



YOUTH, INFORMALITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

A Qualitative Case Study on the Significance of
Public Space for Youth in Mlango Kubwa, Nairobi

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Youth, Informality and Public Space
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates whether, in which capacity and to which extent public space plays a role in improving the lives of young people in informal settlements. Youth in a village in the Mathare informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, is used as a case. The thesis is a qualitative case study, where in-depth interviews with youth has been main source of primary data. The research follows two tracks to examine the role of public space in improving young people's lives. The first is the investigation of how public space can enhance the quality of life for youth. It is found that public space to some extent plays a role as an enabler of education and employment opportunities, while also increasing the

security in the village. The other track in the thesis examines the political dimension related to public space. I find that through the claim for public space and subsequent use of the claimed public spaces, the status and influence of youth is increased both within the community and vis-à-vis the formal political system. I also find that access to the public spaces in the village is contested, and that segments of the youth population do not have equal access to them. The study concludes that public space can improve the lives of young people in informal settlements, though this is granted access.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBO:	Community based organization
GIS:	Geographic Information Systems
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
KANU:	Kenya African National Union
KLFA:	Kenya Land Freedom Army
KSH:	Kenya Shillings
KPU:	Kenya People's Union
MECYG:	Mathare Environmental Conservation Youth group
MLATA:	Mlango Kubwa Landlords and Tenants Association
MYSA:	Mathare Youth Sports Association
NARC:	National Rainbow Coalition
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
NYS:	National Youth Service
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Programs
UN-Habitat:	United Nations Human Settlements program
UN:	United Nations
UNGA:	United Nations General Assembly
USD:	US dollars
WB:	World Bank

1. INTRODUCTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

In April 2015, I visited Nairobi for the first time to attend a UN-Habitat meeting. As a part of the Norwegian delegation, I was invited on a field trip to Mathare informal settlement

to observe a concrete expression of the UN agency's work for youth in the area, which is in part funded by the Norwegian government.



Figure 1.1: Penalty at Slum soccer (Photo: UN-Habitat, 2015)

During the visit, we learned how youth in this area were improving their community. Through persistent work within the community, and through political action, they had created employment opportunities, increased safety and the establishment of public spaces, for youth in particular and for the community in general. Later that year I returned to Nairobi to work for UN-Habitat. One of my tasks at UN-Habitat was to conduct a case study about a youth group in Mlango Kubwa and their work in the community. I spent a substantial amount of time in Mathare documenting the work of the youth group. When arriving back in Oslo after two months in Nairobi, I started working on this thesis. It became natural to envisage a thesis going deeper into the themes I had worked with at UN-Habitat. I felt that I had merely scratched the surface of the intricate politics and development work that was being done in the village. My motivation, then, was to further explore what outcomes are produced and enabled through public space in the community. Choosing to look at the youth population was a consequence of my knowledge about their role as community organizers in the village.

1.1 The research questions

A few themes emerged in designing this study. The claiming and use of public space had been at the center of the developments in the village over the last decade. However, it remained unclear what role public spaces had actually played for the youth in the community. The overarching research question thereby aims at clarifying this aspect:

1. Can public space improve the lives of youth in Mlango Kubwa?

The research question is broad, and could potentially include a wide range of aspects affecting the lives of young people in informal settlements. I chose to narrow the focus onto two main aspects of young people's lives; their quality of life as they themselves perceive it, and their political status and influence. These two aspects have also formed the sub-questions that guide the analysis of this thesis.

The first sub-question relates to the potential for increased quality of life through public space for youth in Mlango Kubwa. I examine this question in light of already experienced improvements, and potential future improvements:

a. What role can public space play in enhancing the quality of life of youth in Mlango Kubwa?

The second research questions aim at uncovering whether public spaces can increase the political influence of young people. In this regard, I analyze how the public spaces in the village are produced by informal and formal politics, and how this production again creates outcomes for the political status of youth.

b. How are public spaces in Mlango Kubwa produced, and does public space enhance the political influence of youth in the community?

