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THE HUMANE CITY

People, Places, and Practices in Precarious Urban Spaces

Mia Jaatsi

TURUN YLIOPISTON JULKAISUJA – ANNALES UNIVERSITATIS TURKUENSIS
SARJA – SER. AII OSA – TOM. 429 | BIOLOGICA – GEOGRAPHICA – GEOLOGICA | TURKU 2026

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University of Turku

Faculty of Science
Department of Geography and Geology
Human Geography
Doctoral programme in Biology, Geography and Geology

Supervised by

Professor, Päivi Kymäläinen Tampere University Tampere, Finland	Professor, Donald Mitchell Uppsala University Uppsala, Sweden
Professor, Jussi Jauhiainen University of Turku Turku, Finland	

Reviewed by

Professor, Philip Hubbard King's College London London, United Kingdom	Professor, Alan Latham University College London London, United Kingdom

Opponent

Professor, Sirpa Tani
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

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To my son

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis is about the humane city. Using ethnographic research methods, I constitute an understanding of a humane city: a city of vulnerability, solidarity, and informal life. I have carried out ethnographic research in urban public space in Finland by volunteering at an outreach station (Article I), hanging out at a forest pub (Article II), and going along informal recyclers (Article III). The findings from these articles highlight the agency of people who manage and resist precarity in urban everyday life. In the humane city that is proposed by this thesis, the practices of people are taken seriously as a voice that constructs everyday knowledge in the city.

I approach the humane city through the concept of urban precarity, referred to as the condition and experience of uncertainty and instability. Precarious conditions in labour, housing, health, and the urban environment reveal the vulnerability of human subjects and shape the ways they live, experience, and practice everyday urban space. The thesis found that precarity is a relative concept, emerging as spaces with intersecting nodes of mobility, networks, services, and sociality. It discovered that in spaces of precarity, also humane spaces emerge through acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building. The thesis highlights the skills and tacit knowledges of people, referred to as “everyday professionalism”, as people engage in informal urban life characterized by flexibility and improvisational uses of space.

The thesis reveals the centrality of particular urban places – the Kontula shopping centre (Helsinki) and the forest pub in Varissuo (Turku) – and practices – the informal recycling of cans and bottles – to the ways precarity is navigated in the city. These aspects outplayed as important sources of security and stability amidst an instable, precarious life. The thesis calls for understanding the mechanisms through which precariousness and ‘the humane’ become constructed in urban space, which is necessary for the social sustainability of our cities, and for making them more humane places to live.

KEYWORDS: precarity, ethnography, urban public space, coping, humane city

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöskirja käsittelee inhimillistä kaupunkia. Etnografisia tutkimusmenetelmiä hyödyntäen muodostan käsityksen inhimillisestä kaupungista: haavoittuvuuden, solidaarisuuden ja epävirallisen elämän kaupungista. Olen toteuttanut etnografista kenttätutkimusta julkisessa kaupunkitilassa Suomessa vapaaehtoistyöskentelemällä liikkuvassa päiväkeskuksessa (Artikkeli I), hengailemalla metsäpubissa (Artikkeli II) sekä kulkemalla epävirallisten kierrättäjien mukana (Artikkeli III). Näiden kolmen artikkelin löydökset tuovat esiin ihmisten toimijuutta, kun he hallitsevat ja vastustavat epävarmuuksia arjessa. Väitöskirjassa esitetyssä inhimillisessä kaupungissa ihmisten käytänteet nähdään merkittävänä äänenä, joka tuottaa arkipäiväistä tietoa kaupungista.

Lähestyn inhimillistä kaupunkia prekaariuden käsitteen kautta, jolla viitataan epävarmuuden tilaan ja kokemukseen. Epävarmat olosuhteet työssä, asumisessa, terveydessä ja kaupunkiympäristössä paljastavat ihmisten haavoittuvuutta sekä muokkaavat tapoja, joilla ihmiset elävät, kokevat ja toimivat arjen kaupunkitilassa. Väitöskirja osoittaa, että epävarmuus on suhteellinen käsite, joka syntyy liikkuvuuden, verkostojen, palveluiden, ja sosiaalisuuden risteävissä tiloissa. Väitöskirja tuo esiin, että epävarmuuksien tiloissa voi syntyä myös inhimillistä tilaa solidaarisuuden, kompromissien, hoivan ja luottamuksen rakentamisen kautta. Väitöskirja korostaa ihmisten taitoja ja hiljaista tietoa, joita kutsutaan väitöskirjassa ”arjen taituruudeksi”. Se ilmenee ihmisten toimiessa kaupungin epävirallisessa elämässä, mitä luonnehtivat joustavuus ja improvisoidut tilakäytöt.

Väitöskirja tuo esiin tiettyjen paikkojen – Kontulan ostoskeskuksen (Helsinki) ja Varissuon metsäpubin (Turku) – sekä käytäntöjen – pullojen ja tölkkien epävirallisen kierrättämisen – merkityksen epävarmuuksien navigoinnille kaupungissa. Ne osoittautuivat tärkeiksi turvallisuuden ja vakauden lähteiksi epävakaan ja epävarman elämän keskellä. Väitöskirja peräänkuuluttaa ymmärtämään mekanismeja, joiden kautta prekaarius ja inhimillisyys rakentuu kaupunkitilassa. Se on tärkeää, jotta voimme edistää kaupunkien sosiaalista kestävyyttä ja tehdä niistä inhimillisempiä paikkoja asua.

ASIASANAT: epävarmuus, etnografia, julkinen kaupunkitila, selviytyminen, inhimillinen kaupunki

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I Jaatsi, Mia & Kymäläinen, Päivi (2023). Navigating precarity in everyday (sub)urban space in Helsinki, Finland. *City & Society*, 35(2): 7-88. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ciso.12461

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II Jaatsi, Mia & Kymäläinen, Päivi (2025). Everyday improvising in public space: The forest pub as a site for suburban being. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 47(6): 2071-2086. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2252535

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III Jaatsi, Mia (2025). Canning in the City: Informal Recycling and the Question of Legitimacy in Urban Public Space. In I. Pardo & G.B. Prato (Eds.), *Forms of Inequality and the Legitimacy of Governance,* volume 1 (pp. 163-183). Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology, Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78607-5_8

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1 Introduction

"We are all human, anyway", a local man remarked as he explained how different groups navigate public space in his neighbourhood (Article I: 6). He was telling me a story about a group of young scouts who had been selling Christmas calendars at a metro exit, where people who use substances normally gather. He explained that at the time there was none, suggesting that the users had moved aside, making space for the scouts. By telling this story, the man reflected a shared moral understanding of how to live with others. He challenged the conception that marginal groups in the city are simply problematic: uncivilized, unskilled, and out-of-place. Resisting this dehumanization, the man constructed an empathetic image of the people and their actions. He saw the people not only as substance users but fellow urban citizens with agency and dignity.

This story depicts the focus of this doctoral thesis on the humane city. For the past few years, I have explored urban spaces that are shaped and co-constituted by processes of marginalization and humanization. I have carried out ethnographic research in the Finnish urban context with people, in places, and along practices that reveal how these two aspects work together on the level of everyday life. In practice, I have completed ethnographic field work by volunteering at a mobile outreach station (Article I), hanging out at a forest pub (Article II), and going along informal recyclers (Article III). The findings of these three articles constitute an understanding of a humane city: a city of vulnerability, solidarity, and informal life. The humane city brings to front people that operate in the urban margins, but become visible through everyday actions and interactions in public space. In the humane city that is proposed by this thesis, the practices of people are taken seriously as a voice that constructs everyday knowledge in the city.

I approach marginality in this thesis through the concept of precarity (Campbell & Laheij 2021; Ettlinger 2007; Millar 2017; Philo et al. 2019; Waite 2009). It has been acknowledged that what has come to characterize "new urban marginality" in the 21st century is economic restructuring and the rise of precarity, trapping particular people "at the bottom of the emerging urban order" (Wacquant 1999: 1642-1644). I understand precarity socio-spatially as the condition and experience of uncertainty and insecurity that are characterized by "life without the promise of stability" (Tsing

2015: 2). I view precarity broadly, reaching various aspects of urban life, including labour, housing, health, and the urban environment (e.g. Campbell & Laheij 2021; Coultas et al. 2023; Philo et al. 2019; Speer 2024). Precarity is everywhere, but it is unevenly distributed, revealing the vulnerability of the human condition (Butler 2004, 2012; Joronen & Rose 2021).

This thesis focuses on the lived, experienced, and practiced forms of urban precarity. This means that rather than exploring *what* makes people vulnerable (what precarity is), I study *how* vulnerability becomes performed on the ground (what precarity does). This puts the agencies and practices of people to the front. Earlier studies have suggested that precarious conditions push people to act in urban space, for instance, to make livelihoods or organize housing (Lancione 2019; Millar 2018; Schilling et al. 2019; Speer 2024). Urban improvisation has been identified as one key tactic of the urban poor to 'make do' under precarious conditions, particularly in the Global South (Kamalipour 2020; Low 2023; McFarlane 2011; Silver 2014; Simone 2004, 2019), but also in the North, and not necessarily by the poor (Hentschel 2015; Low 2023; Müller & Trubina 2020; Schilling et al. 2019). I adopt the concept of urban improvisation in this thesis to examine how the demands of precarity are lived and practiced in urban space in relation to their material, social, and moral surroundings (Crossley 2021; Ingold & Hallam 2007; Krueger & Salice 2021).

Public spaces are key sites for improvising solutions, because they provide opportunities for the informal economy to operate, as well as resources, such as waste, networks, and care (Low 2023). Although I acknowledge that precarity manifests also in private space (Bird 2019; Muñoz 2018; Raynor & Frichot 2023) and rural areas (Hougaard 2022; Tsing 2015), the ways precarity is coped in this thesis centres on urban public space, following the sites of the ethnographic field work (see sections 1.2.1 and 3.1). One of the main ways informants in this thesis craft solutions to precarious situations is income generation practices, including hustling for deals (Gowan 2010; Thieme 2018; Wacqüant 1998) and *canning,* or the collecting of empty cans and bottles and returning them for a monetary deposit (Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet et al. 2009; Iverson 2020). Studying these practices, I especially pay attention to the skills and tacit knowledges that people obtain as they manage uncertain and risky situations, and negotiate their rights to public space and resources in them (Dias 2016; Mitchell 2003; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016). I identify *everyday professionalism* that characterizes such capabilities and identity formations of active agents (see section 4.2). Recognizing the agency of vulnerable individuals is important for protecting their dignity under dehumanizing processes, such as stigmatization.

Paying attention to informal urban life is significant in contexts like the Nordic states, where formality and welfare may overshadow processes of marginality and informality. Thus, the humane city proposed by this thesis highlights the need to understand how cities operate beyond formal structures, and what kind of potentialities might exist in this ordinary, informal context. Not unlike Simone's (2004) idea of "people as infrastructure", this thesis looks at how the practices of people contribute to the makings of the urban in humane ways, namely, through acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building. It also recognizes the importance of social infrastructure in the city, that is, "the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection" (Latham & Layton 2019: 3). The study sites of Articles I and II can especially be regarded as such social infrastructure, with potential to recognize overlooked or undervalued spaces of the vulnerable (Kuoppa & Kymäläinen 2022). Thus, this thesis calls for understanding the humanness that is in the making in contexts of human interaction in the precarious city. Such a soft approach separates this thesis from some earlier conceptualizations of the humane city that have emphasized the role of urban design, planning, and architecture (McHarg 1958; Miraftab 2023; Platt 2006; Sennett 2010; Short 1989; Stevens et al. 2019).

The thesis insists on paying attention to precarity as one of the most comprehensive and defining conditions of the 21st century (Butler, 2004, 2012; Campbell & Lahej 2021; Ettlinger, 2007; Millar 2017; Standing 2011; Tsing 2015; Waite 2009). Precarity shapes our cities through inhumane processes that fail to offer standard employment (Ishchuk et al. 2024), provide access to stable housing (Speer 2024), grant welfare rights (Näre & Maury 2024), maintain a sense of possibility and hope (del Río 2025), and allow inclusive participation and cultural autonomy (Galic 2025). To cope with the challenges that precarity imposes on cities and its people, it has been suggested that more empathic relationships should be built between planners and citizens through participatory processes (Szaboova et al. 2024). In this direction, I propose in this thesis to understand everyday practices of people as a form of participation, a voice, that might have been left unheard. In this spirit, this thesis invites readers to see and understand the multifaced challenges of precarity, and the people, places, and practices around us.

The outline of this doctoral thesis is as follows. In the remaining introductory chapter, I will present the research aims and questions (1.1), the context of the research (1.2), and the summaries of the three original articles (1.3). In chapter 2, I explain the theoretical framework and key concepts, beginning with an overview of how the humane city is viewed by earlier research and in this thesis (2.1). This is followed by three subsections explaining what is meant by everyday spaces of precarity (2.2), tactics and urban improvisation (2.3), and the informal and (il)legitimate (2.4). Chapter 3 describes the materials and methods. I begin by explaining my urban ethnographic approach (3.1) and continue to discuss volunteer ethnography (3.1.1), deep listening and hanging out (3.1.2), and go-along interviews

(3.1.3). The subchapter 3.2 describes how the ethnographic material has been analysed and presented, and the final subchapter 3.3 addresses ethical questions. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of this thesis in three parts: how precarious spaces can also be humane spaces (4.1), how everyday professionalism legitimizes the informal (4.2), and how everyday practice can function as a voice for those who are otherwise unheard (4.3). The final chapter (5) is reserved for the conclusions of this thesis, including suggestions for further research.

1.1 Research aims and questions

In this thesis, I aim to reconceptualize and discuss the humane city in the Finnish urban context. I approach the humane city through (1) spaces of precarity that reveal the vulnerability of human subjects, (2) acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building that constitute humane spaces, and (3) informal urban life that exposes everyday professionalism of people. These aspects of the humane city are characterized by managing and resisting precarious urban conditions that require various strategies of coping, including tactics and urban improvisation. Through the humane city, the thesis aims to show what research on the human scale can reveal about precarious urban life and the ways urban precarity makes cities operate.

Thus, the goal of this thesis is not to constitute a transferrable model for urban development or give answers to how precarity could be eradicated. Rather, it aims to provide understandings on what precarity does on the ground; what kind of knowledges and skills are applied; and what kind of spaces it constructs. This is important because without such understandings, precarious people and places face the risk of becoming furthermore marginalized and dehumanized. Accordingly, the humane city can have implications to urban planning and policy through introducing soft values for city making, and above all, encouraging to recognize and empower ‘the humane’ that exists outside planners’ interventions, but might not be understood or listened to. Without doing this, we only risk widening the gaps between different groups and denying the rights of some groups to equal and dignified urban life.

This doctoral thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. *How is precarity lived, experienced, and practiced in everyday urban space?*

This research question directs the thesis towards micro-geographical understandings of urban precarity. It seeks to describe lived forms of precarity shaped by various forms of vulnerability related to, for instance, unemployment, homelessness, health problems, and fears of displacement. The question implies that vulnerability is a response to precarity, and suggests a spatial perspective to precarity, which takes into account the material, social, and legal aspects of everyday urban space.

2. How is everyday practice used to manage and resist precarity in public space?

This research question highlights the agency of people acting upon the conditions of urban precarity. It also emphasizes the role of public space as the site of these actions. Answers to this question bring to the fore people's skills and tacit knowledge that can be used to manage and resist precarity in everyday life. Moreover, this question directs the thinking in this thesis towards everyday practice and the power it may have in constructing knowledge in the city.

3. How can the precarious city be understood as a more humane place to live?

This research question overlaps with the two other questions in focusing on constructions of space that are both precarious and humane. It suggests to use the humane city as a tool for recognizing humane treatment of others in contexts of marginality and vulnerability. The question pays attention to particular people, places, and practices that are key to understanding precarious spaces in a more compassionate way. This question is underlined by the assumption that it is a fundamental human right to be treated with human dignity.

1.2 Research context

This thesis begins from the understanding that Finland, despite being known for welfare structures, is subject to uneven urban conditions. Inequalities have been growing in Finland in the past few decades: for example, between 1995 and 2023, the number of persons at risk of poverty grew from about 400 000 to 740 000 (from 7,9 % to 13,4 % of population), and between 2015-2023, the share of persons in severe material and social deprivation in Finland increased from 65 000 to 198 000 (from 1,2 % to 3,6 % of population) (Statistics Finland 2024, 2025). The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) estimates that the welfare cuts proposed by the current Finnish government (2023-) will significantly weaken basic security, widen income disparities, and increase the risk of poverty by the year 2027 (Hiilamo et al. 2023). Reduced social benefits have been listed amongst the reasons that have led homelessness to grow in Finland for the first time since 2012 (The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland 2025). In addition, limited resources in social and health care have impacted care work with vulnerable groups (Tamminen 2025). Although in international comparison income inequality in Finland remains low (OECD 2024), the development is worrisome, and calls for understanding the realities of people whom the changes impact the most.

Inequalities in Finland manifest in multiple ways (see e.g. Paukkeri et al. 2024), but one way to look at them is spatially, or how evenly or unevenly disadvantages spread out across different areas. Research has shown that spatial segregation has increased in the three largest city regions in Finland in the 21st century (Saikkonen et al. 2018), two of which – Helsinki and Turku – are included in this thesis. Segregation intensifies in the suburban fringe of these cities, impacting their socio-economic structure, ethnic diversity, school systems, reputation, and everyday life (Bernelius & Vilkama 2019; Huttunen & Juntunen 2020; Junnilainen 2019; Kortteinen & Vaattovaara 2015; Stjernberg 2022; Tuominen 2020). Several governmental regeneration programmes have been inaugurated since the 1990s to tackle questions related to the segregation and other development of Finnish suburbs (*Lähiöuudistus* 1995-1999, *Lähiöprojekti* 2000-2003, *Lähiöohjelma* 2008-2011, 2013-2015 & 2020-2023).

This doctoral thesis was part of the latest suburban development programme (*Lähiöohjelma* 2020-2023) through a research project "The Right to Suburban Space: Public Spaces, Margins and Meanings in the Everyday Life", directed by Professor Päivi Kymäläinen (Tampere University). The research project aimed at studying everyday life in suburbs closely and qualitatively, as opposed to some earlier geographical studies that had used statistical and GIS methods to discover patterns of spatial segregation in suburbs (e.g. Andersen et al. 2016; Bernelius & Vilkama 2019; Kortteinen & Vaattovaara 2015; Stjernberg 2019; Vilkama 2011). The project included an ethnographic part, which resulted in Articles I and II in this thesis. Although the project provided this doctoral research a suburban direction, it must be pointed out that this thesis is not about 'the suburbia'. There are three reasons for this.

