Rethinking Community Kitchens

Domestication of ethnically diverse, and commercial high streets for social inclusion and food security

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Architectural Crossovers Design

Table of contents

Fascination

The starting point for this research was an interest in the connective capabilities that food possesses. The inhabitants in the hometown I grew up with felt growing segregation with the people who newly moved in and their town. Located near Amsterdam, a city which is constantly expanding and becoming more and more expensive and international, the village began attracting ex-pats and people who wanted to flee the city. In response, people started to organise meals to bring together the new and the original inhabitants. Telling their own stories and that of the town over a shared meal resulted in an improved togetherness.

       Food is in some way the same as architecture in its role in stories. It is an object around which stories are told or stories are told with. It finds itself in spaces where other stories appear on which it has no influence but at the same time, it could. It can be the destination of a story or it can be only part of a small stop within the story. It is always present in the everyday lives of persons, whether it is due to its presence or absence. My interest is directed to the people who don't have a place or a meal where they can share and listen to stories.

"Visiting the food bank is a shameful experi-ence for food bank users, because the visit at the food bank makes them aware that they are partly socially excluded."

- (BBC News, 2021)

"They need food. Their children need food.... "They line up even when its blis-tering cold. These people have been soa-ked and drenched in rain without umbrel-las, and it does not deter them to get there early and queue for two to three hours."

- *(Rombach et al., 2018)*

Cohen, D. (10-12-2020), Food for London Now: Hunger crisis deepens as middle class graduates now join queues at food banks

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Introduction

1 New poverty report shows London and low-income communities disproportionally affected by COVID-19 | News from Trust For London & WPI Economics. (n.d.). Trust for London.

2 Whyte, W. H. (1980). The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. Conservation Foundation.

3 Babacan, H. (n.d.). Addressing denial: the first step in responding to racism - ResearchOnline@JCU. https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/17913/

4 Garbutt, R. (2009). Social Inclusion and Local Practices of Belonging. Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 1(3), 84–108.

The lines in front of food banks and other initiatives that provide food packages to the people who are experiencing food poverty are increasing every week. Before the pandemic, the UK was already experiencing issues like food insecurity and poverty. After the pandemic facing the challenge of accessibility to healthy, sustainable and appropriate diets for different cultures has become increasingly difficult. Society has become more and more dependent on emergency food aid due to the rising levels of food insecurity, health inequalities and poverty. In London near to two million people are struggling to afford or have access to food. 14 per cent of the children with parents and 16 per cent of the adults in London are living in a low or very low food secure situation. The effects the pandemic affected no- and low-income households, black, Asian and minority-ethnic Londoners, disabled and older people, households with children and people who are working in the food sector specifically and disproportionately (Trust for London, n.d.)[1]. Feelings of exclusion and loneliness are also related to high inequality, poverty and deprivation rates.

Social inclusion is one of the main points on the agenda of the government along with food poverty and is desirable for society as it is 'the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background or social status, can thrive and achieve their full potential in life' (Whyte, 1980)[2]. Babacan (2008)[3] concluded that social inclusion is a product of social institutions, processes and practices (Garbutt, 2009)[4].
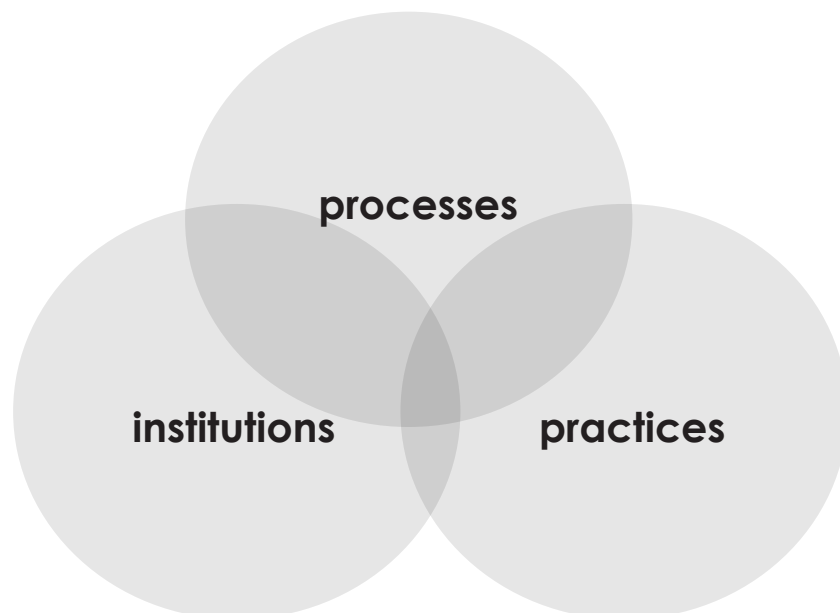

