

EXPERIENCES OF PLACE-BOUND SOCIALITY AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENT-RELATED COPING STRATEGIES

ANNA STADLMEIER, DOMINIK KREMER and BLAKE BYRON WALKER

With 2 figures and 2 tables

Received 16 September 2021 · Accepted 27 June 2022

Summary: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, places of public encounter were effectively inhibited by lockdown regulations. In addition to several quantitative studies of the impact of the ongoing pandemic on society, little is known about the use of one's spatial environment on individual coping strategies mitigating physical isolation. Through an explorative qualitative study we derived a typology of coping strategies that helped participants to balance responsible action and the urgent need for social contact. Our approach aligns with well-known theory in the field of place (CRESSWELL 2020) and place-bound sociality (cf. SCHATZKI 2002) in the context of phenomenology (SLOAN & BOWE 2014, REHORICK 1991, SEAMON 1979). Sixteen participants were selected reflecting diverse conceptualisation of community and representing socioeconomic and gender diversity in both urban and rural areas of the German state of Bavaria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the beginning of the second wave of COVID-19 restrictions from the end of November 2020 to early December, to reflect expectations and early routines associated with the isolation. In addition to social and individual, a variety of environment-related coping strategies can be observed. We (1) interpret those coping strategies, (2) discuss the essential function of places for the coordination and negotiation of social activities, and (3) relate the importance of public spaces to weak social ties (GRANOVETTER 1973) emphasising their outstanding value for individual wellbeing.

Zusammenfassung: Im Kontext der COVID-19-Pandemie wurden öffentliche Orte der Begegnung durch Präventionsmaßnahmen effektiv abgeriegelt. Neben quantitativen Studien über die Auswirkungen der aktuellen Pandemie auf die Gesellschaft ist nur wenig darüber bekannt, wie sich die räumliche Umgebung auf individuelle Bewältigungsstrategien auswirkt, die die Folgen physischer Isolation abmildern. Im Rahmen einer explorativen qualitativen Studie haben wir eine Typologie der Bewältigungsstrategien abgeleitet, die den Teilnehmern halfen, ein Gleichgewicht zwischen verantwortungsvollem Handeln und dem dringenden Bedürfnis nach sozialen Kontakten herzustellen. Unser Ansatz orientiert sich an bekannten Theorien zur Beschreibung von Ort (CRESSWELL 2020) und ortsgebundener Praxis (vgl. SCHATZKI 2002), allerdings mit einem auf die individuelle Erfahrung bezogenen Verständnis von Phänomenologie (SLOAN & BOWE 2014, REHORICK 1991, SEAMON 1979). Für die Studie wurden sechzehn Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer aus unterschiedlichen Communities ausgewählt, die die sozioökonomische Variabilität von Gesellschaft in städtischen wie auch in ländlichen Gebieten des deutschen Bundeslandes Bayern repräsentieren. Die semi-strukturierten Interviews wurden zu Beginn der zweiten Welle der COVID-19-Pandemie von Ende November bis Anfang Dezember 2020 durchgeführt, um die mit der absehbaren Isolation verbundenen Erwartungen und die zu diesem Zeitpunkt bereits ausgebildeten Routinen im Umgang mit der Pandemie zu reflektieren. Zusätzlich zu sozialen und individuellen kann eine Vielzahl von umweltbezogenen Bewältigungsstrategien beobachtet werden. Wir (1) interpretieren diese Bewältigungsstrategien, (2) erörtern die wesentliche Funktion von Orten für die Koordinierung und Aushandlung sozialer Praxis, (3) stellen die Bedeutung öffentlicher Räume für schwache soziale Bindungen heraus (GRANOVETTER 1973) und betonen deren herausragenden Wert für das individuelle Wohlbefinden.

Keywords: Coping capacities, place research, health geography, resilience, COVID-19, Bavaria

1 Social routines in disruption

State measures to contain and control the COVID-19 pandemic through physical isolation brought with them significant ad hoc transformation of enacted social routines and experienced societal rhythms. Regulations to reduce infection risk continue to become increasingly normalised (FÄHRMANN et al. 2020: 3), encouraged, and eventually intuitive (MOSER 2020: 25), and while these measures are demonstrably effective at reducing incidence, scholar-

ship is only now beginning to explore and assess the impacts of these transformations on the everyday lived experiences of *homo socialis* (PÉREZ-ESCODA et al. 2020: 2). Given the sheer range and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the extent to which daily routines have been altered (BIESS 2020: 38), it becomes imperative that the impacts and adaptations are examined at a placially and temporally granular scale and in an interdisciplinary manner.