First, grasping the social life of a suburb would have required long-term sociological or anthropological field work, which was well beyond the scope of this thesis. There is a long tradition in Finland to carry out ethnographic and other qualitative studies on suburbs (e.g. Junnilainen 2019; Kortteinen 1982; Kokkonen 2002; Roivainen 1999; Saarikangas 2014, see also Ruoppila & Turtiainen 2023), which has been influential in shaping our understandings of the social life and challenges in suburbs. Secondly, it should be noted that just like all urban neighbourhoods, all suburbs have their own identities, characteristics, and needs. This suggests that general assumptions about the uniformity of suburban neighbourhoods, suburban life or suburban residents should be avoided, and instead recognize the complexity and heterogeneity of suburbs (Schafran & LeMoigne 2022). Since about 1,5 million residents in Finland (a country of 5,5 million inhabitants) live in suburbs, life in them can look very different, and it should be viewed from the inside of these suburbs to understand what is central in each of them, to whom, and how.

Thirdly, suburbs are not representative of what was meant by urban marginality in the research project, nor in this thesis. The ‘margins’ are not considered physically bound entities at the edge of the city, but rather dynamic social spaces where inequalities become visible and various vulnerabilities become lived and experienced (Kopomaa 1997; Watson 2006). As the articles of this thesis show, marginality can emerge everywhere in the city, also in centrally located places, both in suburbs and city centres. This means that marginality is spatially and temporally shifting (Watson 2006), following the human geographical idea of space as relative (Massey 2005) and the ethnographical view of place and space as socially constructed (Low 2016), both of which suggest shifting dynamics of power. Thus, marginality in this thesis is approached through the context of urban precarity (see section 2.2), rather than as a suburban manifestation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Nordic welfare context provides a distinctive environment to study urban marginality compared to, for instance, North America or the Global South. This is because the Finnish state provides a social protection system that “includes various forms of financial support and benefits designed to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to take part in working life and society in general” (The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2026). In practice, every legal resident in Finland, including informants in this thesis, is entitled to benefits such as housing allowance, unemployment security, national pension, health insurance, and basic social assistance (ibid.). Although it has been recognized that there is a need to reform the Finnish social security system (Hiilamo 2022) and the government is currently weakening some of its benefits (Hiilamo et al. 2023), “the right to social security” is protected by the Constitution of Finland (731/1999, 19 §): “Those who cannot obtain the means necessary for a life of dignity have the right to receive indispensable subsistence and care.”

1.2.1 Study sites

Two Finnish suburban neighbourhoods, Kontula (Helsinki) and Varissuo (Turku), provide the ethnographic sites of Articles I and II in this thesis. They represent typical Finnish suburbs, which are understood as high-rise housing estates built in the 1960-70s outside the city centre to answer the housing needs of a growing urban population (Aalto & Laaksonen 2021; Stjernberg 2022). Their idea was to provide convenient living with affordable housing, necessary daily services, and decent transportation connections. Suburbs were considered ideal living environments in Finland: they offered modern housing, closeness to nature, and generally a higher standard of living in a predominantly agrarian society, transmitting a promise of a better future in the emerging welfare state (Saarikangas 2014; Stjernberg 2022). The rise of the welfare state also meant strong government involvement in housing policy, which led to a substantial share of social housing in suburbs (Stjernberg 2022). The role of suburbs is significant in the Finnish context, because it is through suburbanization that Finland in fact became urbanized and modernized (Saarikangas 2014: 43).

Finnish suburbs have since been heavily impacted by many structural changes in the society, including the loss of traditional manufacturing jobs, the economic recession of the 1990s, and increasing immigration. The following demographic and socio-economic changes as well as deteriorating built environments have contributed to the decline of many suburbs and the accumulation of disadvantages within them (Stjernberg 2022). Table 1 shows how the socio-economic characteristics of Kontula and Varissuo relate to the respective city averages of Helsinki and Turku.

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of Kontula and Varissuo (Source: Statistics Finland, retrieved from Open statistical databases in the Helsinki Region 2023 & 2024 and City of Turku 2023 & 2024)

	Kontula	Helsinki	Varissuo	Turku
Number of residents*	15 479	684 018	9 178	206 073
Share of residents with mother tongue other than Finnish/Swedish/Sami* (%)	39,6	17,3	60,0	16,7
Level of unemployment (%)**	21,8	11,1	28,0	12,1
Share of residents with basic education (%)	43,6*	23,0*	44,9**	22,7**
Share of rental housing (%)	61,2**	47,9**	58,6*	51,5*

*2024 **2023

The concentration of socio-economic challenges has led these areas to be subjects of ‘problem talk’ (Repo 2024; Ruoppila & Turtiainen 2023; Tuominen 2020), and targets of several renewal and development programmes (see previous section). However, studies have shown that local residents in both Varissuo and Kontula distance themselves from dominant stigmatizing narratives, albeit recognizing challenges in the areas (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020; Repo 2024; Tuominen 2020). In Varissuo, locals acknowledge the neighbourhood’s declining services (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020; Repo 2024) and the increasing number of immigrant groups that impact, for instance, the level of Finnish language skills among school children (see Bernelius & Huilla 2021: 52). Put together, the suburb has become “a symbol of the loss of the ‘welfare Finland’ of the past”, particularly for the ‘original’ residents of Varissuo (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020: 4131). Kontula has also witnessed changes through the concentration of ethnic groups (Hewidy & Lilius 2021), as well as the impacts of increased drug use in Finland (see Rönkä & Markkula 2020). Visible use of drugs has caused worry over the safety of the neighbourhood and caught the attention of the Finnish news media (Cremin 2022; Koskela 2020; Rajala 2025).

Both Kontula and Varissuo have lively public spaces that are occupied for multiple uses. Particularly the local shopping centres are important sites for neighbourhood commercial and social life, and host services like a library, children's playground, grocery stores, restaurants, ethnic retail, and community spaces. But the shopping centres have also been contested for their shabby appearance and perceived social disorder (see Kemppainen & Saarsalmi 2015), which is much related to the visible consumption of alcohol and drugs, and the social infrastructure that invites vulnerable groups to the premises (Kuoppa & Kymäläinen 2022, see also Tuominen 2020). An example of this is an outreach station operated by a non-governmental organization at the Kontula open-air shopping centre, which provides the context of Article I in this thesis. Additionally, both shopping centres host several pubs that are key places for the sociability of locals. In Varissuo, there is also a "forest pub" in vicinity of the shopping centre, which is managed by the city with an aim to direct public drinkers away from the more prominent premises in the neighbourhood. The context of the forest pub and its "regulars" are explored in Article II.

The study sites of Article III remain unrevealed due to reasons of privacy. The article addresses closely the informal labour of three informants, and thus, wants to ensure their anonymity. Moreover, their labour – 'canning', or the collecting of empty cans and bottles and returning them for a monetary deposit – is a livelihood activity that moves across urban locations, and thus is not related to any particular neighbourhood. Instead, the context of Article III can be approached through the system under which canners operate. In Finland, the system for recycling empty cans and bottles is state-led, formally organized, and generally well-functioning. The country has one of the highest recycling rates in the world: in 2024, 99 percent of cans and bottles were returned for re-use (Palpa 2025). A majority of this is due to the overall recycling habits of households, but additionally, the monetary deposit (0,10-0,40 euros per can/bottle) has produced economic incentives for people to collect empty cans and bottles to gain additional income. This income is liable to taxation; however, this is rarely announced by recyclers.

The recyclable cans and bottles in Finland are made out of plastic, aluminium, or glass, and include both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Their recycling has been made convenient: reverse vending machines are densely located and accessible in all grocery stores. Opportunities to collect empty cans and bottles in Finnish cities emerge through public drinking that is a rather common and acceptable activity in urban parks, squares, and streets especially in the summer months. Additionally, empty cans and bottles are scavenged from garbage bins, despite being forbidden by the Finnish Waste Act (646/2011). The Finnish Ministry of the Environment has recognized the collecting of cans and bottles as an existing part of the recycling system in Finland (Saario et al. 2014), but there continues to be no evidence on its volume or profiles of informal recyclers due to a lack of research.

The study sites of this thesis are semi-public and public urban spaces. Public spaces in Finnish cities provide rather open and accessible environments compared to, for example, the North American context where public spaces have been targets of heavy regulation and privatization, up to the point of being suggested to having reached “the end” (Mitchell 1995), being “fortified” (Davis 1990; Low 2008), or “disneyfied” (Zukin 1995). In Finland, people can use public places quite freely, as long as they do not “disturb public order”, “endanger public security”, or in the case of consuming alcoholic beverages “in a park or similar public place (--) prevent or unreasonably restrict the right of others to use the area for its proper purpose” (Public Order Act 612/2003, 3-4 §). The Finnish law (Public Order Act 612/2003, 2 §) defines a public place as:

(1) “a road, street, pavement, market square, park, beach, sports field, water area, cemetery or similar area that can be used by the public”;

(2) “a building, public service vehicle or similar, such as government office or other office, public transport station, shopping centre, business premises, or a restaurant which is in public use either for the duration of a particular event or otherwise”.

While these definitions provide a topographical classification of public places, a geographical understanding views public space in a more complex and multifaceted manner. Even if a space is open, it is not necessarily public, because “spaces can be made ‘public’ by people, meanings, and practices and can manifest different degrees of publicness at various times” (Low 2023: 26, see also Mitchell 2003). This means that publicness is not fixed, but a context-specific and dynamic production that is shaped by various social, cultural, and political interactions, and that constitutes multiple publics to multiple subjects (Collins 2010; Watson 2006). For Qian (2020), publicness is variegated: open-ended, flexible, processual, performative and ambivalent. Publicness “is not an inherent quality of space, but an oeuvre borne out of labours and agencies” (p. 79). The spatial context of this thesis shares a similar understanding: accessibility or presence are not sufficient to ensure publicness (ibid.), but rather, it is crucial to also view how public space is performed.

1.3 Original articles

Article I: Navigating precarity in everyday (sub)urban space in Helsinki, Finland

This article studies the everyday forms of urban precarity in the case of an open-air shopping centre in Kontula, Helsinki, Finland. Opened in 1967, the shopping centre is an important locus for neighbourhood social and commercial life, and home to many public and third sector services, including a youth centre, a library, and a day centre for people with substance misuse and mental health problems. The shopping centre is known for its vivid atmosphere, ethnic restaurants, and numerous bars, but also has an infamous reputation due to the visible use of alcohol and drugs. The place is currently a target of urban redevelopment plans, which creates uncertainties for the future of its services and important social spaces.

The study was conducted by practicing volunteer ethnography in a mobile outreach station parked weekly at the Kontula shopping centre. I adopted volunteering to learn about the everyday life at the shopping centre through interacting with the customers of the outreach, and observing the public spaces around it. I encountered precarity related to, for instance, unemployment, homelessness, health problems, and fears of displacement. The study identified urban precarity as a relational concept that emerges as spaces where important services, networks, sociality, and mobility intersect. The article presents vignettes that demonstrate how people use various everyday tactics to manage and resist urban precarity on the street, and find stability at the shopping centre amidst an instable life. The article shows how the navigations of urban precarity can become visible to others and create disorder, but also resist precarity through hustling, affinity, and acts of solidarity. The findings reveal the importance of place for providing security, stability, and a sense of community for the precarious life. It shows that where spaces of precarity become visible, they can also be resisted in the city.

Article II Everyday improvising in public space: The forest pub as a site for suburban being

This article studies a particular place – the forest pub – in Varissuo, a suburban neighbourhood in Turku, Finland. The forest pub is an open but secluded place managed by the City of Turku, where public drinkers are directed to gather, drink, and socialize outside the public gaze. The case of the forest pub illustrates a planning solution that is taken to manage a controversial activity in public space, while aiming to accommodate the needs of different groups. I studied the place by adopting the ethnographic methods of deep hanging out and deep listening so that the users of the forest pub could be reached closely and *in-situ*.

The study shows how the regular users of the forest pub respond to the spatial arrangements in the neighbourhood, as they improvise between what is planned and controlled, and what is lived and performed. On one hand, the regulars challenge the order by choosing to hang out in other places than the forest pub because these places better suit their needs for public sociality, despite being perceived as illegal and facing the risk of eviction. On the other hand, the users embrace the order by feeling safe about their right to be in the forest pub, and by using it in moments of rest, as they escape busier environments and find relief from personal hardships. The users' everyday acts of improvisation unfold as contextualized, experimental, intuitive, and interactive actions, which are rooted in the users' trusted environments, daily routine, and social and physical spatial structures.

The ethnography shows that although planning solutions like the forest pub can restrict the publicness of their users, they can also provide an "anchor" in the neighbourhood, through which feelings of belonging can be experienced. The place and its community appeared to be key in keeping vulnerable lives going, as the act of simply *being* in public space became a valuable part of everyday life. In this study, everyday improvising reveals the importance of different kinds of public spaces for different kind of spatial uses and people's needs for sociality, solitude, and security. Furthermore, it suggests that the way urban spaces are improvised by people can differ from what has been anticipated in moments of planning.

Article III Canning in the city: Informal recycling and the question of legitimacy in urban public space

This article studies the informal recycling of cans and bottles, or canning, as a livelihood activity in urban public space. It uses the go-along method to follow the daily maneuverings of three men as they move across urban space to collect empty cans and bottles and return them in exchange for a monetary deposit. In Finland, the recycling of cans and bottles is organized through a nation-wide deposit-based system, which has produced economic incentives for groups and individuals, or canners, to gain additional income. Whilst scavenging from garbage bins is prohibited by the Finnish Waste Act (646/2011), and canners tend not to announce their canning income to the tax office, the activity enjoys general legitimacy for its environmental value. Yet, international studies have shown that those who engage in canning often face prejudice for being impoverished, dirty, and gaining undeserved money.

The go-alongs revealed that canning is a professional activity practiced by skilled individuals who negotiate the legitimacy of their actions on a daily basis. Canning is a laborious process; not secure nor idle, but requiring constant responsiveness to its physical, social, and legal surroundings. The study identified four aspects that the canners engage in this process: getting ready, doing the job, doing the other job(s), and getting the bigger picture. These aspects were found to involve, for instance, strict schedules, competitive territories, self-management, developing of tools, learning of space and time, and seeking for quick solutions. The legitimacy of canning was constructed from the ground up as canners behaved professionally and balanced their actions and interactions with others against what is necessary for them and what is generally found moral in order to do canning ‘right’. Canning highlights how informal labour operates between law and legitimacy, and calls for paying attention to the active agency of informal recyclers, particularly in countries where informal labour might be overshadowed by formal waste systems. The study suggests that canners are recognized as actors in the recycling process, and contributors to the cleanliness and sustainability of our cities.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Towards the humane city

Cities should be places where ordinary citizens can
lead dignified and creative lives. (Short 1989: 1)

The theoretical framework for this doctoral thesis supports the idea of the humane city. It consists of three main parts: (1) everyday spaces of precarity (section 2.2); (2) tactics and urban improvisation (section 2.3); and (3) the informal and the (il)legitimate (section 2.4). These theoretical parts reflect the content of the three research articles (Articles I-III), but also support their conjunction: what is it that can make a city humane. Before these three sections, I present an overview of how humane cities have been previously approached.

First, it must be acknowledged that there is not an abundance of studies discussing the humane city directly (e.g. McHarg 1958; Platt 2006; Sennett 2010). Other perspectives on ‘the humane’ have included, for instance, “humane communities” addressing sustainable human, animal, and environmental welfare (Hawes et al. 2022), “humane metropolis” taking an urban ecological approach (Pickett et al. 2011), “humane criminology” protecting human and animal rights (Arkow 2021), “humane architecture” emphasizing design for well-being (Stevens et al. 2019), and “humane smart cities”, where “people rather than technology are the true actors of the urban ‘smartness’” (Costa & Oliveira 2017: 230). In the following, I focus on those works that address the humane city from an urban spatial perspective, as is suitable to this thesis.

As early as in 1958, Ian L. McHarg, a landscape architect, wrote about the humane city to address concerns about the abandonment and degradation of American inner cities, as people fled to the sprawling suburbs. McHarg was worried about the quality and liveability of urban public space, because “in history it is open space that the community lived and where the environment was at its most expressive, its most humane” (p. 106). McHarg (1958: 107) saw public space as a stimulus for humane urban life:

> This contribution of humane open space to the city dwellers of the world – rather than the design of prima donna buildings, or the perfection of origin-destination studies – can effectively return the qualities of humanity to the city.

Decades later, Platt's (2006) edited book "The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the 21st-Century City" also discussed the problems of the suburban sprawl. Pratt describes "humane metropolis" as "urban places that are more *green*, more *healthy and safe*, more *people friendly*, and more *equitable"* (p. 15, emphasis in original). As a tribute to the renowned work of William H. Whyte, the book involves several urban design and policy proposals to support the New Urbanist agenda. While some articles in the book also address socio-economic equity and for instance race, its main emphasis is on urban green infrastructure as a fundamental human need and as a prerequisite for a more habitable, humane city.

Taking a slightly different approach, Sennett (2010) argues for creating humane cities where people are exposed to difference. Sennett sees it problematic that the modern city suffers from a divide between the inner subjective experience (the self) and the outer physical life (the city), which has led to neutralized spaces and the removal of social contact that is viewed threatening rather than stimulating. For Sennett (2010), 'exposure' is needed for a city to take a more humane form. In a similar vein, Collins (2010) presents a humane city that is that of "conflict and contact"; a system for multiple publics and modes of appearance, which need to come together to recognize, negotiate, and contest their presence and difference. For Collins (2010), 'humane' represents the humanity of the urban, understood through embodiment and sense/meaning, signifying "the intercorporeal, intersubjective, and political dimensions of being-human together, as a linked set of processes" (p. 913). The morality of the public is at the core of Collin's agonistic view of the humane city.

Short (1989) suggests that to create a humane city, the city needs to be seen "as if people matter". Short critiques capitalist cities and their inhumane planning forces that represent the preferences of those with power; planners, architects, and bureaucrats. Short argues that people should lead dignified and creative lives in better cities that provide better environments, more empowered and engaged citizens, and fulfilling employment. A human-centred view is also taken by Miraftab (2023), whose essay on "humane urbanism" advocates for radical care practices and placing life-making at the centre of urban plans and policies. Miraftab argues that "bully urbanism" under capitalism needs to shift on radical care that relies on non-exploitative logics of need, use, and mutual reciprocity (ibid.).

Finally, Smith (1976) has taken the term humane onto the neighbourhood level to describe residential neighbourhoods as "supportive" and "non-'stressful'" (p. 312), using the mentally ill as an example. Although written 50 years ago, the idea is timely in the context of urban precarity that is known to generate anxiety and stress, amongst other psychological problems (Coultas et al. 2023; Harris et al. 2019; Söderström 2019). By referring to stress, Smith (1976) implies that humane neighbourhoods should be supportive of human well-being and quality of life both physically and mentally. Although the study *measures* humane dimensions of the physical world, it recognizes the multiplicity of the human experience, and suggests that characterizing environments as 'more' or 'less' (humane) is more productive than thinking about them in absolute terms (good/bad). This idea resonates with this thesis in that the thesis also pays attention to how spaces of precarity could be made *more* humane to navigate, as opposed to constructing an ideal view of a city that eliminates vulnerability and conflict (see also Collins 2010). There are no quick fixes to challenges such as precarious labour, homelessness, or drug use, but they are lived daily, and deserve human-centred alleviations. Moreover, Smith (1976) notes that what is humane is itself value-driven and cannot answer to the needs of all urban residents, which are always multiple (see also Collins 2010).

