in urban studies. Struggles of every-

day life simultaneously reflect the relevance of the everyday (micro) and the impact of structural forces (macro). In our research, which aims to understand the different manifestations of socio-spatial change in suburbia, these concepts reflect the idea that these manifestations take place in multiscale shapes and forms. We conceived our contribution within a broader understanding of planning. Empirical social research on social change provides important contributions to planning (see, e.g., Allmendinger, 2017; Schäfers, 2018). In particular, exploratory basic research is an important tool for preparing planning decisions. Thus, a scalar conceptualization of socio-spatial change in everyday life that merges the “structural” and the “everyday” in an analytical framework (for comparative research) is much needed (Mlejnek & Lütke, 2022).

Everyday struggles illuminate the intertwining of everyday and structural perspectives. As such, we contribute to the understanding of current issues in comparative urban research. As the world is no longer an urban but a suburban planet (Keil, 2018), it is necessary to study the urban peripheries in places other than North America, which has provided the stereotype for suburbia for a long time. To date, the field of suburban studies has turned its attention to African, Asian, South American, and European suburbs, but there are still many more suburbanisms to discover (see, e.g., Keil & Wu, 2022). The Global Suburbanisms project has revealed an almost infinite diversity of the suburban, opening a dialogue between perspectives from the Global North and the Global South. This has led, in particular, to a demand for comparative (sub)urban studies through which one can focus on the commonalities and differences of the suburban in various parts of the world or through which one could find an interpretation or concept of the suburban from elsewhere speaking to anywhere (Robinson, 2022). In our study, we transfer the planetary urbanization perspective to German-speaking suburbia discourses through the case of Widdersdorf, which we use to decipher socio-spatial changes and how they are currently dealt with. The objective of the article is, therefore, conceptual and methodological in nature, as we show how our analytical framework and methods enable the interweaving of micro- and macro-perspectives and how such a concept could expand the scope of comparative criteria when centering struggles of everyday life.

In the next two sections, we explain the theoretical and conceptual foundations of our study in order to provide insight into our points of departure. In Section 3, we present our analytical framework and methods. In Section 4, we then identify the recent struggles of everyday life that we encountered in our study. In Section 5, we discuss our results with regard to our analytical framework and finally, in Section 6, summarize our core results and offer our perspective on possible future research.

2. Struggles of Everyday Life

We anchor our research on socio-spatial changes in people's everyday life. Generally, everyday life is understood as "the ordinary and regular practices that people engage in day in and day out" (Rodgers et al., 2013). However, there are very different interpretations of everyday life. From a sociological perspective, in 1978, Elias (2009) compared what could be understood as everyday life and what its corresponding opposite would be. For him, it was important to draw attention to the fact that researchers must clearly state what they mean by the term. Furthermore, he emphasized that everyday life takes place on both structural and individual levels and that, as a result, both perspectives must be taken into consideration (Elias, 2009; Perulli, 2016). This is especially true when seeking to understand socio-spatial change.

Henri Lefebvre is another well-acclaimed theorist of everyday life whose works combine everyday life with social changes. According to Lefebvre, everyday life is the starting point for all social change and his concept of everyday life is based on the idea that everyday life is formed by economic-technological imperatives and subjected to economic reality. This is reflected in the societal and economic developments that occurred after the Second World War and were later known as Fordism (Schmid, 2022; see also Gardiner, 2000; Ronneberger & Vogelpohl, 2018). Lefebvre was interested in the banal and trivial of everyday life, which, for him, embodied a "revolutionary potential" for socio-spatial change. It is the place, where the "production" of society takes place and, therefore:

Exposes the possibilities of conflict between the rational and the irrational in our society and our time, thus permitting the formulation of concrete problems of *production* (in its widest sense): how the social existence of human beings is *produced*, its transition from want to affluence and from appreciation to depreciation. (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 39, emphasis in the original)

However, everyday life itself appears to be largely inconspicuous. Thus, he observed that the "quotidian is humble and solid, what is taken for granted and that of which all the parts follow each other in such a regular, unvarying succession that those concerned have no call to question their sequence" (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 24). Therefore, the unique contribution of Lefebvre's perspective is to explain society by analyzing its ordinary everyday life (Schmid, 2022).

