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# Living locked down – An autoethnographic approach to strategies of adaption to confined living in north Hesse, Germany<sup>†</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Based on autoethnographic observations and phenomenological descriptions of everyday life, this article develops a theory about the connection between challenging housing experiences and the lockdown situation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. A special focus is placed on living in community, i.e. living permanently together with other people. The reorganisation of spatial routines and the bundling of these in the flat led to the development of new methods of everyday life in terms of work, leisure and social behaviour. With the addition of theoretical role considerations, it is shown that the central challenge of life in the lockdown presents itself as a spatial crisis of role fulfilment.

**KEYWORDS:** confinement, living, lockdown, role theory, space

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## Introduction

At the end of 2019, the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pathogen triggered one of the biggest epidemics of the modern world. Shortly after the virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China, it spread across the globe. The unprecedented cosmopolitan and transnational interconnectedness of economic cycles, lifestyles and cultures was and is being severely shaken. The unimpeded flow of capital, information, goods and people have in many ways led to an increase in wealth-relevant indicators globally, even if particularly poor nations and population groups are excluded from this growth (see Jordá & Sarabia, 2015). These relationships and the cosmopolitan elite's need for multilocality enable rapid and extensive dispersal. Thus, Koopmans (2020, n.p.) writes that this class of cosmopolitans, "the princes of our globalised world", are the first to become infected and spread the disease across the world, but can weather it well with their endowment of knowledge and access to health-related resources, whereas poorer populations will be more affected by the consequences. Strong (1990), in the context of the rampant AIDS epidemic, formulated that the effects of a disease become apparent through its infectious nature and its social consequences (e.g. mistrust and stigma) which can even be much more severe. In the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, this is particularly evident in the different levels of availability of spatial resources that can be used to adapt to the lockdown conditions. Here, the social component of the pandemic becomes visible. As a result of the pandemic, staying in one's own home has intertwined in new ways with its spatial, social and temporal meaning. Being and staying at home becomes a

moral imperative, a legal obligation and an everyday necessity. With the closing of nursing facilities, the requirement to work from home and the elimination of many recreational activities meant that many of these functions shifted to the home. The private and the non-private, leisure and work, in short, the different and separate aspects of life are now bundled in the homes of people. The reorganisation of everyday life during lockdown must therefore consider the available spaces, the available time and the available social contacts to be able to meet the basal needs (e.g. leisure, privacy) and requirements (e.g. care, maintaining relationships). The more people share the same living space, the more diverse the needs and demands that have to be realised in the limited space of the residence. In this respect, living together differs greatly in its requirements, but also in its opportunities, with living alone. A dilemma emerges. On the one hand, it can itself be a resource for emotional, social, economic or organisational support, but at the same time it intensifies competition for the time and space resources that are necessary for individuals to successfully organise their everyday lives. For example, not only one person working from home has to use the living area as an office, but potentially several. Furthermore, residents' time demands on available space and each other are not necessarily synchronised (e.g. attention to the children during working hours). Since almost 80% of the population in Germany live together with at least one other person (*Lebensformen* [Forms of Living], 2020). Dealing with this dilemma is one of the major challenges of the pandemic. For most people, living in a lockdown means living in lockdown together.

## Research aim

The article develops a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between accessible spaces, and individual or household conflict during lockdown. For this purpose, the article leans on theoretical role (Dreitzel, 1980; Dahrendorfs, 2010) and symbolic interactionist (see Goffman, 1990) theories. The primary conflicts that arise from this are inter-role, resource-role and synchronicity conflicts. Inter-role conflicts are ones that arise between different roles that are active at the same time (e.g. work role versus leisure role). Resource-role conflicts are between the role and the lack of resources to fill the role (e.g. student role and lack of technical equipment). Synchronicity conflict is between individuals with asynchronous role expectations of each other (e.g. a child's expectations of parents during working hours). For the individual or the household, these conflicts represent breaks in successful interactions with themselves or others. Disruptions of the socio-spatial order concord with the increasing density of people and their life contents in a limited space because of (over) straining existing role routines and the means of adaptability. The change in spatio-temporal resources for role performance leads to innovation pressure on the organisation of the available resources and the behaviour of all users. These innovations can be the reduction of roles, the reduction of people, the increase of available space, or the reorganisation of the usage of resources. If the innovation is not (yet) successful, adequate role fulfilment is at permanent risk.

Directed by the method of research, the conclusions drawn are limited to local situations with a similar development of lockdown laws. Furthermore, the observations describe a dense portrayal and analysis of one particular case at one particular point of time in a singular social and economic situation. Thus the generalisation of the data should not be done in a way of broadening the conclusions for all different forms of households and forms of life, but in a way of reflecting on the social mechanisms identified and social practices disrupted by the lockdown. This article has a discussion and a framing about living under circumstances of lack of access to the public while living with others, thus contributing to a lively discourse about the burdens, chances, inequalities and different layers of living in lockdown.