Many of the theoretical descriptions above highlight the role of urban planning and design in constituting a humane city. While this thesis shares this concern for creating public spaces that are safe, inclusive, and accessible, my primary focus is not on how (physical) urban environments should be planned to enable better human life. Rather, by using the concepts of tactics and urban improvisation (see section 2.3), I turn the focus from planning to people by studying what people are capable of making of the spaces they engage in (see Simone 2004 for "people as infrastructure"). Thus, I understand that humane spaces are not only the outcome of the work by urban planners, architects, and policy makers, but a result of actions, interactions, and agency on the ground.

Consequently, I take a people-centred orientation, which is nevertheless a shared objective with planning, design, and radical care practices in the humane city (McHarg 1958; Miraftab 2023; Platt 2006; Sennett 2010; Short 1989). Building on these ideas, I approach the humane city as being impacted by the rise of precarity and existential human vulnerability (Butler 2004, 2012; Ettlinger 2007). I combine urban informality to the concept (see section 2.4), highlighting the multiplicity of everyday actions, especially in contexts of vulnerability and marginality. This is important because urban informality has been left with less attention in the earlier conceptualizations of the humane city, as presented above.

Furthermore, my approach is place-oriented, because of the ethnographic field work locations and because of the meanings that informants gave to public places that supported their navigations of urban precarity. The way geographers view places is more than a mere location: it is "a unique entity" that "is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (Tuan:

387). Finally, I orientate to the humane city through everyday practice (de Certeau 1984), which became visible through, for instance, everyday improvisations and the use of tactics in public space (see section 2.3). The humane city proposed by this thesis understands that practices of people can function as a voice for those who might otherwise be less heard (see section 4.3).

2.2 Everyday spaces of precarity

> *I wish to present precarity as a condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict.* (Ettlinger 2007: 320)

This thesis understands precarity as "the condition of our time" (Tsing 2015: 20). It recognizes that in cities, where more than half of the world's population now live, precarious conditions take their most intensive form (Campbell & Laheij 2021). I approach precarity from a socio-spatial perspective, defined as the uncertainty and instability that expose people and places to disadvantage, vulnerability, and risk in ways that are unevenly distributed and experienced. The thesis focuses on the level of everyday life, where spaces of precarity emerge multifacetedly at the conjunctures of structural and personal crises, including income and housing instability, job losses, health problems, and fears of displacement (see e.g. Bird 2019; Coultas et al. 2023; Harris et al. 2019; Lancione 2019; Muñoz 2018; Speer 2024). In everyday spaces of precarity, insecure and unstable life situations become lived and resisted in mundane and routinely environments.

Earlier conceptualizations of precarity can be roughly divided into two strands: one emphasizing neoliberal labour and class conditions (e.g. Kalleberg 2009; Lewis et al. 2015; Ross 2008; Standing 2011), and another highlighting precarity as a comprehensive condition of human life (e.g. Butler 2004, 2012; Ettlinger 2007, 2020; Harris & Nowicki 2018; Philo et al. 2019; Tsing 2015). This thesis follows the latter strand in viewing precarity as a broad concept reaching various aspects of human life, and focusing on precarity's lived forms. It nevertheless recognizes that precarity emerges on many scales and can be studied both 'from above' and 'from below', both as a structural condition and as a lived experience, as well as a possible point of mobilisation (Millar 2017; Waite 2009). While this thesis has an urban focus, it understands that precarity also reaches rural areas (Hougaard 2022; Tsing 2015).

A key reading in understanding precarity from a geographical perspective across different scales has been Nancy Ettlinger's (2007) "Precarity Unbound". It argues:

> Precarity is engendered by a wide range of processes and, as it extends across space and time and also materializes (differently) in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, it is an enduring feature of the human condition. (p. 324)

This definition identifies the context-sensitive and inescapable nature of precarity. Precarity endures in us as “a condition of vulnerability relative to contingency and the inability to predict” (p. 320), crosscutting all spheres of life. Precarity is not spatially or temporally constrained but manifests differently in different contexts. In this view, Ettlinger (2007) follows the prominent work of Judith Butler (2006) who speaks of precarity, or *precariousness*, as a common human vulnerability arising from the shared experience of being exposed to harm, uncertainty, and violence, and from our interdependency to different social, political, and economic systems. Precariousness is, thus, an existential reality that is inherent to life itself, which suggests that all human lives are to some extent vulnerable, but that exposure to harm is unevenly distributed, and some people are better protected from precarity than others (Butler 2004, 2012). Referring to this idea of precariousness, Joronen and Rose (2021) further emphasize the implications of our existential vulnerability to power and politics. For them, power does not originate vulnerability, but quite reversibly, vulnerability is the origin of all power (ibid.). The approach is also shared by Tsing (2015: 20), to whom “precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others”.

To highlight the encompassing nature of precarity, Ettlinger (2007) argues for the need to view the everydayness of conditions that give rise to precarity. They criticize the bounding of precarity into particular macrostructural contexts, and instead suggest that the experiences of vulnerability and uncertainty prevail “in the microspaces of everyday life”, reaching the spaces of home, neighbourhood, work, school, and leisure. For them, the danger of thinking about precarity only ‘from above’ is that it can lead to essentialist strategies through the logics of classification, homogenization, and legitimization which only aim at eliminating difference, because “difference is messy, difficult, and can disrupt normalizing schemes” (p. 326).

This view is relevant in thinking about urban public space, where uncertainties become responded with various forms of power and stabilization, including police control and surveillance, rules and regulations, hostile design, and exclusionary practices towards particular groups (Butler 2016; Davis 1990; Koskela 2000; Low 2008; Mitchell 2020; Rannila 2019; Tani 2011). According to Ettlinger (2007), such strategies may result from the human urge to construct illusions of certainty amid uncertainty and vulnerability. They warn that this need of people to “grope for certainty” may lead to the “reflexive denial of precarious life” (p. 320) and to the impeding of possibilities for negotiation (ibid.). This is not unrelated to the separation or denied access of some groups to urban space. For example, Low (2008) has discussed “fortified” communities in the US, where the spatial production of security has led the ‘danger’ of the strange and insecure other to be escaped behind gated communities.

Urban precarity has been of interest to ethnographers, a result of which can be seen in recent Special Issues of Journals, such as “Urban Precarity” (Campbell & Laheij 2021), “Precarious Urbanisms” (Philo et al. 2019), and “Cultural Geographies of Precarity” (Harris & Nowicki 2018). As is also adopted in this thesis, ethnographers tend to follow a relative approach to precarity, involving the understanding of precarity’s context-sensitivity and interconnectedness to social, political, economic, and cultural surroundings. Precarity is viewed as a multifaceted and dynamic concept, beyond something that merely exists, as something that is lived, internalized, and acted upon (e.g. Lancione 2019; Muñoz 2018). This underlines the theoretical and empirical focus of also this thesis on the everyday practices that respond to precarity. This somewhat follows Muñoz’s (2018) view, according to which precarity as a condition is an abstraction, and instead “it is the material and practical ways it is *done* or *experienced* and within the specific spaces where these experiences occur, that produce meaning” (p. 413, emphasis in original).

Previous studies have adopted a multitude of different perspectives to the experiences and acts of precarity. One key starting point has been the uncertain conditions of labour, rooted in the critique of neoliberal mechanisms of flexible and nonstandard, even exploitative, employment relations (Harvey 2012; Kalleberg 2009; Lewis et al. 2015; Ross 2008), and the formation of the *precariat* as a class (Standing 2011). Many studies now understand precarious work beyond a political-economic lens, including also informal and unpaid work, and impacting many spheres and the everydayness of life (Han 2018; Jankowski 2025; Jokinen 2016; Millar 2017, 2018; Schilling et al. 2019; Strauss 2018). Ethnographers have been interested in informal ways to make livelihoods, such as street vending (Low 2023; Perelman 2018), garbage picking (Millar 2018; Rosa & Cirelli 2018), or sex work (Vuolajärvi 2019). The precariousness of informal work is addressed also in this thesis through the practices of street hustling (Article I) and the informal recycling of cans and bottles (Article III). Furthermore, the experience of labour precarity has touched many informants in this thesis, following the recession of the 1990s and job loss that heavily impacted suburban residents in Finland (Stjernberg 2022).

Another widely studied perspective has been the experiences of housing precarity (e.g. Harris et al. 2019; Lancione 2019; Listerborn 2021; Muñoz 2018a, 2018b; Nicholas & Braimoh 2018; Raynor & Frichot 2023; Teodorescu & Molina 2021; Waldron 2024). Housing precarity means most drastically homelessness (Speer 2024), but can also include other forms of insecure and unstable housing, such as social housing (Nicholas & Braimoh 2018), informal housing (Muñoz

2018a), evictions (Lancione 2019), or rental markets (Waldron 2024). The European housing precariousness measure estimates that housing precarity affects over half of the population of Europe, equating to almost 260 million people (Clair et al. 2019). Although Nordic countries rank low in the measure, they are not immune to precarious living conditions, particularly when connected to the precarious legal status of migrant populations (Listerborn 2021; Näre & Maury 2024; Teodorescu & Molina 2021; Vuolajärvi 2019). In international comparison, homelessness is a relatively narrow phenomenon in Finland, as it is estimated that in 2024 there was 3806 homeless people in the country, concentrating on large cities (The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland 2025). Informants in this thesis include some unhoused individuals (Article I), but more commonly people receive some form of welfare assistance to support their housing (housing allowance, unemployment benefit, pension etc.).

Other perspectives to urban precarity have included, for example, gentrification and home (Bird 2019; Harris et al. 2019; Mould 2018), as well as psychological and ontological insecurity (Coultas et al. 2023; Johnston-Schlee 2019; Pykett et al. 2023; Söderström 2019). These perspectives showcase uncertainties in people's everyday living environments and inner lives, which may cause people to feel "on edge" (Harris et al. 2019; Philo et al. 2019), meaning that people are "being enveloped by, imbibing, internalising and acting on the basis of local atmospheres of anxiety, uncertainty and unmoored-ness" (Philo et al. 2019: 10). This "on-edgeness" involves both states and feelings, merging the social, geographical, and psychological, which differs from the socio-spatial sense of being "on the edge", that is, being pushed to "a state of marginality to the mainstream activities of a given society that may well have real, material spatial expression" (Philo et al. 2019: 6). Although diving into the psychological aspects of precarity goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is a perspective worthy of recognizing in this ethnographic context. Volunteering at the outreach station in Article I brought to light that substance misuse and mental health problems are often connected to job loss, homelessness, and other situations of crisis. Also, fears arising from a threat of displacement or losing important social infrastructure became visible through the urban renewal project addressed in Article I (see also Hewidy & Lilius 2021; Kuoppa & Kymäläinen 2022).

It must be noted that these different aspects of urban precarity – labour, housing, health, environment etc. – are not isolated phenomena, but co-constitutive and interrelated with events both in the society and in personal life. People navigate precarity at their everyday conjunctures, not only suffering from precarity's problems but finding ways to resist them. Lancione (2019), for instance, shows how precarity is constantly being *made* and *unmade,* both as a product of the urban condition and a producer of action on the ground. In their study of matsumake pickers, Tsing (2015: 248) explains how people might also find possibilities within precarity:

> Precarity means not being able to plan. But it also stimulates noticing, as one works with what is available. To live well with others, we need to use all our senses, even if it means feeling around in the duff.

Being wary of romanticizing lived precarity, ethnographic studies have highlighted the active agency of people living under precarious conditions (see section 2.3). This has especially been the focus of many precarity studies in the Global South (e.g. Muñoz 2018; Mushonga 2024; Perelman 2018; Schilling et al. 2019), where it has been reminded that precarious life and work is not a new phenomenon, but has rather been the norm, even if called by different names (Waite 2009; Han 2018). This also echoes the long-lasting interest of ethnographers to study the "urban poor" (Das & Randeria 2015), "the subaltern" (Roy 2011; Spivak 1988), or people and places "at the margins" in the city (Lancione 2016; Thieme et al. 2017; Wacquant 2008). While the contemporary agenda of ethnographers is to highlight the emancipation of these groups, Das and Randeria (2015) remind that in many discussions the urban poor come to be defined as victims, a category of aid recipients, or through an institutional (e.g. state, church) lens. Their view calls for understanding that people navigating precarity are not passive spectators in everyday life, but they "have to struggle within the given economic and political structures to ensure that they have access to housing, water, work, and medical assistance; [as] they manage to craft some arrangements, however fragile, within the legal and administrative structures that are at hand" (p. S5). Thus, people need to change with circumstances to survive (Tsing 2015: 27), furthermore highlighting the urgency of precarious everyday agency (Jokinen 2016) that is lived in uncertain rhythms and involves short-term goals and reacting in the present (Das & Randeria 2015; Jokinen 2016; Schilling et al. 2019; Thieme 2018).

In the same vein, Millar (2018), who studies the precarious life and labour of trash pickers in Rio, criticizes scholars for using "the vocabulary of waste" to describe the urban poor surviving under precarious conditions, for the reason that such practice only reinforces the notion of disposable human lives: a surplus population stripped of their humanity. Millar's idea ties back to Butler (2006), who views that those in danger for most severe forms of vulnerability are "humans not regarded as humans" (p. 33), and subject to dehumanizing treatment, essentially, lack of recognition. According to Butler (2006), we must recognize vulnerability because "recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability" (p. 43), through which humanization can only take place.

2.3 Tactics and urban improvisation

> *A key tactic in the face of uncertainties and ambiguities, improvisation marks cities anywhere in the world.* (Müller & Trubina 2020: 665)

This doctoral thesis is inspired by everyday practice in the city (de Certeau 1984). Ethnography is well equipped to explore this aspect, that is, details about how people operate in habitual, mundane, and routinely environments, and what do these ways of operating tell about urban space and relations of power in it. De Certeau (1984) suggests that many everyday practices (e.g. talking, walking, reading, cooking) are *tactical* in character, making a distinction between "tactics" and "strategies". By the latter, de Certeau (1984) refers to functional organization, rationalization, and the structure and power imposed from above: the 'proper' urban order outlined by planners and architects. By the former, they refer to individual actions, "clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong'" (p. 40), which are fluid acts and can change the organization of space from below: like pedestrians reclaiming the street.

Many scholars have adopted the concept of tactics to describe the creative navigations of individuals in the physical, social, economic, and moral structures of urban space (e.g. Casey et al. 2008; Rannila 2019; Schilling et al. 2019; Wees 2017). Urban improvisation is closely related to this idea. Ingold and Hallam (2007: 7) make a connection to de Certeau's (1984) "tactical manoeuvrings" in their conceptualization of improvisation as something that "goes on along 'ways of life' that are as entangled and mutually responsive as are the paths of pedestrians on the street". They suggest that the improvising agent must attune their conduct to that of others and the environment, making "the most of the multiple possibilities they afford for *keeping life going*" (p. 15, emphasis in original). They highlight that life is 'unscriptable' because "life does not pick its way across the surface of a world where everything is fixed and in its proper place, but is a movement through a world that is crescent" (p. 12). Similarly, tactics are not fixed events but make life work by using the resources available (Schilling et al. 2019).

These two concepts – tactics and improvisation – have in fact been used in somewhat similar ways in the urban context. They have been both adopted to describe the flexible uses of public space (Pyyry & Tani 2019; Sand et al. 2023; Wees 2017), as well as the creative capacities of individuals and collectives to 'make do' under challenging conditions (Horsanalı et al. 2021; Kamalipour 2020; Low 2023; McFarlane 2011; Schilling et al. 2019; Silver 2014; Simone 2004, 2019). Just as tactics are "always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'" (de Certeau 1984: xix), these studies show how improvisation makes the most out of currently available resources, knowledges, and potentialities of urban space. As is explained by Müller and Trubina (2020: 666):

> Improvisation is the precarious bringing-into-being of the city multiple: the actualisation of the potentialities immanent in urban life and its material spaces. It is omnipresent as a creative practice that allows not just navigating but, more crucially, tapping the potentialities of the urban as an always unfinished, open project.

While there are clear overlaps between these two concepts, they differ in their theoretical origins, and in their relation to power and resistance. Influential in urban studies, de Certeau's (1984) thinking suggests that tactics are opportunistic acts by those lacking institutional power or control over space and resources, which may eventually subvert patterns of domination. Improvisation, then, is rooted in the arts and highlights action and flexibility, and the creativity of individuals to adapt to the ongoing in the context in which it occurs (e.g. Ingold & Hallam 2007). However, even these characterizations are not straightforward, as urban studies have also adopted the concept of improvisation as a form of resistance by the urban poor (Low 2023; McFarlane 2011; Simone 2019). In this thesis, tactics are acts of improvisation that appropriate urban space and serve as micro-level mechanisms to cope with precarity.

The concept of improvisation has been increasingly expanded beyond the arts into the realm of everyday life, becoming "something of a hot topic" (Ravn et al. 2021: 3). Embracing the everydayness of improvisation, Krueger and Salice (2021) argue against the idea that improvisation should be a practice of the highly skilled few, performed only in specific circumstances by individuals with a special kind of expertise. Instead, they find that improvisation occurs in the most mundane environments and tasks in life, as "we are continually adapting in real-time to the ongoing – and often unpredictable – flow of forces and feedback we receive from the people, things, and spaces around us" (p. 51). For them, improvisation is practical and relational to the physical and social spaces we engage in on a daily basis.

There are two aspects of everyday improvisation that can be highlighted for the purpose of this thesis. First, the relation of improvisation to planning and structure. By principle, improvisation occurs spontaneously in the present moment, differing from the temporality of planning, which involves a future-oriented perspective. To demonstrate their distinct but related features, Preston (2021) presents an "iceberg model", where the smaller, visible tip of the iceberg represents planning, and the larger portion below the surface represents improvisation. The model shows the dominance of improvisation in our everyday lives, suggesting that "we are fundamentally improvisers who occasionally plan, not planners who occasionally improvise" (p. 14).

Preston (2021) also argues that improvisation is "goal-directed behaviour that is under the control of current motivational states and current perceptions of the world across short timescales" (p. 20). This highlights the sense of the present, which is the dominating temporality also in precarious everyday agency (Jokinen 2016). However, Crossley (2021) claims that everyday improvisation cannot be detached into one spontaneous performance with a clear beginning and a clear end, but should be rather seen as "a process", a continuum of actions integral to our daily activities, involving both planning and improvising. In this process, everyday acts of improvisation cannot be isolated from their past but carry forward with what is already known (Crossley 2021, see also Ingold & Hallam 2007). This means that improvised actions are always informed by the agent's prior knowledge, habits, experiences, and past events in life (Crossley 2021; Kumar 2021; McFarlane 2011; Sutton 2021). Think it this way: jazz performers are able to improvise, because they have built the skills and knowledge to do so.

In this process of improvisation, not only is the agent's inner world significant, but the relation of their actions to the outer world. In other words, everyday improvisation is subject to the rules and structures of our physical, social, and moral surroundings, which the improvising agent reflects, interprets, and negotiates as they act (Crossley 2021; Krueger & Salice 2021). For the parkour practitioners studied by Pyyry and Tani (2019), spatial improvisation meant juggling between the formal and informal regulations of space, as well as seeking for opportunities in the urban structure. Thus, because everyday improvisation is governed by various norms, institutions and the socio-material world to which we are vulnerable (e.g. Krueger & Salice 2021), it must be understood that the spatial context matters to the way we improvise, including the uncertain spaces of precarity, which may cause improvisation to intensify (e.g. Low 2023).

