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The development of informal social networks - a study of social support and urban development in Iztapalapa, Mexico City

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The development of informal social networks
– a study of social support and urban
development in Iztapalapa, Mexico City

By

Taru Silvonen

March 2019

PhD



*A thesis submitted in the partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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Informal Social Networks as a Development Framework - the Case of Mexico City

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role and transformation of informal social networks in the context of the formation and formalisation of a *colonia popular* – a self-built neighbourhood – in Mexico City. Local residents' collaborations through informal social networks are investigated focusing on their contribution to processes of urbanisation and neighbourhood formation. The thesis approaches development from a critical perspective, engaging with the debates regarding the inadequate inclusion of local residents in urban development. Alternative understandings of 'development' are discussed, focusing on aspects of local collectivism, which resonate with the collaborative neighbourhood formation processes described in this thesis using a case study approach.

The case study draws on ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, which were carried out over a period of six months in a neighbourhood in Iztapalapa, Mexico City. Informal social networks are approached by detailing interactions and mechanisms of support between family, friends and neighbours. Collaborations between local residents indicate how informal social networks have played an active role in forming and transforming the neighbourhood. However, it is showed that the role of informal social networks has been diminishing. The collaborative community-oriented networks have become increasingly replaced by more personal networks as a basis for exchanges of social support. It is argued that this transformation is driven by broader changes in the neighbourhood, including the rise of more formal processes of urbanisation, growing perceptions of insecurity, as well as social and physical segregation. This thesis contributes to broader academic debates of urban development, social cohesion and neighbourhood networks by proposing an informal social networks approach to increase the understanding of local collaborative processes that have both social and physical outcomes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this research project to the participants and local residents of the research locality, who shared their experiences with me and for a brief moment welcomed me in their lives, families and neighbourhood. I am truly grateful for your time and friendship, you have all taught me so much.

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As a final reflection, I would like to note that this has been a challenging yet rewarding research project. As an outsider researcher but also as a foreigner and non-native Spanish speaker, the contributions of this study in terms of personal growth have been substantial. Throughout the research journey I have encountered words of warning and concerns about the practicalities of entering a neighbourhood I was not familiar with in a low-income part of town of a culturally different megacity. Yet, I encountered few issues during fieldwork and instead was greeted by local residents who were welcoming and supportive of my pursuits as a student and a visitor in their neighbourhood. Interactions with the local people and immersing in a culture new to me have in many ways been the source of motivation for completing this research. Revisiting the research locality during the final stages of research was an important part of the process, allowing me to re-engage with local residents to share broad findings, moving away from extractive research. I emphasise the value of researching social phenomena in culturally different places and areas new to us, no matter how immense the challenge of doing so may first seem. It is the journey that counts, not just the destination.

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List of abbreviations

CAM – Consejo Agrarista Mexicano, neighbourhood

CCC – Cedros community centre

CBD – community-based development

CDD – community-driven development

CONEVAL – National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (*Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*)

CORETT-DF – Commission for Land Tenure Regularisation-Federal District (*Comisión de Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra*)

DCB – Chavos Banda Sports ground (*Deportivo Chavos Banda*)

DGRT – General Management of Territorial Regularisation (*Dirección General de Regularización Territorial*)

FG – focus group

FIDEURBE – Mexico City Urban Development Trust (*Fideicomiso de Interés Social para el Desarrollo Urbano de la Ciudad de México*)

GT – Grounded Theory

INEGI – National Institute for Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*)

ISN – informal social network

NGO – non-governmental organisation

PGJDF – Attorney General for Mexico City (*Procuraduría General de Justicia de la Ciudad de México*)

PRA – participatory rural appraisal

RA – research assistant

SAT – Tax Administration Service (*Servicio de Administración Tributaria*)

UNAM – National Autonomous University of Mexico (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*)

UNCHS – United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

Glossary of expressions in Spanish

Archivo Histórico de Iztapalapa – Iztapalapa Historical Archive

Avenida – avenue

Barrio – neighbourhood, often referring to lower class areas

Buen vivir – living well

Colonia – neighbourhood

Colonias populares – self-built working-class neighbourhoods

Comadre – the godmother of the child of the person in question

Compadrazgo – the relationship that the god-parents of a child have with the parents of the child

Con el poder de la gente – with the power of the people, motto of Iztapalapa-borough

Confianza – trust, confidence

Convivencia – conviviality

Convivir – to live together in conviviality, to coexist, to socialise

Convivio – a social get-together, a convivial event

Credencial – identification document

Delegación – borough

Deportivo Chavos Banda – Chavos Banda sports ground, literally gang guys' sports ground

Dispensa – food parcel, food handout

Distrito Federal – federal district, former formal name of Mexico City

Ejidatario – farmer working on a plot of land that is part of an *ejido*, see below

Ejido – agricultural land divided into land parcels that are farmed by individuals for collective gain

Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal – Federal District Government Leadership

Güera – blonde woman, colloquially 'white girl'

Guisado – a stew-like dish

Hacienda – estate, ranch

Iztapalacra – derogative colloquial term for Iztapalapa -borough

Jefe/a de manzana – Street representative

Lacra – scar, in this instance referring to colloquial meaning of a social or moral blemish

Madrina – godmother

Ministerio de Educación Nacional – National Education Ministry

Mitad y mitad – half and half, referring to a service delivery approach

Oriente – east, referring to the area within and bordering eastern Mexico City

Padrinos – god-parents

Pandilla de barra – rod training gang, group of men taking part in certain weight lighting exercise

Posada – social get-together organised every evening 12 days before Christmas

Programa General de Desarrollo Urbano del Distrito Federal – General Urban Development Programme for Federal District

Prospera – prospering, conditional cash transfer programme to keep children in school (previously known as *Oportunidades*, opportunities)

Pueblos originarios – original villages

Punto rojo – crime hot spot, literally red point

Pura milpa – plain corn fields

Rateros – petty thieves

Terreno – plot of land, land divided for sale

Tianguis – open-air market

Tortillería – a shop making and selling corn tortillas

Vecindad – a slum tenement

Vivir bien – living well

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research focus

This thesis is a study of informal social networks (ISNs) in the context of the formation and formalisation of an informal self-built settlement in Mexico City. As an interdisciplinary research project, this thesis engages with literatures from development studies, urban development and social science research on social networks. Theoretically, this research questions the limited role local residents often hold in international and urban development. This feeds into the broader debates in international development regarding participatory development, post-development and *buen vivir*. Empirically, this study approaches local residents' role in development through the study of ISNs in a former informal settlement in the most densely populated borough in Mexico City, which connects the theoretical and empirical aspects of this research to urban development. This thesis contributes to the debates regarding local residents' role in urban development by showing the relevance of ISNs and local informal responses to neighbourhood improvement, drawing on an empirical case study of a former informal settlement in Mexico City.

The main focus of this research is local residents' agency through ISNs and how this has transformed over time. This includes a historical and comparative element, piecing together urbanisation processes from time of neighbourhood formation and analysing how these processes are intertwined with the formation of ISNs. The concept of social networks is used as an analytical tool, explaining social support functions in the broader context of urban development and informal urbanisation. Previous studies of neighbourhood networks (see Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988; Wellman & Leighton 1979) and support networks (see González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2004) both inform research design and provide comparison points for the analysis of ISNs. This thesis also provides a more recent analysis of social networks in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, providing a new comparison study to some of the now classic neighbourhood network studies (see González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2004).

The main motivation for this research is to increase the empirical understanding of ISNs and the exchange of social support in a disadvantaged urban setting. This stems from previous research which indicates that urban development research rarely investigates local residents' informal collaborations (Beane 2015; Durand-Lasserve 2006; Friedmann 2011). While the focus of this thesis is on ISNs and collaborations among local residents, as a neighbourhood study this

research relates to urban development through the discussion of neighbourhood formation and improvement. This thesis contributes especially to literature on informal settlements by examining the social and physical transformations taking place following the development of a former informal settlement.

Researching ISNs in an informally formed neighbourhood – which has over the years become part of the formal city – allows this research to contribute to debates regarding informal settlements and informal urbanisation. Informal urbanisation continues to be a relevant topic in urban research, as the global urban population continues to grow: more than half of the world population lives in cities (Dempsey et al. 2011:19). Most of the world's largest cities – including Mexico City – expanded rapidly during the second half of the 20th century, and it is estimated that by 2030, 60% of the world population will live in cities (United Nations 2016:ii).

Rapid urban growth creates new issues of spatial fragmentation, along with poverty and inequality (Watson 2009:2259), while the logistics of urban settlement and reasons for migration to cities mostly continue to be the same. The search for education, employment and a better future brings people to cities, while the formation of slums and informal settlements in peripheral areas on the outskirts of cities is a response to lack of adequate housing for the new urban populations (Shatkin 2004). While this shows aspirations for creating more prosperous futures, the urban poor are stigmatised due to their living conditions (see Ballegoijen & Rocco 2013; Durand-Lasserve 2006; Lombard 2015; Perlman 2004), even though especially disadvantaged and informal settlements may also contain resourceful practices of neighbourhood formation (Lombard 2014; Moctezuma 2001; Pucci 2008).

Despite being home to Teotihuacan, the earliest and largest pre-Hispanic city in the Americas (Price, Manzanilla & Middleton 2000), the Valley of Mexico is now most of all known for the issues related to the urban sprawl of Mexico City. Early depictions of life in the disadvantaged areas of Mexico City as hopeless 'culture of poverty' (Lewis 1959), highlights the negative view areas like Iztapalapa are still associated with (see Beane 2015; Jaramillo-Vázquez 2015). Mexico City – more specifically Iztapalapa – provides an interesting field site for this study due to its history of rapid urban expansion (Ziccardi 2000), which gave rise to many informal self-built settlements in the city (Aguilar & Santos 2010; Ziccardi 2012). Informal ways of seeking housing are not a minority response to the issue of lack of adequate housing (Connolly 2009; Perlman 2004). It has been estimated that 70 per cent of the population have relied on irregular access to land and gradual self-help strategies to build their homes in Mexico City (Moctezuma

2001:119). Population growth in Mexico City has already slowed down and the number of irregular settlements increased mostly during 1977-1981 (Moctezuma 2001:119), but many problems persist as former informal settlements continue to have poor access to services (Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001; Ziccardi 2012).

The complex relationship between informal and formal processes of urbanisation is highlighted in Mexico City where many informal settlements were regularised in the 1990s (Connolly 2009; Gilbert et al. 2015). Regularisation indicates authorities' acceptance of informal approaches as necessary strategies to deal with rapid urbanisation, blurring the line between informal and formal (Bourdeau, Gilbert & Labbé 2016; Gilbert & De Jong 2015). Informally formed neighbourhoods in Mexico City are also referred to as irregular settlements because of the combination of land invasion, illegal and legal land sale that have been present in many self-built neighbourhoods (Connolly 2009; Gilbert & De Jong 2015).

Informal approaches to both housing and economic activities are often considered as something negative, reflecting illegal activity and deviance, while formal and institutionalised practices are offered as a solution to issues of informality (Harris 2018). Settlement regularisation itself is a limited solution because despite the positive effects of alleviating insecurity of land tenure, regularisation has not been able to solve limited access to basic services (Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). The illegal-legal and negative-positive dichotomies are respectively applied to informal and formal urbanisation by urban planners (Müller & Segura 2017), and local or national governments (Richards, O'Leary & Mutsonziwa 2007; Roy 2005). Many informal aspects present in everyday practices of local residents in informal settlements challenge these imagined dichotomies, showing that informal strategies are not necessarily only illegal or negative processes (see Lombard 2014; Pucci 2008).

Informality is approached here from a social aspect, which means that informality is rooted in the actions of local residents in neighbourhood formation and exchange of informal support in the research locality. The social aspects extend the way informality is understood beyond the informal-formal division (Müller & Segura 2017:160) to include practices applied by local residents based on available resources, which may also include collaborations with local authorities. Informality is then described through local social practices, not local or national legislation or government practice (see Richards, O'Leary & Mutsonziwa 2007). Informal urbanisation continues to be conceived of as a problem to be addressed (Perlman 2004; van Gelder 2013), despite the centrality of informal approaches in urban environments as sources

of income (Hernández & Kellet 2010; León Salazar 2010) and informal support (Lomnitz 2003; Ziccardi 2012). While social networks are often seen as resources of the poor (Enríquez-Rosas 1997; González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003), informal settlements are rarely considered as potential sites of social support and collaboration, apart from depictions of autonomous settlement improvement (Lombard 2014; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010).

Informal settlements highlight issues of social injustice and inequality (Pucci 2008), as settlements are stigmatised as residual localities of crime and insecurity (Gilbert & De Jong 2015; Perlman 2004). The solutions to these negative aspects have often related to external interventions of settlement upgrading or rehousing (Atuesta & Soares 2018; Shatkin 2004; Wekesa, Steyn & Otieno 2011). This replicates the preference of formal approaches and the emphasised role of institutions in urban development (Misztal 2000; Müller & Segura 2017; Roy 2005). Alternatively, informal settlements are depicted as resourceful and resilient examples of how the urban poor deal with difficulty or insecurity without the involvement of institutionalised actors, which can lead to romanticised suggestions that no institutional support is required (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015; Perlman 2004).

The premise of this thesis is that local residents can hold an active role in urban development, which should be supported by institutional resources, suggesting a perspective that combines the two opposing views described above. The need for informal solutions to everyday issues such as lack of basic services in urban neighbourhoods indicates how local formal institutions struggle to meet demand following an inadequate understanding of the needs of disadvantaged urban populations (Shatkin 2007; Ziccardi 2012). Focusing on local residents' responses to urban challenges also questions the treatment of informal settlements as accumulations of problems caused by informal practices of illegal land occupation, poorly built housing stock and unacceptable living conditions that require externally led interventions. Both national and international development organisations mostly offer settlement removal and neighbourhood upgrading as solutions to informal urbanisation, focusing on external interventions which may disrupt local life by developing neighbourhoods while ignoring local practices (Atuesta & Soares 2018; Imparato & Ruster 2003; Pamyk & Cavallieri 1998).

It is important to increase the understanding of local practices in informal settlements, because despite regularisation, former informal settlements continue to lack services in Mexico City (Beane 2015; Wigle 2010) while new settlements continue to form across Mexico (Lombard 2014; Pucci 2008; van Gelder 2013). Informal urbanisation may have its roots in Latin America;

however, informal settlements are currently increasing more rapidly in Africa and Asia, making it a global issue (Andreasen & Møller-Jensen 2016; Fernandes 2011; Magigi & Majani 2006; Richards, O’Leary & Mutsonziwa 2007). There have been several approaches that have attempted to include local actors in development more, most notably participatory approaches (see e.g. Cornwall 2008; Mansuri & Rao 2013) and community-led approaches (Beane 2015; Ibem 2009), but results have been limited due to institutional interpretations of inclusivity (Craig & Porter 2006; Mansuri & Rao 2013). These approaches will be reviewed in the following chapter along with some alternatives to approaching development.

Informal processes of urbanisation are analysed in this thesis as local residents’ active responses to the challenges of neighbourhood formation and improvement. Researching ISNs has the potential to increase the understanding of local residents’ informal collaborations and how these contribute to processes of urbanisation beyond the institutional context of urban development, while highlighting the limitations of informal collaborations. Understanding local informal collaborations can broaden the debate of inclusivity by calling for a reconsideration of the role of local residents in urban development and seeking more collaborative approaches between local residents and the development sector. I will explain in section 1.2 in further detail how the specific concepts used in this research project enable building an understanding of ISNs as part of local responses to issues of urban development.

This research aims to build an understanding of the role local residents’ interactions in ISNs play in urban development. ISNs are investigated as part of local residents’ agency in informal collaborations and neighbourhood formation, which contributes to the debate of including local actors in urban development by drawing attention to local residents’ collaborations. Processes of collaboration and social support in ISNs are researched through a case study approach, using a neighbourhood in Iztapalapa -borough of Mexico City to analyse ISNs in the context of a disadvantaged urban area, a former informal settlement. The main question that this research seeks to answer is: **how have informal social networks contributed to processes of urban development and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality**. In order to provide a response to this overarching question, the thesis addresses a series of sub-questions through ‘thick’ description (Geertz 1973). These questions are:

- How do ISNs function in the research locality, what actors do they consist of, and what type of support is exchanged through them? These questions include a comparative

element, considering how ISNs have changed in the research locality following neighbourhood transformation.

- What processes are present in the formation and functions of ISNs and the exchange of social support in the research locality?
- What hinders the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support in the research locality?

The data that enabled a response to these questions were collected during two stages of fieldwork between October 2016 and May 2017. The case study focuses on processes of collaboration and social support in a local everyday context. Interactions with participants highlighted the importance of examining how ISNs have changed and collaborative processes have become less prominent, following neighbourhood urbanisation. The initial methods of observation and semi-structured interviews were supported with focus groups in the second stage of fieldwork. The focus groups were used to explore in greater detail the processes of neighbourhood formation and the role of ISNs within this process. Flexibility is an essential characteristic of this research design, as data collection has been guided by initial findings. The case study aims to inform theorisation (see Stake 1995), which is why a reflexive data-driven approach has been central to this research project.

1.2 Social networks as a tool for exploring local approaches to urban development

In the Latin American context, reciprocal exchanges of social support have long been considered an integral resource for the urban poor (González de la Rocha 1994), forming the survival strategies of the marginalised (Lomnitz 2003; Marques et al. 2008). The urban underclass and the disadvantaged neighbourhoods they inhabit continue to be stigmatised, even though social networks are mostly portrayed as mechanisms of dealing with disadvantage (see e.g. Davis 2006; Eckstein 1990; Perlman 2004). Social networks are often understood as part of social support or self-help processes but research on coping mechanisms rarely provide detailed analysis of how support is exchanged between individuals in support networks (Forrest & Kearns 2001; Mitlin 2008; Moser 1998). This thesis proposes a social network approach to increase the understanding of local residents' involvement in urban development processes, aiming to address the misalignment between disadvantaged neighbourhoods as hopeless areas and the resource-rich social networks of the poor.

This research focuses on interactions in social networks, considering whether and how these networks provide informal strategies for dealing with challenges of living in a disadvantaged urban area. ISNs are understood in this thesis as connections of social ties between kin, friends and neighbours, enabling but at times also hindering the exchange of social support and collaboration. These networks are informal in the sense that they function in circumstances characterised with lack of more formal, institutional support. ISNs provide a conceptual tool for investigating collaborative interactions between individuals on a neighbourhood level, focusing on practices of social support. While social networks are often discussed as community resources (Gilchrist 2009), studies of social networks in a neighbourhood setting show that communities consist of several different kinds of networks, based on the social ties and interactions between different people (Craven & Wellman 1973; Wellman 1999; Wellman & Berkowitz 1997; Wellman & Leighton 1979). The high variability of network actors, social ties and interactions highlights the need for researching the interactions within social networks, rather than considering neighbourhoods as unified communities of social support (see Costa 2005; Fischer 1982; Gilchrist 2009; Hennig 2007).

Local communities have long been recognised as a resource in development studies (Long 2001; Moser 1998), but there continues to be a gap between the roles local residents are given in project delivery and including residents in project design (Brand 2013; Müller & Segura 2017; Otsuki 2014). In urban development local residents have been involved, for example, in planning consultations (Sepe 2014) and building housing stock (Wakely 2016) but rarely in the whole duration of development projects (Brand 2013; Lüthi, McConville & Kvarnström 2009). Local residents continue to hold limited roles in urban development, as existing local practices and culture that is embedded in everyday life regardless of their potential to support development is often overlooked by conventional development (Berger & Beeson 1998; Escobar 2008; Nelson 2007; Sen 1999). The solutions offered to development challenges depend on how development is defined and by whom (see Craig & Porter 2003).

This thesis approaches development from the critical perspective of post-development, which is based on more social aspects of well-being as opposed to institution-led interventions aiming for growth and modernity (see e.g. Escobar 1992; Nustad 2001). Criticising development studies for being an extension of colonialism, some post-development theorists find it necessary to completely abandon the concept of development (Storey 2000; Ziai 2004). The essence of post-development, however, is seeking alternatives to development based on local context, local actors, bottom-up approaches and social movements as key actors (Craig & Porter 2003; Escobar

1992 & 2008; Esteva 2014). Post-development does not offer many concrete solutions to development issues (Nederveen Pieterse 1998; Sachs 2010; Ziai 2015), but its criticism is based on challenging the role of national and international institutions as those who define what development means, calling for a recognition of local peoples and cultures as the constructing elements of many modernities (Escobar 2004; McGregor 2007).

To what extent local residents are seen as contributors, participants or partners in development differs between different approaches to development. While participatory approaches, for example, advocate partnership between development projects and local residents, the institutionalisation of these approaches has exposed participation to top-down structures. The result has been participation as a means, instead of participation that leads to co-produced societal transformations as development outcomes (Cleaver 2001; Cornwall 2008; Mohan & Hickey 2004). While advocates of post-development highlight the role of social movements and networks of movements as development actors, the Latin American development paradigm, *buen vivir*¹ (living well), recognises locals as key agents in achieving well-being through solidarity and collectivism on a community level (Gudynas 2013; Villalba 2013). Heralded by some as having the potential to strengthen the position of indigenous peoples that have often been further marginalised by processes of conventional development, *buen vivir* is based on indigenous traditions, especially collective well-being and respect for nature (Acosta 2012; Monni & Pallottino 2015). *Buen vivir* complements post-development by focusing more on collectivism as practice, whereas post-development offers a critical starting point to the whole project of development (Escobar 2008; Gudynas 2018). Despite the growing literature on *buen vivir*, there is still little focus on collectivism in everyday practices especially in urban context (Bressa Florentin 2016; Monni & Pallottino 2015; Walsh 2010), which this research has potential to address.

While previous research has analysed social networks as coping strategies and resources in relation to urban poverty (González de la Rocha 2001; Lomnitz 2003), the practices that take place in social networks are rarely featured in urban development literature per se (Dempsey et al. 2011; Pucci 2008). Research on informal settlements shows that local residents actively contribute to neighbourhood formation, but these processes continue to be overlooked as marginalised and informal approaches to urban development instead of being recognised as collective processes that more formal approaches could build on (Davis 2006; Shatkin 2004).

¹ *Buen vivir* and its relationship to post-development is discussed in chapter 2.

Informal settlements are seen as issues that need to be eradicated, objects of forceful removals or neighbourhood upgrading, which are delivered as external interventions where local residents have very little say (AlSayyad 2004; Pamyk & Cavallieri 1998; Varley 2002). Regularisation and slum upgrading are a move towards acceptance of informal settlements as part of urban landscape and something worth improving (Aguilar & Santos 2010; de Soto 2000; Kovacic & Giampietro 2017). Upgrading aims to integrate residents to the wider formal city (Pamyk & Cavallieri 1998), yet the issue in terms of inclusivity continues to be that the processes of upgrading are carried out by external actors who also define what the outcomes should be, even if local residents take part in upgrading activities (Davis 2006; Huchzermeyer 2003; Imparato & Ruster 2003).

There has been more interest in the involvement of local residents in urban development, such as co-production as a tool for grassroots organising (Mitlin 2008), but there is no wide-spread change in practice (Davis 2006; Watson 2009). New more inclusive practices must be sought to deal with rapid urbanisation, but also to seek more inclusive processes of upgrading and neighbourhood improvement beyond the ideals of European planning systems that still continue to be the norm in many cities of the global South (Roy 2005; Watson 2009). Urban development approaches continue to be largely institution-led despite an increasing number of examples where local residents lead their own development projects in a bottom-up fashion, collaborating and requesting formal support from authorities. While the importance of local actors is being recognised more nowadays in urban settings, the challenge of how development projects can truly be 'community-led' remains (Ibem 2009). Overall, development projects are still mostly designed around outcomes that fit institutional needs rather than reflecting the needs of local residents (see Mitlin 2008).

1.3 Thesis structure

In addition to this introduction and the thesis conclusion, there are seven chapters in this thesis. Chapter 2 reviews literature from the two main theoretical disciplines – development studies and social network theory – that inform the design and core of this research project. Development literature is reviewed focusing on participatory approaches and alternatives to development that have contributed to the debate of local residents' inclusion in development projects. The review of social network literature focuses on interactions in networks, and differences between personal and community networks, drawing especially on the works of Barry Wellman. Finally, I review some network studies of social support exchange in urban

contexts. Individual concepts that support analysis of data and discussion of findings are introduced throughout chapters 4 to 7, supporting the analytical framework applied in different chapters.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach and methods used in this research. The use of case study methodology is reviewed along with flexibility and reflexivity as the main principles guiding both data collection and analysis. The use of observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups as methods is detailed, considering aspects of triangulation. In addition to the specifics of fieldwork, chapter 3 describes the process of choosing the research locality and provides some information on research participants and the gatekeepers used in this project.

There are four empirical chapters in this thesis. Chapter 4 outlines first some patterns of urbanisation in Mexico City, the wider borough of Iztapalapa and some historical background on the research locality. A brief consideration of current issues in the borough of Iztapalapa provides some context for understanding the urbanisation processes in the research locality. The second part of chapter 4 describes neighbourhood formation processes and the role of ISNs drawing especially on focus group data. The description of physical urbanisation processes is carried out alongside the analysis of the formation of ISNs as community networks (Wellman 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1979). The intertwined social and physical neighbourhood formation processes are discussed using the concept of place-making (see Lombard 2014).

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of informal social support observed in the research locality during fieldwork; using observation, interview and focus group data. Exchanges of social support in personal networks (see Wellman 1996) are compared to the functions of ISNs during neighbourhood formation discussed in chapter 4. Providing an answer to the more descriptive questions of how ISNs function, what actors ISNs consist of and what type of support is exchanged through them, the chapter is divided into three sections: family and kinship; neighbours; and friendship. Each section considers how ISNs function utilising a typology of support based on the work of Wellman and Wortley (1990): companionships, emotional support, favours and financial support.

Chapter 6 considers the processes present in the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support. There are four sections in the chapter, focusing on reciprocity, homophily, conviviality and community organisations as interconnected aspects of the formation and functioning of ISNs. Reciprocal exchange, which is conceptualised based on the work of Wellman, Carrington and Hall (1988) and especially the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) is a common theme in all

the four sections. Aspects of similarity between actors (see McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001) and conviviality as processes that bring people together are analysed along with community organisations as settings for the formation and maintenance of ISNs.

Chapter 7 examines the aspects that hinder the formation of ISNs and exchange of social support. It brings together some comparison of how and why ISNs have been changing in the research locality and how that reflects neighbourhood change. The chapter builds on the analysis of chapter 6, continuing to consider how trust enables but most of all how changes in patterns of trust towards lack of trust and distrust hinder the supportive functions of ISNs. The analytical framework draws on Uslaner's (2002) moralistic trust and more rationalistic views on particularised trust (see Hardin 2002). The first section of the chapter describes trust in reciprocal exchange situations, enabling the analysis of changing behaviours. The second section builds on this transition towards distrust, considering environmental factors and neighbourhood change, using concepts such as social boundaries and othering to construct links between social and physical transformations.

The main discussion of findings is carried out in chapter 8. The chapter focuses on answering the main research question: how have informal social networks contributed to processes of urban development and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality. The findings of this research are discussed in chronological order, starting with neighbourhood formation as both a physical and social process, moving towards formation of ISNs as community networks and considering the transition towards more personal networks. Chapter 8 highlights the relationship between neighbourhood development and the transforming ISNs, considering whether there is a relationship between ISNs and neighbourhood development. The first section of the chapter focuses on constructing an answer to the main research question, while the second section broadens the debate by considering the 'community question' (Wellman 1996 & 1979) and the effects of changing community networks. The third section returns to the debate regarding the role of local residents in development, considering the findings of this research in light of development literature by revisiting some of the themes reviewed in the literature review.

The concluding chapter brings together the findings of this research, reflecting back on the aim of this research. The contributions of this research are considered in relation to the role of local residents as actors in development. Finally, the brief conclusion outlines some of the limitations

of this research and considers how future research can make further contributions to the study of social networks in urban development by expanding on the findings of this project.

2. Connecting the dots – from development, participation and *buen vivir* to social networks

This chapter builds connections between the main strands of theory present in this research by reviewing first development literature and then social networks literature. Rather than aiming to form a rigid theoretical framework, literature is approached examining how the concept of social networks fits the broader discussion of inclusivity and the role of local residents in urban development. Following the flexible and reflexive approach applied in this research, the theoretical concepts outlined in this chapter are combined with further concepts in the empirical chapters 4-7, broadening the theoretical framework of this study chapter by chapter.

The first section focuses on local people's agency in development, discussing local residents' role in development processes that continue to be delivered as institution-led interventions. How and to what extent local residents are considered as active partners in development depends first of all on how development is defined, and secondly on the approaches applied in development practice. Participatory approaches to development provide an ample starting point for this because the ideals of participation are based on inclusivity and empowerment of local people (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2008). Participatory approaches have also influenced community-based development; however, the limited role of 'community' poses the question of whether the issue with participatory approaches is participation itself or the application of participation in development projects that are continuations of top-down development (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Otsuki 2014; World Bank 2005). Participation is also reviewed in the context of urban development, driven by the broad research aim of understanding the role local residents' interactions in informal social networks (ISNs) play in urban development.

Building on the review of how local actors have been included in urban development projects, the chapter proceeds to consider how approaches that go 'beyond development' aim to be more inclusive. This includes post-development as a critique of the Eurocentric project of development (Escobar 1995 & 2008), and *buen vivir*, which as a development paradigm based on indigenous tradition and knowledge, is a more practice-based than academic response to development (Gudynas 2011; Villalba 2013). Post-development and *buen vivir* both address the limited role of local residents by abandoning the idea of institutional leadership that conventional development is built on. I discuss the main elements of post-development through

critique of post-development, considering whether *buen vivir* as a more practice-based paradigm can address some of the gaps of post-development. Rooted in Latin America, post-development and *buen vivir* have emerged in settings where social movements and local residents hold active and autonomous roles. This provides a fitting basis for the consideration of ISNs in the setting of this research, as the research locality was formed as an informal settlement.

Following the discussion of development literature, the focus is turned to social network literature, specifically actors' interactions rather than structural analysis of social networks. Components of social networks along with inter-personal social ties and social support are reviewed forming the basis of the theoretical framework of this research, drawing especially on the works of Barry Wellman and his colleagues. Literature on social networks in changing urban neighbourhoods is reviewed considering how personal networks differ from community networks (see e.g. Pahl & Spencer 2016; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). The aspect of changing neighbourhood ties has become more influential in this project as data analysis has progressed, compared to the building blocks of social networks which guided data collection through actor typologies and types of social support.

The final section reviews some previous social networks research that has a focus on urban poverty. This includes two major studies of social networks as coping mechanisms in Mexico, the classic study of Larissa Lomnitz (2003) carried out in Mexico City at the end of the 1960s and Mercedes González de la Rocha's (1994) work in Guadalajara. Because of their focus on urban disadvantaged areas in Mexico, both Lomnitz and González de la Rocha are referred to frequently throughout this thesis. Researching social networks especially in urban settings continues to be a common topic in Latin American countries (see Enríquez Rosas 2000; Espinoza 1999; Marques 2015; Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. 2011). However, there is not much research that focuses on social networks in the context of informal settlements, despite depictions of collective action and neighbourhood organisation in informal settlements (see Lombard 2014; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010).

2.1 Agency of local actors in urban development

Before moving to the specifics of agency in development, it is necessary to consider how these debates relate to the broader field of development studies. International development addresses the question why some countries are becoming wealthier while others seem to lag behind. This is further reproduced in the division between developed and developing countries,

the gap between the 'First World' and the 'Third World' – or the 'underdeveloped' global South (Escobar 1994; Sachs 2010). International development in a broad sense is then a process of change aiming for improvement and progress, involving economic, political and social aspects (Kambhampati 2004; Rist 2014). A further distinction between economic, human and social development has emerged as the processes of development as synonymous with economic growth has become questioned following unsuccessful economic development processes (Escobar 1994, Vandana & Potter 2014).

Economic development was particularly central to early approaches to development, based on the promotion of higher standards of living and global eradication of poverty (Esteva 2010). The formation of the World Bank in the 1940s with the initial purpose of supporting European countries in post- World War II reconstruction can be considered one of the earliest development projects (Fox & Goodfellow 2016:12). The World Bank and the United Nations have been some of the major institutions supporting Third World countries on their road to development – which has often involved moving towards the economic and political systems of the developed West (Berger & Beeson 1998; Kambhampati 2004).

International development has moved beyond the modernisation thinking that was central to economic development and towards people-centred, capability focused understandings of development. Sen's conceptualisation of 'development as freedom' has been highly influential in shifting the attention to communities and societies, promoting "adequate social opportunities" (Sen 1999:11). Development as the expansion of freedom emphasises human agency, moving towards social and human development to complement economic development (Craig & Porter 2006; Escobar 1994; Esteva 2014). The emergence of the Human Development Index in 1989 indicates a shift from strictly governmental or institutional development towards socio-economic development and participatory development, which is discussed further below (Kambhampati 2004; Nederveen Pieterse 1998). The Millennium Development Goals adopted by 189 countries in 2000 and the following Sustainable Development Goals indicate the prevalence of human development, redistribution, equality, peace and justice as the current global development framework (Fox & Goodfellow 2016; Nelson 2007; Parnell 2016; Rist 2014; UN 2015).

A subdiscipline of development studies, urban development focuses on the challenges and processes that relate to life in urban and peri-urban areas: urban infrastructure from transport to sewerage, water access and waste management; land use and tenure regulation, but also

urban services relating to health, education and employment (Bolay 2012; Fox & Goodfellow 2016). Economic development is central to urban development, as cities continue to be drivers of economic growth and modernisation (Fox & Goodfellow 2016:23). More urbanised countries have lower poverty rates (World Bank & IMF 2013:148), yet urban areas are not only concentrations of prosperity. Urbanisation brings with it new challenges relating to housing, land tenure and service provision from water to electricity and transport (Peek, Hordijk & d'Auria 2018). The living conditions of the disadvantaged urban populations in slums, informal settlements or properties in disrepair is a major international development issue (Bolay 2012; Pamuk & Cavallieri 1998; UN 2015; World Bank & IMF 2013). Urban development then intersects with further subdisciplines such as urban planning, urban design and architecture that relate to urban infrastructure and landscaping (Harris 2017).

2.1.1 The many meanings of participation in development

Participation and community engagement have long been central to development policy and best practice, aiming to address the general lack of inclusivity of local people in development (Cornwall 2008; Cornwall & Brook 2005; Otsuki 2014). According to Cohen and Uphoff (1980), the transition to the basic-needs approach made participation an essential element in development. Aiming to “make ‘people’ central to development by encouraging beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them” (Cooke & Kothari 2001:5), participatory approaches to development in principle have been considered to empower local residents by including them as actors in development approaches.

One of the widely known participatory approaches, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), for example aims to enable knowledge sharing between local people and development professionals, based on “field learning experiences”, workshops with a range of different participants, dissemination of information and involvement of local residents in a variety of roles from training to consulting (Chambers 1994:1440). PRA and many other participatory approaches formed initially through grassroots and NGO practice, becoming later popular as mainstream development approaches applied by the World Bank and other development institutions (Francis 2001; Hickey & Mohan 2004). Participation became institutionalised, despite warnings that PRA’s reliance on individual judgement instead of “written rules, regulations and procedures” (Chambers 1994:1450) would make it difficult to apply as an organisational approach.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS 1990) acknowledged so-called enabling approaches – including participatory approaches – already in the 1990s and the World Bank allocated nearly \$85 billion to participatory programmes during 2000-2010 (Mansuri & Rao 2013). Many participatory approaches, such as PRA, support increasing inclusivity in development projects by focusing more on the role of local residents and their knowledge, yet the very building blocks that claimed to make participatory approaches empowering were often lost in project delivery (Mansuri & Rao 2013). Participatory approaches have since been criticised by both academic and institutional actors, with even the well-known participatory thinkers highlighting that the use of participation as a mainstream development approach legitimatises institutionalised views, leading to ‘participation as tyranny’ (Cooke 2001 & Kothari; Ferguson & Lohmann 1994; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Kottak 2000).

The many meanings of the concept of participation is one of the major challenges of participatory approaches (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2008; Cornwall & Brock 2005; Mohan & Hickey 2004). Comparing participation in development projects to Arnstein’s (1969:216) ladder of participation highlights the presence of tokenistic forms of participation, which limit to informing, consulting, or placation, where a selected few local residents are invited to take part in interventions (Gaventa 2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Stephens, Ryan-Collins & Boyle 2008). According to Pretty, there are several different levels of participation, ranging from passive participation to information giving, participation by consultation, participation using material incentives to functional and interactive participation, while the highest level of participation is self-mobilisation (Pretty et al. 1995:61).

Part of the complications of applying participation as a mainstream approach is that achieving higher levels of participation requires reconfiguring the role of development actors as “enablers of capabilities” rather than “directive ‘experts’” (Hickey & Mohan 2004:11). For example, PRA has received widespread critique for potentially enhancing existing divisions in communities by treating communities as homogeneous, suppressing diversity often at the expense of those in less visible roles, such as women (Francis 2001; Guijt & Shah 1998; Hickey & Mohan 2004). Chambers initially warned that only projects that do not expect instant participation nor aim to formalise participatory processes can fall within the empowering scope of PRA, which can still only reach those individuals each development project aims to involve (Chambers 1994:1441). The broad understanding of participation as “almost anything that involves people” (Cornwall 2008:269) is reflected in the institutionalised forms of participation that apply participation as a means to development, failing to reach transformative participation.

There continues to be insufficient evidence that participatory approaches can deliver empowerment, and critics claim inadequate attention is paid to local power settings, the political aspects of participation and citizenship (Cleaver 1999; Cooke 2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Kothari 2001; Mosse 2001). Strict project focus and institutionally oriented goals give little leeway to pursue the participation of wider communities (Cornwall 2008; Mansuri & Rao 2013; Michener 1998; Rahmena 2010) or to ensure resources are allocated accordingly, some of the main steppingstones in participatory development (Cornwall & Gaventa 2000; UN 2008). It is difficult for participatory approaches to be empowering when development institutions are guided by efficiency-based outcome goals, whereas the success of participation depends on the responsiveness of local residents themselves (Cleaver 2001; Nederveen Pieterse 1998).

Participatory development has contributed to the debate of who should be involved in development and how by highlighting the importance of local input in development projects. Partnership is central to participatory development, but it is unclear how this can be achieved if development programmes continue to follow institutionalised development norms and aims (Cornwall 2008; Mohan & Hickey 2004). Critics of participatory development have focused on the way actors within the development sector carry out 'participation' through largely top-down institution-led interventions, showing that the issue perhaps is not with the idea of participation itself (Cleaver 1999; Mohan & Hickey 2004). Processes of participation are based on the role of local residents as agents in social change, which is why participation is more complex than simply a technique of project delivery (Cleaver 1999; Francis 2001; Michener 1998). For local individuals to truly participate in development projects, participatory development should aim for transformative participation where mutual learning takes place throughout development projects so that processes, expectations and deliverables are considered in partnership with institutional actors (Brand 2013; Cornwall 2008). Cornwall (2008:274) criticises international institutions such as the World Bank for neglecting the aim for transformative participation and failing to create change that outlives short term development projects.

In urban development, participatory practice is present, for example, in neighbourhood regeneration (Sepe 2014); housing production (Ferguson, Smets & Mason 2014) and service delivery, such as sanitation improvement (Kar & Chambers 2008; Lüthi, McConville & Kvarnström 2009). Participatory approaches have been shown to create partnerships between communities and local government, but often falling short of equal partnership (Lüthi, McConville & Kvarnström 2009). Reaching the higher levels of participation continues to be problematic, as projects are mostly designed from institutional perspectives. Imbalanced partnerships have

been shown to create further issues between local residents and institutional stakeholders, to the point where local residents have rejected programmes or programmes have caused political turmoil (Bolay 2012:87). Limitations in participatory approaches in the European context relate to communication issues between stakeholders (Sepe 2014), while in the Global South challenges relate to lack of appropriate skills and tools among participating actors (Brand 2013). These challenges apply especially to projects aiming for transformative participation (see Cooper & Pickering 2008), where local actors participate throughout project design to delivery, aiming for mutual learning between local and institutional actors (Brand 2013:226).

Different community-based approaches, especially community-driven or community-led projects, replicate the ideals of transformative participation because of the stronger role local groups and residents hold in the design and delivery of projects (Otsuki 2014). The World Bank has supported both community-based (CBD) and community-driven (CDD) development with more focus on CDD since the late 1990s (World Bank 2005:xi). CBD gives limited responsibility to communities focusing more on “collaboration, consultation, or sharing information” while CDD “supports the empowerment of the poor by giving communities control over subproject resources and decisions” (World Bank 2005:ix). Community-based approaches are hoped to fill the gap of inaccurately aligned social policy and failing social safety nets by drawing on civil society (Chambers 2008; Conning & Kevane 2002; Otsuki 2014).

Community-driven initiatives have the potential to increase inclusivity because they are often initiated in local communities as opposed to external actors aiming to include local groups in projects through tokenistic participation (Lüthi, McConville & Kvarnström 2009). Embedded in CDD is the notion that local communities act as highly organised groups or “inward-looking collectives” attempting to access government funds to respond to local issues (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015:609). The process of collectively gathering information about local neighbourhoods and local needs through networking between different groups increases the participatory aspect of how these local collectives function (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015). In informal settlements examples of local collective information collection include neighbourhood mapping for re-blocking purposes (Schermbucker, Patel & Keijzer 2016:88).

Despite their potential to increase inclusivity and transformative participation, community-driven programmes are not common practice in urban development (De Wit & Berner 2009;

Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015).² Community-driven approaches have been present in incremental housing projects especially in Latin America; however, a shift towards market-oriented housing strategies has reduced opportunities for local involvement (Peek, Hordijk & d'Auria 2018). Aided self-help or 'enabling' upgrading programmes also have an inclusive element but are not usually community-driven, despite using local residents as resources in settlement construction and site upgrading (Wakely 2016).

Both community-driven and self-help approaches have been criticised for transferring ownership and responsibility away from the state and transnational actors, expecting communities to resiliently find their own solutions to issues of development (Berner & Phillips 2005). Institution-led evaluations mostly deem slum-upgrading programmes as unsustainable because their completion often requires more time and resources compared to conventional construction programmes, and projects can become abandoned after 2-3 years (Wakely 2016; World Bank 2005). The success of community-driven approaches is, however, mostly evaluated from institutional aspects, as evaluation is based on outcomes the development institutions have set, focusing on economic efficiency over more social aspects (Brand 2013). This market-oriented premise suggests that the partnership balance between local and institutional actors continues to be an issue (Wutich & Beresford 2017).

CDD has been shown to be a useful approach when working with disadvantaged people in less institutionalised contexts. Slum Dwellers International³ has found CDD beneficial when providing informal settlements and slums with access to finance for improvement projects led by local residents because CDD increases communities' sense of ownership, resourcefulness and integration (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015:609). The ability of Slum Dwellers International as a network of community-based organisations to support CDD projects suggests that major development institutions' difficulties of applying CDD are due to institutions' bureaucratic structures and economic growth-oriented aims (Cornwall & Brock 2005; De Wit & Berner 2009; Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015; Satterthwaite 2001).

² In the fiscal year of 2017, general urban and rural development projects received over three times more funds than social development and protection – under which the World Bank situates CBD and CDD (World Bank 2017:79).

³ Shack/Slum Dwellers International is a federation of community-based organisations that brings together disadvantaged urban actors in a collaborative network. It functions in some 33 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and was launched in 1996 to seek alternatives to informal settlement evictions (Schermbucker, Patel & Keijzer 2016:83-84).

Community-driven approaches, while potentially fostering deeper forms of participation, still seem to pay little attention to the collaborative processes that bring local residents together as actors in CDD (Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015; Wutich & Beresford 2017). The focus on participation has changed from people to processes as development institutions apply participation as a tool for development instead of aiming for the higher levels of participation that could deliver lasting positive transformations that can potentially outlast development projects (Chambers 2010; Francis 2001; Mohan & Hickey 2004). The institutionalisation of participation and diluted versions of CDD are a product of bureaucratisation. Even the rise of NGOs as intermediating actors⁴ between major institutions and local people has not successfully broadened the scope of local actors in development projects, highlighting the complexity of the issue (Beck 2016; De Wit & Berner 2009; Seckinelgin 2006).

2.1.2 Moving beyond development and towards more inclusivity?

Just as participation is not a new concept in development, the whole idea of development especially due to inherently top-down models and neo-colonialism has long been criticised (Dinerstein & Deneulin 2012; Esteva, Babones & Babicky 2013; Ziai 2004). Alternatives to development fail to address the general lack of inclusivity in development by recognising local people as more central actors in shaping societal change. Yet participatory approaches as such are dismissed as potential solutions to development challenges because they form part of the failures of conventional development (Mohan & Hickey 2004:61). The focus here is on post-development and *buen vivir* as two approaches that offer a broader understanding of the importance of local responses that goes beyond the settings of participatory development.

Post-development questions the concept of development as a whole (Rist 2007), suggesting that modernisation and the neoliberal path to economic growth is not necessarily the best 'development' option (Escobar 2004). Post-development combines development critique ranging from rejection of the whole Eurocentric project of development (Esteva & Prakash 2014) to seeking alternatives to development. The need to question development as the "global designs that arose out of the local history of the modern West in the post-World War II period" (Escobar 2008:170) is highlighted. Many consider the 'Development Dictionary' edited by Wolfgang Sachs (2010) as a milestone for the emergence of post-development thinking (see e.g.

⁴ Seckinelgin (2006) among others provides a more detailed discussion of the role of NGOs in development. I have not discussed NGOs in more detail since they are not the main focus of this research.

Esteva & Escobar 2017), following the emergence of highly critical questioning of development the 1980s onward (Escobar 2004; Gudynas 2018).

Claims that development imposes Western values and culture on the global South as part of Western ideology of progress are essential building blocks of post-development thinking (Ferguson 1994; Rist 2007; Storey 2000). Eurocentric and hierarchical views are seen to be inbuilt in development and underdevelopment (Escobar 1995; Rist 2007; Ziai 2013), while the pursuit of economic growth above all else is criticised as unsustainable (McGregor 2007; Rist 2007). Many post-development thinkers highlight the failures of conventional development models in the global South despite decades of development interventions (Escobar 1995; Esteva & Escobar 2017).⁵ While advocating practices considered part of modern and more advanced societies, conventional development is also criticised for justifying the practice of “domination and violence” as ‘development’ outcomes are seen to outweigh potentially negative social or cultural repercussions (Ziai 2015:842).

Post-development itself has been criticised for lacking clear direction as it points out issues in development but offers few concrete solutions (Nederveen Pieterse 1998 & 2000; Sachs 2010; Ziai 2015). There are some shared themes among the different strands of post-development, most of all the recognition of local actors and culture as central to shaping societal change (Ziai 2004). “For an initiative to be considered post-development it should contribute to the dismantling of the physical and discursive hegemony of development so that new locally grounded futures may be imagined and pursued” (McGregor 2007:161). Escobar sees new social movements, such as the anti-globalisation movement and global justice movements, along with community representation as the key alternative to institutionalised development (2004). These alternatives can expand beyond the social movement context in other forms such as “communal solidarity, direct democracy, informal economy, traditional knowledge” (Ziai 2004:1053). The key framework for change offered by post-development is thus a transfer of power from experts and institutions to communities, recognising development issues as inherently political (Kippler 2010).

Post-development has been criticised for rejecting development as a project of modernisation even though not all aspects of modernisation are negative (Corbridge 1998; Storey 2000). While

⁵ Many highlight the lost decade of 1980s as an indication that economic approaches to development, such as structural adjustment, have not worked in Latin American countries (Escobar 2008; Esteva, Babones & Babcicky 2013).

the idea of development may not be perfect, Corbridge points out that some of the development projects between the “Age of Development 1950-2000” (1998:190) have contributed to improved life expectancy especially in China and India. Rejecting modernisation based only on its negative aspects is a dichotomous way of thinking, as is claiming that all development approaches are the same, based on Eurocentric or Western ideals (Nederveen Pieterse 1998 & 2000; Storey 2000). However, the value in the discussions that are emerging from post-development is that in some cases the negative outcomes of interventions may outweigh the positives, indicating that local responses and local practices should be prioritised over international interventions (Esteva, Babones & Babicky 2013).⁶ Emphasising the value of local approaches should not mean romanticising indigenous approaches without understanding the context or the issues local people address in their everyday lives (Esteva & Escobar 2017). In addition, local people should not be treated as “noble savages” (Ziai 2015:836), glorifying local traditions without further assessment simply because they are traditional practices (Corbridge 1998; Storey 2000). Instead local practices should be approached as potential bases for further social well-being, “spaces of empowerment where ordinary people can define their lives” without being limited by external practices imposed by international actors (Corbridge 2007:185).

It has also been raised that in its critique of development, post-development thinkers provide their own explanations of the needs of the global South, thus repeating some of the top-down patterns of conventional development, even if their perspective may not be Eurocentric (Nederveen Pieterse 2000; Ziai 2015). This critique refers also to the emphasised role of social movements in challenging development interventions without understanding how to function in the wider political or institutional surroundings they aim to resist (Nederveen Pieterse 2000:182). While Esteva (1999) has drawn on the Zapatista movement in Mexico as an example of resistance – specifically resistance to the North American Free Trade Agreement and the issues it has caused especially for Mexican agriculture – critics have pointed out that despite the Zapatistas’ success⁷ in creating some alternative realities within Mexico, they have not been successful in challenging the Trade Agreement, but have instead since 1994 changed their aims⁸

⁶ Such is for example the case in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, where the presence of international rescue workers caused a cholera outbreak (Esteva, Babones & Babicky 2013:150).

⁷ The Zapatista movement in terms of alternatives to development and resistance can be considered successful because it has resulted in the creation of some autonomous spaces where the Zapatistas define their own way of life, making the movement emancipatory (Dinerstein & Deneulin 2012).

⁸ According to Kapoor (2017:2672-2673) the Zapatistas have since 1994 stopped waging war against Mexico and are instead negotiating with Mexico, settling for declarations of autonomy in the state of

(Kapoor 2017). This is an indication of the lack of critical assessment of social movements within the post-development discourse.

Despite recognising that social movements can also have negative effects such as strengthening elite democracy (Alvarez & Escobar 1992; Escobar 1994), post-development has been criticised for not extending its critical discourse analysis to social movements as aggressively as to the discourse of development (Kapoor 2017; Nederveen Pieterse 2000; Ziai 2015). Social movements are offered as a solution because of their empowering potential, but it is not entirely clear how the goal of empowerment through social movements can be achieved according to post-development theorists (Nederveen Pieterse 1998; Storey 2000).

The critical premise of post-development has opened the discussion also to other alternative considerations of 'development'. *Buen vivir*⁹ – living well – is an alternative development paradigm based on indigenous traditions rooted in the Andes region in South America (Kothari, Demaria & Acosta 2014; Villalba 2013). While the word development does not even exist in the indigenous languages of the Andean peoples, applications of *buen vivir* in development have been emerging, calling for the recognition of indigenous lifestyles, which have historically been marginalised and excluded especially “in the name of development” (Villalba 2013:1428). *Buen vivir* is referred to as a paradigm, as it is a worldview which has several meanings (Villalba 2013). Gudynas (2011) suggests that *buen vivir* should be translated as ‘good lives’, indicating its plural meanings, which include the alternative development proposals it has formed into in Ecuador and Bolivia.

There are many similarities between post-development and *buen vivir* regardless of their very different origins (Esteva & Escobar 2017). Both post-development and *buen vivir* seek alternatives to development (Giovannini 2016), and recognise the importance of environment, community and localism (Bressa Florentin 2016; Escobar 2008). Gudynas (2018) has suggested that post-development should be the overarching discourse or broad understanding of ‘development’ through which the *buen vivir* -paradigm can then be applied. This would allow combining the more theoretical aspects of post-development – which are based on development critique – with the more practical elements of collective local responses that are

Chiapas. While the resistance of the Zapatistas may continue, Kapoor claims it has not stopped Mexico from further integrating into the trade agreement.

⁹ Also referred to as *vivir bien*, to live well. *Buen Vivir* is more frequently mentioned in academic literature, which is why I use this concept throughout the thesis. The difference in the terms stems from the translations to Spanish from indigenous languages, *buen vivir* being used in Ecuador and *vivir bien* in Bolivia (Kothari et al. 2014:367).

central to *buen vivir*. While post-development is primarily an academic and theoretical critique of development, *buen vivir* has emerged through collective action and campaigns for the rights of indigenous peoples and ways of life as an anti-capitalist critique of extractive development practice (Bell 2017; Bressa Florentin 2016; Esteva 2010; Gudynas 2011 & 2015).

An essential part of *buen vivir* is living a life of fullness (*Sumak Kawsay*)¹⁰ (Villalba 2013:1428), which entails living in harmony within communities, respecting social ecology, equality, sustainability and peace (Gomes 2007; Walsh 2010). This includes respecting cultural institutions and traditions while facilitating local solutions that can be undertaken by communities, drawing on “informal institutions, such as reciprocity and non-monetary exchanges, as well as rituals and collective work” (Giovannini 2016:1146-1147). Well-being is pursued through coexistence between people and nature, so that needs – which are seen as collective rather than individual – are fulfilled respecting natural resources. In terms of development projects, “the duality between donor and beneficiary is broken, in favour of more horizontal relations” (Monni & Pallottino 2015:55). This means cooperation takes place between local residents in a decentralised manner, making the community central in forming potential external partnerships with institutions (Monni & Pallottino 2015).

In social movements, for instance, collectivism is present in dialogue regarding approaches of collective action, which is further developed into shared political, social and economic practices that reflect specific local contexts, needs and aspirations (Giovannini 2016:1147). In terms of collectivism, *buen vivir* is to post-development what participation is to development: highlighting the activities through which local residents can be present in societal change in a context where institutions are considered to have more limited roles in driving well-being. However, moving beyond the context of conventional development and adopting the critical lens of post-development as a starting point, *buen vivir* can support practices that increase social well-being and ways of ‘living well’ as determined by the local communities due to its roots in indigenous ways of life, instead of development actors.

In Ecuador, *buen vivir* was included in the 2008 constitution and the National Development Plan following the efforts of highly organised indigenous social movements (Bressa Florentin 2016; Villalba 2013). Bolivia recognised *buen vivir* in its constitution in 2009 following the change of power in national elections in 2005 (Bell 2017:20). Development processes in these two

¹⁰*Buen vivir* is the Spanish translation of *Sumak Kawsay*, which is Quetchuan language, spoken by indigenous people living mostly in parts of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia (see e.g. Monni & Pallottino 2015).

countries have relied heavily on extractive policies, especially petroleum production, which has been deemed harmful culturally, socially, and ecologically (Bell 2017; Wutich & Beresford 2017). *Buen vivir* stems from the way externally-led development projects have often disregarded indigenous culture and practices, “undermining indigenous people’s trust and expectation of durable relationships” (Giovannini 2012:289). The formal recognition of *buen vivir* in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia has indicated a promising step towards more inclusive development policy (Bautista 2011; Bell 2017; Ranta 2014). However, concerns have also been raised about the institutionalisation of *buen vivir* and changes of the meanings of the paradigm (Kothari et al. 2014), as it is applied to re-label extractive practices that contradict *buen vivir*’s respect for nature (Acosta 2013; Bell 2017; Ranta 2014; Villalba-Eguiluz & Etxano 2017; Walsh 2010). The challenge is that *buen vivir* is not necessarily something that can be applied but something that should be allowed to stem from local communities (Lyall, Colloredo-Mansfeld & Rousseau 2018; Villalba-Eguiluz & Etxano 2017).