## Methodological approach

Being a pre-study to a broader qualitative research project, the observations of the article are largely based on autoethnographic observations during the lockdown, especially with regard to changes in behavioural routines in one's own living space and with other residents. Meaning the changes of a) behaviour, b) perception of environment and c) perception of self of the researcher during the lockdown was the starting and finishing point of data and theoretical reflection. In this approach to autoethnographic research, the own experience is put into a reflective distance by becoming an observer of the first, second and third order. This follows the theory of Luhmann's observations of different orders: the first order – observing the observable from an individual perspective; the second order – observing the observer and its perspective to the observed; and the third order – observing the observations made by the first and second orders to reflect on them (Krause, 2001).

This allows us to enter reflexion, not just about the experience as an individual experience, but also about taking a step back and reflecting on the social mechanism leading to the new experiences and the reactions to them. Finally, it also allows us to reflect on the academic process that leads to the conclusions drawn from the observation of self-awareness and to write about and reflect on the methods that lead to the conclusions drawn. Attempting to take the position of all three levels of observation is the first step necessary to differentiate the experiences made from the reflections on them. By this, the anecdotal character of everyday life leads to a holistic view of the events, determining the reality and the change in that single case.

Many different approaches may be found under the concept of autoethnography, varying in the role of the self, the role of others and the observed focus. Chang (2008) identifies three types of autoethnographic approaches found in the academic field. The most common one is autoethnography focusing on the self and its experiences and placing the researcher as narrator, interpreter and collector of data. Others are only considered as part of this experience and thus only represented as contents of the experience of the researcher, but not as experiencing individuals themselves. Chang (2008) refers here to the studies done by Lazarre (1997), Nash (2002), Tillmann-Healey (1996) and Tompkins (1996). Approaching strongly varying topics of parental experiences with mixed-race children (Lazarre, 1997), the change in professorial role (Nash, 2002), bulimia disorder (Tillman-Healey, 1996) and educational biography (Tompkins, 1996), Chang (2008) identifies the similarity between these approaches in the positioning of others as supporting actors of the researcher's experience. For Chang (2008), the role of others in autoethnographic research is a core attribute differentiating the types. The second type described puts not only the experiences of the researcher into consideration and analysis, but also the experiences of others in similar situations as well, deeming them co-participants (Chang, 2008). This amounts to using the experiences of others in similar situations to reflect on one's own experiences like Foster et al. (2005) did to reflect on Foster and colleagues's experiences of parents with a psychological disorder, valuating the others and the self as equal sources of data. The third type described by Chang (2008) is taking one's own experience not only as the inspiration of the research, but giving up own experience as data resource, but allowing it to sensibly approach the topic and possible participants.

The autoethnographic approach allows an emphasis on the introspective phenomena of the researcher, but does not have to remain there. Estrangement from the self and yet taking it into account while reflecting on that process condenses the task of researching one's own physical and social environment, elevating it from just experiencing life. Yet for this article, the experiences of the researcher may build the source and foundation for the latter conclusions and reflections, but the focus lies not on the internal processes and feelings regarding living under lockdown. Instead, it relies on the observable changes in behaviour of the self and the social context, the changing role of artefacts and the im(possibility) of pre-pandemic routines of life and therefore not following approaches like Ruth Behar's (1996; 2013) by moving along the lines of a travel report, diary and anthropological/ autoethnographic research. To understand the influence of lockdown on behaviour and especially on residential living, the methodological perspective of Schütz' phenomenology is taken to give a dense description of the actual situations and

behavioural changes given during lockdown and taking the individual creation of meaning into account (Schütz & Luckmann, 2003). The autoethnographic character of research allows us to understand the subjective sense of the agent. That is, at the moment when researcher and researched coincide, the rare state of accessibility of subjective meaning and action can be understood. However, since the focus of the article is on the constitution of living in community during the lockdown, the intersubjective meaning strategies of the researched must also be taken into account. For this purpose, following the description of the research site and its conditions, the strategies and corresponding methods of everyday life are densely described through which the new living conditions are organised communally, thus following Schütz and Luckmann, leaning on Garfinkel's (1984) ethnomethodologically approach.

Yet, a structured reflection on the experience of living in lockdown after developing the research question of how living changed under pandemic conditions has to be addressed. Yet, it has to be addressed that a structured reflection on the experience of living in lockdown was primarily retrospective after developing the research question of how living changed under pandemic conditions. The observations contained mainly the changes of behaviour of the two inhabitants of the flat and the people of the nearby social environment. Colleagues, friends and family were informed about the topic of the research and the ongoing process of observation. Hence, the majority of the data concerns the researcher and his partner, thus no ethical misgivings seem to be present.

Besides the autoethnographic approach, an approximately two-hour-long digital video group interview was conducted with about 30 students, considering their reflections on living under lockdown and pandemic conditions. The interview was held after a series of lessons on lockdown and living from a sociological and city planning perspective. This was conducted by giving mostly narrative impulses and asking the students to describe their experiences during lockdown.