The second aspect often connected to improvisation is creativity. In the context of everyday improvisation, also creativity must be thought of as a broad and mundane concept, rather than as a quality of highly talented individuals (Krueger & Salice 2021). In everyday improvisation, creativity can arise also from repetitive and routine interactions, rather than being unique or novel performances (Ingold & Hallam 2007; Krueger & Salice 2021). The creativity of improvisation is in the process: always in the making, and not judged by the inventiveness of its results, unlike the creativity of innovation that reflects the production of novelty and uniqueness (Ingold & Hallam 2007, see also Crossley 2021; Krueger & Salice 2021). In this way, improvisation allows us to examine the creative means by which people reach the ends of their everyday actions, rather than focusing only on the outcomes, which we in general tend to be more attuned to notice (Crossley 2021). The focus can then be shifted to the ways practice is *done*, as people incrementally learn of the city, witness potential, and actualize it by improvising (Hentschel 2015; McFarlane 2011; Müller & Trubina 2020). The creative capacities of people have been shown in studies where people manage informal urban infrastructure (Kamalipour 2020; Silver 2014), craft ways to secure income (Low 2023; Schilling et al. 2019), or obtain material security to sustain wellbeing (Bird 2019). At the same time, however, we should be wary of the neoliberal notion of viewing people as creative individuals capable of managing their own life (Bird 2019), as well as viewing urban improvisation as a purely emancipatory practice of marginalized groups and individuals (Müller & Trubina 2020; Pope 2020).

It has been argued that precarious – insecure and unstable – conditions are a driver for urban improvisation (Bird 2019; Low 2023; Müller & Trubina 2020; Schilling et al. 2019). After all, improvisation exists “at the heart of the uncertain and precarious city” (Müller & Trubina 2020: 665). Therefore, urban improvisation is mainly about reflexive interaction in an unpredictable environment: a practice used by various actors in cities to respond to increasing uncertainty, change, and crisis (Pope 2020). It means that people improvise as they make use of the skills and knowledges that they develop over time to survive precarious conditions in everyday life (see Low 2023; Millar 2018; Simone 2004, 2019). Tactics are used as everyday coping mechanisms that involve “an ongoing, exhausting exercise in anticipating, recognizing, identifying, evaluating, preparing for, and – most importantly – knowing when best to shift… attention to a different threat” (Campbell & Lahej 2021: 295, see also Jokinen 2016). While this view highlights the active agency of individuals in coping precarity, it is important to note that having agency does not mean that a person has the ability to control their life, or an opportunity to choose.

Besides the agency of ordinary people, it has been suggested that improvisation is a practice of urban planners and other experts trying to navigate unpredictable urban environments (Hentschel 2015; Kumar 2021; Müller & Trubina 2020; Pope 2020). For Kumar (2021), “geographies of improvisation” include a variety of urban actors with diverse interests, possessions of power, and moral grounds. Not only is improvising then about the appropriations of urban space by people, but also about planning, controlling, and governing them, or even about being “a tactic of oppression” (Pope 2020: 712-713). Müller and Trubina (2020) approach these different directions of action through their concept of *in-betweenness*, which means that urban improvisation emerges in spaces between them, that is, between formal rules, dominant structures and rigidity from above, and lived spaces, fluidity, and the “real” city from below. At their intersection, the formal and informal become interwoven, and questions of power, politics, and moralities become highlighted (see also Hentchel 2015). This is not unlike working between de Certeau’s (1984) concepts of strategies and tactics in the city.

Thinking about urban improvisation at this conjuncture of actors can shed light on the kinds of conditions that push people and authorities to act (see also Hentschel 2015). Experts must navigate their tasks creatively as they try to find solutions to planning problems that seem uncontrollable and unpredictable, or need to incorporate mixed interests of different groups. Experts can excess power to create boundaries for improvisation (Kumar 2021), but they can also enable conditions that encourage it, as is shown in the case of the forest pub in Article II. Ingold and Hallam (2007: 9) remind that also architects are human beings that “move in the same circles as those who walk the streets of cities they have helped to design”, suggesting that neither do experts work in isolation of the “real” socio-material world, although institutional contexts might limit the possibilities for creative improvisation, or there might be issues of encounter with the realities of different social groups. Spatial conflicts may arise due to this unknowingness and because people’s unplanned actions may be unwanted, although they are pertinent for those who engage in them (Kumar 2021; Kamalipour 2020; Pyyry & Tani 2019). While planners might consider their acts of improvisation more legitimate than those of ordinary people because of their presumably wider benefits (Kumar 2021), improvisations in everyday life can be powerful in supporting people’s claiming of space, and loosening space for more inclusive and flexible uses (Ameel & Tani 2012; Franck & Stevens 2007; Kamalipour 2020; Tani 2015, 2024).

2.4 The informal and (il)legitimate

> *To really ‘see’ informality, we must resist generalisation: there are only particular timed and placed informalities.* (Pratt 2019: 614)

This thesis follows the geographical understanding that space is constituted by different forms of formal and informal law (Bennett & Layard 2015; Delaney 2015; Kymäläinen 2024). Law is understood as a relational, pluralistic concept that involves both formal state law and the norms, customs, and moral agreements that shape our everyday lives (ibid.). This thesis builds on what is referred to as “everyday law” (Kymäläinen 2024), involving micro-scale experiences and “the manifestations, performances, contestations, and constitution of the informal and official law in mundane places and situations” (p. 2). This means paying attention to the relations between people, places, practices, and everyday law, and how these relations shape the ways public spaces are used. In urban space, everyday law is in movement (Kymäläinen 2024), or as Bennett and Layard (2015: 414) suggest: “Law comes alive applied to space”.

Understanding everyday law in this thesis is relevant in order to recognize the variety of socio-legal realities shaping urban spaces around us. Besides the formal rules and the planned environments that control our everyday behaviour, urban spaces are governed by a multitude of moral codes and ideas about what actions are acceptable, ‘proper’, or legitimate (Ameel & Tani 2012; Dixon et al. 2006; Pardo & Prato 2019; Rannila & Mitchell 2016; Rannila & Pyykkönen 2020). Urban ethnographers Pardo and Prato (2018, 2019) have pointed out that it is important to differentiate between what is formally legal/illegal and what is regarded as legitimate/illegitimate by the boarder society. They have found that ordinary people do not necessarily equate legality with legitimacy, or illegality with illegitimacy, but rather employ moral values to separate them (ibid.). Their view suggests that legitimacy, as a moral and ethical category, is socially constructed and relational to its social, cultural, economic, and political contexts, while the formal law is more rigid, static, and distanced from the everyday realities of people in its makings (Pardo & Prato 2018a, 2019). Pardo and Prato (2019: 20) argue: “We need to engage fully with the empirical variations of the morality of what is right and of what is fair and can be lived with, as opposed to what is legal, in the face of the realities of management of power as a graded process corresponding to the graded affirmation of the state”.

Informal activities are a useful focus of study to gain a better understanding of the differences between law and legitimacy, and how legitimacy is constructed by different actors in the city. For example, what makes some activities – considered informal or even illegal – more legitimate than others in the eyes of authorities or the community, can shed light on our shared values and the perceived rights of particular groups. Previous studies have looked at actions such as public drinking (Dixon et al. 2006; Jayne et al. 2006; Kaakinen 2013), use of drugs (Rannila 2019; Ranta & Juhila 2020), street vending (Peimani & Kalamipour 2022; Tucker & Devling 2019), waste picking (Dias 2016; Low 2023; Millar 2018; Rosa & Cirelli 2018), or skate boarding and parkouring (Ameel & Tani 2012; Pyyry & Tani 2019; Tani 2024) to understand how people negotiate their actions within the urban order, and how the borders between the formal and the informal may shift in everyday contexts. While such informal actions can be messy, cause contestation, and challenge the moral order of the city, they have also been argued to promote urban life and the diversity of lived experiences through creating what has been referred to as “loose spaces” (Franck & Stevens 2007) or spaces designed for “disorder” (Sennett 1971). Tactics and urban improvisation, as discussed in the previous section, is one way to think of informal actions in everyday urban space.

Urban informality can be understood to be constitutive of the ‘everyday’, the ‘ordinary’, and the ‘self-provisioned’ (by the civil society) in the city (Pratt 2019). From this perspective, informality is everywhere, “much more than the absence of rules or regulation” (Banks et al. 2020: 226), as the norm rather than an exception (Pratt 2019). Therefore, informality is encouraged not to be viewed as a separate category, outcome, or sector (such as the informal economy), but rather as an all-encompassing "*mode* of urbanization" (Roy 2005: 148, emphasis in original, see also Banks et al. 2020; Pratt 2019). Furthermore, while informality is often linked with cities in the Global South, it is important to recognize that urban informality is practiced also in the Global North by a broad range of actors, including elite groups, even if this is sometimes difficult to identify due to being overshadowed by formal processes, normative representations, and a lack of data collection (Banks et al. 2020; Pardo 2018; Pratt 2019). Thus, one value of using informality as a concept is "to expose activities that would otherwise be excluded, as would our understanding of the modes of organisation, the values held and the roles informality plays in society" (Pratt 2019: 614).

Unravelling informality is also important from the perspective of understanding public life in cities. Following the work of Sennett (1971) on the value of enabling "disorder", and the messy and diverse realities of urban life, Sand and others (2022) suggest that Scandinavian cities should encourage more unfinished spaces that allow "improvised informality" and "unforeseen encounters" to take place, even if they would be difficult to accept within functionalist planning systems. This is especially important during urban regeneration projects that might attempt to remove informal social life and all kinds of disorder from the streets of neighbourhoods that are in the 'need' for order (Sendra 2016).

This thesis addresses two main examples of informal activities in urban public space. One of them is public drinking, which has caused negotiations between authorities and local people over the use of public space and as a possible source of disorder (Articles I & II). This is not uncommon in the context of public drinking, which is generally a controversial practice in public space, seen as a social problem, or an aesthetic and moral challenge (Demant & Landolt 2013; Dixon et al. 2006; Jayne et al. 2006; Kaakinen 2013; Kopomaa 1997). Heterogeneous spaces that mix public drinkers with others have been considered "risky" because "drinkers are consumers who are often badly behaved and do not conform to discourses of polite, civilized and cosmopolitan urbanity" (Jayne et al. 2006: 461). Mitigating such 'risk' has led to the exclusion of some groups from public space through, for example, hostile design and police control (Demant & Landolt 2013; Jayne et al. 2008; Kaakinen 2013), but also to the finding of alternative solutions that aim to accommodate mixed interests (Article II). Indeed, there are differences between who consumes and where, and how civil the consumption appears, in determining how illegitimate or "out-of-place" the drinking is and who are considered "admissible" or "inadmissible" publics to urban space (Dixon et al. 2006, see also Mitchell 2003).

Of course, we should not understate the problems of drinking, including health risks and the fact that the presence of drinkers can restrict the use of public space for others, such as women and children. However, it is important to recognize that gathering in pubs, parks, or elsewhere in public space with a drink is also a social practice and about being part of a community (Demant & Landolt 2013; Jayne et al. 2006; Thurnell-Read 2021). Such informal places of gathering outside one's home is what Oldenburg (1996) would call "third places", where people "gather easily, inexpensively, regularly, and pleasurably" (p. 6), and that can be important sources of belonging and mental wellbeing for otherwise isolated individuals (cf. Isola et al. 2021). This highlights the challenges authorities face when improvising solutions to the needs of different groups (see previous section), especially when some solutions can signal the legitimization of actions that in other spaces would be considered illegal or "not-strictly legal" (Pardo & Prato 2018a: 6). Article II in this thesis addresses one such solution: a "forest pub" that aims at providing locals a safe public place to drink, but at the same time displaces them from the centre of the neighbourhood that is more public and where there is more social life.

The second example of informal uses of public space is informal labour, or more specifically, the informal recycling of empty cans and bottles (Ashenmiller 2009; Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet et al. 2009; Iverson 2020; Vukušić, & 2016; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016). Informal recycling is an interesting topic due to its controversial role on one hand as "dirty work" operating outside formal waste management and tax systems, and on the other hand, as an important contributor to the cleanliness and sustainability of our cities. In this vein, informal recycling can be differentiated from some other informal activities because it is not similarly considered criminal, but rather, it is claimed to have a number of social, well-being, and environmental benefits (Bulla et al. 2021). The activity demonstrates how legitimacy in practice might shift for actions that "fall below the strictly legal line but are nevertheless ordinarily undertaken because they are seen to pose no serious challenge to the moral and socioeconomic order" (Pardo 2018: 63-64).

This description fits well the Finnish context, where scavenging from garbage bins is forbidden by the Waste Act (646/2011) and the income received from the deposits is liable to taxation, but commonly not reported. Yet, informal recycling enjoys general legitimacy for keeping urban parks clean, especially during public events and on summer evenings when people gather outdoors with drinks. While a report by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment (Saario et al. 2014) has recognized the phenomenon, there is a lack of research on the topic in Finland. Even internationally, studies that focus explicitly on the recycling of cans and bottles as opposed to other recyclable materials, are scarce (e.g. Ashenmiller 2009; Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Vukušić & Stelko 2016). International studies have found informal recycling and trash picking to be practices of economically vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, and people excluded from the labour markets (e.g. the elderly, the young, or the unhoused) (Bulla et al. 2021). More studies are needed to understand the concept in the Finnish context: who are those who engage in informal recycling, in which volume, and why?

Studies from elsewhere have highlighted the role of informal recyclers as key social, environmental, economic, and political agents in the city, and referred to them as, for instance, 'environmental stewards' and 'community servants' (Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme 2010; Porter 2015; Sholanke & Gutberlet 2022; Trembley et al. 2010). Such a view suggests that the perception of informal recycling is being reconstructed from "waste talk" – a problem or a sign of underdevelopment (Bulla et al. 2021; Nas & Jaffe 2004) – to a contributor and a partner in urban waste management. At the same time, however, the working conditions and the public treatment of informal recyclers remain contested. Studies have reported that informal recyclers experience prejudice, police harassment, and feelings of shame for being associated with impoverishment and the "waste" they collect (Bulla et al. 2021; Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme 2010; Millar 2018; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016).

Both examples of informal activities in public space – public drinking and informal recycling – demonstrate the complex relations between informality, (il)legitimacy, and everyday practice in the socio-legal spaces of the city. Looking at informality through the notion of legitimacy is useful because it allows to see that there are differences also within informality, as informal actions can employ different levels of legitimacy (Pardo 2018; Roy 2005). This approach also recognizes that because the informal is always relational to the formal, the formality/informality nexus should be seen as a continuum rather than a dualism of two distinctive categories (Banks et al. 2020). Furthermore, the idea of legitimacy helps to understand how the reactions of a state or a city to informality can range "from tolerance to accommodation to demolition – or even to covert or explicit partnership" (Banks et al. 2020: 232).

In everyday lawscapes, it must be understood that the constructions of legitimacy and illegitimacy are not only the outcome of institutional power, but of the general public through moral understandings and day-to-day urban encounters on the ground (Pardo & Prato 2019). This is exemplified by Dixon and others (2006: 196) who suggest that social actions (in their case, public drinking) are not intrinsically civil or uncivil, but that they become so within particular contexts of interaction. This means being sensitive to place, or what is "out-of-place", in a particular socio-spatial context (ibid.). When informality is explored on the micro-level (beyond a general category or a sector), it is always "particularly timed and placed" (Pratt 2019: 614), as well as lived and experienced by groups and individuals. Ethnography can give access to these place-bound realities, as people negotiate the legitimacy of their informal actions in everyday urban space.

Studying the agency of those who navigate between informality and formality (legitimacy), brings front a commonly presented dichotomy about informality: it is "on one hand seen as a problematic unregulated and unplanned reality that must be addressed via regulation, on the other as a celebration of the tenacity of otherwise marginalised groups who exist amidst social, economic, political, and geographic exclusion" (Banks et al. 2020: 224). Whilst it is important not to blindly celebrate informality, understanding the practical differences in the legal perceptions of informal activities between different groups can help to reveal important aspects of the rights different groups have to their city, to public space, and to resources in them (Delaney 2016; Dias 2016; Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003, 2020). As Roy (2005: 155) states: "it is the right to the city that is at stake in urban informality".

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Urban ethnography

Writing about people is always both a risk and a responsibility.
(Pols 2023: 707)

This doctoral thesis adopts an urban ethnographic research approach. By ethnography, I refer to the study of everyday life, where site-focused field work and qualitative research methods, namely participant observation and interviews, are used as key methodological tools. Following the early influential works of ethnography in the urban context, such as the Chicago School (e.g. Park 1915; Wirth 1938), Carolin Ware (1935/1994), and William Foote Whyte (1943) – to name a few – urban ethnographies have continued to proliferate in the past few decades (see e.g. Low 2019; Pardo & Prato 2018b). It has been argued that urban ethnography can be powerful in uncovering social and spatial injustices in the city (Low 2016, 2019), and accessing life worlds that would otherwise be difficult to reach (Browne & McBride 2015). Ethnography is particularly valuable in allowing the researcher to understand the different constitutions of reality as they are lived and experienced by people themselves in environments that are familiar to them (Crang & Cook 2007).

Ethnographers are often intrigued by the question "what is it that is going on?" It involves curiosity towards an unknown subject: a place, an event, a process, a phenomenon, and the people who live, experience, and practice them. By teaching "what particular people, in particular places, at particular times are doing and what it may mean to them", ethnography aims to "reduce puzzlement" of both the ethnographer and the reader (Van Maanen 2011: 229). The question also implies that ethnography adopts an inductive approach, which means that the researcher enters the field with an open mind, being ready to abandon their assumptions and accepting that they can never be sure what they encounter on the field (Koch 2020; Pols 2023; Shah 2017; Van Maanen 2011). Surprises can steer the research process into a completely different direction, making ethnography an unpredictable, but a mesmerizing practice.

In the field, being an ethnographer is primarily about being a human being. Encountering others is part of basic human interaction that requires basic human capabilities, including listening, understanding, and respecting. It is important that an ethnographer acknowledges the power relations between the researcher and the researched, and thus remains reflective of their own position and privileges (Crang & Cook 2007: 26-32). I found that being open, adaptive, and patient in conversations and shared activities supported collaborative encounters on the field. As Pols (2023) states, ethnography is often about "doing things together", which can make the research situation more accessible, pleasant, and attractive for informants, and make the power-balance between the researcher and researched more equal.