Previous literature does not offer many accounts of *buen vivir* in urban settings. Cities have been claimed to cause a disconnection between urban residents and nature due to the replacement of agricultural activities with mercantile exchanges, highlighting the loss of spirituality in indigenous traditions (Medina 2011:52). While the relationship with nature is central to *buen vivir*, the ongoing transition of indigenous people from rural to urban environments and the concern for losing collectivism and indigenous values makes *buen vivir* relevant also in urban contexts (Acosta 2010; Giovannini 2012; Ruiz Rivera & Delgado Campos 2013; Zárate 2014). As emphasised by many, *buen vivir* is a plural concept with many understandings of ways of living well, shaped by the environment in which individuals act collectively (Acosta 2012; Villalba 2013). The urban environment has been increasing in relevance across the global South and some authors have argued that *buen vivir* has the potential to provide tools for rethinking “the current way of organising life in rural areas and in the city, in production plants, and in social living spaces, in schools and health centres” (Acosta 2012:196). Collectivism and active citizenship are interlinked, as the coming together of individuals to form active communities plays a role in making cities more inclusive (Bautista 2011; Bell 2017; Zárate 2014).

Collectivism and the solidarity economy as principles of *buen vivir* are strongly present in social enterprises and cooperatives found in both traditionally indigenous rural settings (Gasca Zamora 2014; Giovannini 2016) and modern urban settings (Torres Villarreal 2014). Housing cooperatives are a collective response to lack of adequate housing, allowing residents to create their own solutions that go beyond market-oriented capitalist options (Torres Villarreal 2014).

Torres Villarreal's (2014) study in Mexico City shows that while housing cooperatives go through internal struggles and collectivism is not seamless, the joint efforts can provide lasting solutions to a lack of housing while increasing collaboration among the residents. Even though the constitutions of both Ecuador and Bolivia formally support equal and inclusive cities, there is little evidence of collectivism in urban development (Bell 2017; Burgos-Vigna 2018). Despite the rise of *buen vivir* in Ecuador, urban housing production focuses on building gated communities through partnerships between the private sector and subsidies following "current financialisation trends" (Peek, Hordijk & d'Auria 2018:215). In the largest city in Ecuador, Guayaquil, housing debate is dominated by the need to relocate residents of densely populated urban waterfronts and seeking user-based ways to make urban change more inclusive, but the process is characterised by the abandonment of bottom-up approaches – such as user-based design and incremental housing – by both national and municipal governments (Peek, Hordijk & d'Auria 2018: 205 & 213).¹¹ This indicates some of the difficulties of applying *buen vivir* in practice regardless of its status in the constitution of Ecuador.

By emphasising the importance of local circumstances and local people in social well-being, both post-development and *buen vivir* make way for alternative proposals to increasing inclusivity in development projects. While criticism states that the role of local responses is overemphasised (Corbridge 1998; Nederveen Pieterse 2010), increasing the understanding of local practices is the only way to build inclusive partnerships or directly support local communities in development. Post-development calls for focusing on local approaches, the solutions that are emerging in relation to geographical, cultural and social settings, as opposed to the global setting that conventional development functions in (Escobar 2008). Combining the critical perspective of post-development with the collectivism of *buen vivir* may provide the grounds for investigating local collectivism but there is little concrete evidence that shows how collectivism functions on a very local level.

2.1.3 Communities and local residents as actors in development – a network approach

Attempts to include local residents more in development projects have been numerous, showing that considerations of inclusivity – who should be involved in development and how – are present in many development approaches from participatory development to post-

¹¹ A clear sign of which is the use of forced relocation of marginalised populations inhabiting informal settlements (Peek, Hordijk & d'Auria 2018:213).

development and *buen vivir*. While post-development and *buen vivir* emphasise localism and collectivism, these approaches to development offer little explanation of how local residents act together collectively working towards social well-being. Overall, debates of participation and inclusivity do not pay much attention to how local residents take part in collective practices, beyond the setting of formal development interventions (Bourque 1997).

Local residents are often referred to as communities in development studies, which is evident from approaches such as community development and community-based or community-driven development (Gilchrist & Taylor 2016; Green & Haines 2016). Simply referring to the 'community', however, is not enough to provide explanations of how individual actors come together in collective practice, especially if 'communities' are inaccurately considered unified and homogeneous entities linked to specific geographical locations (Costa 2005; Somerville 2016). Such a conceptualisation of communities dismisses potentially complex social processes that take place between individuals (see e.g. Costa 2005; Gilchrist 2009; Sen 2006; Somerville 2016). Community development for example recognises local residents as actors but sees community as the object of support, based mostly on a deficit model of community as something that needs fixing (Gilchrist & Taylor 2016; Green & Haines 2016). I do not use the term 'community' to refer to the research locality in order to highlight the heterogeneous nature of the local population and the divisions between local residents, which are further discussed in chapter 7 in addition to the transition from community networks to personal networks (discussed in chapters 5 and 6).

Communities have also been recognised as a resource in development studies (Levien 2015; Moser 1998), especially by approaches that draw on social capital (Durlauf & Fafchamps 2004; Knack 2002; Woolcock 1998). The focus on social capital – or a collective resource producing common good and enabling civic life (Putnam 1993 & 2000) – turned communities into potentially resourceful actors in development projects (Levien 2015; Woolcock 1998). While social capital has been a popular concept in development studies, it has also been widely criticised for the coercive elements of the 'dark side' of social capital, but also for being a broad concept that is difficult to measure (Knack 2002; Levien 2015; Teilmann 2012; Woolcock 1998). In the broadest sense social capital refers "to the community relations that affect personal interactions" (Durlauf & Fafchamps 2004:1). Norms, trust and networks are the three main elements of social capital (Putnam 1993:269), which suggests that social capital cannot be studied without understanding how social networks function. While social capital is useful as a

broad umbrella concept, focusing on social networks allows more specific analysis of collaboration between local residents.

The concept of networks is not new to development studies; however, the focus has been more on networks as broader connections of collaboration than networks as local collectivism. Post-development scholars, for example, discuss networks as something that social movements form between them, creating social movement networks that act on national and international levels (Escobar 2004 & 2008). The concept of 'meshworks' (Manuel de Landa 1997) refers to less organised, non-hierarchical network structures that Escobar (2008) suggests can challenge hegemonic centralised power structures by forming diverse global networks (Escobar 2004). However, little explanation is provided regarding how these networks form or function locally (Stephansen 2013). This leaves some gaps in explanations of broader meshworks, as social movements form initially as small local collaborations (Gilchrist 2009; McAdam 1999). This is the issue also with actor-network theory, an alternative development approach that analyses the functions of local actors in global development networks, focusing mostly on institution-led initiatives (Beck 2016; Campregher 2010; Gareau 2012; Whatmore & Thorne 1997). It has been shown that despite their connections to global issues or extra-local movement networks, local actors should also be considered in more local settings (see e.g. Ireland & McKinnon 2013; Stephansen 2013). I propose the concept of social networks as a tool for investigating local practices of collaboration and collectivism, as increasing the understanding of collective processes among local residents is a logical first step to considering the role of local residents in development.

2.2 Social networks and exchange of social support

This research utilises social networks as a concept to investigate how the participants interact and exchange social support in the research locality. Interpersonal ties in social networks enable the analysis of actor-based social support and collaboration on a neighbourhood level. A social network is understood in this thesis as the social ties through which exchanges and actions between different network members take place. The primary focus is on the agency that takes place in social networks. Collectivism and exchanges of social support make this an interactionist study of networks, leaving more structural aspects of networks aside (see Mitchell 1969). This section unpacks some of the elements previous literature considers part of interpersonal social networks and outlines a conceptual framework that is expanded on throughout this thesis to explain and analyse social support and collaborative processes as part of ISNs in the research

locality. Social network literature is only reviewed from the perspective of interpersonal exchanges, discussing what the key components of personal networks are and how they differ from community networks.

2.2.1 Components of social networks

Previous studies of social networks have focused on a range of elements, often establishing what kind of actors a network includes, strength of ties between actors, frequency of contact, and what kind of resources are available through different types of networks (Wellman 2007:349). More structural studies tend to focus on network members and ties between members (Ennis & West 2012), while more interactionist studies analyse interactions between network members (Mitchell 1969; Wellman & Wortley 1990). Social network research in neighbourhood settings often uses a typology of kin and non-kin actors, such as friends, neighbours and workmates (Wellman et al. 1997). Social networks bring together actors from different contexts, such as family and household, neighbourhood, school, church, and employment, which is why forming categories of the different actors in networks is often an essential part of social network analysis. The coming together of different actors turns networks into diverse spheres of sociability, which include processes of functional, cultural or ideological specialisation, such as shared interests among friends or specific institutions such as family (Marques et al. 2008:15).

Different actors also form social ties in different ways due to the differing social situations in which relations between actors are formed. Kinship ties are not formed through choice, compared to friendship – and to some extent neighbouring (Grannis 2009; Pahl & Pevalin 2005). This may be why kinship ties are often the strongest and most long-lasting ties in a network (see e.g. Wellman et al. 1997). Both kin and non-kin ties can be dynamic, making social networks complex and ever-changing entities. An individual can also be both the neighbour of one actor, a close friend of another actor, and related to a third actor, defined by the binary relationships between individuals (McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013:7). This allows one actor to be involved in single or multiple relations that differ in terms of content, frequency and strength (Diani 2003:8). There is also high variability in how family, friends and neighbours act in social networks, as there are no guarantees that brothers A and B both act ‘like a brother’ towards each other (Pahl & Pevalin 2005). There are also differences in how men and women tend to act in social networks and what kind of support they provide to others (Allan 1989; Diaz-Loving 2006; Gomes 2007).

In addition to who is part of a network, and what the actors' relationship is based on, one of the central questions in network studies is what the social ties between actors are like. The strength of ties refers to "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services" between actors, so that strong ties are likely to exist in kinship or close friendship relations (Granovetter 1973:1361; see also Gomes 2007). Kin are usually connected through strong ties, especially when sharing the same household (Georgas 2006; Pasternak, Ember & Ember 1976). While kinship ties often play a major role in support networks, according to Granovetter (1973), it is the weak ties that act as local bridges, creating more, often less intensive short ties. The importance of weak ties lies in their potential to enable transmission of information as well as further connectivity, as it is the smaller-scale interactions that lead to wider patterns of connections (Granovetter 1973). Proximity to different actors facilitates a variety of relationships and frequent contact allows the strengthening of weak ties (Wellman & Wortley 1990:568; see also Granovetter 1973).

Individuals tend to form social ties with people they can relate to and have meaningful interactions with. Similarity between actors is one of the defining factors. One definition of social networks is "a network of meanings" (White 1992:67), referring to the importance of shared understanding. It is this common ground that facilitates social action and enables the mitigation of potential conflict situations that could threaten network stability (White 1992:8). The concept of homophily refers to how easily individuals develop and maintain links with other actors in similar situations (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). Similarity has also been shown to matter in the context of urban poverty, as sharing a similar economic status often allows individuals to exchange support (Espinoza 1999; Lomnitz 2003). However, this can also lead to the reproduction of urban poverty if disadvantaged people have limited interactions with others beyond their social class (Marques et al. 2008:13).

Social support systems are one type of social network (Wellman 1981:173). As Wellman and Wortley point out, "there is no one kind of social relationship called 'social support'. Rather, many different kinds of supportive resources flow through informal networks" (1989:274). Literature that does not focus on neighbourhood or network contexts as such discusses social support as an essential resource in health, mental health and social service delivery because of links to quality of life (see e.g. Bigby 2008; Eckenrode & Gore 1981; Gottlieb 1981). Social support is often seen as an alternative or addition to formal services, especially in cases where access to services is limited (see e.g. Weng 2016). In addition to intensity, social support is often measured through categories such as financial support; gifts; practical support; emotional and moral

support (Wall et al. 2001:217). The flow of social support in networks is affected according to Wellman and Wortley (1990:560) by access to actors, interpersonal behaviour within social structures; the strength and type of relations between actors; positional resources and similarity between actors. Different actors provide different kinds of support (Wellman & Wortley 1989), which is why a broad social network can equate to a strong support network.

Wellman and Wortley (1990) have researched neighbourhood ties in terms of five types of social support: emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid, and companionship. The study carried out in a middle-income neighbourhood in Toronto showed that social support of all kinds was mostly available through a small number of strong ties, so that while the quantity of strong ties is smaller, they still provide the majority of support (Wellman & Wortley 1990:566). Many of the networks are also kin-centred, explaining the presence of strong ties. Social support through weaker ties, particularly neighbours, did not necessarily mean that the actors “really like each other despite their frequent exchanges of services” (Wellman & Wortley 1990:570). Help based on weaker ties was driven more by mutual convenience than friendship. It should be noted, however, that the networks in this middle-income neighbourhood may have provided support with households’ everyday lives but they did not play such a significant role that they would be linked to making a living or economic support (Wellman & Wortley 1990:583).

2.2.2 Social relations in personal and community networks

This section focuses on personal and community networks, two aspects of social networks that are central to this thesis. A personal network is ego-centred and defined through the analysis of interpersonal ties and relations with other people through one specific actor, the ego (Feld, Suitor & Gartner Hoegh 2007; Pahl & Spencer 2016). While network analysis can be used to research network structures in a variety of topics from biology to telecommunications (McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013), personal network analysis has the individual as the focus of study, researching how individuals are connected, to whom and what these connections mean (Wellman 2007:111). Personal network analysis is then particularly useful for describing how well-connected individuals are and what resources they can access through their social networks (Bidart & Charbonneau 2011). Personal networks are defined through the main actor’s social positions and situations, including lifecourse and personal history, making them unique to each individual (Mitchell 1969:43). Previous literature has shown that personal networks are also characterised by high reliance on kin, making them ideal for exchanges of support (Epstein

1969). A “core personal network” (Marsden 1987), more specifically, focuses on those network members who are considered most important to the main actor (Bidart & Charbonneau 2011:272), acting as the main point of contact for social support.

Compared to personal networks, the concept of community networks is broader, as it is not egocentric. Community networks are a combination of dense and supportive kinship ties and more sparsely knit ties with non-kin such as “friends, neighbours, and workmates whose relations are... companionate, specialised in support, and connected with other social circles” (Wellman & Wortley 1990:580). While personal networks are ego-centred, community networks can contain several egos that form the core group of the community network (Gilchrist 2009; Mitchell 1969; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Community network is a concept used in community development (Ennis & West 2012; Gilchrist 2009; Lyon & Driskell 2011), while many network theorists refer to personal community networks or personal community, to make the distinction that communities are nowadays rarely built around local ties (Fischer 1982; Pahl & Spencer 2003 & 2016; Wellman 1990 & 1999). Community networks are referred to throughout this thesis when analysing social networks that are multi-modal and formed of local ties, while personal networks refer to social networks that are egocentric and formed of both local and extra-local ties.

The conceptual differentiation between personal and community networks is linked to urban change, the decrease of “solidarity communities as the principal source of interpersonal support” (Wellman 1981:176) and a “supposed break-up of close-knit communities” (Pahl & Spencer 2016:72). Previous literature suggests that the concept of personal networks is characteristic of changing urban surroundings, where social networks have become more egocentric (Feld, Suitor & Gartner Hoegh 2007; Wellman 2007; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Local ties may still continue to be important regardless of whether neighbourhoods are changing and becoming less close-knit, because it is neighbours who often provide small services especially in emergency situations; whereas extra-local workmates, for example, tend to limit their support to companionship (Wellman 1996:352-353). The emergence of the ‘network community’ enabled by modern telecommunications among other developments has made it easier for especially emotional support to be exchanged despite long distances (Castells 2010), which is why the nurturing of local ties may be becoming less essential (Wellman 1996 & 1999; Wellman & Wellman 2003).

Many scholars have recognised that neighbourhood ties have been changing as social networks have become more diverse, consisting of more extra-local ties. This has led to a broad consensus that the concept of community should not be attached to neighbourhoods but to people, reflecting the paths that individuals take in life, including more varied geographical locations that reflect opportunities to socialise with broader varieties of people (Pahl & Spencer 2016; Wellman 1996 & 1999; Wellman & Wortley 1990). This reflects the 'community liberated' hypothesis, which suggests that community change does not only have a negative side, as local community networks are becoming substituted by more extra-local social ties that are able to provide more diverse access to support and resources than local ties (Dawkins 2006; Drouhot 2017; Wellman 1996; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Before the rise of the 'networked community' (Castells 2010), less optimistic accounts stated that a loss of local social ties leads to 'community lost', because a strong community, 'community saved', was one characterised by broad community networks where social support flows freely manifesting solidarity (Wellman & Leighton 1979).

Following the realisation that most social networks are nowadays a combination of local and extra-local contacts (Pahl & Spencer 2016; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988), communities are said to have become more personal than neighbourhood or locality oriented (Wellman 1999). The conceptualisations of how individuals construct their social networks and communities draw mostly on research carried out in North American societies, whereas the 'community liberated' hypothesis should be considered in geographical and cultural context (Drouhot 2017; Wellman 1999). While these concepts of community lost, saved or liberated describe local social ties and their changing nature, capturing the complexity of social networks, there remain some issues in how the concepts are applied (Drouhot 2017). As the focus of this research is informal social networks and their functions in a neighbourhood context, the emphasis is on local social ties and interactions between local residents in a non-institutional setting. This includes both community networks and personal networks, that reflect the heterogeneous and changing nature of social ties in a transforming neighbourhood. The analytical chapters investigate how ISNs function in the research locality, focusing on actors and types of support, as well as processes enabling and hindering exchanges of support, analysing interactions between local residents.

2.2.3 Social support through networks of reciprocity and exchange

Social networks are often considered a resource of the poor (Campbell & Lee 1992; González de la Rocha 2007) due to their ability to facilitate the sharing of resources and mutual support in neighbourhoods (Marques et al. 2008). Several studies in the European (Grossetti 2007; Heil 2014; van Eijk 2012) as well as Latin American (Espinoza 1999; González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003; Marques et al. 2008) and Asian (Phillips 2002) contexts have showed the importance of social networks in disadvantaged urban areas. Previous research shows that while social networks can provide resources and act as an integral part of resilient communities, there are also obstacles to the flow of social support such as continuous economic crises (González de la Rocha 2007), limited access to resources (Marques et al. 2008) and inequality between actors (Lomnitz 2003).

Previous research shows that strong social networks help communities recuperate from times of distress (Cattell 2001; Klinenberg 2002; Marques et al. 2008; Waddington, Wykes & Critcher 1991). Social networks are also present in everyday situations benefiting actors' well-being and health, while offering informal care, employment solutions and overall social stability (Helliwell & Putnam 2006; Lomnitz 2003; Woolcock 1998). The social support provided by community members "is a principal way by which people and households get resources, along with *market exchanges*, *institutional distributions*, and *coercive appropriations*" (Wellman & Wortley 1990:559). According to Cattell, deprivation can act both as a cause of hopelessness but also as a catalyst for social action so that social consciousness and community context – such as a locality's history, opportunities for employment, local resources and opportunities for participation – can help develop relationships based on trust, collaborative norms and reciprocity (Cattell 2001:1512). Mutual aid and information exchange can encourage stability within a locality, which in a cyclical manner can support further collaboration between actors building diverse and well-functioning social networks.

In the context of urban poverty, social networks have been showed to function as coping mechanism supporting everyday life (Enríquez Rosas 2000; Lomnitz 2003; Marques et al. 2008). Starting with Lomnitz' (2003) now classic study of the survival mechanisms of the marginalised in Mexico City in the 1970s, social networks have been portrayed as a firm part of everyday life, even if the traditional social fabric has been changing (Enríquez Rosas 2000). As showed by Lomnitz (2003) among others, reciprocal exchange¹² of support is central to both personal

¹² Reciprocity and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) are discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

egocentric and broader social networks in the Mexican context. González de la Rocha (1994) shows that regardless of the type of support provided, reciprocating and returning the support is an important step in ensuring future social support, along with being flexible about when support is returned.

In her study of social networks as survival mechanisms, Lomnitz (2003:142) shows that the availability of social support in egocentric networks depended on social, physical, economic and psychological¹³ distance in a disadvantaged urban settlement during 1969-1971 in Mexico City. Lomnitz (2003:143) defines the broader functions of support networks as exocentric networks rather than community networks (see Wellman & Wortley 1990), stating that social ties within the exocentric network required intense and stable relationships for exchanges to be possible. Social support networks that provided a substantial amount of support in both small and larger emergencies such as “sickness, unemployment and migration”, were usually only formed of kin (Lomnitz 2003:148). Those networks that also included non-kin neighbours were more limited in their functions and mostly function between women, whereas ties between men are more work related and based on companionship (Lomnitz 2003:149-155). Overall, exchanges of support included sharing information, support with employment, borrowing, services, and moral support (Lomnitz 2003:169).

Lomnitz’ study continues to be influential even though it was completed nearly 50 years ago, indicating that social networks are still a relevant aspect of urban poverty. More recent studies in Mexico, most notably that of González de la Rocha (1994), provide explanations for when and why support is available in a contemporary context. First referring to ‘the resources of poverty’, González de la Rocha (1994) has a more economic focus in her studies of support networks in the second largest city in Mexico, Guadalajara, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. At the time of a major economic downturn, social exchange or “the flow of goods and services within networks of friends, neighbours, workmates, and relatives” played a major role “in helping low-income households to meet socially set standards of living” when confronted with recurring economic crisis and instability (González de la Rocha 2001:78). The ‘resources of poverty’ referred to households’ flexibility in terms of gender roles, workloads and consumer habits, as informal employment and women in the workforce helped bridge the gap in household income that was caused by falling wages in the 1990s (González de la Rocha 2001). However, her more

¹³ Lomnitz (2003:142) includes an aspect of trust to psychological distance, making it a “psychosocial” category. Trust is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

recent studies show that the networks of social exchange suffered as the level of poverty increased and economic crises became a continuous part of everyday life. Neighbourhood and even kinship-based networks can then start to disintegrate as there are only so many social relations that can be relied on as resources during difficult times (González de la Rocha 2001 & 2007). Despite the more economic focus, the studies of Lomnitz (2003) and González de la Rocha (1994 & 2001) provide some comparison points for the empirical chapters of this thesis, as well as outlining urban poverty in Mexico.

Latin American studies of social networks do not focus much on the division between local and extra-local ties. This may be due to the emphasised role of broad kinship ties and societal structures, which still draw on more close-knit village-like social ties that are less evident in modern urban settings in Western societies (see e.g. Diaz-Loving 2006; Kanter 2008; Wellman 1999; Wellman & Wortley 1990). Espinoza (1999) in his study of networks in a disadvantaged urban setting in Chile has found that even though local networks are becoming smaller, including less ties, they continue to provide essential informal support to a small, close-knit group of people. Identifying that some changes are taking place in how local residents form networks, Espinoza (1999) concludes that while smaller, more densely connected networks are beneficial in terms of providing support, they are unable to deal with broader challenges a neighbourhood may face as a whole, missing the broader support functions a community network can be claimed to offer. In a more recent study in a similar setting but in Brazil, Marques et al. (2008) found that both personal and community networks enable social support, especially in the context of precarious employment and income insecurity, with network members combining resources from both local and extra-local connections.

According to Marques, “the best social situations are associated with low localism, diversified sociability and with networks constructed within organisational settings”, boasting a variety of sources of homophily (2012:976). This is also reflected in the study of Nast and Blockland, where network inequality is considered to be place-based due to neighbourhoods’ different social compositions, so that actors in more disadvantaged areas do not tend to encounter better-off residents nor their resource-rich networks (Nast & Blokland 2014:487). Marques’ research shows, that actors in networks with more contacts and less local focus tended to have less elements of precariousness in their lives, confirming that individuals’ sociability also defines actors’ access to resources and services depending on how strong and wide a network they are part of (2012:963, 971).

Despite the variety of studies on social networks as survival mechanisms, there have been less focus on social networks as collaborative processes in the context of informal settlements. Whereas previous research shows that there are examples of organised collective action between residents in informal settlements (Estrada-Casarín 2016; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010), little attention has been paid to the connection between these collaborations and community networks. Pucci (2008) recognises the importance of social networks in neighbourhood improvement, calling for more inclusive approaches in urban development that build on existing networks and ways of collaborating. Urban studies have made a connection between poverty and segregation, often concluding that despite the role of social networks in providing support, individuals living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have limited access to resources due to access to less resource-rich networks (Marques et al. 2008; Nast & Blokland 2014). Yet, there is little research of how social networks function in a locality, a topic that due to the heterogeneous and high variability of network functions and diversity of sociability may be challenging to study (see Marques 2015). The continuous use of social networks as resources for informal support however shows that there is need for building the understanding of social networks in disadvantaged neighbourhood settings. This thesis aims to address that by focusing on the actors but most of all the interactions and what enables and hinders social support in ISNs.

2.2.4 Informal social networks and informal urbanisation

Informality is a prominent yet contested concept in urban studies and urban development (Fox & Goodfellow 2016; Harris 2017). Informality is used by scholars focusing on economic activities including informal employment and street vending to analyse unregulated income generation, usually referring to the informal economy (Davis 2006; Peña 1999; Sassen 1994). Informality is also used to describe precarious human settlements, where informal usually refers to self-built dwellings that lack legal basis due to tenure issues or unregulated construction techniques – or both (Davis 2006; Lombard 2016; Varley 1985). Informal activities that relate to the ‘built environment’ have increasingly become the focus among urban planning scholars over the last 15 years (Harris 2017; McFarlane 2012; Roy 2005). Informality is often regarded as a characteristic of urban areas in the global South due to informal settlements (Davis 2006; Holston 2008; Wigle 2010). However, different forms of informality are present also in ‘developed’ cities, suggesting that urban informality takes many forms (Harris 2017:1).

Informality has been conventionally seen either as a state of crisis that requires formal responses or as resilient activity relied on by the disadvantaged (Roy 2005:148). McFarlane suggests that there are at least four different meanings of informality, from spatial divisions between formal and informal to informality as an 'organisational form'; informality as the object of 'governance tools' such as regularisation; and informal as a process where value is constantly renegotiated (McFarlane 2012:91-92). Informal is defined through what is formal – or legal and regulated – whether through the difference between peripheral informal slum settlements and the urban 'core' formed of governance buildings and institutions or contracted and highly organised formal employment (McFarlane 2012). Governance aims to contain urban informality – mainly informal settlements and related coping strategies – through formalisation and regularisation, making urban informality a process in constant flux (de Soto 2000). According to Roy the state defines what is informal and formal, making urban informality "a state of deregulation" (Roy 2009b:80) where value is negotiated through the shifting meanings of land ownership and land use.

While the setting of this research links this thesis to urban informality, the theoretical debates of urban informality are not discussed further because this thesis focuses on social relations in a neighbourhood context, not on urban planning, informal economic activities or the formal-informal continuum per se. Local residents' agency in constructing and transforming a former informal settlement is analysed focusing on informal collaborations and exchanges of support between local residents, using the concept of ISNs. What makes ISNs 'informal' is the lack of structure in the collaborative activities and exchanges of social support that – as discussed throughout the empirical chapters – is based on local residents' needs in a dynamic setting of complex social relations. ISNs differ from institutional and 'formal' settings due to the lack of contractual arrangements, as the exchange of social support is enabled by social interactions between local residents in an unregulated, unstructured and spontaneous manner.

2.3 Conclusion

The discussions covered in this chapter have had two purposes. Firstly, to review how local people are considered as actors in development and how different approaches have attempted to be more inclusive of local actors. Secondly, to review social network literature from a qualitative perspective, focusing on interpersonal social ties and engaging with some of the concepts central to this thesis. Combining strands of literature that have been engaged with

throughout this study, the chapter provides both context and a conceptual basis for the analysis and discussion of the following chapters.

The first section of this chapter has reviewed development literature focusing on how local actors are positioned in development approaches that aim to be more inclusive. Participatory approaches have been discussed at length to highlight the influence of participation in different development approaches from PRA to community-based development. Despite the different efforts to include local actors in development through partnerships, local residents are mostly involved in only certain aspects of projects, which fail to reach higher levels of participation because of the influence of institutionalised approaches to development (Chambers 1994; Cornwall 2008; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Otsuki 2014). This is particularly evident in urban development as emphasised by the way informal settlements are still considered as objects of external interventions.

I have argued that attempts to address the limited roles given to local actors have been hindered by how conventional development sees institutions as the key actors in development. Post-development challenges this by emphasising the role of social movements and localism as central to seeking alternatives to development (Escobar 1994 & 2008). While this critical post-development premise may offer few concrete solutions to development issues, combined with more practice-based approaches such as *buen vivir* can offer more focus on collectivism between local people as key to social well-being (Corbridge 2007; Gudynas 2011; Nederveen Pieterse 2000; Villalba 2013). Because *buen vivir* is rooted in indigenous practice and tradition rather than academic debates, it can complement the post-development discourse by focusing attention on local collective practices (Giovannini 2012; Gudynas 2018; Torres Villarreal 2014). This makes *buen vivir* a paradigm worth discussing in relation to the functions of ISNs in the context of this research. This discussion is expanded on in chapter 8, while local collective processes are discussed throughout the thesis.

Social networks are one platform for collaboration, which is why studying how local residents exchange social support and resources through social networks can increase the understanding of local responses to urban development challenges. The second section of this chapter has reviewed key concepts drawn on in the analysis of ISNs in this thesis. The typology of actors in social networks (see Wellman & Wortley 1990); types of social support (see Nast & Blockland 2014; Wellman & Wortley 1990) and the conceptualisation of personal networks and community networks (see Wellman & Leighton 1979) are discussed in more detail in chapters 4-

7. I understand ISNs as a collection of local social ties between family, neighbours and friends following Wellman and Wortley (1990). What makes these networks informal is their exchange of non-institutional support and resources, based on informal arrangements and reciprocity. Types of support provided by these ISNs include at least: companionship, emotional support, favours, and financial support (see Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

The differences between personal and community networks and the notion of change in neighbourhoods has guided the comparison of ISNs and how they function in the contemporary research locality and during neighbourhood formation. I discuss how community networks and personal networks have been present in the research locality in chapters 4-6, considering the effects of neighbourhood change on ISNs mostly in chapter 7. Reviewing previous studies of social networks in the context of disadvantaged urban areas has supported drawing some comparisons throughout this thesis. Central to these comparisons is especially Lomnitz' (2003) research, as it was carried out in Mexico City in the 1970s and can provide a benchmark for considering how networks have changed.

3. Methodology and data collection: researching informal social networks in the context of urban development

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and the methods applied in this research project. The main research question that has driven the design of this project is: how have informal social networks contributed to processes of urban development and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality. In order to answer this dual question, qualitative data has been collected of practices in informal social networks and the urban development processes of a specific locality, in a case study setting. Research design and data collection has been a dynamic process, allowing flexibility in ensuring the methods used in this project match the circumstances of the research locality. The changes that have taken place in research design also reflect the dynamics of researcher positionality and gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the locality.

The first section of this chapter discusses case study research as the main methodology of this project, also highlighting the prominence of flexibility and reflexivity in research design. Some critique of case study research is engaged with, showing why a holistic approach that provides in-depth data in a contextual setting is suitable for this study and what factors were taken into consideration when choosing the research locality. Data collection and data analysis strategies are also outlined.

The second section covers the three methods used in data collection: observation, interviews and focus groups. The relationship between these three methods and how they have together supported robust data collection is discussed. The final section describes the fieldwork process: role of gatekeeper organisations; use of a research assistant; access to participants; as well as some challenges in the field.

Fieldwork was carried out in three stages, including a three-week scoping study. In total six months were spent getting to know the research locality and collecting data during autumn 2016 and spring 2017 in Mexico City. Fieldwork was approached in a flexible manner, a necessity for an outsider researcher. The initial methods of observation¹⁴ and one-to-one interviews were complemented in the second phase of fieldwork by adding focus groups as an additional

¹⁴ Non-participant observation progressed towards participant observation towards the end of fieldwork as I was able to take part in more activities. This is discussed in 3.2 under changing spheres of observation.

method. These methods were used to provide an understanding of informal social support structures in a densely populated urban area with varying levels of marginality: how do ISNs function, what actors do they consist of, and what type of support is exchanged through them.

3.1 Case Study Research as a methodological approach

3.1.1 Neighbourhood study as a single-case study

This is a qualitative study aiming for depth of understanding by using a neighbourhood in Mexico City as a case study. Qualitative analysis was chosen because it emphasises an interpretive approach to data. This means the type of knowledge this project seeks to produce is most of all descriptive, answering questions such as ‘what’ and ‘how’, leaving the question ‘why’ in the background to provide contextual understanding rather than causal explanation (see Gerring 2012). Case study research enables this as “an in-depth study of a single unit”, where features of a case are studied to identify mechanisms in an exploratory manner (Gerring 2004:341).

Case study research is used especially in qualitative research and in social science because of the holistic approach investigating phenomena in natural settings offers (Eisenhardt 1989; Gerring 2007; Yin 1994). A single case approach has been criticised especially due to limited potential for generalisation, overemphasis of practical knowledge and focus on hypothesis generation rather than hypotheses testing (Flyvbjerg 2006). While a single contextual study on its own is not suitable for generalisations beyond the data in question, a case study as a specific example can become part of a larger theoretical entity, contributing to theory construction (Flyvbjerg 2006; Gerring 2007; Levy 2008). It has also been argued that the generalisability of a case study lies in analytical induction and grounding of theory in the in-depth data when appropriate sampling is used to research a case (Flyvbjerg 2006; Verschuren 2003). A single case study can, however, enable theory building because the detailed analysis that is carried out elaborates how things occur, especially when data are used in a comparative manner and supported by triangulation of methods (Flyvbjerg 2006; Gerring 2007; Verschuren 2003). In this research, the thick descriptive data that provide explanations of social phenomena in a specific urban context allows data-driven theory development.

Case studies are also prone to verification of research bias, having the tendency to confirm preconceived expectations because cases are often built around a certain research premise (Flyvbjerg 2006; Gerring 2004 & 2007). This may be problematic, as the researcher interprets in-depth data from a certain perspective while being immersed in the case instead of investigating

a topic from afar (Flyvbjerg 2006; Verschuren 2003). Yet, Flyvbjerg among others has pointed out that the intensive and context heavy approach of case studies should be considered an enabling factor, because an immersive approach has been shown to challenge preconceived views (Flyvbjerg 2006; Geertz 1995; Gerring 2007). Testing alternative interpretations when processing data can also help bring forward potential researcher bias, challenging any preconceived ideas (Levy 2008:9). A case study approach that aims to build theory from the data can support minimising bias because it emphasises overlapping data collection and data analysis to increase comparison, reflection and flexibility during the research process (Eisenhardt 1989).

Recognising the limitations of case study research, especially in terms of generalisability, the applicability of a case study approach is most of all dependent on how it is specifically applied to address a certain research problem (Gerring 2007; Verschuren 2003). Context is central to social interaction, which makes a case study approach appropriate for the study of social networks. There are several previous studies of social support networks that focus on specific environments (e.g. Espinoza 1999; González de la Rocha 1994). This includes Lomnitz' (2003) study of social support in a specific housing settlement in Mexico City and Wellman's (1979) study of neighbourhood networks in a Toronto suburb, which has acted as the basis of several further network studies (see e.g. Plickert, Côte & Wellman 2007; Wellman & Leighton 1979; Wellman et al. 1997). Research that investigates informal settlement development usually also relies on one or two research localities (Lombard 2014; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2015). A neighbourhood provides an accessible single case study locality, where the participants of this research are observed and interviewed in relation to the disadvantaged urban surroundings.

3.1.2 Choosing the research locality

Iztapalapa is one of the 16 boroughs of Mexico City situated to the east of the city centre.¹⁵ The official slogan of Iztapalapa, 'with the power of the people' (*con el poder de la gente*), refers to the 1.8 million people who live in the area (20.5% of the total population 8.99 million people of Mexico City in 2015 [INEGI 2014]). As this research project set out to study ISNs in a disadvantaged urban setting, Iztapalapa as a lower income self-contained city within the megacity offers a suitable research site. Many of the local issues such as limited access to drinking water and lack of urban services are linked to high population density. Iztapalapa was

¹⁵ Mexico City was known officially as *Distrito Federal* (Federal District) until January 2016. Following a reform linked to federal governance structures, the city became officially known as *Ciudad de México* (CDMX), Mexico City (see for example Agren 2016).

the second poorest borough in all of Mexico in terms of number of people living in poverty in 2010 (CONEVAL 2011). The combination of a history of poverty and marginalisation; informality especially in terms of housing and employment; and the concentration of people guided the choice of Iztapalapa as the wider area for the research locality.



Figure 1 Location of the research locality in Iztapalapa -borough in Mexico City

Taking into consideration the characteristics of the wider borough, a research locality was chosen that was also densely populated and reflected various levels of marginalisation.¹⁶ Figure 2 shows the levels of marginalisation in each neighbourhood (*colonia*) across the borough based on data from the 2000 Census. This map provides useful insight, even though the information is nearly 20 years old because there is no recent data on marginalisation on a neighbourhood level. This makes it difficult to understand the current situation and assess how marginalisation levels may have changed since 2000. There have been more recent estimates of, for example, levels of social development in the borough, but the indicators differ from marginalisation indicators, making comparison difficult. In 2010, social development in the research locality was low, while many surrounding neighbourhoods had a very low level of social development (Tejera & Castañeda 2017:236).

¹⁶ The levels of marginalisation referred to in the *Programa General de Desarrollo Urbano del Distrito Federal 2003* (General Urban Development Programme for the Federal District 2003) are a combination of factors such as demography, health, income, employment, education, marital status, number of offspring, housing, number of occupants, overcrowding and household assets (Delegación Iztapalapa 2008:19).

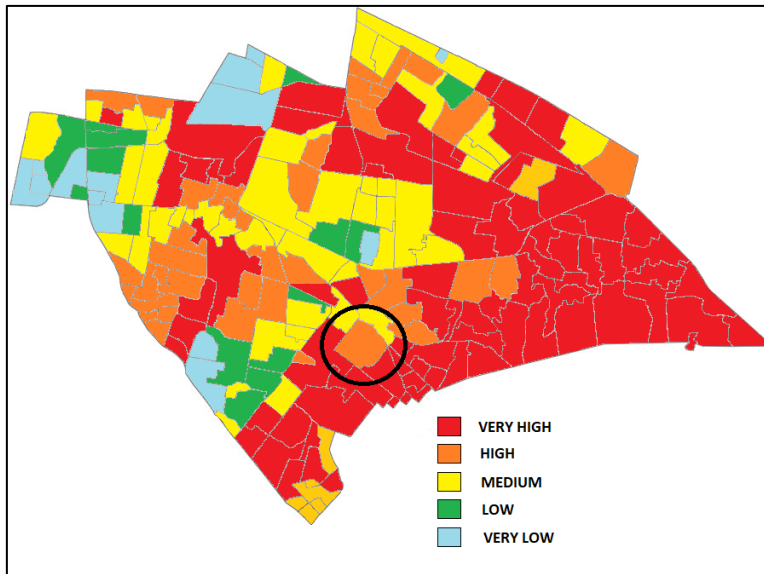


Figure 2 Level of marginalisation in Iztapalapa in 2000. Consejo Agrarista Mexicano marked with a circle (figure based on Delegación Iztapalapa 2008:20)

Figure 2 shows that it is mostly the eastern and south-eastern parts of the borough that experienced high and very high levels of marginalisation in 2000, based on the multi-dimensional index of marginalisation that measures precarious opportunity structures among the Mexican population (CONAPO 2001:11). This makes these areas more suitable for this research, following previous research on marginalised areas such as those by Lomnitz (2003) and González de la Rocha (1994). The more practical factors that were taken into consideration when identifying a research locality were access to local organisations, inner-city location, access by public transport and the level of safety.

The first step to identifying a local organisation was desk-based research, however, there is very limited information available online of local organisations in Iztapalapa. Rabasa's (2015) article written for the Guardian on Deportivo Chavos Banda (DCB) provided more detail of both the local environment and a local organisation than was often available in electronic form. This was the first piece of rich and recent information that I found of a non-governmental organisation online, confirming the organisation was still active and had a role to play in local social development (Rabasa 2015).

One of the challenges of preparing for fieldwork while in the UK was the lack of information available online, which made a scoping trip to the area essential. With local support, a number of local organisations across the northern and eastern parts of Iztapalapa were visited. Some of the community organisations either offered a narrow selection of activities, were located in the

outskirts of Iztapalapa in areas that were difficult to access or had already featured in several research projects. The neighbourhood where DCB is located suited this research due to its location as an inner-borough area and with a high level of marginalisation in 2000 (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal 2003). An accompanied visit by car and subsequent unaccompanied walking tours during the scoping study assured that the neighbourhood was also safe for me to visit alone.

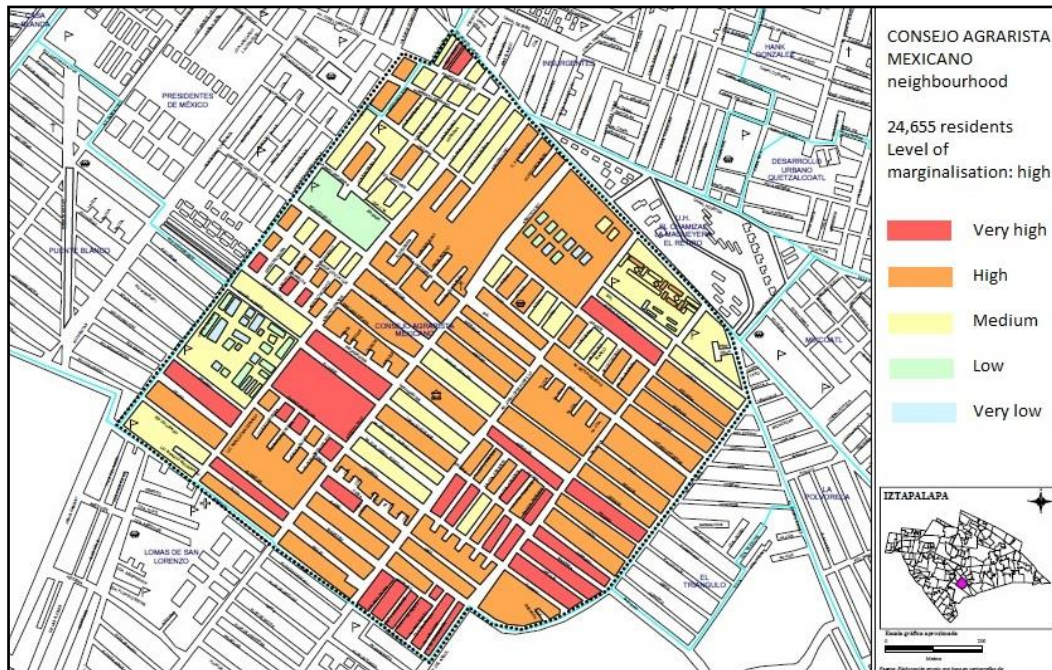


Figure 3 Levels of marginalisation in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal 2003:2)

DCB is located in the *colonia* Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (CAM) (literally ‘Mexican agrarian council’ neighbourhood in English). CAM is described as one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods (*colonia*) in Iztapalapa, which enables researching social networks, as concentrations of people allows observing numerous local interactions (see e.g. Mitrani et al. 2009). While figure 2 shows the neighbourhood to have a high level of marginalisation in early 2000s, figure 3 shows that the level of marginalisation within the neighbourhood in fact varies from very high to low. This supports approaching this area as a snapshot of the wider borough, which is a heterogeneous entity. Desk-based research again showed that very limited information about the neighbourhood was available beyond news of violence and crime. The lack of information made the marginalisation maps and Rabasa’s (2015) newspaper article more valuable. However, this also meant that my understanding of the local area relied on a European piece of journalism and dated official statistics. This is problematic considering the premise of

this research being qualitative analysis and post-development, questioning reliance on quantitative data and a Euro-centric idea of development. Spending time in the research locality interacting with locals showed that the information drawn on prior to entering the field was not entirely representative of the neighbourhood. This is discussed below in section 3.3.7.

While the neighbourhood (CAM) was chosen as the centre of the study, the aim was to speak to people – aged 18 and above – who live or work in the research locality, including an equal amount of male and female participants from different age groups. This aim was not completely fulfilled as the majority of participants were female and aged over 55. Access to older participants became valuable once a historical aspect was added to the research after the first phase of fieldwork. A low number of both men and participants aged 30-55 caused some limitations to data analysis.¹⁷ Before asking participants to be interviewed, it was ensured they had lived locally for at least 3 years so that they were able to discuss local social networks.

3.1.3 Flexibility and reflexivity as a guideline for data collection and analysis

A flexible and reflexive approach to data collection and analysis has been central to how this research project has been carried out. In terms of fieldwork, flexibility meant being responsive to the initial interactions with participants, allowing for changes in research design based on experiences in the field. This was essential because of my positionality as an outsider researcher: I was not familiar with Mexican culture and I had never visited the research locality prior to the scoping study.¹⁸ Entering the field as a European PhD student, I strove to begin data collection with an open mind, allowing my first interactions in the research locality to guide where I was spending time and who I was talking with. This entailed constant reflection of the planned interview questions and topics based on conversations with locals, giving initial findings time to remould the questions I was asking. Reflexivity was also supported by carrying out fieldwork in phases. A brief scoping study was followed by observation and interviews during the first phase of fieldwork, while the second phase of fieldwork included also focus groups to support the study of more historical aspects of ISNs, based on initial findings emerging from the data.

The applied approach of flexibility and reflexivity has been influenced by Grounded Theory (GT), which moves away from broad descriptions that strive for generalisations or verification of grand theories (Bryant & Charmaz 2007a:18). Instead GT focuses on inductive theory building through “conceptual generality that is abstract of time, place and people” (Glaser 2016:7). While most

¹⁷ The limitations of this approach are discussed in the ‘challenges to fieldwork’ section.

¹⁸ I consider positionality and how it has changed throughout this project in section 3.3.

case studies do not apply principles of GT, there are examples of so-called grounded case studies, which aim to build theory from a case study (Eisenhardt 1989; Philipp-Schnurer 2016). I consider constant comparison and dialogue between data collection and data analysis – central elements of GT methodology (Bryant & Charmaz 2007a; Glaser & Strauss 1967) – a research strategy that supports the study of ISNs as a social phenomenon in a neighbourhood setting where several types of support are exchanged between many actors. Reflexivity has been essential in the investigation of these complex interactions in a setting that was previously unknown to me, which meant familiarising myself with ‘usual’ everyday practices and interactions before the more out of the ‘ordinary’ practices could become clear.

Social networks are understood in this research to be theoretical constructions of social ties and interactions, which do not hold a physical form beyond illustrations of data. Social network research with a more structural focus often depicts findings in the form of network diagrams (see e.g. Ellwardt, Steglich & Wittek 2012; McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013; Yu et al. 2017). However, a social network is not a concrete object to study, but an analytical tool for explaining human interaction – in this case collaboration and exchanges of social support. Understanding how networks are formed, how they function and why social support is more available to some individuals than others can benefit from rich qualitative data because of the descriptive nature of these questions. Choosing a qualitative approach takes into consideration previous literature, which highlights the difficulties of measuring social support through quantitative measures (see e.g. Gilchrist 2009; Wellman 2007). The flexible and reflexive approach applied in data collection allows the study of ISNs to be guided by the interactions with research participants. The use of three research methods – observation, interviews and focus groups – supports the data-driven flexible approach to this research through triangulation (see e.g. Stake 1995), ensuring dialogue with different forms of data.

Having a flexible and reflexive approach to both data collection and analysis has helped define and re-define this research project in a processual manner. While the scoping study allowed me to specify the research locality and gatekeepers before data collection was due to begin, carrying out data collection in two stages and having a break from the field made it possible for data analysis to commence before the completion of fieldwork. Data collection was always supported by daily field notes and initial analysis following interviews, however, the first phase of transcription and analysis was completed during the break from the field. As a result of the break from the field – another element recommended by GT (see Charmaz 2014) – the research focus

changed to include analysis of social support and informal social networks as part of urbanisation and neighbourhood change.

The flexible and reflexive approach applied in this project meant building on initial analysis during data collection, allowing me to recognise when substantial new information was no longer emerging, indicating that a sufficient number of interviews had been carried out. Deciding when enough data had been gathered for this research based on findings from data has alleviated some of the pressures of asking the 'right' questions. This meant I was able to spend time exploring and building an understanding of the research locality. The 6-week break from the field also made it possible for me to re-sensitise myself to the social structure of local culture, which I had started to consider 'normal practice' during the first phase of fieldwork. How flexibility and reflexivity have influenced data analysis is discussed in section 3.3.6.

3.2 The use of ethnographic methods for collecting rich data

I chose ethnographic methods of observation and interviews as research methods in order to enable "thick description" of the actors and functions of informal social networks in the research locality (Geertz 1973). Ethnographic methods can support a reflexive approach as they aim to understand "socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings... in cultural systems" (Whitehead 2004:13), also moving away from the ideals of verification. Observation supported interviews firstly by enabling rapport building with participants and secondly by allowing sense-checking between different sets of data. While this can lead to an overwhelming amount of qualitative data, daily fieldnotes and constant reflection helped manage the quantity of data, using observation for triangulation purposes. Focus groups (FGs) were added as a method to examine the historical element of urbanisation and neighbourhood change in relation to ISNs after the first phase of fieldwork.

Observation and one-to-one interviews were chosen as the main methods for this research because of their suitability for collecting rich ethnographic data as discussed above (p.56). One-to-one interviews are also the main method in many previous studies of social networks (Grossetti 2007; Marques 2015; Wellman & Wortley 1990) and were chosen to support the analysis of social ties. I chose FGs as a method focusing on the historical aspect of neighbourhood formation because of the conversational setting focus groups offer, allowing participants to remind and question each other's memories (further discussed in section 3.2.3). FGs were also a method I was familiar with and could include into the research project at a short notice during the break from the field 21/12/2016-30/01/2017. Another possible approach would have been

the use of participatory methods such as drawing in addition to interviewing as Peek, Hordijk and d'Auria (2018) have done. However, participatory methods like these were not included in this study due to resource and timing issues, as I was not experienced in participatory research methods and was not able to address the possible caveats of such methods to a sufficient level. The use of participatory methods could have also meant a second round of interviews would have been required, which the research schedule did not allow time for.

Adding a third method to research design also highlights the flexible and reflexive approach to fieldwork, as first findings indicated the need for a conversational group setting to support collecting historical data based on participants' experiences. The use of the three methods enabled triangulation, dialogue with data collected through the different means (Stake 1998). Triangulation is generally considered good research practice as it enables cross-examination of emergent findings to build an empirically strong case study (see Flyvbjerg 2006; Levy 2008). Drawing on three methods increases the validity of data allowing comparison of observations in new surroundings where people may also say and do different things (Charmaz 2004).¹⁹

Combining observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups supported building a deeper understanding of social structures (see Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). In practice this meant that I was able to ask questions to validate my observations, which was particularly useful when carrying out interviews with participants I had previously spent time with at the gatekeeper organisations. Including some participants whom I had already interviewed in focus groups made it possible to explore how their experiences resonated with other participants. Those participants who were interviewed after their involvement in a focus group could be asked more detailed questions about processes they had mentioned in focus group discussions. Observations noted during the extent of fieldwork have also supported the analysis of both interviews and focus groups, giving more depth to the analysis.

3.2.1 The changing fields of observation

The starting point for this fieldwork was entering the research locality as a complete outsider.²⁰ As the fieldwork progressed and interactions with locals deepened, my position shifted moving from a non-participant observation to more partaking observation. Being an outsider gives an opportunity to “overview a scene, noting major and distinctive features, relationships, patterns, processes and events” – to sensitize to local issues and lifestyle (Jorgensen 1989:56). This was

¹⁹ I consider in the focus group section how this applies particularly to the historical data.

²⁰ Positionality is discussed in section 3.3.

an approach also supported by the break from the field, which allowed me to return to fieldwork with fresh eyes.

During the early stages of data collection observation was less focused exploration of general features of local life (see Jorgensen 1989). The locality was first approached doing walking tours to get to know the neighbourhood, making general observations (see Whitehead 2005). The gatekeeper organisations were a secure starting point for more specified observation, providing a snapshot of local mannerisms, social interactions and gender roles.²¹ I aimed for what Geertz' (1973) calls 'hanging out' or "physical, informal, and prolonged immersion" but this was mostly possible when spending time at gatekeeper organisations due to lack of other public spaces. As the locality was a high crime area, loitering alone in the streets in a high crime area was unusual behaviour and frowned upon (see Browne & McBride 2015:35-36).²²

The lack of public spaces made observation challenging as not all locals visited the gatekeeper organisations. Other public places for observation included the local churches²³ and the local twice weekly outdoor *tianguis* -market.²⁴ While the *tianguis* was a common arena for social interactions among family, friends and neighbours, it was a challenging setting for observing social ties and dynamics due to the busy market environment. Observation in the wider neighbourhood focused on socialising practices and daily schedules, supporting the understanding of the different positions and roles household members hold. It was rare for participants to invite me to their homes, although it became more common towards the end of the fieldwork showing the importance of forming trusting relationships with participants (see Evans 2012). I gained more insight into the family sphere through giving private English classes at participants' homes and by attending various celebrations.

Partaking observation during different activities and gatherings enabled gaining insight of local interactions and culture, furthering rapport-building (Prato & Pardo 2013; Reeves 2010; Whitehead 2005:6). These more interactive and inclusive settings became available mostly during the second half of my fieldwork, enabled by prolonged presence at the gatekeeper organisations. During the first phase of fieldwork, non-participant observation was intertwined

²¹ The limitations in data collection are discussed in the final section of sub-chapter 3.3.

²² Participants often questioned how I 'dared' to walk on my own in the neighbourhood and often warned me not to do so.

²³ I visited two out of the three churches in CAM as well as a larger Catholic church in one of the nearby neighbourhoods. I spent most time in the local Catholic church as most participants were Catholic.

²⁴ Usually every neighbourhood has a *tianguis*, where different goods from vegetables and prepared food to utensils and clothes are sold by both locals and professional sellers.

with the process of rapport and trust building that took place most of all at the gatekeeper organisations. As data collection progressed, observation started to support interviews and focus groups, enabling comparisons between the various interactions I had as part of the other two methods. Combining observation and interviews allowed building a broad understanding of local life experiences, which intertwined with ongoing reflection enabled forming a “multi-layered understanding” (Silverman & Patterson 2015:6) of the research locality.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to focus on a set of relevant key questions, while encouraging participants to share their experiences freely. Glaser and Strauss (1967:75) recommend using less structured interviews and more ‘open-ended conversations’, which resemble informal interviewing more than semi-structured interviews (Charmaz 2014). The interviews in this project are applying both elements of intensive interviews to allow participants to raise issues they feel are relevant but also elements of semi-structured interviews to guide conversation flow.²⁵ While the interviews were structured around an interview guide, the use of open-ended and broad questions allowed participants to control how much detail they wished to share and what questions they personally found most relevant (see Charmaz 2014:56).

As a doctoral researcher carrying out interviews in a foreign language, I found the interview guide essential – something that Charmaz (2014) also encourages novice researchers to use. While probing questions were asked and at times I asked participants to elaborate something they mentioned, the interview guide was followed to make sure all the questions were covered. This limited the topics of the interview, yet participants were encouraged to talk freely so that the interactions would be more like flowing conversations. As an outsider researcher it was challenging to ensure contextually suitable questions were asked, which is why the interview guide was updated as my understanding of the locality evolved.

I expected to be able to find participants through directly approaching them in public places and using snowball sampling. However, the lack of public spaces meant chances of talking to locals outside of their homes were very limited and rather unnatural, which was exacerbated by being in a high crime area. There were very few occasions when snowball sampling was possible. Despite asking participants if they knew someone I could interview, it was rare for participants to introduce me to their acquaintances. When this did happen, a lack of rapport with the new

²⁵ I have included a basic interview guide that contains the main themes discussed in the interviews in the appendix.

contact meant the interview did not provide much detail and lacked free-flowing conversation. I decided against using this approach, even though snowball sampling is often considered a good starting point for making new contacts (Duke 2002) and analysing support networks (Atkinson & Flint 2001; Pitts & Miller-Day 2007). Cohen and Tamar (2011) used snowball sampling in order to manage the challenge of mistrust when researching a marginalised population when directly approaching locals asking questions was met with suspicion. However, I found spending time with locals was the best way to build rapport before proceeding with interviews.