1.2 Main findings

Public spaces can increase the quality of life of youth

The first main finding of the thesis is that public spaces can and do function as a catalyst for improving the quality of life of young people within the parameters of the case. On the one hand, the spaces work proactively as platforms to create employment and education opportunities. On the other, they work reactively to prevent unwanted externalities through functioning as safe spaces for those who use it. I identify the proactive solutions as root cause solutions, because they set out to solve the core causes of the challenges that stand in the way of good life quality, such as lack of education and unemployment. Reactive solutions are labelled safe haven solutions, because they focus on regulating space to exclude unwanted elements. While creating safe spaces can increase the quality of life for those who have access to them, it does not deal with the real cause of the issue, for instance crime caused by unemployment. The existence of public space in informal settlements is limited, and I find that they are also limited in the sense that not all youth have equal access to public spaces. For instance, the exclusion of drug abusing youth in public space is a logical consequence of maintaining a safe space, considering the frequent link between drug abuse and criminal activity. Organized youth, those who are affiliated with a youth group, regulate and maintain the public spaces, and are hence the segment of youth that benefit the most from the public spaces in the village. However, organized youth extensively use their access to public space to improve their community as a whole, for instance through waste management programs

and security patrols. My findings point towards a larger tendency: For equal distribution of benefits, there needs to be structures in place which can assure the inclusion of all people in the community, and that marginalized people are met with measures according to their challenges, and are not lumped into one category of marginalization. For such an equal distribution to occur there is a need for institutions who can address these challenges. When such institutions do not adequately address challenges for the population, it becomes a situation where every person is left to fend for himself. Or, as in the instance of this case, every community for itself. Within this context, my observation is that organized youth in Mlango Kubwa have made a systematic and forceful effort to improve the quality of life of young people in their village.

Public spaces as a platform for political influence

The second path for analyzing the overall research question was to explore the political aspects of youth's use of public space. My aim was to understand whether youth, through public space, could increase their political influence and subsequently widen the use of their democratic citizenship. Through an analysis of how public spaces are produced in the village, I find that organized youth influence politics from several angles. They use the formal political system to their advantage through establishing relationships with NGOs, politicians and the UN. The youth groups nurture the relationships and hold up their end of each bargain made, building bonds of trust and mutual respect. At the same time, they manifest their position within the community, and express explicit resistance when necessary. I argue that their

mode of political influence increases their social and political status both within the community and externally. This status gives organized youth an immense influence on the production of public space, and hence a position to achieve positive developments for their communities. The youth use the public spaces that are produced to promote their causes, and in this sense the public spaces become their 'bastions for conveying politics'.

Transitional youth, transitional space

I stress that youth must be understood as a transitional phase rather than a set age span. In the theory chapter it is emphasized that, when transforming from child to adult, there is a period of waiting in which youth explore their identities and prospects. In this period, most youth move out of the private realm where they spent their time as children, and into the public sphere where their identities are evolved. After a period of transition, the goal and outcome for most youth is to transcend back into their own private space. This space may contain their own family, a job and a home; a livelihood on their own premise. On what point this journey occurs depends on the success of the transition. In the conclusive chapter of the thesis I illustrate how this transition can occur in spatial terms. In addition to private space and public space, I identify a third space, institutional political space. I argue that organized youth in Mlango Kubwa have the ability to access an elevated political space through their use of public space, an opportunity they employ to the fullest. Their extended access to public space functions as a springboard to access an elevated level of 'public', represented by the institutionalized political system. While their public spaces provide opportunities

such as employment and education, institutional political space, the top of the pyramid, give them tools that further increase their opportunities in public space. They do this through using the institutional political space to create more opportunities in public space. It provides them with a mobility which is higher than experienced by most slum dwellers. The tools they gain in institutional political space, then, increases their ability to successfully transition to adulthood. I argue that when youth are able to access this space, transitioning to adulthood becomes less of an obstacle than for most marginalized youth. Through using the institutional political space to improve their quality of life, organized youth in Mlango Kubwa increase their chance at transcending the obstacles that for some block the entrance to adulthood.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Chapter one introduces the themes for the thesis, and elaborates on my motivation for choosing these themes. The scope of the research is defined through the introduction of the research questions for the study. The main findings for the research is briefly introduced.

Chapter two presents background on Kenyan history and politics in general, and about Mathare and Mlango Kubwa in particular. The events and processes that are introduced in this chapter are important because they have since the beginning of the twentieth century played a role in shaping Mathare. The public spaces which are subjected to analysis in this thesis are also introduced in this chapter.