Researching by "doing things together" was realized in this thesis through the ethnographic practices of volunteering (see section 3.1.1), hanging out and listening (see section 3.1.2.), and walking and biking along (see section 3.1.3.). Each was used in one article (I-III), forming the ethnographic core of this thesis. Such an informal research approach is useful in contexts where formal research inquiries might not give access, might feel strange or uncomfortable by informants, or where verbal communication is limited (Browne & McBride 2015; Pols 2023). Informality can also allow the researcher to pay attention to non-verbal aspects of space, such as, the relationship between practice and everyday constructions of space. This means that observations of what people *do* are in the focus, which can help the researcher to reach knowledge about what is demonstrated through action, and notice differences between what people say and what they do (Shah 2017). It is particularly valuable in everyday contexts, where informants might not pay attention to their routinely actions or find them too self-evident to report. Although in ethnography the primary data is often "not about what the ethnographer sees certain people doing but what these certain people see themselves doing" (Van Maanen 2011: 228), I found observations to be a valuable tool, especially if the risk of false interpretations is mitigated through discussing with informants about these observations. This might also open up new topics for conversation.

The key to any successful ethnography is to gain access to the field. Ethnographers must 'throw themselves out there' in order to reach that access, and learn "to rely on a personal sensibility and sensitivity to perseverance, luck, and pro-active engagement" (Browne & McBride 2015: 45). I began the field work from outdoor places that had caught my attention as interesting everyday environments used by locals: an open-air shopping centre (Article I), a forest pub (Article II), and spots of canning (Article III). Access was facilitated by the public and semi-public nature of these places (Articles I-III) as well as collaboration with a non-profit organization (Article I). Carrying out field work in environments that were familiar to informants was important for creating a trustful setting for informants to interact in ways that are not isolated from their everyday context. I also hoped that it would demonstrate that I was willing to take the everyday spaces of informants seriously, and potentially have the field emerge as a site of mutual learning (Garthwaite 2016; Pols 2023; Shah 2017).

My objective was to reach people who are active users of public space through the places and practices in focus. Besides being above 18 years old, no further pre-requirements in terms of age, gender, or socio-economic attributes were expected. This guided the research towards informants who were most often male, between 40-80 years old, spoke Finnish, and experienced economic, social and/or health disadvantages in relation to, for instance, income, housing, aging, or substance misuse. This coincides with some other Finnish studies that have found particular public spaces to be male-dominant and attractive to marginal groups, including public drinkers (Kaakinen 2013; Kopomaa 1997). While the informants were generally eager to participate, this context means that women, the youth, and other language groups are underrepresented in this thesis. I encountered some women and immigrants, but not all wanted to or could participate in the research. Reasons included language barrier, the fear of being exposed, and the shame of doing informal labour, which my male informants explained is generally felt stronger by women. While the number of informants in the case studies is relatively low, it is inherent to ethnography, as it allows the researcher to maintain a trusting research relationship and focus on the micro-scale and in-depth experience (Crang & Cook 2007). I wrote down the ethnographic engagements in a field diary, including notes from conversations with informants both on and off site (incl. phone calls, emails, text messages) and my own observations. The research material is presented with more detail in table 2.

The following three sub-chapters (3.1.1-3.1.3) will explain the ethnographic practices that were adopted in this doctoral study: (1) volunteer ethnography, (2) deep listening and hanging out, and (3) go-along interviews. In addition to these ethnographic practices, I conducted semi-structured interviews as supplementary data. Another researcher (Jenni Kuoppa) from the research project contributed to 6 individual or group interviews (Articles I-II), and professor Päivi Kymäläinen to one group interview (Article II). While the three ethnographic practices were valuable in reaching precarious everyday experience and practice, the interviews provided additional perspectives and background information about life in different areas, urban planning, development, and maintenance. Interviewees were reached through contacting local non-profit organizations (Articles I & II), relevant city departments (Articles I-III), as well as local residents that had been publicly active about their neighbourhood's development (Article I). The interviewees were both male and female, and three interviews were held in a group of 2-4 participants. The interviews were held in person (either indoors or walking outdoors) or as online video calls, and they were audio-recorded. A set of open questions was delivered to the interviewees beforehand. In the case of Article III, the city workers represented their respective organizational teams and had discussed the questions with their team members in advance. Consent to participate in this research was confirmed from all informants either orally or in writing. I communicated with informants in Finnish, and translated quotations into English.

I describe the analysis and writing phases of the research process in chapter 3.2. Ethical considerations are touched upon in each sub-chapter, but mainly discussed in chapter 3.3.

Table 2. The materials and methods used in this doctoral thesis.

	ARTICLE I	ARTICLE II	ARTICLE III
Methods of data collection	Volunteer ethnography Semi-structured interviews	Deep listening and 'hanging out' Semi-structured interviews	Go-alongs Semi-structured interviews
Time and place of field work	02-06/2021 Kontula, Helsinki	04-09/2021 Varissuo, Turku	3, 6/2021, 09-11/2023 Anonymous
Main group of informants	Customers of the outreach station (Male & female, ~80 conversations)	Users of the forest pub (Male & female, ~15 informants)	People collecting cans and bottles (Male, 3 informants)
Additional informants	Active residents (10) City workers (1) NGO workers (4)	City workers (4) NGO workers (2)	City workers (2)
Research material	Field diary notes 15 transcribed interviews	Field diary notes 6 transcribed interviews	Field diary notes 10 transcribed interviews
Methods of analysis	Thematic analysis Vignettes	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis
Field visits after the main period	Yes; until 2023	Yes; until 2023	Yes; until 2024
Dissemination of findings	Yes; to informants and the outreach station's website. Policy briefs from project published online.	Yes; to informants and other locals. Policy briefs from project published online.	Yes; to informants.

3.1.1 Volunteer ethnography

The main method used in the article "Navigating precarity in everyday (sub)urban space" (Article I) is volunteer ethnography (Garthwaite 2016; Goerich 2017; Hagan 2022; Hill O'Conner & Baker 2017). By volunteer ethnography, I refer to research where the researcher takes upon a dual role, both as an ethnographer and a volunteer worker, and works within an organization or group relevant to the research question while simultaneously practicing participant observation. In this study, I volunteered in a mobile outreach station ran by a non-profit organization that offered different forms of support, including warm drinks, food items, clothing, service directing, and listening. The outreach station was chosen because it works weekly at the study site: on the street of an outdoor shopping centre in Kontula, Helsinki. The focus group is people having challenges related to homelessness, substance misuse, or crime, but being situated in public space, the outreach station is open to everyone and visited by a wide range of people. Volunteering at the outreach gave access to otherwise hard-to-reach life worlds and the space surrounding the outreach.

One key idea behind volunteer ethnography is the principle of reciprocity. Garthwaite (2016: 4-5) puts it as: "Not only does volunteering demonstrate the researcher's commitment to the cause and the local area, it also provides a space in which to form relationships that are not solely focused on the researchers' needs and objectives". In other words, instead of solely subtracting information for the benefit of the research, the purpose is also to 'give back' to the study community. While this idea provides ethical justification, the reciprocity of volunteering has also been questioned (Goerich 2017; Hagan 2022). Goerich (2017: 308), for instance, asks: "As researchers, are we actually volunteering if we expect to receive something in return, such as data, information, contacts, or even recognition or acceptance from those with whom we are working?"

Another important aspect discussed about volunteer ethnography is how to draw boundaries between being a volunteer and an ethnographer (e.g. Garthwaite 2016; Goerich 2017; Tinney 2008). Which role comes first tends to shift, or be "merging at certain times and coming into direct conflict at others" (Goerich 2017: 309). This is highlighted in contexts of vulnerability, as it might be difficult for the researcher to distant themselves from emotional stress and feelings of sympathy, guilt, and care (Garthwaite 2016; Hagan 2022). Hagan (2022: 1183) worries that interacting with vulnerable participants might impose a risk for researcher bias and data credibility, as this can create "rose-tinted glasses" and overshadow conclusions. On the other hand, Hill O'Connor and Baker (2017) suggest that empathetic involvement is precisely the strength of volunteer ethnography, as it enables direct experience and understanding the life worlds of informants both physically and emotionally.

My experience is in line with that of other volunteer ethnographers, who report that the two roles inevitably become blurred during practical situations on the field and when writing about them afterwards (Garthwaite 2016; Goerich 2017; Hill O'Connor & Baker 2017; Tinney 2008). To cope with this, I discussed with the non-profit organization about my role prior to entering the field. I signed a volunteer work contract, in addition to which we agreed that my presence as a researcher would be actively communicated to the outreach customers. We also decided that my primary task would be to listen and talk with the customers rather than to give material support, to avoid a sense of dependency between participating and receiving aid. Furthermore, I chose not to donate money to the organization during the research process, which was something Goerich (2017) had done, complicating their position.

These clarifications supported open encounters with informants and helped to make decisions in the field. Although the two roles still at times blurred due to the overlapping tasks of listening and discussing people's everyday lives (inherent to both voluntary work and ethnography), the transparency of the research topic guided most discussions towards the informants' experiences, memories, and personal opinions about the Kontula neighbourhood and the shopping centre. This somewhat differs from the experience of Garthwaite (2016: 4) who states that service users at the foodbank (where they volunteered) were more interested in their role as a volunteer, and how they could provide help. One reason could be that unlike Garthwaite, the topic of my study was not volunteering or the volunteer organization itself, which enabled to differentiate volunteering and research more clearly. Furthermore, in contrast to working in an organization for one or more years (Garthwaite 2016; Gilmore & Kenny 2015; Goerich 2017; Hill O'Conner & Baker 2017), my volunteering period of a few months was less likely to form a strong sense of belonging to the organization.

Volunteering at the outreach occurred weekly for a period of four months, after which I made occasional visits to the study site. Additionally, I had separate meetings and correspondence with some informants I had met at volunteering. The method produced rich material of everyday knowledge, which was saved as field diary notes both during and after each volunteering period. None of the conversations were audio-recorded to protect the privacy of the outreach customers. I discussed the results with the non-profit organization and the informants with whom I kept in touch. Furthermore, I wrote a popularized text on the organization's website, with a link to the open-access research article (Article I).

3.1.2 Deep listening and 'hanging out'

In the article "Everyday improvising in public space: the forest pub as a site for suburban being" (Article II), I adopted the ethnographic method of 'deep hanging out'. Made famous by anthropologist Clifford Greetz (1998), the term "deep hanging out" has been employed by a wide range of disciplines, including geography. Yet, it remains to be an ambiguously defined term. Generally, 'deep hanging out' has been used to refer to a mode of participant observation where the researcher immerses themselves in close-in ethnographic field work and engages with the study subjects informally in everyday settings familiar to them (e.g. Nair 2021; Pols 2023). Instead of observing passively, the researcher interacts – listens, talks, feels – and participates in shared activities guided by the mundane ways of life of informants.

'Hanging out' is, thus, a flexible research practice and a trust-building exercise, with outcomes often difficult to anticipate. Referred to as the "cornerstone of the ethnographic method" (Browne & McBride 2015: 35), 'hanging out' signifies not only data collection but a sensibility towards the studied subject and their environment.

There is some confusion to what is exactly meant by *deep* hanging out in the ethnographic research process. Pols (2023), for example, does not use the metaphor of 'depth' to avoid thinking about one deep immersion, resurfacing, and writing up the research isolated from the field. Instead, Pols uses the term "generative hanging out" (ibid.) to highlight the different qualities and temporalities of collaboration that hanging out can generate during and after the research process. Browne and McBride (2015), on their part, have dropped the 'deep' and talk only of "hanging out", without further explanation. Some other scholars (Nair 2021; Walmsley 2018; Williams et al. 2024) continue to use the original term but for very different types and durations of field work. For Nair (2021), long-term residing amid the study community is a prerequisite for "deep hanging out", whereas Walmsley (2018) – in her two-week field period – seems to view 'depth' in terms of shared experiences and emotions when being-with informants in moments of co-research.

The term 'deep hanging out' was chosen for the field work in Varissuo, Turku, for similar reasons presented by Walmsley (2018). For me, 'deep hanging out' included elements of "deep listening" (Koch 2020), which meant that the field was encountered with "an ethic of openness" and "intellectual humility" (p. 5). In other words, I aimed to be present and listen carefully: be humble, empathetic, and open to whatever was learned on the field over prevailing narratives about the place or its people (Koch 2020). This is particularly important in the context of neighbourhoods like Varissuo that have suffered from a poor reputation in public discussions and the media (Huttunen & Juntunen 2020; Repo 2024, see also Article II). Listening deeply to the insiders of the neighbourhood provided depth to better understand the realities of local people and the places they inhabit, and see the many layers of space they mundanely navigate.

Although 'deep hanging out' can appear casual, it should not be mistaken as a lazy method (Nair 2021). The researcher must be sociable, approachable, understanding, and observant; be ready to adapt to the ongoing; and make mental notes of the field while balancing ethical conduct. The physical and mental immersion can be demanding but also have potential to strengthen researcher legitimacy (Browne & McBride 2015), support more equal research practices (Pols 2023; Walmsley 2018), and offer informants valuable intakes beyond participation, including time, listening, enjoyment, and meaning-making (Pols 2023). Informal modes of being and interacting suited this research, as the field work took place in casual urban spaces, such as the forest pub, where 'hanging out' was a regular activity of users, too. Participating in the same space, time, and practice enabled to demonstrate willingness to get to know the users' own modes of being, which in turn helped to build trust and gain access that would have been difficult to reach by formal modes of inquiry.

However, the informality of 'deep hanging out' can also create "an ethically ambiguous space" (Pols 2023: 712), especially in everyday contexts that do not resemble conventional research situations (vs. formal interviews). Therefore, continuous negotiations between the researcher and the researched are needed in order to ensure transparency and reach consents for participation. I always explained my role as a researcher and the objectives of the research to informants. This was possible due to the fact that the key group of informants was rather small and geographically bounded, and I met them several times. Reassuring consents was also important because the informants often spent time in groups, which could have influenced the participation of individuals. Conversations with informants were primarily not audio-recorded, but I wrote down field diary notes immediately after the periods of 'hanging out'.

I visited the field regularly during a period of three months (usually spending a few hours at once), after which I made occasional visits to the study site. Interaction with informants was based on spontaneous encounters in public space during the morning and afternoon hours, when the regular users were also there, rather than agreeing separate meetings. This also means that those who use the forest pub in the late evenings, are not covered by this research. I disseminated the findings of the study by visiting the site and handing out booklets to locals and explaining the results of the research project. While this approach was fitting to the ways of life of informants, it limited the possibilities for contacting particular informants after the field work period. The researcher was, nevertheless, always reachable to those who participated in the research.

3.1.3 Go-along interviews

The article "Canning in the city: Informal recycling and the question of legitimacy in urban public space" (Article III) adopted a mobile approach to urban ethnography. I employed the "go-along" method (Kusenbach 2003), which was carried out both as 'walk-alongs' (on foot) and 'ride-alongs' (on a bicycle) to study the everyday routes and practices of informal recyclers. Kusenbach (2003: 463) describes go-alongs as "a hybrid between participant observation and interviewing" where "fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their 'natural' outings, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment". Go-alongs are especially valuable in giving access to the spatial and dynamic aspects of everyday experience and practice, and in reaching practical knowledge in the actual time and space where it emerges (ibid.).

Similar to 'deep hanging out', go-alongs are rooted in interactive engagements with the informants' familiar surroundings *in-situ*. In contrast, the go-along method emphasizes movement, which made it a suitable choice to study the mobile practice of informal recycling. Go-alongs have been adopted by researchers to catch mobilities in the city, from the perspective of mobility itself, such as cycling (Scott 2020), but also to gain access to other phenomena, such as local smoking practices (Glenn 2020) or experiences of TQNB youth (Stiegler 2021). Stiegler (2021) has aptly argued that where knowledge is on the move, so must be the methods.

In their review of 23 articles using the go-along method with people in vulnerable situations, Barlett and others (2023) identified five reasons for why the method has been adopted by researchers. One of them is that go-alongs can reverse the traditional researcher-led role, which can be enabling (instead of disabling) for groups who are usually not included in academic studies. Another reason is that the method can make people's skills and strengths "known and knowable", allowing individuals to show a different kind of agency than prevailing narratives of impairment. Third, go-alongs can reveal barriers in the environment, both in terms of physical and social structures. Fourth, the method gives access to the lived and embodied experiences of informants, which also allows the researcher to sense the space differently. The final reason is that the researcher can feel "being one" with the informant as they interdependently share a practice, that is, work together as they move in space. (Barlett et al. 2023)

These five reasons are useful arguments for why the go-along method was valuable also in this study. Movement in urban space was key to seeing the work of informal recyclers in action, and revealing their skills and everyday knowledges in the right context. It also helped to witness urban space differently in terms of, for example, physical, social and moral accessibility. Listening to the interpretations of informants of their actions at the time of occurrence, rather than being told of them in an isolated interview situation, was a benefit also highlighted by Kusenbach (2003). Going along with informants not only helped to 'step in' to their spaces, but also reduced nervousness and relaxed the research situation, especially for those to whom participation was new, or in moments that would not be considered to be of interest to academic research, or even "researchable" (Stiegler 2021).

It has been suggested that the practical applications of the go-along method can vary in two ways: (1) technological mediation and (2) the 'naturalness' of the research design (Scott 2020). The first variation means that go-along interviews can take advantage of technological interventions (GPS devices, audio/video recording, photographing etc.), or rely on researcher's note-taking, memory, and experience. This study falls somewhere between this spectrum, as I audio-recorded some go-alongs, but photographed or videoed none to protect the privacy of informants. Also, I kept a field diary after each go-along to record my immediate thoughts, and as a backup for the audio-recordings, in case they were harmed by the wind or other background noise.

The second variation pinpointed by Scott (2020) concerns the level of involvement of the researcher in the research design. In this study, the routes and lengths of go-alongs (lasting anything between 15 minutes to half a day) originated from the informal recyclers' own routines, habits, and wishes, rather than from my directions or requirements. I found this to be important not only because it made the routes more 'natural', but because it gave the informants the power to choose how much their own work could be interrupted. This way, I wanted to minimize causing economic harm to informants, as informal recycling serves as an important source of income for them. While this in part resulted in a reduced amount of research material, it allowed the informants to stay in control and make choices about their level of involvement.

While there are many benefits in a research method that is mobile, its execution can be physically, cognitively, and mentally demanding for both the researcher and the researched (Larrington-Spencer et al. 2024). Moving in urban environments can bring unexpected situations to the research design and the flow of discussion can be interrupted, causing the focus to slip (Stiegler 2021). Such interruptions are not necessarily a failure, however, but an opportunity to come up with new questions, learn about the informants' reactions to their environment, and analyse the factors leading to this interruption (ibid.). In this way, the movement of go-alongs can in fact generate data beyond what is said, as I show in this thesis.

Moreover, carrying the go-alongs out visibly in public space can be problematic for informants who feel stigmatized, fear negative encounters, or are otherwise in a marginalized position (Barlett et al. 2023; Larrington-Spencer et al. 2024). Although the informants in this thesis routinely work in public, being seen with a researcher could create feelings of exposure, and their own community could view them differently. This could be one reason why not all canners wanted to participate, especially, as they engage in informal work. Although I encountered several informal recyclers in the field, the article focuses on the work of three canners, who were eager to participate, and with whom I met many times and stayed in contact afterwards. I also disseminated and discussed the findings with these informants.