fig. 1,   Diagram of the main three social inclusion influencers

Elshater (2019)[5] concludes from different studies that the sharing of food provides a type of daily physical and social recreation among people and communities. Community food initiatives which provision surplus food could improve community cohesion, a sense of well-being and decrease isolation (Floe et al., 2018)[6]. Wise (2011)[7] ends on a positive yet slightly conscious note in her research. She highlights that the material, ritual and social settings in which food is shared for intercultural interactions are of great influence and that consuming food with different others at the same table can create intercommunal settings. The two settings that are under investigation in this paper are the high street and the community kitchen.

The kitchen in this research is interpreted in two ways. The first is the 'social kitchens', these are the indoor environments where people come together and result in different social configurations. The term community kitchen corresponds to this interpretation and is generally defined as an accessible place tackling food waste, food poverty and (social) isolation. A community kitchen is formed by a small group who prepare meals for their community and themselves.

The second is the 'public kitchen' and relates to the combinations in the outdoor public realm. High streets are an example of these public kitchens. High streets are one of London's most characteristic urban phenomena and places that are known to be central to the community as they are used and accessible for most people. Marginalised groups mostly use the high streets during the day. As food is one of the main resources necessary to fulfil people's daily needs, interactions around food are one of the main fields of activity. Currently, the high streets are confronted with issues regarding the changing retail habits due to online shopping, housing pressure and rising retail space costs and a lack of policy and maintenance due to cuts in government investments (High Streets for All Study, 2017)[8].

Newham and its social dynamics is the main area of interest. The focus is reasoned by the initial findings of the socio-economic research of the city of London. In the borough only one community kitchen initiative (positioned along a high street) is active and there are many food banks present. At the same time, the area is known as one of the most income deprived and with high child(49%) and adult(36%) poverty rates (Poverty and Inequality Data for Newham - Trust for London, 2022)[9].

5 Elshater, A. (2019). Food consumption in the everyday life of liveable cities: design implications for conviviality. Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability, 13(1), 68–96.

6 C. Floe, J. Carmel, & M. Brossard. (2018). How London's communities are tackling food poverty. In London Community Foundation. TSIP.

7 Wise, A. (2011). Moving Food: Gustatory Commensality And Disjuncture In Everyday Multiculturalism. New Formations, 74(74), 82–107.

8 High Streets for All Study. (2017). We Made That.

9 Poverty and Inequality Data For Newham - Trust For London. (n.d.). Trust for London.

Statement & Research Questions

As the high streets are under economic pressure, this paper looks at which places and spaces are still available and purposeful for the community. The government's approach to handling food poverty and loneliness emphasizes community participation and implementation of food-related community initiatives. The research scales all have their narrative but are at the same time influencing each other. The socio-spatial/economic/temporal relation to these narratives will be analysed. The research explores the elements necessary to implement a more community and food-focused strategy on high streets and therefore improve domestication. It does this by seeking to find answers to the following main and sub-question(s):

How can a community kitchen contribute to the social inclusion of communities around ethnically diverse and commercial high streets?

- How can social inclusion be achieved and measured in the environments of multicultural communities?

- How do community kitchens operate in communities and the social food network?

- Which community kitchens position themselves along ethnically diverse and commercial high streets and how do they interact with the high streets?

- Where and how do interactions across differences take place along the two important streets in Newham, High Street and Green Street?

- How does food play a part in interactions in and close to the social environment of high streets?

"hunger for social inclusion" - (Pfeiffer et al., 2015, p. 485)

Theoretical Framework

Social inclusion and belonging

Related to inclusion is the notion of belonging. The approach of belonging used in this paper is one of Garbutt (2009), who explains: belonging is the experience of being part of the social fabric. The sense of belonging in a local community is intrinsic to the coherence of the community, places and their communal diversities, and the constitutive ways of the communities. According to de Certeau (1984)[10], locals define and constitute themselves within places when they are appropriate for them as if it is their own. The appropriation therefore a signifier of the sense of belonging of people in those places. Partly due to these appropriations the places can be seen as lived spaces where bodily experiences are constituted (Watson, 2009)[11]. History, community and geography are seen as important factors that develop and meld over time for creating a sense of local identity (Garbutt, 2009).