Chapter three introduces the theoretical assumptions for

the thesis. Public space, youth and informality is theorized in order to provide a lens for analyzing the empirical data. A framework for understanding quality of life is introduced to create a basis for later defining quality of life in the specific context of the case.

Chapter four introduces the methodology and methods used for conducting this thesis. The chapter elaborates on choices made prior to, during and after the field work in Nairobi in May 2016. The methodologic mode producing and analyzing the data is introduced. Finally, I assess the quality of the data.

Chapter five is the first analysis chapter. It aims at exploring how quality of life can be enhanced through public space. The framework for this chapter is developed through a hybrid between a theoretical concept of quality of life, and empirical data about what youth perceive as challenges for themselves. The framework is then used for analyzing how public space can counteract these challenges.

Chapter six has the aim of answering the research questions of how public spaces in the village are produced, and whether the public spaces functions as platforms for increasing the political influence and status of youth. Contrary to the former analysis chapter, this analysis is largely framed by existing theory, and hence the empirical data is used to elaborate on and nuance the theory. The perspective of dialectic of public space, as introduced in the theory chapter is used to analyze how the public spaces are produced. Perspectives on public space as political space frame the debate about public space as a platform for youth's increased political influence.

Chapter seven summarizes the main findings for the study, and provides concluding remarks to answer the overarching research question.

2. CASE IN CONTEXT

Writing about a different culture, in a different part of the world, where you do not speak the preferred language requires a level of sensitivity towards the subject and reflection regarding your position vis-à-vis the case and the people in it. This will be thoroughly debated in the methodology and methods chapter. However, another important insight that benefits the researcher, as well as the reader, is deeper knowledge about the case, and how it relates to the society it belongs to. In this chapter I will introduce the context relevant for understanding the case at hand, and data that relates to the history and attributes of both the Mathare informal settlement and the Mlango Kubwa neighborhood and its inhabitants. My aim is to demonstrate some of the explanatory forces that has contributed to shaping the Mathare area and Mlango Kubwa. The chapter will first explain some nation-wide historical and political processes that been important in shaping the development of the slums of Nairobi. Second, the chapter will more specifically introduce the political geographic context of Nairobi and the Mathare slum. Finally, an introduction of the neighborhood that has been researched is in order, to adequately address how its public spaces have developed over recent years.

2.1 Kenya: Between hope and despair

The legacy of colonial rule has in many ways shaped modern Kenya and the formation of its slum areas. The area planning practices and labor market controls in colonial Kenya created segregated societies which forced a rise of the informality that dominates the country and the slums of Nairobi today. Although independence marks a period of upheaval in the political and economic system in Kenya, most of the structural injustices that persist today have direct linkages to the British colonial rule that dominated Kenya from 1895 to 1963. The colonial rule was designed to enrich the British Empire and the Europeans that chose to settle in Kenya. When Kenya was made a British protectorate in 1895, the fertile highlands were designated the settlers, and African farmers had to relocate to less fruitful areas of land. At this point, Africans had no formal political influence in Kenya. The legislative body that was constituted in 1907 consisted of predominantly white representatives and a marginal Asian delegation. During World War One, two hundred thousand Kenyans fought on behalf of the British Empire, of which nearly a fourth died. Throughout the war, the British rule tightened its governing grip on Kenya, for instance through the introduction of a strict taxation scheme that ensured the supply of cheap African labor. The Kenyan population

reacted to these governmental developments with armed resistance, which ultimately resulted in the creation of African councils that held some political weight. After the Second World War, the resistance towards the British rule escalated, particularly within the well-educated Kikuyu tribe. It resulted in the Mau Mau uprising, the infamous guerilla war led on by Kenya Land Freedom Army (KLFA) with the aim of independence, which was ultimately achieved in 1963 (Leraand, 2015).

“Between hope and despair” is how Kenya is characterized by Daniel Branch (2012) in his book on post-colonial politics in Kenya. ‘Hope and despair’ refers to the significant difficulties Kenyans have experienced in their efforts to create a stable political system. Jomo Kenyatta, leader of Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the first Kenyan president after independence remained in his seat until his death in 1978. Within this period there were significant political disputes, involving the criminalization of one of KANU’s rivaling political parties, Kenya People’s Union (KPU) and the imprisonment of its leader, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Daniel Arap Moi, Kenyatta’s predecessor remained president until 2002 and in that respect survived the democratization reforms demanded by the international community from the early 1990’s. Mwai Kibaki and the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) won the 2002 election, leaving KANU outside of government for the first time since independence (Leraand, 2015). The following elections were overshadowed by widespread violence, ending in a coalition government between Raila Odinga (son of previously mentioned Jaramogi Odinga) and sitting president Kibaki. In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta (son of Jomo Kenyatta) was elected

president (Leraand, 2015 & Branch, 2012). In the upcoming 2017 elections, history repeats itself when Kenyatta and Odinga go head on for the presidency.