For Lefebvre, everyday life is about recurring gestures of work and recreation. Iterations can be seen in actions but also in elements of time and space. Practices of everyday life, as a result, can be re-produced or modified. He explains:

Thus we assert our decision to explore *recurrence*. Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of

labour and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic, hours, days, weeks, months, years, linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time, etc.; the study of creative activity (of *production*, in its widest sense) leads to the study of re-production or the conditions in which actions producing objects and labour are re-produced, re-commenced, and re-assume their component proportions or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications. (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 18, emphasis in the original; see also Lefebvre, 1987)

So, it is in the day-to-day routines or, more specifically, in the struggles that people encounter in their everyday lives that socio-spatial changes can be traced. In regard to Lefebvre's vision of an urban revolution, one might think about struggles in a strictly revolutionary sense. Yet a "struggle," in a generalized and conceptually open sense, can be understood in various ways, for example, as a fight, a difficulty, a great effort, or a resistance. Struggles can be traced in the passive, seemingly trivial events of everyday life, as points of friction or markers that indicate the presence of cracks in socio-spatial structures. Furthermore, the strategies affected people use to address those struggles do not necessarily culminate in a "revolution," rather, the everyday adaptations help people press on with everyday life. According to this interpretation, struggles appear to be systemic but manageable parts of everyday life.

In relation to the study of suburbs specifically, Keil (2022) emphasizes that suburbs and ways of living in suburbs have been "normalized" and that many studies have drawn "lines around the subject of the suburban to capture its ordered regularities and predictable trajectories" (p. 405). In light of Lefebvre's perspective on everyday life, which centers the ordinary in everyday life, the suburban seems to be a rich setting for the study of societal changes. As previously mentioned, socio-spatial changes evolve not only in urban or rural, but also suburban contexts (see Section 1 and, e.g., De Vidovich, 2022; Häußermann, 2009; Hesse & Siedentop, 2018; Mlejnek et al., 2020). In our case, focusing on recurrences in everyday life and their reproduction and/or modification helps us to decipher socio-spatial changes and descriptions of the "unalterable and stable" suburban (Keil, 2022, p. 407). As we show in Section 4, focusing on the struggles of everyday life highlights the processes of reproducing and modifying the suburban.

3. Research Design

3.1. Analytical Framework

The major strands of urban theory widely discussed in recent years include debates about planetary urbanization. Brenner and Schmid (2011, 2015, 2018) are two researchers at the heart of these debates. They argue that the urban is still "black-boxed" (Brenner &

Schmid, 2015, p. 155) meaning that we would need a new epistemological framework to address this open agenda. They provide such a framework through the term planetary urbanization, which is a reference to Lefebvre (e.g., Brenner, 2013, 2018; Brenner & Schmid, 2011; Schmid et al., 2018). As our conceptual starting point, we focus on an integral part of their concept, a nexus of three moments of urbanization (concentrated urbanization, extended urbanization, and differential urbanization) and three dimensions of urbanization (spatial practices, territorial regulation, and everyday life). Together, these elements “produce the unevenly woven, restlessly mutating urban fabric of the contemporary world” (Brenner & Schmid, 2018, p. 57; see also Brenner & Schmid, 2015, p. 171, 2018, pp. 56–59). However, Brenner and Schmid’s framework has been criticized in various ways (see, in particular, two special issues focusing on their works: Oswin & Pratt, 2021; Peake et al., 2018). A central strand of this criticism focuses on the notion that Brenner and Schmid do not place enough emphasis on everyday life (e.g., Ruddick et al., 2018) or the works of Lefebvre (e.g., Buckley & Strauss, 2016) upon which their framework is based. Thus, at the end of their critically engaged discussion of planetary urbanization, Angelo and Goh (2021, p. 743) emphasize that “to expose and center everyday struggles as an inevitable part of plural, multiscalar processes.”

Recently, this criticism has been taken up and developed further, resulting in a scheme that centers struggles of everyday life within a field of tension between segments derived from planetary urbanization and extended with Lefebvre’s three dimensions of space (Mlejnek & Lütke, 2022). In each case, the segments cover facets of micro (*forms of life, daily routines and practices, and social and everyday experiences*) or macro perspectives (*built environments, territorial arrangements, governance systems, and territorial regulation*).