In this research community and belonging to a place is about reciprocal social relations and therefore focuses more on what the community does instead of what the community is (Neal et al., 2013)[12].

Over time multiple theories on the practise, processes and institutions involved or have an influence on social inclusion and belonging in ethnically diverse communities have appeared. The two main trends that are addressed in this paper are social capital and conviviality theory.

Social inclusion and social capital

Two of the two main contributors to the discussions on social capital were Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu defined social capital as:

"Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." - (Pierre Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119)

Bourdieu and Putnam are similar in their understanding of the main aspects related to social capital. What Putnam names as the norms of reciprocity, Bourdieu describes as how individuals gain resources possessed by their associates and the relationship that is required. Secondly, Bourdieu speaks of the presence and quality of those resources. Putnam et al. (1993)[13] state that the networks of social capital are the foundation for reciprocity, solidarity and participation. This thought is shared by the likes of Kawachi and Berkmann (2000)[14], who associate

10 Certeau, M., & Giard, L. (1984). The Practice Of Everyday Life (1st edition). University of California Press.

11 Watson, S. (2009). The Magic of the Marketplace: Sociality in a Neglected Public Space. Urban Studies, 46(8), 1577–1591.

12 Neal, S., Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., & Mohan, G. (2018). Community and Conviviality? Informal Social Life in Multicultural Places. Sociology, 53(1), 69–86.

13 Robert D. Putnam. (1993). The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life. The American Prospect, 13(4), 65–78.

14 Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. F. (2000). Social Capital, Social Cohesion, and Health. Social Epidemiology, 290–319.

16 Wilson, L. (2006). Developing a Model for the Measurement of Social Inclusion and Social Capital in Regional Australia. Social Indicators Research, 75(3), 335–360.

17 Putnam, R. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon & Schuster.

18 Misztal, B. A. (2005). The new importance of the relationship between formality and informality. Feminist Theory, 6(2), 173–194.

19 Bourdieu, P. (1991). Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 42(1), 106–114.

20 Sauter, D., & Huettenmoser, M. (2008). Liveable streets and social inclusion. URBAN DESIGN International, 13(2), 67–79.

21 Lapiņa, L. (2016). Besides Conviviality: *Paradoxes in being 'at ease' with diversity in a Copenhagen district* Nordic Journal of Migration Research, 6(1), 33.

22 Lofland, L. H. (1998). The public realm: exploring the city's quintessential social territory. Choice Reviews Online, 36(04), 36–2458.

high stocks of social capital with economic and human development while creating socially inclusive and cohesive societies (Wilson, 2006)[16].

Two types of social capital are distinguished by Putnam (2000)[17]. One refers to the connections between like-minded people. 'Bonding social capital' therefore includes some but at the same time excludes others. The other describes places where connections across differences are made. This heterogeneous form is formulated as 'bridging social capital' (Wilson, 2006). How participation and solidarity are possibly achieved also depends on the processes and practices that occur nearby and in between them. Therefore this paper looks into other social capitals next to community kitchens and on the high streets which could encourage participation.

According to Sennet, the use of social capital as a theory for social inclusion lacked in addressing the social processes and practices that happen in the more informal spheres of the public realm (Watson, 2009; Misztal, 2005[18]). This lack of recognising of the influence of the micro relations and spaces on inclusiveness makes social capital more applicable to the analysis of inclusiveness on the meso- and macro-scale.

Following up on the work of Bourdieu's 'Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space' (1991)[19], three dimensions for measuring social inclusion/integration in the public realm are distinguished by Sauter & Huettenmoser (2008)[20] for analysis of liveable streets. The first dimension is the structural dimension: the accessibility and usability of the space. The second is the neighbourhood relations and activities in public spaces which is named the interactive dimension. The last dimension is the subjective dimension: the personal satisfaction and contentment in the situation and one's sense of belonging.

Social inclusion and conviviality

The interactive and subjective dimensions are more related to the processes and practices that occur in both the informal and formal spheres of the public realm. By focussing on the interactions between different individuals and groups, the theory of conviviality to social inclusion operates foremost on the micro- and mesoscale. Accompanied by the theory on social capital this research explores the inclusiveness of the locality on all scales and in an interwoven manner.

Conviviality has been defined in multiple ways over time. This paper it is seen as the way people live with differences in culturally diverse environments through everyday encounters and practices (Lapina, 2016)[21]. How these encounters occur has been described by multiple researchers.

