

## Article

# Navigating Fragmented Infrastructures of Care: Children's Sense of Home in Residential Education

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**Abstract:** Residential education often both challenges and reinforces the norms and systems supporting children and young people's need for homely environments. In this context, studies on pupils' sense of home when attending residential schools provide a ground for exploring broader infrastructures of care available to them as they move through different spaces. Drawing on autoethnography, life-story interviews, and semi-structured interviews, we illustrate how, for children within the Latvian residential school system, homeliness may be found at a relative's apartment, school bus or youth center affected by how each of the spaces relates to children's safety and control, privacy, community, identity, everyday life, and time. While normative discourses remain fixated on home as a family space where infrastructures of care can be limited, but educational settings emphasize control as a measure for safety without being attentive to peer-to-peer relationships, children's agency in achieving a sense of homeliness becomes fragmented and stronger in some places more than others.

**Keywords:** home; alternative care; residential education; care; infrastructure; agency; children



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## 1. Introduction

Since their establishment, residential schools have both challenged the norms of what kind of homely environments children and young people should reside in [1] and provided options for filling gaps in care available in domestic spaces [2]. Nevertheless, the vision of how to provide positive homely experiences at the interstices between the residence of a child's caregivers and the school, if such a division exists for them, has been both changing and contested. 'It all starts at home' is a common phrase the staff of residential schools repeated when reflecting on societal problems during our research as well as during the first author's childhood stay at a residential school. This statement both describes home as a challenging environment, alludes to a perceived failure of home to provide a positive experience, and reifies a division between the private space of a child's home and the public space of an institution. This division, however, rarely reflects the lived experience of children themselves as they often experience constant transitions and transfers between home and institution, state official visits in their homes or parents being asked to appear in school, without even mentioning the movement of the children themselves. From the child's perspective, therefore, the meanings of home are not always that clear as experiences of home and homeliness are often fragmented and do not neatly fit into hegemonic positive definitions of home and family environment.

Drawing on autoethnography, semi-structured and life-story interviews in Latvia about periods from 1980 to 2020, in this paper, we explore the meanings and experiences children ascribe to home when attending residential schools. In trying to understand children and young people's experiences in multiply contested and often violent environments, our central research question is: what forms of agency are possible for children and young people in alternative care in constructing and experiencing homeliness within fragmented home and family environments? Theoretically, we draw on anthropological approaches to home, infrastructural approaches to care, and studies on domains and practices people

ascribe to home to analyze how power relations, peer relations, and opportunities for different activities affect children's experiences of home in expected and unexpected spaces.

While residential schools have a long and complex history in Latvian educational and social support systems, they have not garnered significant scholarly attention either locally or abroad. To examine how it relates to the broader context of children's life outside the institution, we propose a synthesis between the infrastructural perspective on care and the subjective meanings of home that allows us to critically evaluate the impact different social structures have on the maintenance of care and creation of homes for children attending residential schools. By examining how young people navigate the intersections between homes, residential care, and education, we contribute to the study of children's sense of homeliness, the agency of children and young people, and broader societal infrastructures of care.

### *The Meanings of Home in and between Residential Education*

In everyday use, home, housing, and homeliness host a variety of meanings. If people often use the notion of home to describe homeliness and belonging, critical approaches also recognize how the home is permeated by intersecting forms of power and gendered, aged, and kinship-based orderings of space and labor [3]. For example, in a collection on ethnographies of housing, anthropologists [4] treat it as a practice of housing that is "at once a built-shelter; a collection of relations, affects and moralities; and a node within neighbourhoods, communities and larger political-environmental regimes". In this perspective, the domestic and public spaces in and outside of residential education can both be viewed as nodes of different practices that aspire to produce relationships and spaces seen as appropriate for children and young people.

Relationship-building possibilities form a key role in shaping residential experiences. In their review article on positive peer relationships in alternative care, Haddow, Taylor, and Schwannauer [5] have shown that the ability to establish friendships during one's stay in alternative care institutions, such as residential schools, can have several measurable positive effects on adolescent life both in the institution and after it. In this context, particular attention should be paid to practices of care. According to [6], housing is sociomaterially constitutive of care not only through organizing domestic labor but through systemic arrangements of the housing system formed by materialities, markets, and governance. Thus, the arrangements in the governance of housing and residential patterns formed by policies and institutions affect what forms of care are possible in different spaces. In our case, we take this infrastructural lens on care to explore how it is related to experiences and meanings of home instead of housing. This allows us to observe how the infrastructural arrangements of homes and residential schools shape children's sense of home and their agency in affecting its aspects. From this perspective, it becomes possible to explain how children might feel at home in multi-sited and unexpected spaces due to feeling more comfortable in certain relations of care accessible in one space than in others. This also allows us to overcome the fixed concept of home (house) as opposed to other spaces, such as the street [7].