Participants for interviews and focus groups were mostly recruited through the two gatekeeper organisations, so that I could first spend time getting to know people. Using two gatekeeper organisations as entry points helped reduce sampling bias, however, the use of gatekeepers introduced some bias because it was clear not everyone in the neighbourhood visited the organisations. This limited data collection to more socially active locals.²⁶ As I approached all participants myself, there was little threat of gatekeeper bias in choosing participants, apart from the narrow take of service users (see Atkinson & Flint 2001).

In total I carried out 56 interviews²⁷ as the next step from informal social encounters with participants, allowing one month for building rapport and familiarity within the neighbourhood before starting interviews (Reeves 2010). 18 interviews took place during the first stage of fieldwork, whereas most interviews were completed during spring 2017. The aim of the interviews was to discover whether informal support was widely exchanged within the research locality, what type of issues participants seek help for or support others with and when or why this support is not available. Participants were encouraged to explain these processes in narrative settings by asking for examples of times when they have helped a neighbour or family member, who they turn to during difficult times and how they socialise in the neighbourhood. I engaged with social network literature before starting fieldwork, making myself aware of different actor and support types usually present in social network research in neighbourhood context (see e.g. Grossetti 2007; Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990). Themes covered in the interviews included experiences of living in the neighbourhood, interactions with local residents and dealing with daily challenges. Background questions related to household composition and socio-economic factors.

²⁶ This limitation is further discussed below in the challenges in the field section.

²⁷ I aimed to carry out 45-60 interviews so that it was possible to analyse social networks and identify some patterns in the functions of ISNs, rather than aiming to generate generalisations (see Payne & Williams 2005).

Interviews began with an introduction to the project and verbal informed consent procedures.²⁸ Most of the interview was left open for conversation, closing with comments about keeping in touch or plans for further interviews. This structure is recommended by literature that focuses on carrying out qualitative research in community settings (Silverman & Patterson 2015:62). The only section of the interview guide that did not provide rich data or free conversation was asking participants about hardships and issues of everyday life. Despite rephrasing the questions, participants did not share experiences of deprivation freely, which I found surprising considering the history of high level of marginalisation in the area. This may have been an issue of trust or pride for participants, related to how questions were phrased or misalignment of my expectations of marginalisation as an outside researcher.²⁹

Nearly all interviews were carried out at the grounds of the two gatekeeper organisations, mostly outdoors using a quiet corner away from the main street. The approach was an attempt to neutralise the power setting of an interview as well as ensure my own safety by staying in public spaces. The use of an informal social space has been noted to neutralise some of the top-down “play of power... making the researcher a listener instead of a controlling actor” (Duke 2002:52). According to Charmaz, interview settings can be considered very unequal (2004:1077), especially when carrying out research in a community setting with local residents. Carrying out interviews beyond household settings also minimised interruptions from other family members (see Thapar-Björkert & Henry 2004). Another benefit of using the organisations as interview locations was that I was able to arrange interviews before or after activities, minimising the need for organising meetings for set times. The difficulty of setting times for meetings with participants in informal cultures where plans are often made at the last minute has been an issue for outsider researchers (Hautzinger 2012).

Only one interview was not audio recorded, and apart from this one exception, participants did not seem to mind the use of a recorder and spoke freely. The length of interviews varied between 15 minutes and two hours, average length being 35 minutes. This shows how some participants did not share their experiences with much detail, despite agreeing to be interviewed. While several factors could have affected this, based on my experiences, it was mostly a matter of personal differences in willingness to share personal views and experiences,

²⁸ I used verbal consent because collecting signatures from participants when carrying out research in an informal community setting was not appropriate. Literacy levels in the research locality was also a concern, which proved to be accurate as many older participants had not completed primary school education.

²⁹ Considered in more detail in the empirical chapters, especially chapter 5.

rather than feeling uncomfortable because the conversation was being recorded. It was mostly the 50+ age group that gave detailed accounts in interviews. There was no substantial difference in the length of time male and female participants interviewed, but men³⁰ aged 20-50 usually interviewed for some 30 minutes while men aged 50+ often spoke for over an hour. It may be that the older age group had more time to spend talking about their experiences; however, it should be noted that grandparents share care responsibilities for grandchildren, meaning that they also have strict schedules. It took time for some participants to agree to take part in an interview or focus group, indicating a level of suspicion among some.³¹ However, there was no clear pattern in how freely participants talked in interviews in relation to the length of time I had known them for prior to the interview. In fact, the longest interview was with a woman aged 65+ who I met the same day; however, I believe naming some of the local people we both knew facilitated the fluidity of conversation.

3.2.3 Focus groups informing of historical aspect

Focus groups (FGs) were included as a research method because of the conversational setting they offer, enabling participants to share and compare memories and experiences (Cyr 2016; Sagoe 2012). The purpose of FGs was to bring forth data about neighbourhood formation and urbanisation practices to allow analysis of how ISNs have transformed. The open group interview environment offered by FGs facilitated simultaneous interaction between several participants and the researcher (Ryan et al. 2014: 329), allowing participants to “listen to others’ opinions and understandings to clarify their own” (Rossman & Rallis 1998:135). This was essential because FGs discussed historical elements of urbanisation and events that took place some 30-40 years ago.

Previous research has found FGs useful when researching historical aspects and past experiences because of the settings FGs provide for sharing and comparing information (Sagoe 2012). How useful FGs are often depends on the topics discussed and the sensitivity of information (Hautzinger 2012). Group conversations were ideal for triggering participants’ memories and confirming when key phases of local development took place. Discussion topics

³⁰ Overall, men were slightly more reluctant to be interviewed. In total two men directly declined to be interviewed, while only one woman reacted less positively to an interview proposal but did not directly refuse even if the interview never took place.

³¹ I did not approach people several times asking for an interview, but in some cases participants appeared to avoid the subject, knowing I was interviewing people. Yet, two participants approached me later to ask when I would like to interview them or when would the next focus group be.

included participants' experiences of moving to the area, taking part in urbanisation processes, and overall neighbourhood formation and change. Some of the potential shortfalls related to FGs are discussed below.

The clear overrepresentation of older participants became useful when a historical aspect was included in the research. Participants in the second phase of fieldwork were specifically chosen to enable the investigation of the history of local development in the neighbourhood. All the 28 participants in the four FGs were aged 60+, due to the topic of historical development and urbanisation. 13 out of these 28 participants³² were also interviewed before or after the FGs supporting triangulation and 'theoretical sampling' (see Charmaz 2006). All the FGs took place at the community centre, a familiar place that had positive connotations due to the activities the participants normally took part in. Participants knew each other from group activities held at the gatekeeper organisation and as only one male attended an FG, discussions were supported by an inclusive environment based on "similarities in background characteristics such as age, gender, class and ethnicity" (Morgan 1995:519). The FGs could thus "mirror the kinds of conversations participants might have in their daily lives" (Hollander 2004:607) and provide a more informal platform for data collection than one-to-one interviews.

Participants' familiarity with each other was beneficial as they were able to remind who lived in the area and when or what services were available when different people moved there. Historical dates such as the 1985 earthquake were used to specify timings allowing comparisons of what services were available and who was involved in the delivery processes. As participants discussed similar or shared experiences, it was possible for them to "challenge each other's statements" if they seemed "inaccurate" (Hollander 2004:628). Familiarity also meant participants often encouraged each other to share their experiences asking each other questions balancing the dynamic of the conversation. Using a location known to participants and drawing on a "naturally occurring" group setting (Lunt & Livingstone 1996:6) provided an informal atmosphere for the FGs, alleviating some of the common threats to validity such as trust issues and deceptive responses (Hautzinger 2012:25).

There are also downsides to familiar FG settings, as familiarity may increase "social desirability issues" and "face-politeness" due to the need of saying the 'right thing' or not wanting to offend anyone (Hautzinger 2012:25). In the first FG there were some politeness issues in terms of conversation dynamics and participants waited for those who normally have a more active role

³² Appendix 1 lists all interview participants and appendix 2 lists those who took part in focus groups.

to take the lead. Hollander points out that familiarity between participants can have a negative side, as “participants may feel compelled to appear consistent with earlier expressed beliefs” (2004:627). This was not a major concern in this research because the topics of the conversations were not particularly intimate, even if some personal experiences of settling in the neighbourhood were discussed. While participants talked about their experiences in the neighbourhood, the conversation did not involve sensitive information, reducing the threat of coercion or “conformity pressures” (Hollander 2004:610). This is also why the possible effects of the social context are minimised, although despite triangulation, a researcher can never be sure if the participants do in fact “exaggerate, minimize, or withhold experiences” during an FG discussion (Hollander 2004:626).

Group sizes were between 5-12 participants and length of FGs varied between 36 and 84 minutes. While the larger group enabled combining participants’ experiences and piecing together a history better, some participants seemed impatient to talk, which is why smaller groups were more inclusive. All FG discussions were recorded. Participants’ verbal consent was recorded after informing the whole group that the conversation is recorded, and their participation also acts as consent for using the information. The attempt was made to include a research assistant to support with FGs, but the difficulty of organising groups and finding mutual schedules meant this did not materialise. As the FGs were content driven and data were collected about historical events more than sensitive personal topics, the FGs did not necessarily need an assistant to take notes of behaviour and group dynamic (see Ryan et al. 2014).

3.3 Fieldwork – navigating between expectations and reality

This section explains the specific procedures involved in carrying out fieldwork for this research project. In total, six months was spent in the field for the scoping study, first and second phase of fieldwork. Data collection was carried out during the two phases of fieldwork between October 2016 and May 2017, including a six-week break from the field in December 2016 – January 2017. Fieldwork was carried out in Iztapalapa borough of Mexico City, interviews and focus groups taking place in CAM -neighbourhood.

In total 73 people participated in the study through interviews and focus groups. 16 out of the 58 participants that were interviewed live in the surrounding neighbourhoods, while the majority live in CAM.³³ Only 19 out of 73 participants were male and only one male took part in

³³ Two of the interviews included responses from two people, hence 56 interviews were completed but number of interviewees is listed as 58. See appendix 1.

an FG. It was easier to reach women through the activities at the gatekeeper organisations this way building rapport with them. Women tended to also be more willing to take part in interviews and focus groups.³⁴ Overall participants were aged 20-81, but the majority (29 out of 58) of those that were interviewed were aged 60 and above, not including the 15 participants who only took part in focus groups and also belonged to the 60+ age group. It was easier to engage with older age groups because of their more active attendance at the gatekeeper organisations compared to locals aged 30-55, who were more likely to have work commitments. It was rare for participants to decline the invitation to take part, yet some “resistance tactics” – as Wanat (2008:204) describes them – of ‘yes I would like to when I have time’ were at play at times and some participants repeatedly failed to arrive to organised meetings. While some participants were genuinely busy and did eventually take part, others were clearly finding it difficult to refuse an interview assertively – something that previous research has noted to particularly apply to women (Thomas, Bloor & Frankland 2007: 440).

All participants who took part in FGs frequently visited the community centre CCC while nearly all participants who were interviewed visited the two gatekeeper organisations CCC and DCB. This meant that the group of participants excluded those in the neighbourhood who did not go to the community centres, which potentially means those who were less well-off were not included in the sample because some of the activities in the community organisations had fees or required materials to attend. Seeking to include people in the FGs who had lived in the neighbourhood during neighbourhood formation also meant that the newer residents who had moved to the area more recently were not included in the study, apart from those interviewed individually. This means the sample is tilted towards those who have been in the area for longer and are aware of the processes of neighbourhood formation. Processes of othering discussed in chapter 7 are analysed from the perspective of the original settlers but not the newer residents whom in some cases are the object of othering and distrust. Eight participants lived in three of the local housing estates, three of whom lived in the housing estate that had a particularly bad reputation and was the object of othering among many of the participants.

3.3.1 Role of gatekeeper organisations

Access to most participants was gained by building a relationship with a local non-governmental community organisation DCB, and a local community centre (CCC) that was run by Iztapalapa

³⁴ I do not want to make generalisations of traditional gender roles in Mexican society, but feel my gender was a limitation when approaching male participants.

borough. CCC became a gatekeeper during fieldwork, while DCB was visited during the scoping study, making it the primary gatekeeper. The decision to use DCB and CCC as gatekeepers was straightforward, as the only other organisations in the research locality were local churches and an Alcoholics Anonymous, both having specific services used by certain groups only.³⁵ I wanted to approach organisations with a wide range of service users and the two organisations complemented each other in this aspect, as DCB focused more on young people, music and sports; whereas CCC had more active groups for pensioners. I was able to split my time between the two locations, as CCC was open throughout the day, whereas DCB was only open some mornings and most evenings. Interestingly, the two centres were not in contact with each other in any way, despite being located less than 500 metres away from each other. Relying on one gatekeeper increases the power the gatekeeper holds in terms of the success of the research project (Reeves 2010), which is why being able to add CCC as a second gatekeeper helped balance the researcher-gatekeeper power dynamic.

DCB was set up by local young people who used to be involved in gang activity (Rabasa 2015). The group of young men who instigated the organisation originally wanted to bring positive activities to people of all ages in the community, in order to steer away from criminal activity (Rabasa 2015).³⁶ DCB offers a range of activities from boxing classes to pensioners' exercise and graffiti workshops to embroidery classes. A core team of four people is supported by changing activity leaders with different skills. Some give classes voluntarily, some charge a small fee from their participants, while others offer activities as part of the youth programme (*programa de juventud*) funded by the city government. DCB had large premises including a basketball court, a small football pitch and outdoor gym equipment.³⁷ I considered DCB a suitable organisation because of its focus on social development and established role in the neighbourhood that has been built over 25 years (Rabasa 2015).

CCC was approached during the first phase of fieldwork to provide another entry point to the neighbourhood. Even though CCC was owned, funded and managed by Iztapalapa borough, there was no information available of its programme online, which is why I was unaware of its existence before starting fieldwork. CCC included a community hall type building, a small

³⁵ Interviews showed that while many participants identified as Catholic, they only went to church on special occasions instead of attending mass weekly.

³⁶ I discuss the formation of DCB in more detail in chapter 6.

³⁷ Funding from sources such as Deutsche Bank and the government of Mexico City through the neighbourhood improvement programme (*Programa Comunitario de Mejoramiento Barrial*) has contributed to improving the premises.

outdoor play area for children and some urban gym equipment. The staff consisted of two managers, some activity leaders who work for the borough, two pensioners groups that use the space for free and some organisers who charge for their activities. The activities offered by the CCC included also exercise and martial arts classes, exercise and social groups for pensioners, as well as a beauty therapist course for adults. The clear difference to DCB was the more structured approach: CCC managers wrote weekly reports to the borough reporting how many people were using the centre.

Even though CCC was less independent as it was run by the local borough, I was able to access both centres and take part in activities freely. Offering to teach English free of cost probably encouraged this. The informal welcome by both organisations enabled me to start building relationships with locals immediately without having to wait for official permissions, which is often the case with gatekeepers in institutional settings (Campbell et al. 2006; Thapar-Björkert & Henry 2004; Wanat 2008). Some researchers (see Campbell et al. 2006) have struggled to find a balance between how to split their time when working with several different groups during data collection, but there never seemed to be any rivalry between the two organisations.

DCB and CCC acted as passive gatekeepers, allowing my presence and that way enabling me to build contacts in the neighbourhood but not introducing me to participants directly, making negotiating access my responsibility.³⁸ This meant changing power dynamics in the research process over time as I often became more familiar than staff themselves were with some of their service users. According to Campbell et al. (2006:99), once initial access has been negotiated, the researcher starts to “acquire information... to the extent that he or she becomes a type of gatekeeper as well”.

The gatekeepers were invaluable bases in a neighbourhood with very little public space. They also gave me an active role by allowing me to teach English at their premises for free.³⁹ Data collection in an everyday setting requires finding a role of sorts in the area, which is often

³⁸ When the organisation staff did introduce me to other staff members or service users, I was always introduced as the English teacher or as a student who gives English lessons at the organisations. This allowed me to explain myself why I was there in the first place and what my research topic was.

³⁹ I started giving classes on Saturdays at DCB increasing to two classes on Saturdays after the success of the first class. Classes in CCC began in late November with one basic class on Wednesdays. Both classes were free to attend and the number of attendees varied between 2-20. The Saturday class drew a more mixed group of attendees from primary school children with their parents to pensioners, while the Wednesday class consisted only of adults aged 50 years and above during 2016. The break from the field caused changes to schedules and I increased the number of classes to four per week also gaining a more varied demography of students.

enabled by the use of gatekeepers, particularly for outsider researchers (Bondy 2012; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Taking the role of an English teacher meant forming an exchange relationship with the organisations and having a mechanism for giving something back. This type of cooperation emphasises the benefits of the presence of the researcher (Wanat 2008:201). Giving classes for free enabled me to use the two community spaces without cost, while providing me with a safe place for carrying out interviews and focus groups. Volunteering on a regular basis also supported the processual nature of gaining access and building rapport (Duke 2002), as teaching English made me more approachable to locals. As noted by Kennedy-Macfoy (2013), volunteering when carrying out fieldwork can give a sense of purpose to the researcher. The process of giving back helped me overcome the feeling of being an outsider who was only there to extract information.

3.3.2 Building rapport with participants

Spending time at the gatekeeper organisations enabled me to begin the “interactive processes” of “access, entry and rapport” (Harrington 2003:599). This was intertwined with the more “traditional rapport-building techniques” (Wanat 2008:200) of spending time with possible participants at the organisations’ grounds before asking to interview them. Negotiating access to the organisations and gaining participants for interviews and focus groups, however, were separate processes requiring different approaches (Reeves 2010; Wanat 2008).

Rapport building required openness, building relationships and navigating between the different roles local people applied to me. Sharing personal experiences with participants is encouraged by previous research (Smith 2014; Wanat 2008), and I found that particularly discussing family life helped find common ground. Sharing experiences can lead to friendships, which could increase the risk of coercion in data collection. Yet some level of friendliness allows researchers to become more of an insider (Neal & Gordon 2001; Pitts & Miller-Day 2007). Participants also “define researchers in terms of categories that are meaningful to” themselves (Harrington 2003:598). This increases the complexity of encounters with participants as well as gatekeepers, making them “mediated by other relationships, social meanings, composite social identities and discursive practices” (Crowhurst 2013:471).

Doing something that benefitted the locals enabled building what Wanat (2008:200) calls “empathetic relationships” with both gatekeepers and participants. The English classes did introduce me to possible participants; however, I only interviewed six participants that attended the classes, while most people were recruited through my interactions with them in the

gatekeeper organisations. Because I gave classes that were open to everyone to attend for free, there was no real threat of coercion due to possible benefit of taking part in my research. I was open about the purpose of my visit and made it clear that there was no obligation for anyone attending my English classes to take part in interviews or focus groups. I never encountered the type of blaming from my participants about being European as Adams (1998:224) did, nor was I ever told I should volunteer or take part in reciprocal exchange. While the teaching role could be considered to strengthen hierarchical power relations (Adams 1998:228), I ensured the locals knew I was a student myself and not a certified English teacher.

It became obvious during the first weeks of fieldwork that forming relationships with locals without some kind of a link was difficult. It is possible that one of the reasons why some people were more reluctant to be interviewed was that I was working in an area experiencing high levels of crime, such as burglaries and muggings. Ross, Mirowsky and Pribesh (2001) found it difficult to gain participants' trust when carrying out research in a high crime area. This applies to some extent to the research locality because participants frequently warned me to be careful of who I talk to and at least initially limited how freely some people shared their experiences with me. Simply being present and gaining visibility in the neighbourhood by spending time doing walking tours and taking part in informal conversations mostly did not lead to new participants; however, socialising and finding common ground with participants did enable trust building (see Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

3.3.3 Use of local research support

I recruited a local research assistant (RA) to support me with possible language issues, as Spanish is not my first language.⁴⁰ My research assistant was a young female high school student, who grew up locally and was from a similar socio-economic background as the participants. RA tasks were to accompany me during research locality walking tours, supporting with any language difficulties during interviews and taking notes during interviews if the participant did not agree to the use of an audio recorder. The latter was never required. The assistant was paid based on the hours worked referring to average salaries of secretarial work in Mexico City as a guideline, as the RA did not have a higher education background and was only providing general support. The relationship was thus clearly one based on employment, reinforcing the asymmetrical power setting between a Western researcher and a local assistant (Molony & Hammett 2007). I

⁴⁰ Intensive language training was undertaken before starting fieldwork, however, my level of fluency benefitted most from the time spent in the field.

attempted to mitigate this by asking if the RA thought the payment I suggested was fair and if she was happy with the arrangements. As a local 'expert' (Molony & Hammett 2007), the RA also had a powerful stance considering that I would not carry out interviews if she was not present and the schedules were made based on her availability.

The RA had a passive role as she did not recruit participants nor prepare or lead the interviews. Despite being a local, the RA had never visited CCC where she attended the first interviews and did not know any of the participants interviewed there. This minimised the challenges often linked to the use of local RAs, as an RA's familiarity with participants can introduce a threat of coercion. Coercion may affect participants' patterns of recruitment, responses, even leading to distorted data, where the participants' responses are formed based on seemingly approval or disapproval of the RA (Jenkins 2015). RAs are often used as interpreters making them crucial for the success of a project (Jenkins 2015; Molony & Hammett 2007), but there are also examples of research where RAs have an extended role leading interviews and focus groups (Deane & Stevano 2016). The use of RAs can influence "the processes of data collection and research design" causing bias and "possibly misleading results" (Deane & Stevano 2016:214). These issues did not apply to this project due to the very limited role of the RA.

The RA was only present during the first eight interviews due to her other commitments. Overall, the RA had a limited yet important role due to her presence as a local during my first weeks in the field and the companionship she offered – almost as a "cultural tour guide" (Molony & Hammett 2007:293). RAs can become highly influential in research projects (Pasquini & Olaniyan 2004), yet because I only was supported by my RA for a number of weeks, our relationship did not have time to grow in importance, limiting her influence on the project.

The RA was almost an intermediary bridging my relationship with the locality, although she did not introduce me to participants. The benefits of being accompanied by a local can help "mitigate the influence of... power relations" between researcher and participants (Deane & Stevano 2016:215). As most of the participants at that point were female and CCC was female-run, it was also beneficial that both myself and the RA were female, considering gender divisions often present in Mexican society (see Montesinos & Meráz 2017). Age has been found one of the most significant factors affecting research dynamics (Deane & Stevano 2016; Pasquini & Olaniyan 2004) and while we were perhaps seen as young and naïve, this also made us more approachable as we did not come across as experts but eager listeners (Pasquini & Olaniyan

2004). The only communication language was Spanish, and the assistant was not asked to translate any documents, only to support with language issues when necessary.

3.3.4 Positionality – ‘you are a visitor in our country, we must treat you well!’

Despite my many changing roles during fieldwork, I was always the outsider – known by everyone as the *güera* (blonde girl). Having a pale complexion and blonde hair was a constant reminder of this, emphasised by the looks and comments from locals. It was never the aim of this project to produce “an insider’s understanding of the studied world”, like ethnographers often aim to do (Charmaz 2014:36). In fact, I was able to enter the field with all senses open, as Mexican society and life in a disadvantaged urban area were unknown to me. I became accustomed to some cultural differences quickly yet continued to struggle with the informal time concept throughout my fieldwork, as this affected progressing with interviews and focus groups.

One of the benefits of being an outsider is that it may allow the researcher to ask questions that would otherwise be considered intrusive (Bondy 2012). Sometimes participants also find it easier to open up to a complete stranger, who does not share the same culture (Eckstein 1977). The fluidity of the outsider role (Fine & Hallett 2014) meant I could easily explain, for example, why I was not religious yet attend religious celebrations. However, being an outsider meant even the most trivial matters, such as school hours and public holidays, were unknown to me, making it challenging to understand locals’ schedules and having to pay more attention to respecting local customs. My position clearly changed towards the end of fieldwork when I started to receive more invitations to celebrations and family gatherings. Accompanied by locals, I was accepted as a guest while shifting towards being an outside-insider (Fine & Hallett 2014).

One of the factors enhancing my position as an outsider was where I lived during fieldwork. I was only able to find a reliable contact for arranging accommodation during the second phase of fieldwork through my conversations with participants and local organisation staff. While I lived a 40-minute walk away from the locality during the first phase of fieldwork, not living locally had its challenges. Living further away meant I always had to leave before sunset to make sure I could return ‘home’ safely. During the first phase I was an outsider who also did not live locally but moving to the locality supported the transition to outside-insider. Living in the research locality benefited data collection as it was easier to organise meetings with participants and ‘hanging out’ (Geertz 1973) was more natural. Living locally meant increased interactions with locals, as I frequently bumped into participants in the streets and was able to become more

integrated to everyday life. There was a clear difference in the depth of my relationships during the first and second phase of fieldwork, although trust building was seemingly enhanced by my return to the locality.

The researcher is said to have multiple roles in any given field setting, which “creates variation in the information to which the researcher has access” (Harrington 2003:602). I took my time building rapport with locals and spending time in group activity settings at the local organisations was the most efficient way to do this. There were many people who I spent a lot of time with throughout my fieldwork, yet who used “resistance tactics” (Wanat 2008) when it came to participating in an FG or interview. Despite becoming an outside-insider by the end of my fieldwork, there were topics that many participants kept private and which were not discussed with me, showing that some barriers remained throughout the fieldwork process. For example, locals seemed keen to show the positive side of life and this may be one reason why I was unable to collect much data about hardship. If this was due to pride in a society where keeping up appearances seems particularly important (see e.g. Paz 1950), being an outsider would not have made a difference to this behaviour.

3.3.5 Challenges and limitations to data collection

The key challenges I faced during fieldwork were linked to not knowing the research locality more thoroughly. The geographical and cultural distance of my research locality from my university meant I had to draw on dated statistics to support choosing the locality as well as to build an understanding of local life. I entered the research locality considering it a highly marginalised urban area and keen to research how ISNs were used to cope with hardship. I started to question this misaligned presumption during the first phase of fieldwork because the neighbourhood did not appear to experience very high levels of marginalisation and the participants often referred to past challenges and hardship. This eventually led to including a historical aspect to the project in order to understand the role ISNs have played in local development.

Not being aware of local circumstances or misunderstanding them was an issue when starting interviews, meaning that I perhaps was not asking the ‘right’ questions. However, interview questions were rephrased following constant reflection and participants were encouraged to share their stories in a more narrative way than using strictly structured questions (see Glaser & Strauss 1967). Despite my flexible approach, being a novice researcher meant it was challenging to consider how interviews could be improved when I was in the middle of the process of

recruiting participants. The pressures of carrying on with data collection meant that I was unable to thoroughly consider whether the issue was the questions I was asking or my misaligned expectation of researching a highly marginalised area.

Being foreign meant I was cautious when entering the research locality – an area known for violence and high crime rates. While considering whether it was safe to take part in some activities, to speak to certain people or walk in the streets during evenings were reasonable aspects of mitigating risk, these steps simultaneously limited some of my interactions. Iztapalapa has a negative reputation in Mexico City and it is a borough that many locals avoid, and tourists rarely visit. Even those who lived in the borough in nearby neighbourhoods warned me of the dangers of the research locality. When spending time in the research locality, I always made sure I had nothing valuable on my person, did not wear branded clothing nor ‘flashy’ accessories. Having been warned by locals of muggings, I was always prepared to potentially lose something and made sure I had some money and my keys in my pockets rather than carrying all my essential items in a bag. I avoided using local buses because robberies often took place on buses. This meant I walked a lot which allowed me to get to know the neighbourhood and some people, but also meant I had to make sure I returned home around sunset as the risk of violence increased during hours of darkness.⁴¹ I did not encounter any issues in terms of crime or violence during research but continued with my precautions regardless.

The shortfalls of data collection include recruiting an uneven sample of men and women from different age groups, recruiting participants through local organisations, and failure to reach the more socially marginalised residents.⁴² Mostly reaching locals who had links with the local organisations may have distorted analysing ISNs, as participants who sought out activities offered by the organisations may have been more likely to actively form ISNs. Some of the activities at the organisations had attendance fees, which could also mean that locals who could not afford to pay for activities were not included in the sample. Difficulties related to the historical aspect included lack of documented information of development in the research locality. This meant constant comparisons with statements made by participants and known key

⁴¹ Newspapers regularly report of shootings that take place late at night in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (El Mañana 2018).

⁴² For example, I decided – for security reasons – to not attempt to enter a small squatting community at the edge of the research locality where people according to the participants lived in very poor and overcrowded circumstances.

events such as the 1985 earthquake had to be used to piece together a local history.⁴³ Due to the differences in collecting historical and current data of ISNs, there were some limitations to how accurate comparisons I could draw between previous and existing practices of social support.

I identified these issues during data collection and made every effort to include participants outside of the organisations. Unfortunately, the difficulty of building relationships outside of the organisations meant that interviews that were carried out without an organisational link were often less informative and participants did not seem to talk very freely. The shortfalls of the data meant that very limited comparisons could be made between gender and age differences in terms of participants' social networks. The lack of male participants indicates that there were differences in the social interactions of men and women, also highlighting the limited interactions I was able to have with male participants because of being a female researcher but also because men often spent long days working outside the research locality. Despite completing my goal of carrying out some 50 interviews, reaching an equal number of male and female participants from different age groups was not plausible due to the difficulty of reaching certain demographic groups because of my personal characteristics as a researcher. Instead, I returned from the field once interviews no longer provided substantial or conflicting new information, indicating data saturation (see Charmaz 2006; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Silverman & Patterson 2015).

3.3.6 Constant comparison as a data analysis strategy

Building on from the flexible and reflexive approach to data collection, data analysis has utilised the principle of constant comparison, following Glaser's (1992) approach to theory development. I have used line-by-line coding to interact with the data, then moving on to selective coding to highlight emerging themes for initial categorisation, using analysis memos to identify core categories. Theory formation in my research has been emergent because findings have been developed further through the writing and re-drafting process, allowing the main findings to mature during the writing period.

⁴³ Visits to the historical archive of Iztapalapa (Archivo Histórico de Iztapalapa) and a meeting with a local historian confirmed that there is no documented history for the neighbourhood as it is one of the areas of rapid urbanisation in the 1980s and considered a young neighbourhood.

While qualitative analysis is nowadays often carried out using scientific software programs (see Bryant & Charmaz 2007a), I found analysing using a more mixed approach useful because I was not bound by the rigidity of the functions of a software program. A substantial amount of time was invested in processing the raw data, as I translated audio recordings that were in Spanish into transcripts in English using word processing, simultaneously thoroughly re-engaging with each interview and focus group. Coding and memo writing were then initiated using word processing software for line-by-line coding, which was complemented by hand-written notes and switching between an electronic Excel spreadsheet for categorisation and collation of basic information. The arduous transcription process meant truly working with the data, which I believe enabled identifying categories and building conceptualisation.

Constant comparison between individual interviews was also supported by focusing attention on the differences among observations and interactions with participants, bringing forth unique examples and exemptions. This allowed me to maintain a critical eye during data analysis, especially when categorising data into different actor and support categories. Some of the core categories were formed based on actor or support type categorisation drawing on network research, most notably Wellman and Wortley (1990). Other categories such as othering, distrust and conviviality emerged more directly from data. Interviews did not bring further actor categories forward, however, some of the suggested support categories did require some clarification following interactions with participants. Moving between transcripts, analysis notes and fieldnotes made it possible for me to sense check the more detailed accounts emerging during data analysis before constructing broader findings. I have used freewriting to work with categories and moving to core categories, referred back to extended quotes from transcripts and turning analysis memos through re-drafting into chapter sections, meaning that the key concepts are still present and recognisable throughout this thesis.

3.4 Ethical statement

The ethical approval for this project was granted by the Ethics Committee for Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. Full approval was sought in May-June 2016, prior to the scoping study that was completed in July-August 2016, even though no formal data collection was completed during that visit. I updated the ethics documents during the second stage of fieldwork, adding focus groups as a research method and considering the relevant issues of recording consent and respecting individuals' anonymity.

Despite consent to take part in research is often recorded in writing, I chose to use verbal consent throughout my study for two reasons. Firstly, I felt asking participants' signatures would go against local practice, which reflects informal approaches in many aspects of everyday life. Secondly, I was concerned that not all participants would be able to read or write fluently. This turned out to be the case, which is why I continued recording consent verbally also when carrying out focus groups. I prepared a printed participant information sheet which I gave to all participants and explained the contents of the information sheet to participants in person before starting each interview, to ensure understanding and allowing time for further questions. As all interviews apart from one were recorded, it was easy to record participants' verbal consent at the beginning of each interview, as well as before each focus group.

I have considered throughout this research project how I can protect my participants' anonymity and whether I can name the neighbourhood at the centre of the research locality. Because I have used a newspaper article (Rabasa 2015) to identify one of the gatekeeper organisations and choose the research locality, I decided to name the key research neighbourhood CAM as this information can be found in the article. I believe naming the main neighbourhood is beneficial for future research but also allows the discussion of local areas in a more specific manner. Because of naming the neighbourhood, I have however, decided to not include interview nor focus group transcripts in the appendix of this thesis, because many of the transcripts contain information that could put the anonymity of the participants at risk. This is especially important since I have named the local community organisations, which I have been granted permission to do by DCB and CCC managers.

3.5 From expectations to reality – concluding thoughts

Despite some limitations, case study methodology and the three methods applied in this research project were appropriate considering the topic and research locality, enabling me to collect the data I required. The elements that have particularly enabled collecting such a large amount of data have been the flexible approach and the break from fieldwork, which made it possible to carry out initial analysis before completing fieldwork (see Bryant & Charmaz 2007b; Glaser & Strauss 1967). The value of flexibility and reflexivity during data collection and analysis has been indicated by changes made during fieldwork. The changes have had a significant effect on the project, enabling the analysis of the relationship between ISNs and urban development in the research locality. The emphasis of constant reflection and readjustment of both questions asked and methods used (see Bryant & Charmaz 2007b) have been a tremendous help in

carrying out research as an outsider in a setting, which has been more complex than a high marginality and high crime area, as portrayed by the media (see de Mauleón 2015; Rabasa 2015).

Even though the data I collected included some limitations due to the approach of using gatekeepers to establish local contacts and imbalance in terms of gender and age groups, the high number of one-to-one interviews and the use of two gatekeeper organisations increase the validity of the data. While the limitations reduce the possibility of gender and generational comparisons, the large amount of data collected using observation, interviews and focus groups reaching a high level of triangulation provided sufficient material for analysing ISNs in the research locality. I approached the research locality as an instrumental case study that informs theory formation (see Stake 1995), aiming to explore whether social networks can be useful in explaining local agency in urban development based on the unique settings of the research locality, rather than create broad generalisations.

The research locality and the data for that matter should not be treated as “representative of poor neighbourhoods” (Small 2009:16) but as a single case study that provides detailed information that enables generating theories about social processes in said context. While the research locality has historically been a highly marginalised area, nearly as many levels of marginalisation have been experienced in the neighbourhood as in the wider borough of Iztapalapa as showed in the maps depicting levels of marginalisation (figures 2 & 3). One of the challenges but also one of the elements that has substantially limited my interactions with locals has been the potential danger of carrying out research in Mexico and more specifically in Iztapalapa as a foreigner and as a young woman. While I never experienced any threatening situations throughout my fieldwork, I believe this was because I was extremely cautious even though at times I perhaps could have gained more data by being less cautious.

4. The processes of neighbourhood and informal social network formation

Urban development, especially in the peripheral areas in Latin America, has often been initiated by local residents in a context of illegal land occupations and incremental self-help housing (Bredenoord & Van Lindert 2014). Urban research considers these developments often informal or irregular settlements (Perlman 2004). In Mexico, neighbourhoods that have formed in this manner are called *colonias populares* or working-class “people’s neighbourhoods” (Hernández Bonilla 2009:192). In Iztapalapa, many new neighbourhoods formed between the 1960s and 1980s have since then become consolidated as part of the eastern borough in Mexico City (Ziccardi 2000). The consolidation processes often include local residents’ efforts to improve the living environment and basic services in addition to regularisation of land tenure (Bredenoord & Van Lindert 2014; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010).

This chapter describes neighbourhood formation in the research locality and the transformation from agricultural land to an urban residential area. The formation of the neighbourhood is also the beginning of local support relationships and informal social networks (ISNs), making the analysis of the historical processes related to the urban development relevant to this study. The focus is on the informal: collaborations between neighbours in the absence of more formal organisations or institutional actors. Informality has played a major role in the urbanisation of Mexico City, due to lack of public housing and inadequate housing policies in response to rapid urban change (see Connolly 2009; Moctezuma 2001). This is reflected in the name *colonias populares*, the self-built people’s neighbourhoods.

The history of Iztapalapa is first discussed providing context of the wider borough where the research locality is situated, as the patterns of migration and urbanisation reflect those of Iztapalapa. Iztapalapa is known for extremely rapid population growth and intense processes of urbanisation (Castillo Palma 2012; Montaña 1984). Prior to urbanisation, the borough had a long history as an agricultural area, which is why more information is available about the older parts of the borough, the *pueblos originarios* (original villages) (see e.g. Hernández Granados 1977; Nazario Cruz 2013) and less so on the newer neighbourhoods, such as the research locality. Some of the current issues affecting Iztapalapa are also considered, as these are broadly similar to those present in the research locality. Both the history and more contemporary challenges in

Iztapalapa and Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (CAM) provide some explanation to the formation and transformation of ISNs in the research locality.

Urbanised between the 1970s and 1990s, the research locality is one of the younger areas of Iztapalapa. Very little information is held about the formation of the locality or how it has become one of the most populated neighbourhoods in Iztapalapa (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal 2003).⁴⁴ The four focus groups held in Spring 2017 provide data especially on the historical aspects of neighbourhood formation, providing a tool for piecing together the story of urbanisation processes from participants' memories in group conversation settings. The focus groups were also supported by one-to-one interviews with those participants who took part in neighbourhood-wide collective projects. All the information regarding delivery of basic services and neighbourhood urbanisation is based on the data from the focus groups and interviews unless otherwise noted. The collective processes that were part of the urban development of an informal settlement included both small group efforts among the nearest neighbours and neighbourhood-wide projects. Considering how these processes intertwined allows building an understanding of how informal social networks were formed first as community networks between neighbours in the locality, differing from more personal networks of kin and friends (see Wellman & Leighton 1979).

Participants' experiences of moving to an undeveloped area are considered through descriptive analysis, aiming to provide a detailed description of the history of the research locality. Focusing on the role of ISNs in local development, the analysis draws particularly on participants' efforts to improve the area and the delivery of basic infrastructure. The descriptive analysis is presented through sections focusing on the uncertainties of moving to a new area, lack of services and the challenges of urbanisation, considering these processes in relation to community networks. The concept of place and place-making is used to focus on the social and physical side of neighbourhood formation (see Lombard 2014). Place-making refers to the many processes related to turning space into a place that is made meaningful through dynamic physical and social practices such as building attachment and identification to a certain space (see Aravot 2002; Jorgensen & Stedman 2006; Massey 1995; Rolnik 2014).

⁴⁴ Several visits to the historical archive of Iztapalapa did not provide any official information about the formation of the research locality neighbourhood. The archive only held one three-page document naming the main land holding company and the land invasions that resulted in the company losing some of its land.

4.1 A brief history of Iztapalapa

The transformation of Iztapalapa from agricultural land to industrial areas and urban settlement was a multilateral process involving the redistribution of public, private and *ejidal* lands by both legal and illegal means (Montaño 1984). The term *ejido* refers to agricultural land and the surrounding human settlements. *Ejido* is a collective form of tenure where land is divided into individual parcels which are farmed for collective gain and created mostly in the 1930s (Díaz Barriga 1995). The collective nature of *ejido* land became problematic when housing development and self-help construction started to change the use of land. While agrarian reforms in 1992 gave *ejidatarios*⁴⁵ the right to sell and rent their land, rapid urbanisation in Mexico City in the 1950s-1980s meant that *ejido* land was either bought by settlers illegally from *ejidatarios* and third parties or invaded forming informal settlements (Díaz Barriga 1995; Lombard 2016; Varley 1985). The regularisation of informally acquired land began in 1973 through the Comisión para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra (CORETT), which aimed to prevent further formation of irregular settlements (Varley 1985).

According to Montaño, *ejido* land was turned into industrial areas through government expropriation which lasted until the 1950s in Iztapalapa, with the remaining land being acquired by property development companies and private individuals (Montaño 1984:13). Preceding urbanisation, Iztapalapa has historically consisted of pockets of populated areas and villages (see image 1 for a map of *pueblos originarios* in Iztapalapa) due to the location of settlements in the proximity of the system of lakes in the east of the Valley of Mexico (Montaño 1984:14). Irregular urbanisation along with slum constructions changed Iztapalapa to a densely populated working-class borough between 1970-80 due to the availability of cheap land near the city centre (Montaño 1984:202; Ziccardi 2000).

⁴⁵ *Ejidatarios* held the rights to *ejido* land, yet the rights to sell *ejido* land was limited by the agrarian law until 1992. The limits the agrarian law posed on *ejido* land until 1992 were the underlying factors leading to illegal land sales, invasions and other informal forms of land appropriation at time of rapid urbanisation. (Jones & Ward 1998; Varley 1985.)

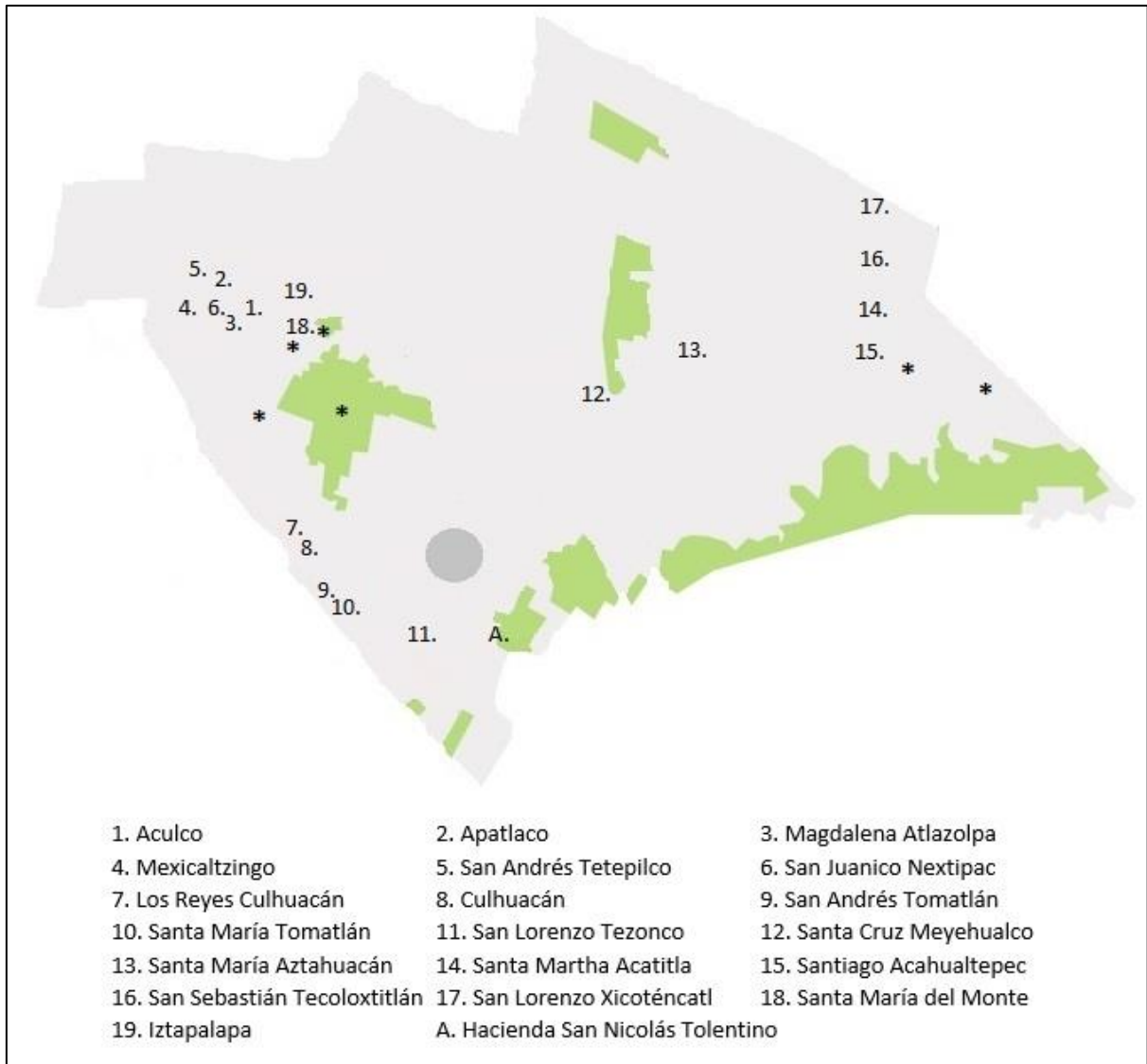


Image 1 Map of pueblos originarios and archaeological sites* in Iztapalapa (Author's construction)

4.1.1 Processes of intense urbanisation in Iztapalapa

The urbanisation of Iztapalapa follows largely the patterns in the rest of Mexico City, where population started to increase significantly in the 1940s. The population of Mexico City reached 2.6 million people in 1950, increasing by 31% from 1940 (Castillo Palma 2012:147). Nationally, the two main phases of migration in the 20th century took place during the Mexican revolution (1910-1921) and industrialisation (1930-1970) (Negrete Salas 2000:265). The main reason for moving to the city was the growing demand for workers for industry and services (Castillo Palma 2012). In 1940, the areas receiving most migrants were the boroughs Gustavo A. Madero and Azcapotzalco, with fewer people moving towards the east to Itzacoalco and Itzapalapa (Castillo

Palma 2012:148). Regardless of this the population of Iztapalapa doubled from 1940 to 1950 indicating strongly accelerating urbanisation (Castillo Palma 2012:149).

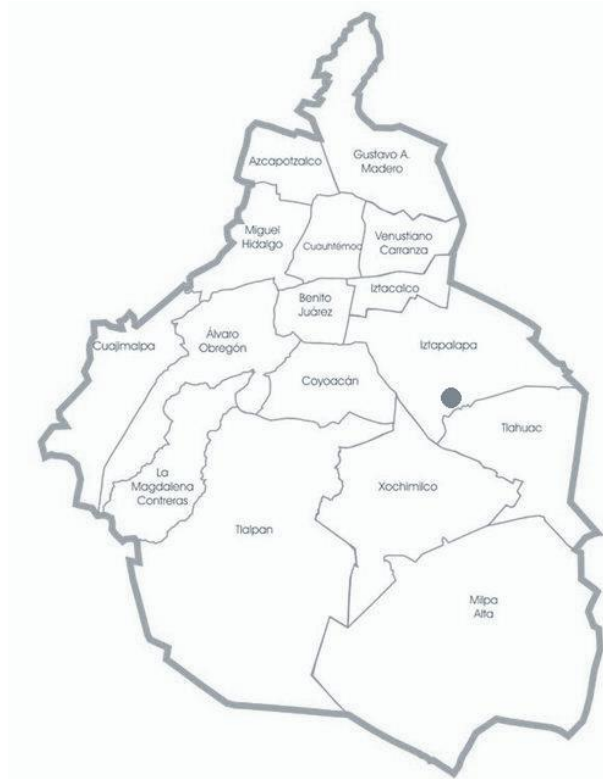


Figure 4 Map of the 16 boroughs of Mexico City and the research locality

The annual population growth rate in the metropolitan area of Mexico City reduced from 5.3% during 1960-1970 to 4.2% in 1970-1980 (Negrete Salas 2000:265). While this shows that the metropolitan area as a whole was growing at a more intense rate until the 1970s, the largest waves of urbanisation reached Iztapalapa after the peak of urbanisation in the metropolitan area. Figure 5 shows the population of both Iztapalapa and Mexico City between 1960 and 2015. While the population of Mexico City reduced slightly from 1980 to 1990, the population of Iztapalapa kept growing, although more modestly than from 1970 to 1980. Iztapalapa became urbanised mostly as a result of migration within the city, not direct rural-urban migration (Castillo Palma 2012).

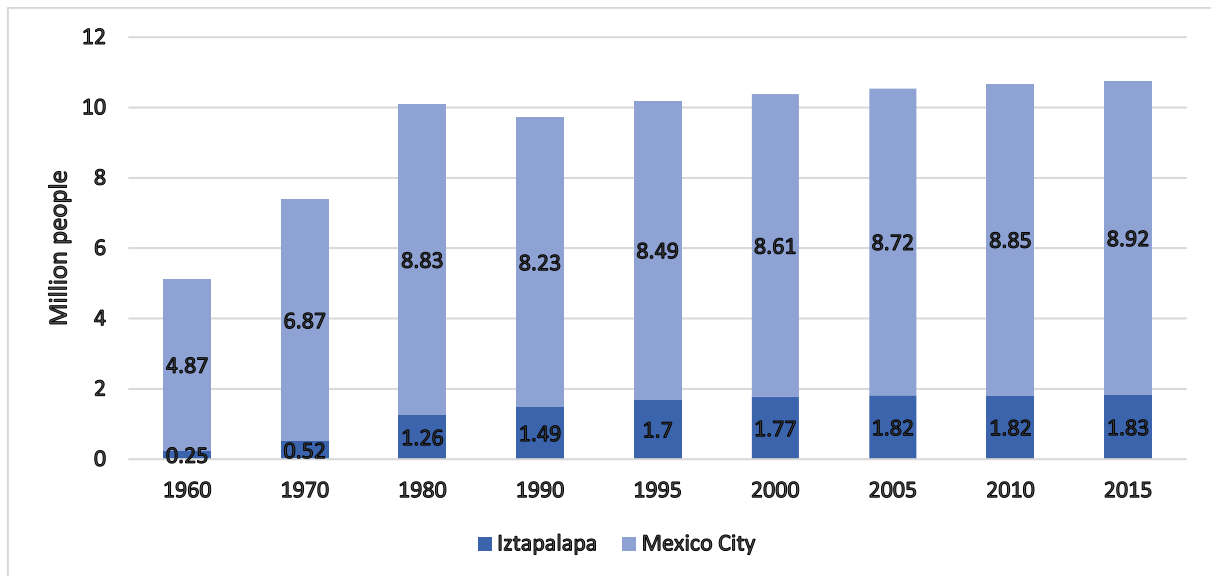


Figure 5 Population in Iztapalapa and Mexico City between 1960 and 2015 (Figure based on INEGI 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015a)

Most of the *ejidal* land had already been divided into smaller plots by 1940, following land division that started in the 1920s as part of the agrarian reform (Montaño 1984:116-117). The old hacienda of San Nicolas Tolentino Buenavista in San Lorenzo Tezonco was one of the first that was turned into an agricultural settlement during the 1910s (Castillo Palma 2012:153), slowly taking the form of an urban neighbourhood. Agriculture started to disappear from Iztapalapa as farming became unsustainable due to lack of water and the small plots of land (Montaño 1984:172). Montaño's analysis (1984:173) shows that based on the census of urban and rural population, urban settlements of 2,500 people and more increased from 50% in 1940 to containing 82% of Iztapalapa's population by 1955. Some small farms and *ejidos* still remained across Iztapalapa in the 1950s, but it quickly became more profitable to sell farming land as plots (Castillo Palma 2012:154-155). *Ejidatarios* and their families often lived in extreme poverty which is why they had no alternative but to sell land illegally to major landholders such as property development companies and wealthy individuals trading in land sales (Montaño 1984:30, 80).

The remaining agricultural land was slowly taken over by 'irregular settlements' (Castillo Palma 2012:155) and groups of individuals who were fraudulently selling land they had no ownership of to those looking to buy at low prices – often migrants who used to be *ejidal* farmers (Montaño 1984:203). Former farmers found themselves in a situation where they were confronting *ejidatarios* and previously settled local communities in attempts to acquire land to settle on

(Montaño 1984:203). Former *ejidal* farmers and migrants often took part in land invasions due to the poor quality and insufficient quantity of land otherwise available (Calderón Cockburn 1987:303-304). The land invasions led to the creation of new irregular settlements, neighbourhoods that later became known as *colonias populares*, characterised by high levels of poverty and marginalisation (Ziccardi 2000:594). Irregular settlements are not only common in Iztapalapa but continue to be an issue in other boroughs in Mexico City, such as Xochimilco and Magdalena Contreras (see Aguilar & López Guerrero 2013; Wigle 2010). Self-built housing has been a creative and necessary solution due to a lagging housing policy and lack of adequate public housing. The self-built homes vary greatly in quality of build, whereas lack of basic services is a more distinctive feature of *colonias populares* in Iztapalapa (Castillo Palma 2012).

Migrants moved to the metropolitan area mostly from the nearby states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, Puebla, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Veracruz and Guerrero between 1965 and 1990 (Negrete Salas 2000:268). The 1970s saw a wave of migrants move to Iztapalapa particularly from Guerrero and Oaxaca (Montaño 1984:203). However, previous research shows that the migration flows to Iztapalapa were not direct rural-urban change (Castillo Palma 2012; Greene 2007; Rosales Ortega et al. 2005). Families or individuals often came to Mexico City from the nearby states to live and work in central parts of the city, then settled in Iztapalapa later as it was still possible to buy land there. This can be described as generational change, as young adults established themselves in the city before getting married and settling down in Iztapalapa, where they built their own houses (Castillo Palma 2012:174). In the 1930s Iztapalapa was still an area passed by migrants on their way to work in the city, while by the 1950s it had already turned into an area of permanent habitation, forming a reserve of labour for the needs of the megacity (Montaño 1984:202). Iztapalapa still has a higher percentage of dwellings owned by the habitants compared to the city as a whole (73% compared to 65%) (Rosales Ortega et al. 2005:67). This also applied in the research locality, as 51 out of 58 interviewees (or 88%) were homeowners, while only seven of the homeowners did not live in a self-built property.

The population of Iztapalapa increased more than 23-fold from 76 600 in 1950 to 1 771 700 in 2000 (Ziccardi 2000:590). The population exploded between 1970 and 1980, increasing from 522,100 to 1,199,600 people in a decade (Ziccardi 2000:590). This was mostly due to migration flows within the city, as Iztapalapa did not start to attract more migrants to the metropolitan area until 1985-1990 (Negrete Salas 2000). The population density in Iztapalapa was similar to that of the wider city in the 1970s, yet the rapid increase in population from 1970 to 1980 led to a density of “142.4 habitants per hectare in year 2000” (Rosales Ortega et al. 2005:22). The

population density in the wider Mexico City was 56.95 habitants per hectare in year 2000, not changing much from the levels in the 1970s (Rosales Ortega et al. 2005:22). Iztapalapa thus continues to be a densely populated borough with a wide range of issues related to the high concentration of people, some of which are outlined below.

4.1.2 Current issues related to urban development in Iztapalapa

Despite widespread regularisation of former irregular settlements, Iztapalapa continues to have a bad reputation in the megacity and is considered a no-go-zone among the city's wealthier residents.⁴⁶ The main issues in terms of urban development are linked to low income levels and the high number of habitants, which makes it challenging to provide sufficient public services (Ziccardi 2000:594). Basic infrastructure as well as transport connections have improved in Iztapalapa due to local efforts as part of the rise of urban social movements in the 1980s, with political links making it possible to achieve some of the vital services (Ziccardi 2012:192).⁴⁷ Local residents often held meetings to discuss and organise change in their neighbourhoods (Gissi 2009).