Of specific interest in this inquiry are the ways in which placially-bound and social routines of the

individual have changed whilst pandemic control measures are in effect. The various strategies for reshaping daily interaction and maintaining social connectedness are both intertwined and bound to place (SCOTT 2020: 343). A person's coping capacity and resilience to disruptions of social routines are therefore (partial) functions of social network and place-bound community constructs, both of which are directly linked to human health and wellbeing (GLANZ & SCHWARTZ 2008: 211; HEANEY & ISRAEL 2008: 180). The fundamental conflict arises between the human need for social contact and the risk of transmission that social contact provokes. The social coping capacity and adaptability of an individual (including their willingness to follow regulations) therefore has a significant influence on the spread of the virus and therefore on the governmental measurements (DRYHURST et al. 2020: 8; SCOTT 2020: 343).

In this study, we focus on theory-informed empirical interpretation of qualitative data from the perspective of human geography and the social sciences to interrogate placial and non-placial coping strategies of a sample of study participants in Bavaria, Germany, providing initial steps towards a more embodied understanding of social adaptation as responses to disruption of the social function of places.

1.1 Everyday spatiality in lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a disruptive event, transforming society in general, but especially the everyday spatiality of routines and practices (ALIPOUR et al. 2020: 8). Whereas the socio-cultural structure of discourses constraining and sanctioning access to space and place have been subject to inquiry before (GLASZE & MATTISEK 2021), the unique characteristics of the pandemic challenge established everyday spatial routines in distinctive ways. Within days of so-called "lockdown" rules coming into effect, meanings of place were inverted from sites of social life to governed entities meant to measure and contain infection (KAUFMANN et al. 2020: 329). Spaces of social contact immediately lost their ascribed and experienced functions as sites of continuous exchange, particularly in less digitalised communities in the Global South (ALIPOUR et al. 2020).

Consequently, creating semi-transparent digital spaces as alternatives for normal life underlines the need of socializing as a vital function of society (SANDSTORM & DUNN 2014a: 2). This served the purpose of staying in touch with friends and fam-

ily through the pandemic (KAUFMANN et al. 2020: 325). From a simple hug to the sites of the social themselves, e.g. restaurants, clubs or open spaces, research shows that many qualities of haptic or bodily experiences of social contact have not been replaced by digital means (KAUFMANN et al. 2020: 330). MIRONOWICZ et al. (2021) points particularly to an absence of movement in public space, both in urban as well as rural areas, as an immediate and socially experienced impact of the restrictions. Weighing the need for physical social contact against the widely accepted need to comply with infection control measures, many people adopted their own rules and routines, a grey zone defined by one's own degree of risk taken (KAUFMANN et al. 2020: 330). Interestingly, instead of dense urban spaces, rural areas and urban greenspace became core stages of social interaction and wellbeing (KAUFMANN et al. 2020: 328; MIRONOWICZ et al. 2021: 15f.).

1.2 Placing social practices

In our study, we looked for theory-grounded concepts that allowed us to explain empirical results regarding the interdependency of a pandemic situation, place-based regulations and individual (re-)action in coping with both of them. In this context, the well-established place theory merged and developed by CRESSWELL (2004, 2010, 2020) and based on the earlier works of AGNEW (2003), TUAN (1977), SEAMON (1980) and RELPH (1976) in the context of phenomenological geography (HEIDEGGER 1993) provides us with the key perspective to analyse individual coping strategies when spatially bound regulations inhibited place-bound social life. In doing so, we followed an empirical and analytical understanding of phenomenology in the sense of individual spatial experiences (see also KREMER 2018) shaping spatial reactions to the pandemic, rather than pursuing a holistic one. We also enriched this theoretical vantage point with additional insights derived from the impactful work from SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN (2003) and SCHATZKI (2002) to highlight that the place of the pandemic is created by processes in the social realm first-hand. In interrogating coping strategies of individuals in general, we were able to explain their spatial consequences beyond obvious symptomatic observations, e.g. empty streets. It is not our intention to derive an overarching theoretical framework of the site of the social as partially being placial, rather to be able to solidify and contextualise our empirical findings through theory-informed reflection.

In essence, CRESSWELL (e.g. 2020: 117f.) distinguishes between *location*, *locale*, and *sense of place*. While location is not conceptualised as geoposition, rather as node in a relational space, locale signifies material settings at locations, both visible and tangible to the sensory experience of the observer. Sense of place refers to the sense-making of these arrangements by individual feelings and emotions that can produce very personal and individual meanings (on the subjectivity of spatial sense-making; see also SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN 2003: 54, 98 and DÖRFLER & ROTHFUSS 2018: 99). Eventually, those ascribed meanings form the ground on which individual action takes place (HASSE 2017: 356). Besides those meanings being individual, they are not only framed by earlier personal experiences, but also by media or other mediations in specific socio-cultural settings. SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN (2003: 75f.) emphasize that sense-making of place is coordinated between individuals through *co-presence* (see also ROTHFUSS & DÖRFLER 2021) and *communication* (CRESSWELL 2020: 121). As this coordination relies on the range of the human body, places can be either immediately accessible (the world within actual reach) or temporarily absent but thought to persist for recurring action (restorable reach) (SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN 2003: 71f.). This can also be expected for virtual environments (ROTHFUSS & DÖRFLER 2021: 158). Everyday mobility uses places as anchors of daily life (CRESSWELL 2020: 122). Vice versa, places require not mere presence, but recurring mobility to be enacted (CRESSWELL 2010). Individuals present at specific places are able to manipulate the locale according to their needs and resources (zone of operation) (SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN 2003: 77). In effect, places are continuously reconfigured by daily spatial practices. As the materiality of a place is the result of all preceding individual actions relying on individual experiences and sense-making, the locale raises constraints for all further interactions as it inhibits particular actions and enables others (CRESSWELL 2020: 117). In sum, social life is an *assemblage* of places, (individual) meanings, and (social) practices (CRESSWELL 2020: 123). Following CRESSWELL (2020: 120), the interesting question becomes: which social processes lead to inclusion or exclusion of particular types of sense-making and action?