The video-recorded interview, as well as field notes, served for the later analysis. Yet, the data gathered this way is only taken into minor account in this article, which focuses on the experiences in changed behaviour of the researcher. If not explicitly mentioned, the observations described derive from the experiences and observations of the autoethnographic approach.

## Context of research

The residential context described is Kassel, Germany, a city in the centre of the country (population in 2021: 201 585). The city itself is located in the north of the state of Hesse and thus represents the infrastructure centre of the area.

The flat in which most of the observations were made is located in the centre of the city. It has about 70m<sup>2</sup> of space and is occupied by a couple, including a living room, a kitchen, bathroom, a bedroom/office, a guestroom/office and access to a small balcony. The rooms are connected via a small corridor. Besides the rooms in the flat, there was access to a cellar without electricity or light.

There are seven other flats in the building with similar size and layout. One of the flats on the first floor is significantly smaller and is mostly suited for a single person household. The composition of the other flats in the house varied a lot, from

single households to couples and families. During the lockdown period, at least three of the tenants changed, leaving one flat empty after the former tenant moved out. There is little to no neighbourly connection between the inhabitants of the building, besides receiving deliveries and occasional chats in the common areas.

The flat of the researcher, and thus the most researched environment, has a shared bedroom, a shared living room, an office/guestroom, as well as a corridor, kitchen, bathroom and small balcony. The household has no car for permanent and free use. Public transport is close, reliable and available at short intervals. Independently of this, all everyday needs (utilities, culture, health, leisure) can be reached with at least one opportunity within a few minutes' walk. Parks and green spaces are also available on a smaller scale, making small green areas reachable in less than 5 minutes and big parks in around 15 minutes of walking.

At the time, both residents of the flat worked as academic employees at the local university and accordingly had an office at the university. In the flat itself, there was a desk in the bedroom and a desk in the computer/guestroom.

The lockdown in Germany began in March 2020 and at its peak, all facilities that were not part of the so-called "essential infrastructure" were closed or severely restricted in their access. After a period of easing between May and October 2020, the lockdown began again in November 2020, tightening at an alarming rate, and continued into May 2021. Thus, the lockdown experience is divided into the first phase in March 2020 and the second phase in Germany's autumn to spring period 2021, interrupted by a phase of opening and ambiguity in the middle of 2020. The longest uninterrupted lockdown period in Germany was thus the second phase, with a length of about half a year.

In the following, the changes of behaviour, role management and interactions will be described and analysed concerning the new conditions of working, leisure time in real and virtual space and social interaction as everyday life happened almost completely between these spheres of living in lockdown.

## Behaviour and behavioural change

The impact of the pandemic led to significant changes in behaviour even before the official lockdown was established. In particular, social practices of togetherness, which previously took place through unreflective routines of making appointments, entered into new processes of negotiation. Friendly togetherness was no longer characterised exclusively by the mutual will to interact, but by questions about the moral justifiability of physical proximity to each other. With the introduction of a state-imposed lockdown on 22 March 2020, these debates about "*Soll-Normen*" (should norms) became sanctionable "*Muss-Normen*" (must norms) (Dahrendorf, 2010). Public space could only be visited alone or with a roommate, meetings with friends were restricted to one person from another household. Cultural institutions and much of the service sector were closed. People were only allowed to leave their residence for narrowly defined reasons such as work. At the same time, it was recommended that those who were able to do their work from home should do so or that the employer should create the opportunities for this. With the coming into force of these regulations, the behaviour in dealing with one's own living space changed abruptly.

This change in spatial and temporal availability of routine forced a radical restructuring of the everyday life (Fuchs, 2020). Risi et al. (2021) consider these changes as "reframing" everyday life in their studies on living under lockdown circumstances in Italy. This refers to Goffman's (1986) symbolic interactionist approach of understanding social (inter)action as interpreted through frames, allowing individuals to put sense into their own actions. The ability to perform a meaningfully directed social routine is thus the central intent for every individual. Manning (1992) develops this as the constant need for the individual to understand "what is going on" and thus which forms of social behaviour are appropriate for the situation. Risi et al.'s (2021) aim with their research, parallel to the aims of this article, describe the social mechanisms leading to reframing everyday life during living in lockdown.

## Work

The first, most obvious change in everyday life was the removal of the necessity of physically going to work, being there and coming back. This meant that the associated events such as crossing the city and using public transport were no longer necessary, and contact with colleagues was no longer possible. At the same time, however, the time spent in the flat multiplied and the contact with the partner who also lived in the flat increased significantly. For both residents, the beginning and the end of work could no longer be clearly differentiated by spatial boundaries of the respective offices. Accordingly, work and leisure time could only be distinguished in terms of time.