Table 1 shows our analytical framework centered on the dimensions in which the struggles of everyday life unfold (middle row) and structured in micro and macro

perspectives. The bottom row contains short explanations of the respective segments. Centering the struggles of everyday life within these segments provides us with a fruitful opportunity to combine micro and macro perspectives in our exploratory study. These segments are, however, not to be understood as separated, fixed, and standalone but as open and interdependent, and are only listed here in tabular form for better clarity. The interdependence of the dimensions is evident, for example, in social and everyday experiences related to the socialization of inhabitants and the experiences they gather through daily routines, territorial arrangements that relate to a specific location, and to the specific location’s accessibility via infrastructure. At the same time, experience gathered through daily routines and practices interrelates with the built environment and territorial arrangements. Moreover, interconnections depend on people’s living arrangements and differ accordingly. For example, families with kids have different everyday struggles than individual senior citizens do. In Section 4, we take these segments as the starting points for our analysis of the struggles of everyday life and combine them with Lefebvre’s perspective on everyday life focusing on the practices of re-production and modification.

3.2. Methods

Our contribution is based on an ongoing explorative study of people living in Widdersdorf, a suburban district of the City of Cologne, Germany. With regard to socio-spatial change, Widdersdorf appears to be particularly interesting as the district has been greatly expanded not only through construction but also socio-structurally as there is a large newly developed area (see Section 4). Furthermore, Widdersdorf, being a suburban district of Cologne, is influenced by the heterogeneity of this large city and broader, globalized forces. At the same time, it is also permeated by stereotypes of suburban life. To date, 10 narrative-episodic interviews (see, e.g., Flick, 2022) have been conducted, mostly with families with children. Most interviews were conducted in person with

Table 1. Dimensions of struggles of everyday life.

	Micro				Macro			
Forms of life	Daily routines	Practices	Social experiences	Everyday experiences	Built environments	Territorial arrangements	Governance systems	Territorial regulation
Living arrangements of people/household	Series of activities at a certain time that is done regularly (every) day	Way, form, and manner of action	Experiences based on, e.g., socialization, biography, and origin	Experiences made in daily life, e.g., through daily routines and practices	Physical structures and material objects of the environment	Relational positioning regarding, e.g., locations/site or centrality	Form/system of regulation, e.g., participatory planning	Legislation and politics

Source: Authors’ work based on Brenner and Schmid (2015, 2018) and Mlejnek and Lütke (2022).

one or two adult family members. Some were conducted as video interviews at the request of the interviewees. The audio material amounts to approximately 600 minutes. All audio materials were transcribed and analyzed using an open coding process. The citations from the interviews used in the following have been translated into English for the purpose of this article. All names and other personal information have been anonymized. In Section 4, we therefore resort to anonymizations in the form of “Interviewee 1/2 (Household A/B/C).” As triangulation was a key principle in our research, observations from field trips and interviews were gathered in field vignettes that helped contextualize and set the scene in which the interviews were conducted. Field vignettes are a form of written description of authentic situations from the field. They condense the experiences of the researcher during their field visits (see, e.g., Creutziger, 2018). Furthermore, they helped the researcher self-reflect on their own positionality. In addition, two expert interviews were conducted with professionals involved in the process of conceptualizing and planning the large newly built area, Widdersdorf-Süd. Finally, we complemented our data by adding information gathered from local reports/documents and statistics. Data collection started in January 2022 and is still ongoing. Our research process is based on the moment of iteration/circularity. That is, there are no strictly separable stages in the research process (e.g., sampling, analysis, presentation), they are all being worked on in tandem. The collected data is, thus, promptly evaluated in order to draw conclusions about the methods used and the subsequent cases to collect.

4. Micro and Macro Perspectives: Impressions From the Field

In the following, we exemplify how micro and macro perspectives are interwoven in the struggles encountered by the participants in our study. We found that the struggles of everyday life are related to very different topics including everyday mobility, housing (especially searching for a home and future plans), recreation, childcare, and domestic work, etc. In this article, we focus on some key aspects of mobility relevant to the inhabitants of Widdersdorf and present them in a more condensed and comprehensible way by highlighting the interweaving of micro and macro perspectives through the labeled segments presented in Table 1.

First, we describe our case study, Widdersdorf, by illuminating its built environment and territorial arrangement. Widdersdorf is a small suburban village on the outskirts of the City of Cologne, with long historical roots and a formerly agricultural character. It was incorporated into the City of Cologne in 1975. Since then, there have been several urban extensions, predominantly featuring new residential buildings. In terms of settlement structure, the district has no direct links to nearby neighborhoods. It is surrounded by green infrastructure and sep-

arated from the central area of Cologne by a highway (see Figure 1). It is today predominantly characterized by residential buildings but has a vibrant community life (in particular connected with the football club and carnival association).