This type of self-help housing is a solution to a lack of formal housing; however, land titling programmes led by agencies such as FIDEURBE (Fideicomiso de Interés Social para el Desarrollo Urbano de La Ciudad de México; Mexico City Urban Development Trust), CORETT-DF (Comisión de Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra; Commission for Land Tenure Regularisation-Federal District) and DGRT (Dirección General de Regularización Territorial; General Management of Territorial Regularisation) have contributed to formalising these areas (Díaz Barriga 1995; Huamán 2010).⁴⁸ Regardless of formalisation of land titles, the environmental and social challenges in Iztapalapa have largely remained the same (Ziccardi 2000). There is still a strong element of informality in Iztapalapa, where most of the homes are "self-built" (Greene 2007:203).

⁴⁶ Iztapalapa is frequently portrayed in media as a negative area (see e.g. Rodea 2017). Informal conversations during fieldwork especially in other parts of Mexico City confirmed that this negative connotation is replicated in the opinions of residents across the city.

⁴⁷ Moctezuma (2001) provides a detailed account of some of the urban social movements in Iztapalapa. However, as only one of the research participants mentioned involvement in an organised movement, I have not considered these movements to have much effect in the research locality specifically.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the organisations and processes of tenure regularisation and land titling in Mexico City see Huamán (2010). These have not been covered in more detail in this thesis because of the lack of data collected in interviews and focus groups regarding land titling in the research locality.

Greene – writing in 2007 – stated that 20% of households in Iztapalapa still lacked drainage and 42% of residents did not have access to the public water network compared to 29% across the city (Greene 2007:203). The borough continues to be known for low-quality tap water even if the water network covers most of Iztapalapa by now and drinking water is distributed by water tank trucks to those located beyond the network or when disruptions occur.⁴⁹

With a population of 1.8 million, Iztapalapa is the size of a large city itself, forming a heterogeneous entity. Pockets of higher income areas are located nearer the city centre, whereas the areas on the eastern side of Iztapalapa have historically been less well off (Rosales Ortega et al. 2005). This seems to follow patterns of migration and older settlements, so that *pueblos originarios* (original villages) are nowadays more established than the more peripheral areas that formed as irregular settlements more recently.⁵⁰ The levels of income have increased from 1990 to 2000, so that it was only the areas furthest to the east bordering State of Mexico that still had only one to two minimum wages as total household income in year 2000 (Rosales Ortega et al. 2005:31). In 2000, the daily minimum wage in Mexico City was 37.8 pesos (2.12 USD in August 2017), the highest bracket of minimum wage in Mexico (SAT 2016). The neighbourhoods in the eastern parts of Iztapalapa are also the most densely populated parts of Iztapalapa, which explains why Iztapalapa as a whole was still the second poorest borough in all of Mexico based on number of people living in poverty (CONEVAL 2011). The officials in Iztapalapa considered the majority of local working population to live in poverty, influenced by marginalisation in terms of malnutrition, complex families, illiteracy, poor health and issues with violence and drug abuse (Delegación Iztapalapa 2008:3).

The borough (*delegación*) of Iztapalapa is part of what is commonly known as the *oriente* (east). This area spans across the eastern borders of Mexico City to the State of Mexico, including areas such as Nezahualcóytl. Violence, crime and lack of basic services are some of the issues linked to these eastern parts of the megacity (Jaramillo-Vázquez 2015:51). Iztapalapa, representing the larger entity of the east, has a negative connotation, which is reflected through derogative names such as *Iztapalacra*.⁵¹ It is questionable how much of this is based on negative perceptions of the area and how much this reflects everyday life.

⁴⁹ Tap water runs yellow in many parts of Iztapalapa, including Desarrollo Urbano Quetzalcoatl where I lived during second stage of fieldwork.

⁵⁰ For maps of levels of marginalisation, see figures 1 and 2 in chapter 3.

⁵¹ *Lacra* referring to a social or moral blemish or scar.

While especially northern parts of Mexico are known for crime and violence relating to illegal drug trade, Mexico City has been more affected by muggings, kidnappings and assaults (Alvarado 2000; Alvarado Mendoza 2016; Morris 2013). Robberies are the most common type of crime in Mexico City (Pansters & Castillo Berthier 2007). Overall, reported crime in Mexico City increased in the 1990s coinciding with the economic crisis (Alvarado 2000). Regardless of a reduction in crime in the 2000s, the general perception is that crime in Mexico City is increasing as well as becoming more violent and more organised than before (Castillo Berthier & Jones 2009). Youth gang culture in Mexico City was influenced by the rise of gangs in the U.S. in the 1980s (Jones 2013; Rabasa 2015). There are an estimated 30 active youth gangs in Iztapalapa which are suggested to be more linked to organised crime than in other parts of Mexico City (Jones 2013:17). Iztapalapa is said to house crime networks that relate to drug trade and the trafficking of stolen vehicles (Pansters & Castillo Berthier 2007:591).

According to Müller (2012:329), the “upsurge in crime” that was witnessed across Mexico City after 1995 has also increased the level of crime and violence in Iztapalapa making it known as one of the city’s crime hotspots. In 2016, 21.4% of reported crime in Iztapalapa was of high impact⁵², a high level compared to other boroughs and second only to Gustavo A. Madero (PGJDF 2017). This explains partially the violent reputation Iztapalapa continues to have. However, it is likely that many crimes in Iztapalapa (as also in other areas) go unreported due to lack of trust in the police force.⁵³ As Müller (2012:329) shows, according to local residents, corrupt local police officers may even contribute to the increase in crime by collaborating with perpetrators providing confidential information or not reporting crime when it takes place.

The east continues to be known as a precarious area due to the same issues of legal status of land ownership, lack of public and private investment, low levels of income, lack of public spaces, location on the periphery of a megacity and poor quality of vital services such as water (Ziccardi 2012:192). What makes Iztapalapa an even more controversial area is its political power, as a high percentage of those eligible to vote within Mexico City are located in Iztapalapa. Greene (2007:203) estimated that some 18% of the eligible voters in Mexico City live in Iztapalapa. This

⁵² Crimes of high social impact include murder, violation, kidnapping, car theft, robberies in public places, private homes and at cashpoints, robberies of drivers, passengers or handlers of public transport and taxis, robberies at businesses and violence from a firearm (PGJDF 2017).

⁵³ Previous research shows how public opinion in Mexico is mostly that the police force is corrupt (see e.g. Davis & Ruiz de Teresa 2014; Fried et al. 2010).

is widely known and political parties often hold rallies and events offering participants food parcels (*dispensa*) in return for a copy of their identification papers (*credencial*).⁵⁴

4.2 Neighbourhood formation as the beginning of informal social networks

CAM – the research locality – is situated in the southern part of Iztapalapa. CAM is bordered by a set of hills to the east, densely populated neighbourhoods to the north, the city's main male prison to the west and to the south by San Lorenzo Tezonco, one of the 16 original villages (*pueblos originarios*) of Iztapalapa (now known as Lomas San Lorenzo and Pueblo San Lorenzo neighbourhoods). While there is little information recorded of the urbanisation of CAM and the surrounding neighbourhoods, there are some records of economic activity in San Lorenzo since the 19th century (Montaño 1984:25). The records refer to the *hacienda* (estate) of San Nicolás Buenavista, which was slowly turned into an agrarian neighbourhood following division and sale of land, only returning a fraction of the land to the villagers of San Lorenzo Tezonco (Montaño 1984; Castillo Palma 2012).

Several participants mentioned that some of the land in the neighbourhood was not suitable for building on because the ground was not stable.⁵⁵ Yet one of these areas was now the location of one of the major housing sites, which has required some of the buildings to be corrected due to structural damage caused by ground instability. Some of the land surrounding the hacienda in San Lorenzo is wetland that used to consist of small ponds that provided local villagers with fish (Montaño 1984:67). Castillo Palma (2012:25) shows how Iztapalapa used to be a peninsula surrounded by the lagoons of Chalco and Tescúco. Secondary sources do not provide more detail about the urbanisation of the wetlands, but it is possible that the instable land is one reason why the neighbourhood became urbanised later than the surrounding neighbourhoods.

FG discussions and interviews indicate that CAM became inhabited first in the South-Western part of the neighbourhood. Those participants who have lived in CAM longest live in these parts, particularly in the area surrounding the Catholic church Santísimo Sacramento (see image 2). Those who arrived to the neighbourhood in the mid-1980s or later inhabited the Eastern parts of CAM. The two major housing estates located in the North-Eastern part were built in stages. Benito Juárez housing estate was a social housing project, housing families displaced due to the 1985 earthquake and completed in 1990-1992. The Cedros housing estate was a commercial

⁵⁴ I know this from attending one political rally myself during fieldwork.

⁵⁵ Based on several informal conversations and focus groups held 23/02/2017, 24/02/2017 and 27/03/2017.

neighbourhood were formed through illegal settlements in the 1970s on land that used to be part of the *ejido* Santa Cruz Meyehualco.

The document in the Archivo Histórico de Iztapalapa refers to land titling that took place in the 1990s during the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari.⁵⁸ (Archivo Histórico de Iztapalapa 2017). While some participants mentioned land titling as a process that involved visits to the borough authorities, interactions with participants provided little detail of how this process took place and how many local residents were involved in titling. This is evident from the quote below, which shows that the land owners did not necessarily know much of the legislation involving *ejidal* land use. The interviews also showed that not all participants obtained land in an informal manner:

I had to pay for my plot in monthly instalments until I was given my paperwork. I bought the land from a private person. He was registered at the borough as a land owner, he had a very large piece of land that he was selling so the borough was helping him do that. I think they called them *ejidatarios* (Guadalupe, aged 67, interview 26/04/2017).

CAM formed after the 1970-1980 peak of population growth in Iztapalapa, when the estimated annual population growth rate was 8.80% (compared to 1.71% in 1980-1990) (Rosales et al. 2005:22). Considering the patterns of urbanisation in Iztapalapa, CAM is a newer neighbourhood that became inhabited mostly during the 1980s. The 1985 earthquake caused the final major wave of urbanisation due to the need to re-house people living in areas severely affected by the earthquake.⁵⁹ Figure 6 below shows the location of CAM in relation to San Lorenzo Tezonco, the new metro line 12 and other nearby neighbourhoods.⁶⁰ Urban sprawl reached the research locality following urbanisation patterns in more established areas nearby. Once older neighbourhoods such as Francisco Villa and Puente Blanco had been inhabited, the edge of residential area started to spread towards CAM. One of the participants lived first in Puente Blanco where she arrived in 1960 before moving to CAM. Similarly, another family lived first in

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of the legislative reform relating to *ejidal* land see Jones and Ward (1998).

⁵⁹ The 1985 earthquake hit Mexico City on the morning of September 19th. The 8.1 Richter scale earthquake was followed by another of 7.1 magnitude the evening of 20th September 1985. This was a major disaster killing thousands of people and injuring over 10,000 people. Official figures of the devastation remain estimates. (See Dynes, Quarantelli & Wenger 1990.)

⁶⁰ The first metro line to Iztapalapa was line 8. This was completed in 1994, including five stops in Iztapalapa, terminating at the Constitución de 1917 stop, located near the centre of Iztapalapa. Line 12 serves the more southern parts of Iztapalapa and became fully operational in 2015. Both metro lines have stops approximately 2.5-3km from the centre of the research locality.

Francisco Villa before moving to CAM in 1971. Being located near more established neighbourhoods was important as it enabled new residents to access services that were missing in CAM. Previous research shows that building a house near the existing electric power lines is a strategic choice, as it meant light could be taken from the electric main onward using cables (Kovacic & Giampietro 2017). The most populated areas were San Lorenzo Tezonco village with 1,934 inhabitants in 1940 and 3,208 in 1950 (Montaño 1984:174). In 2000, the population of CAM was 24,655 people, in an area of around one square kilometre (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal 2003).

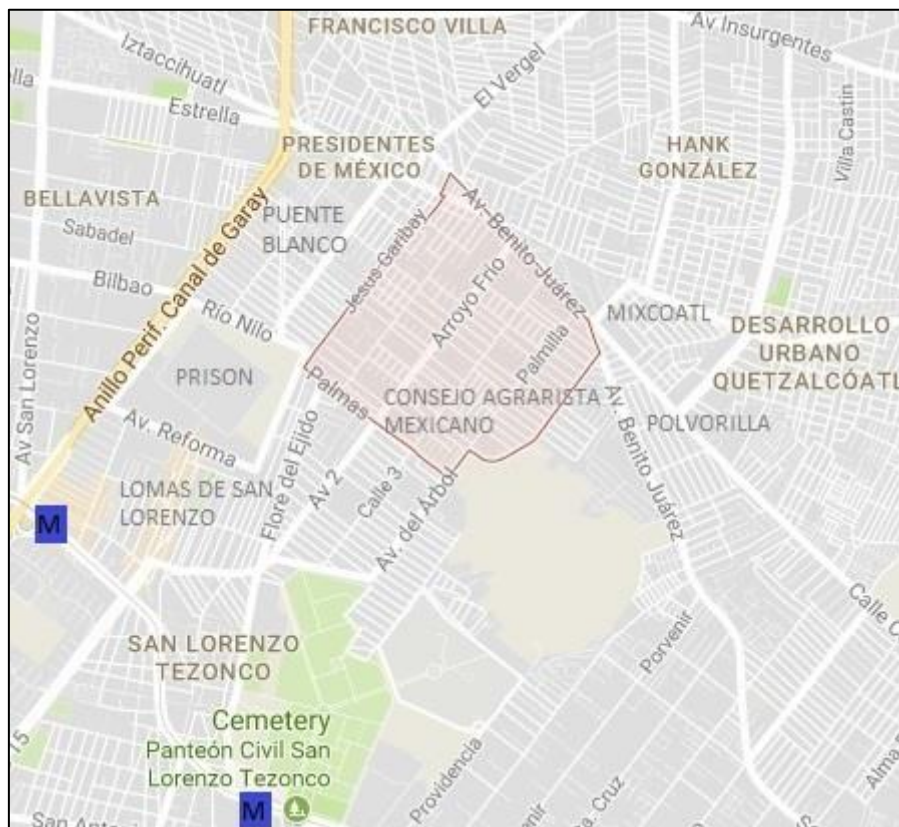


Figure 6 Map of Consejo Agrarista Mexicano and surrounding neighbourhoods (Google Maps 2017).

The sale of plots (*terrenos*) in CAM started around the 1970s, yet the rate of transformation from rural to urban land use was at its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the research participants moved to the area around 1982-1985, explaining that CAM became highly populated by 1988. As one participant stated: “There were a few houses already but there was no light, no water, no drainage... I have lived here for 34 years this year in August [2017]” (Helena, aged 68, focus group 27/03/17). She arrived to CAM in 1983 with her husband and lived one street away from another participant who arrived to the area in 1975, showing how long some families lived there without basic services. Two participants who arrived in CAM in 1975

were the first families to build houses on their streets. According to several participants, in 1984 there was still plenty of open space and very few houses, whereas the area was noticeably more populated by 1985. One participant described herself as one of the founders of the neighbourhood having moved there in 1971:

I have lived here for 46 years... I decided I needed a house for my children and I came to search over here. They were selling *terrenos* and we came. There was nothing here, just land used for farming corn, courgette and tomato (Sofia, aged 67, interview 04/04/2017).

4.2.1 Dealing with the uncertainties of moving to an undeveloped area

Many participants described the experience of moving to a new and unknown but also undeveloped area as a difficult and frightening process. Buying a plot of land could be risky in itself due to many unauthorised sellers but the process of moving to an area that consisted of fields and lacked all urban infrastructure made it particularly challenging. The participants' doubts were overpowered by their aspirations to build their own house, which many female participants said was their suggestion.⁶¹ Several women also told how they instigated the process, having to convince their spouses to buy land and build a house for the family. This was especially in cases where the couple already lived in Mexico City but shared a house with the husband's family. Even though men were typically the heads of the households, women were responsible for the progress in building a house because men tended to work long days.

When I arrived, my husband said he will not come and live here because it is very ugly here. And I said 'well now it is but with time we can make it better. One day it would be fixed, and we can make it better'. I said to him that 'if you want, stay here with your mother but I will go and build my own house'. In the end he came with me (Magdalena, aged 68, FG 24/04/2017).

The experience of building a house here was lovely. First you buy a *terreno*, materials to build, speak to builders... I had to come here to organise things because I used to live near Portales and my husband could not be here because he had to work (Araceli, aged 71, interview 08/12/2016).

⁶¹ This relates to family expansion stage. As discussed in chapter 5, it used to be common for women to move to live with their husband's family upon marriage.

Some participants had the benefit of other family members purchasing land in CAM and one participant had several siblings living on the same street. The support of family or friends was of great importance considering the difficult living conditions in an unurbanised area. However, for the majority of participants, moving to CAM meant leaving behind existing support networks, especially extended family. One participant was hesitating to buy land but was assured by the godmother of her child (*comadre*) that the land sale was legal, as she knew the landowner personally. Despite the difficulties of settling in a new neighbourhood and having to make it liveable, many participants felt proud of their achievements of coming to the area, incrementally building a house and gaining basic services and infrastructure:

It was so difficult for us to get started here that when people ask me if I would sell my little house, I say I would never do that because of the amount of work that we had to put into living here. It is better to build more rooms above if needed (Magdalena, aged 68, FG 24/04/2017).

The main reason for moving to the area was to build a family home and settle down when land was still affordable and available. This reflects the general characteristics of migration to Iztapalapa as reasons for moving to CAM were to relocate within the megacity (see Castillo Palma 2012). Prior to moving there many were renting with other extended family members, close friends or living in accommodation provided by their employers. Houses were self-built and to begin with often consisted of one room in a make-shift building, following the principles of incremental self-help housing (see e.g. Greene & Rojas 2008).

I arrived here 33 years ago when I got married. My husband had already bought a *terreno* here and we had two rooms in a home built of steel sheets. He was still paying for the *terreno*, it was paid for in parts. There was no drainage or pavement. There was water and light, but light was taken with cables and it often failed to work (Luciana, aged 64, interview 10/03/2017).

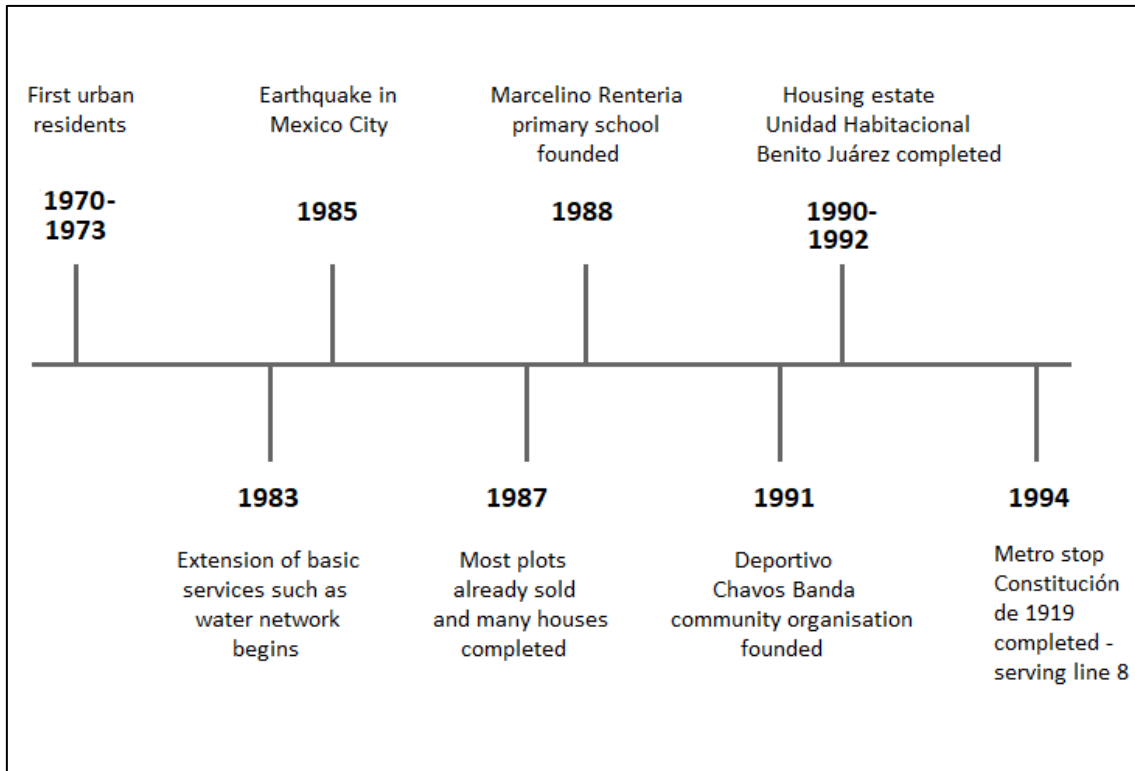


Figure 7 Timeline of key developments in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano and surrounding areas
(Author's construction)

Some participants built the first house from whatever material was available to protect their plot from land invaders by showing that someone lived there. Most participants immediately built a make-shift building⁶² so they could live on site while continuing building a house, but there were also some who continued living with family elsewhere, commuting to their new plot after work or over the weekends and spending more time preparing the new house. The process of building was arduous, and most participants carried out the building works themselves with no outside help. Previous research also shows how in an informal settlement in the state of Veracruz, Mexico, all family members who were present, including young children, helped in construction work (Lombard 2014). One participant explained it took them five years just to build the foundations for the house because the plot they purchased was wasteland and not suitable for building on. This meant they were able to buy it for a low price but also meant it took longer to connect to the water network. Overall, these types of issues are characteristic of

⁶² The building materials used in the make-shift houses were mostly sheets of tin and steel, which nowadays are still in use but mostly only for roofs of houses, according to one participant.

informal settlements, which are often built on land not suitable for housing (Davis 2006; Perlman 2004).⁶³



Image 3 Main street of Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Author's photo)

Dealing with the uncertainties of an unknown area shows the compromises that living in an informal settlement meant: often using illegal means to acquire land and services, as well as living in areas that are not suitable for building on. As Lombard (2014) among others shows, the struggles involved in inhabiting informal settlements do also act as a positive place-making practice, where marginalised groups improve land that is unused making it liveable. Place-making includes processes of building attachment, dependence and identification to a space (Aravot 2002; Jorgensen & Stedman 2006; Lepofsky & Fraser 2003). It can be both a physical process of building a house but also has an inherently social and affective dimension, such as turning a house into a home or feeling at home in a neighbourhood. The informal history of the research locality and gradual neighbourhood formation indicate how place is created through social relations and collective processes within the locality and in relation to place identity and

⁶³ As discussed in chapter 2, informal settlements in Mexico City were often a combination of land invasion, illegal land sale and formal land sale, which is why they are often referred to as irregular settlements.

the outside world (see Massey 1995). This includes the process of changing the meaning, as well as, the use of space from agricultural land to an urban settlement.

The affective dimension of place-making in the research locality was evident in participants' accounts of the effort required to move to the area and build their own house. These experiences were referred to with pride, as indicated by the quotes from Araceli and Magdalena above, as well as, discussions in the focus groups. Building a house incrementally was motivated most of all by the needs and wants of young families to provide a better future for their children.

In informal settlements, the contested meaning of place (Massey 1995) is highlighted when comparing how settlements are seen by those inhabiting the place, actively making it (see Cresswell 2005), and those who lack personal experience and consider settlements from afar. The affective side of place-making reflects this, as those who have endured difficulty and built their own house experience the property as something priceless, such as Magdalena's (FG 24/04/2017) commitment for her "little house". Previous research provides several examples of conflicting meanings of place in urban settings. Conflicting views often arise between local residents and local authorities over potential changes in use of public land, such as in the case of a public park in New York City (Cresswell 2005). The conflict may also occur between different resident groups, who have different views of public land management, which indicates that a place can hold several meanings even within a local population, as Hernández Bonilla's (2009) research in Xalapa, Mexico highlights.



Image 4 Self-built houses in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Author's photo)

Even though some scholars portray incremental housing nowadays in a slightly more positive light (see e.g. Dobson, Nyamweru & Dodman 2015), informal settlements are often depicted as chaotic continuous building sites by governments and developers (see e.g. Atuesta & Soares 2018; Davis 2006; Shatkin 2004). The importance of slowly expanding and improving self-built houses as a strategy that takes into consideration the abilities and resources of local residents is disregarded (see e.g. Ferguson & Smets 2010; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). Despite the positive aspects of place-making, a decision to obtain land in an undeveloped area and building a house with little help or resources was considered a strategy adopted out of necessity by the participants. This was often attributed to pressures to meet the needs of young families to gain their own property at a time when their household was expanding.⁶⁴ In a broader context, as discussed in chapter 2, informal housing and self-built strategies were not a minority response to the issues of inadequate housing provision in the expanding Mexico City.

It took a lot of work to come here, to buy a plot of land and bit by bit build our house. We did everything slowly because we didn't have a lot of money. We moved here because we used to live with my mother and when my brother moved in with his wife and child there wasn't enough space for us (Sara, aged 67, interview 08/02/2017).

⁶⁴ Several participants reportedly lived in overcrowded circumstances, sharing housing with other family members, prior to arriving to the research locality. This was discussed in interviews with Alberto (03/12/2016), Fabiana (17/11/2016), Maite (01/04/2017), Ricardo (03/04/2017), Sara (08/02/2017) and Sebastian (22/04/2017) particularly.



Image 5 Completed and unfinished houses in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Author's photo)

The family home was usually slowly improved adding a second or third floor when possible. The local Roman Catholic church *Santisimo Sacramento* in CAM was a good example of this type of incremental construction. Participants told how Mass used to take place outside when they arrived in 1975 and the location of the church was marked by a statue of the Virgin. The church was then built little by little with financial donations from local residents and completed after 1985. The current landscape showed that there were still many houses where this kind of transformation was ongoing, showing unfinished upper levels or missing windows (see images 5 and 7). This flexible way of building appeared to be one of the factors explaining the reduction in the level of marginalisation in the neighbourhood, as expanding an existing home vertically when resources so allowed was an easy solution to overcrowding. This process of building step-by-step and expanding homes when possible – or incremental housing – is estimated to stand “for 50-90% of residential development in most developing-country cities” (Ferguson & Smets 2010:288). While it is coined especially as a strategy applied by marginalised people, it has also become applied in social housing projects in both Latin America and across the world (see e.g. Greene & Rojas 2008; Lizarralde 2011).



Image 6 The landscape in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano in the late 1970s (photo taken by a participant and used here with permission)

Image 6 shows what the typical landscape was like in CAM still in the late 1970s – vast fields. When asked what the area used to be like, the vast majority of participants described it as *pura milpa*, plain corn field, with paths running through the fields. The lack of lighting meant it was impossible to do anything during the evenings outside and navigating through these fields was considered dangerous due to poor visibility even during the day. While many participants mentioned being wary of walking through the corn fields, only three participants mentioned violent crime occurring there, one explaining she saw a corpse hanging from a tree when taking her children to school in Francisco Villa neighbourhood.⁶⁵ The occasional incidents of violence were perhaps enabled by the undeveloped landscape and lack of formal law enforcement, which was later addressed by local ‘watchmen’ who patrolled the neighbourhood in the evenings with lanterns. A clear majority of participants still considered the contemporary neighbourhood more dangerous, with crime and violence being a more prominent part of everyday life than previously. These aspects form part of the analysis in chapter 7.

⁶⁵ Based on interviews with Fabiana (17/11/2016), Guadalupe (26/04/2017) and Sofia (04/04/2017).

4.2.2 The formation of community networks to improve living environment

The change from agricultural land to a densely populated residential area took place in stages with different collaborative strategies applied by local residents as they worked to improve their local area. New residents supported each other first very occasionally by offering advice or walking to nearby neighbourhoods together. Once the neighbourhood became more populated, collaborations with neighbours became more frequent as it was necessary to collectively drive forward the development of the area. This facilitated the formation of community networks, which comprised mostly of local non-kin actors, who provided each other with social support showing solidarity (see Wellman & Leighton 1979).



Image 7 A view of the built-up Consejo Agrarista Mexicano neighbourhood in April 2017

The lack of infrastructure and services meant the new residents had to go to nearby neighbourhoods of San Lorenzo or Francisco Villa to buy basic items like food. The distance to the neighbouring areas was between 1-3 kilometres but when the streets were still unpaved, walking there often meant going through corn fields. Without street lighting, any chores or trips to purchase goods had to be done during daylight: “In the evening when it was dark it was impossible to do anything. We had to use candles to see” (Larissa, aged 65, FG 24/04/2017). At the turn of the 1970s, milk could be collected from a farm but this meant walking there early in the morning. “We had to walk up until who knows what neighbourhood early in the morning to

buy milk. There was another woman I went with and we could together get a lift from a truck” (Olivia, aged 81, FG 23/02/2017). The availability of basic goods slowly increased when more people moved to the area. The local *tianguis* market was started around 1985, growing as the neighbourhood became more populated.⁶⁶

The participants described how electricity for lighting was taken from the nearest mains lighting point using illegal extensions to bring light to the new homes. Patricia who moved to the area in 1975 described the process of installing electric cables: “We located a light source on the corner of Avenida Benito Juarez, two blocks away from Calle Jose Lopez Portillo (main street in CAM) and we took light all the way from there using cables” (FG 27/03/2017). This was an informal solution to a lack of infrastructure, which meant that the electricity company would frequently cut the long cables disconnecting homes from the main network. The participants who had already started building their house often allowed new neighbours to take electricity for lighting from the cables they were already using, creating informal electricity networks. The transformation from informal to formal electricity network was not discussed by the participants in detail but required proof of tenure to proceed.

The most essential necessity, water, was accessed using wells before water tank trucks started to distribute water around 1985.⁶⁷ Those who did not build wells into the proximity of their homes were able to share a well with a neighbour: “I had a neighbour who had a well and she helped us with water because my husband never wanted to make a well” (Patricia, aged 63, FG 27/03/2017). Participants described the water from the wells as the cleanest that has ever been available in the area. The use of wells had to be stopped when the area became more populated and lack of drainage contaminated the groundwater. Some residents were already connected to the water network just before the 1985 earthquake. While the earthquake did not cause major devastation in CAM, the electricity and water network were damaged. Several participants said that water quality worsened due to the earthquake and has not improved since.

Collaboration with neighbours was occasional when the neighbourhood started to form, as shown by the examples of sharing water, access to electricity and trips to purchase basic goods. In most cases, building work was each family’s own responsibility, which many participants

⁶⁶ As explained in chapter 3, *tianguis* is an outdoor market where stalls are set up on the main avenue once or twice a week.

⁶⁷ One participant (FG 27/03/2017) stated that the water network had been installed when she arrived in 1975 but it was not active and they could not access water through it. They lived on the edge of CAM near Puente Blanco and Francisco Villa.

explained was because everyone had their own home to build. Only one participant said they helped another family build their house, also receiving help in return.⁶⁸ In most cases, occasional occurrences of collaboration such as Laura's experience below led to the formation of social ties that slowly evolved to strong local ties over the years, in some cases maturing into friendship between neighbours.

We were both working while building this place. First, we just made a small provisional room and had to put all the tools and materials there because our neighbour across the road said that people were trying to get in when we weren't here. One time they broke in and stole all our things so the neighbour opposite said he can store our things so that they wouldn't get stolen again (Laura, aged 65, interview 29/03/2017).

Occasional support where neighbours helped each other with basic issues like sharing water or passing light cables is an example of the formation of local support networks. Most participants identified those neighbours who lived closest and who had remained the same for several decades as the most trustworthy local non-kin ties, and members of their support networks: "I didn't know anyone when we moved here so it wasn't easy. Little by little I got to know some people by spending time working together to make the area better. Most people have come here from somewhere else" (Ana, aged 64, interview 24/11/2016). The processes of neighbouring in the contemporary ISNs is discussed in chapter 5.

It was regularly emphasised by many interviewees and focus group participants that once the area began to be more populated, residents started to collaborate with nearby neighbours making demands for basic services. Every street or block collaborated separately requesting basic infrastructure from the borough as the streets became habited, after 1983-1985 in most cases. Occasional collaborations with individual neighbours were extended to continuous collective projects between neighbours living on the same street, forming small community networks. Previous research in irregular settlements shows that collaborations for service delivery are often organised involving the whole neighbourhood (Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010) but this was not the case in CAM where residents came together street by street. One reason for this is the way the neighbourhood became inhabited gradually, instead of a collective group effort such as described by Moctezuma (2001), where two groups of people settled in one area, forming a community-based organisation with the help of external support. In the research

⁶⁸ I have discussed this particularly strong local non-kin support relationship in chapter 5.

locality, basic services were installed in stages following persistent requests and collaboration between local residents:

We had to ask for everything separately... We had to hire a truck to get the materials here and then the borough helped with the work. The sidewalks we had to install ourselves. There was this programme of *mitad y mitad*⁶⁹ [half and half] so the borough gave us materials and then we had to do the work but water and drainage was different. They gave us everything but we had to prepare the ground so they could come and just install it (Andrea, aged 71, interview 21/03/2017).

The collaboration between neighbours to improve the neighbourhood and deliver basic services can be described as actions of several small community networks, because the motivation for collaboration was based on shared needs of local young families. Most participants did not have any extended kin living in the same neighbourhood or nearby, which meant that social support relied more on non-kin ties, most of all neighbours. Wellman and Leighton (1979) consider community networks to be based on strong involvement between members and strong but also different strength ties that form locally extensive networks. A main characteristic of community networks according to Wellman and Leighton is the exchange of solidarity support, which can be accessed easily when support is required due to the size of the network (Wellman & Leighton 1979:373-374). In the research locality, the collaborations between new neighbours were first occasional and later organised to specifically drive the delivery of basic services. In that sense these ISNs resembled community networks, as these interactions often grew into more regular solidarity support.

The cooperation that was required between residents living on the same street increased familiarity through frequent interactions and despite seeking support from the local borough, the collaborations between local residents were very informal by nature. Most focus group participants⁷⁰ described forming small neighbourhood groups to drive the delivery of services,

⁶⁹ *Mitad y mitad* (half and half) was also mentioned by another participant but I have not been able to find any official records or literature mentioning this programme.

⁷⁰ There was general agreement in FGs 24/02/2017, 27/03/2017 and 24/04/2017 that neighbours collaborated street-by-street once more people arrived to populate each block. FG held 23/02/2017 highlighted that this depended on the area, as areas where more people arrived at the same time collaborated between more neighbours than those living on the same street or block.

as *jefes de manzana* or street representatives did not exist yet.⁷¹ The lack of formal local representation meant that the collaborations between neighbours were more informal. Collaboration with new neighbours who were most often complete strangers was made possible by the similar situation and recognised shared needs to act collectively. Areas where many people arrived around the same time were an exception to this, and instead of small neighbour groups, people joined forces through informal meetings held in the street. “Someone would say there is a meeting and everyone went... You had to go, because we were the owners of the houses” (Violeta, aged 73, FG 23/02/2017).

In most cases mentioned by the participants, neighbours organised by having informal conversations, collecting names of neighbours or paperwork where available and then visiting the borough offices in Centro Iztapalapa in person.⁷² The responsibility for presenting the borough with the evidence was often shared taking turns, so that those neighbours who were able to go in person did so. Even in those cases where a certain responsibility was taken over by one person, the participants always highlighted that several visits were needed for each service they were seeking, putting constant pressure on the borough. In some cases there was more clear leadership with one or two people taking the lead for organising requests for services, but this leadership was voluntary and only related to seeking each service based on the ability of the individual to attend the borough offices. There was usually no connection between these individuals and later more formally recognised *jefes de manzana*.

The community networks in the research locality were mostly constructed around the need for collective action and perhaps in that sense initially did not provide as broad a range of solidarity social support as previous research attaches to community networks (see Wellman & Leighton 1979; Wellman & Wellman 1992). Being driven by specific functions such as the need for basic services, however, shows that the community networks that formed in the research locality were based on “specialised relationships” (Wellman 1999:23). Other accounts of community ties recognise that community networks’ functions relate to more specific support, showing that local ties tend to provide social support in the form of small favours (Espinoza 1999; Lee & Campbell 1999; Lomnitz 2003; Otani 1999). Solidarity that is built around shared and specific

⁷¹ *Jefes de manzana* system was later formed as a predecessor of the existing neighbourhood committees and political local leaders. I discuss *jefes de manzana* along with other aspects of formal representation in the neighbourhood in section 8.2.2.

⁷² Based on FGs held 23/02/2017, 24/02/2017, 27/03/2017 and 24/04/2017 as well as interviews with Aitana 12/12/2016, Andrea 21/03/2017, Araceli 08/12/2016, Lucas 20/02/2017, Sara 08/02/2017, Sofia 04/04/2017, Valentina 07/04/2017 and Violeta 29/11/2016.

needs is also highlighted in other studies of neighbourhood formation, as groups that migrated to Mexico City together later continue functioning as community networks improving specific neighbourhood issues (Gissi 2009).

Despite some differences in how local residents formed the initial connections with their neighbours, the collective projects both depended on and facilitated the formation of locally based social ties. The collaborations were motivated most of all by a shared need to improve basic infrastructure, which indicates their community-orientation. The social ties that were formed through the functions of these small community networks were the first step towards strong ties with some neighbours. Wellman and Leighton (1979) point out that community networks often include a number of central members that are prone to taking on more responsibility than others. In the research locality this appears to also have been the case, as those individuals who frequently took on the responsibility to attend the borough offices showed some informal leadership.⁷³ This indicates that even though the collaborations and networks were formed and functioned on a mostly informal basis, there were also some aspects of more structured informality present.

The shared responsibilities also meant that the network members forming the cluster was dynamic and shifting, as different neighbours took on different roles. Describing the process of service delivery on her street, Patricia (FG 27/03/2017) stated: “we contributed for the good of everyone and sometimes collected money to get some food and organise get-togethers.”⁷⁴ One neighbour got us together and as a group of 5-6 people we were able to do it all”. The collective projects among neighbours, however, did not form one large community network, but several small networks, which later overlapped to some extent as network members participated in more neighbourhood-wide collaborations. These included the founding of a local primary school and the founding of DCB.⁷⁵

The founding of the local primary school brought together parents of school-aged children driven by the need to have another local primary school, as the first school was already full.⁷⁶

⁷³ Based on FGs held 24/02/2017 and 27/03/2017, as well as interviews with Andrea 21/03/2017, Guadalupe 26/04/2017, Mateo 13/04/2017, Sara 08/02/2017 and Sofia 04/04/2017.

⁷⁴ Conviviality is discussed as an enabling element of social networks in chapter 6.

⁷⁵ I consider the founding of DCB in chapter 6.

⁷⁶ The first primary school was opened by the borough based on a request by a resident with some political links. This may be one reason why the first school did not require much involvement from local residents.

Guadalupe, one of the founders of the school, used to take her children to a school in Francisco Villa but they were only able to attend some of the classes there.

We started talking that it was not right to have to take our children so far [to go to school]. We were spending a lot of money on transport or it takes a long time to get there and come back, and then lunch and everything. There was enough land for them to give us another primary school so we asked for it. We had to also find the teachers to work here. There was an office where teachers went to look for work in public schools and that is where we had to go and we spend the whole day there because teachers were like hot bread back then. And still if the teachers were ready to come they [officials] told us that we had to wait for the authorisation and follow the procedures before we could open the school (Guadalupe, aged 67, interview 26/04/2017).

The school, Marcelino Renteria, was formed through continuous efforts of local parents. The data show that the process began by collecting names to evidence the number of children without a local school place, which was then presented to the borough in order to acquire land for the school.⁷⁷ This was followed by attending the Ministerio de Educación Nacional (National Education Ministry) several times to seek teachers for the school and assisting in the preparation, building works and maintenance of the school building. Once official confirmation for the school was given, the parents also contributed in preparing the plot for the provisional school building, which was just one room with panel walls and sheets of tin as the roof like most of the local houses at first. This made the building both unstable and extremely hot in the sun, so the parents planted trees that were acquired illegally from nearby plantations to provide some shelter from the sun. The primary school was finally opened around 1988 using a provisional building while building works were ongoing to build an official school building. The process happened in stages requiring frequent interaction from local parents.

The founding of the local community organisation DCB that is discussed further in chapter 6 is another example of a neighbourhood-wide collective project. In the case of DCB, it was local young people who organised in a similar manner as with the primary school. These two neighbourhood-wide projects linked the social ties that had already formed among the small neighbour groups, allowing residents to form wider local ties and build broader community

⁷⁷ Especially the FG held 24/02/2017 and interviews with Aitana 12/12/2016 and Guadalupe 26/04/2017.

networks (see Wellman & Leighton 1979) that did not only include their families and nearby neighbours, but also other residents in the neighbourhood. This allowed the small community networks to include more local actors, broadening access to resources but also keeping the networks active. In this way, the participants slowly increased their contacts in the new neighbourhood, while the continuity of the collaborations allowed familiarity between actors to grow. Not all those participants that collaborated with their neighbours forming community networks continued to draw on those same ties, but some of these relationships have lasted.

The collaborations between neighbours in small groups and wider collective projects to improve their immediate living environment shows that neighbourhood formation in the research locality has been both a social and a physical process. Informal social networks have formed through social ties between neighbours. The collaborations between new residents could be described as community networks because the actors formed mostly local non-kin ties working towards collective goals rather than personal well-being. However, this is not to say that the research locality formed one large community network. The issue with the concept of community is that it relies too much on community as a homogeneous entity, whereas it is only used here to refer to local non-kin ties that are driven by a shared cause. I have highlighted that even if all participants who came to inhabit the research locality at the time of its urbanisation had to take part to some extent in the physical side of neighbourhood formation, not all social ties were particularly strong or included frequent interactions. Some neighbours developed deeper friendships that were still active after decades of living on the same street. The following chapters show, that while constructing the neighbourhood was also a social process, the research locality to this day is a very heterogeneous neighbourhood, a network of various networks more than one unified community network.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided some contextual scene setting as well as constructed a basis for the rest of the thesis, especially for the comparison of ISNs in the contemporary research locality. I have provided a brief description of rapid urbanisation processes in Iztapalapa and Mexico City, highlighting the lack of information about urbanisation and neighbourhood formation regarding the research locality. The borough where the research locality is situated is known for *colonias populares*, 'people's neighbourhoods' (Hernández Bonilla 2009), which continue to struggle with issues related to high population density, lack of access to services, insecurity, violence and most of all very negative perceptions (Jaramillo-Vázquez 2015). The context that is reflected

throughout this thesis, is that the research locality formed as an irregular settlement and has since become formalised mostly through the efforts of local residents. This means the locality was characterised with processes of incremental self-help housing and collective efforts of neighbourhood improvement and service delivery.

The description of neighbourhood formation was completed based primarily on FG discussions that were supported by further one-to-one interviews. I have focused on the participants' experiences of arriving to the research locality between 1970-1988, especially the processes of incremental self-building, the uncertainties related to inhabiting an informal settlement and the collaborations with neighbours that acted as a basis for the formation of ISNs and social support.

Collaboration and social support was first provided very occasionally, but the need for improving the immediate living environment led to the formation of small neighbour groups, which acted as several community networks (see Wellman & Leighton 1979) making requests for basic services and taking part in service delivery. These small community networks connected with neighbours beyond the same street or block through more neighbourhood-wide collective projects, such as the founding of a local primary school and a local community organisation. The small neighbour groups that had mostly formed between neighbours living on the same street or block could form ties with the broader neighbourhood, expanding the community networks.

The description of neighbourhood formation shows the physical and social side of place-making (see e.g. Lombard 2014; Rolnik 2014). Building their own houses, the participants created their own individual places but collaborating with new neighbours to bring basic services such as water, drainage and pavement to the immediate surroundings meant neighbourhood formation on a wider level. Place-making has not been discussed at length in this chapter but both the social and physical side of place-making is reflected in the analysis of community networks, the collective projects that were formed to make the local neighbourhood more liveable. The small neighbour networks formed the basis of wider ISNs, of which some ties still remain active. The shared need for collaboration and solidarity support brought the new fellow inhabitants together, creating a social neighbourhood. These social and physical processes of neighbourhood formation indicate that informal urbanisation can bring people together in more aspects than simply providing a place to live. These aspects are further discussed in chapter 8.

Analysing the processes involved in neighbourhood formation, this chapter provides the basis for the following chapters, and comparison of the functions of ISNs that are present in the contemporary research locality. Chapter 5 focuses on the current state of networks, deepening

the analysis of what actors ISNs consist of, what type of support is exchanged through them and how this differs from the community networks discussed in this chapter. Chapter 6 further considers the processes present in the formation and functions of ISNs, while chapter 7 focuses on the apparent diminishing of ISNs along with broader neighbourhood transformation. I revisit place-making and the broader discussion of community networks and the community lost, saved or liberated (see Wellman & Leighton 1979) debate in chapter 8.

5. Informal social networks in an urban neighbourhood – who supports whom and how in personal networks

Social networks take a variety of forms. Community networks (Wellman & Leighton 1979) discussed in the previous chapter refer especially to non-kin ties in a local setting and explain how neighbours in the research locality have come together in neighbourhood formation processes, collaborating based on shared needs. This chapter builds on this analysis focusing on the current state of informal social networks (ISNs) drawing especially on interview data collected throughout the two stages of fieldwork. The research questions this chapter aims to answer are: how do ISNs function, what actors do they consist of and what type of support is exchanged through them.

As in previous chapters, social networks are approached from an interactionist perspective (see Mitchell 1969; Wellman & Wortley 1990), focusing on who provides social support to whom and how. Whereas Chapter 4 traced the evolution of these networks during the neighbourhood urbanisation period, this chapter focuses on the contemporary social networks in the context of a now formalised settlement. Comparisons are then drawn between these networks and those described in the previous chapter. I argue that the ISNs described in this chapter are more personal networks, formed around household members and personal ties, personal experiences and lifecourse (Mitchell 1969; Wellman et al. 1997). Social support in personal networks focuses on personal needs, as opposed to shared needs that influenced community networks in chapter 4.

The analysis is supported by applying a typology of actors based on previous social network studies, most notably that of Wellman and Wortley, whom have carried out a detailed study of social support and social networks on a neighbourhood level. The different actor categories are family, friends and neighbours (Wellman & Wortley 1990; see also Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco & Hoyos de los Ríos 1997; Lomnitz 2003; Marques 2015), each containing some sub-categories and differentiating factors such as nuclear and extended family; other kin; and 'fictive kin' (see Carlos 1973). Some of these are culturally specific, and present most of all in Mexican studies of networks (see González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003).

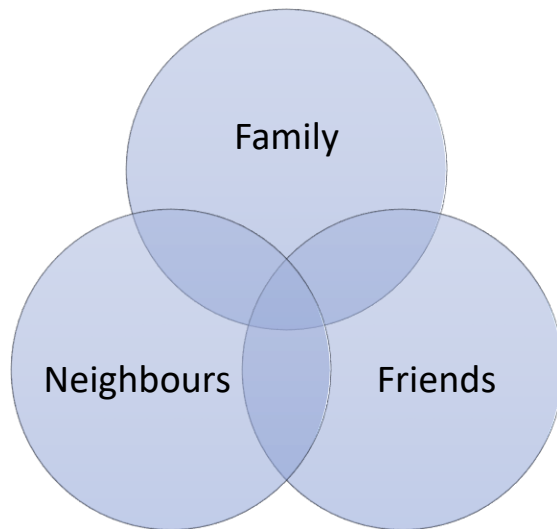


Figure 8 Actor types in informal social networks (Author's construction)

The use of categorisation is common in the study of networks (see e.g. González de la Rocha 1994; Grossetti 2007; Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990), even though the use of strict categories has been criticised for introducing limitations to data analysis (see Hirsch 1981). Strict categorisation is avoided, as the categories applied in this research are fluid and actors can take on many roles: a neighbour can be a friend but also a family member while the same actor can form a friendship -based tie with one actor and a neighbouring tie with a different actor of the same network (see McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013). Friendship itself is a complex category because a friend is a very relational concept: different actors may interpret friendship differently.

The categories of social support are less fluid but also leave some room for interpretation. Wellman and Wortley (1990:562-563) use a typology of five dimensions of social support: emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid and companionship. I have changed this typology very slightly, treating 'services' as a single category of favours, and use companionship, emotional support, favours, and financial support as categories for analysis. There is some overlap between these categories, as financial support could also be considered a favour and companionship can also include emotional support. I have used small and large favours in interview questions, using examples to clarify the differences, however, will consider favours only as one category below, drawing out differences in level of support. Childcare for example could be a small favour if it takes place infrequently and for a short period of time but a large favour if it is more regular or provided in an emergency situation. Yet, a small favour such as giving a lift to the hospital can be essential if provided in an emergency situation, which makes

the level of support relative. Social support takes many forms but the core of it is the “positive interaction of helpful behaviour provided to a person in need” (Weng 2016:68).

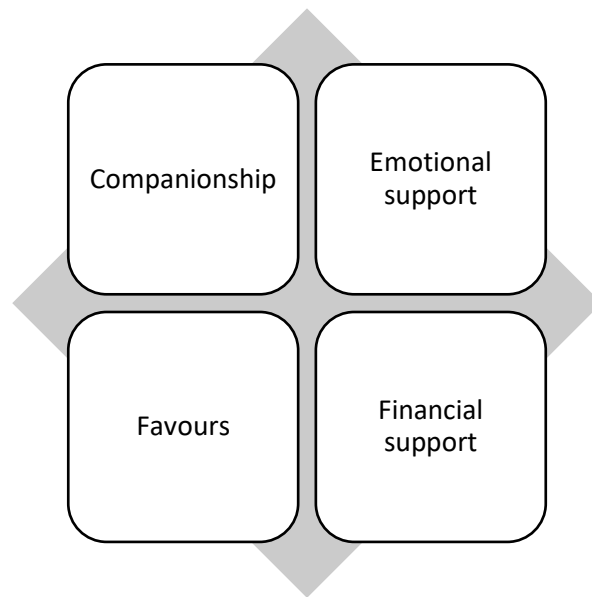


Figure 9 Typology of social support (Author’s construction)

The chapter is structured around the three main categories of actors in ISNs – family, friends and neighbours – following typologies found in previous social networks research (see e.g. Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990). Section 5.1 discusses family ties, focusing on the importance of kinship support. The differences between nuclear and extended family households and other kinship support are analysed in section 5.1.1, and the types of support analysed in section 5.1.2, referring to the typology of support outlined above. Section 5.2 analyses neighbourly support and a conceptualisation of neighbourly ties. Section 5.2.1 analyses the exchange of favours and occasions when more substantial support is made available between neighbours. Section 5.3 focuses on the meanings participants applied to friendship, which unlike family and neighbours, is a more relational category (Pahl & Spencer 2003). Section 5.3.1 discusses different forms of strong friendship ties. Section 5.3.2 analyses exchanges of support focusing on companionship and favours. Finally, section 5.3.3 discusses the role of friendship groups in community organisations.

5.1 Support within the family – ‘we are all fingers of the same hand’

The data show that family was the most important source of social support for most participants, and the core of personal social networks. Especially those sharing the same household with several family members relied on each other for support in many ways. The majority of

participants lived in extended family households, which consisted of several generations.⁷⁸ This allowed several types of support from emotional support and favours, companionship and even financial support to be exchanged frequently in a flexible manner, responding to everyday needs. Observations supported previous research that shows how kinship ties usually provide the majority of social support in social networks (Bazán 1998; González de la Rocha 1994; Grossetti 2007; Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

Family as a concept is often used by researchers as a synonym for 'nuclear family', which following a Western understanding of family life normally contains parents and their child(ren) (Georgas 2006:4). In Mexico, family has traditionally been a tightly-knit unit where several generations share the same household, forming extended families (Woodward 2001). Nevertheless, a household survey carried out in 2000 shows that a clear majority of households in Mexico City are nuclear, with only some 20 per cent consisting of extended families (Gomes 2007:550). The shift from extended to nuclear family households has been argued to be a product of urbanisation and modernisation (Georgas 2006).

Diaz-Loving (2006:399) proposes that extended family households are characteristic of "lower socioeconomic levels", especially in an urban context. In the research locality – which is a disadvantaged neighbourhood – 56% of the interviewees lived with extended family. Extended family consists usually of three or more generations and can include the maternal or "paternal grandparents, the wife/mother, the husband/father, and their children, the aunts, siblings, cousins, nieces and other kin of the mother or father" (Georgas 2006:13). González de la Rocha (1994) does not limit the household to kinship relations. In this research project, however, none of the participants shared a household with non-kin, which is why I analyse household support only in relation to kinship support.

⁷⁸ One of the background questions during one-to-one interviews was whether participants live in a rented or owned property and who they live with.

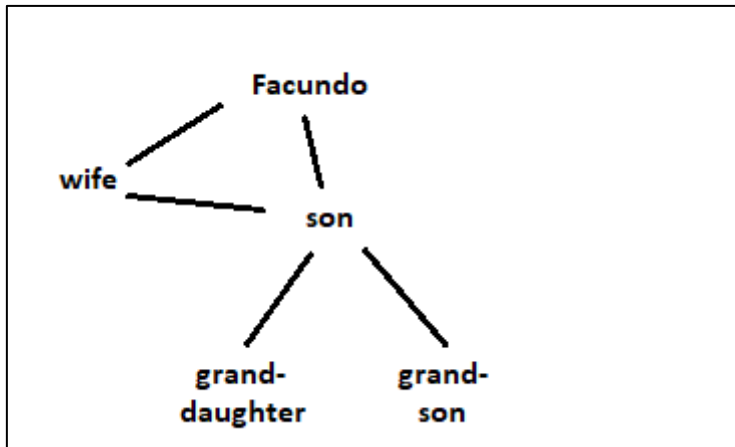


Figure 10 Facundo's social ties within his three-generation extended family household (Author's construction)

The participants' households were in many cases dynamic, expanding often from a nuclear family to extended family as one or more of the adult children married and/or had children. The flexibility and resourcefulness of the household is highlighted in those cases where unexpected changes in circumstances increase the need for family support, causing major changes to household composition. Facundo (aged 69) and his wife moved to the neighbourhood 12 years ago to support their adult son, who had become widowed. They left their home in a village in the state of Oaxaca so that they could help look after their grandchildren. In addition to childcare, the presence of the extended family provided companionship and emotional support.

My stay here is precisely so that I could help my son, so that he can work and we can look after the children. The older one was 12 years old then and the younger only 5 years old. ...I come from a very poor state, the family was very numerous so we look for ways how we can support the family. I couldn't go to university, I studied the basic education of the time which was primary school. And then I came here to the university of life, that is where one becomes capable to work with others (Facundo, interview 22/11/2016).

Parents continued to have a strong sense of responsibility in terms of supporting their adult children and their young families. However, Araceli (aged 71) received a variety of forms of support from her adult son's young family after her husband passed away. Araceli first moved to the neighbourhood with the father of her children in the 1980s but once they completed building their house, her husband left, leaving her as a single mother with three young children. She raised her children alone and later remarried, moving to live with her new husband and

leaving the house to her oldest son and his family. When Araceli's husband passed away, she returned to the old family home and now shares the house with her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. This arrangement allows Araceli to help with childcare, also sharing financial and other household responsibilities. The household unit expanded from nuclear to extended, making flows of support possible in an everyday shared household setting.⁷⁹ It used to be common in Mexico for the oldest son of the family to expand the nuclear family of his parents when he got married (Lewis 1959). Despite changes following urbanisation, living with or near husband's kin continues to be the most common living arrangement across the world (Georgas 2006).

The participants frequently highlighted grandchildren as a reason for providing support, especially in the absence of one of the parents of the grandchildren. Malena (aged 67, interview 30/11/2016) moved to the research locality with her adult son and granddaughter to purchase an apartment together with her son.⁸⁰ This shows mutual financial support but also mutual care and companionship, without which everyday challenges such as childcare would be a major issue. Extended family households in the research locality offered invaluable support in everyday life, changing household composition to respond to new arising needs. Parsons considers changes within the extended family as necessary adjustments to "social change", showing the positive flexibility of kin-relations. He identifies two key functions of family: an "instrumental" function relating to survival or well-being of the family, and an "expressive" function, relating to the maintenance of morale and cooperation (Parsons 1991). Extended family households would seem to be an extension of the strategies applied in informal settlements in terms of incremental self-built housing and informal collective support. Those families that own their own houses are capable of also expanding the family home as required and allowed by resources.