3.2 Analysis and (re)presentation

The research material described above was qualitatively analysed after the initial field work period. The process of analysing qualitative data is often not sequential with clear steps of collecting, analysing, and writing up, but a connected process where the researcher has an ongoing relationship with these phases and the field (Braun & Clarke 2006; Crang & Cook 2007; Gubrium & Holstein 2014; Nowell et al. 2017). In this way, I revisited the field during and after the analysis, and wrote about the experiences and thoughts emerging from the field throughout the ethnographic process. While the lack of rigid structure in ethnographic data collection and analysis can seem ‘messy’, maintaining strict procedural rules possibly “misses the point, which is to provide understanding” (Gubrium & Holstein 2014: 4). Gubrium and Holstein (2014: 2-3) suggest that researchers should rather find “analytic inspiration” by remaining open to new analytical connections and findings, which works as “a leap in perspective” that “brings into view what methods of procedure cannot do on their own”. In other words, ethnographic analysis requires a tenacious, but creative mind.

The analytical process of this study was guided by thematic analysis (TA), which is a widely used method for analysing qualitative data. In their approach to TA, Braun and Clark (2019: 591) describe: “qualitative data analysis is about telling ‘stories’, about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the ‘truth’ that is either ‘out there’ and findable from, or buried deep within, the data”. The role of the researcher is important in generating themes “at the intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity” (Braun & Clarke 2019: 594). This approach fits the fluidity of ethnography, as it offers flexibility and a possibility to seek meaning, with an aim to catch themes that are not necessarily based on quantifiable measures but on finding something important in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clark 2006). This approach to TA also acknowledges that the researcher commonly comes to the analysis with some preliminary analytic interests and thoughts that have developed on the field (Nowell et al. 2017).

In practice, thematic analysis means to identify, organize, describe, interpret, and report the data (Braun & Clarke 2006). The analysed data in this research includes field diary notes and transcribed interviews (table 2). I transcribed the audio-recordings with the help of Window’s online transcription tool, in addition to which a transcription service was used for two interviews (via the research project). I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo12 to support the analysis, and MS Office programmes to make tables and notes. I applied thematic analysis to all research material, but kept the field diary entries and transcribed interviews separately. The generated themes are rooted in the ethnographic material, but supplemented with the interview data, when it was thematically fitting.

Following the phases of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), I first familiarized myself with the data by reading the material several times and looking for initial patterns of meaning. Second, I organized the data by coding segments in the text relevant to each article’s material and topics of interest. Third, I collated the coded segments into themes and considered how the different codes might form meaning as overarching themes. Fourth, I reviewed the themes in relation to each other and by going back and forward to the raw material to ensure that they describe the selected material in a meaningful way and that there are no overlaps. Fifth, I analysed the data within the themes to find the "story" it tells in relation to the research questions and named the themes illustratively. Finally, I reported the most significant themes, constituting the core of the analytical sections of the three research articles (Articles I-III).

To exemplify, in Article I, I coded "walking" as one spatial practice observed and discussed in the data. I grouped it under the theme "mobility" with, for example, traveling with the metro. When I analysed this theme, it actually told a story about survival and fighting insecurities. These meanings led to the formation of an overarching theme "strategies of coping", as discussed in the article.

The findings of the thesis were written in the form of two co-authored journal articles (Articles I-II) and one solo-authored book chapter (Article III). In the two co-authored articles, I was the first author with the main responsibility of forming the research questions, collecting and analysing the ethnographic data, writing the publications, and navigating the publication process. The role of the second author (prof. Päivi Kymäläinen) included planning the research setting (the suburban context and neighbourhoods), coming up and sharing ideas (precariousness, volunteer ethnography, and deep listening), co-collecting a group interview (Article II), supervising, writing parts in the text, and revising/commenting the manuscripts. Kymäläinen also led the research project under which the two co-authored articles (Articles I-II) were completed. All three articles are published in English.

The articles include elements of ethnographic writing, which has been characterized as being "something of an art, science, and craft rolled into one" (Van Maanen 2011: 224). This means that the aim is not solely to report the results, but to write about them in an interpretative, descriptive, and narrative manner. Humphreys and Watson (2009) highlight that there is a difference between "writing-up ethnographic research" and "writing ethnography", suggesting that ethnography is not only the action on the field that the researcher then returns to "write up", but also the writing itself. Similarly, Van Maanen (2011: 224) states: "there is simply no such thing as ethnography until it is written".

The articles of this thesis incorporate elements of thick description (Geertz 1973), vignettes (Miles & Huberman 1994: 81), and direct quotations to bring experiences from the field closer to the reader. They aim to transmit the field by paying attention to details and giving more space to the informants' own stories, feelings, and actions. Such ethnographic writing can be an opportunity to build bridges between the 'ordinary' and academic debates, possibly widening the audiences of the study. However, often the trouble with studies of everyday life is that the field material is so mundane and relatable that it might feel troublesome or distant to wrap it into academic language and concepts (Pols 2023). This was not a strange thought in the process of this geographical thesis, but it could be mitigated by publishing in channels where ethnographic writing was rather the norm than anomaly.

All in all, it has to be recognized that what the three articles of this thesis transmit is a representation by the researchers. To whom these articles are distributed and who has access to them, is a key concern. I have presented the findings to academic and non-academic audiences in universities and conferences, and through interactions with stakeholders, informants, and other locals. Articles I and II are openly available in the respective journal's online editions.

3.3 Ethical reflections

> *I'm afraid of my power. What right do I have to intervene to*
> *the lives of these people?* (field diary, Jaatsi 2021)

The quote above was one of the first notes in my field diary in Spring 2021. It underlines a key concern that ethnographers face particularly in research settings where informants are in a vulnerable or marginal position: the power relations between the researcher and researched (Crang & Cook 2007: 26-32). As I was engaging in such a setting, I quickly realized my privileges and the impacts of the decisions I was making as a researcher. Whatever I encountered, whatever I paid attention to, whatever I decided to write about, were my interventions and reflected my role as a researcher, and the power that came with it. Throughout the ethnographic process, I was forced to face and reflect upon my own position both as a researcher and a human being in a society that my informants and I shared, though lived, experienced, and practiced quite differently.

Reflexive practice has been offered as one solution to deal with this disparity, as reflexivity is vital to understand and unpack the assumptions and positionings that are always part of qualitative research (Braun & Clark 2019; Gilmore & Kenny 2015; Goerich 2017). I aimed to practice reflexivity by understanding my own position in relation to the study topic and the people and places I studied, and recognizing the situations where it particularly mattered and impacted, both on and off the field. I unpacked my thoughts in the field diary, read the experiences of other ethnographers, and discussed ethical concerns with my supervisors and other fellow researchers. Although these reflections were bound to my head throughout the research process, it was not an easy task to transmit them into writing and to the ways the field was being represented through that writing. This became highlighted in contexts where I knew the studied areas and people experienced prejudice and stigma. The process required to occasionally catch breath and take an outsider's perspective into how the text might be read by people with different assumptions and backgrounds, or in fact by people with similar experiences and knowledges to those who were being studied. Discussing this with informants was valuable in providing a sense of realistic understanding and mutual confidence to proceed with writing.

One concrete way to support reflexivity as an ethical research practice is to engage in bidirectional research, which is typically inherent to ethnography (e.g. Garthwaite 2016; Pols 2023). As discussed in previous chapters, ethnographic practices can foster mutual interaction by bringing the researcher and researched closer to each other. This can have multiple benefits in terms of, for example, gaining trust and access, facilitating communication, understanding in-depth experience, and sharing information about the research. But methods characterized by deep immersion also come with risks, including (overt) subjectivity and emotionality that can overshadow conclusions, possibly leading to researcher bias (Hagan 2022). The fact that each field work period in this thesis lasted rather months than years might have in fact mitigated this risk, as I was still primarily viewed as a researcher (rather than e.g. a close friend), despite resulting in more reduced amount of material. This contrasts with some other studies where the researcher has created profound relationships, leading to ethically challenging their position (Garthwaite 2016; Gilmore & Kenny 2015).

This doctoral thesis has followed the ethical guidelines of The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2019) and received ethical approval from the funding instrument and the Ethics Committee for Human Sciences at the University of Turku. This process was necessary and useful for thinking about the research design and practical decisions that the researcher must take during the research process. However, alongside this official process, what the research practices of this thesis highlight is the tendency of ethnography to rely on "everyday ethics" (Banks et al. 2013; Pols 2023). It means that ethical considerations in studies of everyday life do not stop 'when consent is given', but remain part of that relationship and reflections throughout the research process (ibid.). The close and often repetitive interaction between the researcher and the researched in ethnography can in fact support reaching and maintaining informed consent, as the researcher is able to discuss on a low threshold with the informant about the research and its ethical aspects. Hagan (2022) has argued that ethnographers could benefit from having ethical guidelines regarding specifically the unique research practices in ethnography.

One of the main principles of conducting ethically justifiable research is that "the research does not cause significant risks, damage or harm to research participants, communities or other subjects of research" (TENK 2019: 8). I applied this principle as practical actions in different phases of the research (table 3).

Table 3. Ethical practices considered during the research process.

Ethical consideration	Action
Reaching informed consent	○ Participants are informed about the research and their rights as participants. Participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any point. ○ Consent to participate is collected in writing or orally. Participants who are unable to give consent are omitted from the study.
Ensuring participant anonymity	○ Collecting personal data is minimized. ○ Data is pseudonymized and some details are altered. ○ No photographs of participants are taken.
Depositing and handling data securely	○ Data is stored in a secured online depository provided by the University of Turku and in locked storage units at the Department of Geography and Geology. ○ Data is handled using the protected VPN connection provided by the University of Turku.
Avoiding physical and mental harm of participants	○ Participants and their rights are treated lawfully and with respect. Results are based on truthful empirical material. ○ Participants are given a realistic understanding of the scope of the research and what participants benefit from participating. Participants do not receive monetary compensation.

Ethical reflections are an intrinsic part of the ethnographic learning process. It teaches many “dos and don’t’s” in different stages of the research, particularly in relation to field work. For instance, only through this doctoral work I became to truly understand what it means to work with informants on the field, and what might be the benefits and pitfalls of having different levels of engagement. Many decisions could now be made differently, but this is part of the learning process. As Van Maanen (2011: 219) puts it: “One becomes an ethnographer by doing it.”

Finally, coming back to my worry about the power dynamics outlined at the beginning of this section. I have come to think that rather than fearing possessing power, the focus could be placed on the ways that power is exercised. It may very well be possible that power is used in responsible ways. As Pols (2023: 713) suggests: if researchers do not write about the people, no one will know of their lives.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Precarious spaces, humane spaces

> *I love to be where people, hustle and bustle come together. Dangerous situations, that's amazing! [laughter] Even if I won in the lottery, I probably couldn't stay at home. Perhaps I'd buy one beer, go sit in the park and watch urban life.*
>
> (informant, Article III: 169)

The three articles in this thesis demonstrate how urban precarity shapes the makings of the humane city. Precarious conditions expose a fundamental human vulnerability (Butler 2004, 2012), which I view as central to the exposure of 'the humane'. Recognizing the existence of this vulnerability enables to see how solidarity and care manifest as a response to this vulnerability. While Miraftab (2023) argues that radical care practices are needed to create a "humane urbanism" through urban planning and policy, this thesis suggests that humanness can be found also outside planners' interventions, co-emerging alongside precarity through acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building. This chapter will focus on describing both the vulnerabilities and solidarities that I discovered through ethnographic field work in precarious spaces in the Finnish city. I do so by explaining how spaces of precarity emerge and work in the context of this thesis.

Low (2023) has demonstrated how precarious conditions push people to act in public space. Vulnerabilities that mobilized informants in this thesis relate to precarity in labour, housing, health, social relations, and the urban environment. These aspects also made precarity a visible part of public life in the ethnographic study sites, where it existed both as a condition and as a lived experience. As explained in Article I (p. 2), precarity as a condition is understood as a general instability and insecurity characterizing contemporary urban life with its many aspects. Precarity as a lived experience, then, is about instability and insecurity as felt, managed, and resisted by people in their everyday lives and in different urban spaces (ibid.).

Furthermore, Article I identified precarity as a relational concept. This suggests that precarity should not be thought of as a static condition characterizing specific people in specific places, but rather to be emerging as spaces with intersecting nodes of mobility, networks, services, and opportunities for sociality. The study site of Article I – an open-air shopping centre in Kontula, suburban Helsinki – manifested as such a node. The study discovered that the Kontula shopping centre and its amenities, including opportunities for social support, food distribution, and needle exchange, attract people in precarious situations to the premises. The attractivity is increased by the shopping centre's good public transportation connections and status as a place with a tolerant atmosphere and possibilities for maintaining social relationships, informal networks, and trade (see also Tuominen 2020). The centrality of the shopping centre was confirmed by the workers of the mobile outreach station where volunteer ethnography took place: they had chosen the locations of the outreach station based on their studies of the whereabouts of their focus group. This also suggests that the lived spaces of precarity are on the move, and can manifest in various locations in the city, not only in the suburbia, where much of the ethnography of this thesis was situated.

Understanding how spaces of precarity emerge and work involves recognizing that urban precarity is a dynamic process, "always in the making" (Lancione 2019). It means that precarity is constantly being "made" and "unmade" as a result of a condition and a form of resistance (ibid). This could be witnessed at the Kontula shopping centre, where urban renewal plans generate atmospheres of uncertainty particularly for vulnerable groups to whom its services provide an important social infrastructure (see Kuoppa & Kymäläinen 2022). Fears of displacement produced anxiety and worry over how to maintain important social relations, assistance, and routines of everyday life. Such precarity is also felt by the shopping centre's retail keepers, many of whom have an ethnic background, and who have enjoyed the affordable rents (Hewidy & Lilius 2021). Moreover, instabilities emerged at the site through the actions of vulnerable groups who use the shopping centre's social infrastructure, including the municipal day centre for people with substance misuse and mental health problems. Alongside reaching these services, the groups gather to the premises to socialize, maintain networks, and make use of these networks for the purpose of the informal economy, including hustling for deals (see Thieme 2018). This creates fuss at the shopping centre, and together with the multiple bars, the use of alcohol and drugs is made visible. Informants experienced the shopping centre as messy, disorderly, and having "a lot going on"; generally lacking a sense of stability.

Yet, precarity was also "unmade" precisely due to the existence of this social infrastructure and the presence of other vulnerable individuals. The disorder depicted by some as uncomfortable and unsafe was in fact for others a source of security and conviviality. Entering the disorder of the shopping centre could play out as a tactic to stay safe and alleviate feelings of vulnerability, particularly if a person is lonely, fragile or in poor health. Informants reported that the business of the shopping centre provided more safety than the surrounding forests or shelters where robberies might occur. It also provided opportunities to resist economic insecurity through income generating practices, like selling items. Moreover, the shopping centre manifested as a familiar and trusted place for social interaction and maintaining meaningful relationships. Especially the local bars, referred to as "living rooms" of locals, were reported to provide an important social routine and a sense of community, alleviating feelings of insignificance and isolation, which is a recognized threat for individuals experiencing exclusion in the society (Isola et al. 2021). The public and third sector facilities at the shopping centre played a key role in the production of stability and acceptance amid the uncertain pulses of precarity. Consequently, while the unmakings of urban precarity made precarity visible for others, they also generated humane spaces characterized by security, solidarity, and care.

The importance of the Kontula shopping centre highlights the meaning of place for the everyday navigations of urban precarity. Place – a key concept in geography (Tuan 1979) – manifested on different scales: a shopping centre, a pub, a park, or a network of different places. The places were key in attracting people to the public sphere to meet others and socialize, but also to fight isolation, addiction, hunger, or lack of money. Some places explored in this thesis would align with the characterization of "third places" by Oldenburg (1996) as sites where people meet regularly and informally outside their home and work, and that are crucial for social interaction and a sense of community. Local pubs, as stated above, were mentioned by locals as such places, a role of which has been noted also by other studies (Miller 2019; Thurnell-Read 2021).

Some other places would not fit into this classification, however. This is because in lived precarity, places of home, work, and community cannot truly be separated (Millar 2018; Perelman 2018; Strauss 2018; Thieme 2018). This research shows how precarious spaces of work overlay many other aspects of human life, as the prevailing experience of economic insecurity is lived, internalized, and acted upon. This can be especially demonstrated by the work of canners (Article III), who are constantly on the look for economic opportunities as they practice informal professional life and move around in the city hunting for empty cans and bottles (see section 4.2). As one of the canners explained, wherever he goes – even for a walk with his daughter or to meet a friend – he carries a plastic bag in his pocket. And even at home, canning remains inside his head, sometimes so much that he has to take some "time-off" from canning. This shows the totality of lived precarity that can have serious health consequences, even driving a person mentally "on edge" (Harris et al. 2019; Philo et al. 2019, see also Coultas et al. 2023; Söderström 2019), in addition to being pushed to the socio-spatial margins, "on the edge" of the city

(Philo et al. 2019). It further implies the comprehensive nature of precarious spaces that are not restricted to specific aspects or places in life (like work), but encompasses as a prevailing condition of being human (Butler 2004, 2012).

Moreover, the study found that Oldenburg's (1996) first place of home – of domestic, family life and privacy – needs to be understood more broadly, as it extended to the third places of the community. Informants reported that for vulnerable individuals, it sometimes feels safer to escape the isolated space of home into the public to avoid unpleasant thoughts or practices like "grabbing a bottle", and instead find something meaningful and/or busy to engage in. This was a coping strategy for some of the canners to whom the routine labour was an important way to stay occupied and in control, while at the same time gaining additional income and doing community work. In this way, informants re-created routine that had been broken by precarity, which made spaces of precarity feel more manageable. As they chose to leave home to the public, they found public space itself caring as it helped to avoid harm elsewhere. Similarly, the Kontula shopping centre manifested as a "home base" for vulnerable individuals, which is a term used by Sheehan (2010) in the context of the unhoused. It describes a public place with a busy social, cultural, and economic life that can support the spatial claiming and place attachment of the unhoused (ibid.). As informants also in this thesis found security and care from such a home base, it shows how in lived urban precarity the borders between home, public space, and safety can become blurred.

Furthermore, Article II demonstrates how a public place – the forest pub – reproduces the social and humane aspects of home. Informants explained that the forest pub community functions as "a replacement of a family" whose members take care of each other (Article II: 2080, see also Oldenburg 1996). The locals who have been using the forest pub for years – mainly "original" residents of Varissuo – know each other well and maintain their community through regular encounters in the neighbourhood's public spaces, similar daily rhythms, and shared understandings of what it means to have hardships in life. If a person has not been seen for a while, others begin to worry and ask questions. This produces an informal safety net that brings stability into an otherwise instable, vulnerable life. It also highlights the power of being in public under the eyes of others (Jacobs 1961; Rannila 2019).

Although the fundamental idea behind the forest pub was to remove public drinkers, the place was accepted by its users with a sense of gratitude. Referred to as "a resting place for adults" by informants, the forest pub signified a peaceful place to "be alone and with your own thoughts" (Article II: 2079), as opposed to socializing in the more central and busier areas in the neighbourhood. Informants explained that tranquillity is valued at the forest pub because it enables profound reflections and deeper conversations as "a place to dig into one's soul and discuss issues of the mind" (Article II: 2082). Providing mental relief from personal hardships is especially important in the context of people with substance misuse problems because they are often linked with mental health problems (interviews, Article I). The forest pub shows that in the absence of formal support, informal spaces of care can be meaningful in managing such challenges.