Lofland (1998)[22] asks three questions for interactions in the

23 Yeo, S. J., Ho, K. C., & Heng, C. K. (2016). Rethinking spatial planning for urban conviviality and social diversity: a study of nightlife in a Singapore public housing estate neighbourhood. Town Planning Review, 87(4), 379–399.

24 Wise, A., & Velayutham, S. (2013). Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: Some brief comparisons between Singapore and Sydney. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 17(4), 406–430.

25 Radice, M. (2016). Unpacking Intercultural Conviviality in Multiethnic Commercial Streets. Journal of Intercultural Studies, 37(5), 432–448.

26 Valluvan, S. (2016). Convivi-ality and Multiculture. YOUNG, 24(3), 204–221.

built environment. How do interactions occur? Who interacts with whom? And what is the content of the interactions? The value of these interactions for social inclusion and the way they occur are described by Misztal (2005). The three different types of interaction she mentions are encounters, exchange and pure relationships. She links these types to the interaction styles of civility, sociability and intimacy. Civility is seen by her as an interactional practice with respect for others and related to (easy) encounters. Sociability is related to exchange and the creation of a sense of belonging and social acceptance. Intimacy respects the privacy of relationships. Encounters are understood to be accidental and momentary and therefore have a sense of temporality. How the built environment provides materiality and spaces for intimate, comfortable and safe interactions is relevant as its results in a (temporary) staying behaviour (Yeo et al., 2016)[23].

Wise and Velayutham (2013)[24] name the themes of space and place, bridging and connecting works and intercultural habitus as important factors for the occurrence of these interactions. How convivial spaces function or are perceived is further investigated by Radice (2016)[25] and he speaks of four layers of conviviality. The first layer contains micro places for interactions which are accessible, heterogeneous and flexible. The second speaks of the social codes that regulate a place. The third is somewhat similar but speaks more of the visible codes, groups and intergroup relations. The last one is the critical infrastructure which projects an image of a place and contributes to its readability. Configurations of space are found to be key in limiting and realising convivial interactions (Valluvan, 2016)[26].

Own photograph, (2022), appropration of the sidewalk and public elements on a high street

Interactions can occur in different spatial configurations. In the urban fabric, there is a balance between informal and formal spaces. Informal spaces are spaces that are unplanned and unregulated. These places are characterised by spontaneity, efficiency and flexibility. In these informal spaces and their relation to formal spaces, interesting topics of society can be found such as inequality, social inclusion and migration (Lehmann, 2020)[27]. Because they are spontaneous, unregulated and therefore temporarily appropriated, these informal spaces have overlapping characteristics with convivial encounters. Therefore it is worth it to not only look into the formal configurations of space and social capitals and their encounters but also into the intercultural interactions that take place in the informal spheres.