Not only due to differences in relations of care but also due to different forms of separation in time and space and the differing power relations forming domestic and educational spaces, residential education can produce fragmentation in experiences of home. In untangling such fragmentation, it is useful to build on approaches that have analyzed qualitatively different meanings people ascribe to home. For example, treating subjective understandings of home as based on practices, Pennartz [8] distinguished five main factors that his research participants most associated with home: "communicating with each other; being accessible to one another; being relaxed after having finished work; being able to do what one wants to do; and being occupied, absence of boredom". Also focusing on practices as strategies, Falk et al. [7] have distinguished three dimensions of the environment in creating a sense of home in residential care: (1) attachment to place, consisting of strategies for nesting and being in charge; (2) attachment to place, consisting

of strategies for taking part in activities with others, expressing personality, and making friends; and (3) attachment beyond the institution, consisting of strategies for bridging the gap between past and present, and attending home someplace else. Similarly, during the experience of residential education, our interlocutors felt that their sense of home depended on such situations, strategies, and practices due to the interstitial nature of living in and outside of the institution.

Using a slightly different approach, Després [9] has categorized the meaning of home into six themes: safety and control, privacy, community, identity, everyday life, and time. While some of the themes correspond to the practices described by Pennartz, Després' categorization opens possibilities to analyze not only practices but also how broader socio-political regimes permeate these themes in our interlocutors' experience of home. Thus, in our exploration, we take inspiration both from Pennartz and Després, combining it with analysis of how intersecting forms of power and socio-material enablers of care in places where children reside shape their agency in finding homely situations in their life in and between residential education.

Residential schools in Latvia are called *internātskolas*, the term coming from the period of occupation by the Soviet Union (from Russian *школа-интернат*) and refers to an institution that is both an educational facility and a dormitory, which may also provide the pupils with additional support such as meals and clothing. This type of institution is not exclusive to Latvia or the Baltic region. Residential education has historically been used around the world both for educating the elites ([10,11]) as well as part of the colonial systems to re-educate the native population ([1,12–15]).

Examples closer to the research locality shows that most research in similar institutions has been conducted in Russia. Alleman [16] has explored how the residential school system is used as a tool of social reproduction in the Northern part of Russia, and in a similar vein, Khlinovskaya-Rockhill [2] in her exploration of childcare systems in Russia also explores the role of residential education. Current scholarship has also been focused on the culturally specific forms of residential education ([17,18]).

Nevertheless, the residential school system in Latvia is distinct from these approaches, as it does not deal with elite education or the assimilation of indigenous people. Therefore, we focus on the way residential education is proposed as a solution to a system where the resources available for caring for children and young people are limited and in time, the residential school system becomes self-sustaining regardless of the support mechanisms available to its inhabitants. Here, it is pertinent to remember that within the Latvian system, residential schools are not recognized as part of the alternative care system but only as educational institutions [19]. Within such a system, the children are not transferred away from their families as the state is neither able nor willing to take full care of them, but rather, they enter a system where they may return to their parental household only on weekends, only on holidays, or only between semesters, therefore making the experience of home unstable and fragmented. During the time of research, the total number of institutions kept shifting as the country was in the midst of a deinstitutionalization process which included a goal of closing down the residential schools, a goal that was never achieved. As there is no unified system within which the schools need to state whether or not they have boarding capacity, the number varies greatly. In my research, I came to rely on the data from the Ombudsman's Office of Latvia, which stated that there were 115 residential schools in Latvia on 29 April 2020.

As the institutions are employing creative tactics to avoid deinstitutionalization there is great variety in the names, sizes, and locations of the institutions. A residential school may be called "school with residential capacity", "centre of development", "school for children with special needs", or there may be nothing mentioning the fact the school has a residential capacity in its name at all. Nevertheless, they can be found in most regions across Latvia, including in the capital city. Overall, despite being state or municipal institutions, the residential schools are ostensibly invisible to the official discourse.