Kenyan politics since independence has thus been dominated by an elite, consisting of a closely knitted web of family relations and connections. Politics has also been shaped through tribal lineages, although in recent years a considerable effort has been made to unite the tribes both in politics and daily life. Although tribes live side by side, marry each other and work together, the tribal divide is still apparent on all scales Kenya, and in some settlements demarcations between ethnic groups have become more apparent in the recent years. Depending on the definition, Kenya has between 40 and 70 ethnic groups. The largest group is Kikuyu, which has long dominated Kenyan politics through KANU¹. Following Kikuyu, other important tribes according to size are Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo, Kamba and the Somali people (Hansen, 2015). Branch describes hope and despair as a hallmark of post-colonial politics in Kenya. Such hope and despair can also be traced in current a citizen’s views on the duality between attempting to erase tribal conflicts on one hand, and having politicians escalate them on the other:

¹ Daniel Arap Moi was an exception to the Kikuyu dominance, as he was of the Kalenjin tribe. Notably, he became president because he was the sitting vice president when Jomo Kenyatta died.

“

It is a really nice community. I know it, I was born and raised in this community. It is a very good community. But, we have some politicians who comes and try to divide and to bring this tribalism. “Oh, you are not a Kikuyu”, or something like that. We are mixed tribes in the community but politicians try to divide us. It is a nice community, it is just the politicians trying to divide us. We see them and notice them. We try to make it better. In this world we have different types, but we are all the same people” (young man 1, interview 15.05.2016).

”

Nairobi: An ‘excellent’ site for explosive growth

Nairobi is the capital of Kenya, but it has only in the last century become its epicenter for politics and business. The area where Nairobi was established, was envisaged as an eligible lay-over spot during the construction of the rail line between Uganda and Mombasa in 1899. George Whitehouse, the Chief Engineer, made the observation that the location was an “excellent site for the quarters of offices and subordinates” (Gatabaki-Kamau and Karirah-Gitau, 2004, 159). The expansion of the area we now know as Nairobi was carried out through city planning processes in 1905, 1927 and 1948. Traditionally, Europeans

were located in the North-Western parts of the city, Asian construction workers stayed close to the city center and Africans who were not domestic workers were stacked together in the ‘Eastlands’. The colonial regulation and planning of the area has undoubtedly had long term effects on the spatial distribution in Nairobi, and was a catalyst for the emergence and growth of slums such as Mathare. As stated in the official plans for the area developments of Nairobi from 1948, deemed the master plan, racial zoning was a key component, and it was justified through arguments to counter the spreading of disease with minimum public spending. A new master plan from 1973 was meant to supersede the 1948 plan, but it was never effectively put into motion. This new plan was developed post-independence, and the administrative segregation characteristic for the 1948 plan was replaced by a socio-economic segregation in terms of land being allocated by income levels (Gatabaki-Kamau and Karirah-Gitau, 2004). Another expression of the colonial planning regime was its extensive labor market controls, known as the Kipande system, which demanded that all African males would be able to provide papers and records for prompt inspections. On one hand, Kipande limited growth rates in the designated African settlements through strict regulations. On the other hand, they naturally forced a system of informality where the labor market regulations could be avoided (Andvig and Barasa, 2014).