5.1.1 Types of support in an everyday context

Support within the household core personal network took many forms but often revolved around care and companionship, highlighting the strong connections between parents and children, regardless of age. Single parents especially received substantial support from their elderly parents. Lucas' (aged 67) extended family home comprised of him and his wife (the

⁷⁹ Based on interview with Araceli 08/12/2016.

⁸⁰ Based on interview background questions, only three of the 56 participants who were interviewed had bought a house or apartment in the research locality, while the majority had built their own house.

grandparents), their adult daughter and 3 grandchildren. The mother of the grandchildren worked so the grandparents took on the responsibility of looking after the children during the day, including taking them to school. In addition to Lucas, four other participants mentioned supporting their single parent adult children.⁸¹

Substantial support like this, as well as financial support, was most often described as being provided within the household sphere. As shown below when discussing friendship, there are some exceptions to this but support that was both frequent and more substantial was rarely available beyond the household. Previous research shows similar findings in both a modern and traditional Mexican context (Bazán 1998; González de la Rocha 1994; Lewis 1959; Lomnitz 2003). Within the household, financial support took many forms, including supporting either adult children or parents with their businesses. Now that his grandchildren were older and required less childcare, Facundo had started to help his widowed son run his small business over the weekends. There was also a sense of enjoyment combined with the responsibility: “it is informal work and I do it to help my son. But it is also good for my head, to do something and be useful in some way” (Facundo, interview 22/11/2016). Reversing the roles of parent-to-child support, Marcos (aged 20, interview 17/11/2016), occasionally worked in his father’s stationary shop during the weekends.

Female participants tended to look after the home, while men were mostly the heads of the households, making the main contributions to household income. Previous research carried out in Mexico shows that women continue to carry the main responsibility of taking care of the household, having a smaller role in providing an income (González de la Rocha 1994; Lewis 1959; Lomnitz 2003). In the research locality, several women supplemented their personal or household income by selling catalogue goods such as cosmetics and homeware, or by selling food items, in addition to completing daily household chores. Two of the female participants aged 65 or over also frequently supported their adult daughters in their food or market stall businesses, indicating that women also directly or indirectly contributed to income generation, extending their supportive roles beyond the household.⁸²

For Valeria (aged 31), her father’s support – first with her studies and then with employment – has been invaluable. She grew up in the neighbourhood and continued to live with her mother, father and younger brother. She left her office job in the city centre and started working at her

⁸¹ Based on interview with Lucas carried out 20/02/2017.

⁸² Based on observations as well as interviews with Josefa 22/11/2016 and Beatriz 01/12/2016.

father's convenience store in the research locality. While working for her father meant doing something beyond her field of studies, the change was needed, as Valeria was often unwell and exhausted from the long days and commuting. The arrangement was also beneficial for her father, who found someone trustworthy and flexible to work with him.

My father said: 'come and work with me, I'll pay you and you can come and go as you wish, spend time with your friends and all'. And there is no problem if I want to go on holiday or something. I can walk there from home and I am spending time with my family and they give me food so what more could I ask for. I am very happy here. So now it is almost three years since I have used the metro (Valeria, interview 07/04/2017).

Among the participants, the household was often the most important source of support as responsibilities and household costs were shared. Even if there was one person in the household that provided most of household income, there were several other roles that supported the head of the household. One of the reasons why the household is so central to an individual's social network is the private setting of the household established through shared residence and income-generation (Chant 2011; González de la Rocha 1994). Most participants identified other household members as the people they tended to spend their free time with and emphasised the importance of the household for discussing personal matters, either with the spouse, the mother or other siblings. Many female participants identified their mothers or sisters as the most trustworthy relationship, the people you could share anything with. The mother-child relationship worked both ways: mothers who have reached an older age discussed important things with their children who were now adults.

Previous research highlights that the bond between a parent and a child is the strongest and most important when it comes to kinship networks (Wellman & Wortley 1989). However, very few male participants mentioned emotional support and companionship in the sense of sharing private issues with others. Alberto (aged 67) identified his wife as the closest person to him, yet added that there were some personal matters that he could not discuss with his wife and were best shared with other men like his brothers. Previous research shows similar findings. Drawing on longitudinal data, Kahn, McGill and Bianchi (2011) have found that it is rare for men to provide emotional support in household settings in the United States. Research on support networks in Mexico has shown that older men consider women to hold more caring characteristics than men (Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. 2011).

5.1.2 Asymmetrical support within the household

The data show that extended family households were central in the flexible exchanges of support in the research locality, but also that support was rarely exchanged in an equal manner. This is in line with previous studies on Mexican households and support networks that show that the household is a unit where support often flows asymmetrically (González de la Rocha 1994; Lewis 1959; Lomnitz 2003). For example, grandparents often take on some of the responsibility of caring for grandchildren, but also look after the household, making sure they are not considered a burden in extended family households (Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. 2011). The data indicate similar inter-generational patterns of support. Especially the older participants portrayed themselves as the responsible supporters of the household but seldom mentioned receiving support. For example, Facundo, who supported his son in various ways as discussed above, stated he often declined his son's offers to lend him the car or take him and his wife somewhere.

My son is always offering to help us but I say, we are still in a situation where we walk on our own. Save the benefits you want to give us for when we really need it, when we can't manage on our own anymore. I think it's an act of consideration towards my son (Facundo, interview 22/11/2016).

The data do not show many examples of the younger generations providing care for the elderly in the research locality. Previous research clarifies that it is often the adult children who are the only option for care for elderly parents in Mexico (Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. 2011). When support was provided, it tended to happen beyond the household. In the case of Fernanda (aged 71), she lived with her son who took care of everything she was unable to do but this mostly meant maintaining the property. If Fernanda got ill, her son would tell his sister (Fernanda's daughter) who lived in the same housing estate to come and help.⁸³ This was one of the many examples participants discussed in interviews, showing that it was mostly women's role to provide care, whether for the young or the elderly.

There was only one example where it was the parent who was in extreme need of support. Even in this case, the adult child was not the only source of support, even though he provided a place to stay. Camila (aged 62) was homeless for years until her adult son took her in. Now they shared a one bedroom rented apartment and shared the responsibilities of the household.

⁸³ Based on interview with Camila 24/11/2016.

He did me the favour of offering a place to stay because I was living on the streets. Because of things related to destiny I had to walk the streets until my son said come and live with me. That is how I came to this borough and I have had good companions here who have lent me a hand and helped me (Camila, interview 24/11/2016).

Apart from sharing household responsibilities with her son, Camila mostly mentioned her companions as sources of support for various things, including borrowing money. There were a number of possible explanations for this: it could be due to the changed direction of support between parent and child, and the preference to rather speak to other people for further support; or support had to be sought from others because of the limited resources her son had access to. Either way, it was an example of how the household might provide the most essential support through the strong ties but how the weak external ties are also important as they often provide a wider range of resources and potential support (see Epstein 1969; Granovetter 1973).

5.1.3 Kinship support as extension of the household

By kinship support I refer to kin who do not live in the same household. The interview data show that other kin had a diminished role in providing social support, mostly due to less frequent contact. The frequency of contact was in some cases hindered by geographical distance, yet there were also examples where participants lived on the same street as other kin but rarely interacted with them. Few participants had relatives living on the same street and even fewer participants had relatives living in other parts of the locality or nearby neighbourhoods. Kinship support provided by other kin who lived nearby was mostly based on parent-child relationships. Overall, kinship support was mostly formed of favours related to care, and companionship or emotional support.

Other kin who did not live nearby mostly provided emotional support and companionship, acting as contacts for discussing important issues or personal life. Many participants had moved to Mexico City from other states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca or Guanajuato, which are at least a four-hour drive away.⁸⁴ Contact with these relatives often happened over the telephone or mobile phone, which acted as a platform for emotional support and long-distance companionship as visits were less common. Family celebrations where everyone got together were important events for companionship, and one of the more fun, sociable sides of kin relations. Araceli

⁸⁴ One of the background question posed to all interviewees was where they and their family were originally from.

enjoyed spending time with her large family: “we are many in our family. My mother always says that with all her grandchildren, there are 65 grandchildren. And several great grandchildren. I am a great grandmother as well, I have 5 great grandchildren already” (Araceli, interview 08/12/16).

Interview data show that having kin living nearby did not automatically mean that there was a lot of kinship support. For example, Daniel (aged 32) lived in the same building with five of his uncles and aunts, with each nuclear family living in their separate apartment, forming their own households. Despite sharing the building, there was little interaction between the different households and Daniel did not mention other kin to hold a specific role in his social network.⁸⁵ Similarly, Mariana (aged 34) and Diego (aged 35) lived above Mariana’s father in a separate apartment. Her aunt lived next door, but they hardly spoke to each other and did not feel they could rely on the aunt’s family for support. They preferred to rely on Mariana’s mother and Diego’s parents, who all lived in a nearby neighbourhood a 15-minute walk away. This highlights the strength of ties between parent and child, but especially the role mothers and grandmothers have as carers, as it is the grandmother or Diego’s grandparents who were the preferred choice for kinship support and lived within a short distance.⁸⁶ As shown by Lomnitz (2003) among others, kin living nearby is the most important source of support outside of the household. However, research shows that the distances between families have been growing as urbanisation has advanced, making the household the main setting for familial support (Puschmann & Solli 2014).

Childcare was mentioned as an important form of support by several participants. Childcare support could be regular or less frequent, forming smaller favours. Regular childcare support was mostly provided by a locally living grandparent. This responsibility was part of everyday practice and was seemingly enjoyed especially by those participants who did not live in the same household with their grandchildren. Kin ties that interact in a more voluntary setting, rather than out of “a sense of duty”, have been showed to be more similar to friendship ties (Pahl & Spencer 2010:203). In the research locality this was evident in the way the participants referred to their grandchildren and the time spent together in a very cherishing way. For example, Natalia (aged 52, interview 15/12/2016), stated she enjoyed spending time with the grandchildren so much that she was concerned what would happen when they become teenagers and no longer are

⁸⁵ Based on interview with Daniel 18/03/2017.

⁸⁶ Based on a joint interview with Mariana and Diego 19/04/2016.

interested in her company.⁸⁷ Childcare offered a lot of companionship due to the social interactions and sense of importance brought on by continuing to have an active role in the family. Sara (aged 67) found the regular visits from her grandchildren after school helped alleviate her loneliness, as the daughter she lived with was often away for work. Sara cooked for the grandchildren, which she enjoyed, but this support also alleviated some of the children's mother's financial and time pressures, indicating how companionship and more material support can be related.⁸⁸

Caring for the elderly was more frequent through kinship support among the participants. Fortuna (aged 57) lived a few blocks away from her elderly mother and often spent her days looking after her. All Fortuna's other siblings worked long days, so she was the only one who was able to dedicate her time to looking after her.⁸⁹ Luana (aged 54, interview 14/12/2016) also supported her elderly mother taking turns with her sister who lived in a nearby neighbourhood. It was common that kinship support related to ill health or death, indicating that while extended family support was more trivial and frequent, kinship support was made available when it was vital. The need for support needed to be communicated with those that might be able to offer support, so that suitable support – whether financial, emotional, or non-material – could be reached at time of need. The only specific example of kinship support Jorge (aged 22) gave – despite living on the same street with several relatives – was when a head of the household in one of the homes belonging to his relatives passed away and his parents offered financial support to the family in question.⁹⁰

Sense of responsibility appeared to be less distinctly present in kinship support compared to household support, which added to the complexity of support patterns among the participants. It was not a given that kin living nearby would provide support even if it was desperately needed. Samuel (53) lost his sight in a work accident over 10 years ago. He used to live with his mother who looked after him when he had the accident, but the death of his mother 10 years ago limited his ability to navigate outside their apartment. When he needed the support of his kin the most, the relationship with his aunt suffered a breakdown.

⁸⁷ However, as one of the younger grandmothers, Natalia still works herself and is not involved in childcare on a daily basis like some of the participants.

⁸⁸ Based on interview with Sara 08/02/2017.

⁸⁹ Based on interview with Fortuna 01/12/2016.

⁹⁰ Jorge was interviewed 26/11/2016.

My mother's sister lives here nearby but we are not in touch anymore. She lives five blocks away, but she has never invited me to visit her or to eat with them, nothing. It is very painful because when I had money they were interested and now nothing. When my mother died I stayed with my mother's sister for six months, because I didn't know how to move around alone. My house was left empty, people broke in and stole my computer, some of my mother's letters, money, and the paperwork of another plot of land that my mother had bought. It is impossible to get the plot back [without the papers]. My aunt is angry that this happened because she knows who will get (inherit) the apartment if anything happens to me. Because I never got married (Samuel, interview 15/03/2017).

Even though the family in the broad sense was often the primary provider of social support in the research locality, social ties with kin – within or beyond the household – were not always unproblematic. The challenges that tied a household together and often bound other kin tighter together could also become unbearable and cause breakdowns within the family. This is discussed further in chapter 6 where I consider reciprocity as a process that provides explanations of how ISNs work.

5.2 Neighbouring and informal social networks – 'we coexist but only as neighbours, nothing more'

The research locality was characterised by people moving there to build their own houses, which is why the same families had mostly lived on the same street for several decades. Children who were born in the neighbourhood have grown up and many have gotten married expanding the household unit. Neighbour relations had in many cases benefited from residential stability, which has been shown by previous research to enable the formation of strong neighbour ties (Guest, Cover & Matsueda 2006; Wellman 1992; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Nearly all participants explained that the neighbours had stayed the same as when they first moved to the area. However, the strength of neighbourly ties and the frequency of interactions varied greatly in the research locality. There were participants across ages and genders who only greeted their neighbours despite having known them for years. Those who had little involvement with their neighbours still greeted each other and many participants mentioned the importance of mutual respect as an important element in terms of maintaining neighbourly relations.

Being a neighbour starts with geographical proximity. Throughout this thesis, 'neighbour' is used to refer to people living on the same street or block. It was common for the participants to have a closer relationship with one or two specific neighbours who were not always those living next door. Despite geographical proximity, neighbouring was a passive relationship until the neighbours chose to take part in more engaging interactions. Studies of neighbourhood networks have shown that while proximity means neighbours are available for frequent interactions, support is mostly limited to minor favours at time of specific need (Wellman 1992:219). Research on neighbouring is mostly built around aspects of socialising, neighbourhood attachment and whether local ties are becoming less active, with less focus on how neighbour ties are formed (Espinoza 1999; Fischer 1982; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999; Plickert, Côte & Wellman 2007; Woolever 1992).

Grannis describes neighbouring through four hierarchical stages: geographical availability; casual and unintentional encounters; "intentionally initiated contact"; and "substantial activity that indicates mutual trust or a realisation of shared norms and values" (Grannis 2009:22). Grannis' typology provides a useful basis for analysing neighbouring in the research locality, but to a limited extent as neighbour relations were more dynamic than hierarchical. Grannis' (2009) stages are then useful to discuss the many layers of neighbouring, focusing more on individual cases. Most network studies conclude that despite the potential for interaction and support due to geographical proximity and the frequency of interactions, neighbours usually only provide limited support, forming only a small proportion of intimate ties (Wellman et al. 1997:40).

Most participants stated they had good relationships with their neighbours, highlighting the importance of living in harmony. While some neighbours formed stronger ties, it was important to maintain a level of amicability with all neighbours. Previous research shows that it is not only relationships with different people but also different types of relationships that enable access to a variety of resources in social networks (Plickert, Côte & Wellman 2007). Santiago explained how neighbour ties had evolved since buying a house in the locality when relocating with his family some 14 years ago:

When we arrived, two neighbours really welcomed us here. It's with them that we coexist more. The street where I live is quite unified, some neighbours are a bit different but mostly there is union between us... My relationships with my neighbours are very good. I know one family who lives opposite, one that lives on the side, one that lives on the corner and we

always greet each other. With 2-3 neighbours we have more communication because there are always a few that drift away (Santiago, interview 15/03/2017).

Living next door to the same person for a long period of time did not automatically mean that a social tie would form between the neighbours in the research locality. Previous research shows that time spent together is a prerequisite of forming strong ties (Granovetter 1973) and it is often fellow housewives or househusbands that rely more on neighbours (Wellman et al. 1997:40). However, those that worked long days elsewhere lacked opportunities for local interactions. Manuela (aged 74) used to work independently selling sweet and savoury pastries in the streets and various locations beyond her neighbourhood.⁹¹ Despite living in the same house for decades, she did not know her neighbours very well and there was no neighbourly support between them.

Most female participants stopped working when they had children and focused on looking after the household. This gave plenty of opportunities for both casual, unintentional encounters (see Grannis 2009) with others in the neighbourhood and planned interactions which were often with other mothers or housewives. Casual encounters facilitated exchanging information on local incidents such as crime but could also be used to inform others of specific support needs, facilitating further support or exchanges. The benefits of weak ties (Granovetter 1973) that unplanned interactions foster (Grannis 2009) are highlighted in the neighbourhood context as a broad variety of local contacts enables access to more varied resources and different types of support (Wellman 1996; Wellman & Wortley 1990). Carla (aged 72), for example, stated that she knew all her neighbours because most of them had lived in the neighbourhood for some 40 years. She identified several small favours that were exchanged between her neighbours and saw neighbourly ties as a resource that could be drawn on when needed.

We always help each other. When there are parties, we help each other with the food and all that. We have always helped each other... There is still some conviviality⁹² and one helps the others in any way one can...We look after each other's houses when the neighbours go out... Sometimes a neighbour needs a kilo of sugar and we share what we have (Carla 02/02/2017).

⁹¹ Manuela was interviewed 04/04/2016.

⁹² Conviviality refers to social activities such as celebration but also get-togethers that take place in everyday settings (see Heil 2014; Wise & Noble 2016). Conviviality is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

There was also one example where two female participants who were roughly the same age had developed a particularly strong relationship with their neighbour, becoming close friends. Neighbouring can include an element of binary relations (McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013), as a neighbour can also be a friend or a family member. Araceli got to know Larissa (aged 67) when she moved to the neighbourhood in the 1980s to build a house and Larissa's family happened to live across the road.⁹³ They frequently visited each other's homes, attended the same group activities at CCC and had a very close relationship with support ranging from sharing information to small favours. Their adult children were also friends and Araceli's son often gave Larissa's son a lift to work. The relationship between Larissa and Araceli had reached the highest stage of neighbouring, also spreading "intentionally initiated contact" between their families (Grannis 2009). Araceli's return to the neighbourhood after living several years elsewhere with her husband showed that their relationship was not only based on neighbouring, as the friendship tie remained intact even when the two lived on opposite sides of the city.

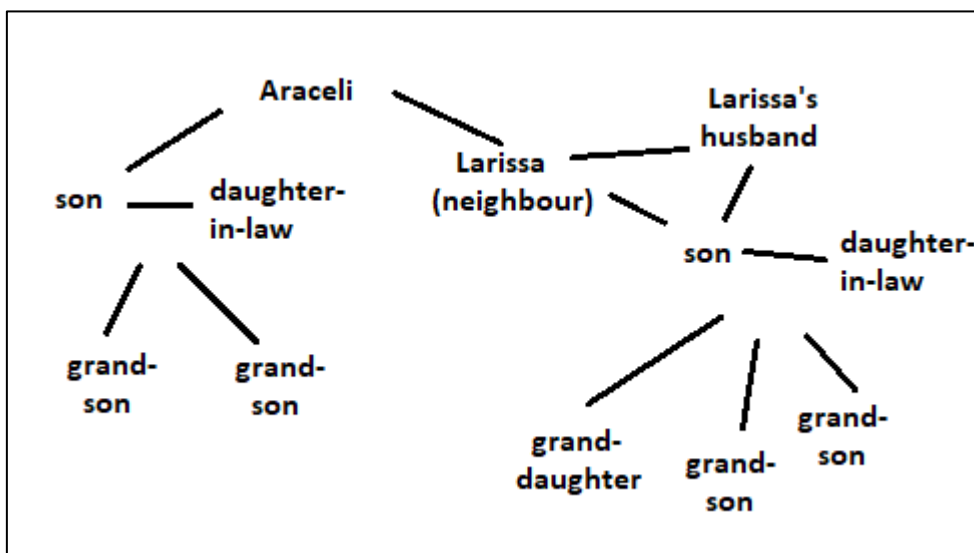


Figure 11 Araceli's social ties including extended family household and close friendship tie (Author's construction)

As discussed in the family support section, it was not common for the participants to have other kin living on the same street. Marcos (aged 20) was one of the few younger participants who felt there were particularly strong neighbourly relations on his street, although five of the other

⁹³ Araceli took part in an interview 08/12/2016, whereas both Araceli and Larissa attended the FG held 24/04/2017. Both also attended various activities mostly at the Cedros community centre (CCC) but at times also at the sports ground (DCB), making it possible for me to interact with both frequently.

houses belonged to his aunts and uncles. He had several kin living on the same street which seems to have contributed to the formation of social cohesion.⁹⁴

My street is very unified so if there is someone who needs help we will go and help them. If it's someone you know, even better. But we always greet each other and there is a lot of communication between us. We have gotten used to these social relations... I know everyone on my street... We grew up together, except that my cousins were a bit older and none of them was the same age as me (Marcos, interview 17/11/2016).

A street unified through the combination of kin and non-kin relations is an example of “personal and wider community networks” coming together (Wellman and Wortley 1990:559). A member of kin as a neighbour can increase the stage of neighbouring (see Grannis 2009) with minimal effort due to being built on a kinship tie; however, most of the participants either did not have kin as neighbours or they did not interact with them.

5.2.1 From small favours and casual encounters to substantial activities and support

Those who had more active relationships with their neighbours and could give examples of neighbourly support talked mostly of small favours. Everyday examples of support were often food related: sharing food, borrowing food items, sharing the responsibilities of preparing food for joint celebrations and feeding the neighbour's children when looking after them. Other examples of small favours related to services that not everyone had access to, such as car lifts to work or medical appointments, sharing water during service disruption and providing vigilance when the neighbours' house was empty. Both the elderly participants as well as young mothers had examples of emergencies when they had relied on a neighbour in order to get to a hospital. Similarly, Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. (2011) identified assisting with health-related issues and vigilance as two of the most important functions of neighbour support received by the elderly in four smaller Mexican cities. These mostly non-material small favours, while trivial, were also essential, because lack of support could lead to accumulative costs. As Kleinman (2006) shows, it is circumstantial and relative how substantial a small favour can be. In the research locality, the minor support provided by most neighbours at some point provided a sense of security for the participants. This also made it important to maintain a basic level of

⁹⁴ Social cohesion is discussed in chapter 7.

amicability during casual encounters with neighbours (Grannis 2009), so that support could be reached if needed.

Borrowing items from neighbours mostly happened between those neighbours that were more familiar with each other and who had a more trusting relationship. Tools were often borrowed between male neighbours. Women tended to borrow more household items but could also ask a male neighbour to help with checking a fuse or changing a gas tank. Overall, women tended to rely on each other for domestic or care related support, which reflects findings of previous research (see Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco & Hoyos de los Ríos 1997). Borrowing is not something that all participants approved of and it usually happened only with one or two specific neighbours. There were also several participants who were particularly reluctant to lend or borrow anything to or from their neighbours. For some it was due to previous bad experiences or lack of resources, but one participant stated she had been specifically brought up to avoid it, showing some potential socio-economic differences:⁹⁵

But there are many neighbours who do that, lend me your blender or iron or pan and that is also why some problems occur. If I need something, I will save money and get the money together to buy it and then it will be mine (Juana, aged 43, interview 23/03/2017).

Giving or borrowing food items, as well as helping with water could take place at the lower stages of neighbouring. Borrowing more expensive items, sharing food or being invited to a neighbour's home are signs of a more trusting neighbourly relationship that often includes what Grannis (2009) calls intentionally initiated contact and more substantial activities of higher-level neighbouring. Interactions with participants indicated that the home was a private space that was not open to visitors frequently, showing some reluctance to invite neighbours to be part of the household sphere. "If there is something wrong we help each other any way we can... But to *convivir* [live convivially], we don't. They don't come to my house nor do I go to theirs" (Fabiana, interview 17/11/2016).

Socialising is an important part of neighbouring – as indicated by different encounters in Grannis' (2009) stages of neighbouring. It was common for households to extend their celebrations to the street outside their homes, which was why some considered it rude not to invite the

⁹⁵ During her interview Juana mentioned it was her mother who always advised not to borrow things. Now Juana lived in a housing estate that has a particularly bad reputation, but she emphasised that they own the apartment, rather than rent, like most other people there.

neighbours. However, these celebrations had become more exclusive as neighbours were now rarely invited. Two older male participants also commented that despite being invited, they chose not to attend celebrations because of the “vices” that were involved, referring to excessive use of alcohol and associated issues.⁹⁶ Celebrations have historically been an important part of Mexican culture (see e.g. Lewis 1959; Paz 1950). Coming together to socialise was mentioned by many participants as an important way of engaging with neighbours. This kind of conviviality could also bring together the different actors in one’s social network, making it an enabler of ISNs.⁹⁷

Support through neighbour ties was mostly described by participants as taking place in case of acute need, such as at time of emergency or death, in line with previous research (Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco & Hoyos de los Ríos 1997; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Several participants gave examples of support they showed their neighbours when they knew someone in their neighbours’ household had passed away. Support was made available at a difficult time, even though interactions otherwise may have been limited: “We don’t have very good relations, but we do know each other. If there is any kind of a difficult situation, we unite... It is solidarity... If a neighbour’s family member dies, I offer to do the rosary” (Sara, interview 08/02/2017). Grief and funeral arrangements in the neighbourhood follow mostly Catholic traditions. Sara has also brought food and drink to a grieving neighbour several times during the nine days of prayer following a death.

There were also examples of receiving support due to a death in the household. Maite (aged 45) lost her father, the head of the household at the time, ten years ago.

The unity of the neighbours was very strong, they supported us a lot. The neighbours organised everything for us with my mother. The neighbour living opposite lent us a hob to make food, they would give us their food rations and brought us bread or something else once a week (Maite, interview 01/04/2017).

A death in the family – particularly if the household was small – could also force people to seek new support networks beyond their relatives. This shows that while the household was a

⁹⁶ Based on interviews with Benjamin 08/03/2017 and Ricardo 03/04/2017.

⁹⁷ The impact of this type of conviviality (*convivencia*) is discussed further in chapter 6.

dynamic and resourceful entity, the loss of a key household member could trigger a need for adaptation and expansion of ISNs.

My mother died 10 years ago and I was left closed into the flat because I did not know how to leave. One of the neighbours who lives in the housing blocks is from Oaxaca... they take me to church... They invite me to eat with them 3 times a week. The neighbour who lives below me also invites me to eat with them. And I always buy my tortillas and everything I need for the week at the tianguis and they help me make my purchases. Some of my neighbours support me a lot (Samuel, interview 15/03/2017).

In the case of Samuel, he reached out to the church and that way met the family who lived in the same housing estate and went to the same church. The emotional support and companionship shown in this case coincides with larger favours because of the frequency of assistance Samuel was receiving. Wellman and Wortley (1989) show that those who provide emotional support often do not provide other types of support, apart from large services. For Samuel, the support he received from his neighbours may have been trivial in some cases, but it showed high levels of companionship due to the frequency of the support. Such a high level of support between neighbours was rare in the research locality, and only Samuel and Araceli expressed having such strong ties with one of their neighbours.⁹⁸

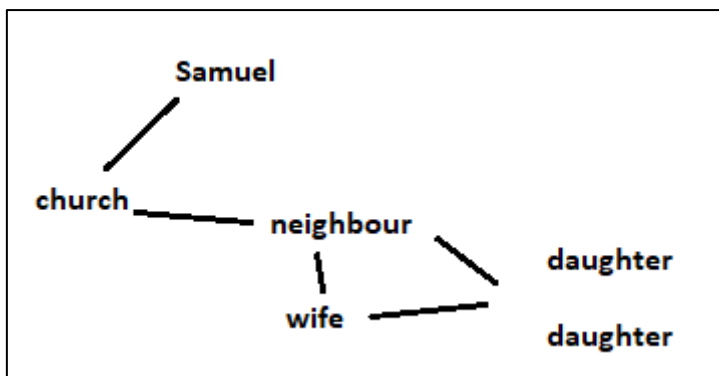


Figure 12 Samuel's social ties obtained through church (Author's construction)

One key difference between kinship relations and neighbourly relations was the level of symmetry of support between the actors. As mentioned above, it was common for support exchanged within the extended family household to be unequal and have a high level of flexibility. It was more important to maintain some equilibrium between neighbourly support,

⁹⁸ Araceli took part in an interview 08/12/2016.

as the data show that there was more expectation of mutual support.⁹⁹ Kinship ties usually provide the strongest level of support because of the special bond of responsibility and duty between the actors (Puschmann & Solli 2014), while neighbour ties draw more on “community sharing” and “equality sharing”, giving based on what is expected by others in an equal manner (Komter 2007:98). The bond of responsibility between neighbours is built through the different stages of neighbouring (Grannis 2009), so that those neighbours who have frequent planned interactions with each other develop more responsible bonds towards each other. However, as the availability of support at time of emergencies shows, it was not always the case that neighbours had reached a higher level of neighbouring in order for support to be made available. This supports previous research, which shows that while extra-local ties are increasing, local ties continue to be important as weak ties that can provide a variety of support (Granovetter 1973; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988), even if local ties may have access to limited resources (Marques 2012). There were also occasions where neighbours previously socialised and exchanged support more frequently but have now returned back to unintentional encounters, showing that neighbouring in the research locality did not proceed in a linear manner, unlike in Grannis’ (2009) typology of neighbouring.

5.3 Friendship based support – ‘we are always united’

Based on the data, the participants applied a broader spectrum of meanings to friendship than to the social ties based on neighbouring. The most common ways participants referred to friends included acquaintances, companions, dependable friends, and good or best friends. This reflects the complexity of friendship as a category (see e.g. Pahl & Spencer 2003; Policarpo 2015; Willmott 1987). I draw on Willmott’s (1987:20) definition of a friend as a non-kin with whom the participants have a meaningful social relationship, established through a variety of sources such as work, childhood, education, and leisure activities. The sub-categories of friendship are not analysed in this thesis, but the nature of friendship is considered to be relational (see Pahl & Spencer 2003:6). The focus is on the broad variety of interactions and support taking place between friends in the research locality.

The interview data indicated that there were some generational differences in how the participants experienced friendship. Strong friendships – especially extra-local – have been linked to individualisation and the transition from local community networks to more personal

⁹⁹ Reciprocity is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

communities (Pahl & Pevalin 2005; Wellman et al. 1997). Previous research indicates that while strong non-kin friendships tend to be central in the social networks of young adults, partners and kin often become main contacts for companionship as people age, following lifecourse changes (Pahl & Pevalin 2005). This is echoed to some extent in the findings of this research. Younger participants referred to strong friendship ties with non-kin, whereas older participants were reserved about who they considered to be their friend. When asked particularly about relationships with friends, Ana (aged 64) said she does not have any friends, only acquaintances: “God is my best friend and I can always speak to God, he listens to all my problems” (Ana, interview 24/11/2016). In comparison, Jorge (aged 22) mentioned friends as those he spent most of his free time with, and especially those he had known for a longer time to be those he mostly exchanged favours and even financial support with.¹⁰⁰

The majority of the research participants were women aged 50 and above, which may have been one of the reasons why many participants talked about friendship less than support within the family.¹⁰¹ The generational differences can be explained to some extent with the different social environments those aged 20 to 40 had access to. The younger generation spent more time in educational institutions, often progressing to higher education, whereas many of the participants in their 60s had only completed primary school or a few years of education. Work also offered opportunities for forming friendships and this is one reason why men often had more work-related social networks, whereas women who stayed at home looking after the household formed more local networks. Kahn, McGill and Bianchi (2011) show that in the U.S., men tend to have more relations outside of the home, offering less emotional support and focusing more on favours, that are also more often financial compared to support provided by women. González de la Rocha (1994:215) also found that women’s networks in Guadalajara revolved more around childcare and household tasks.

As mentioned previously, there were some gendered differences in the formation of ISNs in the research locality, and this also applied to friendship. While women interacted more within the household and social support was based more around domestic issues or care, male participants rarely mentioned household issues in the interviews, mentioning work and work relations more. Previous research shows that especially in rural Mexico, friends are separate from the household sphere and it has been rare for friends to enter the family home (Kanter 2008). Often confined

¹⁰⁰ Based on interview carried out 26/11/2016.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 3 for the age range of the participants.

to working within the home, women rarely had close friends, whereas men could socialise more freely in a wider environment (Kanter 2008:65). González de la Rocha (1994:14) also shows that women's interests mirror broadly the household interests, whereas men's interests are more individual.

In the research locality, the activities that took place at CCC and were mostly attended by female pensioners revolved around crafts, food and conversing or light exercise. Men on the other hand socialised by playing team sports or dominoes, activities that women rarely took part in. Basketball teams in the research locality used to be formed by men living on the same street, so that teams playing against each other contained residents from different streets. Alejandro (aged 31) formed many of his friendships across the neighbourhood playing basketball and these connections consequently created a particularly broad network of friends in the wider neighbourhood.¹⁰² Similarly, Daniel (aged 32) met his work colleague through frequently playing basketball at the local sports ground (DCB), which led to his current job.¹⁰³ This indicates that men's interactions in the research locality revolved around work but also how male participants tended to socialise beyond the household sphere.

5.3.1 Friendship as a replacement of kinship support

The interview data show that the importance of friendship ties increased if household or kinship support was not available due to breakdowns or lack of resources. Carla's (aged 72) husband was a recovering alcoholic and she herself struggled with depression, making life at home turbulent. She preferred to spend her time with the friends she has made in the neighbourhood throughout the years, and also had a close relationship with a few of her neighbours.¹⁰⁴ Previous studies show that friends can also take family-like roles, providing a broad range of support that in most circumstances would normally be provided by kin (Pahl & Pevalin 2005). Paula (aged 64) moved to the research locality from another state in Mexico when she got married in the 1980s. New to the city, she often spent her days alone looking after the house while her husband worked long days. Paula described it as a difficult time due to lack of basic services and lack of social contacts, which is why befriending an older woman who had moved to the neighbourhood

¹⁰² Based on interview with Alejandro 09/03/2017.

¹⁰³ Based on interview with Daniel 18/03/2017.

¹⁰⁴ Based on interview with Carla 02/02/2017.

from the same state as Paula provided much needed companionship. The friendship also provided Paula with advice on how to cope in the new household situation.¹⁰⁵

Forms of “fictive kin” (Pahl & Spencer 2003:4), such as godparents, can connect family and friendship ties in the research locality, following similar patterns to those described by Lewis (1959) and Lomnitz (2003). “*Compadrazgo*, literally co-parenthood, establishes a ceremonially-sanctioned alliance among individuals. The persons who are bound by *compadrazgo* into a fictive co-parenthood relationship are the god-parents (*padrinos*) and the parents of an individual for whom a religious ceremony is held at the time of a life-cycle event” (Carlos 1973:76). The special relationship with a *comadre*¹⁰⁶ is conventionally the closest non-kin friendship women have (Carlos 1973; González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003). This was also the case in the research locality, although the younger participants seldom referred to their *compadres* when describing their support networks, indicating that traditions may be becoming less relevant. It was also only female participants who mentioned fictive kin in the interviews, further indicating that women’s ISNs were focused around the household and family.

My *compadres* and my friends who I have known for many years [are my social network]. And with them whenever there is something that someone needs help with, we have always helped each other (Paula, aged 64, interview 02/02/2017).

5.3.2 Support between friends: companionship, emotional support and a variety of favours

The most common form of support provided by friends in the research locality was companionship. Friends were mostly mentioned in relation to spending time together talking about everyday life, which is understood here as companionship. It was also common for friends – especially older women – to accompany each other to medical appointments or to the market. There was some indication of overlap between the typologies of companionship and emotional support, but only 17 participants mentioned sharing private matters with friends or asking for advice on specific important issues.¹⁰⁷ Fewer than 10 participants mentioned providing or

¹⁰⁵ Based on interview with Paula 21/04/2017.

¹⁰⁶ While a godmother (*madrina*) refers to the relationship between the godparent and the child, *comadre*, refers to the relationship between the godparent and the parents of the child.

¹⁰⁷ This relates specifically to the interview question: with whom do you discuss matters important to you. Those participants who gave examples of specific matters mostly mentioned health, concerns related to family members and disputes with other kin or friends as some common important matters.

receiving financial support from a friend, a similar quantity to those participants who mentioned having close or good friends, or frequent interactions that went beyond companionship.

Circumstances where emotional support was clearly present were only described by female participants. While this may reflect differences in how men and women discuss aspects of emotional support, previous research also highlights gender differences. Previous research shows that emotional support takes place most of all between female friends (Kahn, McGill & Bianchi 2011) or women and family members (Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco & Hoyos de los Ríos 1997), while men offer more companionship and advice (Wellman 1992).

I have a close friend, Elena, and we always talk about everything, I tell her 'Elena now what do I do, this has happened' and she always tells me what to do and guides me and I am so grateful for this because people need guidance (Fabiana, interview 17/11/2016).

Favours were frequently exchanged, especially in the form of sharing information. Malena (aged 67, interviewed 30/11/2016) often helped her acquaintances with the paperwork they needed to provide to the borough when claiming formal support like benefits. Martina (aged 42) both received and gave advice regarding the different social programmes that supported school aged children. "This borough is very well supported through [social] programmes like donation of water and studentships for children... Word spreads fast about these programmes" (Martina, interview 13/04/2017).

Some of the information support could evolve into more concrete small favours. Malena, for example, helped one friend who is in a wheelchair by taking her paperwork to the borough when she went there herself. Martina also has found companionship through the social programmes as she has gotten to know so many local mothers.

I know a lot of people here, from the schools over here as well as there below. And people from the meetings for the [social] programmes, we all get to know each other through the government programmes like Prospera.¹⁰⁸ We are almost 900 people here in the neighbourhood that are part of the programme (Martina, interview 13/04/2017).

¹⁰⁸ Prospera (previously Oportunidades) is a conditional cash transfer programme aiming to keep children in school and attending medical centres regularly.

The strength of the friendship tie appeared to define how substantial the favours exchanged between individuals were. It was mostly the younger participants that mentioned borrowing money and supporting their close friends financially if needed.¹⁰⁹ There were very few older participants who mentioned doing this; instead it was often emphasised that financial support was not exchanged beyond the private household setting. Rather than receiving financial support when needed, maintaining a friendship was also sometimes considered costly. One of the reasons why Facundo (aged 69) did not spend much time with his friends anymore was the financial burden of socialising:

If you go to celebrations or feasts or social centres, you go there to participate. If you go to a party you have to bring a present. You have to get there somehow and you have to tip the waiter. So you have to think about money. If there is no money, it's better to stay at home (Facundo, interview 22/11/2016).

Among the older participants, the urgency of need could increase the level of support provided. It was clear from the history of the research locality that the older participants had all faced some hardship previously, which might be why support was made available to those who were clearly struggling. This was particularly evident in the support that Camila (aged 62) received from her friends. She had been homeless for several years and while she now lived with her son, she mostly received support from her friendship network.¹¹⁰ Women of her own age, who she knew from the pensioner's group, provided her with companionship and emotional support. She often exchanged fruit for bread with a friend who worked in a local bakery. For financial support she could turn to her friend's partner, who worked as a dentist and was able to help her because he earned a good wage.

¹⁰⁹ In this case both male and female participants aged 20-35.

¹¹⁰ The relationship between Camila and her son is also discussed in section 5.1.2

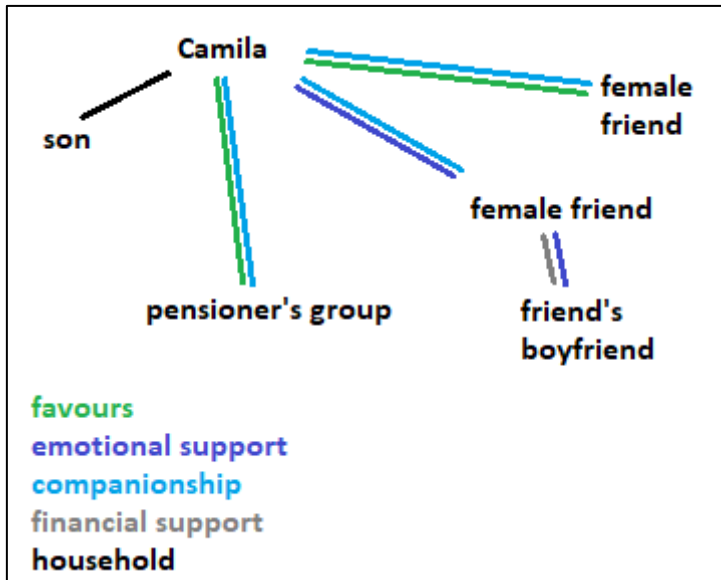


Figure 13 Camila's social ties and types of support received (Author's construction)

Camila was one of the few examples where friends provided substantial support because she did not have any relatives in the area, only her son and they were already sharing many of the household responsibilities.

I have several acquaintances and friends who have helped me, each for something. Thank God. And also, when I have it [resources], I also help them. When I am able to, I bring them fruit and things. But what I receive from them is a lot. So more than anything I need to also give them something when I can (Camila, interview 24/11/2016).

5.3.3 The role of friendship groups in broadening pensioners' socialising opportunities

The two community organisations functioning in the research locality provided social spaces for friendly interactions in a broader local context. As discussed before, DCB focused more on arts and sports for younger people, whereas CCC had more active groups for pensioners.¹¹¹ One of the pensioners' groups shared food, conversed and made handicrafts, while another larger group held an exercise class. These groups provided pensioners with an important place for socialising outside of the household. Social ties were particularly strong in the handicrafts group because some of the women had known each other for some 30 years and assembled in people's homes before CCC was built. The exercise group fostered more weak ties, because even though

¹¹¹ The normal pension age in Mexico is 65 but early retirement is possible at 60.

there were more people in the group, there was less interaction, as the focus was on individual exercise rather than team sports for example. As suggested by Granovetter's (1973) hypothesis of the strength of weak ties, the weak ties in group settings could through frequent interaction turn into stronger ties and close friendships, as observations especially in the group that shared food and made handicrafts while conversing indicated.

Many of the older female participants described their ISNs to only include their household and some neighbours, as many came to the research locality with their spouse, not knowing anyone locally. This was the case for Ana (aged 64) who also worked her whole life and for that reason had limited opportunities for neighbouring. Now that Ana was retired and widowed, the group offered a lot of companionship. Despite attending the group for over 10 years, she did not consider the contacts there to be her friends, simply acquaintances, showing how friendship can be experienced in different ways.¹¹² Previous literature shows there are many levels of friendship, but spending time together is also one of the prerequisites of forming strong ties (Granovetter 1973). This makes Ana's statement of not having any friends striking, which implies that there were more complex factors than gender or generational change present in how the participants experienced friendship.

Other participants have formed close friendships through the group that made handicrafts and frequently exchanged food or small favours, and even small quantities of money when necessary. Fabiana spent most of her free time with the crafts group because her other adult household members worked long days, leaving her alone in the house. Fabiana enjoyed cooking for the group and felt this was a way of looking after everyone by providing nutritious inexpensive meals and making sure everyone ate something.

The group is also important because you can laugh together and eat together. If you sit at home alone, what are you going to do? Get bitter and watch some TV programmes... when I go to the group, we chat about everything as if we were children again, laughing so that then I return home in a good mood (Fabiana, interview 17/11/2016).

The possibility of spending time with other locals of the same age brought with it a broad range of social benefits and for many it made broader social interactions possible. Previous research shows how rare these types of social settings are for pensioners in Mexico (González de la Rocha

¹¹² Based on interview with Ana 24/11/2016.

1994; Lomnitz 2003) and how positively social environments are received by the older population (Pelcastre-Villafuerte et al. 2001). Josefa (aged 65), also a widow, praised the group for the support it provided:

Coming to the group is like escaping everyday life. To talk about whatever with some people... about things that are going on at home but also to just play and chat and joke like we did when we were younger (Josefa, interview 22/11/2016).

Due to the lack of public space in the research locality, different local organisations were particularly important. DCB was similarly praised by younger participants as a place where they could socialise with other young people living locally while attending a range of activities. While the younger participants had broader opportunities for socialising through work or educational institutions, these opportunities were in most cases located outside the neighbourhood, meaning that the friendships formed there were also extra-local. The several local churches also provided places for forming friendships but as only three participants mentioned attending church groups or having a more active role at the church, religious institutions have not been considered to play a particularly significant role in ISNs.¹¹³

5.4 Conclusion – the network is personal

The analysis of ISNs and social support in this chapter has addressed the research questions relating to how ISNs function, what actors they consist of and what type of social support is exchanged through them. These questions have been approached by applying an actor and support type categorisation that has been amended slightly from the typology used by Wellman and Wortley (1990:562-563). ISNs include exchanges of companionship, emotional support, favours and financial support between family, neighbour and friend ties. Overall, the participants' ISNs reflect a broad spectrum of circumstances, living arrangements and lifestyles. The fluidity of the at times overlapping categories of support and actors indicate this complexity, as a neighbour can also be a friend, while friends can also have family-like roles (McCulloh, Armstrong & Johnson 2013; Pahl & Pevalin 2005). The detailed analysis of exchange of support in a neighbourhood in Mexico City contributes to existing neighbourhood networks literature by

¹¹³ For example, one participant frequently helped set up the room for Mass at church, including placing fresh flowers.

broadening the understanding of social networks in urban settings, providing more recent accounts than those of Lomnitz (2003) and González de la Rocha (1994).

The extended family households were central providers of social support, which was made possible especially by the expansion of households, as the homeowners' children had grown up, and in many cases, had had children of their own. Household responsibilities were shared between household members, making the household more private and exclusive of other local support. The older generation still mentioned neighbours and 'fictive kin' as important sources of support, yet many stated that they had fewer interactions with their neighbours than previously. The extended family household provided many forms of support, including companionship, emotional support, favours and at times also financial support. The scope of support appeared narrower among other kin, who mostly provided support to specific needs such as childcare or emergencies. This reflects previous research, which shows that especially households provide a broad range of support, and that family support is central to personal networks (González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003; Pahl & Pevalin 2005; Wall et al. 2001; Wellman & Wortley 1989).

Compared to family support, neighbourly support was often trivial, revolving around minor favours, which regardless could be an essential part of everyday life. This included sharing local information and supporting especially with access to limited services. The analysis of neighbour ties also utilises Grannis' (2009) stages of neighbouring. The findings show that neighbouring does not only progress hierarchically, as suggested by Grannis (2009), but that neighbour ties were more dynamic. The level of support exchanged between neighbours in the research locality fluctuated based on need more than the stage of neighbouring, so that neighbour support could activate in emergencies, despite infrequent contact. Younger participants exchanged most types of support, including occasional financial support, showing that friendship could in some cases even replace family ties. The older participants often limited their friendship functions more to companionship and favours, even if they had attended the same friendship groups for several years. Being based on individual choice (see Pahl & Spencer 2003), friendship was an essential part of personal networks, as indicated by the higher proportion of companionship support. Comparing this to the findings of Lomnitz (2003) highlights this change, as friends were rarely mentioned in the urban settlements in the 1970s.

Altogether, the participants' ISNs resembled personal networks, consisting of family-based support which was boosted by support from friends and to a lesser extent by neighbours. The

increasing reliance on the growing extended family households was a distinct change from the community networks discussed in chapter 4. While there were still some examples of exchanges of support between neighbours, neighbourly support was now mostly based around individual instances of support or emergencies, rather than acting collectively to bring about change as previously. The transformation was more prominent when comparing the interactions of older and younger participants in the research locality. Those participants who continued to be active in broader local ISNs that extended beyond the household were mostly the older participants who also had lived in the locality for longer and taken part in neighbourhood formation, as discussed in chapter 4. Some of the reasons behind this change from community-oriented to personal networks are discussed in chapter 7.

Overall, social support was exchanged most of all within the extended family household when it comes to supporting everyday life, while neighbours and friends provided support in a more limited manner, focusing on specific needs and emergencies. The role of friends was more emphasised with the younger participants, but overall, friends provided more emotional support and companionship than neighbours. The functions of networks had now shifted, so that there were less collaborative elements and more personal exchanges of support, moving towards personal networks (see Wellman et al. 1997). A personal network is more individual, as it is defined through an individual's social positions and situations (Mitchell 1969:43). This is broadly in line with neighbourhood network studies, which suggest that "people's communities are...in flux" (Wellman 1999:25), as community networks are giving way to personal networks that are a mixture of local and extra-local ties (Drouhot 2017; Espinoza 1999; Hennig 2007; Wellman 1981). This is discussed further in chapter 8, first considering what processes are present in the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support in chapter 6 and what hinders the formation of ISNs and exchange of social support in chapter 7.

6. Processes related to the formation of informal social networks and the exchange of social support

Chapters 4 and 5 show that informal social networks (ISNs) in the research locality were dynamic social structures. They also show that community networks were more prominent at time of neighbourhood formation, while personal networks were more relevant in the contemporary setting. This chapter builds on the analysis of the characteristics of ISNs in the research locality, answering the research question what processes are present in the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support. Focusing on these processes also provides some explanation to why social support is made available to certain people and what brings these people together to form ISNs.

The analysis in this chapter draws primarily on interview data, with focus group conversations and observation enabling comparison of findings. The concepts of community networks and personal networks are utilised to highlight the dynamic nature of ISNs, considering processes that are specific to different types of ISNs. The chapter is formed of four sections, each discussing specific processes present in the formation of ISNs and exchange of support, based on the patterns that have most clearly emerged from the data. As discussed below, however, these processes are also interconnected in practice, meaning that ISNs in the research locality are fluid rather than functioning based on evident hierarchical processes.

The first section (6.1) focuses on reciprocity as a primary process regulating the formation of ISNs and most of all the exchanges of support. The previous chapters have indicated that social support in the research locality was mostly based on giving, sharing and receiving, which are aspects of reciprocal exchange. Chapter 5 particularly showed how support was exchanged between actors in a reciprocal manner, making support available when it was needed. The “norm of reciprocity”, that “people should help those who help them and, therefore, those whom you have helped have an obligation to help you” (Gouldner 1960:173) is prominently present. The categorisation of reciprocal exchange proposed by Wellman, Carrington and Hall (1988) is applied to highlight how processes of reciprocity fluctuate depending on social tie type.

In the second section (6.2), aspects of similarity are considered as a process that provides explanations to who individuals choose to form social ties with. The concept of homophily refers to why similar people tend to interact with each other more than those who are different from them (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). Household composition (6.2.1), age and lifecourse

(6.2.2), as well as geographical proximity (6.2.3) are analysed as aspects that were characteristic of the formation of social ties in the research locality. There is some overlap between these different aspects, as detailed below. The contributions of aspects of homophily to the formation of ISNs during neighbourhood formation is also analysed, considering how these processes have changed in the research locality over time.

The third section (6.3) analyses how local interactions in the research locality were changing from the aspect of conviviality. Conviviality refers to a variety of social activities that take place in everyday settings and more celebratory events where people come together to socialise (see Heil 2014; Wise & Noble 2016). The social aspect of conviviality can help form new local ties and strengthen existing ties, as is demonstrated below. Conviviality is discussed as a mechanism that binds people together, focusing especially on how the participants have experienced conviviality in the research locality when the neighbourhood was still forming and whether these experiences have been changing over the years.

The final section (6.4) focuses on community organisations as a basis for ISN formation and exchange of support, broadening the scope of frequent interactions in a local setting. There is a connection with conviviality and community organisations, as especially one of the two local community organisations was the venue of regular get-togethers. I compare how the two local community organisations Deportivo Chavos Banda (DCB) and the local community centre (CCC) were formed and how this affected the surroundings they provided for forming and maintaining ISNs as well as reciprocal exchange of support.¹¹⁴

6.1 Reciprocity as a basis for forming and maintaining informal social networks – ‘the way to request is to give’

Reciprocity was an overarching process in ISNs, affecting both their formation and the exchange of support in the research locality. This was evident in the way social support was exchanged and how changes in reciprocal behaviour affected social ties. The data show that interactions between actors were relational and experienced behaviour determined future actions as indicated by some of the conflicts and breakdowns of relationships participants described in interviews. Gouldner’s (1960) ‘norm of reciprocity’ provides a fitting description of the unspoken yet pertinent expectations among the participants that amicable and supportive behaviour should be responded to in a similar manner. Lomnitz (2003:25) also recognised reciprocity as an

¹¹⁴ The organisations also acted as the gatekeepers of this study and have been introduced in chapter 3.

essential part of social support and claims that reciprocity as the exchange of favours and gifts is both a consequence and an integral part of social relations. Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity is referred to throughout this chapter, because his definition focuses on reciprocity as promoting stability in social relations.

Exchanges of social support in the research locality indicated that there were several patterns of reciprocity. How, when and by whom support was expected to be returned varied at least based on social ties and how close the relationships were. A range of previous research from social exchange to support networks shows the complexity of reciprocity in social interactions (Komter 2007; Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007; Uehara 1990). The norm of reciprocity may be universal, but how reciprocity applies to social relationships in practice varies greatly from individual to individual (Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007; Walker, Wasserman & Wellman 1993).

Literature usually makes a distinction between restricted or similar, and generalised reciprocal exchange (Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007). Wellman, Carrington and Hall (1988) refer to these as 'specialised' and 'generalised exchange', adding the category of 'network balancing', which refers to social support that is exchanged within a network so that support flows more freely between different network members. While in 'specialised exchange' the same resource is returned by the recipient, in 'generalised exchange' the recipient of support reciprocates by exchanging a different resource. Walker, Wasserman and Wellman (1993:84) note that the study of reciprocity would require data of the flow of support between all network members. The analysis of reciprocity here focuses only on the interactions of one participant in their ISN, which means that reciprocity can only be discussed in a limited manner, from the perspective of each participant.

The interview data show that different patterns of reciprocity applied especially to neighbour ties and family ties. In the research locality, the participants' exchanges of support with neighbours were mostly based on specific and generalised exchange where support was returned by the recipient in a broadly symmetrical manner. This was evident from the examples of support that took place with participants and their neighbours but also from the way neighbourly support was described as mutual. Describing the relationships with her neighbours, Galenia (aged 66) stated: "we all coexist and help each other with whatever small is needed" (interview 08/12/2016). An expectation of equal exchange was present in informal exchanges of food, invitations to share meals, watching over each other's houses and the exchange of other small favours. "There is mutual support with a few neighbours. If I help you, you'll help me too

when I need something and when it is possible to support” (Daniel, aged 32, interview 18/03/2017). Not all participants had this kind of relationship with their neighbour, yet even those who had more distant relationships highlighted the importance of mutual respect as the basis of good neighbour relations. The focus group conversations also highlighted the importance of equal participation between neighbours at time of neighbourhood formation and urban service delivery, even though the discussions did not consider interpersonal exchanges specifically.

While neighbour ties were described by the participants as being based on mutual exchanges of social support, expectations of reciprocity between close friends and especially family were more flexible. While the variability of participants’ interpretations of friendship made the identification of specific reciprocal patterns in friendship relations challenging, family ties especially within the household showed more reciprocal flexibility in the exchange of support. When the participants described how they supported their family members, there was very little mention of mutuality in the provision of support, compared to neighbour ties where mutuality was emphasised. The household especially formed a core personal network where social ties were particularly strong, and support was exchanged between the different network members resembling “network balancing” (Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988:170). The parent-child – especially mother-child – relationships stood out as the ties that provided a wide range of support. Especially elderly parents provided more support than they received.¹¹⁵ Previous research also shows that maintaining family ties may require less effort than relationships with non-kin because of the inherent closeness of being related (Anheier & Kendall 2002; Lomnitz 2003; Williams & Windebank 2001). The private sphere of the household provides an environment for sharing everyday life and growing together, strengthening shared values and norms (Lomnitz 2003; Wellman & Wortley 1990).