Therefore, examining the context of infrastructures of care becomes relevant in understanding why children find meanings of home where they do. As argued by Massey, “in context of ‘a place called home’ both the geography (proximity, time space distancing, etc.) and the content of the social relations themselves (full of the implications of sexism, or of the power relations of colonialism present or past, or of the relations of capital accumulation) must be taken into account” [20]. However, this process cannot be perceived as only happening to children as passive actors. As we illustrate later, children and young people redefine the notion of home and homeliness by establishing it in new and unexpected places. Thus, exploring the different ways children find a sense of home or its lack in residential education offers the possibility to analyze the ability of children and young people to create homes and respect the ways they choose to do it.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The data for examining residential school pupils’ sense of home was collected by drawing on life-story interviews, autoethnography, and semi-structured interviews. The fieldwork phase took place from late 2019 until early 2021 and was significantly impacted by the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was part of a broader ethnographic research on the residential school system in Latvia, forming the first author’s doctoral dissertation. While we build on more throughout fieldwork on the workings of the residential school system, the analysis is mostly based on an in-depth analysis of three individual experiences of attending residential education.

A key source of data was life-story interviews with two former inhabitants of residential schools, forming the opportunity to analyze how their sense of home was formed and changed over time. As argued by [21], the life story should be viewed not as either only the story of the participant or the information that has been craftily acquired by a researcher but rather as a result of coproduction between the researcher and the research participant where the participant is actively constructing the story as they see it. While a sense of home was not the major topic explored by the interviews, it inevitably came up as participants constructed their experiences of moving between caregiver home, residential school, and other spaces of importance as part of the formation of their self.

The participants of life-story interviews were recruited during the fieldwork on the residential school system in Latvia through personal contacts and residential school staff. This process relied on word-of-mouth as many of the former residential school inhabitants were rather reluctant to discuss their experiences. For this reason, I relied on my other research participants for introductions and contacts to gain access to the interviewees. The first interview was conducted with Antra (pseudonym), who was in her fifties and had studied in a specialized residential school geared toward children perceived as gifted but functioning similarly to ordinary residential schools regarding its residential capacity. The second interview was with Dzintars (pseudonym), who was in his twenties and had studied in a regional residential school that used to be one of the largest regional educational facilities, though it had already undergone several reforms and downsizing, which had left it as a shadow of its former self.

In both life-story interviews, I started out by establishing the starting point of the stories, which was the entry point to the residential school. After that, I allowed the research participants to continue to tell their stories the way they wanted. After they had finished their initial stories, I followed up with some questions that I developed during an interview and if they felt comfortable with it, I also proposed developing a participatory timeline as an additional tool to help them get their story across. In both cases, participants started with a short synopsis of the main events and later expanded on significant episodes or key points they wanted to make.

The other large data point was the autoethnography of one of the authors, Artūrs, on his own experience of inhabiting a residential school for his first nine years of education. The primary objective of autoethnography is to establish a connection between the personal and the cultural field by situating the self within a social context [22]. This approach

enables readers to gain insight not only into the data gathered from others but also into the inner world of the author. Our approach to the analysis of life-story interviews connects this study to the autoethnographic method, which is grounded in a similar interpretivist tradition, as the purpose of research is not merely to faithfully describe lived experiences but rather to focus on extracting meaning from them [23]. This approach rejects the positivist notion of maintaining an objective research stance and requires the author not only to narrate relevant experiences but also to maintain a critical perspective when selecting which experiences to describe and how to do it. In our case, the involvement of a co-author provided an additional critical viewpoint, which we represent in our writing by describing the autoethnographic data in the third person.

The data was collected by Artūrs writing his memories as he remembered them and identifying the important themes in them. The initial version of the story served as an entry point for our autoethnographic data. This was later complemented by the main corpus of the autoethnographic writings, which were produced later in the writing process and in relation to other types of data. Such an approach is characterized by Ellis, Adams and Bochner [24] as “therapeutic writing”, which works to both help the author to come to terms with their experiences as well as to communicate their experiences to the readers.

Finally, to research the broader context of the residential education system and to include the voice of staff members from the residential schools, the project also included eleven semi-structured qualitative interviews with the staff, local officials, state officials as well as parents and family members of people who were living or had lived in residential schools conducted by Artūrs and his colleagues. These interviews were conducted as part of the wider research project and included questions both directly related to the topic such as the everyday life in educational facilities and about the relations in the community as well as about more general themes relating to the wider research perspective on non-violence. Through the combination of the three data sets it was possible to break down information about both wider workings and perspectives of residential schools as well as experiences and practices within.

The research was conducted as part of a dissertation for which approval was received from the University of Latvia ethics committee. Names have been either removed or changed, aside from Artūrs, to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, while the details about residential schools were omitted to avoid potential harm to both the participants and schools. While our research and data are affected by Artūrs’ insider perspective and our involvement in children’s and housing rights as well as violence prevention advocacy, in this paper, we focus on analyzing the perspectives present in our data.

