

The Finnish Urban Studies Conference 2026 – Session 14

Housing precarity and everyday practices

Housing Patterns and Challenges of South Asian Immigrants in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area

Dishni Tharika Akuratiya Gamage

The immigration rate in contemporary Finland is increasing each year, with a particularly high number of immigrants originating from South Asia. Housing is recognized as a key determinant of immigrants settling in the host society. It is crucial to understand immigrants' experience of the housing process because housing and neighborhood play a crucial role in integrating immigrants into the mainstream society. There is a lack of studies conducted to investigate housing patterns and challenges of South Asian immigrants. To address this gap, this study aims to explore the housing experiences of South Asian immigrants in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, with a particular focus on identifying typical housing patterns, challenges faced in securing suitable accommodation, and the economic, cultural, religious, social, and institutional factors that influence their housing decisions and outcomes. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 17 participants, and their countries of origin are India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. A mixed analysis method was utilized; hence, spatial distribution analysis and content analysis were done. Theories utilized to understand the findings are economic capital, social capital, Cultural Capital, and segmented assimilation theory.

The findings of the study suggest that while shared South Asian cultural roots influence certain broad housing needs, each community exhibits unique patterns influenced by specific social, economic, and religious factors. Understanding these intra-group differences is essential for designing housing policies and services that address the diverse needs of immigrant populations, and it ensures more inclusive and culturally sensitive urban planning in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

Keywords: Housing patterns, Housing challenges, Social Capital, Cultural Capital, Economic Capital, Segmented Assimilation

The Lived-In Values of Home

Aislinn McCarthy

Bearing on the shoulders of the modern architect today is a committed diligence to sustain, taking critical care of intact, affordable homes before deciding to deconstruct, demolish and replace. Architectural mindsets equating innovation with increased material production, following a logic of growth and consumption, warrant an 'ideological cleansing'. To pursue slower circularity loops, existing dwellings must be appreciated through their accumulated traces of life and use, challenging reductive perceptions of them as devoid material banks. Grounded in the practice of repair, this work calls on the field to provide an alternative destiny for the hasty erasures of intact, post-war social housing blocks in Denmark which are home to thousands. Treated as mass entities from the exterior, their current evaluations include many voices but often omit the internal dweller's perspective. By exploring practices and limitations of resident-led repair embodied on a domestic scale, daily acts of alteration and appropriation are regenerated, cultivating knowledge of designs through their everyday lived reality in use. Case studies and fieldwork unfold a set of 'lived-in values' from these voices, presenting an expanded framework for assessment, rooted around principles of care through

dwelling. Positioned at the intersection of social and material science, the physical conditions of the built home are now entwined with the emotional dimensions, which could challenge and prolong thresholds of reparability, guiding professional practice towards an entire cultural shift, working towards architecture for longevity.

Keywords: Repair, home, lived-in values, domestic scale

Between Threat and Opportunity – Prefiguring in a Precarious Space

Anna Kobierska

The transformation of urban space into a scarce resource has increased the precarity of urban everyday life practices. My research understands housing precarity broadly as the spatial dimension of all urban everyday life and its vulnerabilities. These are strongly reflected in alternative, non-commercial spaces, which are the focus of this study. The efforts of the City of Helsinki to sell and redevelop its property holdings have increased uncertainty among communities that have long been building alternative futures on city-owned property. These prefigurative communities create alternative worlds in their everyday lives while being simultaneously supported and threatened by the City and its urban policies.

This research mobilizes a case study of Lapinlahti, a former psychiatric hospital that, through grassroots initiatives, was transformed into a center for mental well-being and culture. Lapinlahti serves as an example of a prefigurative space where a desired future is lived here and now, yet in a perpetually precarious position. The role of the City as both a sustainer and alleviator of precarity is controversial: it enables the activities through rent arrangements yet simultaneously threatens them with redevelopment and sale projects. This dual role creates tensions that are reflected in the communities' daily life practices as well as their survival and defense strategies.

The results from walking interviews show that prefiguration is intertwined with institutional, contentious, and everyday politics: communities negotiate with City officials, mobilize support, and engage in everyday resistance. The study offers new insights into how prefigurative communities maintain alternative futures in precarious urban spaces, simultaneously reinforcing and challenging their own precarious position.

Carceral and abolitionist geographies of Housing First units in Finland

Virve Repo

Housing First (HF) strategies have increased significantly in many countries during the 2000s. The Housing First model represents a radical and innovative approach to housing homeless people without requiring them to recover first. Thus, substance abuse is not prohibited in these units. Since 2008, the Finnish state has launched several programmes based on HF strategies to end long-term homelessness. The results were good until recently, when homelessness started to increase again in 2024. While HF strategies have been studied in many research projects, less attention has been given to everyday life inside the units. This study focuses on living and working in the units, utilising

the theoretical frameworks of carceral geographies and Ruth Wilson Gilmore's abolition geographies, as well as the concept of freedom as a place. Data was collected in two HF units in Helsinki through interviews with residents and staff members, as well as through volunteer ethnography. The results show that, although HF units are not institutions per se, they possess institutional and even carceral features. However, Housing First strategies can be seen as part of abolition geographies, in which institutions are aimed at being transformed into more humane forms. The results also reveal that the concept of free place-making is rife with contradictions, with residents and staff members perpetually navigating the balance between freedom and control. Substance use, for example, can create places of unfreedom, particularly among younger residents and in larger units. While HF strategies have been effective in reducing long-term homelessness, more attention should be given to everyday life in the units.