Beyond place, the study shows that the dynamic spaces of precarity emerge in relation to time (see also e.g. Ettlinger 2007). The research found that on one hand external threats impact the felt intensity of urban precarity, including the fears created by processes of urban gentrification in the case of Kontula (see also Harris et al. 2019), and the temporalities produced by institutions, including schedules of aid provision or the monthly cycles of welfare payments. Locals in both Kontula and Varissuo were well aware of what was generally known as the "social allowance day" (in Finnish: *tukipäivä*), when movement in spaces of precarity intensify, streets are more restless, and pubs are busier than usually. The opening hours of social service points and times of food distribution further impact these flows of space, also causing worries about substance misusers crossing paths with children on their school route at the Kontula shopping centre.

On the other hand, the research found that personal life situations can impact the temporalities and the level of urgency through which urban precarity is coped with. This was visible through for instance a person's housing situation: being unhoused meant feeling agitated and operating under immediate compulsion to find quick solutions (Article I), whereas having a more stable housing situation enabled to navigate precarity more strategically and make plans for daily labour (Article III). This aligns with the finding that in a severely erratic life, energies become channelled into survival rather than dedicated to long-term decision-making (Thieme 2018). In such urgency, the risk of resolving instabilities with temporary solutions also grows, and these solutions might only steer the person into other forms of precarity (Campbell & Lahej 2021; Muñoz 2018). In the Finnish context, the "housing first" principle is one way to offer stability and support the human dignity of the unhoused, while aiming to prevent exposure to more vulnerability and risk (Ranta & Juhila 2020).

The research also showed that spaces of precarity are likely to cause spatial contestations. On one hand, they can re-enforce the experiences of precarity and fuel the need for urban renewal programmes that aim to 'stabilize' and 'return order', and eliminate difference in urban space (Ettlinger 2007; Mitchell 2003, 2020; Sand et al. 2022; Sendra 2016). In Article I, being exposed to precarity also created anxiety, resistance, and feelings of negligence among those who lived precariously themselves. Precarious spaces were seen as visionless, with no hope, and where "rough life" is lived (Article I: 7, see also Junnilainen 2019; Tuominen 2020). "Problem people" were directed to the back corner of the Kontula shopping centre to "roam around" (Article I: 6), and in Article II, public drinkers were relocated to the forest pub to avoid aesthetic and social disorder. For Ettlinger (2007), such processes could be understood as the denial of precarious life that eliminates possibilities for negotiation. In this thesis, they could be viewed as efforts to dehumanize public spaces and the people in them (see also Collins 2010; Sennett 2010; Short 1989).

On the other hand, the research revealed how spaces of precarity enhance encountering, create affinity, and support empathetic attitudes towards vulnerable individuals. In the absence of formal support, local communities helped their members in challenging situations, and particular places generated a sense of stability. These kinds of aspects were the building blocks of humane spaces in the local scale. Thus, balancing between precarious and humane spaces required understanding and compromise. This was the attitude of social workers and some residents in Kontula, who believed that "people need to be somewhere anyway" and accepted the presence of vulnerability as "it is what it is" (Article I: 7). The use of drugs was problematized mostly due to their impact on the environment (i.e. drug needles found by children or animals) and the unpredictable behaviour of drug users, rather than characterizing them as inhumane subjects. Moreover, the outreach station offered a space where vulnerability was welcomed and everyday conversations took place without people being labelled as "cases" of social work (cf. Isola et al. 2021), enabling exposure to difference, as called for by Sennett in the humane city (2010).

However, it must be noted that spaces of precarity are never neutral but involve different relations of power and "managed marginality" (Herring 2014, see also Parker 2020). In all articles, informants mentioned the presence of authorities who control, including security guards, the police, or surveillance cameras. Street-level workers, such as the mobile outreach station, could also be regarded as actors that manage and direct actions on the street (Lancione 2019). However, unlike in some other societal contexts where police encounters are feared or have led to negative confrontations (Gutberlet et al. 2009; Jaffe et al. 2018; Nichols & Braimoh 2018), informants in this thesis reported being in decent terms with the authorities, and even felt the presence of the police comforting. This reflects the general trust people have towards authorities in Finland (cf. Pardo & Prato 2019). Also, it is worth noting that for the vulnerable, the presence of surveillance can in fact be a safety measure, rather than a mechanism of exclusion, as has been shown in the case of unhoused women in public space (Casey et al. 2008).

Finding compromise between authorities and ordinary people is one way to humanize urban space, that is, increase inclusivity, access, and solidarity between different subjects. There was evidence of this in all articles. In Article I, the urban renewal plans of the Kontula shopping centre continued to include the municipal day centre for people with substance misuse and mental health problems in order to ensure the continuance of aid. Only the location of its entrance was subject to reconsideration to avoid uncomfortable encounters with other groups, such as children. In Article II, a familiar policeman who had been working in the neighbourhood for years softened the interactions with public drinkers who then did not raise a conflict, although they were being removed to the forest pub. In Article III, cities had installed "bottle tubes" adjacent to public garbage bins so that canners would not need to scavenge the bins. While aiming to protect the safety and dignity of canners, it must be noted that the tubes also keep the bins locked, decrease repairing costs, and aestheticize canning. These examples demonstrate that efforts to stabilize space are not always realized through eliminating difference as feared by Ettlinger (2007), but can involve aims to accommodate the needs of different groups. Moreover, the examples suggest that acts of solidarity can also be practiced by authorities, unlike viewed by Short (1989) who critiques acts of those with power as inherently inhumane. Thus, the thinking of this thesis moves beyond the polarity in which authorities regulate and people negotiate (Parker 2020) into finding possibilities for inclusion and negotiation between people and authorities (see also Sheehan 2010).

Finally, I recognize that the informants of this thesis have been closely exposed to vulnerability, which might impact the ways they understand precarious spaces. This might represent more solidary views than by people who have not encountered difference so closely. Also, some experiences of vulnerability might have gone unnoticed in this thesis due to the gender and age structure of informants. Nevertheless, it is worth recognizing that among the informants – both local people and representatives of cities and NGOs – challenges were mainly approached through thinking about solutions rather than denying them, and aiming to accommodate different needs rather than stripping people of their humanity.

4.2 Everyday professionalism in urban space

It's the hustling you see in here. (--) You just always come up with
something that makes money. It's how you survive.
(informant, Article I: 7)

The three articles in this thesis demonstrate the various skills and tacit knowledge that people use to manage precarious everyday life in the humane city. Article I shows how individuals use different tactics to cope with precarity on the street, including selling items or knowing how to exit a threatening situation. Article II reveals how routine, experience, and structure inform the ability to improvise in everyday uses of urban space. Article III presents the different kinds of tools and talent informal recyclers master in their daily labour of collecting empty cans and bottles. All these coping strategies are driven by the experience of precarity in one or more areas of life, including income, housing, health, social relations, or the urban environment. As discussed in the previous section, these aspects have been identified as characteristic of contemporary precarious urban conditions, used in daily life to fulfil various material, social, and psychological needs, and above all, to keep life going amid uncertainty and instability (Campbell & Lahej 2021; Harris & Nowicki 2018; Lancione 2019; Philo et al. 2019).

This thesis finds that *everyday professionalism*, defined as the knowledge and skills people develop and perform as they manage precarious urban life, is learned in multiple ways. One important source of learning is prior experience, in terms of both general, long-term life experience and the experience picked up in particular situations of practice. These forms of learning are inevitably connected, but carry different temporalities. The former, cumulated life experience, became visible through cognitive processes such as creating trust towards being and acting in particular urban places (Articles I-III) or gaining wider perspectives in life and overcoming shame (Article III). The latter, more direct ways to learn from experience, occurred in practical situations such as trying out different tools (Article III), or testing the boundaries of authority control (Article II). The main aspects characterizing learning from experience are that it occurs incrementally, in relation to the surrounding socio-legal and material spaces, and supports the ability to improvise, as people expose themselves to various situations of coping (see also Hentschel 2015; McFarlane 2011).

Another important driver for everyday professionalism is the routines and structures of everyday life. This means that the skills and knowledges used to cope with precarity are often not intentionally learned but rooted in familiar environments and the habits people develop and practice. Routines became highlighted because they had been broken by precarity, yet reconstructed by informants who tried to bring predictability and stability into their uncertain lives. Routines involved practices such as visiting an outreach station (Article I), meeting others in particular places (Articles I-II), performing the same routes and schedules (Article III), or living cyclically with welfare payments (Article I), which all produced a trusted ground where knowledge could be created, tested, applied, and re-generated. This supports the view on how people improvise (Crossley 2021; Ingold & Hallam 2007; Krueger & Salice 2021): rather than being an inherent talent or confined to the situational moment, the performed actions make use of previous experience, habits, and learned structures. Because informants scripted their lives with daily habits, they were in fact able to *be* ’unscripted’ and improvise. This suggests that planning and structure are not merely a small share of improvisation as proposed by Preston (2021), but rather the foundation that keeps improvisation (and life) going. In other words, routine was needed to act intuitively: an aspect of everyday improvisation found in Article II.

For the informants of this thesis, not only habits of social life, but the stability of trusted places was key in finding self-assurance to act. In Article II, spatial navigations were facilitated by the familiarity of local places, which had developed over the years of living locally, as well as by the informants' routinely ways of using them. Locals improvised because they had built a structure to do so: they demonstrated their capacities to navigate between different legalities of space, between spatial opportunities and restrictions, and between solutions of planning and their needs in everyday life (see also Müller & Trubina 2020). The regular users of the forest pub acknowledged the forest pub as a legal space where they had the right to be and drink publicly. However, they also recognized the deficiency of the forest pub in supporting their social life, which made the informants seek for solutions from other spaces, despite perceiving them as illegal. Having learned 'the rules of the game', locals felt confident to claim space and take the risk of being evicted. One example of this is a tactic that informants had learned against the security guards of a local shopping centre: they sat right behind the property line, where the guards had no authority to remove them (Article II).

Thus, this thesis shows how professionalism in mundane contexts becomes realized through everyday actions in public space. It demonstrates active and skilled agents in contexts characterized by informality and marginality, which might go unrecognized by more formal urban processes. The focus on informality reveals how people are capable of managing their own lives and contributing to public morality, which is for Collins (2010) at the core of the humane city. As in other studies known for makeshift urbanism (e.g. Roy 2005; Simone 2004, 2019), informal urban life is key to understanding how cities actually operate on the ground. Therefore, informal professional actions need to be noted to grasp the humane potential of a city proposed by this thesis.

This chapter will next turn to describe everyday professionalism in more detail through the informal work of canners, or the informal recyclers of cans and bottles, studied in Article III. The article identified four dimensions of canning as labour: (1) getting ready, (2) doing the job, (3) doing the other job(s), and (4) getting a bigger picture. It must be noted that the article presented these dimensions for analytical clarity, rather than to suggest that canning is a linear process with a clear beginning and a clear end. Just like improvisation pays attention to the creative means rather than to the end product of a particular action (Crossley 2021; Ingold & Hallam 2007), these four aspects intend to highlight that canning is a process involving many tasks in addition to what we can witness of the practice on the street. The discovered tactics of canners highlight skilled practice, catering to the question *how* people use what they have, rather than measuring *what* they have at a given moment (Schilling et al. 2019: 1345). This also reflects the temporality of both improvisation and precarity, as a way of grabbing onto opportunities at hand. Work methods of informal labor such as canning must be adapted to “what works as work works here and now” (ibid.).

First, the study discovered that canners “get ready” by planning and preparing for the work both strategically and in practice. They designed canning routes and schedules by using their knowledge of the city, which has been referred elsewhere as the human asset of canners (Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet et al. 2009). To make their work as productive as possible, the canners considered issues such as urban infrastructure, movements of people, events and nightlife hours, other canners, and the time and distance required to achieve a prolific outcome. One of the canners was especially strategic about optimizing his routes in a way that would allow him to work productively without much competition. He had spent a significant amount of time investigating different areas, which he later found to be worth the investment, although it had caused a temporary drop to his income. Knowing such territories, or “traplines” (Trembley et al. 2010), and their projections of symbolic power (see De Souza 2021; Sisson 2021), indicates being professional about canning. Although it was reported that maintaining territories requires commitment, perseverance, and is practically impossible, the fear of losing one’s income to others pushed to act, highlighting the urgency of lived urban precarity (Das & Randeria 2015; Schilling et al. 2019; Thieme 2018).

Furthermore, part of preparing for canning was the building of physical assets (Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet et al. 2009), which in this study meant besides physical endurance, a variety of material tools such as bicycles, bags, gloves, lamps, sticks, hooks, pliers, disinfectants, and mobile phones. Tools were gathered to keep the work as safe and efficient as possible, as well as to boost a sense of doing professional labour. Utilizing one’s know-how to tune necessary equipment was seen by some as compulsory for accomplishing the work, while for others, it was a way to immerse oneself in an ambitious project where they could maintain interest and show expertise (see also Gowan 1997; Prato 2018a; Thieme 2018). The level of immersiveness was also under scrutiny: a high level of proficiency could be viewed as excessive boosting and promoting competition, leading to the questioning of a canner’s genuine need for money. In contrast, a low effort could be framed as lack of skill or tenaciousness. In this way, canners constructed perceptions of what is a decent level of professionalism needed to be a ‘proper’ canner, and drew borders to those who do not live up to these criteria. This also exemplifies how everyday law might work in practice, as canners constituted informal systems of law and judgment (Kymäläinen 2024).

Second, the canners were “doing the job” by actually labouring: collecting empty cans and bottles from public areas and bins, and returning them to the reverse vending machines for a monetary deposit. They were masters of seizing opportunities in urban space (also de Certeau 1984): being “at the right place at the right time" (Schilling et al. 2019: 1339) and having a "feel for the situation" (Jokinen 2016: 91). The canners used all their senses to detect the whereabouts of empty cans and bottles, and making the right decisions in the moments of handling them. For instance, they evaluated the costs of carrying different types of cans and bottles against the values of their deposits and the time and distance needed to the nearest returning point. Tacit knowledge was used also to evaluate the origins of cans, as those from neighbouring countries are incompatible with the Finnish deposit system. The risks of not receiving a deposit or carrying glass bottles that are too heavy were often too high, which meant that some cans and bottles had to be left unrecycled, challenging the work ethic and ecological values of professional canners.

Because canning was experienced as legitimate "work" that can be "tough" and "stressful" both physically and mentally, the practice calls for humane spaces that are "non-stressful" (Smith 1976). The work involves having to move long distances, confronting health risks (see also Gutbert et al. 2009; Jaffe et al. 2018; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016), and staying alert under the uncertainty of the outcome. Canners could feel "burnt out" when the work got too intensive or frustrating and needed to "take some time off", further adopting the vocabulary of standard employment. The attitude of canners coincides with studies that have viewed informal recycling as genuine labour, with specific conditions, demands, regulations, and policy frameworks (Bulla et al. 2021). However, as Article III shows, canners must survive the physical and mental challenges of canning without the securities of formal structures, relying on the ability to self-manage one's work and wellbeing. In Vancouver, Canada, safer conditions for canners, or "binners" as called in the local context, have been addressed through an association that advocates more inclusive policies for informal recycling (Sholanke & Gutberlet 2022; Tremblay et al. 2010; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016). Such collective mobilization was not found in the Finnish context, which could be due to the phenomena's rather small scale or lack of imperative, as authorities do not principally intervene in this informal action, signalling its legitimate position. Instead, informants emphasized the responsibility of an individual canner in taking care of oneself: knowing 'how it's done', mitigating health risks, and not doing anything "extremely stupid" (Article III: 172). Thus, the canners projected their skills not only to making canning efficient, but keeping themselves as safe as possible.

Thirdly, canners were "doing the other job(s)", which means that they were constantly negotiating their actions within their social and moral surroundings. Informants highlighted the importance of doing canning "right" and maintaining trust between their work and the authorities and the general public. This is because losing trust could lead to resistance and difficulties in continuing their work. Consequently, canners engaged in tasks of community and environmental work: fixing bins with their tools, sorting waste, cleaning public spaces, recycling other materials, and showing compassion towards other people on the street, including listening and transmitting waste food. These practices reflect besides solidarity and the work ethic of canners, their need to deal with the assumptions that canners are illegitimate actors in public space (see Bulla et al. 2021; Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme 2010; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016). Although informants explained that in general people treat them with respect, they encounter occasional prejudice and criticism for being greedy or "undeserving" of the money they receive (see also Salonen et al. 2018). Because canners must be aware of operating "in a grey area", as explained by an informant, they have to be professional about their behaviour in public space (Article III: 174). This is also because they understand being under the moral gaze of others (Jacobs 1961; Kymäläinen 2019).

Acting professionally in the moral sense became highlighted in situations where canners work close to the consumers who donate their empty cans and bottles. To interact with others, canners followed an unwritten "etiquette", described in the article as "a general moral understanding of the requirements of being polite and respectful towards other canners and those who provide the deposits" (Article III: 176). This could be seen as an unorganized version of the "Binners Code" in Vancouver, which includes behaviour and attitude recommendations for informal recyclers (Trembley et al. 2010). The informants drew a moral line between those who follow the etiquette and those who do not, legitimizing canning as a practice of those who embrace an acceptable work ethic. They considered it unprofessional to break the etiquette by acting aggressively or disregarding others, including not asking a permission to take empty cans and bottles from consumers. This was considered important because bad behaviour could lead to the ruining of the reputation of canners. Moreover, informants had found that being polite is more productive: people are more likely to give their cans and bottles if the canner is worthy of them (see also Vukušić and Stelko 2016).

Finally, by "getting the bigger picture", informants were reflective of canning to their own life and the broader society. The monetary deposits of cans and bottles formed an important source of income for informants, contributing to their overall finances together with welfare payments. While it has been recognized that the unemployed are more likely to engage in informal work (Williams & Horodnic 2017), the income from canning often supplements other means, including social assistance (Gutberlet et al. 2009; Trembley et al. 2010; Wittmer & Parizeau 2016). The challenge of staying organized with one's economy was handled by accepting outside aid, in addition to which own skills were used to remain up-to-date, or even keep statistics of canning. The tax liability of canning was criticized by canners, as the income is little anyway, and the activity promotes recycling and provides free cleaning work for the city. A similar view has been taken further by a Member of the

Finnish Parliament, who introduced a bill in 2016 to eradicate the taxation on income from collected cans and bottles (LA 50/2016 vp), though since rejected.

Moreover, as ‘environmental stewards’ (Chikowore & Kerr 2020; Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme 2010), canners embraced the environmental value of canning and validated their informal work as a benefit to the public. Sharing the same goals as the city or even the society legitimized their work and contributed to a sense of professionalism. Furthermore, in their daily interactions with urban space, canners became knowledgeable of various local and societal phenomena impacting canning. For instance, they noted that waves of immigration increase the number of canners and bring competition, that habits of beverage consumption especially amongst the young are changing and impact productivity of canning, and that technological development (e.g. the emergence of mobile applications) creates new dimensions and unpredictability to the work. Amidst such changes, one of the canners stated that the best tactic is to stick to one’s routines to maintain control over canning, rather than to start hustling and end up being at the mercy of others.