The relevance of reciprocity as a regulating process in ISNs was highlighted in family ties. Even though support exchanged with other family members indicated the highest level of flexibility in terms of returning support, family ties could still suffer a breakdown if the norm of reciprocity (see Gouldner 1960) was frequently broken. Interview data show that lack of reciprocity within a household could lead to drastic changes in household composition. Laura (aged 65) used to share her house with her adult daughter’s young family, but Laura felt her daughter’s family

¹¹⁵ For a more detailed description of family ties in the research locality see chapter 5. The discussion regarding Facundo and the support he has offered to his adult son shows the imbalances of support within the extended family.

were not contributing to running the household. When Laura raised the issue with her daughter, the young family decided to move to live with the husband's family instead. This was one of the several examples where the participants experienced they constantly gave more support than what they personally felt they received in the long-term. Other examples of this related to issues with alcoholism, and disagreements of house ownership in the research locality.¹¹⁶ Previous research also shows that family support can be exhausted if relied on constantly without it being returned, especially when faced with ongoing economic insecurity (González de la Rocha 2001). Replicating reciprocal behaviour was particularly important when providing and receiving financial support. In the research locality it was rare for participants to receive financial support from kin beyond the household, but there were some examples of providing financial support especially to younger kin. While returning a loan was not necessarily an act of reciprocating financial support, respecting the arrangements relating to financial support indicated the importance of adhering to expectations of reciprocal behaviour, as highlighted by the quote below.

Sometimes my family come and speak to me and say they want to do this and that but can't afford to do it, asking to lend money for 6 months and I do. There are families that don't do that or [family members who] never pay back. In life there is everything, even in the same family there can be people who are ready to do anything for you and some who are not willing to do anything (Ricardo, aged 62, interview 03/04/2017).

While reciprocity within the family might flow in a more flexible manner, allowing more time for returning support, frequently breaking the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) within the family would still have negative consequences. Network balancing as a reciprocal process in exchanges of support within the family suggests that reciprocity is applied differently depending on the social tie but still highlights the importance of reciprocal practice in ISNs (Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Similarly, previous studies in Mexico show that the inability to reciprocate can lead to exhaustion of supportive ties (González de la Rocha 2001; Lomnitz 2003). Lomnitz (1998) also notes that social norms of reciprocal exchange are particularly strict in Latin American societies, implying that reciprocal exchange is not entered lightly. The data indicate that the norm of reciprocity was clearly present in interactions between different actors and functions of support.

¹¹⁶ These themes were brought up by many interviewees, especially Beatriz 01/12/2016, Carla 02/02/2017 and Julieta 19/04/2017.

However, reciprocity alone was not enough to explain the formation of ISNs but should be considered a regulating process relating to the exchange of support. The complexity of reciprocal processes was also evident from the relationship between reciprocity and trust, which is discussed in chapter 7.

6.2 Homophily – different aspects of similarity and social tie formation

Several previous studies of social networks identify homophily – or similarity between actors – as a mechanism for both forming social ties and strengthening ties with some more than others (Grossetti 2007; Kossinets & Watts 2009; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001; Smith, McPherson & Smith-Lovin 2014). Homophily can include different personal characteristics such as profession or social status (Kossinets & Watts 2009) and a range of socio-economic variables such as age, gender and religion (Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007; Smith, McPherson & Smith-Lovin 2014). Lomnitz (2003) does not discuss homophily per se but uses a typology of social, economic, physical and psychosocial distance as four combined factors that affect reciprocal exchange and the level of support between individuals. As the following sections show, there are some similarities between my findings and Lomnitz' (2003) typology. However, there are several aspects of homophily that relate to personal characteristics present in the data that indicates that who interacts with whom and why is based on several factors that overlap. Lomnitz' (2003) social distance refers to relationship categories, but does not take into consideration other social factors, such as age or role in the household. Instead Lomnitz (2003) theorises that social, economic and physical distance together are elements of psychosocial distance, which refers to trust and confidence between individuals. Due to the complexity of the characteristics of social ties and homophily found in the research locality, trust is considered separately in chapter 7.

6.2.1 Household composition as an element of social proximity

Household composition was a key aspect of homophily in the research locality for two reasons. Firstly, the household as the core of personal networks as shown in chapter 5. Secondly, household needs were the basis of many social support flows, because both need for support and ability to provide support were rooted within household circumstances. The participants with similar household needs relied on each other in a reciprocal manner: the older female participants who were widowed or divorced had befriended others in similar situations; while young mothers interacted with other young mothers; and neighbours who spent most of their days alone exchanged support with other neighbours in a similar situation. Previous research

also shows that it is often women who manage relationships with neighbours and tend to interact with other families who have dependent children (Grannis 2009; Willmott 1987). Wellman (1992) among others also shows that men's interests often do not align with the needs of the household. As discussed previously, the data show that women in the research locality often had more involvement with their neighbours than men, and social support exchanged between neighbours related to household matters. The focus below is on women as mothers and carers because most of the participants were women.

Motherhood enabled the formation and maintenance of reciprocal relations because of the similar situations women encountered as carers.¹¹⁷ The interviews showed that it was especially women who looked after the household and the family, which was why there was also more need for mothers to form support networks.¹¹⁸ As carers, women were exposed to specific social interactions beyond the household, such as the different institutions they accompanied children to. The interview data show that grandmothers and female neighbours sometimes helped take children to school or kindergarten, but this was usually the mothers' responsibility, making these institutions potential locations for building social networks. Adriana (aged 32) grew up in the research locality, went to school locally and now helped at both the kindergarten and primary school where her sons studied. She had also befriended other mothers and was still in touch with those friends from school she had made as a child who also had become mothers:

I am still in touch with many of my friends from school and many of them have children who are the same age as mine and we meet each other when taking them to school. Many of them still live here, some have moved away but the majority are still here... I spend most of my time with the mothers from my kids' schools. I go to kindergarten and spend some time with the mothers there, I also help the kindergarten set up breakfast with the kids because all the kids bring their own breakfast with them. Primary school the same, I spend time with the mothers when I go there (Adriana, interview 31/03/2017).

¹¹⁷ This is not to generalise that only women could be carers. This could also apply to men as carers; however, it was common for male participants to point out that they did not look after children. Some older male participants did refer to themselves as grandparents with the responsibility to help with childcare.

¹¹⁸ This also reflects previous research carried out in Mexico (Chant 1991; González de la Rocha 1994; Lewis 2011).

Adriana felt a strong connection to other mothers and herself identified having children of the same age as a reason for staying in touch with her friends from school. School enabled forming lasting friendships when Adriana was younger, whereas now school was a nodal point for most of her networks beyond the household, making motherhood the shared factor.¹¹⁹ However, not all young mothers built their ISNs by socialising at school gates, indicating that how the participants socialise was a matter of personal preference. Several previous studies highlight the importance of personal characteristics in how actors interact with others (Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Salazar Cruz (1996) identifies how some women even avoid befriending other local women because this can lead to negative gossiping, which was also the case with Mariana, one of the participants:

I have a very strict upbringing and my mother always told me not to stay talking with the other mothers at school... don't stay there gossiping. So I still don't do that, I only take them there. I believe very strongly that it is better to be at home than to get involved with the gossip (Mariana, aged 34, interview 19/04/2017).

Women's and especially mothers' responsibilities in Mexico are traditionally thought to be at home (see e.g., Chant 1991; González de la Rocha 1994; Lewis 2011). Several participants referred to spending time with other women as gossiping, which was often seen as negative and something that could lead to problems. Ximena (aged 27) was careful of not conversing too much with other mothers, but while she thought that gossiping could cause issues, she also mentioned that she was not accustomed to these types of interactions because she grew up in the countryside.

When (my daughter) goes to school, I don't stay there to chat with the other mothers. I only know one other mother who I talk to... Sometimes you stay and listen and you end up getting in trouble. So maybe they think I'm being rude for not staying to chat but it's not for me... I didn't interact with many people when I came here.¹²⁰ Because we come from a village, we don't really talk to many people here. I would work at home and then maybe go out with

¹¹⁹ As mentioned in chapter 5, the older participants who lacked opportunities to attend school had a more limited number of friendships and network members beyond the household.

¹²⁰ The word she used in the interview was *convivir*, referring to conviviality and coexisting.

some friends but not much. I come from Veracruz, from the coast. Life is very different here (Ximena, interview 14/03/2017).

In Ximena's case, the friendship that involved occasional reciprocal exchange was formed with the mother of Ximena's daughter's friend. In this case network membership developed due to further interaction between the women, facilitated by their children's friendship. Similarity was then based on motherhood, but the social tie was strengthened by the friendship between the children, which in turn was based on interaction in school, indicating the many layers of homophily. Indicating the complexity of the many levels of homophily, Ximena's case showed how similarity could drive people apart if the actors held different values and norms, but also how these differences could be bridged by other aspects of homophily, in this case children's friendship.

Similar household composition combined with the shared experience of building a house also enabled social tie formation when the neighbourhood was still becoming urbanised. Isabella (aged 70) and her husband befriended another young couple who were also building a house, forming a close relationship:

When we bought the land, my husband came here to build the first rooms on Sundays, and we got to know a family that was also building a house here a few streets away. They became the godparents for our children, and they were there when we got married. My husband helped them quite a lot and they also helped us when they could. They now live on another street but only the children, the parents already passed away. The help was with building the house at first, they had children who were the same age as ours (Isabella, interview 06/04/2017).

For Isabella, the mutual support relationship was based on sharing a similar experience of settling in an area that still lacked all basic services. A need to form local ties, combined with similar household composition and similar situation led to forming a close relationship that was later formalised by mutual godparenthood. A *compadrazgo* relationship – or fictive kin – has been shown to be a strong basis for reciprocal exchange (Molm, Collett & Schaefer 2007; Pahl

& Spencer 2003). As demonstrated in chapter 5, the relationships with fictive kin in the research locality were mostly close friendships with family-like flows of support.¹²¹

While motherhood and household composition were one aspect of homophily strongly present in the data as a factor combining actors in ISNs, there were other elements such as broader social contexts of motherhood or social ties formed between children that enabled tie formation. Social interactions were also guided by other personal factors, as Ximena's quote showed, and in some cases, frequent contact was required so that a weak tie could grow into a stronger relationship or reciprocal exchange. While frequent social interaction between similar actors has been shown to enable reciprocal exchange (Buchan, Croson & Dawes 2002; Lomnitz 2003; Mitchell 1969), a similar household composition alone could not guarantee exchange of social support in the research locality due to other limiting factors such as access to resources and questionable abilities to return support.¹²²

6.2.2 Age and lifecourse as aspects of homophily

The data show that age was an important factor in terms of homophily, as most participants' interactions beyond the household were with people of similar age. Previous research has focused on age as an explanation for varied levels of support. It has been showed that middle-aged people tend to give and receive more support (Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007), while young and older age groups have smaller social networks (Campbell & Lee 1992; Haines, Hurlbert & Beggs 1996). Campbell and Lee (1992:1080) state that may be because older people are less involved in "important social roles" in the United States. However, the data indicate that in the research locality this was not as clearly the case, as especially women provided care first as mothers and later as grandmothers, continuing to support with childcare and repeating roles of care throughout their lifecourse.

There is a connection between age and lifecourse, because individuals' needs and resources vary following changes in their lifecourse. In addition to an individual's lifecourse, focusing more on the household level, González De La Rocha (1994:21) refers to the domestic cycle, to draw out changes and different phases of family life. The domestic cycle relates to different stages of the lifecourse that cause changes in the household, such as having children, getting married or divorced, which may change the roles and responsibilities within a household (González De La

¹²¹Fictive kin exchange a wide range of support, including both companionship, emotional support, help with everyday life such as childcare as well as economic support.

¹²² Trust and reciprocity are discussed in chapter 7.

Rocha 1994). The processes in forming social ties that related to age, lifecourse and the domestic cycle were particularly clearly present in the experiences of those participants who had lived in the research locality all their lives. Both Adriana (discussed in 6.2.1) and Valeria had formed local friendships at a young age, which extended to their families in terms of reciprocal exchange but had changed following their personal lifecourses and domestic cycles.

I get on well with the neighbour on the right because she is my age and we have known each other since we were children. It was their family that used to help my father when his shop was still there. But now it is different because we work long days. When we get home in the evening, we don't go out anymore. You just greet neighbours in the morning when you leave and, in the evening, when you come back... The father of this same neighbour passed away a week ago... I approached them and said if there is anything that we can do to help we are here. I've taken them bread and I've taken them chairs.¹²³ But apart from that normally we don't see each other much (Valeria, aged 31, interview 07/04/2017).

Valeria's quote shows the interrelated nature of different aspects of homophily: how similar age and the progress in lifecourse has changed the relationship between the actors. Living next door to each other for 30 years had enhanced the stability of the social tie while household composition and changes in the domestic cycle had both brought the two households together. Changes in the domestic cycle in this case meant evolving simultaneously from children to adolescents and adults as well as employees and stepping up to look after the household when the head of the household had passed away. This shows how changes in individuals' lifecourse could limit social interactions and weaken local social ties, whereas changes in the domestic cycle could also increase need for support, activating social ties in ISNs. Here the death in the family had increased need for support and caused more interaction between Valeria and her neighbour.¹²⁴

Because age is closely related to lifecourse and the domestic cycle, it was also present in the formation of social ties at the time of neighbourhood urbanisation. When the neighbourhood began to urbanise, many of the new inhabitants were recently married young couples who

¹²³ To help with the arrangements for the wake and the readings of the rosary, which take place over nine days.

¹²⁴ Neighbouring and provision of support at time of emergency is discussed in chapter 5.

began to build their own homes in preparation for or to accommodate household expansion. The processes of homophily at the time of neighbourhood formation were also more broadly related to shared experiences of arriving to a new area simultaneously, sharing the experience of building houses and collaborating to improve the living environment. Previous research suggests that shared experiences at time of distress can lead to acts of solidarity (Cattell 2001; Ochoa 2004). Solidarity among new residents appeared to be among the first steps towards forming ISNs in the research locality, with more specific aspects of homophily contributing as processes to develop stronger ties.

6.2.3 Geographical proximity as context for homophily

Geographical proximity refers to living near others and spending time locally. Like other aspects of homophily, geographical proximity alone did not guarantee social ties would form, but the data do show that participants who spent most of their days within the neighbourhood had more local ties.¹²⁵ Both men and women who worked long days beyond the research locality hardly interacted with their neighbours, which made exchanges of social support also unlikely.¹²⁶ Various network studies show that lack of local contact affects the number of local ties negatively (Wellman et al. 1997; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988; Wellman & Leighton 1979). Weakening local ties are also part of the 'community lost' argument, which claims that local solidarity in form of support is disappearing as interactions are becoming more extra-local (Guest 2000; Wellman 1996). In the research locality this applied more to men and younger generations, as most of the female participants were either retired or housewives.

Geographical proximity was central to the formation of local social ties at time of neighbourhood urbanisation. Arriving to a new area at a time when visiting or contacting familiar ties elsewhere was difficult due to lack of transportation or telephone lines, made it important to form local friendships that could become the source of support. Previous research has identified lack of local kinship support as a reason for increased reliance on neighbourly support (Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco & Hoyos de los Ríos 1997; Heil 2014). Street-by-street collaborations to improve the immediate living environment also relied on geographical proximity, yet it was other aspects of homophily that contributed to forming more permanent social ties and friendships. The female participants formed reciprocal relationships especially with other

¹²⁵ Aspect of neighbouring are discussed in chapter 5.

¹²⁶ Commuting to the city centre from the research locality using public transport took between 1.5-2.5h. While some participants had access to a car, driving to the city centre often took a long time because of constant heavy traffic.

mothers, enabling them to share care responsibilities. There were at least three cases where female participants frequently supported each other based on the needs of their children. Sofia (aged 67) moved to the area after her husband died and was one of the first people to build a house on her street. When more people arrived, she frequently looked after other children living nearby when her own children were young: “They ate at my house and spent a lot of time there. I helped them with their canon for their first communion and later I would bring them food and they would all sit down at my table” (Sofia, interview 04/04/2017).

Previous research in Mexico City shows that female support networks rarely rely on non-kin for childcare (Salazar Cruz 1996), which indicates that the lack of local kin ties in the research locality at time of urbanisation emphasised the importance of neighbourly ties. This supported the formation of strong ties especially when different aspects of homophily bound actors together. One of the observed and particularly strong neighbourly ties between the participants was between Araceli (aged 71) and Larissa (aged 67). The women lived on the same street, both went through the process of building a house, had similar age children and still had a strong friendship, even though Araceli lived elsewhere for several years.¹²⁷

While geographical proximity at time of neighbourhood urbanisation supported the formation of social ties, the interview data and observations show that it was nowadays those participants who worked locally who had more local interactions and local social ties. Those male participants who worked locally had broader networks and mentioned their work roles as a reason for meeting new people, also allowing them to build relationships through frequent contact over extended periods of time. Previous literature shows that having an active role in a neighbourhood is linked to having a strong local network (Fischer 1982; Grannis 2009; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999; Wheeldon 1969). According to Lin (1999) the more extensive a network, the broader the range of social resources actors have access to, as indicated by the case of Valeria:

We know everyone who has a business on this street. If there is an issue with something, we always talk to each other. It is the ones who are nearest who we talk to the most, the *tortillería*¹²⁸ and the stationery shop. And it was even more so where we were before because that was the corner of our street [where we live] (Valeria, aged 31, interview 07/04/2017).

¹²⁷ This relationship is discussed in a more detailed in section 5.2.

¹²⁸ *Tortillería* is a shop making and selling corn tortillas.

Working locally did not only allow spending more time in the neighbourhood but often increased everyday interactions with other local residents. Valeria's family had had a corner shop since she was a child and it had made her father a very well-known person in the neighbourhood. Local jobs mostly included selling goods or food, or providing services such as a mechanic, which all involved some social interactions, enabling building a wide network, even if the ties might have been weak. In Valeria's father's case, when their shop used to be on the same street where they lived, repeat customers were also long-term neighbours they had stronger ties with and who often bought groceries with credit. This now happened less as the family had had to relocate the shop to a different part of the neighbourhood.

Those selling at the biweekly local outdoors *tianguis*-market worked at the heart of the neighbourhood, because the market took place on the main road and the variety of products meant most of the residents passed through regularly.

I know a lot of people on my street but because we sell at the *tianguis* we know a lot of people in the neighbourhood. We have a lot of conviviality because of that and if there is something going on people come and inform you at the *tianguis* and there is a lot of support in that sense.... My mother started to sell at the *tianguis* when it first started (Maite, interview 01/04/17).

How geographical proximity relates to other aspects of homophily as an aspect of social tie formation has been changing in the research locality. Living next door to a family with similar household composition might not mean that interactions between the two families were frequent because the participants tended to spend less time locally, which applied especially to the younger generations. Public transport, car ownership and telecommunications also made it easier to maintain extra-local social ties. Those families who lived in extended family households now had more family ties they could rely on locally, which reduced the need to rely on other local ties such as neighbours. This reflects the findings of several previous studies that focus on modernisation aspects of communities and the rise of extra-local social ties (Castells 2010; Curtis White & Guest 2003; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1979).

While the importance of geographical proximity as an aspect of social tie formation might be changing, it still formed a part of other aspects of similarity that brought individuals together in the research locality. Combined elements of homophily meant that network actors were more likely to have shared experiences, which meant that they were likely to also share some of the

same issues or at least the ability to relate to each other's' issues (see Kossinets & Watts 2009; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001; Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007). Similarity between actors related to more personal attributes such as preferences of socialising and place of work or education, compared to the shared experiences of building a home and collectively making the immediate environment liveable. There continued to be similarities in how young mothers exchanged support based on factors related to the household or caring for children. The higher variability of individuals' lifecourses and family situations, however, meant that there were also more differences between the participants and how they chose to reciprocate.

6.3 Conviviality binding people together like social glue – 'we support each other, we coexist'

Convivencia or conviviality was mentioned frequently by the participants as a key element of neighbourhood relations. It is the most prominent concept that has emerged directly from the interviews based on the participants' frequent use of the word. Heil defines conviviality as a process that includes both cooperation and conflict through "relative equality, mutual respect and consideration" (2014:453). This refers particularly to multicultural and socio-economically heterogeneous neighbourhoods where cohabitation may need to be negotiated (Heil 2014). Wise and Noble explain conviviality simply as "the capacity to live together" (2016:423). Conviviality, as explained by the participants, went beyond friendly behaviour: it meant coming together to spend time, chat and share experiences. There was also an expectation of mutual behaviour in the basic functions of conviviality (see e.g., Wise & Velayutham 2014), indicating that there are some similarities to the norm of reciprocity and doing to others as they do to you (see Gouldner 1960). The participants discussed conviviality as if it was something material, referring to it as a function (*convivio*), an active verb (*convivir*) and a level of activity in the neighbourhood (*convivencia*).¹²⁹

A *convivio* or a get-together that brings neighbours together usually took place in the research locality around a national holiday or before the festive period such as in December. One could also be organised for no specific reason, just to bring people together to share food, which was a key part of get-togethers. Everyone contributing something to the gathering showed that the get-togethers were collective events, where everyone played a part. Just like in reciprocal

¹²⁹ Nowicka & Vertovec (2014) provide a more detailed explanation of the root of the word conviviality.

relationships, everyone was expected to have something to offer and it was the shared experience that allowed the get-togethers to act as social glue that bound people together.

When I moved there and was still in good health, in the beginning we used to *convivir* a lot. We would all come out to the corner [of the housing block] and eat together, everyone would make a *guisado* [a stew-like dish] and we'd have a good time (Fernanda, aged 71, interview 16/03/2017).

Fernanda described a usual get-together that used to take place with some of the people who lived in the same housing estate. *Convivios* refer to gatherings between groups or neighbours but family celebrations were also often set up in a similar manner, because families tended to be large and sharing food preparation made organising the *convivio* a shared responsibility. Alberto (aged 67), for example, described a family celebration where someone brought the cake, someone else the stew and so on. Sharing food played a key role in participating in *convivios*, showing that people were willing to contribute in social activities, making it an event that strengthened the shared norm of collaboration and reciprocity. This way a get-together could enable social interaction, the creation of weak ties and the strengthening of existing social ties.

Wise and Velayutham (2014:417) consider sharing food in a convivial get-together a “social ritual” because sharing a trivial action creates a social world among those present and provides opportunities to get to know people better. Trivial activities, such as eating, when done together gain new meanings as processes of tradition and ritual experiences. Forrest & Kearns (2001:2134) consider organising street parties as one characteristic of cohesive neighbourhoods along with other shared activities such as local political petitions and campaigns. This is because street parties too are based on collective activity and collaboration, even if the function itself may be less serious. Santiago (aged 66) gave an example of a get-together that was the only one his neighbours still organised, but one that took place every year to celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹³⁰ Even though the get-together was the only one the neighbours organised regularly, it still maintained the social norm of sharing among the more socially active neighbours.

Where I live, for the 12th of December we celebrate the day of the Virgin. With several neighbours we get together to collect some money to organise the Mass, music and everything and then everyone brings a *guisado* [a stew-

¹³⁰ The Virgin of Guadalupe is widely celebrated in Mexico. The tradition is Catholic but is also celebrated in many ways.

like dish], and the whole block is invited but not everyone joins us. It is the only celebration that we still organise every year with the neighbours. And every year it is the same people who turn up. There are some 20 people who always come (Santiago, interview 15/03/2017).

Conviviality provided opportunities for communicating with the neighbours and sharing other activities, such as sports. Even though Adriana (32) stated her street used to be very conflictive because a known gang member used to live at the other end of the street, Adriana highlighted that there used to be plenty of conviviality because the neighbours used to play football together. Those neighbours who wanted to come together and share positive experiences regardless of the negative environment, did so, showing that conflictive spaces could also be collective spaces when filled with conviviality. This resembles what Wise and Noble call “lived negotiation” (2016:425), which they consider an essential part of the processes of *convivencia*. The shared activity in a conflictive environment could create a more positive environment for those coming together to coexist, making playing sports only one element of the social interaction.

Everyone on my street used to get together to play football and organise a football team. My dad used to play with them. And we used to go to the hill over there to play. There was more union and conviviality, we used to organise *posadas*¹³¹ everyone in their turn (Adriana, interview 31/03/17).

Like reciprocity, conviviality was mostly an informal phenomenon. It did not follow a set of rules or leaders, but it took place based on mutual understanding. However, there were also elements that supported shared activities that did require some leadership and organisation, like the formation of football teams in Adriana’s example. One female participant who used to have an active role as a local street representative (*jefa de manzana*) also extended her informal leadership to organise get-togethers on her street. Her role in the neighbourhood meant that she was known by a variety of local residents and was able to bring neighbours together to *convivir*, coexist. Andrea was also able to draw on her political connections and gather resources for joint celebrations, which made it less demanding for disadvantaged neighbours to take part.¹³²

¹³¹ *Posadas* are gatherings, where specific food and drink is shared every evening for 12 days before Christmas Eve. They are traditionally celebrated with neighbours living on the same street.

¹³² The neighbourhood was more disadvantaged some 30 years ago when there were still high levels of extreme poverty in Mexico City.

When I was in charge, when Mothers' Day came we all put tables out in the street and put some music on and all celebrated together. Later I managed to get them items for the parties through the political groups and we did the same for Fathers' Day, children's day and Day of the Dead and all made altars together (Andrea, aged 71, interview 21/03/2017).

The practices of conviviality detailed by the participants indicated how the "co-presence of others" in social occasions helped spread collective interests, reinforcing "mutual bonds and feelings of belonging" (Misztal 2003:127). Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence relates to these processes of dissemination explaining the shared excitement of gatherings as a resource that strengthens communities (Misztal 2003:127). Conviviality as shared activities has become relevant in research that seeks solutions to improve the sense of togetherness in complex neighbourhoods (see Nowicka & Vertovec 2014; Payson 2018). While even the most trivial yet frequent interactions created familiarity between actors, convivial activities increased familiarity by bringing people together to share experiences in a collective setting. Previous research identifies communal spaces in housing estates as one example of the environment in which familiarity is increased as individuals carry out their own activities in the presence of others (Wise & Velayutham 2014). Similar interactions took place in one of the gated housing estates in the research locality, but this was an exception as most of the neighbourhood consisted of individual houses and residents came to the streets to spend time together.

The participants described convivial get-togethers that used to take place in the streets outside their homes, which is according to Cuesta Moreno (2010) usual especially in Iztapalapa. Now that there were two community centres in the research locality, these had become hubs for conviviality. One of the pensioners' groups that assembled to do crafts often organised special *convivios*, even if they normally ate together during the two weekly activities. These meetings lasted between two to four hours and were often a place to exchange both emotional support and goods. Those who were involved in casual sales could circulate their catalogues for ordering products such as cosmetics or household goods. Those with similar medical issues could exchange healthcare products, including medication. In this setting, the *convivio* functioned as a venue enabling reciprocal exchange that varied from exchange of food or other goods to companionship and emotional support. A physical setting for a regular *convivio* offered a place for more "substantial interaction", which forms a basis for sharing norms and values with neighbours (see Grannis 2009:22).

Despite the two active community centres, convivial activities between neighbours in the research locality were declining. Nearly all participants who discussed conviviality in the interviews stated that overall, there was now less conviviality in the neighbourhood. There were several explanations for this reduction, including some personal reasons such as the more active neighbours passing away, but most of the explanations that were offered reflected neighbourhood transformation. Fernanda (aged 71) stated that the reduction had been happening because many things had been changing: her health was not as good, people had other work or family commitments, children had grown up and “everyone has their own things” (interview 16/03/2017). Many worked two jobs to earn a sufficient income, which meant free time could be sparse. At least three participants stated that shared celebrations such as *posadas* were no longer organised by their neighbours, expressing no interest in taking the responsibility to organise them.

Some of the younger participants also stated that conviviality between neighbours had almost disappeared. Both Adriana (aged 32) and Alejandro (aged 31) shared similar experiences of their parents being socially active with many neighbours playing football or basketball, but this no longer happened as all the children had grown up and had children of their own.¹³³ As get-togethers reduced, there was less interaction among neighbours, making it more difficult to reach the level of familiarity required for reciprocal exchange and strong social networks.

6.4 Community organisations and informal social networks

There were two community organisations in the research locality, DCB and CCC which acted also as the gatekeepers for this study. Previous network studies referred to throughout this thesis (González de la Rocha 1994; Lomnitz 2003) do not mention any community centre -type local organisations, showing that community centres as a response to social development are a relatively new addition to Mexican neighbourhoods (Ziccardi 2012). The two organisations in the research locality provided opportunities for forming and maintaining local social ties; however, there were differences in how DCB and CCC were founded, how they functioned and how the local residents used them.¹³⁴ How these organisations were formed and how this affected how they enabled ISNs in the research locality is considered below.

¹³³ Based on interviews with Adriana (31/03/2017) and Alejandro (09/03/2017).

¹³⁴ I have discussed CCC in chapter 4 as a setting for friendship groups to show how different the participants’ understandings of friendship and different levels of friendship are.

Because DCB formed following the efforts of local young people who were involved in gang activity, it had since its beginning been an informal organisation.¹³⁵ Youngsters from rival gangs pursued a public space that could be used as a sports ground, giving local young people a space where they could spend time. The years between 1987-1989 were particularly violent in the research locality in terms of gang activity.¹³⁶ Many conflicts between the gangs resulted in killings, while robberies and vandalism happened frequently.

It was a very complicated situation. People used to fight before too but not like that... The ones that were most powerful in the gangs, with the greatest prestige, used to have guns. But there weren't many of them when the area wasn't that populated. Then more people came who carried machetes or knives. So the fights got [Nicolas pauses] let's say bloody... There is a difference because if someone shoots you, one bullet is enough to kill. When one gang fought another gang, they would kill with 80-90 stab wounds all over the body. And that is really what pushed us to search for this space. The mothers and siblings of those involved in the gangs couldn't walk freely in the *barrio*¹³⁷ because they would get assaulted when they went to the shop or when they went out to buy some food. Bus drivers and taxi drivers were also assaulted so that people couldn't enter the area... At seven in the evening the streets were empty" (Nicolas, aged 43, interview 27/04/2017).

In 1990, following debates with various local authorities, the collective efforts of local young people led to gaining access to a plot of land. The land used to act as a border between two gangs but also had to be claimed in order to keep other rival groups from accessing the land.¹³⁸ The whole process of founding DCB reflected an unravelling of a social dilemma, where pooling individual resources for the sake of a common good exceeded the potential returns of individual efforts (see, e.g. De Cremer & Van Lange 2001:57). The violent gang situation posed a serious

¹³⁵ As discussed in chapter 3, DCB stands for *Deportivo Chavos Banda*. This can be translated as gang youths sports ground. *Chavo* is Mexican slang and refers to a male youth.

¹³⁶ The focus groups conversations confirm that by 1986 most of the land in the research locality was already inhabited and many houses completed. The construction of the first housing estate following the 1985 earthquake was completed around 1990-1992. This appears to coincide with the increase in gang activity described especially by Nicolas who was interviewed 27/04/2017. Gang and youth violence were frequently mentioned in interviews and informal conversations.

¹³⁷ *Barrio* refers to neighbourhood but has a more derogatory meaning than *colonia*, which is the official term used for neighbourhoods.

¹³⁸ Land invasions were common at the early stages of urbanisation in the area. This is discussed in chapter 4.

enough shared issue for a solution to be sought, following some of the practices discussed in chapter 4 in relation to neighbourhood formation and community networks. To increase the complexity of the shared issue, the land that the borough gave to DCB was owned by a private landowner, leading to a complex legal case. The agreement with the landowner still stipulated that DCB could use the land for communal social and sports activities only; otherwise they would lose access to the land (Rabasa 2015).¹³⁹

While the collective efforts to found DCB were initiated by young people, the initiative was supported by many in the wider community as a potential solution to curb violence by creating a place where young people could spend their time. One of the participants who was actively involved in leading neighbourhood improvement stated: “I also helped with DCB, helped them obtain the grounds. Imagine what the neighbourhood would be like if it (DCB) was not here” (Andrea, aged 71, interview 21/03/17). Previous research has recognised this kind of shared interest and cause for collective action as one of the elements increasing social cohesion and social interactions in neighbourhoods (Forrest & Kearns 2001; Scott & Liew 2012). The interview data show that while some participants had reservations about DCB due to previous links to gang activity, having a public sports ground in the neighbourhood was considered important.

I didn’t have any role here when they were starting [DCB]. But there was support from a political party because we wanted there to be a sports ground where our children could go, a place to go because there was nothing here (Sofia, aged 67, interview 04/04/2017).

In this manner, DCB brought many of the local residents together forming a network of networks, a loose organisational structure which was still present in how the contemporary DCB functioned. A network of networks is a broad entity that does not only form a network through its actors but also hosts other networks within, providing a broad nodal point (see, e.g. Wellman & Berkowitz 1988). A networked organisational structure has been considered beneficial due to the open structures that increase inclusivity, even if it may mean that organisational efficiency suffers (Gilchrist 2009:54). The complexity and length of the initial struggle to found DCB reflected the community networks that were more prominent when the neighbourhood was still becoming urbanised. DCB continued to function as a “self-organised” initiative (Ostrom

¹³⁹ The complex process of obtaining the space and founding DCB was also discussed in several interviews, especially with Alejandro (09/03/2017), Andrea (21/03/2017), Nicolas (27/04/2017) Sofia (04/04/2017) and Valentina (07/04/2017).

2000:149), with elements of collective action, as many of the activities available were provided by self-taught locals on a skills exchange basis, indicating a high level of collectivism.

Beyond how DCB had formed and continued to be run, it provided a social space for local interactions. Especially the younger participants whose daily interactions were nowadays mostly beyond the neighbourhood emphasised DCB's importance as the "link that brings us together" (Jorge, aged 22, interview 26/11/2016). The multiuse buildings and outdoor space meant DCB could be used by a broad range of local residents. DCB also provided a space for a local *pandilla de barra*, young men's weightlifting group that used a vertical metal bar for gymnastic shows of strength. This highlighted the inclusive nature of DCB, providing a space for the group which had formed in a local prison and many of whose members were former convicts.¹⁴⁰ The group's presence was an example of the broader social functions DCB had in the neighbourhood, bringing together different types of people with various interests. Those participants who actively visited DCB showed through their individual stories how involvement with DCB had supported them in their pursuit of educational or employment goals. In some cases, the participants also made more resources available through DCB, as a network of networks had formed over the years.

Compared to DCB, CCC as a formal organisation lacked some of the social characteristics of a collectively formed networked organisation, as it was built as part of a commercial housing project and later opened as a community centre by Iztapalapa borough. There was no local initiative involved in the founding of CCC. Conversations with several locals showed that many were not aware of CCC's existence even recently.¹⁴¹ Space at CCC was more limited, comprising only of one main hall and small outdoors play area for children, which might be why many people did not attend activities there. Iztapalapa borough employed the two managers and maintained the building but CCC received very little funding and the building was in disrepair. The activity levels had reduced in the last few years and the centre no longer offered summer activities for children like it used to.¹⁴² Some of these issues were due to changes following the political cycles of the borough and reductions in funding. Comparing CCC and DCB showed that the involvement of local residents in building and maintaining a space was also an important social process,

¹⁴⁰ *Reclusorio Oriente Varonil Preventivo* -prison is located near the western border of Consejo Agrarista Mexicano neighbourhood and is one of three male prisons in Mexico City.

¹⁴¹ This included the research assistant who was born and raised locally and lived a 15-minute walk away from CCC.

¹⁴² Based on both observations and interviews with participants (especially Juana 23/03/2017 and Natalia 15/02/2017) as well as more informal interactions with locals.

creating a sense of pride for the collectively created organisation. This was lacking from CCC, which was an externally run organisation managed by the borough instead of local residents.

CCC still contributed to the functions of ISNs by acting as a location for interactions for those locals who did use it, which was nowadays mostly adults aged over 55.¹⁴³ The *convivios* one of the pensioners' group frequently organised were discussed in the previous section, showing how different sides of reciprocal exchange were present in these get-togethers. It should be noted, however, that the pensioners' group formed and used to meet in people's homes before CCC was opened.¹⁴⁴ This clarifies CCC's role as a location for interaction, as the most prominent network of people that used the space was originated elsewhere and used to be more informal. Here informality refers to having a people-led non-institutional origin, whereas formal would be a group set up by an employee of the borough. Compared to CCC, DCB had broader social functions in the neighbourhood and a less formal environment. While DCB was formed in order to stop the violence in the neighbourhood, it continued to offer a broad variety of activities including music lessons, arts and crafts, with a focus on physical exercise but a broader social function, which made it inclusive, portraying a networked structure. However, both organisations enabled social interactions among local residents, supporting especially the formation of extended networks (see Epstein 1969), offering broader sets of weaker ties.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to build on the characteristics of ISNs in the research locality by analysing the bases of social ties. The research question addressed in this chapter is: what processes are present in the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support. The different sections show that while there were some processes that brought people together enabling the formation of ISNs and exchange of support, these processes overlapped and intertwined. They were also dynamic processes that were present to different extents following the changing broader social setting of the research locality. The findings imply that reciprocity, aspects of homophily, conviviality and community organisations all contribute to the formation of ISNs and exchange of support, whereas some aspects such as geographical proximity were less relevant in the formation of social ties in the research locality currently than before. This chapter has shown the dynamic nature of the processes of ISN formation and the increasing importance of personal

¹⁴³ There was also one exercise group for pensioners with two weekly activities at DCB, but CCC appeared to be more popular among the elderly, perhaps because activities took place during the afternoon.

¹⁴⁴ Based on FG held 23/02/2017 and interviews with Carla 02/02/2017 and Sara 08/02/2017.

attributes such as age, motherhood and stage of life course as a determinant of who exchanges support with whom. The changing nature of ISNs is further discussed in section 8.1.

Even though reciprocity and the norm of doing to others as they do to you (Gouldner 1960) was prominent across different social ties and present in both contemporary and historical ISNs, there was no clear single pattern or rule that defined the processes of ISN formation. The role of reciprocity in social relations and especially social support has been emphasised by previous research in various contexts (Komter 2007; Plickert, Côté & Wellman 2007; Uehara 1990). While reciprocity was an overarching process present in ISNs, how the norm of reciprocity was applied in practice varied depending on the type of relationship or whom the exchange of support took place with. The three types of reciprocal exchange; specialised, generalised and network balancing (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988) enabled distinguishing the different levels of flexibility of reciprocity. Reciprocal exchange in the participants' ISNs was mostly based on network balancing in family settings, where actors were more flexible in terms of when and how support should be returned. Close friendships where ties were more family-like could allow more substantial support, but overall local non-kin ties tended to be based on general reciprocity, where support was exchanged between two actors. The centrality of reciprocity as a process in the participants' ISNs was evident from the breakdowns of family ties that could happen if the norm of reciprocity was frequently broken. The prominence of reciprocity as a mechanism in ISNs was also reflected in the relationship between trust and reciprocity in social interactions, which is discussed in the following chapter.

Even though reciprocity provides an overarching description of how ISNs function, it does not explain the processes of ISN formation. As the second section of this chapter shows, different aspects of homophily – or similarity between individuals – were present in situations where people forged social ties. This finding reflects previous research, as personal characteristics such as socio-economic factors have been found to enable forming social ties (see e.g. Kossinets & Watts 2009; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001; Smith, McPherson & Smith-Lovin 2014). Lomnitz (2003) does not discuss homophily but refers to 'physical, economic and social distance' as factors that enable reciprocal exchange in social networks. While her typology has much in common with homophily, and provides a useful comparison point, Lomnitz' (2003) concept of social distance relies heavily on relationship categories as an explanation of social interaction. The data show that social ties in the research locality function in a complex setting, where household composition, including motherhood, age and changing lifecourses were the most prominent social aspects of homophily that enabled the formation and maintenance of ISNs.

Geographical proximity did contribute to the formation of social ties but comparing the processes of ISN formation at times of neighbourhood urbanisation and more recently showed that geographical proximity no longer played such a prominent role as an enabler of ISNs as before. This was especially due to the weakening reliance on neighbours and other non-kin for support as many households in the research locality nowadays were extended family households whereas previously local kin support was unavailable. The aspects of homophily that were more prominent in the participants' ISNs nowadays were more based on personal characteristics, than at time of neighbourhood urbanisation, when the participants used to take part in many collaborative processes and shared experiences, rather than focusing mostly on individual goals.

Both reciprocity and homophily overlap with the process of conviviality, as convivial get-togethers and sharing activities from celebrations to playing sports allowed actors to build familiarity with others and evolve shared practices by doing things together. The act of doing even trivial things together creates social rituals that reinforce the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), as well as creating a sense of togetherness between the participating actors (see e.g., Nowicka & Vertovec 2014). The finding that conviviality is an essential part of social tie formation, maintenance and flow of support raises some concern for the future of ISNs in the research locality, as convivial activities have been less prominent in the contemporary social interactions. The decline of convivial practices implies that there was less social interaction with local non-kin ties in the broader neighbourhood. Even if extra-local social ties may be increasing as proposed by Guest (2000) among others, a reduction of conviviality may lead to a more socially fragmented neighbourhood. I consider the diminishing ISNs by analysing the factors that hinder the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support in chapter 7.

In the final section, I considered how the two local community organisations enable ISNs in the research locality. It is evident that community centres offer first of all opportunities for interactions and spaces for convivial experiences (Payson 2018). This applies to both DCB and CCC. However, how DCB was formed made it an informal local network of networks, whereas CCC was a formally run community centre acting as a more traditional location for interactions between local residents. Conviviality and community organisations continued to enable the formation of local ties in a community-oriented manner so that the participants could come together based on geographical proximity rather than aspects of homophily which mostly related to personal characteristics. The overall reduction of conviviality as emphasised by the participants reflects the finding that ISNs were becoming less community-oriented and more

personal. The community organisations still had the potential to enable local ties by engaging locals in the delivery of activities and maintaining the communal spaces. However, activities in CCC had been reportedly reducing and the building itself was in disrepair. Based on the interview data, DCB used to be supported by the wider community but the data does not allow comparing whether DCB was now visited by fewer people, even if it appears to be mostly run by a small core network of people. This chapter has then showed that while there were several processes that together contributed to the formation and functions of ISNs, the social interactions in the contemporary research locality were most of all based on personal characteristics, while the processes that related more to neighbourly interactions were more prominent in the ISNs prominent at time of neighbourhood formation.

7. Aspects hindering informal social networks – ‘everyone scratches with their own nails’

There is a saying in Mexico that was mentioned by five female participants in interviews when discussing patterns of support: everyone scratches with their own nails (*cada uno se rasca con sus propias uñas*). For one participant the saying related to relying on her own means and not being a burden to others, yet most mentioned the saying in relation to the unavailability of support, lack of reciprocal behaviour and lack of trust.¹⁴⁵ This chapter focuses on the research question: ‘what hinders the formation of informal social networks (ISNs) and the exchange of social support in the research locality’. The focus is especially on aspects of trust in relation to reciprocity and distrust as an extension of neighbourhood transformation and increasing insecurity.

The previous chapter showed the importance of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) and aspects of homophily as two of the processes present in ISN formation and functions. Breaking the norm of reciprocity is analysed further in this chapter as a factor that limits forming trust between individuals, making trust relevant in how individuals act in collaborative situations and whether they choose to take part in exchanges of support. Previous research shows that trust is one element of social networks (see, e.g. Lin 1999) as it guides with whom and how people interact (see, e.g. Willmott 1987).

Interactions with participants and local residents emphasised the presence of distrust, showing that trust had an essential role in how ISNs work in the research locality, which many described a conflictive neighbourhood. In Spanish, trust is *confianza*, which translates to English as confidence, insinuating that to trust someone means to have confidence in someone. Trust is considered a dynamic concept in this thesis, something that can be gained or lost depending on of how each actor trusts or chooses not to trust. The interview data provided descriptions of social situations where trust was eroding, which is why trust is approached as an explanation for diminishing social support.

The first part of the chapter (7.1) analyses participants’ experiences of trust, focusing on who is trusted and why. Uslaner’s (2002) moralistic trust is considered as an explanation to why the participants might trust strangers, suggesting that based on moral values we are taught, some

¹⁴⁵ Based on interviews with Ana (24/11/2016), Beatriz (01/12/2016), Julieta (10/04/2017), Manuela (04/04/2017) and Victoria (13/04/2017).

people believe most people in general are trustworthy. More rationalistic approaches to trust (see e.g. Hardin 2002) suggest that trust is based on information and previous experiences of others, explaining patterns of finding people trustworthy or untrustworthy (Buchan, Croson & Dawes 2002; Hardin 2002). Drawing on these differing explanations of trust, the relationship between reciprocity and trust is discussed, moving from special relationships of trustworthiness to effects of reputation and gossip.

The second part of the chapter (7.2) analyses how patterns of trust were affected by the surroundings (see Williams & Windebank 2001), neighbourhood change and social as well as physical segregation (see Bayón & Saraví 2013; Lupton & Power 2002). The diminution of social interactions and overall familiarity is analysed in light of neighbourhood formation, the arrival of housing blocks and increase in population. Connections between environmental factors and high level of crime and insecurity are explored, discussing the emergence of a climate of fear and distrust, processes of othering and the reconfiguration of social boundaries (see Tilly 2006).¹⁴⁶ Overall, the chapter moves from patterns of trust to how distrust is formed, piecing together the changing social and physical landscape and analysing how these processes affect the functioning and formation of ISNs in the research locality.

7.1 The challenge of trust in informal social networks

Trust has been claimed to make society possible (Simmel 1990), yet there is little agreement on how trust should be defined. Trust is a complex concept, which is evident from applications of trust in a range of disciplines from economics to psychology (Axelrod 1984; Newton & Zmerli 2011). This thesis applies a broad definition of trust as having confidence that others can fulfil our expectations (see Freitag & Traunmüller 2009; Newton & Zmerli 2011; Ruokonen 2013).

Trust as a social phenomenon is often suggested to be based on action and rational analysis, driven by “encapsulated interest” (Hardin 2002:1), so that finding people trustworthy is based on “concrete experiences...in social interaction” (Freitag & Traunmüller 2009:787). More psychological explanations of interpersonal trust claim that the foundation of trust is a state of mind and driven by morality rather than simply peoples’ interests (Nooteboom 2012; Ruokonen 2013; Uslaner 2002). There is also a plethora of explanations for the basis of trust that combine some aspects of rational and psychological perspectives on trust (see e.g. Möllering 2001; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough 2016). This chapter focuses on both trust in strangers and specific

¹⁴⁶ Definition of distrust is provided in section 7.1.

individuals in certain situations based on the participants' experiences, which is why the analysis draws on generalised and particularised trust from the perspective of rationalistic trust and moralistic trust.

Considerations of whether someone can be trusted are central to trust as rational action, because our choices to trust are based on information such as reputation and previous experiences with certain individuals (Nooteboom 2012:12). Particularised trust, or trust in people known to us is the focus of rationalistic perspectives on trust (Frederiksen 2014a; Freitag & Traunmüller 2009; Hardin 2002; Nooteboom 2012). Generalised trust, or trust in strangers, cannot be explained as rational action because it is not based on informed considerations (Freitag & Traunmüller 2009). Rationalistic trust scholars such as Hardin (2002) do consider trust as a multi-layered concept that does not always rely solely on rationalistic calculations when we trust particular individuals. However, a moralistic explanation of generalised trust specifically moves away from information-based trust, providing explanations to why we might trust strangers based on individuals' moral compasses (Nooteboom 2012; Uslaner 2002).

Uslaner (2002 & 2012) suggests that trust in strangers is based on a moralistic view that people in general can be trusted. According to Uslaner (2002 & 2012), generalised trust is learnt and how we trust people in general remains largely unchanged throughout life, possibly even throughout generations. Other scholars suggest that generalised trust is based on individuals' previous experiences of trust (Glanville & Paxton 2007; Macy & Skvoretz 1998). However, central to Uslaner's (2002) moralistic foundation of generalised trust is the idea that generalised trusters have a positive outlook on life, which is why their expectations of people's behaviour tend to be more optimistic. This is also echoed by Yamagishi and Yamagishi who propose that those who in general trust people unknown to them do so because of a "cognitive bias", a tendency of general trustworthiness applied in their evaluations of others' goodwill (1994:139).

Rationalists such as Hardin are criticised for not explaining why and how people trust strangers (Nooteboom 2012; Uslaner 2002). Uslaner's (2002) moralistic foundation of generalised trust, however, suggests that we trust strangers because we have learnt a moral grounding to do so. Trust in strangers is then based on a belief in "the benevolence of human nature in general" (Yamagishi & Yamagishi 1994:139). Both particularised and generalised trust are present in the participants' experiences of trust in the research locality, which is why this division between informed choices to trust and benevolent beliefs as the basis of trust is relevant to this thesis. Generalised trust relates more to the community networks at time of neighbourhood formation

when the participants collaborated with people previously unknown to them. Particularised trust was more evidently present in the smaller personal networks where the participants know well the people they interact with, enabling rationalistic calculations of who can be trusted and to what extent.

Both the interview and focus group data show that those participants who arrived to the research locality at early stages of urbanisation only knew their household members, with the exception of two participants who arrived together with other kin. The premise for the small neighbour groups to form and collaborate delivering basic services and improving the immediate surroundings appeared to be based on a setting of generalised trust, or that most people can be trusted (see Uslaner 2002). Albeit brought together with a shared need to collaborate and a common situation of arriving to the neighbourhood aiming to build a house and settle down, the participants did not know each other, lacking familiarity. The actors in collaborative processes also came from many backgrounds¹⁴⁷ and socio-economic situations,¹⁴⁸ which Yaniv and Kleinberger (2000) among others consider a hindrance to trust formation. The collaborations were not always unproblematic and two of the participants mentioned some people were suspicious of those who took on more responsibility in organising shared matters.¹⁴⁹ Regardless of this, the participants collaborated with others who were first completely unknown to them, which was the beginning of forming several community networks as discussed in chapter 4 (see Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). These combinations of weak non-kin ties evolved over years of active interactions, in some cases creating strong ties and local friendships.

As shown below, the participants discussed trust in the contemporary setting mostly in relation to specific situations where interactions and availability of social support depended on relationships with certain others. Social support was made available by the participants mostly to those they had established relationships with or others they had positive experiences of from previous interactions, indicating patterns of particularised trust. Malena (aged 67) regularly supported one of her friends, a pensioner who had a particularly low income, by offering her

¹⁴⁷ For a more detailed discussion of participants' backgrounds see chapter 4.

¹⁴⁸ An indication of differing socio-economic situations was land acquisition, which in some cases included land invasion, illegal land sale or more formal and authorised land sale, as discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁴⁹ Mateo (interviewed 13/04/2017) described that some neighbours were doubtful of his father's intentions when he was leading the delivery of basic services. Andrea (interviewed 21/03/2017) referred to suspicion in general, stating that some people were reluctant to collaborate in the delivery of basic services.

occasional informal cleaning work. While it was not unusual for women to do informal household work outside the home, Malena was the only participant who paid someone to help look after the household. “There is someone who helps me clean the apartment when I need it and she is a trustworthy person. I just ask her and she comes, and I can leave her alone in the apartment” (Malena, interview 30/11/2018). Malena explained that she knew the pensioner was a trustworthy person, because they had known each other for several years. Malena knew she could trust the pensioner to the extent that she could be left unaccompanied in the apartment based on previous information and positive experiences, indicating patterns of particularised trust.

Many trust scholars consider particularised trust to mirror reciprocal behaviour, where expectations of returning support are formed based on experiences of previous behaviour (see Berg, Dickhaut & McCabe 1995). As discussed in chapter 6, the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) was a key process present in the functioning of ISNs in the research locality. Geographical proximity could further enable collecting information about how others in the neighbourhood tended to behave. Reciprocal exchange with neighbours was not that common in the contemporary research locality and only took place regularly with those neighbours who lived nearby, or the participants had more trusting relationships with. “If it [exchanges] does happen, it is with those who we trust more. If there is a need for it [exchanges], it will take place within the closest circle of people” (Lucas, aged 67, interview 20/02/2017). Aitana (aged 67) described the relationship with her nearest neighbours as exchange of support based on solidarity. One of her neighbours used to be her sister-in-law who had a key to Aitana’s house and used to water the plants and turn off the lights in the evening when Aitana was not at home.¹⁵⁰ If one of the neighbours was away, they still often left their keys with Aitana and she looked after the property while it was empty.¹⁵¹

The support exchanged between Aitana and her neighbours was an example of the effects of reciprocity on trust building (see Buchan, Croson & Dawes 2000; Parsons 1991).¹⁵² Coleman (1988:S102) – who defines trust from the rational theory perspective – states that the more actors rely on each other, the more reputational knowledge forms between them, building trust. Previous research shows that a well-functioning cycle of reciprocal exchange reinforces and

¹⁵⁰ This was frequently done for security reasons to show that houses were not left empty or unsupervised.

¹⁵¹ Despite Malena leaving her friend alone in her apartment when cleaning, leaving keys with a neighbour was not mentioned by any other participant apart from Aitana.

¹⁵² Based on interview with Aitana 12/12/2016.

creates trust (Berg, Dickhaut & McCabe 1995; Elster 2015). There was some indication of this in the data, as the participants frequently stated they reciprocated with those they trusted the most, or those they had known for a longer time, in addition to support within the household.¹⁵³ As detailed in chapter 5, the interview data show that most social support in the research locality was provided within the household, where social ties were often also stronger. This indicates that those who reciprocated frequently also held strong ties and a high level of trust; however, it was not clear whether it was reciprocity that preceded trust or vice versa.

Burt and Knez (1995:257) highlight the power of interpersonal exchanges as activities accumulating trust, starting with “tentative initial exchanges” and moving on to “familiarity and more significant exchanges”. Simmel (1950) focuses more on initial exchanges and describes the trust that enables the initial exchange as the ‘leap of faith’. Building on Simmel’s work, Möllering (2001) explains the leap of faith as suspension, part of the mental process of trust where interpretations of knowledge momentarily are considered certain. In the research locality, the participants mostly exchanged support with those they already knew. Apart from the initial collaborations that took place in community networks, there was no indication of completely intuitive leaps of faith.

Gossip – “exchange of information about absent third parties” as “idle or social conversation” (Foster 2004:81) – often acts as one of the forms of feedback regarding reciprocal behaviour when interpersonal exchanges involve several actors (see Burt & Knez 1995:257). Considering whether actors are trustworthy can also take place through reputation building, where information about actors’ behaviour is shared forming perceptions of trustworthiness (Buskens 1998:267). As detailed in previous chapters, the research locality was formed mostly of extended family households where several generations lived under the same roof. This combined with information sharing through casual interactions as the most common form of social support meant that news travelled fast – good but especially bad news. This reflected the findings of previous research, which shows that both positive and negative effects of interactions are amplified as they are discussed by others around you (Burt & Knez 1995:281). Interactions with the participants showed that information of one negative occurrence could build a negative reputation, even leading to social ostracism as a kind of social sanction. High residential stability contributed to this, as the participants might not have had personal

¹⁵³ Based on interviews with Araceli (08/12/2016), Benjamin (08/03/2017), Camila (24/11/2016), Carla (02/02/2017), Fabiana (17/11/2016), Malena (30/11/2016) and Marcos (17/11/2016) especially.

experiences of specific individuals living in the neighbourhood but were aware of their families. One household member's negative action could reflect negatively on the whole household, indicating how tightly knit the participants considered a household to be.

I get on well with people, [but] there is not that much conviviality between us anymore for various reasons. And those that I don't have much trust with, it is because of issues of drug addictions... One day one of the youngsters was doing drugs in his car as my son-in-law was driving up the street, and the youngster accelerated his car towards my son-in-law. I had to go and speak to him and say what are you doing. He apologised and said he didn't recognise him. But it was because of the drugs... We still speak to each other, and they said they will pay for the damage. His mother said he wants to pay for his doings and I spoke to him but things haven't been the same since (Guadalupe, aged 67, interview 26/04/2017).