Data were analyzed using qualitative coding with a mix of open and a priori coding [25]. While the dissertation’s chapter on which the paper is based used a different system of codes, for the purposes of the article, the data was coded for the second time to represent the different themes emerging in the context of participants’ experiences of homeliness. The major themes brought out by analysis clustered the data by (1) pathways to residential school; (2) safety, control, and privacy; (3) community and identity; and (4) everyday life and time, bringing together [9] thematic categories of meanings related to housing in clusters of two.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Pathways to Residential School

As described above, residential schools have been a part of Latvian care and education systems for a much longer period than we describe in this article. We concentrate on the way residential schools have worked from the 1980s to the 2010s with the aim to provide the readers with information about specific characteristics of the institutions in different time periods, which illustrate both the changes and the continuities within the residential education system. This is described mostly through exploring the life stories of three core

participants who each entered the residential school during different time periods and in a different locality.

Starting with Antra, she lived in her residential school during the late 1980s during the Soviet Union's occupation of Latvia. In her story, her arrival in the residential school is the result of her own talent and the opportunities the school presented to her:

I was about 4–5 years old, I was taken to a music conductor and found to have absolute pitch. [...] And I was taken to Z [prestigious Latvian vocational school for musicians]. But in that year, there was no building in Z, the accommodation building was under repair, because Z also was a residential school. Therefore, there was no admission that year for those who need an overnight stay. [...] And then there was the idea that they would go to [another residential school for musicians] and then maybe move to Z. But of course, once I got there, I stayed there.

(Antra)

Later in her story, however, she also revealed that her continued education and life within the institution were connected as much to the specialized education available in the school as well as the challenges experienced by her family during her studies. The conditions at home were fraught with tension due to domestic violence between her parents, which eventually turned toward her. This setting created the conditions for not only entering residential school but also staying in it and prevented Antra from perceiving return to home as something that might bring her the support that she needed due to the often violent environment within school walls.

From later classes I certainly remember everything that has to do with something, those moments, like not getting up in the morning, one of the teachers comes in and just turns the bed upside down or in the gym if the teacher does not like something and they just pull you down from the gym wall by your leg, or there is something else they don't like and they simply hit your legs with a fly swatter—that was normal, it was an everyday occurrence, nothing out of the ordinary.

(Antra)

In turn, Artūrs had his years in residential school around the millennium, and for him also, the transfer to residential school was presented as an opportunity:

At the time it was explained to us that as my sister was excelling in physical education, we should start studying in town to make sure she has access to additional support for her talent. What was less clear, was why I also needed to go with her as my physical achievements were virtually non-existent. Still, this was what my parents told me, and I believed them at the time.

(Artūrs)

However, similar to the case of Antra, for Artūrs, the continued stay in residential school was also the result of the challenging conditions at home. Both of his parents suffered from alcoholism, and everyday life was often fraught with challenges connected to poverty, neglect, and violence. The last sentence from the excerpt is important here, as for Artūrs, these things were not the reason to enter residential school. As far as he knew, most of his peers in his home village lived in similar conditions, and he perceived the conditions at home as normal. Nevertheless, the conditions at the household were complicated enough that eventually, he also learned to recognize that neither school nor home provides a safe space for relaxation and enjoyment of the community.

Finally, Dzintars entered the residential school in the 2010s due to the economic hardship experienced by his family. Dzintars' experience took place after the financial crisis of 2007–2009 in times of deep-state austerity. Though school buses could transport children to and from school, their availability depended on the number of students and at a certain point, it did not cover the transportation costs:



The thing is, we had a bus that drove us to elementary school. It was a school bus. It was a kind of private property of the school. There was a hired driver who drove the children. There was not enough of us at high school at the time and so we didn't have that bus.

(Dzintars)

Here, we see that the entry of Dzintars into residential school is not necessarily the result of additional opportunities, nor is it connected to the same level of challenges within his family. Rather, for him, it is more openly connected to larger social processes, which stay obscured in the stories of Antra and Artūrs. Here, the home environment is not something that is necessarily experienced as fraught with danger but rather as remote, unreachable, and distant. This was the same argument that was often used by other research participants, as both school staff and state officials, often when discussing residential education, fell back toward discussing the significance of residential education regarding the physical distance between schools and the living places of pupils. Dzintars' choice to look for a home outside of his own family household was a result of having to stay within an institution, which again proved to be unsafe, as well as failing to provide him with options to spend his free time in a way he had hoped for.

All three pathways to residential school show that it is never a simple choice and emerge in the context of relationships in each family environment and broader social processes affecting access to education. In effect, these challenges to housing and relational permanence have strong effects on one's sense of home in how it fosters or aspires to ensure homely safety, control, community, identity, everyday life, and time to which we now turn.