What is distinctive about Widdersdorf is the substantial extension of the built environment. Widdersdorf-Süd, the newly built area, is known to be one of Germany’s biggest privately developed areas focused on predominantly single-family homes. Widdersdorf-Süd covers an area of approximately 500,000 m² net and includes approximately 1,600 housing units (around 850 single-family homes and 250 apartment buildings). The whole planning area of Widdersdorf-Süd is 132 ha, including residential and traffic areas, green spaces, and a golf course. In total, 27% of the housing units in the newly built-up area are apartment buildings. The largest proportion of the housing units are single-family homes. These are divided into terraced houses (22 %), semi-detached houses (26 %), and detached houses (24 %; see Figure 2 for some examples).

The planning process of the newly built area Widdersdorf-Süd started in 1999, the development plans became legally binding in 2006, 2010, and 2012, and marketing of the plots started in 2007. The number of inhabitants of Widdersdorf rose strongly during this process, about 55% in a decade: The population increased from 8,024 inhabitants in 2010 to 12,453 inhabitants in 2020. In 2000, the district only had about 5,810 inhabitants (Amt für Stadtentwicklung und Statistik, 2018, 2020; Schäfke, 2017; Wieck et al., 2014).

Our study has identified mobility as one of the main everyday struggles. Mobility is somewhat limited in Widdersdorf compared to other parts of Cologne. In terms of the territorial arrangement, Widdersdorf is only connected to other parts of the city by two roads and bus connections. There is currently no streetcar connection, although one has been in planning for a long time. Therefore, to get to Widdersdorf, one either has to travel by car or take a bus from one of the nearby districts. However, the buses, according to some of the interviewees, are not always reliable and are mostly used by children going to and from school. Within Widdersdorf itself, most distances are walkable or bikeable.

Turning our focus to forms of life, in a manner reminiscent of “classic” suburbia, most people in Widdersdorf live with their families in some form of single-family home and approximately 38.5% of the households in Widdersdorf have children. In comparison, only 18.3 % of households have children in Cologne (Amt für Stadtentwicklung und Statistik, 2020). The everyday life of the families we interviewed is shaped by a typically hectic pace and the organizational struggles of balancing childcare, domestic work, job obligations, and recreation. Many day-to-day tasks or responsibilities require some form of transport, whether for taking the children to school or kindergarten, commuting to work, daily shopping needs, or going to the sports club. As Interviewee 2