The central artifact of "work activity" was the laptop provided by the employer. Each of the residents would exclusively use one designated laptop available in the household – one permanently situated on the desk in the bedroom, the other without a fixed place in the flat. While a desk was available in the computer room, this was occupied by a personal computer and thus was a central place of leisure. The partner, on the other hand, did not use her desk as a place for leisure activities, but as a workplace. So the usage of the laptops overlapped with the actual usage of the temporally or permanently designated workspace. That is, when work was done in the living room, the use of the living room as a common place of recreation overlapped with its use as a private workspace. At the same time, the stationary computer work station in the bedroom changed the usage and meaning of the room from a shared space for both residents to an individual working space for only one of them. Due to the availability of the original equipment of the rooms, the actual function was also at least potentially permanently available and thus competed with the conversion to a place of work for attention. When it came to the asynchronous claim of both occupants to the same room, strategies had to be developed to resolve this contradiction. At the beginning of the pandemic, this was often solved through a return to the primary use of the rooms, while giving up their use as a workspace. Due to the constant presence of both residents in the flat, a constant personal exchange was much more likely. The offered functions of the available rooms (e.g. living room) made it easy to switch from one activity (e.g. work) to another (e.g. leisure conversations, cleaning up). These multiple options on site changed "working" into a dynamic activity that could be stopped and started repeatedly, but without being able to be completed fully as long as the "laptop" as a physical

manifestation of the "work" could not be excluded from the living areas. With ongoing time in lockdown, several methods of separating different spheres of life were attempted. One of the first was to store the laptop out of sight. Furthermore, fixed times were set for spatial usage and there were limitations on non-work-related interactions in designated rooms for designated times. The attempt at separation was founded in the experience of lesser efficiency of work and lower quality of leisure time.

In addition to the major task of socio-spatial organisation of work inside the flat, there was the challenge of maintaining collegial contact and cooperation – including the formalised contents of work. Informal contents of regular personal contact were abruptly disrupted without any immediate replacement strategies available. Telephone calls, email exchanges and later video conferences closed the gap for formalised exchanges relatively quickly, but could not maintain the quality of informal interaction.

With the progression to normalisation of video conferencing for work at home, new areas of conflict emerged. With a lack of separation of work and leisure locations at home, cameras not only showed the participants, but also a view into private spaces normally far from the professional context of work. Thus, work did not just invade spaces normally separated, but the video conferences also opened private spaces to the gaze of colleagues and superiors. Being in front of the camera, the private space becomes part of the work context of others and thus, via this interaction, the content of one's own work activity. As a result, the private and the intimate can no longer be freely portrayed in one's own home where it used to be unconcealed. In the observed case, the bed was in the field of view of the camera from the work space in the bedroom. The bed as a genuinely private space in the home now had to be prepared and presented in a way that was appropriate to be seen in the work context. The appropriate and the inappropriate had to be evaluated and checked to see whether they were visible in the background of the camera or not. The design of previously private spaces becomes an obligation similar to how clothes and appearance needed to be chosen appropriate for the work environment. Instead of making sure to be properly dressed, one was now pressured to choose the right representation for the background of the video calls.

While the visible was more limited and thus less restrictive in terms of everyday appearance, the gaze went deeper and thus penetrated further into the spheres of self-determination and leisure. Colleagues owning symbols of education-oriented university work placed them in the frame of the visible (instruments, books), while others picked the inconspicuous and innocuous. The camera's gaze and the microphone, however, cut through the space of the private even further. Insofar as one did not live alone, the double use of space was now not only characterised by distraction or lack of space, but by the visibility of the other, the impossibility to cross their own private space unseen by strangers and forced to adapt their own language, music and sound volume to the appropriateness of a conference taking place in their own home, without taking part in it. This limited not just the private space and leisure time of the working person, but also those of co-inhabitants.

Therefore, the video call room was made an actual "space" with defined rules and boundaries. With the advent of



"Zoom"<sup>1</sup> as the preferred video conference tool, the technical means to disguise the background of one's own visibility became established relatively quickly. Now either the sight into the private was blocked by digital means, or an audio-visual window of the non-private was designed and displayed between the view of the cameras and the reach of the microphones. Parallel methods of non-interrupting, like turning the microphone off while others were speaking, or raising a virtual "hand", developed to handle working together in one's own home (e.g. team meetings).

### Leisure time – real space

Through the reduction of all life's contents to one place (the dwelling), physical and social mobility became extremely limited, but at the same time the functional distinction of spaces became weaker. Yet, even if mobility were possible, mobility itself was not equivalent to social contact or opportunity, but the act of transit, e.g. in one's own car, is isolation in movement. The same can be stated for using public transportation under social distancing measures. Without places to go and people to meet, mobility has no social meaning by itself (see Sheller & Urry, 2006), thus overemphasising that accessible mobility may shorten the perspective of the relevance of distinguishable places to go. When all spheres of life were concentrated in one place, their spatio-temporal distinctions began to blur. The originally ascribed usages of space in the home were now competing with newly ascribed functions (workspace – leisure space). In particular, the decoupling of work from the availability of work spaces and the associated temporal decoupling have already been outlined. With the lockdown, however, the dwelling was not only put under pressure to be innovative in integrating workspaces, but at the same time to incorporate appropriate leisure functions. The loss of the service sector, cultural institutions and sports facilities meant that a large part of the potential leisure activities outside the home were no longer available. At the same time, one's own home was no longer exclusively a place of privacy, recreation and intimacy. Spatial separation, either from the private sphere or from work, could therefore no longer be guaranteed by retreating to work or to the home, but only by leaving the home for the public space, which at that time was almost functionless, or a forbidden place to visit. Even as a social meeting place, it could hardly be used or only with a relatively high organisational effort, considering the restrictions stemming from lockdown measures and disease control measures. The use of public space without the presence of its offers significantly reduced the practices of demarcation from the total life in the flat to walking and grocery shopping. Walking in particular represented an individual and social practice of breaking through the spatial monotony and exuberant demands of expectation of the home.