### 3.2. (Un)safe Homes: Resistance and Control through Hidden Kettles and Broken Flowerpots

While children in most contexts are treated as in need of safety, control, and privacy, the amount of surveillance and opportunities for personal choice are highly dependent on one's caregivers and institutional practices. Due to this, safety and privacy were often ambiguous for both the residents and the staff members of the residential school. Both ones' home outside the school's context or the school were often contested as sites lacking safety and control.

It also depends on the family. However, they cannot bring him home every night. It is exactly this rejection. Let's be honest: even the worst family is better [than residential school], except for one with violence in the physical sense, where children are beaten and young children are neglected, who do not have a chance of surviving as their parents are drunk and [the children] simply cannot protect themselves.

(Gundega, principal)

This excerpt illustrates the often-contradictory view of the families of residential school pupils. Life within the family was perceived as being necessary for a child's well-being; however, it was exactly the question of safety where most of the professionals drew the line. For them, the main function of the institution was to provide safety for children in complicated conditions, therefore reflecting a long-running trend in former socialist countries where families are often described as "problematic" and seen as irreparable. A strategy of state institutions including residential school can then be to extract the child from a 'dysfunctional family' (*nelabvēlīgā ģimene* (*Nelabvēlīgā ģimene* is Latvian version of the Russian *neblagopoluchnaya semya*: "The term *sotsial'no-neblagopoluchnaya sem'ya* readily evokes the image of alcoholic, low- or no-income family, living in poor and dirty dwellings, with poor hygiene, diet and health, unkempt personal appearance, and a lack of material goods, good furniture or clothes". (Rockhill 2010).)) rather than provide support for the family. This also meant that staff saw pupils as 'damaged' and their care, therefore, was directed toward managing this damaged state. When the child enters the residential school, these preconceptions are already there, which often leads to either internalization of this

feeling of being damaged, which is sometimes accompanied by angry rejection of the system that demands acknowledgment of their damaged state. Interview data with school staff, however, indicates that this usually results in achieving the opposite, as teachers and other school staff were more likely to see this as confirmation of their suspicions. This contributes to not only a lack of belief in the care provided by the institution but also significantly contributes to the insecurity felt within the walls of the institutions which are seen as threatening rather than comforting.

For children themselves, the idea of home, therefore, becomes complex as it becomes hard to pinpoint where exactly to locate 'home'—is it the institution, the place where they live with their parents or something else entirely? Adding to this, in both settings, the child may experience high levels of control over their life by others while lacking it themselves. Whether referring to the decisions of their parents to transfer them to residential school or the need to fit their daily lives within the daily schedules of the institutions, lack of control over their lives contributed significantly to the sense of uprootedness for research participants.

To overcome this and gain a sense of control, the pupils applied different strategies. Some were geared toward developing a sense of safety, control, and privacy within the institutional context. From Artūrs' experience, he can remember many instances where the destruction of doors, closets, windows, and even houseplants brought a sense of joy and accomplishment during the most boring and/or frustrating days. This was often not done openly but in a form of hidden protest that allowed to feel some agency in residential school. The results were, however, always tenuous, intermittent, and fleeting.

Another dimension that appears through the resistance to the rules of the institution is the tension between various levels of oversight.

Q: You mentioned that there was no kitchenette for pupils at your time.

D: There was no kitchenette. I had my own toaster or a kettle. [..]

Q: Were pupils allowed to have these?

D: Officially no. Unofficially, yes. The educators knew about it. But when the big inspections came, [the educators] knew, who had toasters and kettles. We were informed and we hid it all quite nicely.

(Dzintars)

Here, we see an example of oversight and control that is simultaneously enforced and resisted by the residential school staff. The use of appliances such as a kettle may have been forbidden for numerous reasons, starting from fire safety and ending with their symbolic meaning, where the need for pupils to make their own food would indicate insufficient meals from the school, but the professionals who were working in direct contact with children were aware of how these requirements sometimes needed to be skirted in order to maintain what they saw as good care.

While it is not impossible to feel at home in a residential school or at one's caregiver home, children themselves enact upon their agency and resist the often violent experiences in their families and/or in the institutional setting. In Antra's case, a sense of homeliness was provided by an extended family member's home living closer to the residential school rather than her parents' home.

Oh, also, I kind of lived with my grandfather's sister in [...], and on holidays I went to my mother's family. But since my grandfather's sister was in respectable years and she was not ready to take me home every day, they still chose the residential school. And then on weekends I went to her, and on holidays to my parents. Not to my parents, to my mom and foster father.