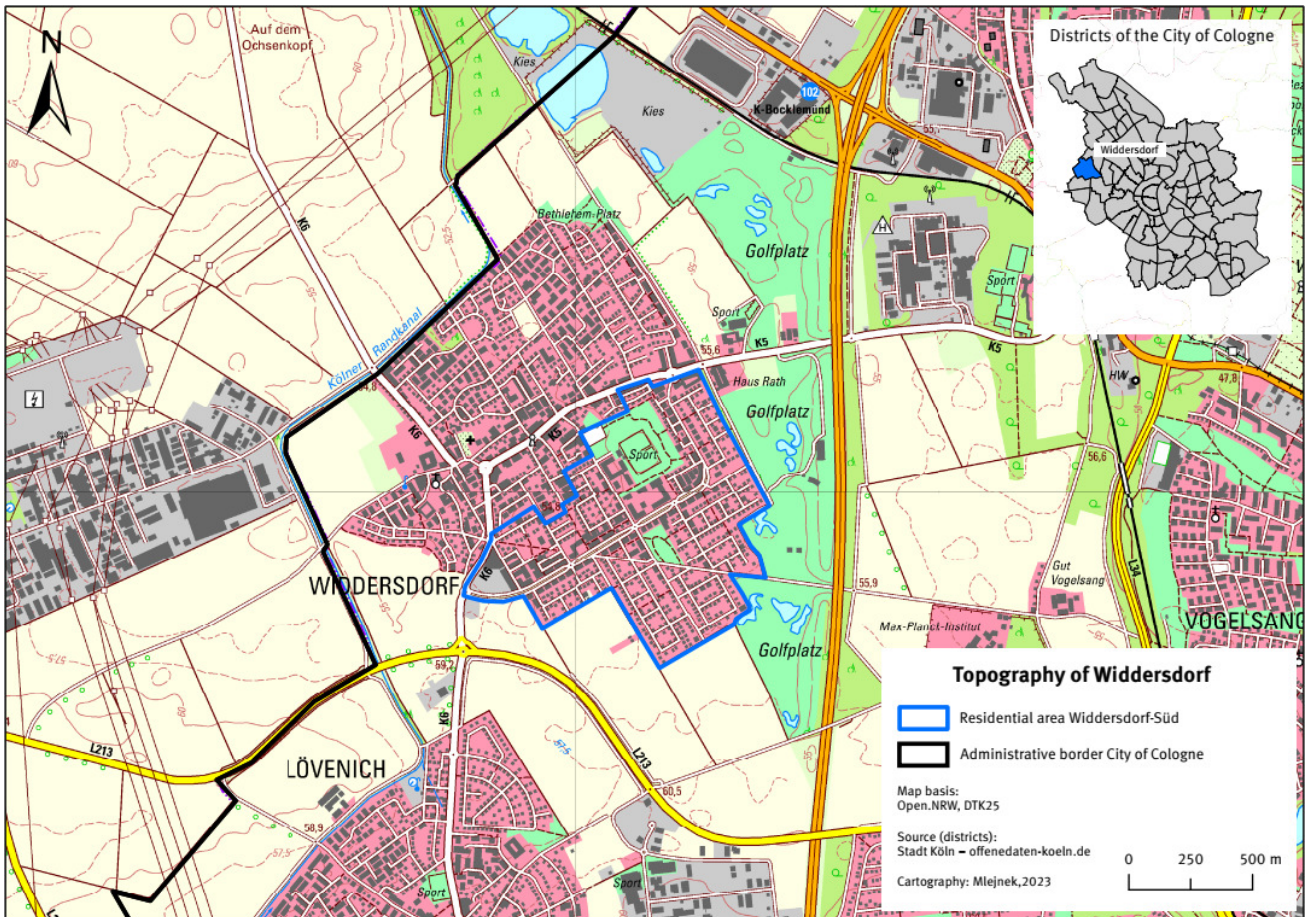


Figure 1. Overview of Widdersdorf. Source: Marius Mlejnek, 2023, based on Landesregierung Nordrhein-Westfalen (2023) and Stadt Köln (2023).

(Household E), who lives in a row house with her husband and two children, puts it: “So my everyday life consists of working, childcare, housework.” This is of course different in other cases. For example, Interviewee 1 (Household G) is a single senior citizen. She lives in a cooperative women’s housing project (*Beginenhof*). Her daily life has fewer obligations and is characterized more by volunteering, community, and recreation activities, which nevertheless involve commitments and transport requirements, for example, going to the theater or the opera downtown. Another respondent, Interviewee 1 (Household F), lives in a single-family home (bungalow) with his same-sex partner and no children. His everyday mobility needs are predominantly shaped by his airline job, which requires him to travel all over the world. He is only at home in Widdersdorf part-time, that is, only ever for a few days at a time.

Everyday experiences as well as social experiences in suburbia not only differ based on people’s form of life but also on which force shapes the individual’s everyday life. For example, as he is often away because of his airline job, Interviewee 1 (Household F) has different everyday experiences in places all over the globe while, for example, Households A, B, C, or E who are all families with kids living in Widdersdorf full-time have

everyday experiences that are highly influenced by social routines and practices within Widdersdorf. Nevertheless, their experiences of socialization influence their everyday struggles. Thus coming from a more rural area in Germany, Household E used to consider homeownership and homes with a lot of space as “the gold standard” where they came from but now, after living in Widdersdorf for six years, are feeling comfortable in their row house.

The daily routines and practices of the families in our study are geared toward the daily tasks previously mentioned. The built environment (especially the infrastructure) of Widdersdorf makes it possible to perform many everyday tasks on foot or by bicycle. With regard to the territorial arrangement, the location of Widdersdorf, thereby, supports keeping the everyday life of the families living in Widdersdorf primarily within the neighborhood: “So it’s like, everyday life takes place a lot in Widdersdorf actually” (Interviewee 2, Household E). Being outside of their daily routines and outside of Widdersdorf is what Interviewee 1 (Household E) described as the opposite of everyday life: it is something special. As they do not have a theater or cinema or much gastronomy in the neighborhood, people often leave the district to engage in these recreational activities.