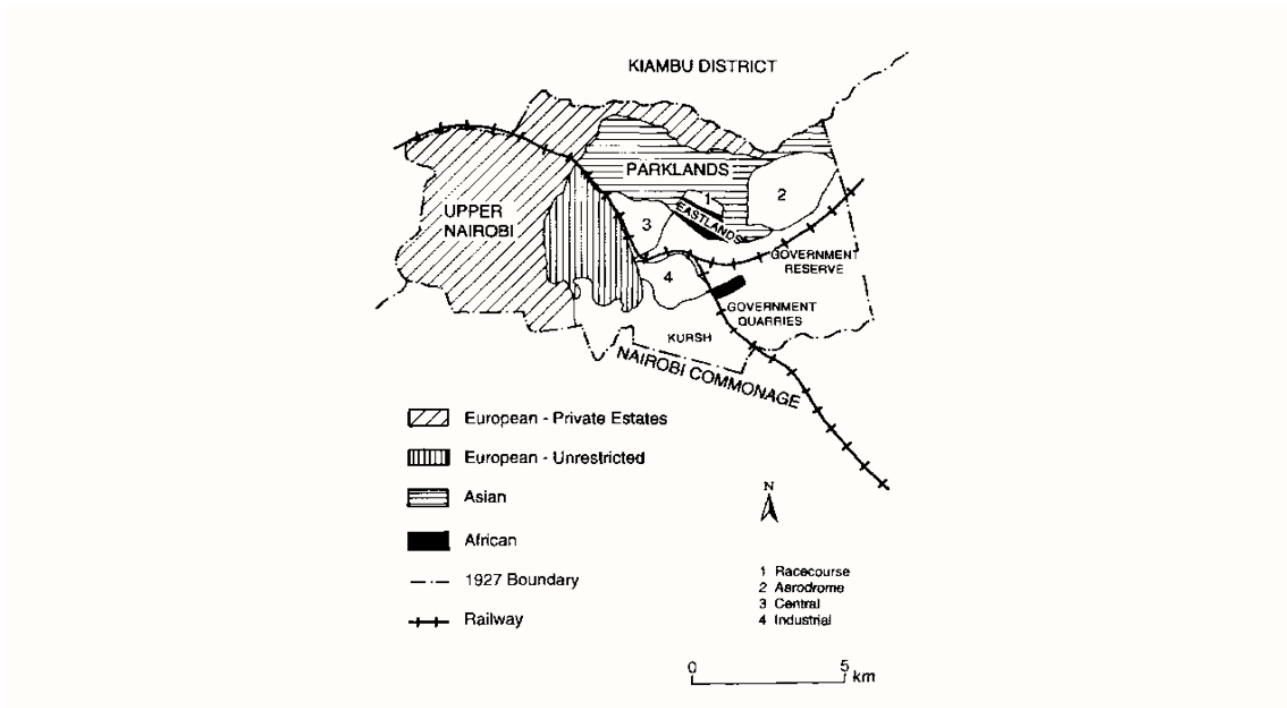


Figure 2.1: Racial zoning in Nairobi, 1909. (Obudho, 1997)

Nairobi has grown substantially both physically and in population over the last since its establishment. Alterations of the city borders have occurred on several occasions, most notably in 1963 when the city was expanded to include the predominantly European-occupied suburbs surrounding it, such as Karen, Spring Valley and Ruraka (Gatabaki-Kamau and Karirah-Gitau, 2004).

Figure 2.2 gives an indication of the population growth that has occurred and continues to accelerate in Nairobi. Rural-urban migration has been a prime driver of this exponential growth, and it is projected that there will be 6 million people by 2025, and as much as 14 million by 2050. (Hoorweg and Pope, 2014 & Kenya London News, 2013).

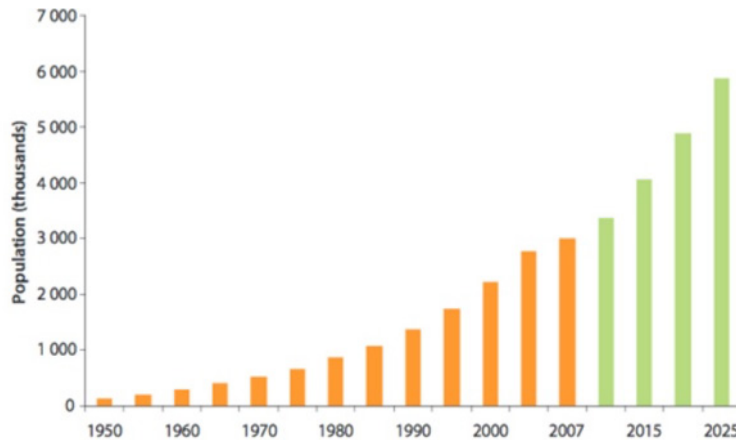


Figure 2.2: Population growth in Nairobi from 1950-2025 (Source: Kenya London News, 2015)