(Antra)

Antra associated both her parental residence and residential school with difficulties as she experienced domestic violence from an early age, and when she was transferred



to a residential school, the situation did not improve. Though she was no longer abused physically by her parents, residential school staff was still often violent toward pupils, which again prevented Antra from experiencing a sense of security and care. In contrast to Dzintars, Antra did not speak fondly about her residential school and home experience but rather turned toward her grandfather's sister as the key carer in her life while also talking about isolated cases of care in residential school by reflecting on educators, teachers, and staff she remembers positively. Although these cases were isolated and few, they illustrated another important component in the creation of a sense of home, which we look at in the following chapter, namely, establishing and maintaining a community that helps the individual child to grow and develop their own sense of identity.

### 3.3. Relational Homes: Building Communities and Identities at Unexpected Spaces

The need to have a space for communicating with others who are providing the child with support and encouragement was expressed by all research participants. However, the fragmented experience of home when attending residential schools, which was often the result of one's position in one's family and accessible communities, meant that the related identities the child associated with were often also fragile and threatened. Importantly, when residential school experiences were as traumatic as those at home, the children looked toward other spaces. While the interviewed staff revealed several cases when children ended up living without any adult supervision, it was assumed that children were avoiding home, not the institution. So, in their interviews, teachers from the institutions often referred to the residential school as an escape from the difficulties experienced by children at home, while the complications experienced within the residential school were treated as exceptions and not seen as connected to the reluctance of the children to engage with adults or official support systems. Our cases, however, make a case for problematizing both. Importantly, for Artūrs and his interlocutors, their sense of home was frequently found elsewhere, away from residential school or family home. Mostly, these were related to positive experiences of community and care.

In Artūrs' experience, the place where his parents lived was often unsafe and lacked a caring relationship. He did not have an extended family where he could look for an alternative care environment. Importantly, despite his stays at the school being longer than for some others, the school environment and community did not foster a sense of home either. He did not enjoy extracurricular activities and was either too scared or too angry to participate in any of the organized activities for a long time, showing unattached relationships with peers.

Children in his residential school formed relational identities divided into those living in the school (*internātnieki*) and those going home after their studies (*mājinieki*). Though there was quite a stable division between *internātnieki* and *mājinieki*, in some cases, this line could be crossed. Artūrs was one of the few children in residential school who not only crossed the line between both groups but was even able to sometimes visit his friends during afternoons. This did set him apart from other children staying in residential school as he never heard of anyone else visiting their friends at home.

In Artūrs' case, the alternative positive relationships were formed through friendships outside the residential school, allowing him to avoid constant presence in the 'abusive community' of the residential school and develop relationships that were based on trust and care for each other. While navigating the constant sectarian warfare of the residential school during afternoons, he had the alternative option of sometimes leaving all of that behind and visiting a friend to play video games. One of the possible explanations for his privileged status could be the fact that he entered residential school a year later, which meant that while most of his peers had already figured out how to persist in the abusive community of residential school, draw the battlelines and establish positions he arrived without all this knowledge which at the same time made his position deeply unstable. It often made him the target of ridicule and bullying while also allowing him to craft relationships without falling back to the established antagonisms between *internātnieki* and *mājinieki*. Additionally,

he never really fit in with the usual assumption about the *internātnieki*—he read too much and fought too little. All of this gave him the opportunity to build resources that would later help him to last through all his years in residential school.

If Artūrs found a sense of home in meeting his friends outside of the school, Dzintars found it at a youth center, which provided him with a space where he was listened to, able to express himself, and could relax, which was more challenging in residential school due to his experience of being bullied. In Antra's case, what made her grandfather's sister's apartment feel like home was not only the act of returning there on weekends but rather social relations that took place there and helped her to counteract both the physical (as her apartment was located in the same city as the residential school unlike her family residence) and emotional distance that characterized her experience in her parent's home and residential school. Antra also emphasizes the importance of "other workers" within the residential school context, pointing out that while interactions with teachers and educators were often complicated and sometimes violent, she found other adults in her life to be more friendly, such as school nurse, a cook, or a dentist. It is interesting to note that at the same time, this part of school personnel was regarded very low by state officials in their interviews. For them, the expanded technical and support staff of residential schools represented yet another problem in the form of additional costs, without realizing their potential role in the provision of a home environment for students in more ways than one. The relational aspect of feeling at home here is realized despite the lack of kinship relation or professional skills of the staff but rather established through a kind and supportive attitude forming an important part of the institutional infrastructure of care.