Figure 2. Examples from Widdersdorf-Süd (top four) and other parts of Widdersdorf (bottom two). Photos by Marius Mlejnek, 2022–2023.

Commuting to work is a good example of a daily routine related to mobility that can be a struggle for those living in Widdersdorf. Regarding the built environment and especially the transport infrastructure, there is often no practical way around driving a car to work. While an expert from the City of Cologne describes car use as part of today's *Lebensinzenierung* (life staging), the interviewees have a different perspective. Interviewee 1 (Household B) explains:

I drive, normally there's a bit of congestion most of the time, but I drive 25 minutes in the morning. If I travel by public transport, that's one and a half hours, easy. So...that doesn't pay off at all.

The place of work of Interviewee 1 (Household B) is only about 20 km from Widdersdorf but using public transportation is not a viable option for him because of the time it would take, so he drives instead. An expert from

the City of Cologne confirms this problem: "In my view, the residents, including new residents, are significantly dependent on actually driving to their workplaces by car." In doing so, he also admits that the situation would be better if there was a streetcar connection. Yet, he cannot say when, or even if, that will eventuate: "As far as I know, there are still no actual figures presented here that prove that this route...would actually be economically viable." As a result, as Interviewee 1 (Household A) noted, it is always very crowded on the street during rush hour because most people drive their cars to work in the morning and back home in the afternoon/evening. Interviewee 1 (Household E), whose workplace is around 13 km from their home, recently bought an e-bike for his commute. This, according to him, is much easier than using public transport or a car.

With regard to governance systems and territorial regulation, this is a contentious issue: Why is there still no streetcar connection when it was planned from the

beginning—even if there are no reliable economic figures right now—especially given the enormous population growth in the neighborhood and the possible future growth and denser building structures? A more strictly supply-oriented urban governance would have built a streetcar connection in the beginning as this would have encouraged people to use it. As Gehl (2010) suggested, it could be argued that we should not only build cities for people but also suburbs.

The Covid-19 pandemic was another major influence on the everyday struggles of our subjects. Looking at territorial regulation, in Germany, the regulative institutions not only initiated lockdowns, as in many other places, but there was also a duty for employers to allow employees to work remotely/from home when possible. Working from home represents a significant opportunity to better manage the struggles of everyday life and not having to commute every day supports the management of the daily routines and practices of families. Moving to Widdersdorf (before the pandemic) and struggling with childcare and job obligations, Interviewee 2 (Household B) gave up her original job in finance to work part-time as a secretary in a public institution:

Exactly, I work three days a week and only five hours a day, so that I could even manage if my husband could not be here because of work. That I can get the kids to school and also be back when school ends.

Interviewee 1 (Household B), who has a time-consuming job in the sports industry, describes the job change as having been necessary for managing everyday life. Thus, the pandemic had such a major influence on everyday life that Interviewee 1 (Household E) differentiated between two everyday lives: “One everyday life working from home, one everyday life where we are on the road.” As Interviewee 2 (Household E) articulated, everyday life is a lot less stressful for families when working from home:

It is definitely helpful that someone is at home much more often....Not having to commute, not having to get on the highway and see if I get stuck in a traffic jam, if I’ll still get to kindergarten or school on time, or if I’ll get home on time. Is my daughter perhaps standing in front of a closed door because I didn’t make it on time? So it certainly lessens the stress.

Everyday life before, when commuting to the workplace, required a lot more organizational effort. Furthermore, Household A used to employ a *Leih-Oma*, an elderly woman to take care of the children, who they dismissed during the first Covid-19 lockdown:

We initially looked for a *Leih-Oma*, because he always worked in the office, never worked from home, who could take charge of the kids at three o’clock...We just don’t have that problem now. So during the lockdown, the first one, we let her go immediately.

(Interviewee 1, Household A)

The former *Leih-Oma* is simply not needed anymore because either Interviewee 1 or 2 (Household A) is at home when the kids come back from school or kindergarten and can take care of them. Not having an office at home is manageable too. When working from home, Interviewee 1 (Household A) stays downstairs in the kitchen and living area. She mentioned being annoyed by having the computer in the living areas and the general need for an office; nevertheless, she likes being next to the coffee maker and being able to keep an eye on the children.