27 Lehmann, S. (2020). The unplanned city: Public space and the spatial character of urban informality. Emerald Open Research, 2, 16.
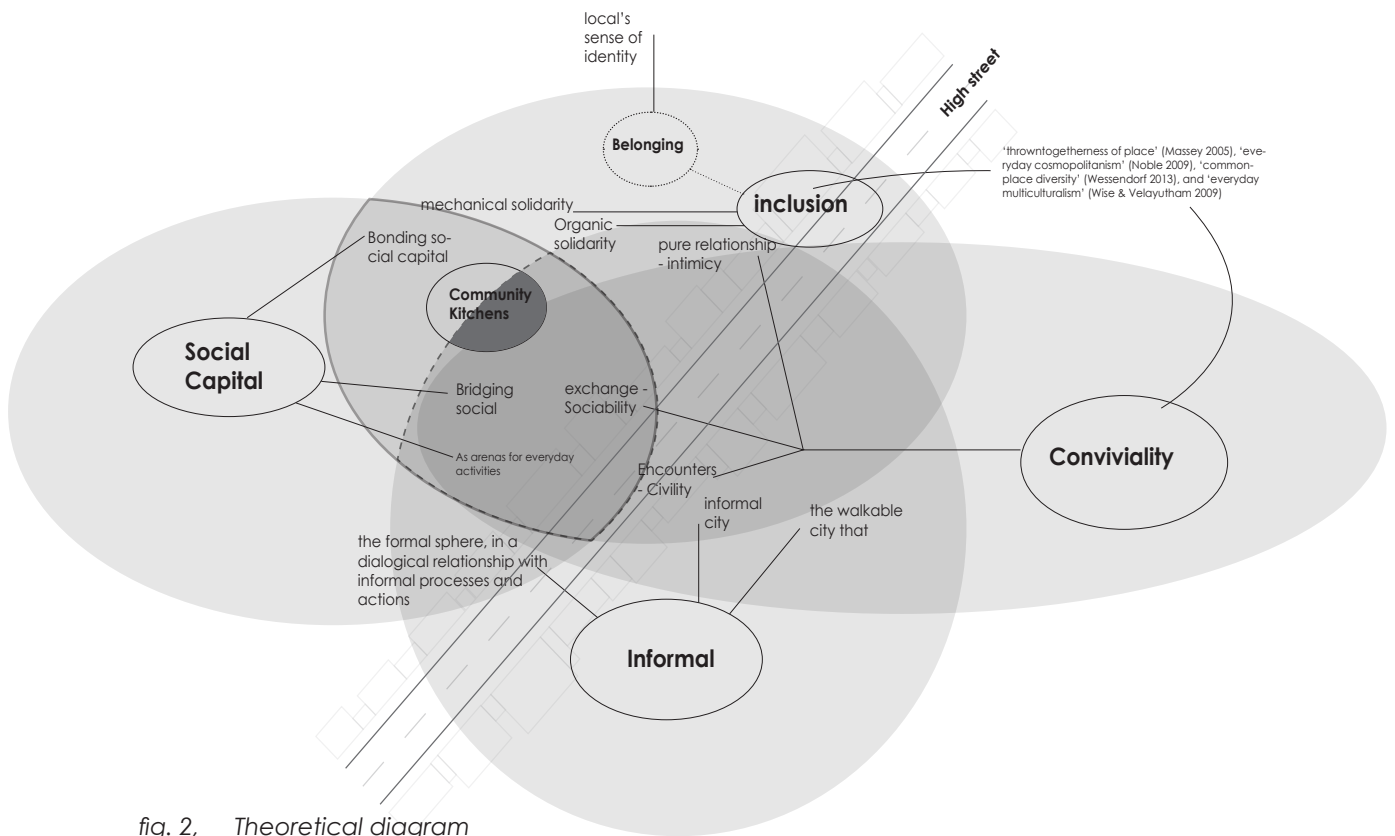

fig. 2,   Theoretical diagram

Methodology

To assess the community togetherness on the high streets it is important to understand the community activities that happen around and on the high streets. These activities are split into: public functions present that facilitate a place for all the communities, functions that give gathering space for a specific part of the local community, and everyday interactions in the public realm of the high street. These everyday interactions can occur between people of the same age, ethnicity, culture, class and income group, but also across these differences. By looking at the functions and places where the local community gathers, a socio-spatial analysis can be made.

Interactions between common and different societal groups are understood to be temporal and are therefore dependent on the spaces that give room for these temporal interactions. The first way of investigating the temporalities in the community is by analysing the times of operation of several community functions and activities like schools, libraries, churches, and other communal sites. By doing so, an investigation of the rhythm of social interaction intensities can be made on the mesoscale. The second way dives into the spaces which are not particularly linked to intercultural activity but where staying behaviour and interactions occur in an informal way. The cultural, spatial and material characteristics related to this staying behaviour will be described.

To gain a broader understanding of the workings of communities, and community kitchens on high streets, a side step will be made for comparison to the area of Peckham in the borough of Southwark. In Peckham, a similar situation occurs as there is a community kitchen placed along the high street Rye Lane. The two areas differentiate from each other, as the former is a more disadvantaged and less developed segregated area.