The quality of leisure activities available at home promoted blurring the boundaries between leisure and work. The home itself had hardly any opportunities for leisure activities other than computer use and media consumption. The passive consumption of media content was not symmetrical to the creative activity of work, and thus guilt and lethargy became

interwoven. However, the longer the lockdown progressed, the more attempts were made to replace the consuming logic of lethargy with creative hobbies and thus to contrast it with an equivalent use of time and space within the home. Moreover, as already mentioned, work from home could only be done via digital means and thus hardly differed from recreational media consumption in the pure, physical practice of looking at and evaluating screen content. The advantage of media-consuming leisure activities during the lockdown was the low demands on space required. Although there were dedicated rooms for this, the availability of smartphones and laptops meant that the same content was available everywhere in the flat and thus at least flexible enough not to compete directly with overlapping room uses. In particular, the availability of multiple mobile devices meant that there were no conflicts of synchronicity between residents.

This was not true for all devices, however. The personal computer generally used for playing games was not mobile in the flat due to technical requirements. Although all the tasks of work could have been done on the stationary computer, especially since it was on a desk, this place was kept as far away as possible from the intermingling of uses. To allow for new recreational activities in the flat, heavy use was made of artistic and sporting activities. Sporting activities especially took a level of high importance. The lack of mobility not only appeared in the lack of mobility over distances, but also in the mobility as movement of the physical body. Several studies show that leisure time sports and exercises (LTSE) have a beneficial effect on mental well-being (Wiese et al. 2018; Mutz et al., 2021). Mutz (2021) even states that a reduction of LTSE during lockdown led to a decrease in general well-being, while an increase of LTSE during lockdown led to an increase in general well-being. Reflecting on that, sporting activities done during the lockdown appeared, due to their undeniable physical character, as temporal kinetic artefacts of role certainty, thus structuring time and space for exercise, and therefore allowing less to no parallel interpretation of role demands and space during their appearance. Explicit places with a certain permanence were created especially for artistic activities such as weaving and pottery. For example, the dining room table could no longer be used as such for a long time, since it was now used as a place for handcrafting and painting. The newly created leisure activities were characterised by a strongly physical component – moving one's own body or sculpting clay. The need for specific coordinative processes and the use of equipment (e.g. sports equipment, modelling clay) separated these activities more strongly from the competing offers of space and thus created bubbles of uniqueness in the unbounded living space.

### Leisure time – virtual space

As central as the perception of physical hobbies became, using the computer in leisure recreation remained central for one of the residents. This was not just because it was used for playing games, but also because social contacts could be cultivated that way despite the conditions of the lockdown. Playing on the computer was drastically different from the simple logic of media consumption at the beginning, because progress and change only took place through the active influence of the player. Gaming was drastically different in its dynamics from the stagnation of everyday life during the lockdown.

1 "Zoom" is a digital conference platform allowing people to engage in video-calls. Parallel a chat function is available. Zoom is one of the most commonly used platforms for video-calls during the lockdown in the researchers work context.

At the same time, an unlimited virtual space expanded a very limited physical space. Just like physical space, this has its own spatial dimensions, internal laws of physics and concepts of "inside" and "outside". Even if the virtual space cannot be fully autonomous from physical space, it has its very own quality of being a phenomena and thus can be filled with individual meaning (see Kofoed-Ottesen, 2020). In general, the meaning and the discussion of the relation between the physical experience of existence and the possibilities of the virtual can be discussed in a much deeper sense than is possible at this point (e.g. Breuer, 2020; Kofoed-Ottesen, 2020). The freedom of moving one's body, even if only in the form of an virtual avatar, through open worlds was now doubly attractive. On the one hand, there was the possibility of experiencing something, and on the other, much more fundamentally, of deciding freely about the positioning of one's body in the world. Aside from playing in worlds free of corona-imposed restrictions, the computer also made it possible to play with each other. This was either with people in existing online communities, or with friends from the pre-existing social environment in real life whom, due to a lack of alternatives, now resorted more to computer games themselves. At the same time, what happened on the computer, in its almost infinite expanse of digital space, was not in spatial competition with the necessities of physical space. Only the attention of the person playing the game on the computer or with his partner in the physical realm had to be synchronised. Accordingly, the use of the computer as a provider of tasks and of change was elementary for coping with the lockdown for one of the residents, while the person who did not play on the computer fell into states of boredom much more quickly. However, the computer's position in replacing social and everyday content did not last. As time went on, it became clear, on the one hand, that the maintenance of social contacts via purely digital means did not achieve the same quality as physical contact, without this quality being describable. On the other hand, it could not be denied that virtual worlds ultimately have only limited, repetitive content that lacks the special quality of the physical so that, in the end, even when actively playing, a feeling of pure consumption set in and the physical hobbies described above came to the fore.