5. Reflections: Linking Micro and Macro Perspectives

5.1. Exploring Struggles of Everyday Life in Widdersdorf

In our study, we link micro and macro perspectives by starting with peoples’ daily life at the micro level. Therefore, in Section 4, we provided an overview of the struggles of everyday life that we encountered in our exploratory study. By focusing on the struggles of everyday life, we turned a spotlight on the segments of everyday life in which micro and macro perspectives merge together. We have shown that individual everyday life struggles are traceable on the micro level, in people’s daily routines, practices, and social and everyday experiences, and are dependent on their form of life. Nevertheless, the friction that results manifests on macro levels, in the built environment (e.g., infrastructure: streets, parking space, local supply), territorial arrangement (e.g., location: central or peripheral), governance systems (e.g., local or regional spatial planning), and territorial regulation (e.g., urban politics, legislation). At the same time, the struggles of everyday life are influenced and shaped by macro-level elements, for example, through infrastructure and policy design (see Section 3.1). The rather stable-looking image of everyday life in suburbia is framed by the built environment (primarily typical single-family houses) that, in our study, recalls suburban stereotypes.

With regard to the struggles of everyday life we encountered in our study, it can be concluded that they are typically manageable, and this is their signature characteristic: The interviewees approach the struggles of everyday life in such a way that everyday life continues with its obligatory routines. In our case, the specifics of the daily routines correlate with the forms of life, and the social and economic situation of the interviewees, which enables them to minimize their struggles so that everyday life continues to function within the usual routines. This relates to the social capital (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1982) of our interviewees in Widdersdorf, many of who may be considered typical (upper) middle-class suburban dwellers.

The “revolutionary potential” of everyday life (according to Lefebvre) is not exhausted in our cases as

the families were able to minimize their struggles. Our results indicate that there are processes for approaching the struggles of everyday life that can make suburbs appear stable and unalterable from the outside. However, the large extensions of the built environment alone certainly do not make the suburb appear particularly stable. This rapid development highlights how areas can change a lot in a relatively short period of time. However, focusing on the struggles of everyday life, we were able to identify practices that facilitated the re-production of stable everyday routines through small modifications or accepting certain inconveniences, such as buying an e-bike to get to work because of poor public transportation and congestion or tolerating having a work computer set up in the living area. In future comparative suburban research, it could be very fruitful to start at the level of the everyday in order to decipher socio-spatial changes and how they are dealt with. Also, within the dimension of forms of life, special consideration should be given to the social situation of inhabitants, their resources, and their capability to engage with the struggles of everyday life.

5.2. Planetary Urbanization as an Analytical Framework

With this more open conceptualization of the (sub)urban, the planetary urbanization framework allowed us to analyze the struggles of everyday life in relation to broader and macro perspectives. In light of our epistemological framework (see Brenner & Schmid, 2015, 2018), Widdersdorf-Süd, as a large-scale infrastructure project, exemplifies the production of specific forms of socio-spatial transformations through moments of concentrated, extended, and differential urbanization. The privately developed massively built-up environment in Widdersdorf-Süd illustrates the processes of concentration on the outskirts of a city and the specific practices of daily routines and everyday experiences that result. For example, in Widdersdorf, the built environment and territorial arrangement have compelled people to commute to work in their cars. In this regard, Widdersdorf-Süd is interpreted as a spatial clustering of people (which has more than doubled the number of inhabitants in Widdersdorf), of infrastructure (a planning area of around 132 ha), and of investment (having been privately developed and marketed). At the same time, Widdersdorf has long been considered the residential land reserve for the territorial regulation of the City of Cologne. Located outside of the coherent settlement structure of Cologne, Widdersdorf-Süd extended these structures by activating formerly agricultural land. This included a process of valorizing less valuable agricultural land into sellable land for development, the transformation of part of the agricultural landscape into (sub)urban fabrics, and the creation of spaces for the reproduction of labor power. The struggles of everyday life we have encountered, that lead to (sometimes slight) modifications in and reorganizations of routines and prac-

tices, then resemble the transformation and creation of different socio-spatial relations and configurations and, thereby, do not result in radically new forms of life but, instead, re-produce suburban everyday life.