Mapping
Mapping as a research tool is applied on different scales. The Social food network of London and its relation to socio-economic characteristics are mapped on the macroscale. (Social) Capital mapping of the borough of Newham applies to the mesoscale. Movement mapping on the high streets and around the community kitchens is analysed on the micro-scale. Whereas Accessibility and public transport orientation is of importance on the previously mentioned mappings and therefore on multiple scales. On the borough and kitchen environment scale, A more precise demographic investigation will be executed on the gathering locations, compared to the socio-economic analysis on a macro-scale. These different analyses all together give an insight into the structural and interactive dimensions of social inclusion around high streets and community kitchens.
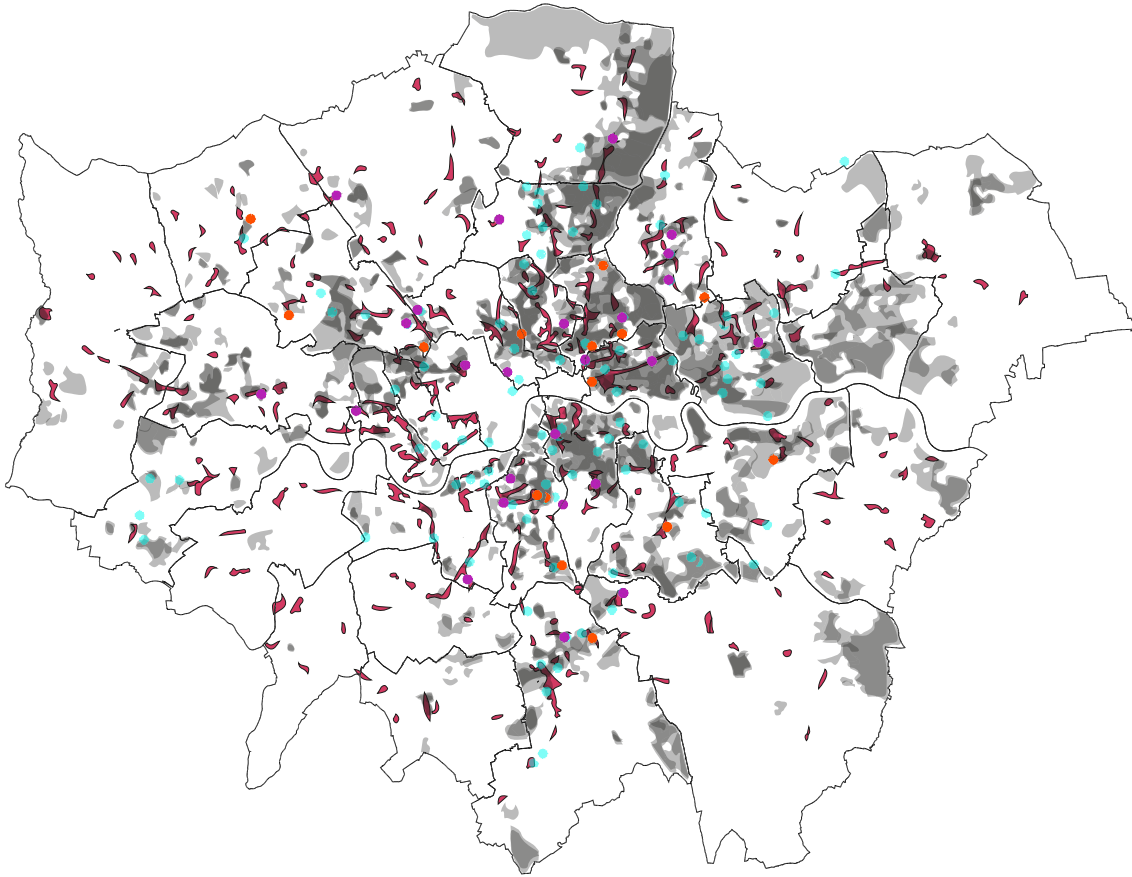
fig. 3,   *Map of income and multiple deprivation in*
             relation to social food institutions and high streets

Interview

The subjective dimension is examined by interviewing people on their perspective in the vicinity of the high street area and its community kitchens. Since it is about the lived experience of the people, the questions of the interviews will focus on the interviewed persons' perception of the public spaces and the possibilities for interactions with different others within them. Two kinds of groups will be interviewed. The first group contains the temporary visitors, passing through the space for the first time and their perception of accessibility and welcomeness, available resting points and accessibility of the spaces is reviewed. The second group are the persons who use the spaces frequently and see the usage of and interactions at the spaces on a daily/ weekly bases, such as volunteers, regular visitors and nearby shop owners.

Photography and sketches

Photography and sketches capture the author its perception of the activities. As the appropriation of the spaces is temporary, tools that capture the use of space and types of interactions in a certain moment are useful to translate its temporality. Not only the activity on the public high streets will be recorded but also the activity behind to facades. By doing so community activities which are an extension of the high street are incorporated. The method employed here is an empirical one, and the findings of the authors' perceived local activities are used to support the previous methods.