### Meeting each other

The third major change during the lockdown were the opportunities and methods of contact with other people. Changes in formal contact with colleagues have already been described above, so now the changes in contact with friends and family as well as informal contact with colleagues are addressed. The primary point of contact during the lockdown was in the couple relationship. Most of the adjustments to the new circumstances had to be negotiated with the partner. At the same time, the mode of interaction with each other required little adaption since spending a large amount of free time together was already common before lockdown. However, the lockdown had a major impact on a central method of the relationship: conversation. With the loss of one's own unshared experiences in everyday life, the content for possible conversations was reduced to either one's own sense of lockdown experiences or the discussion of explicit content from the news or other media. After some time, this reduction of discussable content led to an

increased need for external information and friendly contact with people outside the partnership.

Under the lockdown conditions, this could be established via electronic means or via strictly selected walks with friends that complied with the applicable rules. The non-digital forms of contact were characterised by a strong physical distance and simultaneous regret for the lack of closeness through hugs, for example. On the other hand, it became apparent that these meetings were reduced to highly selective contact persons. These then mostly took the form of joint walks and conversations and were thus strongly dependent on the weather. The acts of personal greetings (e.g. hugs) gave way to new forms of physical greetings (foot bumps, elbow bumps, small bows) which, however, did not have a variation of intimate and non-intimate, and thus the greeting between the friend and the stranger could only be distinguished by looks and words.

Just as central as the possibility of walking were the options of digital contact. In contrast to the work context, however, it was not primarily "Zoom", but "Discord"<sup>2</sup> that prevailed as a communication platform. This separation was another attempt to divide the content of work (Zoom) from that of leisure time (Discord) and to draw boundaries in the unbounded. Here, too, the same conditions applied as described above in the work context, although here too the view was not directed from the non-private to the private, but from the private to the private. The view of the friend into one's own home and vice versa. This meant that a large part of the methods of concealment also fell away and the visible was even extended to allow a further and deeper look into one's own home. At the same time, the strict enforcement of mutes (as in Zoom meetings) was dispensed with so that the conversations were more difficult to follow, but the exchanges followed the natural order of the social group. Getting together was given a certain formalisation through the planning of the get-together, but at the same time, there were no concrete occasions other than the get-together itself. There, people could play, drink and talk together. But even the act of conversing was changed through the new methods of doing so, especially in the way that the usually unstructured order of talking, with people talking parallel to each other, became much less dynamic. Instead, the practice of taking turns became established during talking online with friends. As time progressed in the lockdown, however, these methods of social gathering also became less common because although they allowed contact, on the one hand, the available technical equipment for games etc. varied greatly and the relevant content that could be conveyed through the pure logic of conversation became less. In contact with several people in a household, different methods of participating in the group conversation became apparent. Either a computer or mobile phone was used through which all residents could communicate, or two (or more) devices were used in the flat, so that even the residents of one flat communicated via digital means for the time of the meeting. Especially in the second case, even possible physical social exchanges were replaced by digital exchanges, meaning that each of the inhabitants of the residence, although both present in the same flat, were talking via digital means during the group chat. Firstly, this way of communication was much better

<sup>2</sup> "Discord" is a free platform for text chatting, sound transmission, video calls and shared multimedia. It is capable of organising temporary and permanent group chats as well as individual communication channels.

supported by the available technical means, and secondly, it equalised the spatial relationship of all participants. The physical proximity of the persons became irrelevant for the time of the group meetings and so the quality of social interaction was more symmetrical between all participants.

## Summary

Overall, it has been shown that in the observed case many methods developed to organise everyday living during lockdown, especially the changed negotiation of space which affected time usage and social contact. However, with an ongoing time in lockdown, many of the methods decayed or just vanished because what they tried to replace, they could not sufficiently emulate. They were not revolutionary improvements to the status, but a temporarily deficient replacement used only until it could be discarded. Thus, while not directly affected by the virus, the health crisis resulting from COVID-19 occurred as a crisis of space in the observed household.

## Observation, space and role

Combining the autoethnographic observations made in the studies by Risi et al. (2020) and first reflections on the group interview data, it can be shown that specific changes and crises of role management reappear. Thus, it is necessary to develop a theoretical framework to frame and understand the influence of locked down and pandemic living as not only crisis of health, but of social order. Inferring abductively from the observed phenomena of living together under lockdown, I developed the following theory of spatial conflict in lockdown. For this, approaches of symbolic interactionism and role theory are primary used. First, the concepts of "community" and "housing" will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications of each for the research question. Finally, the modelling of the relationship between lockdown and community will follow theoretical role approaches.