As shown by the process of canning above, everyday professionalism emerges in informal contexts to manage precarious situations. While a key objective in such informal labour is to generate income, the articles of this thesis show that informants applied their knowledge and skills also for other ways of coping. Filling other material needs such as food or housing were important goals, but at the same time immaterial objectives, including a sense of purpose and maintaining social ties, were pursued. For instance, in Article I, a local man cleaned his neighbourhood voluntarily. Every day, he would walk around the area with a shopping cart to collect waste, make spatial adjustments, and help others in risky situations. He was motivated by community work but also to reach first-hand knowledge of what is going on in the neighbourhood. As a result, he had become a visible and known figure in the neighbourhood, reaching a recognized status as a public character who knows everybody and keeps others “up-to-date” on local matters (Oldenburg 1996: 8; see also Jacobs 1961). The solidary acts by canners and other locals could be viewed as practices of radical care inherent to humane urbanism (Miraftab 2023).

This also suggests that professionalism in everyday contexts is not only performed actions, but a constructed identity. Those who celebrated their competences as informal actors where outspoken about their characteristics as hard-working, entrepreneurial-minded individuals (see also Gowan 1997; Pardo 2018; Thieme 2018), refusing to submit to the perception that such individuals are not worthy of human dignity. Because the informants in Article III were self-standing of what they were doing – what equipment to use, what routes to take, what ethics to follow – they considered themselves more professional than some other canners who only collect irregularly, without a proper plan or mental determination. The canners were not hiding their profession, either because they wanted to prove that disadvantaged individuals are not lazy or undeserving (cf. Salonen et al. 2018), or because they were proud of, or at least in terms with, what their acts of labour and care do for the environment. As one canner stated: “I tell everyone I’m a recycler! Even if I go on a date, I tell that I dig trash bins” (Article III: 175).

Such an internalized idea of being a professional recycler is not unlike being “a professional hustler” described by Wacqüant (1998): an identity of which involves being “something of an independent street peddler” requiring “grounded intelligence” in “a world of hustling [that] stands in structural opposition to that of wage labour” (p. 4-11). Although the context of Wacquant’s study, “the black American ghetto”, is strikingly different from Finnish urbanity, hustling was brought up also in the field work of this thesis. In Article I, hustling (in Finnish: *hustlaus*) was presented by informants as a visible part of street culture and a tactic used to survive precarious situations at hand. Hustling was performed to find solutions to current hitches, typically lack of money, by being on the move and acting upon crafted opportunities (see also Thieme 2018). Hustling was defined by local outreach workers as “a mobile practice enacted by deals and exchange, which involves distrust and the search for ways to benefit from other people and situations” (Article I: 7). They further explained that the entering of global markets has created new demands for hustling, as the street has become more difficult to navigate and decreased trust among individuals. The variety of competencies required by hustling has also been recognized by other scholars, referring to hustling as “emotion work” (Gowan 2010), “life-work” (Thieme 2018) and “brain work” (Chulek 2020), further drawing parallels between informal practice, labour, and other aspects of life.

One of the main values of investigating everyday professionalism in urban space lies in the possibility of seeing the agency of individuals and groups differently (e.g. Barlett et al. 2023; Das & Randeria 2015; Millar 2018; Waite 2009). This is important because the narratives attributed to vulnerable groups have led to constructing images of them as, for instance, passive recipients of assistance (Das & Randeria 2015; Isola et al. 2021; Salonen et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2016). This study challenges this perception by showing that operating in the margins does not equate with being unskilled or inactive in the society. Informants considered that their actions contribute to valuable goals beyond personal gain, including the environment or the community, which reconstructed the meanings of their actions and reduced feelings of being a “second-class-citizen” or merely a “social-welfare case”, as has been found by a study of people experiencing prolonged poverty in Finland (Isola et al. 2021). The experience and identity of being professional kept people busy, lifted their sense of worth, and reconstructed what might had been dehumanized by precarity.

In this context, it could be questioned whether everyday improvisation by people should be seen as “inexpert”, as suggested by Krueger and Salice (2021), who differentiate the concept from “expert improvisation” in highly specialized contexts, such as the arts. What the skills of informants in this thesis have demonstrated, is that there are ‘experts’ also in everyday life. Recognizing this is central to understanding the agency and dignity of people that the humane city aims to transmit. That said, we must be wary of seeing the traits of being skilled, entrepreneurial, and creative as the norm, because otherwise “we run the risk of sleepwalking into a world in which precarity is an accepted element of the everyday” (Harris & Nowicki 2018: 390). Also, it must be noted that there are differences among the precariousness of canners and other vulnerable individuals. The fact that the canners in this thesis considered themselves more professional than some other, less prepared, less strategic, and less ethical canners, might reflect the fact that they had the opportunity to be so. This highlights the need also to research canning by women and by those who are pushed to extreme precarity due to, for instance, homelessness or the lack of a legal status.

4.3 Practice as voice

I try to behave here so that as many people as possible notice that I also sort their waste. And if it’s really messy in here, I try to fix the place up a bit. Then if someone sees me, they’ll make a note of it and perhaps will help me out, too.
(informant, Article III: 174)

One of the main findings of this thesis is the variety of everyday practices taking place in the humane city. This is noticeable already on the titles of the three articles, which all reveal some kind of action: people are “navigating” (Article I), “improvising” (Article II), and “canning” (Article III) in urban space. The titles suggest an active agency of people who practice urban public space in distinct ways, and are reflective of the fact that the humane city became discoverable through everyday actions on a micro-geographical scale. On one hand, these different modes of everyday ‘doing’ depict particular moments of urban life; what people were doing as they were observed and listened to in particular places during the field work period. On the other hand, they can tell a broader story about the meanings of everyday practice to the construction of space and resistance in the city (De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1974/1991).

Notably, the everyday practices explored in this thesis are studied in the context of urban precarity. Thus, they reveal not only how urban precarity is lived and experienced but how it is *acted upon*. This is significant so that we can learn how in practice people resist vulnerability in their everyday lives. Muñoz (2018) makes a point that without paying attention to detail, precarity can remain as a too abstract of a concept: a condition that merely exists ‘out there’. Similar to their ethnographic research, this study traces precarity onto the micro-scale materiality, and its relation to experience and action. For instance, in Article I, empty juice boxes on the ground revealed the presence of drug users and the role of food aid to their movement in the city. In Article II, a table cloth in the forest pub symbolized a homelike place and the importance of belonging to a community. In Article III, a wooden ice cream stick exposed the wit of a canner in opening locked garbage bins and the demands of doing informal labour in the city.

These examples demonstrate that a human scale is needed to understand the humane city. In this thesis, reaching the everyday practices of people was enabled by close-in ethnographic field work. This is important in thinking about the voice of informants, because going close to people allowed to bring their stories close to action. Something similar has been suggested by Gowan (2010) in their study of the unhoused, where they treat action as a kind of speech. Reaching knowledge through action is valuable because in contexts of vulnerability, verbal communication can be limited (Pols 2023) and formal channels for participation inaccessible (Browne & McBride 2015). This is relevant in the processes of planning where people are primarily expected to participate through formal verbal communication (e.g. in resident meetings) or in writing (e.g. surveys and digital platforms). Short (1989) notes that a lack of citizen engagement can lead to inhumane spaces that only serve the interests of the economy and those who planned them. Therefore, this thesis suggests to expand the methodological notion of "deep listening" (Koch 2020) to the sphere of practice, and encourage to recognize that what people *do* can be an important form of articulation: a voice for those who might otherwise remain unheard.

Furthermore, thinking about the voice of practice calls for understanding that people who are formally silent should not be regarded as silent, but that their voice might only constitute differently. Indeed, voice can be performative: practiced in humane spaces where these practices become recognized. This relates to the idea by Collins (2010) that suggests that the humane potential of a city is articulated by embodied human actors (p. 922, see also Butler 2012). However, while Collins (2010) emphasizes contact between bodies as crucial for the politics of 'the humane' (ibid.), this thesis highlights performed practice as a form of understanding, participation, and a source knowledge in the city. In this way, the ethnographic studies in this thesis have not only aimed to give voice, but to recognize that actions are the voice.

Consequently, everyday practice can expose in which ways people participate in the makings of the urban, if not in the expected formal channels. The articles of the thesis demonstrate that as people practice informal urban space, they must balance between visibility and invisibility. They show how some informants chose visibility over invisibility, and how some others did not have an opportunity to choose. These findings somewhat contrast with the view that marginal groups withdraw from public space and consequently participate less (Isola et al. 2021). As this thesis shows, this visibility can also come with conflict: it may lead to eviction, but it can also make people and their forms of resistance apparent (see also Casey et al. 2008; Kamalipour & Peimani 2019; Lancione 2019; Mitchell 2003; Sheehan 2010). Moreover, visible practices in public space can function as a call for care, revealing the vulnerability of individuals and exposing them to different forms of power (Joronen & Rose 2020). In this thesis, visibility made the needs of people public, which is important because visibility is what challenges authorities to act.

All three articles in the thesis provide examples of how the visibility of informal actions is negotiated in public space, and what it might voice about the needs of people. In Article I, the street hustling of vulnerable groups could be read as an immediate request for money, food, drugs, or social networks, but more broadly, as a call for more adequate service provision, including longer opening hours of day centres, drug consumption rooms, or supported housing. In Article II, sitting in public space was a way to resist loneliness and to demand different kinds of public spaces for the varying needs of their users. The forest pub community kept a place they perceived as “illegal” clean and avoided causing a fuss, through which they transmitted a wish that it would be legitimized as a “legal” place like the forest pub, and that the community would be worth the trust. The members of the community chose visibility also because only in public could they take care of each other.

In Article III, the practices of professional canners were signalling a moral standard: the canners communicated through their actions that they are “not doing anything bad at least” (Article III: 173), but rather contributing to environmental and community work. One of the canners wanted to make his work visible so that canning would appear more approachable and understandable to others. Another canner chose to make his canning visible so that others would see the realities of some people in the society. By carrying empty cans and bottles in a transparent plastic bag, he found it important to communicate that Finland has poverty too, and that disadvantaged individuals are not lazy, but active and legitimate members of the society.

In contrast to these examples, it is worth noting that some informants chose to be invisible, or as ‘non-disturbing’ as possible, which reflects another kind of voice worth recognizing. For instance, public drinkers removed themselves from public space when children were around (Articles I & II) or when an adjacent church had a service (Article II). Or, one of the canners avoided shopping centres on the weekends to not disturb the leisure time of families (Article III). Also, in one go-along interview, my informant asked whether I wanted to walk a few meters behind him, anticipating possible embarrassment in being seen together. These examples demonstrate that the informants are moral agents who negotiate exposure to difference. Although this has been considered integral to the humane city (Collins 2010; Sennet 2010), informants in this thesis suggest humane behaviour by avoiding exposure temporarily. However, the examples also show that behind these actions exists internalized vulnerability: a crucial part of the human condition exposed by precarity (Butler 2004, 2012). The intention of informants to be 'non-disturbing' in the eyes of the public suggests that the informants are aware of their vulnerability and of the assumptions made by others of them as "dirty", "uncivilized" or "risky", and engaging in activities only practiced by the poor (Bulla et al. 2021; Jayne et al. 2006; Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme 2010).

Furthermore, it must be noted that the socio-legal context of everyday practice matters to the negotiations of visibility. This is because everyday practice responds to not only the formal law, but also to the unwritten rules, norms, and social contracts that govern what is considered moral or acceptable behaviour in urban space (Ameel & Tani 2012; Bennett & Layard 2015; Kymäläinen 2024; Pardo & Prato 2018a, 2019; Rannila 2019). Informal actions in particular can test the boundaries of formal and informal law through their perceived (il)legitimacy. This research has shown that people can, through their informal practices in public space, transmit different ideas of what is "right", "fair", or "can be lived with" (Pardo & Prato 2019: 20), as opposed to what may be harmful to other people or the environment. This is important to understand in the humane city: for public spaces to be inclusive to a variety of people and practices, they need to be understood as flexible constructions that allow for unscripted everyday life to take place. This coincides with the idea of loosening public space through improvised actions (Ameel & Tani 2012; Franck & Stevens 2007; Kamalipour 2020; Tani 2015, 2024), only to think beyond the dualism of loose/tight space, and to ask *how loose* is morally acceptable, or could be lived with. Sometimes this requires experimental uses of space: an aspect of improvisation found in Article II. Other times it can be more strategic, as the efforts of canners in Article III demonstrate.

Consequently, the research found that one way everyday practice functions as a voice is that it constructs and transmits the legitimacy of informal actions. I recognized that relations of trust were a building block to gain that legitimacy in public space, especially when the agent considered their own practices morally acceptable and unharmful to others (see also Pardo 2018). Trust was built from the ground up, which demonstrates another direction of trust building than what is often witnessed between authorities and vulnerable populations in, for instance, social work (Tamminen 2025). This process requires informal and creative approaches to work practices (ibid.), which in this thesis became visible through, for example, the environmental and community work of canners. Through their actions, the canners transmitted care towards maintaining trust and legitimacy especially horizontally at the grassroots, but also upwards towards the authorities, where formal recognition is negotiated. Their informal labour could be read as a proposal to think waste as a public resource that is “shared with society, like water and air” (Dias 2016: 376, see also Pikner & Jauhiainen 2014). In this vein, the voice of informal practice might not always involve a struggle against formality (Banks et al. 2020), but could rather be a call for partnership.

Finally, considering practice as voice calls for understanding *why* it is important to pay attention to everyday practice in the city. Critical urban studies have been influential in explaining the significance of everyday practice to, for instance, urban change and resistance (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1947/1991), production of space (Lefebvre 1974/1991), street-level urban life (Jacobs 1961), coexistence (Amin 2006; Watson 2006), makeshift urbanisms (Roy 2005; Simone 2004), and struggles for the right to the city (Harvey 2003, 2012; Lefebvre 1968/1996; Mitchell 2003). Influenced by these works, I have in this ethnographical research aimed to build knowledge on *how* everyday practice works on the micro-geographical scale in order to understand the ways people manage and resist precarious urban life. In this task, it needs to be regarded that the majority of everyday practices explored in this thesis are performed by white, masculine bodies. Nevertheless, ‘practice as voice’ should be understood to represent agency in a context of vulnerability that might restrict other forms of articulation. This is important because it is humanizing to be represented (Butler 2004).

5 Conclusions

Earlier in this thesis (p. 39), it was suggested that an ethnographic study often begins with the question “what is it that is going on?”. Answering this question, I have studied precarious urban spaces with people, in places, and along practices in the Finnish urban context. What I found is a humane city: a city of vulnerability, solidarity, and informal life. In contrast to some earlier conceptualizations, the humane city presented in this thesis is not a planning or design proposal, but rather a tool to recognize ‘the humane’ that is emergent, always in the making in contexts of human interaction. Through the humane city, I aim to show what ethnographic research on the human scale can reveal about precarious urban life and the ways it is coped with, and how precarity makes cities operate on the ground.

This thesis has approached the humane city in the context of urban precarity – the condition and experience of uncertainty and instability – that touches everyone, but is unevenly distributed. The articles of the thesis show how precarious conditions in labour, housing, health, and the urban environment reveal the vulnerability of human subjects and shape the ways they live, experience and practice everyday urban space. The thesis found that precarity is a relative concept, emerging in spaces with intersecting nodes of mobility, networks, services, and opportunities for sociality. It was discovered that there are peculiarly central places at the intersections of these aspects, which produce meaning and matter to the ways precarity is navigated in the city. Such places can provide opportunities to, for example, gain income, organize housing, reach social and health support, create routine, belong to a community, and feel a sense of purpose. At the same time, however, these places can be a source of disorder, insecurity, and risk. Consequently, the thesis found that places that might be perceived as marginal can in fact be very central to the production of stability and security amidst an instable, precarious life.

The findings of this thesis indicate that although spaces of precarity are prone to causing contestations, they are also constitutive of humane spaces, where vulnerability gives rise to acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building. Besides local communities, authorities were key in transmitting a sense of acceptance and compromise, although their actions could also cause exclusion. These findings suggest that there is potential for negotiation between people and institutional actors such as cities and NGOs to support the management of urban precarity by making precarious spaces more humane to navigate. What was suggested in this thesis is, for instance, adequate social and health care services, the housing first principle, loose but safe public spaces, and the recognition of the informal.

Moreover, the thesis discovered that informal, ordinary urban life is inherent to the makings of the humane city. It means tolerating flexibility, fluidity, and improvisational uses of space, and understanding that precarity pushes people into informal modes of action. In this thesis, precarious conditions exposed “everyday professionalism” of people in managing uncertainties, which was rooted in people’s routines, skills, and tacit knowledge. For the informal recyclers studied in this thesis, working professionally was a mechanism to legitimize their informal labour and to construct an identity of a legit and deserving member of the society. This finding also highlights the importance of paying attention to everyday law and moral systems that are at the core of the humane city through value formations. For instance, the environmental and social value of informal recycling raised the question whether the informal and the formal should always be placed at opposite ends, or could there be, between these ends, moral legitimization. Finding such avenues is important for recognizing the variety of agencies in the city, and for humanizing spaces where precarity is managed and resisted.

During this research process, I was asked where does precarity end. While this question remains unanswered by this thesis, it does highlight the timeliness of its topic. As long as there is no end at sight for precarity, we have an important task to alleviate its lived forms, that is, make precarious spaces more humane to be, feel, and act. In this task, I argue that it is crucial to recognize everyday practices of people as a voice through which they can participate and create knowledge in the city. This is particularly important in contexts of marginality and informality which might be overshadowed or unreachable by formal processes. Such an approach also reveals that marginality is not always hidden, but voiced through differently, as everyday practice in urban space.

There is a need for future research to deepen the idea of the humane city. Studying it empirically in different spatial contexts or developing it conceptually are both useful ways to proceed. It would be important to incorporate more diverse subjectivities, including women, young people, immigrants, and refugees. Empathy would also be a necessary aspect of the humane city to be studied further. Additionally, the understudied topic of informal recycling of cans and bottles provides various new possibilities for research, especially in the Nordics where welfare and a formal waste management systems can overlay informal activities. Useful topics include the scope of informal recycling, different profiles of recyclers, and the formal-informal nexus. Moreover, since the welfare cuts by the Finnish government are projected to increase economic and housing vulnerability in the future, the need to research how precarity is managed by people who are most affected will continue to be vital.

To summarize, this thesis argues that increasing knowledge of what is going on in precarious urban spaces is important for understanding inhumane and humane processes in the city. The thesis underlines three aspects of the humane city: (1) spaces of precarity that reveal the vulnerability of human subjects, (2) acts of solidarity, compromise, care, and trust building that constitute humane spaces, and (3) informal urban life that exposes everyday professionalism of people on the ground. These aspects highlight the importance of recognizing the agency and dignity of people, the role of places that are public, and the power of practice as a voice to participate in the city. Recognizing these aspects is necessary for the social sustainability of our cities, and for making them more humane places to live.

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