This is largely consistent with SCHATZKI'S (2002) concept of the *site of the social*. The theoretical vantage point is just slightly adjusted from individual experiences to social practice. Similar to place theory, "places only exist within and through activities that arrange surrounding entities and meanings. On the other hand, activities occur amidst these ar-

rangements" (EVERTS et al. 2011: 327). In addition to CRESSWELL'S locale, SCHATZKI (2002) distinguishes *material* and *non-material arrangements* with non-material arrangements being formed by the visible commitment of on-site individual actions to specific discourses. In this social environment, places are constantly (re)shaped by social practice. In effect, "[l]arge social phenomena are partly the result of long, complex and interwoven chains of actions." (EVERTS 2016: 56). As an arena for ongoing renegotiations, arrangements are bound to recurrent affirmative everyday actions. Otherwise, they will decay and finally cease to exist. Although primarily hierarchies of power govern arrangements at distance (EVERTS 2016: 65), individual encounters contribute to this process as well. Especially new rules meant to govern places have to be carried out by individual action and "rules are appropriated differently by different people" (EVERTS 2016: 60).

Combining related work and theory, we expected a unique situation, in which bodily and social experiences were prevented by regulation measures cutting effectively off places as arenas of renegotiation. In a need for mental health, rural areas and greenspaces provided sources to cope with the situation first-hand, while digital social media served the same for social health, both not being able to fully replace bodily social experiences. Deliberately taking on a social perspective on place, we were primarily interested in exploring, (1) which other coping strategies helped people to mitigate the consequences of lockdown measures, and (2) if and how different appropriations of the regulations would finally lead to a recreation of physical arenas of renegotiation: Places in the sense of CRESSWELL (2020) in their function as site of the social (SCHATZKI 2002).

2 Methodology

In our study we used guided interviews to gather informants' experiences and expectations during the lockdown phases. During the interviews participants were given as much open space as possible to verbalize their subjective systems of relevance, interpretations, and points of view. The guiding was listener-oriented in order to let the interviewees speak in monologue as much as possible. Within the process it was precisely documented how the interviews had been implemented. During the interview implementation the stimuli were chosen to support narrative generation and the language was kept simple (KRUSE et al. 2015: 148–149). Recurrent

feedback and reflection were undertaken throughout the qualitative data collection and analysis processes (KRUSE et al. 2015: 219). Therefore, the overall epistemology of this work is based on hermeneutics, to involve the positioning of the researcher as part of the social transformation and the singularity of the pandemic situation, including her as a guide in the process of this work.

2.1 Interviews

Bavaria was chosen as the study area on the following grounds: (1) the initial COVID-19 cases and hotspots in Germany were first identified in southern Bavaria in early 2020 (RKI 2020); (2) Bavaria featured a high number of cases, compared to other states in Germany (ADEN et al. 2020: 108); (3) two of three authors were familiar with the sociocultural context of the region which simplified participant recruitment.

Interview participants were recruited in Bavaria, Germany, and included at least two persons from each of Bavaria's seven administrative regions: Middle Franconia, Upper Franconia, Lower Franconia, Upper Bavaria, Lower Bavaria, Swabia, and Upper Palatinate. Participants were contacted via the gatekeeper approach and snowball-convenience sampling with a focus on sociodemographic stratification (Age, sex, marital status, migration background, occupation, educational attainment, and place of residence). Additionally, participant pre-screening also sought to recruit a diversity of conceptualisations of community. To reduce bias, interview questions were not provided to contacts in advance, but rather only informed that the interview addresses the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. After initial contact, the interviewees received a privacy statement for informed consent, including a brief background on the interviewer (lead author), and the interview objective of exploring interviewees' individual and personal experiences and perceptions regarding the COVID-19 crisis (KRUSE et al. 2015: 209).