In the case of Guadalupe, her family had lived on the same street for over 30 years and they knew almost all their neighbours well.¹⁵⁴ Her family did not have a close relationship with the family referred to in the quote above but a level of familiarity had been established by spending time in convivial get-togethers. Previous research shows that a good reputation is easier to lose than to gain (Yaniv & Kleinberger 2000:278). Observations and conversations with local residents showed that there were some families and streets that had a particularly strong negative reputation that was based more on gossip than actual experiences of interactions.¹⁵⁵ When other network members and neighbours heard about negative experiences through others, those residents were easily branded as untrustworthy. In Guadalupe's case, regardless of the neighbour's mother's apology for the actions of the drug-using youngster, Guadalupe explained that she chose to avoid their whole household, showing the spill-over effects of deviant behaviour.

A change in behaviour or reputation means that the actor becomes a risky collaborator again, becoming worse than a stranger whose previous actions are unknown. Frederiksen (2014a:139) points out that conscious decision making regarding trusting a specific actor means that risk has already been taken into consideration, indicating lack of trust. Reputation is a "social response"

¹⁵⁴ Those that she does not know very well have moved to the street more recently, showing the importance of neighbour stability in collecting information of others.

¹⁵⁵ This was especially the case with one of the housing blocks, which was referred to in several interviews and the 27/03/2017 and 24/04/2017 FGs.

to actors' behaviour (Lahno 1995:498), not actual information about previous actions. Yaniv and Kleinberger (2000:263) also show how negative information is understood as deviant social norms, which leads to an actor with negative reputation to be considered more unique but most of all different. Fear of reputational damage can also be a reason for not accepting or extending offers of support. Alberto (aged 67) gave an example of a situation where he hesitated to provide support to an elderly neighbour he did not know well. Helping his neighbour carry her shopping, Alberto realised how difficult the neighbour's situation was and wanted to do more for her. However, concerned of how the neighbour's family would react, he decided not to, indicating the importance of respecting the privacy of the household sphere as the primary source of support.

The neighbour's husband passed away and the lady is 88 years old. I saw her [in the street]... and asked would you like me to help you when she was carrying her bags and things. She said yes please, so I helped her. I opened the door for her and took the things into her house and she said 'please come in, I already fell over here once'. I walked into the house and saw that it was in a bad state, neglected and there was rubble on the floor where she said she had fallen over. I wanted to help her more but I didn't know if I could because of her family. They might think I am helping because of a financial incentive, people have their way of thinking (Alberto, interview 03/12/2016).

Had Alberto had a closer relationship with his neighbour, he could have perhaps supported her more without doubting if his help was welcome, making lack of familiarity a factor hindering the flow of support. Seligman (2012:190) emphasises the importance of familiarity in having confidence in others' actions, as shared previous experiences indicate similar values, strengthening feelings of familiarity and predictability. Despite being familiar with neighbours, several participants mentioned the importance of keeping a distance from neighbours and acquaintances because of gossip.¹⁵⁶ Previous research shows that gossip is not only a function that requires gaining and sharing information but that strengthens groups, excluding those seen as deviant others (Foster 2004; Gluckman 1963). While gossip is often considered to violate privacy, it also has a protective function as a medium for warning of bad practice (Wert & Salovey

¹⁵⁶ Based on interviews with Alberto (03/12/2016), Benjamin (08/03/2017), Fabiana (17/11/2016), Facundo (22/11/2016), Isabella (06/04/2017), Luana (14/12/2016), Ricardo (03/04/2017), and Violeta (29/11/2016).

2004). When a group becomes less unified, gossip takes on a disintegrating function amplifying arising negative issues (Gluckman 1963).

In the research locality gossip related to two aspects; firstly, having your personal issues and hardships discussed by others in what was often considered a spiteful way. Secondly, gossip related to sharing information about yourself and exposing your household to external threats, which according to the participants could include burglaries especially when homes were left unattended.¹⁵⁷ A strong sense of privacy and the personal nature of the household related to both aspects of possible negative effects of gossip, providing some explanation to why ISNs in the research locality were becoming more personal. The contemporary ISNs consisted mostly of close ties with other household members as opposed to community networks formed of local actors in the broader neighbourhood (see Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). While some participants were reluctant to take part in gossiping and exchange information with their neighbours, they would still engage in exchanges of information with the trusted members of their personal networks, such as specific household members. Previous research shows that who we gossip with indicates friendship and trust (Ellwardt, Steglich & Wittek 2012; Hannerz 1967). The importance of knowing who is trustworthy was emphasised in many of the interviews with participants. This was also reflected in the frequent remarks I encountered during fieldwork as local residents often warned me to be careful of who I conversed with.

The effects of gossip and reputation are particularly important when providing financial support, which Lomnitz (2003) among others shows requires more trust between actors. In the research locality financial support mostly took place within the family or between actors who otherwise had an established relationship. The interview data show that failing to pay back financial support easily led to changes in particularised trust behaviour. Previous research also shows that failure to reciprocate contributes to distrust and can lead to revenge (Tripp, Bies & Aquino 2002). Facundo (aged 69) appeared reluctant to put himself into situations where he might not be able to reciprocate.¹⁵⁸ He preferred to limit his actions to his financial means and had a strong conviction of how borrowing money should work: “(If) someone asks to borrow money from you and then doesn’t pay back, then what happens. They lose their place. You have to pay” (Facundo, aged 69, interview 22/11/2016). Considerations of trustworthiness are especially important in

¹⁵⁷ One of the forms of neighbourly support in the research locality included looking after neighbours’ properties when they are empty, as discussed above and in chapter 5.

¹⁵⁸ The case of Facundo is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

high risk situations, such as borrowing money (see Elster 2015; Uslaner 2002), where the extent of negative outcomes is undeniable.

The data do not show many cases of non-payment of loans, which might be because the participants rarely discussed financial hardship. However, if trust was broken it was hard to repair, and there were many examples of breakdown in relationships both between neighbours and family. One example in particular stood out, showing how negative trust experiences and financial support had led to a change in behaviour, indicating aspects of generalised distrust. Laura (aged 65) specifically said people not paying their loans back was the reason why she no longer supported neighbours financially:

There have been situations where they (your neighbours) leave you in a bad way, you might help them when they need something but then they leave you in a bad way. Sometimes people come to see me and say can you lend this amount of money and I will pay it back on this date and I lend but there have been occasions when they have left me without fulfilling their promises. And my daughter says that we are like a bank, people are always asking to borrow money from us. But when you get to know people, you get to know which ones are not trustworthy and for that reason this happens less now. It is better not to lend anything and keep their friendship (Laura, interview 29/03/2017).

For Laura, offering financial support was not worth the risk of non-payment, but she considered there was also a social cost related to non-payment, as this could lead to breakdowns in relationships. However, there is a difference in non-payment due to lacking the means to pay and lacking the willingness to pay, as the latter suggests deliberately breaking shared social norms. According to Heil (2014), breaking social norms can cause problems for neighbourliness and future collaboration. While “exploiting the cooperative efforts of others” can be beneficial to individuals in the short-term (Axelrod 1984:92), in a neighbourhood setting such as the research locality where residential stability was high, exploitative behaviour is likely to be short-lived as information spreads quickly. Reputational damage, as the third-party effects (Burt & Knez 1995:281) outlined above, means that an individual with a negative reputation can quickly become a high-risk actor, leading to others abstaining from interaction or taking precautions when faced with increased risk (Elster 2015:336).¹⁵⁹ This suggests opposite patterns to usual

¹⁵⁹ Elster (2015) defines risk as the possibility of negative outcomes in situations of uncertainty.

effects of familiarity as a stabilising element in risk situations (see Frederiksen 2014a:134), as negative experiences and negative information increase future risk, reducing the willingness to collaborate, as the quote above shows.

Overall, there were evident patterns of particularised trust in the research locality, but there were also some participants who appeared to be more trusting than others. Similarly, some seemed more willing to participate in social interactions than others. De Cremer and Van Lange (2001:S6) call those actors who are more prone to collaborate and aim to improve collective outcomes 'prosocials'. Prosocials tend to react more positively to "social responsibility" that involves reciprocity and supporting others, relating to equal outcomes as opposed to outcomes more beneficial to the self or others (De Cremer & Van Lange 2001:S6). When asked about collaboration between neighbours, Alberto said "I don't need to trust anyone", referring to having a watch dog that guarded their property when they were away. Alberto was showing what De Cremer and Van Lange (2001:S6) call proself behaviour, as he had chosen to individually solve his issue rather than rely on the neighbours for a collective response. Prosocials show characteristics of generalised trust, believing that "most people can be trusted", while proselves are likely to show trust only towards their own kind, making them particularised trusters (Uslaner 2000:573).

The data show more examples of particularised trust than generalised trust, as social support in the contemporary research locality flowed more between people who knew each other well and were able to make informed considerations of whether others should be trusted. I argue that this reflects the prominence of personal networks over community networks (see Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988), as discussed in chapter 5. There was very little mention of trusting strangers in the contemporary setting, whereas examples of collaborating with previously unknown others related to the time when the neighbourhood was still forming. While the participants used to be faced with a situation where collaboration and trusting strangers was necessary to improve the immediate surroundings, the contemporary settings rarely required the participants to trust strangers in the research locality. Previous research also shows that whether individuals decide to trust others depends on the specific situations and the people they are interacting with at certain points in time (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies 1998). While the participants might have trusted their new neighbours in joint pursuits to deliver basic services, they might not have trusted the same neighbours with their personal issues, until they had become more familiar with each other. Some participants did build on the initial ties with

neighbours forming strong ties and frequent reciprocal exchanges, but this was not always the case, as shown in chapter 6.

As discussed above, the participants at times specified actors they trusted specifically but when sharing their experiences, the focus was often on negative outcomes, which indicates the prominence of particularised trust. Actors in smaller personal networks were able to hold more specific information about each other, also being able to share gossip more frequently as network actors had closer ties, interacted often and found each other trustworthy – or untrustworthy – compared to those beyond the personal network. Reputational information and previous experiences were affecting participants' reciprocal behaviour and flows of support, often leading to participants not finding many people trustworthy. This was evident in how parents and grandparents frequently warned children and young people to be cautious, as insecurity had become a part of everyday life in the research locality. For example, muggings on the local bus routes took place on a regular basis. Those younger participants who grew up in the neighbourhood had been surrounded by insecurity and crime from a young age, which may have affected their behaviour towards people they did not know. Neighbourhood transformation and the effects of the physical surroundings on ISNs is discussed in the following section.

7.2 The effects of neighbourhood transformation, crime, and othering on informal social networks – 'this is a very conflictive neighbourhood'

This section focuses on the elements related to the physical surroundings that hinder the functioning of informal social networks. Environmental factors, neighbourhood transformation and increase in crime levels are discussed along with othering as factors that contribute to hindering the flow of social support in social networks. These are interconnected issues that are all linked to particularised trust, distrust and lack of social cohesion. Some of the hindering factors are based on changing circumstances and difference, which indicates that as detailed in the previous chapter, homophily has become a prominent aspect of ISNs formation and the exchange of support.

Williams and Windebank (2001) identify environment as one barrier to taking part in exchanges of social support, referring to the living environment and issues linked to a specific area. The research locality is a very densely built area with no green space, very few trees and poor air quality, yet there were a number of other environmental factors that limit the participants'

interactions.¹⁶⁰ Mariana (aged 34) and Diego (aged 35) lived on the main road, so their children were never allowed to play outside their house because of traffic and lack of space.¹⁶¹ As discussed previously, spending time in the neighbourhood can lead to casual encounters with others, forming the base of active neighbourly relationships, as friendship between children can extend to their adult life as well as bring neighbouring families together. Mariana lived in the same house as a child and was then spending most of her time indoors with her grandmother – this secluded behaviour was now replicated by her children. The limiting effect of the environment was clear, because the children’s behaviour and interactions were different elsewhere. “When we go to my mother’s, the girls are always playing outside because they can. There is not that much traffic, the neighbours know us, and they are convivial” (Diego, interview 19/04/2017).

The contemporary research locality was described by the participants as a conflictive neighbourhood, including both pockets of quieter areas as well as streets that locals knew to avoid as crime hotspots.¹⁶² Williams and Windebank (2001:140) highlight issues related to living in a deprived urban area, including “perceived lack of trust, community and sense of well-being”, which leads to people keeping to themselves. Previous research has shown links between neighbourhoods stigmatised as problematic and limitations in neighbour interactions (see Forrest & Kearns 2001; Warr 2005). However, as van Eijk (2012:3023) states, these vary based on strength of stigma and severity of poverty and disorder. The history of gang culture in the research locality and the effects of former violence had given the neighbourhood a negative reputation, which was replicated both by locals and those living in nearby areas.¹⁶³

There are a lot of issues here, for example the people outside on the other side of the street they are selling drugs and it is clear. People know it but nothing can be done about it. That is why it’s called a *punto rojo*¹⁶⁴ (Natalia, aged 52, interview 15/02/2017).

¹⁶⁰ Pollution levels are known to be high across Mexico City; however, air quality in Iztapalapa is particularly poor due to the high concentration of people, traffic, local industry and location at the edge of the megacity (Domínguez 2018).

¹⁶¹ Based on interview 19/04/2017.

¹⁶² All participants mentioned crime as an issue during the interviews, some going into more detail and describing actual incidents while others discussed the reputation and violent history of the neighbourhood.

¹⁶³ Gang violence is discussed in chapter 6 in relation to the founding of local community organisation DCB.

¹⁶⁴ *Punto rojo*, literally a red point, refers to a crime hot spot in this context.

The participants talked about petty crime, burglaries and violence as part of everyday life. Some warned that the local *tianguis*-market was full of pickpockets, many told stories of frequent muggings on local bus routes, while some had been robbed in the local corner shop during the afternoon. Insecurity had become expected and what Sheinbaum (2008:249) refers to as “self-protecting behaviours” of not carrying anything of value, having little money on your person and spending more time in the house, especially after sunset was everyday practice in the research locality. The security issue extended to children playing outside, as one reason why young families preferred to leave the neighbourhood and go to a new park and outdoor playground located in a nearby neighbourhood as opposed to spending time locally at DCB sports ground.¹⁶⁵ This shows the detrimental effect of neighbourhood insecurity on residents’ willingness to spend time locally, which can have a further effect on limiting local social interactions as discussed in chapter 6.



Image 8 Graffiti painted on the main street of Consejo Agrarista Mexicano (Author’s photo)

Literature shows that social networks can increase local residents’ fear of crime due to being well informed of local incidents (Boessen et al. 2017). Insecurity was a real issue in the research

¹⁶⁵ This was mentioned in interviews by young mothers, Adriana (31/03/2017) and Victoria (13/03/2017), but also by Lucas (20/02/2017), Matias (25/03/2017) and Ricardo (03/04/2017) who have children and grandchildren.

locality, but the neighbourhood's reputation of crime and violence was also reinforced through the constant warnings echoed by local residents.

The neighbourhood suffers from a lot of crime and that only calms down when it gets so bad that there are dead people in the streets. When it calms down because of that, it will worsen again when things have gotten calm enough (Alejandro, aged 31, interview 09/03/2017).

While all participants mentioned crime in relation to the research locality, many also thought that crime was an issue in all parts of Mexico City nowadays due to growing inequalities and increases in prices of basic goods, which forced people to rob.¹⁶⁶ Many participants blamed constant burglaries and muggings in the research locality on the 'bad people' who live locally and keep thieving, suggesting social divisions.¹⁶⁷ People from different socio-economic backgrounds have been shown to seldom interact in Mexico City, where social and physical segregation is contributing to an already divided society (Bayón & Saraví 2013). Based on their research comparing residential areas at opposite sides of the megacity, Bayón & Saraví (2013:47) claim that "the poor are viewed as 'violent', 'drug-addicted', 'resentful', and are blamed for their situation" also in areas where the rich and the disadvantaged live side by side.

Similar processes of segregation were observable in the research locality. While most residents did not come from opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum, they were divided in terms of housing, and segregated by physical spaces.¹⁶⁸ Segregation was most evidently visible in different lifestyles such as leisure habits.¹⁶⁹ As one participant who grew up locally and had recently returned to live in the research locality mentioned: "here maybe 80% of people don't study or have [formal] work and they just live off trades, like carpentry or something. They have very rude values" (Agustina, aged 33, interview 24/03/2017). Jorge (aged 22, interview,

¹⁶⁶ Based on interviews especially with Agustina (24/03/2017); Alberto (02/12/2016); Alejandro (09/03/2017); Guadalupe (26/04/2017), Natalia (15/02/2017), Nicolas (27/04/2017); and Sebastian (22/04/2017).

¹⁶⁷ It tended to be the older participants who referred to 'bad people' in the interviews, particularly Ana (24/11/2016); Andrea (21/03/2017); Beatriz (01/12/2016); Josefa (22/11/2016); Laura (29/03/2017) and Ricardo (03/04/2017).

¹⁶⁸ This was assessed based on observations of participants' activities in convivial get-togethers, taking part in excursions to other parts of the country and ownership of commodities such as cars and type of housing. All interviewees were asked if they owned their house and what employment they were in now or previously, but no specific questions regarding economic status were asked.

¹⁶⁹ Those with access to a car appeared to spend more time outside of the research locality, which is reflected in visits to the cinema or shopping centres. While there were reasonably good transport links in the locality and two metro stations within a 2-mile radius, muggings frequently took place on the local buses, which might cause local residents to avoid local travel.

26/11/2016) simply stated that it is better to not go out after midnight because “you can see some violent things”. Beatriz (aged 73) lived near a housing block that allegedly was a hub for drug use:

People say there are lots of drug users there but I don’t know them. I only hear other people complain. It’s a gang... People say they go about hitting people or killing people, there used to be a lot of that but not that much on my street. I have never seen a dead person on my street (Beatriz, interview, 01/12/2016).

The avoidance of social interaction between those who many participants saw as morally corrupt and less well-off widened the disconnections within the neighbourhood. Several studies show links between social cohesion and trust (Uslaner 2012) as well as segregation and lack of trust (see Enos & Celaya 2018; Laurence 2017; Sturgis et al. 2014). In the US context, Uslaner (2002:195-197) notes that people associate crime with poor areas such as ghettos and large minority populations, referring to the stratification between white and black populations. However, the roots of segregation in the research locality were not race based, but what was striking was the strong social divisions in a neighbourhood that was broadly characterised as a low-income neighbourhood.

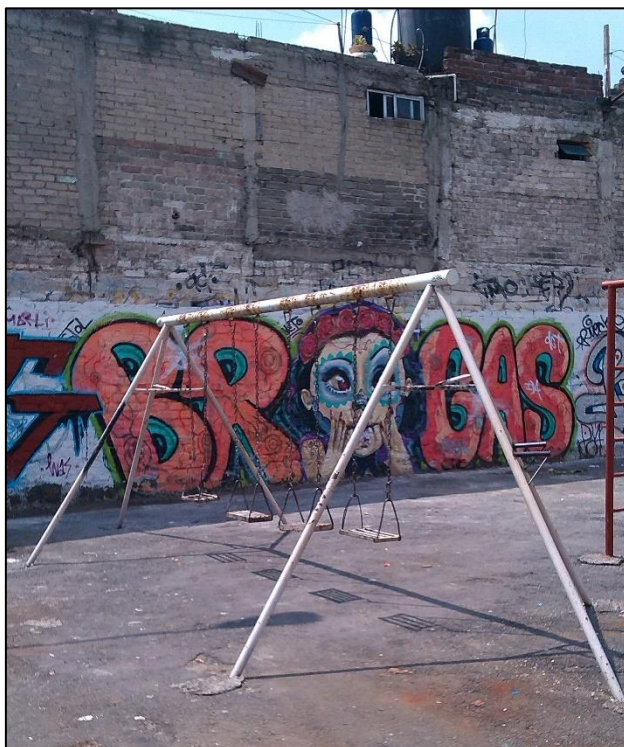


Image 9 Play area in Consejo Agrarista Mexicano filled with graffiti (Author’s photo)

Previous research shows that high levels of crime are linked to an environment of distrust and suspicion (Lupton & Power 2002; Williams & Windebank 2001). A negative environment can drive people away from an area, causing it to decline further, as it becomes more accessible for criminals such as drug dealers (see, e.g., Lupton & Power 2002; Richardson & Mumford 2002). As discussed in chapter 4, the research locality became urbanised in stages, as people started to slowly arrive to build houses on land that was previously in agricultural use. Participants described the area as peaceful, because even though there were many issues due to lack of basic infrastructure and services, the neighbourhood was not very populated and incidents such as burglaries or violence were less common.¹⁷⁰ The neighbourhood at the heart of the research locality was nowadays among the largest neighbourhoods in the borough of Iztapalapa in terms of population (INEGI 2015b). As the neighbourhood transformed from an urban village to an urban setting, becoming part of the wider city, it has also become more prone to urban issues of crime and insecurity. Those participants who had lived in the neighbourhood for 30 years and more, frequently stated that the area had become more dangerous over the years.¹⁷¹

When we started to settle here it was very peaceful and a beautiful place. But when it started to turn into neighbourhoods, it started to decompose. It really changed when the area started to become more advanced, when the metro was built and people started to come here from many different neighbourhoods, *barrios* you can say. That is when it got more violent around here (Sofia, aged 65, interview 04/04/2017).

In terms of neighbourhood change, many participants mentioned the earthquake of 1985 as a key milestone, because it created a need to rehouse people within Mexico City and brought several housing blocks to the research locality, some privately built and some social housing.¹⁷² Two out of the three interviewees who lived in the housing block that had a particularly bad reputation said the situation in terms of crime and conflict had improved in recent years but continued to be an issue. According to Juana (aged 43, interview 23/03/2017), there might be some people living there with links to crime, but there were also many 'common' people who had lived there for over 20 years with their families. Regardless of this, many participants had

¹⁷⁰ Crime in Iztapalapa is discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁷¹ Based on FGs held 23/02/2017 and 27/03/2017, as well as interviews with Ana (24/11/2016); Araceli (08/12/2016), Carla (02/02/2017), Galenia (08/12/2016), Fabiana (17/11/2016), Isabella (06/04/2017), Josefa (22/11/2016), Luana (14/12/2016), Lucas (20/02/2017), Sofia (04/04/2017) and Violeta (29/11/2016).

¹⁷² Based on all four FGs as well as a number of interviews.

strong prejudiced views regarding that particular housing estate, without necessarily having had any interactions with people who live there.

It was precisely those that came to live here after the earthquake that started to cause issues but the people who moved here before are very peaceful. The housing estate here for example is very problematic, where people have come from the city centre. It is pure bad people that live there, they are people who have less and if you don't get involved with them you won't have any issues. We live in peace and they have never done anything to me but I have never gone there. People tell me about the issues there and advise not to go there (Ricardo, interview, 03/04/2017).

The prejudice towards people living in the specific housing estate was one form of othering taking place in the research locality. Othering is a concept based on dichotomous settings, drawing on differences between the self and the Other (see e.g. Jensen 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin 2010). Schwalbe et al. (2000:422) emphasise the notion of othering in the reproduction of inequality, so that the divisions between the dominant actors and the inferior actors become emphasised through the strengthening of collective identity. In "oppressive othering" advantage is sought by categorising the other group as inferior, while "implicit othering" refers to the creation of power elites and "defensive othering" is identity creation based on reflections on subordinate others (Schwalbe et al. 2000:423-425). In the research locality, othering was a manner of explaining neighbourhood decline, finding a cause for the negative developments that were taking place, resembling more defensive othering than advantage or power-seeking action.

Especially those participants who had taken part in the physical formation of the neighbourhood drew differences between those residents who arrived later and who according to some participants did not seem to care about the neighbourhood.¹⁷³ Some participants also blamed young people for the disorder, however pointing out that neglectful parents and bad upbringing was the root cause for disrespectful behaviour and even drug addiction.¹⁷⁴ The neglectful parent was also stigmatised as the other for supporting conflicting social norms. "When more people came to live here delinquency also increased. People lack respect... Often young parents give

¹⁷³ Based especially on focus groups held 27/03/2017 and 24/04/2017.

¹⁷⁴ Based on interviews with Ana (24/11/2016), Andrea (21/03/2017), Constanza (28/03/2017), Guadalupe (26/04/2017), Laura (29/03/2017) and Ricardo (03/04/2017).

their children too many liberties and let them do what they want. This is what causes the problems”, stated Ana (aged 64, interview 24/11/2016) who at the time had lived in the neighbourhood for 36 years.

The labels applied to the others in the research locality by the participants included: bad people, the rude, and *rateros* – petty thieves.¹⁷⁵ Beatriz (aged 73, interview 01/12/2016) referred to those who were part of her informal network and were supportive as “good people”, making a distinction from those who should be avoided and who would only get you into trouble. The participants saw these ‘bad people’ as less well-off, having problematic nature, questionable social norms and overall as inferior compared to the rest of the population. There are various accounts of similar socio-economic stigmatisation in previous literature in the context of Europe and United States (see Wacquant 1999) as well as Latin America (see Bayón & Saraví 2013; Lombard 2015).

Oscar Lewis (2011) listed untraditional family structures, irrational behaviour and conflictive personalities as some of the characteristics of a disadvantaged family living in Tepito neighbourhood in Mexico City in the 1950s. These characteristics still applied to how many of the participants saw the other in the research locality. Many participants also named Tepito as one of the areas where the newer residents living in social housing came from, highlighting the different or even deviant social norms they related to the other. The participants did not seem to show solidarity towards those who were relocated to social housing due to the 1985 earthquake. Instead participants highlighted the struggles and effort that was required to make the neighbourhood liveable. The negative label of Tepito was combined with the thinking that ‘we’ were the ones that did all the work, “everything was ready for them and they just moved here” as Mireya (aged 68) stated (FG 27/03/2017).

Othering in the research locality was part of drawing social boundaries (see Tilly 2006) to differentiate ‘us’ from ‘them’ based on the roles different actors had held locally. This made ‘us’ the ones who came to the area to improve their lives, bought some land and built a house, worked collectively to improve the area and gained basic services. Participants saw ‘them’ as those who lived in social housing, who came from neighbourhoods with negative reputations like Tepito, who had questionable social norms and who were to blame for the increase of crime. Previous research shows that othering both creates and maintains social borders (May 2013; Schwalbe et al. 2000). Similarly, the divisions based on othering in the research locality brought

¹⁷⁵ Based on several interviews and informal conversations.

one part of the neighbourhood together at the expense of the other. The formation of social boundaries has been linked to a weakening sense of community in previous studies (Barth 1969; Seligman 2012), yet Gupta and Ferguson (1997:13) find exclusion and othering as part of the process of community identity building and identifying cultural similarity. While situations that threaten an established communal entity can act as supportive elements of community building (Weeks 2000), the processes of othering and social boundary reconfiguration in the research locality indicate that internal conflict increases social and physical segregation.

The participants did not refer to the others as being more disadvantaged economically; instead the frequent references to petty crime suggested victimisation of the majority population. As Andrea (aged 71, interview 21/03/2017) stated: “I have seen people robbing in the *tianguis* and that is not a place to be robbing, from the poor people”. The research locality was a socio-economically heterogeneous neighbourhood, that used to be a distinctly marginalised area, with levels of marginalisation varying between low and very high (Jefatura de Gobierno del Distrito Federal: Coordinación de Planeación del Desarrollo Territorial 2003).¹⁷⁶ Nowadays, it could be described more as an area where income levels varied between low and medium.¹⁷⁷

Socio-economic differences were, however, highlighted between those who had moved to the area to build a house and those who had been relocated to an apartment. Those participants who bought a plot of land and built a house were able to do so in stages, expanding the house vertically when they had the financial means to do so and when the family was growing requiring more space, showing the positive side of incremental housing (see Ferguson & Smets 2010). In comparison, those living in small one-bedroom apartments were often characterised by higher levels of marginalisation, living in overcrowded situations and with no option to expand within the property.

Divisions based on socio-economic inequality are not uncommon, as discussed above in relation to different neighbourhoods in Mexico City (Bayón & Saraví 2013). Studies in the UK have also identified inequality-based othering to take place between the working population and unemployed benefit claimants (Lister 2004), as well as between people with different income levels (Chase & Walker 2012). In the United States, Hoff and Sen (2005) have shown households with similar socio-economic status and preferences to create cliques increasing segregation

¹⁷⁶ The levels of marginalisation refer to several socio-economic indicators. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

¹⁷⁷ Based on researcher’s own observations.

between affluent and disadvantaged residents. Inequality is a major factor as an enabler of social boundaries because it is difficult to share norms and values if actors' life situations and needs for support are very different due to unequal socio-economic situations (Uslaner 2000:580).

In the research locality inequality made it difficult to build reciprocal relationships with those who were considered to have less. Luciana (aged 64) described her relationships in the neighbourhood to be very limited because some of her neighbours had a higher income level. Here economic status was highlighted as the reason why some of Luciana's neighbours did not interact with her, showing that even though the participants did not directly mention the other as lower in terms of economic status, income levels did have some effect.

[There is] one lady who lives opposite me and a few other neighbours who are very simple and sociable with whom up until now we have gotten on very well. But there are only a few people like this because the others see us as poor people, that we don't have the same economical level and they see us as very low (Luciana, interview 10/03/2017).

Inequality mirrors some of the elements of similarity that were discussed as aspects enabling the functions of ISNs in the research locality in chapter 6, even though economic factors were not highlighted by the participants as a hindrance for social support. Williams and Windebank (2001) identified the lack of economic resources as a main barrier stopping individuals taking part in communal self-help. While Luciana's quote above shows that economic status does matter, it was the reason she identified herself for limited interactions with her neighbours. All the other interviews only showed processes of othering rather than being othered. A lower socio-economic status might indicate potential difficulties in returning reciprocal support; however, the interviews did not express this to be a particular concern but highlighted deviant behaviour as more problematic.

Calculations of trustworthiness and consideration of knowledge of others are often part of reciprocal exchange (see May 2013). In the research locality, negative expectations related to processes of othering, enabled by reputation and gossip, which guided considerations of trustworthiness and decisions to partake in reciprocal exchange.¹⁷⁸ Suspicion of whether the other actors would adhere to the same social norms or not, hinders social support because bad

¹⁷⁸ Reputation building and gossip are discussed in chapter 6.

reputation might make them seem morally different (see Laurence 2017; Uslaner 2012). This was evident in the othering directed towards those who were considered petty thieves and deviant actors, who the participants tried to distance themselves from rather than build social ties that might lead to reciprocal exchanges.

Those who were considered as the others were those who came to live in social housing apartments, those who did not participate in making the neighbourhood liveable but who many participants believed to be responsible for making it more disorderly. Because of residential stability, those households that included household members who took part in criminal or gang activity also quickly gained the status of the other. As one participant stated, “most people have been contaminated, most people already have bad people living in their homes that are family” (Andrea, aged 71, interview 21/03/2017). Andrea referred to one of the families living on her street, where she believed the two young sons were not being disciplined enough by their mother who did not want to believe they were ‘bad people’. The boys were involved in gang activity, which finally became evident when one of them was killed.

As mentioned before, the increases in the neighbourhood’s population following the aftermath of the 1985 earthquake were considered by many participants as a negative turn for the development of the neighbourhood. The sudden increase in local population meant that there were many new residents who lived in separated housing estates. The sudden increase in population affected the surroundings and combined with the increase in crime, created divisions in the neighbourhood between those who the participants saw as honest and hardworking based on shared experiences of together improving the neighbourhood and those who were seen as dishonest, petty thieves or who had been given everything ready – even if they lived in overcrowded small apartments.

The changes in the neighbourhood, including increase in disorder, contributed to the negative expectations of the others, while social boundaries were reconfigured in the research locality to defend the majority population, the homeowners. Those who considered themselves to have built the neighbourhood, showed lack of solidarity but also lack of trust towards the inferior others, which hindered the formation of reciprocal relationships. ‘Intergroup bias’ describes the tendency to favour the members of a specific group at the expense of non-members, expressing bias that is based on discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis 2002:576). Even though intergroup bias is normally used to describe relationships in more distinctly defined group settings than a neighbourhood (see Hewstone, Rubin & Willis 2002), the

divisions between residents in the research locality resemble intergroup bias. Those who were considered the other, were not treated as trustworthy, instead highlighting divisions by extending trust to those who were specifically considered 'good people'. This means that social support and collaboration was only available to those people the participants could relate to or found similar to themselves (see Hewstone, Rubin & Willis 2002:578).

In Oaxaca¹⁷⁹ people are still pretty hospitable and warm towards others. Like sociologists sometimes say, the overcrowding and excess of habitants in one space creates distrust. There are many people from the provinces [here] and we don't know each other so that worries us and stops us from getting to know each other. So maybe this is what is increasing the distrust between people here because when people start to offend you and take your things from you that is what has happened here, the increase of delinquency (Matias, aged 46, interview 25/03/2017).

Despite his statement above, Matias tried to have an active role in the neighbourhood. His family went to church regularly and they used the sports ground at DCB, yet he was aware of the issues in the area and was concerned for his daughters' safety. As discussed in chapter 5, Matias' family provided frequent support to Samuel, a participant with a visual impairment, much of which seemed to go beyond the norm of reciprocity, as it was clear Samuel did not have the means to return the support.¹⁸⁰ Samuel also attended the same church and appeared to be accepted as part of Matias' in-group, compared to those people who Matias felt had offended him. This suggests that negative experiences may not completely change the trusting behaviour of an individual, yet experiences clarify the different expectations applied to particular people, similarly to particularised trust (see Hardin 2002).

Finding others different increased the level of suspicion in the research locality, driving people to keep their distance from those they were not familiar with. As discussed above in relation to gossip, many participants mentioned the importance of keeping their distance from neighbours, because sharing too much personal information might have bad consequences. Keeping to yourself had become commonplace among participants: "because it is a problematic neighbourhood, people have their own circles, so they stay at home. I don't mess with you and

¹⁷⁹ State in southwestern Mexico.

¹⁸⁰ The case of Samuel is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

you don't mess with me. That could be why people think it [the neighbourhood] is very individualistic" (Diego, aged 35, interview 19/04/2017).

Othering in the research locality was based on perceived differences in actors' behaviour and norms. Some of these differences were based on negative perceptions which were transmitted through reputational information and gossip that were rooted in negative experiences with certain actors. As shown in the first half of this chapter, particularised trust was more prominent in the contemporary research locality, while generalised trust applied more to collaborative projects at time of neighbourhood formation (see Hardin 2002; Uslaner 2000). In the contemporary setting, social support and reciprocal exchange took place among more limited groups of actors. In the opposite end of the spectrum were the others, those actors who the participants considered different in a negative way and who were likely to not be suitable for reciprocal exchange.

There was an evident rise of distrust in the research locality, as othering created closed social borders, excluding certain groups based on an application of negative values on the others. The prominence of personal networks detailed in previous chapters further indicates the importance of particularised trust, while processes of othering described above highlight the patterns of distrust. Previous research in Santiago, Chile has also identified that resources in a disadvantaged urban neighbourhood were mostly shared among small closely-knit circles of local residents (Espinoza 1999). According to Espinoza (1999:176), external pressures erode strong ties in a community, leading to smaller circles of intense exchanges of support; however, the smaller groups were not able to sustain a cohesive community. This is similar to the processes of othering, exclusion and patterns of particularised trust and distrust that were present in the research locality.

As Axelrod has noted, "a good way to increase the frequency of interactions between two given individuals is to keep others away" (Axelrod 1984:130). Having fewer actors involved in any one situation of collaboration increases the likelihood that reciprocal actions continue undisturbed, whereas, increasing the number of actors can cause issues such as free riding and diminishing trust between actors. In the context of the research locality; crime, insecurity and overall disorder that indicated neighbourhood decline were likely to continue to further social and physical segregation at the expense of community networks. The contemporary research locality was divided and likely to become more divided in the future as residents turned inward exchanging support mostly with those residents they had previously formed social ties with.

7.3 Conclusion – from patterns of trust to othering and distrust

As the previous chapters indicate, ISNs in the research locality formed around personal preferences and experiences. These aspects also guided who could be considered trustworthy and could be expected to return reciprocal behaviour. This chapter has focused on the research question: what hinders the formation of informal social networks (ISNs) and the exchange of social support in the research locality. As indicated throughout this chapter, trust relates to this question in two ways. Firstly, particularised and generalised trust relate to aspects of reciprocal interactions. Secondly, lack of trust relates to neighbourhood transformation and changing patterns of social support. The data show that interactions in ISNs were hindered by negative experiences, reputation and gossip, as well as increase in population and disorder, factors related to the physical surroundings. This chapter has highlighted the connection between social and physical urban development by analysing how changes in the physical surroundings such as construction of major housing estates and the following increase in population can affect social cohesion negatively in an urban setting, which is further discussed in section 8.1.

The first section of the chapter focused on participants' experiences of trust and the role of previous information when exchanging support. The focus was on moralistic and rationalistic theories of trust as theories of trust that provide explanations to participants' patterns of trust in strangers (see Uslaner 2000 & 2002) and trust in certain individuals based on previous information (see Hardin 2002). Participants' experiences of trust have mostly revolved around trusting those they know and have previously interacted with, which I claim reflects the centrality of personal networks in the contemporary research locality. While trust could enable reciprocal exchange in ISNs and vice versa, the participants mostly shared negative experiences that had led them to reconsider their considerations of trust, highlighting that aspects of trust hinder exchanges of support and the formation of ISNs.

Reputation and gossip formed sources of previous information that the participants utilised to guide their interactions. The participants effectively shared negative experiences with other third-party actors through gossip to distinguish who could be trusted and who should be avoided in collaborative situations. Particularised trust was more prominent in participants' recent experiences of trust, whereas generalised patterns of trust were more limited to the interactions and exchanges of support at time of neighbourhood formation. This provides some indication that lack of trust in those the participants did not know and who they felt were different was hindering the formation of broader community networks in the contemporary research locality.

Neighbourhood change, most of all the increase in population and increase in insecurity provided some explanation to why particularised trust had become so prominent.

The second part of this chapter has analysed how environmental factors, neighbourhood transformation and increased insecurity have contributed to increasing suspicion and distrust in the research locality. These processes were detrimental to the flow of social support and the formation of informal social networks because they created negative social boundaries (see Tilly 2006) through othering. It was undeniable that the research locality was a high crime area and that there was a genuine need to take some precautions or “self-protecting behaviour” (Sheinbaum 2008:249). However, it was apparent that the negative stigma related to insecurity was also strengthened through othering and putting the blame on those who arrived to the neighbourhood under different circumstances than the majority population that had arrived there to build their own houses. Othering placed the blame for neighbourhood decline on newer residents, gossip efficiently extending the negative stigma across the neighbourhood. The patterns of particularised trust and distrust were also reflected in the processes of othering (see Uslaner 2002). Those who were considered different were treated with suspicion and those who had a negative reputation were not interacted with. These processes worked in a cyclical manner creating both social and physical segregation in the neighbourhood, as actors had started to avoid people they believed held deviant norms, as well as avoiding certain parts of the neighbourhood.

There had been a gradual change in how participants treated others in the neighbourhood, especially people they did not know well. Negative experiences of collaborative situations as well as experiences of crime and disorder had made local residents reconsider how trusting they were of others. Being less trusting limited interactions especially in the broader neighbourhood, hindering the formation of community networks (see Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988). Collaborative processes and exchanges of support were more limited to those individuals the participants knew could be trusted. This did not necessarily mean that existing networks were becoming weaker, but that they were becoming more exclusive and personal, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

8. The rise and fall of informal social networks in the development of an informal settlement

One can't say it's a beautiful neighbourhood. The people here are nice, very pleasant... but there are many things lacking, good lighting, security... those are the things that we need as a neighbourhood... (Sebastian, aged 32, interview 22/04/2017).

The quote above refers to the current state of the research locality, demonstrating that even in the now regularised former informal settlement, local residents were central to constructing a positive neighbourhood – making up for the issues related to the physical environment. Yet, the collective processes that were central to the formation of informal social networks (ISNs) and the formation of the neighbourhood had now diminished, along with community networks, as discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

The rise of ISNs relates to the early stages of neighbourhood formation, the construction of a liveable environment through collective processes, which formed social ties between strangers (see Wellman 1999). These social ties formed community networks (Chapter 4) through which residents continued to improve living conditions as well as building a sense of belonging (see e.g. May 2013; Palomares & Simon 2006). The fall of ISNs relates to the current state of the neighbourhood, where once active community networks have been replaced by more limited personal networks (Chapter 5) in a surrounding of insecurity and disorder. The purpose of this chapter is to broaden the discussion of those findings of this research project that provide an answer to the main research question: how have informal social networks contributed to processes of urban development, and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality.

Chapters 4 to 7 have analysed the formation of ISNs in the research locality from the time of neighbourhood formation in the 1970s onward, analysing the functions of ISNs in the past as well as in the contemporary research locality, considering how these practices of social support have changed along with neighbourhood change. The social and physical elements of neighbourhood change in the research locality are discussed further in this chapter, using the concept of place and place-making, previously introduced in chapter 4. Neighbourhood formation shows elements of place-making and the process of giving a space meaning through social and physical attachment, sense of belonging, dependence and identification (Aravot 2002;

Jorgensen & Stedman 2006; May 2013). Only those elements of the concept of place are considered in this chapter that support the discussion of neighbourhood formation and change, focusing on place-making as a dynamic physical and social process (see Lewicka 2011; Massey 1994 & 1995). Place-making is combined with the discussion about the role of local residents in urban development in the second section of this chapter, focusing on the history of the research locality as an irregular settlement.

The chapter sections follow the order of the thesis, discussing in a chronological order the formation, the change, the current state of the neighbourhood and finally what these findings mean in the broader context of development studies. The first section (8.1) focuses on the collective processes that emerged as part of neighbourhood formation. Section 8.1.1 draws comparisons between the findings of this research and previous urban research in Mexico, focusing especially on neighbour collaborations. The shift towards more formal processes of urban development is discussed in section 8.1.2, along with the effects diminishing community networks (see Wellman 1999). The decline of collaborative and convivial activities is discussed in section 8.1.3, in light of community change literature, which suggests that as communities are becoming more modern, social ties are increasingly formed beyond distinct geographic neighbourhoods (see Curtis White & Guest 2008; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1979). The main research question is addressed by discussing how both ISNs and the neighbourhood have changed in this case study.

The second section (8.2) builds on the discussion of the findings of this research project, focusing on the argument that there is a disconnect between the social and physical aspects in urban development that requires addressing. The role of local residents in development outlined in chapter 1 as one of the broad debates this research aims to contribute to is discussed in section 8.2.1 by considering how the relationship between ISNs and urban development processes demonstrates the relevance of local practices and their social dimensions in urban development. The discussion is an extension of the review of development literature in chapter 2. ISNs are reflected on as a form of collectivism, drawing on elements of *buen vivir* and the centrality of local residents in improving collective well-being (Kothari et al. 2014; Villalba 2013; Villalba, Jubeto & Guridi 2014). Section 8.2.2 focuses on the social outcomes of neighbourhood formation drawing on literature on informal settlements and place-making.

8.1 The relationship between urban development and informal social networks

The main finding of this research project is that ISNs have contributed to the urbanisation of the research locality, while more formal processes of urbanisation and neighbourhood transformation have led to the diminishing of ISNs. This indicates a relationship between ISNs and urban development. The collaborative processes that local residents took part in led to the formation of ISNs along with improving the living environment and delivery of basic services as a gradual process. The transition from an informally self-built area to a regularised neighbourhood also affected local ISNs. Interactions between neighbours gradually reduced and the arrival of more formal processes of urbanisation and local representation made community networks less relevant. These findings are discussed below, making comparisons to previous research, while focusing on the elements that show the positive contributions of ISNs in both the physical and social formation of the neighbourhood. The discussion relates back to the aim of challenging the negative stigma often applied to disadvantaged urban areas (see e.g. Lombard 2015), one of the motivations for this research (Chapter 1).

8.1.1 Informal social networks in informal settlement formation

The formation of the research locality neighbourhood and transformation from an informal settlement to a regularised densely populated neighbourhood became central to this research project, as it became evident from data that there used to be more collaboration between local residents previously. As discussed in chapter 4, the research locality was formed by collaborations between neighbours and some neighbourhood-wide collective projects. These informal collaborations among local residents were required to improve the immediate environment, making the neighbourhood more liveable. It is common for local residents to collaborate improving their surroundings in informal settlements due to the lack of institutional actors (Connolly 2009). Previous research shows that collaborative processes that are mostly autonomous from local authorities have often been the driving force in the delivery of basic services as part of urbanisation in several Latin American countries, such as Argentina (Massidda 2018), Brazil (Perlman 2004) and Mexico (Lombard 2014).

The neighbourhood formation practices described by the participants in the research locality differ slightly from those depicted by previous studies in Mexico (see Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010), as the collective processes first took the form of small neighbour groups

instead of larger collectives or organisations to request basic services. The difference is to some extent explained by the gradual process of inhabiting the neighbourhood that began in the 1970s (Chapter 4), so that small groups were formed street by street once more people arrived to live on the same street or block. Studies carried out in other areas of Mexico City highlight collaborations that brought neighbourhoods together in more organised or broader collaborations to further improvement of informal settlements. Moctezuma (2001) shows how San Miguel Teotongo was formed of two groups of people who later joined forces in an organised social movement. In Wigle's (2010) study of neighbourhood formation in Xochimilco borough of Mexico City, the settlers were united in their efforts to improve the neighbourhood, requesting urban services, which were completed providing each service to the whole neighbourhood. More recent research carried out in Iztapalapa shows highly organised approaches to autonomous settlement improvement (Beane 2015). In Miravalle, residents utilised both governmental and non-governmental funds in improvement works, whereas in Yuguelito residents collaborated with a wider urban social movement Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente (Beane 2015).

The collective processes brought the new residents together in small collaborative groups, forming initial ties between individuals and families that came to the research locality from various geographical locations both within and beyond Mexico City and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁸¹ The small neighbour groups can be described as small community networks as they were based mostly on neighbourly ties and shared goals (Chapters 4 and 5), compared to personal networks that consist mostly of kin or friendship ties (see e.g. Wellman 1999 & 2007). The processes of neighbourhood formation thus had an important social function bringing together residents who in most cases arrived to settle in the neighbourhood with no previous knowledge of the area, leaving behind resourceful family ties. This differs especially from the formation of San Miguel Teotongo neighbourhood, where two previously formed groups came to inhabit the area: a group of indigenous migrants from the state of Oaxaca, and another group formed of working-class migrants collaborating as settlers (Moctezuma 2001:118). It is not unusual for informal settlements in Mexico City to form of a mixture of people from other parts of Mexico City and other states in Mexico but there are also examples where pre-existing local ties spanned several generations (see Wigle 2010). In the research

¹⁸¹ The origins of the participants is discussed in chapter 4.

locality the role of collaborative processes as increasing interactions between new residents was highlighted due to the absence of pre-existing social ties but also a need to collaborate.

The small neighbour groups increased familiarity between otherwise unknown neighbours, enabling the formation of social ties in a situation where most participants lacked local support networks. During the initial stages of the neighbourhood's development, the level of social interaction was high, enabled by the need to discuss and collaborate, seeking ways to improve the immediate surroundings. The number of people involved in each neighbour group and how the delivery of basic services was approached varied depending on the part of neighbourhood and stage of overall urban development in nearby areas (Chapter 4). However, despite some differences, the participants described that these collaborations extended over several years before all basic services were achieved, enabling long-term interaction with neighbour groups. In some cases, these interactions led to strong ties and reciprocal exchanges of social support.¹⁸²

This is not to claim that the small neighbour groups with their limited scope of interactions were necessarily responsible for creating one unified 'networked community' (see Gilchrist 2009). They were the starting point of several networks, which evolved alongside the broader neighbourhood-wide collective projects. There were two broader collective projects that functioned beyond the street by street setting, focusing on specific issues: the founding of a local primary school (Chapter 4) and a communal sports field DCB (Chapter 6). The founding of the primary school resembled the processes detailed by Lombard (2014) in her study of two informal settlements in Xalapa¹⁸³, Veracruz, where local residents sought permissions from the local authority to found and build schools, highlighting the importance of local basic education. Yet, the founding of DCB was an unusual neighbourhood improvement project because it had a distinctly social focus and was led by young people rather than adults. Previous research mostly discusses community organising in relation to forming housing unions or associations and housing cooperatives (Estrada-Casarín 2016), in some cases with the support of external activists (Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001). However, the founding of the primary school and DCB were examples of local residents coming together to drive the improvement of a particular issue, rather than aiming to form neighbourhood-wide organisations.

¹⁸² I have discussed one example of a long-term friendship that was formed between two neighbours in the research locality in chapter 5. However, in most cases the social ties active in the community networks have become more inactive, as shown in chapter 6.

¹⁸³ Xalapa is a medium-sized city in the state of Veracruz in Mexico. Veracruz is a coastal state situated to the east of Mexico City.

The wider collective projects brought together local parents and local young people, also including more formal elements. Both projects required a level of institutional recognition, not only support from the borough in the form of resources. Still, collaboration was initiated through informal discussions and reaching out to the wider community for further support. The social setting in the neighbourhood was formed then of at least two different level community networks, the small neighbour groups and the wider collective projects. The networks all contributed to neighbourhood improvement but also enabled the formation and maintenance of local social ties. There are not many previous studies that detail the social processes present in neighbourhood formation. Enríquez-Rosas (2001) actually shows that interactions and social support processes were limited in newly formed informal settlements where collective improvement processes had not taken place. Residents have also been shown to be highly reliant on kinship ties in a marginalised urban *vecindad*¹⁸⁴ (a slum tenement) where interactions with non-kin local residents were more limited (Lomnitz 2003). Comparing these situations to the collectivism documented in this research indicates that the collective efforts required in physical neighbourhood formation facilitated the formation of community networks, due to high reliance on local residents in the absence of kin support.

Focusing on the participants' interactions in collaborative processes and ISNs has highlighted the social side of neighbourhood formation in the research locality. The intertwined nature of the social and physical aspects is not as pronounced in previous studies of self-help practices in informal settlements, as the focus tends to be more on the structures and outcomes of collaboration rather than interactions between actors (see Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). Local community responses to the development of informal settlements continue to gain more attention in urban studies but mostly as a means of neighbourhood improvement as part of institution-led approaches (Andreasen & Møller-Jensen 2016; Magigi & Majani 2006; Meredith & MacDonald 2017). Local residents' involvement in upgrading projects has been studied for example in relation to land regularisation, service or housing improvement but with little mention of the social outcomes of the collaborative practices (Andreasen & Møller-Jensen 2016; Magigi & Majani 2006; Pimentel Walker 2016).

¹⁸⁴ The urban settlement Lomnitz (2003) carried her research in was a densely populated housing site, comprising of large buildings divided mostly into two room homes, where marginalised families lived in crowded circumstances. The homes were rented and the tenants did not take part in building them, hence the *vecindad* lacked an aspect of physical collective processes.

Those previous studies of informal settlements that focus on local residents' collective action in the form of organisations or social movements recognise the potential of the agency of local people. However, they do not provide details of the social practices of neighbourhood formation beyond collective action as a means to deliver change (Beane 2015; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). For example, Amin (2014) describes how social life and community is inherently constructed through the collective processes of planning and delivering material infrastructure in the outskirts of Belo Horizonte in Brazil but provides little detail of the social infrastructure following neighbourhood establishment. Social outcomes of residents' participation are often mentioned in relation to community development, yet it is unclear what these social outcomes include in practice (see e.g. DeFilippis 2001; Kassahun 2011; Mitchell-Brown 2013).

Lombard (2014) shows that forming and formalising an informal settlement includes both physical and social processes of place-making. As residents build their homes, improve infrastructure and together construct places of worship and education, they also create shared meanings and a sense of belonging (Lombard 2014). The collective processes in the research locality indicated that the neighbourhood was constructed through the participants' efforts to make their street liveable and incrementally build their own homes at an achievable pace. The community networks that formed following the physical neighbourhood formation showed that the struggles to inhabit an informal settlement can have socially valuable outcomes, strengthening the potential agency of local residents in a manner that urban development often tends to overlook (see Friedmann 2011; Lombard 2015; Shatkin 2007). How place and place-making relate to urban development and the debate regarding local residents' agency is discussed further in section 8.2.

8.1.2 Changing patterns of collaboration – from community networks to personal networks

It was easier to get people to do things back then... Before you just went to knock on their door and say we need to do some work, some materials are being brought in and we need people to help do the work. And they would just ask how many people do you want me to bring. It was all for the progress of the community but now no one is interested except those whose streets are filled with rubbish... (Andrea, aged 71, interview 21/03/17).

Several aspects related to neighbourhood change have affected the formation and functions of ISNs in the research locality. The quote above describes how collaboration between neighbours

has diminished in the research locality. As discussed in chapter 4, the regularisation of the neighbourhood meant community networks became less relevant following the accomplishment of many shared needs and basic services. The arrival of more formal representation first in the form of local representatives, *jefes de manzana*, and later two official neighbourhood presidents, meant that informal collaboration was slowly replaced by more formal channels.¹⁸⁵

The arrival of more formal representation coincided with a reduced need for resident collaboration to make the neighbourhood liveable. The contemporary neighbourhood had basic services, the primary school was still in use and the local sports ground and organisation DCB had been active for years – even if some of the services such as the water network and tap water were of poor quality. Compared to previous neighbourhood improvement requirements, some of the contemporary urban issues such as insecurity and disorder required more complex solutions than physical resources and physical labour (see e.g. Carrión 2002). Lessening informal collaboration among local residents led to diminishing community networks, which as described in chapter 4 initially formed through frequent interaction among neighbours over the years. Community networks had become less active and more infrequent interactions in the broader neighbourhood meant that community networks were not being maintained nor relied on by the participants to respond to new challenges in the research locality. Previous research shows that strong social networks help communities recuperate from times of distress (Cattell 2001; Marquez et al. 2008). Coping with disasters (Norris et al. 2008), negative changes to infrastructure (Adger 2000) or change and uncertainty (Magis 2010) are some signs of community resilience. In the research locality, shared challenges related to making the neighbourhood liveable had already been responded to. Changes in the participants' interactions in ISNs in the contemporary research locality indicated that ISNs were no longer the source of support for neighbourhood-wide issues, highlighting a shift towards more personal networks. This is discussed further in section 8.2.3.

The lessening of informal neighbourly collaboration was highlighted especially by the arrival of housing estates that had formally employed managers and security guards, making neighbour responses and even *jefes de manzana* less central. The ISNs that used to be more community-

¹⁸⁵ A structural change of local representation took place in Mexico City in 1995, causing a shift from neighbour meetings to citizen councils, *Consejos Ciudadanos*, where neighbourhood presidents represent the localities (Mellado Hernández 2001:55). The institutionalisation of community participation that started in the 1970s and 1980s has been criticised for weakening local residents' access to decision making (Aguilar 1987:289).

orientated were based on familiarity that was established through neighbourly collaborations to deliver improvements in the neighbourhood. The participants had formed strong non-kin ties mostly with neighbours who lived near and who the participants knew personally. This indicated that established neighbour relationships were linked to the early collaborative processes, as especially the older participants still had close relationships with some neighbours (Chapter 5). This finding supports previous research, which shows that participation in shared projects that drive shared interests support social cohesion (Forrest & Kearns 2001; Kriegler & Shaw 2016; Scott & Liew 2012). Previous research also shows that socialising within social networks enables individuals' participation in collective processes (Passy 2003), while lack of contact and interaction can make the differences between individuals seem greater, making collaboration unlikely (Laurence 2017; Uslaner 2012). Lack of interaction amongst neighbours in the research locality meant less familiarity and less reciprocal exchange beyond kin-ties and personal networks.