The combination of methods will be used to make a visual reproduction of the rhythms and behaviours of the community on their way to and around social and food activities on the high streets.
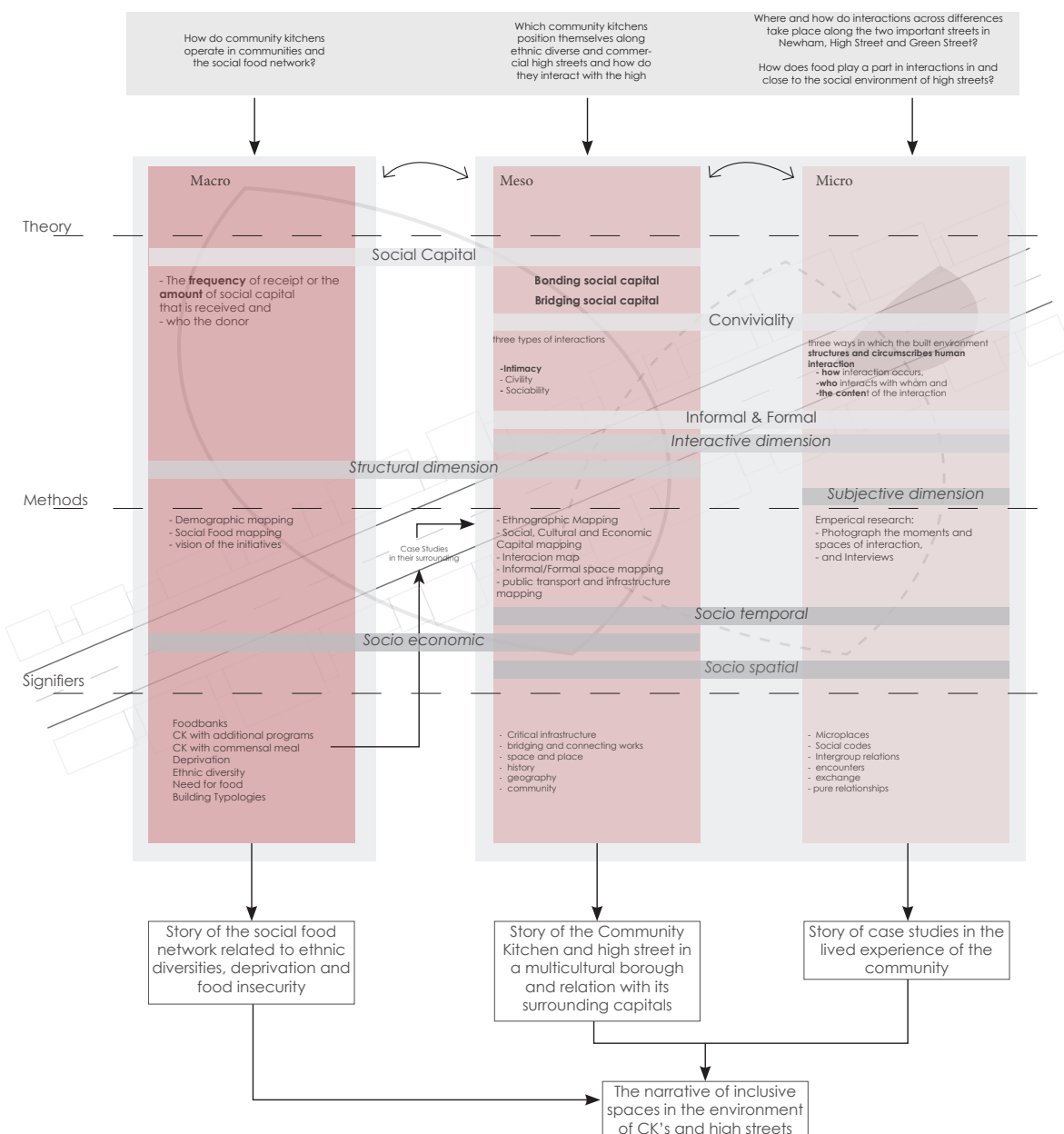

fig. 4,   Methodologic diagram

Arguments on Relevance

This research aims to obtain an understanding of the social position of community kitchens within their communities and surroundings, particularly around high streets. This is done by analysing the operations, behaviours and appropriations of the community on and around the high streets and that of a kind of community initiative, in this case, community kitchens. The research findings seek to provide a strategy that could bring a sense of belonging and togetherness to the high streets of Newham. The inclusion of the community is not only important to tackle the growing segregation in a multicultural city. Awareness of-, confrontation with- and participation in the community (food) related initiatives is a step necessary to take in the search for the solution or at least the softening of issues such as food poverty, nutrition and mental health problems hidden in society.