The empirical component of this work used guided interviews with open questions, which were pretested in advance. The prior testing focused for example on how the questions were interpreted and understood and whether the arrangement of the questions did not have an influencing effect. The interview procedure was based on recommendations from KRUSE et al. 2015, dividing questions into three blocks: block 1 served as an introduction

and focused questioning concerning participants' individual changes in social contacts during the pandemic. The primary goal of Block 1 was to identify the individual's communities and their importance. Block 2 addressed individual perceptions of restrictions and personal resilience with a focus on identified changes in the coping capacity of the participant. Block 3 focused on questions concerning anxiety and risk perception considering individual and public interest in the context of the pandemic. Using block divisions, the author sought to maximise flexibility of the question range. Only Block 3 "anxiety and risk perception" was always asked last, to reduce potential response bias.

The lead author conducted 16 guided interviews from 28 November to 12 December 2020 via video call software (n=13) and in-person (n=3). In-person interviews were conducted in accordance with all relevant regulations. During the interview phase, the federal pandemic restrictions changed substantially, and the government announced future restrictions regarding Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

2.2 Analysis

The data analysis followed the content structuring coding methodology proposed by KUCKARTZ & RÄDIKER (2020), which focuses on deriving thematic summaries (cf. FLICK 2014) with the aid of software. The method stands for a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analysing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study. As shown in Figure 1, this was carried out in four steps with 11 main categories derived from the interview guide and later based on the data.

The undertaken axial and selective coding have been demonstrated to be an effective means of maximising knowledge gain (KUCKARTZ 2010: 77; SALDAÑA 2013: 218). Ongoing discussions amongst the authorship were held throughout the following process. Step 1 covers the organisation and exploration of the data. The transcription was rolled out following consistent rules to ensure an equal starting position. In step 2 the basic terminology was defined, categories were formed based on the interview questions and theory, in vivo codes were created and initially sorted into the guideline categories and detailed coding rules were set up. Step 3a comprises the first coding cycle, in which the category system was steadily adapted and extended

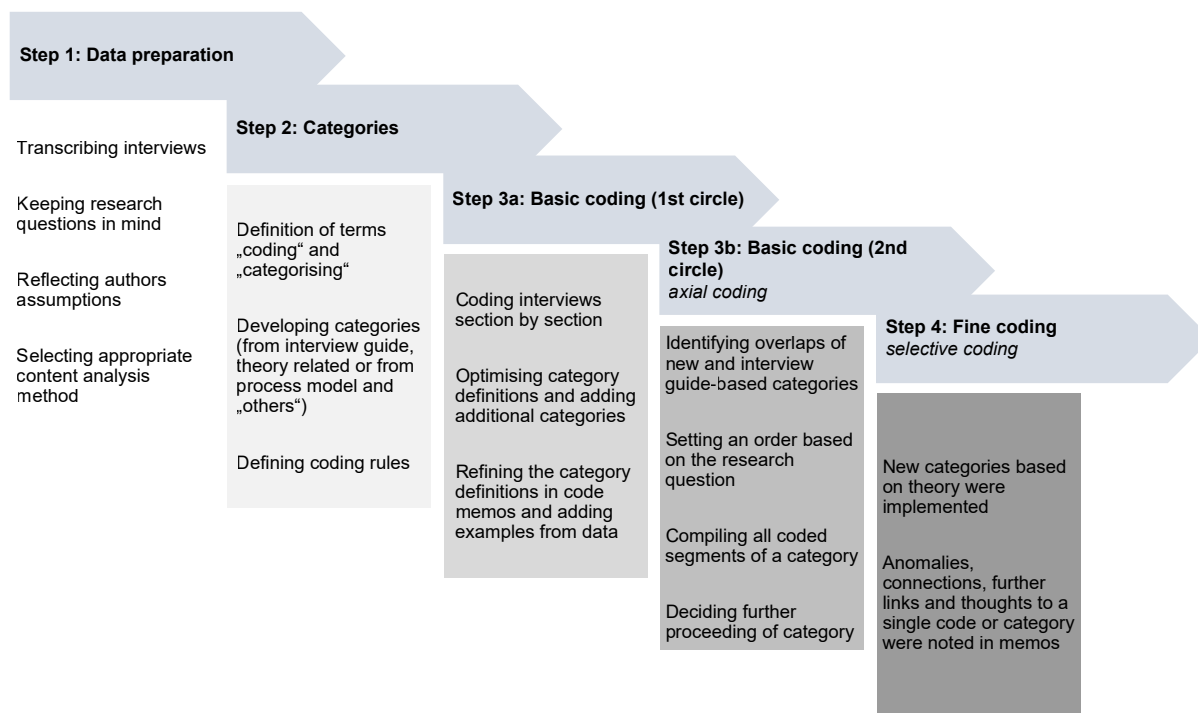


Fig.1: Data processing procedure. In addition to KUCKARTZ & RÄDIKER (2020) we integrated a screening coding step (3b) to improve the reliability of the generated codes.

with new categories and definitions, and notes were added and refined. Starting from Step 3b, our coding scheme then diverged from the six-step method of KUCKARTZ & RÄDIKER (2020) to reveal early intersections between multiple codes and to prioritise the knowledge gained from the first coding cycle according to the relevance for answering the research question. This step assures the reliability and comparability of the knowledge gained from the interviews (KUCKARTZ & RÄDIKER 2020: 40f.). Step 4 denotes the process of enriching specific cat-

egories with the researchers’ prior knowledge. New categories based on theory were applied. If necessary, anomalies, connections, and further links and thoughts to a single code or category were noted.