The experiences and practices described in this chapter show that in order to be able to establish a continuous community, it needs to incorporate both relational aspects, such as a supportive and cooperative environment, and activities that help the children to find meaning and fulfillment in the activities they are engaged in. The fragmented nature of the residential school environment meant that the activities that were available were often either relaxing but rather boring or exciting but potentially violent or dangerous. To counteract this, a different type of practices are necessary which we describe in the following section.

### 3.4. *Everyday Homes: The Excitement of Spending Time in Transitional Spaces*

As described above, everyday life in residential schools was often filled with boredom interspersed with episodes of violence and resistance for research participants. This meant that far from having a space where they could feel relaxed and not bored, they often experienced the exact opposite. In this chapter, we turn toward describing how alternative spaces were carved out by Artūrs and other research participants with the aim of establishing spaces that not only allowed them to survive but also to develop their skills and talents or to recuperate from the challenges, expecting them on both ends of the residential care continuum.

When relationships of care are not available in either one's caregivers' home or the institution, where can the child overcome loneliness and gain a sense of fulfillment? This question may seem irrelevant in the case of Dzintars, who, as we saw, did receive the most support and talked both about residential school and his parent's house as his home. But also, in Dzintars' case, the space external to the residential school or place of his origin becomes imbued with many of the qualities that are usually assigned to the home environment:

Then every Monday afternoon after the school, I was a little late for evening learning. I had already told the educator that I would be a little late that I had to be there. Then was the first round [at the youth centre]. Then there were those two-hour evening lessons. Then we ate dinner and then I went out from about seven to eight. I went for the second round for a bit. We were basically the ones who stayed last, because for visitors it shuts down at nine, I think. But we walked away around 21.30. Sometimes because we just didn't have a choice,

because until the last moment we sat there, worked, hustled, thought how to get it all done.

(Dzintars)

Throughout the interview, Dzintars talked about his experience in his town's youth center fondly and considered it one of the formative experiences in his life, both because of the skills he acquired there and the sense of belonging and appreciation he experienced. But here, he shows that it was the ordering of time with meaningful social activity that was also crucial.

The second space that we see as constituting home for Artūrs during his residential school years was the buses. Despite the ever-changing experience of using public transport (different seats, other commuters, and different buses), there was always a certain comfort in stepping onto a bus, looking for a seat, (hopefully) finding one, and for around two hours not having to think neither of whether his parents are sober nor about whether he will get physically attacked or humiliated by peers.

Artūrs' experience during the bus rides illuminates the ways individuals from remote regions can exert agency on their isolation and creatively resist feelings of distance and isolation. By engaging in activities such as listening to music or reading, the space within the bus can be enhanced to become more comfortable and safer. This creates not only disassociation from the temporary setting of the perceived homely environment but also serves to reinforce it as repetitive and, therefore, somewhat stable. Artūrs' experience also illuminates the ways individuals from remote regions can exert agency on their isolation and creatively resist feelings of distance and isolation. While it could certainly be argued that Artūrs' engagement with books and buses and the subsequent sense of home is the result of loneliness and isolation, it also represents an active choice to craft a livable space in public, relatively unsupervised but also perceivably safer space.

What characterizes the spaces inhabited in both cases is their transitory character, as our participants were only expected to stay within them briefly and temporarily. Their experiences, however, illustrate how the experience of a homely environment may also be experienced in settings such as buses or youth centers. This characterization of home as transitory also helps to better understand the significance Antra assigned to the extracurricular activities during her school years, as during her interview, she spoke very highly about the hiking trips organized by one of the schoolteachers or the obligatory work component of the residential schools in the Soviet Union. For her the positive connotations of these activities not only arose from the ability to escape the control of the family and institution or the ability to create new and different relations. The significance is also tied to the way these events interrupted the daily life of residential school inhabitants and how their very form as somewhat disruptive activities allowed her to reclaim her agency with meaningful activities within transitory spaces even if the larger structures were still unchanged. This is represented by the story in an interview with one of the local deputies who explained how residential school children were taken on a trip to the nearest youth detention center with the aim of showing them what their future is going to look like if they misbehave. Extracurricular activities such as this one do not serve the purpose of reclaiming children's agency but rather in the opposite direction and remind them of the way the staff perceives them.

For Artūrs and Dzintars, the public space became most resembling homeliness. As the private space becomes associated with a lack of security and a sense of threat, they both found public spaces being somewhat regulated and safer than a room in a residential school or, in Artūrs' case, also home back in his village. Similarly, a bus to a friend's home was always transitory, which led to the development of a particular relationship with other human and nonhuman actors within the space. This makes the individual aware of the constant need to renew their relationship with things and people and, in the end, may not help to overcome the lack of trust and care that pushed them toward the alternative space in the first place.