By creating spaces for inclusive interaction and conversations across different ethnicities, cultures, ages and classes, boundaries preventing society from moving forward in these issues can be broken down. The people who suffer from or experience these issues could help to make a difference for themselves and others. The solution cannot always be expected to be given by the government and I suggest that by incorporating the community in the route to a solution a more cohesive and solidary future. This aim is inspired by Wise (2005) as she names three important factors for investigating intercultural relations and environments. These are the importance of understanding the social context of the local community, stating the negative and the positive relations, and what she calls the 'true multiculturalism of place sharing and this contains the recognition of different individuals and their forms of reciprocity. Accordingly, understanding each other's situation, positive or negative, and recognising each other's presence through place-sharing and interactions can help introduce a movement forward towards an environment where all party mutually benefits.

"Conviviality cannot be coerced, but it can be encouraged by the right rules, the right props, and the right places and spaces." – (Iveson, 2007)

Research Diagram
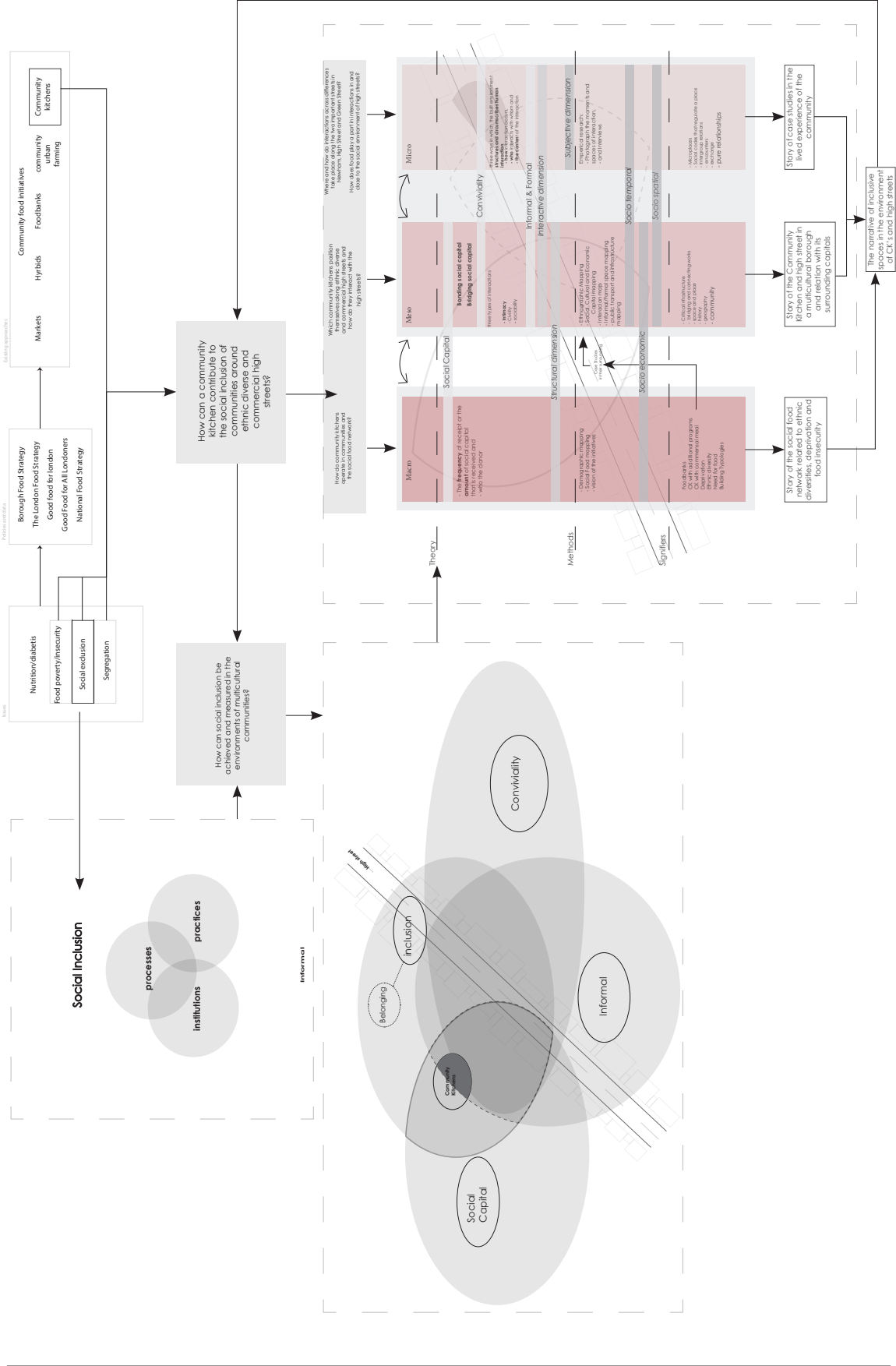
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