Table 1 shows the distribution of our participants over various parameters. Main goal was to balance over different characteristics to observe a broad variety of statements in the data.

In the coding process we first identified main categories which we checked for mutual dependency (chapter 3). From the optimised categories we

Tab. 1: Sample characteristics, all self-reported

	<i>alone</i>	<i>2 persons</i>	<i>> persons</i>
Number of household members	4	5	7
	<i>< 30</i>	<i>30-54</i>	<i>> 54</i>
Age (years)	6	5	5
	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>diverse</i>
Gender	9	7	0
	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	
University degree attained	6	10	
	<i>urban</i>	<i>rural</i>	
Neighbourhood type	9	7	
	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	
Migration background (self-reported)	2	14	

n=16

Participants frequently returned to the struggle between a need to support their social and mental health as represented by physically visiting spaces outside the household versus a sense of solidarity and responsibility to other members of their community. This was often framed as a dichotomous decision-making process, in which the participant was compelled to weigh their own wellbeing against that of others. The basic need to meet one's friends as a source of mental health, was constantly weighed against the desire for social contacts as a source of pleasure. This often took the form of an ethical dilemma, i.e. if it is morally right to endanger others so that one might benefit from in-person social contact, and if that social contact were truly necessary. These elements were, in most cases, spatially fixed to an inside/outside or private space/public space dichotomisation, in which the household was constructed as the sphere of routine and shelter, whereas social space was seen as anxiety-inducing, risky, and in many cases, forbidden. In consequence, the categories anxiety and space were strongly related in our interview data.

The categories government and social transformation were strongly emphasised in participants' reflections on freedom, ownership, sovereignty, and self-determination during the pandemic. In addition to regulation at that time, individuals faced the challenge of responsible action on their own. One participant explained that every citizen has the right, the ability, and the need to decide for him or herself what is best, emphasising their own house as a space where they have the right to decide who and when one may or may not enter.

3.1 Individual, social, and environment-related coping strategies

We identified three key types of coping strategies comprising 8 subcategories directly relevant to the initial research objectives of the study (Fig. 2). Within the analysis of the relationships of the categories, contact and community were the most frequently occurring. Figure 2 shows the fine-grained categorisation of the coping strategies we found to be active in dealing with the challenges of the pandemic. The strategies were related to individual and social aspects, but also pointed directly to the limitation of everyday place-bound human environments as impacted by infection control regulations.

In the following sections, we will present findings and quotes associated with the three main categories: Individual, social, and environment-related coping strategies.

3.1.1 Individual coping strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant disruptions to individual and societal routines. Individual coping strategies, in this instance, serve as a set of available means for responding to the crisis and expressing resilience against negative or restrictive influences on one's wellbeing. The interviews revealed a set of individual coping and maintaining strategies as follows.

Adaptation to the pandemic situation was crucial for ensuring individual resilience. This includes flexible and creative handling of disruptions to routine

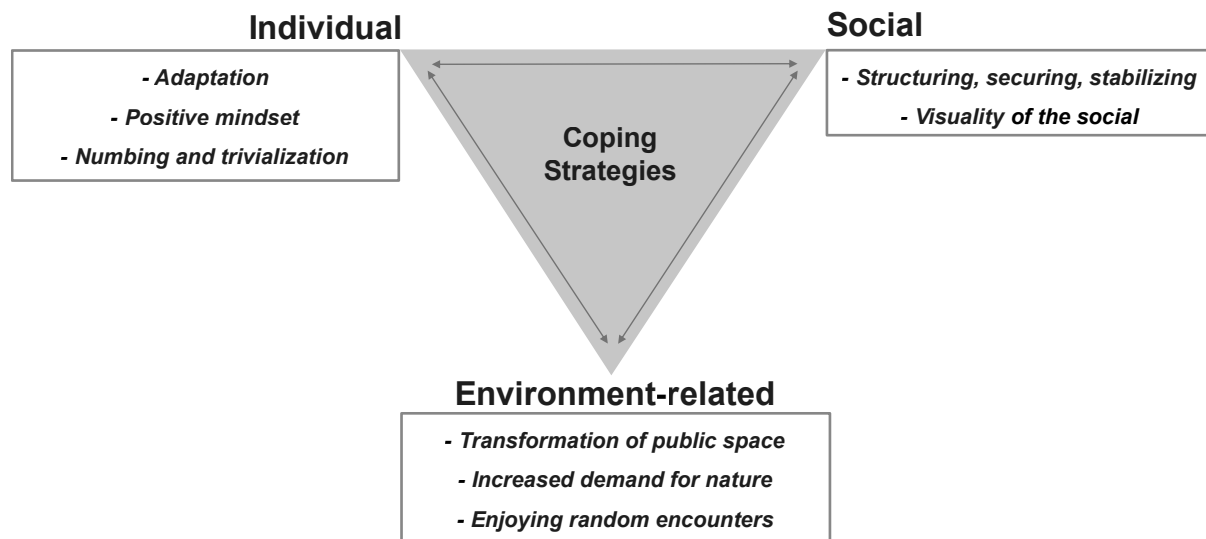


Fig. 2: Fine-grained codes of (place-bound) coping strategies found to be active amongst our participants.