To approach the questions of what living together in lockdown means, central terms of togetherness and living have to be clarified. For that, it is necessary to introduce the concepts of "community" and "housing". To do justice to this, a brief theoretical embedding and presentation of their applicability follows. Community is developed as a counter-concept of society in the considerations of Tönnies (2005), Weber (2009), Plessner & Fischer (2006) and, by extension, Durkheim (2016). Tönnies (2005) determines the central logic of distinction based on the concepts of the *Kürwille* (roughly: free will) and the *Wesenswille* (roughly: will of essence).

The *Kürwille* describes the relationship to other people, shaped by the intention to realise one's own, individual goals, and thus describes life in society. The *Wesenswille* on the other hand is characterised by the orientation of the individual towards the goals of the collective, and thus describes life in community. For Tönnies, there are three basic forms of community:

- Community of blood (kinship)
- Community of place (neighbourhood)
- Community of the spirit (friendship)

If we take Tönnies' (2005) assumptions as a basis, living in community means living with relatives, friends and couples, or in neighbourhood relationships. With this theoretical classification,

family living arrangements and couple households are clearly identifiable as forms of "communal" living. The concepts of free will (*Kürwille*) and essence (*Wesenswille*) become important, if one transfers their meaning to the research question (i.e. How has the organisation of residential living changed during the lockdown?). Explicit living together (*Kürwille*) justifies its "communality" from its purposefulness, while implicit living together (*Wesenswille*) is a consequence or practice of social connectedness, meaning that living together for the purpose of housing (e.g. *Kürwille*) differs strongly in its basal structure from living together as a method of a couple relationship (e.g. *Wesenswille*). This separation enables an analytical assignment of different forms of "community" as a resource for different purposes.

A brief theoretical examination of housing, its tasks and its changes follows. If we now look at Häußermann and Siebel's (2000) analyses of the changes in housing, the drastic nature of this change is revealed. For them, one central factor is the change in the necessity of the functions that the living space or housing itself must perform:

The professional activity of women, the outsourcing of the old and sick to old people's homes and sanatoria, the placement of children in crèches, day-care centres and (all-day) schools or the renunciation of children altogether, the development of the technical and social infrastructure, of personal services, the increasing mobility in leisure time, the development of the hotel and restaurant industry and leisure facilities, in general the increasing market- or state-like organisation of more and more areas of life, all this has led to the fact that no one is inevitably dependent on their own home any more (Häußermann & Siebel, 2000, p. 14).

This shift of function from the home to the realm of the public and services accordingly also reduces the services that existing housing still had to or can perform. A counter-concept is the "whole house" developed by Otto Brunner (1968), which in pre-modern times united all functional areas and life processes in one functional unit (i.e. a courtyard or house).

Thus, "living" now finds itself in the field of tension between the changed task profile of the living space and the disappearance of physical services and recreational activities in the non-private. The concept of modern housing is reaching the limits of its affordability due to the demands of the lockdown phases. The "whole house", on the other hand, although no longer a farm or general production facility, finds itself with the possibility of reintegrating as many of its functions as possible even though they were previously no longer present in one's own living space. Thus, those who have more space or rooms are more likely to be able to integrate a workroom, fitness room, care room, recreation room, etc. into the existing living space than those who do not have the necessary space. For example, given the circumstances described above, no extra rooms or spaces were available and so all integrated functions got into direct competition for space with already existing functions. The worse the economic situation of someone, the more the described spatial competition increases. On one hand, there is no spatial overspill left for integrating new functions, and on the other hand new functions are probably not affordable to be integrated in the first place.



Häußermann and Siebel (2000) developed four key characteristics of modern housing. Since the first three features are directly affected by lockdown developments, they are directly connected to the observed data. Assumptions can already be formulated regarding their consequences for community living during lockdown:

- (a) *Separation of work and housing* is made much more difficult by the rise of the home office;
- (b) *Limitation of persons in the household*: Living as a couple household at great physical distance from family because of career mobility, resulting in more, but exclusively existing, households;
- (c) *Separation of public and private spheres* takes place through similar mechanisms as the dissolution of boundaries between work and home. The privacy of the home or the household, but also the privacy of the individual, is coming under pressure because non-private contents must also be realised in private spaces. As described in the gaze of the camera into the private space. It not only allows work contents to mix with leisure time, it also blurs the borders between private and public, creating a window of public visibility inside spheres of intimacy and privacy; and
- (d) *Emergence of the housing market as a commodity* (Häußermann & Siebel, 2000, p. 15).

The ability to deal with decreasing, functional differentiation of living spaces, while at the same time increasing the functional scope of spaces, has strong implications for life in community. With the concentration of many areas of life on the home or the immediate living environment, many roles and role expectations, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, fall into a space that is physically strongly limited and temporally strongly delimited. The density of roles that can be attached to each other increases drastically, especially in multi-person households with simultaneous presence.