Based on the global suburban and the specificities of individual cities, even in an era of increasing globalization and economic forces of global capitalism, “urbanization is dependent on specific local and historical conditions and therefore does not proceed evenly across the board” (Schmid, 2015, p. 290). As we have seen in our study, the suburban unfolds in its own specificities that, in our case, include its developmental history, its socio-economic structure, and the practices through which people approach the struggles of everyday life—specificities that are interdependent (see, e.g., Lütke & Wood, 2016). These specificities are expressed differently in different suburbs around the globe, not only from a structural perspective but also in relation to their social, cultural, and political configurations. Based on our results, it seems to be beneficial to include the dimension of geographic-historical specificities in the analytical framework when focusing on the struggles of everyday life in future comparative suburban research.

Starting at the level of the everyday and using a broader conceptualization of urban theory to analyze it made the linking of micro- and macro-perspectives possible. The planetary urbanization framework ties in with other “grand theories,” such as postmodern urban development (Soja, 2000), whose benefit for urban research lies primarily in their multidimensionality. Still, planetary urbanization is not used as a substantive theory of the (sub)urban, but rather as a “reading glass” to trace socio-spatial changes. Nonetheless, it is necessary to adjust and complement the concept with a perspective on everyday life if we are to decipher the struggles of everyday life. Consistent with the critical engagement on planetary urbanization, it was helpful to complement our framework with Lefebvre’s perspective on everyday life and socio-spatial change (see Section 3.1. and, e.g., Angelo & Goh, 2021).

6. Conclusion

We have shown that everyday struggles illuminate the interweaving of everyday and structural perspectives and have argued that the struggles of everyday life we encountered in our study led to (often slight) modifications or reorganizations of daily routines. We achieved this by adopting Lefebvre’s perspective and focusing on recurrences of the ordinary in everyday life. The epistemological framework of Brenner and Schmid (2015, 2018) allowed us to then analyze the struggles of everyday life in relation to various dimensions while combining micro and macro perspectives of socio-spatial changes.

The social and economic capital of our interviewees allowed them to minimize the struggles of everyday life. Therefore, we conclude that there should be a substantial emphasis on socio-structural, socio-cultural,

and socio-economic factors relevant to those living in the suburbs when studying suburbia. This agenda has recently been reflected in other academic contexts. For instance, there is a lively debate about poverty and the impact of the economic crises in the suburbs in North America (see, e.g., Anacker, 2015; Maginn & Anacker, 2022) that has not yet been transferred to or studied within German-speaking contexts. Suggesting that this would be a valuable activity, the people in our case study had the opposite experience. The pronounced socio-economic structure of the interviewees we encountered made the struggles of everyday life manageable. However, they may not be as manageable for people who are less well-situated economically or less well-educated. As there is no homogenous single suburbia, even in Germany, this might be another fruitful anchor point for future research.

The pandemic has not only affected everyday interactions but also called into question the order of central categories such as state, individual, politics, and society. In our study, we encountered the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on everyday life and its daily routines and practices. The Covid-19 pandemic, like a spotlight, illuminated socio-spatial fractures and catalyzed transformations. However, it is still unclear how long-lasting the effects of the pandemic will be: Are suburban residential settlements sustainably functionally expanded by the opportunity to work remotely? Will the inhabitants, especially families, continue to have the opportunity to work from home in order to better manage the struggles of everyday life in the future? What effects can be expected with regard to suburbanization or moving to the urban periphery? To what extent will this affect families' search criteria for a home?

The analytical framework used here is not restricted to the suburban. Coming from a broader epistemological framework of the urban (see Section 3.1) and with regard to a more open delineation of the suburban (see Section 1), focusing on struggles of everyday life could also be a fruitful starting point for studying the suburban in urban or rural neighborhoods, when the interrelation of micro- and macro-perspectives is at the heart of the research. Our results provide an initial idea as to why the suburban has been widely read as stable and ordered. As demonstrated in the empirical section of the article, when focusing on the "ordinariness" of everyday life, as Lefebvre suggested, struggles do not necessarily manifest in the form of a "revolutionary fight" but, more often, in day-to-day adaptations. Using Lefebvre's perspective on everyday life and social change (see Section 2) helps highlight practices of re-producing and modifying everyday life. In our case, our interviewees provided a largely stable picture of everyday life in the suburban (see Section 4). Transferring the planetary urbanization framework to suburbia and enriching it with a stronger emphasis on Lefebvre's perspective then allowed us to combine micro- and macro-perspectives on socio-spatial change. Future (sub)urban research could

engage fruitfully with this concept and these results and, by comparatively researching struggles of everyday life in the suburban, help further develop this perspective on socio-spatial change.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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