scenarios, for example, by readjusting expectations for social contact. This coping strategy featured a strong spatial frame amongst participants, where the household became a place for creating physical and psychological distance from the pandemic situation, for example:

“This staying-at-home-thing is simply a bit of a return to the essentials and the type of activities or lifestyle would just change a bit and shift to other areas more into thoughtfulness, contemplation. And just less going out and events, it’s just a go into yourself again, come to your senses.” (P7)

Other participants showed behaviour closer to rebellion in relation to the state interventions and regulations. Some people even extended the regulations to their own needs. Thereby no malice could be detected but mainly self-protection was in the foreground.

“I complied with all specifications and laws concerning contacts to others for a very long time. Until simply my patience was wearing thin. Then it was clear to me, I must break the rules now- for my own health. I can no longer adhere to the rules. It did not feel good for me to isolate myself. Suddenly, the risk and fear of infection were proportionally lower than becoming completely crazy. I had no more energy.” (P8)

In conclusion, people proved to be quite adaptive in arranging with the necessity of the regulations. Nevertheless, some stages of observable neglecting behaviour known from other life-threatening situations (e.g. KÜBLER-ROSS 1997) are clearly visible: anger in form of open rebellion (P8) and bargaining in putting private property as not affected by the rules.

A positive mindset shows a different perspective of the pandemic situation for an individual person. National as well as international reports on the extent of the pandemic are perceived as very stressful by an individual person. As a response strategy, some decided to put aside the displeasure with optimism and faith to think more positively. A participant explained that she intentionally stopped herself from listening to the news too often because it would be difficult to bear after a while. In addition, one respondent emphasised the possibility of redressing the uncovered grievances and societal issues that became visible as a result of the pandemic, and even

experiencing a better and more promising time in the future. Faith played an important role in coping with the situation as well. The main emphasis is on the fact that any human action cannot oppose the fate of a single person. Although decreasing religiosity may indicate an overall decline in fatalism, it can be very supportive in a crisis.

In such an exceptional situation, participants tried to keep negative thoughts away through numbing. A participant, working in a kiosk, observed others consuming alcohol during daytime and assumed that the consumption helped them to be more resilient and calmer in regards of personal consequences of the pandemic. This also included use of cannabis (illegal in the study area), as an individual strategy to cope with the crisis. Deliberately set repressive thoughts underline the high mental stress of the individuals.

3.1.2 Social coping strategies

A first social coping strategy focuses on the contacts of an individual person and how they were perceived in the context of the pandemic. Interviewees were directly asked for changes and current circumstances regarding contacts and two different functions of contacts were identified.

Contact with other humans has a structuring function on the daily routine of an individual person. Without social exchange, individual thoughts are caught in hypothetical concerns, even more in times of a crisis. Based on related work (SCHATZKI 2002, REHORICK 1991, SEAMON 1979), we interpret participants’ responses as underscoring that meeting others, but especially feeling part of a community at a specific place generates strong routines in the temporal rhythm of one’s everyday life. One respondent emphasised above all how much she misses other persons, and events (such as weddings and family reunions) in her life.

Second, social contact has a securing effect on individual life. As other people and contacts act as feedback loop for individual emotions and thoughts to mitigate concerns and provide a protected social environment. In times of a lockdown,

“[...] when you’re all alone, you’re especially alone with your thoughts and fears, and you feel very cut off from the world. Especially the fear is a completely different one when you just don’t have a protected social framework.” (P1)

Furthermore, the stabilising effect of contacts acts as an anchor for relating individual decisions and actions. Through contact with others, one's own opinion and position can be questioned. Family, partners, and close friends provided the social network in which individual positions are constantly checked and adjusted, but the lack of access to other people increased the mental vulnerability of the participants.

“I've realised already, I would like to be with people again just somewhere. I love to sit in pubs and talk silly stuff - talking to each other should be fun and should be interesting, I miss that already a bit.” (P2)

In addition, especially in times of a crisis, one's social network provided an important source of circulating information as well as modes of acting upon. These exchanges range from casual conversations to serious and complex exchanges of information.

A second focus within the social aspect can be drawn through the visibility of the social. Most of the participants explained that if they do not see other people in nearby spaces, this is regarded to be an absence of normal social life. In contrast, being at a certain space where one might engage in activities associated with experiencing or observing social activity (e.g. at a café) creates a pleasant, familiar, and possibly comforting space:

“During summer I had the feeling that we could breathe a little easier again - we went out for coffee and so on and there were moments when everything felt almost normal again - except for the masks.” (P1)

In essence, social coping strategies in place reveal their importance to structure and mediate everyday practice. They were often described in relation to spaces, the relevance of which became even more evident when they were clear of people.