ISNs in the contemporary research locality resembled personal networks as they functioned around the needs of individuals as opposed to the more shared needs that used to drive community networks (Chapter 5). The household – which for 59% of interviewees consisted of several generations – had become the centre of the networks and the main sphere where most social support was exchanged, highlighting the limited neighbourhood-wide social interactions.¹⁸⁶ The changed household composition is one explanation for the increased importance of personal networks in the research locality. The finding that ISNs were becoming more personal also supports previous research of social networks in disadvantaged urban areas. Enríquez-Rosas (2001:52) highlights reductions in network sizes, showing that networks are often maintained by women in a kin context, especially the nuclear family. Espinoza (1999) shows that economic support was mostly exchanged between few selected strong ties in small local networks in a neighbourhood in Chile, instead of forming a neighbourhood-wide solidarity economy. González de la Rocha (2001) and Enríquez-Rosas (2001) found that especially financial support was rarely exchanged between non-kin, which is not surprising considering Lomnitz (2003) reported similar findings in a 1970s *vecindad*. The increase of extended family households in Mexican cities (Gomes 2007; Rabell Romero & Gutiérrez Vásquez 2012) suggests that kin ties are not losing their importance even in modern urban settings in Mexico.

¹⁸⁶ Interviewees were asked who they live with. Household composition is discussed in chapter 5.

The overall diminishing of social interactions with non-kin in the research locality as part of the shift from community networks to personal networks indicates the importance of convivial activities in the formation and functioning of ISNs (Chapter 6). Convivial activities enabled strengthening those social ties that had been formed through neighbour collaborations. Shared celebrations and sports activities helped maintain community networks but also enabled reciprocal exchange of social support by increasing familiarity between residents. Previous research highlights the importance of conviviality for social cohesion (Payson 2018; Wise & Noble 2016), emphasising its role in creating a shared social world (Wise and Velayutham 2014:417) and bringing different people together (Heil 2014). In the research locality traditional forms of conviviality such as seasonal street celebrations organised amongst neighbours had mostly disappeared. Regular convivial activities had started to take place at the local community organisations DCB and CCC, but these took place away from neighbourly contexts. This limited the scope of conviviality as activities tended to only include certain people who used the community organisations. Trejo Velázquez (2015) for example suggests that the value of conviviality lies in the negotiations and dynamic social practices through which local residents engage with each other, which cannot be institutionally replicated.

While similarity brought people together enabling reciprocal exchange of social support, being different could limit the formation of ISNs (Chapters 6 & 7). Those who did not take part in neighbourhood formation, were not living in a self-built house or simply based on gossip or negative reputation appeared to be different were subject to othering in the research locality. Processes of othering included an aspect of distrust, as those who the participants saw in a negative light were excluded from exchanges of social support. Previous research shows similar findings. Lomnitz (2003) suggests that aspects of social, physical and economic distance together affected the formation of trusting exchange relationships. An environment of insecurity and disorder has been shown by previous research to contribute to the formation of distrust and lack of trust between neighbourhood residents (Enríquez-Rosas 2001; Giglia 2008; Kriegler & Shaw 2016; Williams & Windebank 2001). Othering, distrust and the rise of personal networks all relate to neighbourhood transformation in the research locality, indicating that a changing neighbourhood can negatively affect local social practices.

8.1.3 From collaboration to distrust – community lost, saved or liberated?

Decreasing collaboration among local residents in the research locality and the shift from community networks to more isolated personal networks, shows that neighbourhood change

was a key factor in both the formation and transformation of ISNs. There was some indication that generational change, as well as, changing gender roles, work and education contributed to the change of ISNs.¹⁸⁷ Yet, the factors that appeared more prominent in interview and focus group data related to more advanced urbanisation, and the changed balance between local collaborations and external input to urban development. While residents previously collaborated and asked local authorities to support the delivery of basic services, the development of infrastructure and housing became more externally led as indicated by the arrival of housing estates. The construction of housing estates was highlighted by the participants as an unwanted change, as they did not only change the landscape of the research locality but increased local population substantially (Chapter 7). Neighbourhood regularisation also brought with it more formal processes of local representation, which along with more external involvement in neighbourhood development made previously active community networks less relevant in the research locality.

Overall, the diminishing of community networks in the research locality corresponds with debates of the changing role of community as a source of social support. As outlined in chapter 2, following societal change and urbanisation in the 1970s,¹⁸⁸ community has been suggested to be either 'lost, saved or liberated' (see e.g. Curtis White & Guest 2003; Wellman & Leighton 1979). Community is considered to be 'lost' when local social ties have diminished and no longer function as solidarity support networks between neighbours, as they once used to in more village-like social settings (see Wellman 1999). The ISNs in the research locality have become more personal, acting more exclusively within the sphere of the household, rather than spilling beyond the household and to the neighbourhood as they used to. This matches some elements of the community lost argument, most of all weakening solidarity among residents and weakening power of community networks (Wellman & Leighton 1979:368-9).

In the research locality, acts of solidarity between neighbours were more limited to emergencies or major incidents such as a death in the family. ISNs had diminished to consist mostly of household members and some close friends. The participants exchanged support with few people, but these social ties appeared to be strong, as they were formed with people the

¹⁸⁷ These aspects have not been analysed further due to some of the limitations of the data, most of all uneven gender split and uneven age split between the participants.

¹⁸⁸ It is worth noting that Wellman and Leighton (1979) instigated the debate of the changing state of communities and networks based on their research of urban communities in Canada, which as an advanced capitalist society had a different societal structure to Mexico and especially the research locality in the 1980s.

participants had more established relationships with. According to the community lost - argument, modernising urban areas have become characterised by density and diversity of people. In modern urban societies governmental institutions have broadened their scope at the expense of more conventional institutions such as the family, while social networks are becoming less local (Hennig 2007; Wellman 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1979). The finding that the research locality has become divided, including processes of othering and more particularised ways of trusting demonstrates that while ISNs have diminished, social cohesion has also weakened (Chapter 7). This also shows a move away from community 'saved', where local residents are seen as "fundamentally good" and capable of collective action when faced with challenging situations, even if local interactions may be more limited (Wellman & Leighton 1979:374).

Even though community might in the modern urban context be mostly lost or liberated, there is some disagreement among scholars whether this matters if the resources that local ties provide are replaced by extra-local ties (Connerly 1985; Craven & Wellman 1973; Curtis White & Guest 2003; Guest and Wierzbicki 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1979). The 'community liberated' - argument claims that networks do not need to be local and forming ties beyond the locality allows individuals to form city-wide 'networks of networks', which allow drawing on more versatile resources of support (Curtis White & Guest 2003). In the context of this research, however, the diminishing of community networks and rise of personal networks was a consequence of the increase of insecurity, othering and lack of trust, highlighting the importance of local social ties. While the challenges of making the area liveable, which were the starting point of ISNs, have largely been achieved, new challenges such as crime and insecurity also require local solutions. However, the replacement of community networks by personal networks means that the participants were less capable of providing responses to collective neighbourhood-wide issues by drawing on ISNs. There are similar findings in previous research, which shows that local social ties are particularly useful for solving local issues, even if communities may be becoming more 'mediate', and social ties becoming more extra-local (Guest 2000; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999; Marques et al. 2008).

The collaborative processes through which neighbours used to seek responses to neighbourhood issues enabled the formation of ISNs in the research locality, which suggests that a lack of collaboration or lack of need for collective action limits the maintenance and formation of new social ties that could form community networks. As discussed in chapter 7, processes of othering and distrust have started to be prominent in the research locality instead of more

trusting behaviour that could enable exchanges of social support with a broader set of network ties. While community networks might no longer be essential for improving the neighbourhood, broader networks can still contribute to maintaining social cohesion. A more unified neighbourhood is potentially more capable of responding to neighbourhood-wide challenges such as crime and disorder. Espinoza's (1999) study in Chile shows that a neighbourhood where wider community networks have been replaced with smaller personal networks is not able to respond to external challenges because they lack the capacity for collective action.

8.2 Collectivism through social and physical neighbourhood formation – informal social networks as social approaches to urban development

The main finding of this research is that ISNs were formed through collaborative processes and contributed to urban development through both social and physical neighbourhood formation. This combined with the shift from community networks and convivial activities to personal networks following advanced urban development and more formal representation indicates that ISNs and urban development are interconnected processes. The findings of the case study suggest that local collaborations can have both social and physical positive outcomes in urban development. The gradual fading of these practices has had negative social consequences, which are linked to neighbourhood decline. I propose that urban development is not only a physical but also a social process, which is why increasing the understanding of local responses to urban challenges is essential. Re-engaging with some of the literature reviewed in chapter 2, the focus is first on the collectivism central to *buen vivir*, discussing local residents' role in the delivery of collective well-being. The social and physical aspects of neighbourhood formation discussed in section 8.2 are then considered in relation to place-making in urban development and the lack of recognition of local practices especially in informal settlements.

8.2.1 Collectivism and urban development

This research project aimed to address the ongoing debate regarding the role local residents hold in development.¹⁸⁹ Reviewing how the general lack of inclusivity in development has been addressed previously, participatory and community-based approaches to development (see e.g. Cornwall & Brock 2005; Mansuri & Rao 2013) have been discussed in chapter 2. The interest in researching ISNs and collaborative practices stems from the observation that participation is mostly applied as an extension of top-down institutionalised development (see Cooke & Kothari

¹⁸⁹ Discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis.

2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004). As noted by Cornwall (2008) among others, the problem is not the idea of participation, but the way 'participation' continues to be applied as a means for development rather than aiming for participation as part of lasting societal transformations.

While participation and institutions appear to go hand in hand, post-development offers a promising premise to the debate regarding who should be involved in development and how. Post-development scholars challenge the idea of development as institutionally delivered top-down improvement of well-being, calling for alternatives to development (Escobar 1992 & 2004; Gudynas 2015; Ziai 2004). Yet, post-development scholars have focused on critiquing development on a broad theoretical level, offering few solutions to how 'development' should be delivered by local actors (Kiely 1999; Nederveen Pieterse 1998 & 2000). Gudynas among others proposes combining the more theoretically inclined discourse of post-development with the *buen vivir* paradigm (Gudynas 2018; Villalba, Jubeto & Guridi 2014). Combining the post-development premise that local actors – people, social movements and networks of social movements – should be central to improving social well-being, *buen vivir* (living well) that stems from communities moves beyond the predicament of institutionalised participation (Escobar 2004; Gudynas 2015 & 2018).

Collectivism is central to the *buen vivir* paradigm, which based on indigenous lifestyles and knowledge recognises that it is local communities that drive collective well-being (Bell 2017; Kothari et al. 2014; Villalba 2013). According to *buen vivir* both the needs and well-being of a community are based on a shared understanding, which is why their fulfilment requires collaboration and cannot rely on the individual alone (Giovannini 2016; Monni & Pallottino 2015). The collaborations that took place in the research locality at time of neighbourhood formation, contributing to both the formation of ISNs and improving the physical neighbourhood resemble collectivism, as the collaborations stemmed from shared needs and action was taken to improve shared urban infrastructure. While families individually worked on building and improving their houses, collaboration was needed to make the surroundings more liveable, which also brought residents together. The collaborations in the research locality reflect the interconnected nature of social processes and social outcomes, as collectivism contributed to the formation of ISNs, constructing a social neighbourhood.

Previous research identifies indigenous enterprises, social movements, social enterprises and cooperatives as forms of collectivism (Ezaro 2010; Gasca Zamora 2014; Giovannini 2016; Scarlato 2013). Indigenous enterprises for example pursue social goals over profit-maximisation

(Giovannini 2016:73). The collective practices have been shown to have “social and economic, but also cultural, political and environmental” outcomes as they “mobilise a plurality of local resources in order to achieve community objectives” (Giovannini 2016:73). Collective aims are pursued through collective measures, which contributes to the maintenance of the social ties that bring people together in co-existence (Monni & Pallottino 2015; Walsh 2010).

Buen vivir and collectivism is mostly discussed in rural contexts as *buen vivir* stems from indigenous knowledge. Previous research in Mexico has focused on collectively owned enterprises that are managed through resident participation in the rural parts of Southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca (Gasca Zamora 2014; Giovannini 2016). In Ecuador indigenous social movements that are set up as social enterprises apply collectivism and solidarity, creating opportunities for marginalised groups in rural settings to become part of the social economy (Scarlatto 2013). Ezaro (2010:1028) notes that indigenous organisations that operate as cooperatives are one of the many forms of goal-oriented collective action and ‘organised living’ that indigenous groups have promoted for decades in the Amazonian region in Ecuador.

There are few examples of community-driven collectivism in urban settings, where collective projects are often organised by local government (Burgos-Vigna 2018). Perhaps *buen vivir* and collectivism that is based on indigenous culture and communities’ relationship with nature is not directly transferable to the modern cities (see Bell 2017; Ranta 2014), but this does not make collectivism irrelevant in urban settings. As Torres Villarreal (2014) demonstrates using as an example a housing cooperative in Mexico City, collectivism in urban settings can be a non-monetary communal response to a housing shortage. The housing cooperative Torres Villarreal (2014) analyses has a more organisational structure than the ISNs of this research project, yet both demonstrate how collectivism can drive social well-being in urban settings through improvement of the physical surroundings. The informal settlement setting and neighbourhood formation processes analysed throughout this thesis highlight the role of collective processes in constructing a liveable neighbourhood. Furthermore, the findings show the value of local collaborations that have contributed positively to both the social and physical development of the research locality.

The dual role of local neighbourhood construction processes emphasises the importance of local residents especially in informal urbanisation. Gradually transforming the living environment in an informal settlement requires frequent interaction and continuous collaboration between neighbours, maintaining collectivism. As with social enterprises or housing cooperatives,

collectivism does not only lie in driving shared goals but in the more social outcomes that contribute to collective well-being beyond material development. The importance of creating a social in addition to physical neighbourhood becomes evident from the diminishing role of community networks, which in the research locality followed more formal development but also increases in population and insecurity.

Even though *buen vivir* became part of the constitution in Ecuador following social movement activism (Scarlato 2013), it has been questioned whether collectivism continues to be central to *buen vivir*. Critics claim that institutionalised programmes that carry the name '*buen vivir*' continue to deliver neo-extractivism and disregard indigenous populations (Lyll, Colloredo-Mansfeld & Rousseau 2018; Villalba-Eguiluz & Etxano 2017). *Buen vivir* is given a new institutionalised meaning, turning *buen vivir* into a means for development, moving away from indigenous traditions of collectivism that could be reproduced as an outcome of collaborations. Community is not only an actor but also the object of action in *buen vivir*, as collective well-being is reached through collaboration with others following principles of reciprocity and complementarity (Villalba 2013:1430). Yet, recent research from Ecuador shows that *buen vivir* is mentioned even in relation to delivering wireless internet services, as if the label of '*buen vivir*' was a passive cure for all (Lyll, Colloredo-Mansfeld & Rousseau 2018).

Despite its origins in indigenous culture and emphasis on collective well-being (Monni & Pallottino 2015) *buen vivir* seems to be confronting some of the same issues of institutionalisation as participation (see e.g. Cooke & Kothari 2004; Cornwall 2008; Gudynas 2018; Hickey & Mohan 2004). As discussed in chapter 2, participation became a popular development approach in the 1990s, heralded for its empowering characteristics (Mansuri & Rao 2013; Rahmena 2010). Instead of the ideal of participation as both a means and an end in development, 'participation' became a quick fix tool applied so it fit institutional goals rather than local circumstances and collectively defined needs (Chambers 2010; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Otsuki 2014).

The gradual neighbourhood decline and transformation of ISNs in the research locality following more formal urban development suggests that institutionally led development initiatives have limitations in terms of maintaining local collectivism. The observed transformation of ISNs from community networks to more personal networks (see e.g. Wellman 1999) and the move away from collective responses caused a shift from collectivism to othering. Achieving basic services but also the formalisation of processes of representation and development explains the reduced

need for collaboration. Yet, the findings show that this reflected negatively on social activities such as conviviality because people were not interacting so regularly. While frequent interactions that extended across several years initially brought neighbours together, allowing the formation of social ties, the diminishing of collaborative practices – alongside broader neighbourhood transformation – has had the opposite effects. Advancing and more formal urbanisation has turned the self-built settlement into a regularised neighbourhood but the effects of formalisation have not only been positive. This calls for the recognition of social aspects of neighbourhood formation, which is discussed in section 8.2.2.

The challenges related to the institutionalisation of both participation and *buen vivir* indicate that collectivism is something that should stem from the local community. Collaborations between local residents can be responsible both for the delivery of shared goals and the strengthening of collectivism as an outcome of collaborative processes. While it is clearly challenging for institutions to lead development projects in a manner that fosters collectivism and social outcomes, there is also some indication that formal development practices can affect existing local practices negatively. In the research locality, the processes of collectivism had become replaced by formal representation, formal services and formal infrastructure, which in terms of urban development per se might be a positive outcome. However, the changing social neighbourhood gives some indication of the detrimental effects of disregarding local practices.

I claim that the social outcomes of local responses to development needs are not only valuable but more difficult for institutional approaches to achieve, which is why the balance between local residents and institutions as actors in development should be reconsidered. Yet, indications of the dismissal of social outcomes are present in both participatory approaches to development and some applications of *buen vivir*, even though both aim to improve the role of local residents in development (see Chambers 2010; Cornwall 2008; Villalba 2013; Walsh 2010). If collectivism cannot be maintained by institutionally led development, the role of institutions should focus on supporting local approaches rather than implementing external development projects.

Post-development scholars, for instance, have called for a diminished role of institutions for years (see Escobar 2004; Sachs 2010). The presence of participatory, community-based or community-driven approaches to development and the attention *buen vivir* is gaining in development debates beyond Latin America suggests that there is ongoing interest in including local residents in development projects (Lombard 2014; Shatkin 2007; Villalba 2013; Walsh 2010). However, if the approaches do not aim to reconfigure the role of institutions as well as

the role of local residents, attempts to be more inclusive may continue to fall short. A further challenge to maintaining or encouraging collectivism in urban settings relates to the strict administration of cities by local authorities who draw on legislation that may further increase urban divisions and inequalities rather than support resident involvement (Aguilar & Santos 2010; Delgado Ramos 2015; Lang 2013).

8.2.2 Social and physical aspects of collective processes

The shift from community networks towards personal networks following the transformation of the broader neighbourhood demonstrates that there is a relationship between ISNs and urban development – the social and physical aspects of neighbourhood formation. There are not many previous studies that discuss such a connection, even though there continues to be more research that recognises that informal settlements can be home to valuable local processes that construct social neighbourhoods (Kovacic & Giampietro 2017; Lombard 2014; Richards, O’Leary & Mutsonziwa 2007). The focus in this section is on the social outcomes of neighbourhood formation in relation to the role of local residents and institutions discussed in the previous section. I claim that it is essential to increase the understanding of local collective processes so that development projects can support and maintain collectivism beyond limited institutionalised frameworks.

As discussed in section 8.2.1, previous research on local approaches to informal settlement improvement focuses mostly on collective responses as a means of neighbourhood improvement (see Estrada-Casarín 2016; Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). Informal settlements are not usually portrayed highlighting local collectivism, instead they are seen as issues that require external solutions (see Durand-Lasserve 2006; Massidda 2018; Shatkin 2004). Settlement upgrading and removal continue to prevail as responses to informal settlements, suggesting that the agency of local residents is not taken into consideration in urban development projects (Atuesta & Soares 2018; Shatkin 2004; Wakely 2016).

Some scholars continue to call for more mixed approaches to upgrading informal settlements (Meredith & MacDonald 2017), acknowledging the importance of community involvement in land regularisation (Fernandes 2011, Magigi & Majani 2006) and service provision (Andreasen & Møller-Jensen 2016). These approaches give local residents more active roles in transforming their living environments, while institutions take a step back and focus on supporting processes rather than imposing interventions. This indicates a shift towards recognising the rights residents of informal settlements or other disadvantaged urban areas hold as active citizens (see

Fernandes 2011; Friedmann 2010; Meredith & MacDonald 2017). However, disadvantaged residents still do not appear to have access to institutional support in the same manner as residents of more affluent areas (Lombard 2014; Shatkin 2004 & 2007).

This research demonstrates that informal urbanisation processes can be essential for the social construction of neighbourhoods, indicating the need to understand the processes taking place in informal settlements and driven by local people. The collective processes that led to the formation of the physical neighbourhood also included social aspects, which resulted in the formation of community networks in the research locality. It has been challenging to locate previous research these social aspects could be compared to; however, Lombard's (2014) account of place-making in two informal settlements in the state of Veracruz, Mexico bears some similarities.

In her research Lombard (2014:5) highlights that informal settlements should be understood through the processes that formed them as these processes have bound together "individual and collective constructive efforts". Lombard (2014) shows how the efforts of local residents have contributed to making both a social and cultural place through the construction of places of education and worship, in addition to the delivery of local infrastructure and services. While these collaborative processes are analysed in relation to concepts of place and place-making, social outcomes such as constructing a cohesive neighbourhood identity are prominent (Lombard 2014). Other place scholars have highlighted place-making as a process through which local residents build their identities, attachment and belonging (see Jorgensen & Stedman 2006; May 2013; Palomares & Simon 2006). Considering place-making as both a social and physical process draws attention to the construction of both personal and community ties through local residents' contributions to improving the physical environment (Lombard 2014).

The intertwined nature of social and physical neighbourhood formation processes is also highlighted in the elements that affect how individuals experience place: length of residence, generational differences and changes in life-courses (Jorgensen & Stedman 2006; Lewicka 2011). These aspects are also an observable part of the ISNs analysed in this thesis, but they relate more to the formation and functions of personal networks rather than the collective processes of physical neighbourhood formation (Chapter 6). Place-making is a continuous process, and as neighbourhoods change, the social aspect of place often changes too (Blokland 2001; Massey 1995). While places are made through social interactions, there are also certain moments or events in these "social relations, nets which have over time been constructed" when change can

occur (Massey 1994:120). The findings emphasise that the case study neighbourhood was made initially as a “collective undertaking” (Friedmann 2010:159) but the challenge is that further urban development was mostly external and did not involve local processes that could continue to bind residents together.

Collective processes contributed to both urban development and the formation of ISNs by creating interactions that enabled the integration of residents who came to the area from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Similarly, Aravot shows that taking part in place-making acts as an antidote for “alienation and estrangement” (2002:202) and Palomares and Simon (2006) link social integration to building a neighbourhood identity. The diminishing of community networks following neighbourhood change, however, indicates that changes in the surroundings such as increase in population and disorder can affect residents’ sense of belonging, challenging previously established neighbourhood identities (see Forrest & Kearns 2001; Lupton & Power 2002).

Without understanding the social processes and practices that take place in disadvantaged urban settings – be that in the form of social support or neighbourhood improvement – development projects may disregard the elements that have contributed to local social integration. Recognising local social practices can also expose existing conflicts, as differences among local residents can lead to holding contradictory neighbourhood identities (Bonilla-Silva, Goar & Embrick 2006). As the findings of this research show, shared experiences within one group of residents can create strong in-group bias, leading to the exclusion of those that are considered different. Previous research shows how the ‘urban poor’ can also apply self-segregation to themselves based on shared experiences of living in slums in addition to the segregation of disadvantaged urban areas from the broader city (Haynes & Hutchison 2008).

The separation of social and physical aspects of development is further highlighted by the pursuit of social integration as an outcome on its own. The findings of this research indicate that cohesion was supported by the collaborative processes in which local residents came together to improve their living environment. Changes in the neighbourhood that affected social cohesion negatively lacked a connecting element between old and new residents, such as the interactions and dialogue that used to be part of the collaborations at time of neighbourhood formation (Chapter 7).

External projects that aim to create neighbourhood cohesion focus on institutionalised outcomes such as sustainable community. While this includes an idea of neighbourhood

maintenance, there is little mention of the role of local residents in this process (Dempsey 2008; Dempsey et al. 2011; Palermo & Ponzini 2015). In deprived urban settings such as informal settlements, local residents' efforts to construct a liveable environment are mostly disregarded despite possible social outcomes that emerge from physical construction efforts (Davis 2006; Lomnitz 2003; Perlman 2004; Richards, O'Leary & Mutsonziwa 2007). Self-build incremental housing, for example, can be a form of neighbourhood maintenance (Estrada-Casarín 2016; Greene & Rojas 2008). However, these processes are seen as negative informal solutions instead of contributions to the 'lived environment' or a 'sustainable community' because they take place in informal settlements (see Dempsey 2008; Perlman 2004; Shatkin 2004). Processes that shape the physical environment can also create local social relations, as has been demonstrated throughout this thesis.

The finding that those local residents who did not take part in the physical formation of the neighbourhood were left outside the integrative dimension of the collective practices further emphasises the relevance of social processes to social cohesion. There was a division between the majority population – the original settlers – and those who have moved to the neighbourhood later, especially to inhabit housing blocks. There were processes of othering, as blame for increase of crime and insecurity in the neighbourhood was rolled on those others who had not contributed to the development of the neighbourhood (Chapter 7). Cohesion between the different groups of people appeared to be lacking, as were collective processes and shared experiences of place-making. Integration between the different groups of people was made challenging by the physically excluded housing estates, which were gated and, in some cases, guarded complexes. Making the neighbourhood liveable through collaborative projects acted as a "common narrative" (Madanipour 2016:208), building social cohesion among residents who were proud of their shared efforts and achievements.

In the research locality, the social fabric of the neighbourhood changed following the influx of new residents, major housing developments and more formal representation. It was a gradual transformation from collaborative projects and community networks to diminishing conviviality, personal networks and processes of othering, following neighbourhood change and formalisation. The lack of collaborative processes that initially brought the old residents together in ISNs have not been available for the new residents, although it is possible the housing estates themselves facilitated some internal networking functions. External housing development contributed positively to the extension of some urban services, but the

neighbourhood itself had become both physically and socially divided, lacking distinct social processes that could bind people together.

The integrative elements had given way to social exclusion and the neighbourhood had become divided, as the arrival of new residents that had not contributed to neighbourhood formation coincided with an increase in crime and disorder. Processes of othering and closed personal networks appeared to be defence mechanisms, a way to keep away what was considered deviant – but what was in many cases new and different. The arrival of housing estates caused a major change in the social and physical landscape of the research locality, showing that externally led projects can have unexpected social impacts, such as social segregation. This is not to say that the housing estates were not a necessary response to a severe lack of housing. However, it is not surprising that building housing estates in an area that became inhabited as an irregular settlement and where local struggles to construct the neighbourhood were distinctive caused divisions between the original settlers and new residents.

Based on these findings, I propose that institutionally led development struggles to maintain local social processes that often create “virtuous circles” (Shatkin 2007:95) as existing social ties are strengthened through community collaboration. As Madanipour (2016:209) states, “it is the absence of social integration which causes social exclusion, as individuals do not find the possibility and channels of participating in the mainstream society”. The transformation of ISNs and shift from collaborative processes to othering and distrust shows that formal urbanisation processes can have unexpected negative social outcomes. This does not mean that informal urbanisation should be glorified as unproblematic or always resulting in harmonious social neighbourhoods where collaborative processes thrive. However, it does suggest that more balanced divisions of rights and responsibilities between local residents and development institutions are needed. Expanding the active citizenship of residents of disadvantaged areas should include expanding access to support so that local processes can continue to thrive (see Friedmann 2011; Lefebvre 2000).

8.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings of this research, providing an answer to the main research question: how have ISNs contributed to processes of urban development and how have processes of urban development affected informal social networks in the case study locality. I claim that ISNs have been an integral part of both social and physical aspects of urban development in the research locality. Neighbour collaborations were required to drive the

improvement of the neighbourhood, leading to the formation of community networks. However, more advanced urbanisation processes, the arrival of housing estates, increasing population and disorder caused a shift towards personal networks, indicating that processes of urban development also affect how ISNs form and function. Physical infrastructure in the research locality has been developed and marginalisation has been reducing (see CONAPO 2001 & 2012), even though issues with access to water and water quality remain. On the other hand, the research locality has become socially divided, and characterised by disorder, crime and distrust between residents who had not established social ties and close relationships.

The first section of this chapter discussed neighbourhood formation and informal collaborations as processes that made the area liveable, brought residents together forming ISNs and created familiarity between residents with different backgrounds. Discussing findings that related to neighbourhood formation in relation to previous research in Mexico City and elsewhere in Mexico, showed that local residents' collaborations in small neighbour groups and neighbourhood-wide collective projects differed from other informal settlements where residents were more organised. There are not many previous studies that allow comparing findings regarding the social dimensions of neighbourhood formation processes, as previous research mostly focuses on collaborations as a means to drive physical neighbourhood formation (Moctezuma 2001; Wigle 2010). Some studies of place-making, however, recognise the intertwined nature of social and physical neighbourhood construction, which is why place-making has been discussed in the second part of the chapter.

The finding that neighbourhood change in the research locality was linked to diminishing community networks has been discussed in relation to a dated discussion of community change. Previous studies regarding the 'community question' have suggested that as long as social resources continue to be accessible through other social ties, it is not a concern that local ties and solidarity support in modern neighbourhoods is diminishing (Wellman 1999; Wellman & Leighton 1974). This research, however, shows that local social ties and community networks used to be an essential part of the research locality, driving improvements based on shared needs. The shift towards more personal networks on the other hand indicates how support continues to be available on a personal level locally, yet the potential for neighbourhood-wide collaborations has weakened. The findings that indicate the prominence of particularised patterns of trust, as well as suspicion towards those who fall beyond the participants' personal networks, demonstrate the importance of community networks and active local ties in creating a socially cohesive neighbourhood.

The second part of the chapter discussed ISNs and neighbourhood formation revisiting the broader debate of the role of local residents in urban development. The findings demonstrate that ISNs and urban development are interconnected processes, which is why social and physical aspects of urban development should be considered together. The diminishing ISNs in the research locality following formal urbanisation, increase in population and disorder indicate that disregarding the social practices and focusing only on developing the physical neighbourhood can have unwanted social outcomes such as the erosion of social cohesion. As pointed out throughout this chapter, the collective processes that take place in disadvantaged urban areas in response to urban challenges are seldom considered as practices that should be supported or that more formal development approaches could build on, even though there is evidence of the potential of local collaborations (see Beane 2015; Durand-Lasserve 2006; Estrada-Casarín 2016; Friedmann 2011; Moctezuma 2001).

The collaborative processes central to community networks in the research locality have been discussed in light of *buen vivir* and collectivism to highlight that there are some development perspectives that recognise the role of local residents in driving social well-being. However, as has been demonstrated considering the shortfalls of both participation and *buen vivir*, the potential of collectivism can be hindered by institutionalisation, which often restricts rather than supports the agency of local people. I argue that local collective practices should be supported by institutional actors because collectivism appears to have positive social outcomes such as social cohesion that institutional approaches to development are less capable of achieving. Collectivism should stem from the local people as an extension of local residents' "active citizenship" (MDMQ 2012:10). The challenge continues to be how aspects of collectivism and local practices can be supported by development actors in an urban context without losing local residents' agency in the process (see Burgos-Vigna 2018; Delgado Ramos 2015). It is not enough to focus on the delivery of urban infrastructure, housing, or settlement upgrading without also focusing on the social aspects of urban development.

9. Conclusions

The understanding of urbanisation processes and related development challenges has progressed tremendously as the world has become increasingly urban. As urbanisation advances, spreading from one continent to the next, it is worth noting that many aspects conventionally seen as development challenges, such as informal settlements, follow suit. It can then be questioned whether responses to development challenges are addressing these issues in the best possible way or whether there are some gaps in how local residents continue to be understood as potential actors in urban development.

This research project set out to explore the role of informal social networks (ISNs) in urban development, motivated by the observed general lack of inclusivity in development projects. Approaches addressing this deficit of inclusivity have been reviewed in chapter 2, focusing most of all on participation and how participation in practice has fallen short of its 'transformational' potential (see Chambers 2010; Francis 2001; Mohan & Hickey 2004). The broader theoretical debates this thesis draws on relate to participation and collectivism, collaborations that drive improvement of local well-being emphasising *buen vivir*. This is also reflected in the interactionist approach applied to the analysis of ISNs, focusing on collaboration and social support among local residents. The concepts of social networks applied in this study have been reviewed in chapter 2, however, this conceptualisation has been broadened and specified in each empirical chapter respectively. ISNs have then been examined considering how local residents rely on social ties and social support to deal with challenges, including a historical aspect of neighbourhood formation in a former irregular settlement.

Chapters 4 to 7 have examined specific aspects of the case study, while chapter 8 has brought the findings together to address the main research question. This short concluding chapter restates the research aim and examines how the secondary research questions have supported achieving the aim of exploring the role of ISNs in urban development. First, the research findings are summarised, followed by a discussion of limitations related to drawing conclusions from the case study. The contributions of this study are considered in light of the broader debate regarding local actors and agency in urban development. Finally, suggestions are made for future research, based on elements of this study that require further investigation.

9.1 Fulfilling the research aim and objectives

The research project has followed a case study approach, considering how ISNs have contributed to processes of urban development in a low-income neighbourhood in Iztapalapa, Mexico City. A historical aspect of neighbourhood formation was included in the research following initial findings that the functions of ISNs had been changing in the research locality. Secondary research questions supported addressing the research aim: How do informal social networks function in the research locality, what actors do they consist of, and what kind of support is exchanged through them? What enables the formation of ISNs and the exchange of social support? What hinders the formation of informal social networks (ISNs) and the exchange of social support in the research locality? How social support has been exchanged in the research locality includes a comparative element that focuses on building an understanding of how ISNs have changed following neighbourhood development.

While social support was exchanged between family, friends and neighbours to a varying degree, the findings showed that family members living in the same household had become the most important sources of support while neighbours were relied on less in the contemporary setting. ISNs in the research locality resembled community networks at time of neighbourhood formation, including solidarity exchange that focused on driving shared needs of neighbourhood improvement. In contrast, the ISNs present in the research locality in recent years resembled more personal networks, consisting of household members, friends and other kin that lived locally, in addition to a few selected neighbours who had formed strong ties over the years. The supportive functions of ISNs focused more on personal issues and personal goals, often revolving around household needs.

Community networks used to be enabled by shared needs, collaborative practices and convivial activities. The two local community organisations still supported the formation and maintenance of social ties, as well as provided a space for convivial activities, which nowadays took place less in the research locality. The flow of social support was nowadays mostly enabled by reciprocity and aspects of similarity between actors (Chapter 6). Not reciprocating or sharing any characteristics such as age or household composition to some extent could hinder the functions of ISNs by affecting patterns of trust in a negative way. Environmental factors such as increase in population, crime and disorder have hindered the exchange of support through ISNs, along with processes of othering and diminishing familiarity between local residents (Chapter 7).

Overall, the data show that the broader community networks were tied to processes of physical neighbourhood formation, while the rise of neighbourhood insecurity and reduction in collaborative processes were linked to the rise of personal networks. Comparing current and former interactions in ISNs shows that there was nowadays less collaboration between local residents who did not have a close relationship. This indicates that social networks have a potential role in urban development, as the social and physical aspects of neighbourhood development appear to be connected. The intertwined nature of social and physical neighbourhood formation processes highlights the tension between local and external or informal and formal responses to urban development challenges. This addresses the main research aim of exploring the role of ISNs in development, as the case study shows that collaborative processes support social cohesion, whereas more advanced formal urbanisation may have the opposite effect, emphasising the value of ISNs. A disconnect between local actors and more formal development processes can have an indirect negative impact on the social setting of a neighbourhood if neighbourhood change causes tensions between local residents. This is not to say that institutions are not central actors in urban development but suggests that local collaborative processes should be supported by institutions rather than undermined when delivering external interventions.

9.2 Limitations of this research

Relying on a case study approach means that while this research provides some new insights to ISNs and the exchange of social support on a neighbourhood level, these insights are also limited by the context in which the research has been carried out. The ISNs analysed in this thesis share some similarities with previous research but also many differences, showing that the research locality is a unique setting with its own social practices. As is common in case study research, the findings of this research provide a basis for further theory testing (see Hays 2004; Stake 2003; Verschuren 2003; Yin 1994). This is especially the case in terms of the main finding that ISNs can contribute to the formation of both a social and physical neighbourhood, which “may be valuably transferred to facilitate consideration of other settings” (Ager 2000:33). This demonstrates that the study of ISNs has the potential to broaden the understanding of local residents as actors in development.

The way ISNs have been conceptualised in this research focuses more on networks as a potential source of support and enabler of development. As such this research mostly disregards possible negative effects of social networks as social structures for coercion or exclusion, which can lead

to unequal access to resources and social support. The data indicate that unequal access to ISNs and patterns of exclusion emerged during neighbourhood decline, as indicated by aspects of othering (Chapter 7). While the history of the research locality indicated that there are other aspects of coercion and limited patterns of support present, for example, in the processes of local youth gangs, these aspects were beyond the focus of this research. Coercion and specifically limiting access to resources were not prominent patterns in the data, which is why these aspects have not been analysed further.

There are some limitations relating to data collection and access to certain participant groups, especially unequal age division among participants. However, the larger quantity of older participants enabled focusing on the historical aspects of neighbourhood formation. The underrepresentation of young or male participants has been taken into consideration in data analysis, as distinctive findings have not been drawn based on gender aspects or generational change. Investigating historical aspects has limited the specific comparison of community and personal networks as it has not been possible to collect symmetrical data. For this reason, the analysis has not focused on specific structural details but on identifying the broader patterns of how interactions in ISNs have changed. This leaves more specific analysis of what processes erode ISNs more than others for future research as discussed below.

9.3 Contributions of this research

As an interdisciplinary study, this research contributes to debates regarding inclusivity and the role of local residents in development by increasing the understanding of the input of local residents in the development of a former informal settlement. The contributions of this research then relate to the broader field of development studies, as well as urban development and the development of informal settlements by analysing the relationship between the social and physical processes relating to neighbourhood transformation. By focusing attention on ISNs as a form of local agency, this thesis also contributes to studies of neighbourhood social networks by providing a detailed account of ISNs and the exchange of social support in a developing urban neighbourhood.

This research contributes to debates regarding the role of local residents in urban development by focusing attention on ISNs as contributors to the social as well as physical processes of neighbourhood formation. Local residents' role in development has been previously discussed widely (see e.g. Esteva, Babones & Babcicky 2013; Rist 1997; Ziai 2004). However, previous studies show how participation and community-based approaches have been limited by the

institutional frameworks in which they are applied (see Conning & Kevane 2002; Cooke & Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2008; Hickey & Mohan 2004). Alternatives to development, such as post-development and *buen vivir* call for a more central role of local actors, but some questions remain regarding what this means in practice (Gudynas 2018; Nederveen Pieterse 2000). This suggests that there continues to be a need for increasing the understanding of local responses to development issues, which the study of ISNs has the potential to address.

By providing a detailed analysis of ISNs and the exchange of social support in a neighbourhood in Mexico City, this thesis contributes to existing literature on social networks as well as the exchange of social support in disadvantaged urban settings. This includes literature on the 'community question' (see Drouhot 2016; Wellman 1979) and especially previous accounts of social networks in Mexico City (Lomnitz 2003) and Guadalajara (González de la Rocha 1994). Focusing on ISNs frames local residents' collaborative interactions as the drivers of neighbourhood improvement, analysing the potential of ISNs beyond the conventional conceptualisations of social networks as structures bridging local and institutionalized actors in development (see e.g. Gilchrist 2009; Gilchrist & Taylor 2016). Networks have also been discussed by alternative development scholars as part of broader development structures, such as networks of social movements and local actors as part of global development networks (Beck 2016; Escobar 2008; Manuel de Landa 1997; Stephansen 2013). The study of ISNs shifts the attention away from these broader structures to the non-institutional collaborative processes that take place between local people, proposing a new perspective to networks in development.

This is not to suggest that ISNs per se are a new concept, as previous studies discuss informal support from various perspectives, often relating to disadvantaged settings. However, scholars mostly consider informal support as a coping mechanism of the poor who faced with adversity such as food poverty draw on their 'informal safety nets' (Dercon 2002; Devereux 1999; Heemskerk & Norton 2004). Analysing exchanges of informal support from a coping strategy perspective may recognise the resourcefulness of the rural or urban poor (see Devereux 1999; Lomnitz 2003). However, the analysis of local residents' interactions and ISNs carried out in this thesis suggests that ISNs are not relied on only as coping mechanisms but that ISNs were formed in the process of actively improving living conditions, rather than merely coping with adversity. The transformation of ISNs from community networks to personal networks suggests that circumstances do not only define the type of support provided through ISNs but how ISNs and social ties are formed. Rather than considering ISNs as merely coping mechanisms, further

attention should be paid to how ISNs are formed and function in different settings, taking into consideration the dynamic nature of ISNs.

ISNs as social responses to urban development challenges also address some of the negative considerations of urban poverty and informal urbanisation. Urban residents, especially in the context of informal settlements, continue to be dismissed by institutional actors when urban settlements are planned, redesigned or upgraded (Durand-Lasserve 2006; Friedmann 2011; Shatkin 2004; Watson 2009). ISNs have been a particularly useful concept in this study as the networks approach has shown how local residents have collaborated making their surroundings liveable and how social processes both enabled and were constructed through these collaborations. On the other hand, the rise of personal networks shows that local social practices may require external support so that community networks and conviviality do not diminish in complex urban settings where development challenges do not relate to the physical environment alone.

Focusing on social interactions between participants alongside neighbourhood transformation revealed a connection between ISNs and urban development, indicating the value of informal collaborations for the construction of a social neighbourhood, creating cohesion among local residents in an informal settlement. By showing a shift from community networks to personal networks that has followed neighbourhood decline indicates that local social ties and neighbourhood social networks continue to be important for neighbourhood stability, rekindling an interest in now classic neighbourhood studies (see Fischer 1982; Wellman, Carrington & Hall 1988; Wellman & Leighton 1979). Highlighting the interlinked nature of social and physical development calls for a realignment of the urban development discourse to take local social practices – exchanges of social support, the formation of ISNs and informal collaborations – more into consideration. Instead of investigating the input of local residents in development challenges, disadvantaged settlements are seen as problems that require external interventions (Roy 2005; van Gelder 2013; Watson 2009).

Social networks have been used in this thesis as a tool to explore the role of local residents in urban development. The potential of social network analysis is widely recognised in aspects of urban development but research tends to focus on the structural aspects of networks, such as issues with urban systems and development policy (Furtado, Sakowski & Tóvolli 2015), knowledge sharing between organisations (Jackson 2010), network ties in urban waste management processes (Alemu 2017) and connections between risk factors (Yu et al. 2017).

Networks are then considered by scholars in relation to or as part of institutional structures. Cities themselves are even said to be well-connected, forming global city networks (Neal 2011) but the focus is rarely on local residents' interactions. Even studies of neighbourhood networks have shifted their focus from local to extra-local social ties or away from face-to-face interactions to telecommunications losing interest in local social networks (Curtis White & Guest 2003; Hampton & Wellman 2003).

This thesis contributes to studies in urban development by proposing both a comparative historical approach to the study of neighbourhoods as well as an interactionist approach to investigating ISNs as part of the social neighbourhood setting. The analysis of interactions and exchanges of support among local residents has resulted in findings that depict neighbourhood change, showing the role of collaborative processes for both the social and physical development of a former informal settlement. This highlights the potential of an interactionist social networks approach to reveal complex collaborative and informal practices in everyday settings. Increasing the understanding of urban neighbourhoods as social and not only physical settings, an interactionist approach can support finding more balanced partnerships between local actors and institutional actors in urban development. A comparative historical approach can further support this by bringing forth the observed effects of urban development from neighbourhood upgrading to efforts to improve social cohesion.

As a case study, some of the contributions of this study are specific to the research locality. Collecting information about neighbourhood formation and urbanisation processes increases the information held about an area where very little official information of neighbourhood formation was available. This information can support further studies of formalisation processes in informal settlements. The study provides a further comparison point, similarly to the studies by Moctezuma (2001), Wigle (2010) and Lombard (2014), which have enabled identifying the specific processes of urbanisation found in the research locality of this study. Depicting the formation of a *colonia popular* has also showed that regardless of the negative stereotypes often attached to the research locality, the history of the neighbourhood is rich in positive experiences where the original residents constructed a home for themselves and a neighbourhood for each other. As such this thesis contributes to challenging some of the negative connotations of informal settlements by showing that it is not only processes of formalisation that construct a neighbourhood.

9.4 Directions for future research

This research has found that in the research locality, there was a relationship between ISNs and urban development: ISNs were formed during collaborative processes that contributed to urban development, whereas aspects related to more advanced urbanisation have had detrimental effects on ISNs. As this thesis draws on a single case study, further research would be required to investigate whether this relationship applies also to other urban settings. Replicating the use of an interactionist social networks approach can build on the contributions of this research by seeking other examples of neighbourhood formation and transformation. Building comparisons between research sites would enable identifying broader connections between ISNs and development processes so that more general conclusions can be made regarding how to support local residents in urban development.

One of the limitations of this research has been lack of data for specific comparison of ISNs at time of neighbourhood formation and in the contemporary neighbourhood. However, the comparisons that have been carried out throughout this project have resulted in the findings that collaborative processes related to neighbourhood formation enable the formation of community networks, whereas more formal urbanisation is linked to the rise of personal networks. Longitudinal data would allow more focused comparison and provide a more detailed picture of not only potential patterns of change but to what extent different elements are causing changes to occur. Longitudinal research especially in the context of informal settlements can be valuable to evidence local practices and the outcomes they are related to. This includes providing information about how development interventions affect local settings both socially and physically, as well as what aspects of interventions support the local practices and what are detrimental to them. Lack of reliable data of disadvantaged urban surroundings continues to limit research on informal settlements, showing that there is a need for more systematic data collection in urban settings. While longitudinal research requires resources that can be difficult to obtain, studies that compare historical neighbourhood formation to contemporary settings can increase the understanding of current issues, also showing how different approaches to formalisation or settlement upgrading work in practice.

The findings of this study imply that the role of local residents in finding solutions to urban development challenges should not be disregarded, because local responses have social outcomes that more formal approaches may not be able to replicate. It has been argued in this thesis that institutions should support local responses to development challenges rather than

dismiss local residents in institution-led development projects. While this thesis has shown that local residents are capable of being the central driving force in neighbourhood improvement, the diminishing of community networks has shown how fragile social practices can be when local circumstances change following external influences. Further research is needed to clarify how local actors can be supported so that local collective practices are not lost and how these processes can be reintroduced in settings where they have been diminishing.

The institution-critical post-development discourse combined with the *buen vivir* -paradigm can provide new perspectives for the ongoing debate regarding the role of local people in development, as suggested by Gudynas (2018). *Buen vivir* and the idea of collectivism at the heart of communal well-being may because of its indigenous origins seem an unlikely framework for unravelling the dynamics between local people and institutions in development. However, examining how collectivism takes place in different settings can help bring about more balanced divisions of rights and responsibilities between local and institutional actors. Further research can broaden existing discussions of inclusivity in development by exploring the applicability of *buen vivir* beyond Ecuador and Bolivia, to analyse how collectivism is present also in modern urban settings (see Delgado Ramos 2015; Gudynas 2018; Torres Villarreal 2014; Villalba 2013). I propose that engaging with the *buen vivir* paradigm, collectivism and social well-being can provide some answers regarding the challenge of how to bring back collective processes once they have been lost.

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Appendix 1: Interview participants

	Interview date	Duration hh:mm	Interview location	Gender	Age*	Name**	Profession
1	07/11/2016	00:20	DCB	M	33	Julio	Teacher
2	17/11/2016	00:32	CCC	M	20	Marcos	Student
3	17/11/2016	00:33	CCC	F	66	Fabiana	Pensioner
4	22/11/2016	00:49	CCC	M	69	Facundo	Pensioner
5	22/11/2016	00:48	CCC	F	65	Josefa	Pensioner
6	24/11/2016	00:28	CCC	F	62	Camila	Pensioner
7	24/11/2016	00:37	CCC	F	64	Ana	Pensioner
8	26/11/2016	00:26	DCB	M	22	Jorge	Student
9	29/11/2016	00:35	CCC	F	73	Violeta	Pensioner
10	29/11/2016	00:19	CCC	F	68	Miranda	Pensioner
11	30/11/2016	00:23	CCC	F	67	Malena	Pensioner
12	01/12/2016	00:41	CCC	F	73	Beatriz	Pensioner
13	01/12/2016	00:19	CCC	F	57	Fortuna	Pensioner
14	03/12/2016	00:51	DCB	M	67	Alberto	Pensioner
15	08/12/2016	00:27	CCC	F	66	Galenia	Pensioner
16	08/12/2016	00:27	CCC	F	71	Araceli	Pensioner
17	12/12/2016	00:35	CCC	F	67	Aitana	Pensioner
18	14/12/2016	00:10	CCC	F	54	Luana	Houseperson
19	02/02/2017	00:39	CCC	F	72	Carla	Pensioner
20	08/02/2017	00:31	CCC	F	67	Sara	Pensioner
21	15/02/2017	01:09	CCC	F	52	Natalia	Manager
22	18/02/2017	00:34	DCB	M	23	Ignacio	Office worker
23	20/02/2017	00:36	CCC	M	67	Lucas	Pensioner
24	08/03/2017	01:39	CCC	M	65	Benjamin	Cleaner
25	09/03/2017	01:35	CCC	M	31	Alejandro	Assistant Manager
26	10/03/2017	00:34	CCC	F	64	Luciana	Pensioner
27	14/03/2017	00:18	CCC	F	27	Ximena	Houseperson
28	15/03/2017	00:28	CCC	M	53	Samuel	Student
29	15/03/2017	00:20	CCC	M	66	Santiago	Pensioner
30	16/03/2017	00:18	CCC	F	71	Fernanda	Pensioner
31	17/03/2017	00:19	CCC	F	53	Mia	Houseperson
32	18/03/2017	00:19	DCB	M	32	Daniel	Teacher
33	21/03/2017	01:35	CCC	F	71	Andrea	Pensioner
34	23/03/2017	00:54	CCC	F	43	Juana	Houseperson
35	24/03/2017	00:27	Home	F	33	Agustina	Houseperson
36	24/03/2017	00:30	CCC	F	80	Antonia	Pensioner
37	25/03/2017	00:33	DCB	M	46	Matias	Office worker
38	28/03/2017	01:02	CCC	F	48	Constanza	Teacher

39	29/03/2017	00:18	CCC	F	33	Florencia	Food stall holder
40	29/03/2017	00:46	Home	F	65	Laura	Pensioner
41	31/03/2017	00:30	DCB	F	32	Adriana	Houseperson
42	01/04/2017	00:26	DCB	F	45	Maite	Houseperson
43	03/04/2017	00:25	CCC	M	62	Ricardo	Assistant Manager
44	04/04/2017	00:46	CCC	F	74	Manuela	Pensioner
45	04/04/2017	00:39	DCB	F	67	Sofia	Pensioner
46	06/04/2017	00:45	CCC	M	70	Isabella	Pensioner
47	07/04/2017	00:20	Home	F	71	Valentina	Pensioner
48	07/04/2017	00:58	DCB	F	31	Valeria	Shop assistant
49	13/04/2017	00:47	DCB	F	34	Victoria	Teacher
50	13/04/2017	00:47	DCB	M	35	Mateo	Taxi driver
51	13/04/2017	00:29	DCB	F	42	Martina	Shop keeper
52	19/04/2017	01:03	CCC	F	63	Julieta	Houseperson
53	19/04/2017	00:43	Home	M	35	Diego	Construction worker
54	19/04/2017	00:43	Home	F	34	Mariana	Houseperson
55	21/04/2017	00:45	CCC	F	64	Paula	Houseperson
56	22/04/2017	00:38	DCB	M	32	Sebastian	Teacher
57	26/04/2017	01:02	CCC	F	67	Guadalupe	Pensioner
58	27/04/2017	01:01	DCB	M	43	Nicolas	Manager

*Some ages are estimates based on the activities the participants attended or their household situations.

**All participants' names have been changed to protect anonymity.

DCB = Deportivo Chavos Banda, local community organisation

CCC = Cedros community centre

Appendix 2: Focus group participants

Focus Group date	FG length	Gender	Location	Age	Name*	Interviewed separately
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	66	Fabiana	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	73	Beatriz	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	73	Violeta	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	68	Miranda	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	72	Carla	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	67	Sara	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	70	Isabella	Yes
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	81	Olivia	No
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	65	Ariela	No
23/02/2017	01:24	F	CCC	68	Estrella	No
23/02/2017	00:52	M	CCC	67	Lucas	Yes
23/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	80	Antonia	Yes
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	67	Guadalupe	Yes
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	65	Laura	Yes
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	64	Luciana	Yes
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	63	Francisca	No
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	65	Inez	No
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	68	Jacinta	No
24/02/2017	00:52	F	CCC	67	Lalia	No
27/03/2017	00:36	F	CCC	68	Mireya	No
27/03/2017	00:36	F	CCC	73	Sarita	No
27/03/2017	00:36	F	CCC	63	Abril	No
27/03/2017	00:36	F	CCC	65	Patricia	No
24/04/2017	00:37	F	CCC	67	Thalia	No
24/04/2017	00:37	F	CCC	71	Araceli	Yes
24/04/2017	00:37	F	CCC	66	Magdalena	No
24/04/2017	00:37	F	CCC	62	Helena	No
24/04/2017	00:37	F	CCC	67	Larissa	No

Appendix 3: Interview questions

The following questions have been used as a broad guide in the interviews with the participants. Each question has been tailored to each individual interview and several additional questions have been asked focusing on the experiences the participants mentioned themselves.

- What is your history of living in the area? Have you lived here for long? Why did you move here? Did you or your family build the house you live in now? Can you describe the process?
- Can you describe the neighbourhood and your experiences of living here? What was the neighbourhood like when you arrived here?
- What is the street like where you live? Have there been many changes there? What about the neighbours, do they change often? Did you or your family take part in delivering the basic services or was there water and light here already when you moved here?
- Are there any issues or challenges on the street where you live? What about in the neighbourhood or the area more broadly?
- Can you describe a normal day in your family? Are there some things that are particularly challenging? How has your family life changed over the years?
- Relationships in the neighbourhood. What is the relationship with your neighbours like? Do you know many people on your street or other parts of the neighbourhood? Do you know the local representative?
- Informal support networks. Can you give an example of a time when you supported one of your neighbours in some way?
- What about an example of exchanges?
- Who are the people you usually spend your free time with? Specify relationship, gender and age.
- Who are the people you usually talk to about everyday matters or issues important to you?
- Who do you normally help with small favours?
- What about larger favours?
- Who do you usually exchange something?
- How many people live in your home and who are they?

- Do you rent or own? Did you build your house?
- What is your job? Where is it located?
- Where are you and your family originally from?
- What is your religion? Which church do you attend and how often?
- What is your education level?

Appendix 4: Focus group question outline

The focus group discussions were formed around the following questions. These questions were used to guide conversations. Further questions were asked based on participants responses, making each focus group slightly different.

- What was the area like when you moved here? How did you find moving here and living here, when there was not much in the area except for a few solitary houses? How did you find/purchase the land you built your house on, was the sale of land encouraged by the government somehow?
- What was daily life like before a network of water/drainage/light was constructed? Was there a lot of support between different people among the new residents who moved to the area? How did this support enable everyday life?
- How and when did these services arrive to the area? Was there a lot of collaboration between the new residents to bring these basic services to the area? What was the whole process like? Was the process different for pavement/water/drainage/light or other services like schools and churches?
- Were there many cooperatives that were formed in order to improve the area? How did these cooperatives form, are they still in use to some extent? Are you still in touch with the people who you worked with to improve the area? Were/are these people your neighbours? Did the collective groups in the neighbourhood also work together?
- What were the main events that you can remember when the neighbourhood was constructed/improved? What about when the services that arrived a lot later (community centres, sports field, schools) were constructed, who were the organisations/individuals driving these improvements? What about churches?
- Who do you think have been the most important organisations/cooperatives/individuals that have driven the improvement of the area? How important has the role of the local city council been? What about jefes de manzana/neighbourhood committees?