Each person is in a constant and reciprocal state of assuming the role appropriate to a situation or person, with the implicit aim of preventing "loss of face" or conflict (see Goffman, 2017), that is, to be able to understand the behavioural expectations appropriate to an interaction or place and to perform the corresponding actions. The clashing roles of two or more people are not always compatible, so conflict, avoidance or agreement may occur (e.g. the usage of the living room as a work place). In addition to this, role conflicts can also occur within a person, namely when either two different roles make conflicting demands on the individual (inter-role conflict: e.g. partner role – employee role), or different groups of people have conflicting expectations of a role of the individual (intra-role conflict e.g. differing expectations from one's self and partner in the roommate role). Furthermore, the successful exercise of roles requires both the necessary resources and the necessary knowledge of the individual on how to fulfil the expected role (see Dahrendorf, 2010).

Certain role expectations are tied to certain times, places or resources. For example, the role of the employee is clearly delimited from other roles by being in certain places at certain times. Role delimitation thus ensures a lower probability of role conflicts occurring within a person and between persons (e.g. by declaring certain places at certain times as areas of work for certain people living together). If this is not possible,

Dreitzel (1980) even speaks of the possibility of role anomy, i.e. the impossibility of recognising and implementing the acutely applicable role requirements (e.g. in equally strong expectations of partnership and employment without external support through spatial orientation). This represents a serious upheaval of the social situation that can only be overcome through very few strategies (including escape and open conflict). In the absence of resources or the necessary delineation of role performance and expectations, it is this anomic role condition that weakens community as a resource and strengthens it as a field of conflict.

Spaces, time and disconnected or synchronous everyday management of individuals coincide. The spatial resources necessary for some roles are not available or only available in competition (e.g. sports role/fitness room). The worker role in a couple household can be constantly forced into negotiation by the expectations of a roommate or oneself for the partner role, the roommate role, the private role, etc. As long as the activities are not synchronised, the role of the worker is not available or only available competitively. As long as the activities are not synchronised or spatially separated, a diffuse role situation can arise for the participants, who can determine neither which roles are primarily valid based on the location nor the available resources. These findings strongly connect to the results of Risi et al. (2021). One major point of experiencing a crisis of routine is the inclusion of all life contents inside one place and so leading to feelings of stress (Risi et al., 2021). Following Risi et al. (2021) and bringing back in Goffman's (1990) approach to symbolic interactionism, the former described role anomy as a result of the inability to differentiate between different audiences to perform certain sets of behaviour – a blurring of the so-called front stage and backstage for adequate role performance (Risi et al., 2021). The findings this article support the conclusions of Risi et al. (2021), especially their results which consider the weakened power of space to organise everyday life. Rosa and Scheuermann (2009) deem time the scarcest resource of modern life, while Risi et al. (2021) add that space was the most needed and less available resource during lockdown. But space and time cannot be treated separately, independent of physics or social science. The daily routine of living life is a complex socio-spatio-temporal regime which is strongly reliant on the spatio-temporal uniqueness of social interactions to allow successful role management and role performance. Statements made by the participants of the interview support these findings, reporting that the missing limitations of space and social expectation led to feelings of uncertainty, especially considering leisure time and working time.

## Conclusion

The lockdown led to a drastic change in the spatial, temporal and social order of everyday life and in particular the role of the home. As the observations showed, new methods of coping with everyday life developed relatively quickly under the new conditions. The observed strategies were shown to emulate the lost contents of life in an attempt to replace them, but also revealed the failing, development and consolidation of new methods of spatial organising while living in the lockdown. The developed strategies evolved along the premise of role orientation and avoiding, or dealing with, emerging role conflicts. The rampant epidemic thus takes on a social character that favours those with more space per capita, digital interfaces

and knowledge of how to deal with them. The more people share a lockdown container and the less space is available for each person (e.g. a flat) and the more roles each individual "possesses", the more serious the role pressure becomes for each individual. This is not to say that people living alone do not experience pressure from the pandemic, but they are drastically different in quality from those living in community. The analyses here are mainly limited to the "modern" housing that is prevalent in Germany and large parts of Europe and contrasts with the "whole house" described above (although Germany has one of the largest rental housing markets in Europe). The questions that remain unanswered here are to what extent similar phenomena can be observed internationally, to what extent alternative house projects are affected and whether forms of living and housing in the context of rural structures are also primarily affected by role delimitation or rather by phenomena of collective isolation. Accordingly, it is advisable to deepen the research on living conditions in situations of limited access to the public beyond autoethnographic approaches, allowing for broader and more diverse insights into the reality of a socio-spatial crisis of living.

Conditions of forced multi-residence in one's own home can also be expected beyond the COVID-19 pandemic due to the intensification of the climate crisis. Heat waves, cold snaps, storms or social unrest and poverty, and the resulting inability to participate, are all causes or reasons for an increased stay in one's own living space without being able to fall back on the offerings of public space. In this sense, this article should help us to better understand how to deal with these times and to be able to design "living" in a way that is capable of meeting these needs in the future.

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