3.1.3 Environment-related coping strategies

The environmental-related coping strategies cover opportunities for breaking isolation making use of environmental or public spaces. As mentioned earlier, the interviewer intentionally did not ask about placial and spatial changes, in order to avoid biasing the response with a geographical setup.

The first aspect focuses on the perceived changes regarding space: Transformation of public space. A few participants explained at the beginning of the pandemic an extension of public space in the city. On one hand, the contact restrictions led to a lot less traffic in the city, which released space for recreation and recovery and to a renaturing effect of the urban area. For example, fewer cars led to less noise and the environment of the participants living in urban areas seemed to be positively changed. On the other hand, others illustrated clearly that rural residences were the reasons for them to not experience spatial restrictions: Increased demand for nature. In rural areas, people living there know each other personally and sense a certain degree of distance from the police and the state.

“Weekdays in the afternoon on the Fürther Straße (busy main road) in Nuremberg: Only every few minutes a car passed by. You hear the birds; you see nature changing and if you look at the sky there are hardly any contrails. I kept asking myself, have the birds gotten louder now, or is just the noise level gone? That was totally pleasant to perceive.” (P2)

Of course, less privileged access to allocative resources led to a different assessment. Participants living in urban areas emphasised that walking around in the city was the only option they had during the lockdown.

Interestingly, the lack of social places led to a higher valuation of individual movements in outdoor environments. Some participants explained that green and blue spaces in their rural areas help them to handle with the pandemic restrictions and the situation in general.

Furthermore, some interview statements show the meaning of random encounters during the pandemic. Through the process of getting used to the situation some participants illustrated how the role of the neighbourhood changed.

“You're happy to meet anybody [...] even with the neighbour [...] something very personal. We've lived next door for 23 years and since the first lockdown we've been on a first-name basis. We had addressed one another formally for 23 years. And now we always say thank you, it was nice today, take care.” (P12)

Out in the woods, the threatening aspects of both the pandemic and the associated regulations became less relevant. Surprisingly, after applying the centre-periphery-metaphor in a first reflex to push the pandemic beyond the sphere of everyday life (KREMER 2020), we observed at the beginning of the second wave across all participants unanimous framings of the crisis as a global singular beyond the sphere of the national.

3.2 Short note on the importance of weak ties

Although inhibited by lockdown measures, the strong demand for social contacts shown above points to the outstanding value of weak ties in social networks. On any occasion, participants aimed at restoring them.

“Something that strongly stuck out is that people who I have often encountered coincidentally, I do not meet them anymore. These are persons with whom I never had contact, but I always appreciated meeting them somewhere.” (P9)

In absence, the added value of these random encounters for individual wellbeing became even more visible:

“I already realise that I would like to be with people again just somewhere. I love sitting in pubs and talking and drinking, talking stupid stuff, chatting, but really nothing special - talking to each other should be funny, should be interesting, I already miss that a bit.” (P2)

The need for social exchange became so prominent that even functional interaction was used for that purpose, for example, speaking casually with a cashier. SANDSTORM & DUNN 2014b demonstrated that loosely related people in a social network can contribute meaningfully to our wellbeing and function to bridge information within otherwise isolated cluster of strong ties. For example, engaging in or observing brief routine encounters with other community members at a local bakery provide a means of exchanging information on a neighbourhood level.

Further on, our results reflect that many participants desperately looked for encounters with peripheral members of their social network

(SANDSTORM & DUNN 2014b) in specific community spaces known to provide social exchange:

“The pandemic led to a restriction of my contacts. I was cooped up at home for a long time again and began to ruminate and brood; I realised then that one thinks too much. So then I went grocery shopping every day. I bought all the items one by one, which I normally never do- always at different places to be somewhere new, somewhere else. Just to get out, to see something different. You begin to slowly realize that it’s not quite enough anymore. Since March you only see your own four walls. The forest and the grocery and other shops that you have nearby.” (P8)

To overcome the lack of social interaction due to the contact restrictions, a virtual expansion of private and working space took place. Some participants stated that the virtual space became a replacement and alternative space for personal meetings, especially at the very beginning of the pandemic. Virtual contact was considered by many to be a very suitable option. Participants mentioned a large variety of online communication platforms, e.g. Skype, Threema, Whatsapp, e-mail, Steam, Discord.

It needs spatial platforms and frameworks to even have the possibility to meet with unknown people or acquaintances from other networks, for example a public concert, associations or common hobbies and interests. Again, those place-bound elements could not be fully replaced by the digital realm. Participants explained that virtual contact makes it more bearable in the short term. In the end, a participant explained that meeting anyone seemed preferable instead of suffering from the absence of social interaction.