#### 4. Discussion

In this paper, we have focused on how children in residential education construct their sense of home across the domains of safety and control, privacy, community, identity, everyday life, and time. According to our analysis, the differently distributed infrastructures of care across family homes, residential schools, and different interstitial spaces create a fragmented sense of where homeliness can become located. In each domain, a different space may become more dominant in producing homeliness as the freedom to do one's desired activities and benefit from caring and supportive relationships when one's home does not provide it.

Our exploration of safety, control and privacy illustrates how residential schools struggle between establishing different levels of control aiming to ensure the safety of the inhabitants while trying to negotiate space for care and support, which the very same safety practices may ban. This leads to an unstable and fractured experience for the inhabitants, who end up living in a hyper-regulated and simultaneously confusing space to which they learn to respond through small acts of resistance, which further confirms the need for increased control. In this way, residential school becomes a mirrored image of the experience that the pupils already experience at home, where the adults entrusted with their care may end up harming them. Nevertheless, the schools are also forthcoming, and pupils experience a sense of homeliness through negotiating improvements in their rooms and receiving care from non-authoritative staff, like cooks.

When hyper-control rather creates a sense of insecurity and fosters space for violence, the children end up looking outwards for supportive and less restrictive relations, especially when relations with peers in school are frequently conflictful. This may be expressed through developing strong and supportive friendships, involving oneself in extracurricular activities or drawing on the extended kinship relations closer to school than one's kinship-based home. Thus, spaces like friends' homes and youth centers might provide better infrastructures of care than one's primary places of residence. This is crucial in the possibilities of feeling a sense of belonging in a community and navigating the school identities that might build on one strongly associating oneself with the residential school.

Similarly, possibilities to fill one's everyday life with fulfilling outside activities for our interlocutors were significantly associated with transitional and public spaces. The transitional space, like a bus drive, provides a means to feel a type of safety possible in public space, which nevertheless is without the often-unwanted surveillance or encounters present at a family home or the residential school. As argued by Inglis in his research on driving in post-war France, "[driving] makes it possible to be simultaneously at home and further and further away from home" [26]. While Inglis makes this statement about driving a personal car, here, this statement also applies to public transportation. This again shows that when we reflect on the sense of home for our three interlocutors, we must look past the places that are usually associated with home toward alternative places that allow participants to find the space necessary for a desired sense of control, privacy, caring and supportive relationships, and agency to spend one's free time where and how one desires.

Overall, we found multiple ways in which children had agency to navigate homely environments, but for our interlocutors, it was significantly higher in spaces outside of the residential school and one's family home. Both the positive definitions of home and family environment and some of the children's efforts to establish higher control were sometimes counterproductive in improving homeliness both at one's family home and in the residential school environment. Nevertheless, the small ways in which such a sense was established were also important. While our interlocutors attended residential schools at different points in time, their experience of it was mostly fragmented and sometimes problematic, but as our analysis shows—significantly different in terms of where they found homeliness. This means that the conditions also foster creativity at multiple interstitial spaces and offer opportunities to create homeliness in finding control, supportive relationships, and time and space even if infrastructures of care are lacking in multiple of them.

This, however, might not be the case for everyone. As a qualitative, in-depth study, our research focused on three specific cases and, therefore, is not representative of all residential school students in Latvia. Therefore, the interpretations within this article should be approached with caution when applied to other contexts, either in Latvia or elsewhere. Furthermore, the information was obtained from adult participants who had already concluded their study periods, which also should be taken into account when considering the connections of the discussed experiences with contemporary situations.

Finally, the study has not been focused on evaluating differences on the basis of gender or other structural factors, which opens potential avenues for future research. By including these variables, it would become possible to evaluate in what ways larger social structures affect the experience of home, homeliness, and home-making for children in residential education, especially if also connected holistically to other potential determinants. The inclusion of children currently located within residential schools also presents a potential for future research, simultaneously ensuring that their voice is heard and allowing us to gain perspective from participants who are currently residing within the institutions.

## 5. Conclusions

In the context of residential education, home is a notion that has a variety of strong normative assumptions since many participants' family homes are seen as lacking positive qualities of home while institutions often do not even aim to offer a homely environment. Our analysis shows that it remains important to critically assess both normative notions of home and children's experiences of home to evaluate alternative visions on improving children's quality of life in conditions of mobile and transitional experiences of being housed. Treating children's experiences of homeliness as resulting from homes as infrastructures of care reveals how relationships, materialities, and governance can intersectionally increase their caring capacities in multiple ways. Importantly, some sense of unhomeliness results from children's lack of agency in doing what and when they wish to do, finding relational spaces where to belong, and shaping their places of residence according to their will.

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