Looking at weak ties, it becomes evident how important encounters with loosely related people are - even more so in the time of crisis, when established routines are at stake (see stabilising in social coping strategies above). Our observations highlight how a lack of social contacts threatened mental health, because no ideas from outside to break the vicious circle of one’s own thoughts and fears. Again, virtual services provided an insufficient replacement of the many places and stages for meeting with others outside one’s inner circle, like pubs or concerts. Even chatting with the cashier became preferable to suffering from isolation.

4 Places as sites of renegotiating regulations

As our main question was to track spatial and placial consequences of regulative measures during the second wave, we will now discuss our main findings and interpret them in the context of place theory.

Locked up at home, our participants experienced a field of tension between the will to adapt and comply with the regulations and the need of contact with other people than just household members, if any. Interestingly, different from the first wave in spring 2020 (see KREMER 2020), people did not try to neglect the impact of COVID-19 on their daily life but showed broad acceptance. Means to persevere covered a positive mindset or numbing. A first spatial coping strategy made intense use of outdoor environments to restore resilience by physical activity.

Furthermore, we were able to observe numerous examples for a lack of social exchange in the pandemic: our participants missed the positive effects of social interaction, explicitly naming structuring, securing, and stabilizing functions. Of course, in times of a crisis these coordinating interactions to adopt and adapt coping strategies of others were missed even more. When weak ties and even random encounters were at stake, digital contacts in established social networks did not provide a platform for an adequate amount of supportive feedback. A second spatial coping strategy thus made use of the legal option to go shopping for daily needs as often as possible to be able to exchange with others.

As anticipated from the considered theory, the places of the pandemic were limited by the non-material arrangements of governmental regulations in their social functions. In contrast, as expected, we were able to observe that our participants appropriated the regulations very differently. Places, coordinated by all preceding and recurrent individual actions through co-presence and communication, instantly became arenas of renegotiation of lockdown measures. Immediately, private property set the scene to articulate rules deviating from the official ones to the need of the owner, either relaxing official rules or even reinforcing them. In public places, the mere visibility of others' behaviour appropriating regulations resulted in a relief by consensus ("others do it as well") or in defying regulations ("put your mask on again"). From a theoretical vantage point, the pandemic thus provided a setting, in which every day manipulative practice renegotiating places became evident slightly readjusting the non-material arrangements in effect to individual needs. This

proves that places are not only shaped by powerful action, but also by numerous individual recurring actions attaching to them.

5 Conclusion

There are few opportunities to observe the unfolding of a large-scale discursive event with a prominent spatial component. The COVID-19 pandemic provided us with the context to ask (1) which coping strategies are applied in dealing with rapid and intense social transformations putting everyday routines at stake, and (2) how the spatial consequences of this setting are experienced and addressed. To observe and analyse the contingency and singularity of the pandemic's unfolding required a deliberate study setup.

We observed coping strategies to be composed of social, individual, and environmental components. Having social coordination inhibited by lockdown measures, places revealed their essential roles for society. When the social strategies that provided a balancing and coordinating effect for the participants were reduced to homes and digital media, individual strategies included keeping a positive mindset and making slight deviations from regulations to suit one's own needs. The environment acted as a release valve to address tension through movement and action. Whereas mainly intended to cope individually, environments simultaneously reinstated the negotiating effect of places by affording observation of others' actions. Nevertheless, it was possible to maintain contact to family and close friends but especially the balancing and coordinating effect with loosely related people and random encounters were effectively diminished.

Taking on a theoretical vantage point rooted in phenomenology CRESSWELL (2004, 2010, 2020), SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN (2003) and SCHATZKI (2002) allowed us to frame coping strategies not purely as discursive practice, but as part of individual actions according to "rules [...] appropriated differently by different people" (EVERTS 2016: 60). In addition, earlier studies show that in a conflict between compliance to the rules and the individual need for social exchange, individual actions highly depend on the individually accepted risk level (KAUFMANN et al. 2020). In this context, by asking participants for their coping strategies in general and not in relation to pre-identified spatialities, we were able to identify the impact of environmental-related coping strategies in comparison to other, non-spatial coping strat-

egies. Interestingly, even in times of digital communication technologies, place proofed its exceptional function not only as individual resource for recreation, but also as stage for collective practices of negotiating appropriate risk levels by public visibility of individual behaviour.

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Authors

Anna Stadlmeier

ORCID: 0000-0002-1958-1605

anna.stadlmeier@fau.de

Prof. Dr. Blake Byron Walker

ORCID: 0000-0002-1983-3147

blake.walker@fau.de

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Institute for Geography

Community Health Environments and

Social Terrains Lab

Wetterkreuz 15

91058 Erlangen

Germany

Dr. Dominik Kremer

ORCID: 0000-0003-1244-7363

dominik.kremer@fau.de

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Department of Digital Humanities and

Social Studies (DHSS)

Nägelsbachstraße 49c

91054 Erlangen

Germany