Although the Nairobi master plan of 1948 was formally replaced, there are still concrete expressions of this planning legacy of the colonial rule in Nairobi. Besides the contrast between gated communities and high security areas where expats and rich Kenyans live, and the more than 100 slum areas in deep lack of service provision, current planning tools reinforce the old structures. For instance, the legal minimum size of a parcel of land is still larger in the old European areas of the city than in low income areas. In Karen, parcels of land can only be sold if they are over the size of half an acre². No such legal rules apply in Mathare or in the other slums of Nairobi. One consequence of this is that land in

low income areas can be sold for up to three times the price of land in high income areas (Obala, 2011, 105). Another effect is the *de facto* residential exclusion of a large proportion of the population in several areas in the city, and the maintenance of old segregating structures.

2.2 Mathare

Over 60 percent of the population in Nairobi live in informal settlements. The existence of informal settlements in Nairobi is, according to Gatabaki-Kamau and Karirah-Gitau (2004) a result of contradictions between colonial and post-colonial labor policies, housing policies and economic relations. Mathare is a collection of slums in the center of Nairobi, which is said to be the oldest in the city,

² Karen is a suburb which was previously outside the city of Nairobi, and it was predominantly inhabited by Europeans. The area is named after Karen Blixen, whose famous book "Out of Africa" describes her life as a coffee farmer in this area.

where roughly 44 percent of the inhabitants live below the poverty line (Michelson et al., 2012). The initial villages started developing in the 1920s, and grew along Juja road in the 1930s and 50s. Definitions what Mathare entails in terms of geographical area varies. Mathare valley is a distinction which is sometimes (and sometimes not) used interchangeably with Mathare, entailing the area bound by Thika road in the North and Juja road in the South, beginning in Muratina road in Southwest and ending at outer ring road. The Mathare 'slums' is often used about the roughly 50 percent of the southern parts of the area. There are various formation processes that has led to what constitutes Mathare today. The first villages were results of non-commercial modes, where squatting and gradual infiltration occurred on government-owned land. Subsequent villages were established through commercial modes where land buying cooperatives and companies acquired land, and squatters illegally subdivided and sub-subdivided it to sell it in smaller units (Gatabaki-Kamau and Karirah-Gitau, 2004).

Population estimates in the settlement range from roughly 200 000 to 800 000 people (Corburn et al., 2011 & COHRE, 2008). Population estimates are partly difficult because of lack of clarity regarding geographical distinctions connected to stated numbers. It is also problematic because the government on one side might have an interest in limiting the count, and community based organizations (CBO's) and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) on the other hand might benefit from an overestimated count. In the electoral constituency of Mathare there are, however, approximately 200 000 registered voters (Softkenya, 2016). Information about the attributes of the population in Mathare is

somewhat easier to retrieve, considering it has been subject to a substantial amount of research over the recent years. It is still vital to note that considering the lack of information about the total population of Mathare, the data presented in the following section could reasonably be challenged.

Demographic and social characteristics

A survey conducted with 1000 inhabitants from four of the six wards in Mathare shows that the demographic distribution in Mathare in terms of gender is 49,7 percent male and 50.3 percent female, which mirrors the national average. This mirroring of national statistics is also evident in age distribution, where the survey shows that approximately 41 percent of the population in Mathare is under 25 years old. 80 percent of the population is 35 years old or younger. This coincides with the demographic distribution on a national level (Spatial Collective, 2013, World Bank, 2015).

The population in Mathare is predominantly very poor, and the average monthly income per household is less than 8,500 KSH or about 82 USD³. The average monthly expenditure for a household exceeds the average income with 9,100 KSH. The discrepancy between income and expenses is illustrative of the hardships of the life in Mathare (Corburn et al., 2011).

Despite the low levels of income, education levels in Mathare are almost as high as the national average. Much of this is due to the introduction of free primary school in Kenya in 2003. Three fourths of people in Mathare reports to have completed either primary or secondary school

³ Currency rates from 4.4.2017 Source: <https://www.finn.no/reise/valuta/>

education. On a national level, over 80 percent of the population completed primary school. 17 percent of the population in Mathare reported that they had achieved a

college or university degree, and less than 1 percent had gone above the undergraduate level (Spatial Collective, 2013, Kovacic, 2014).

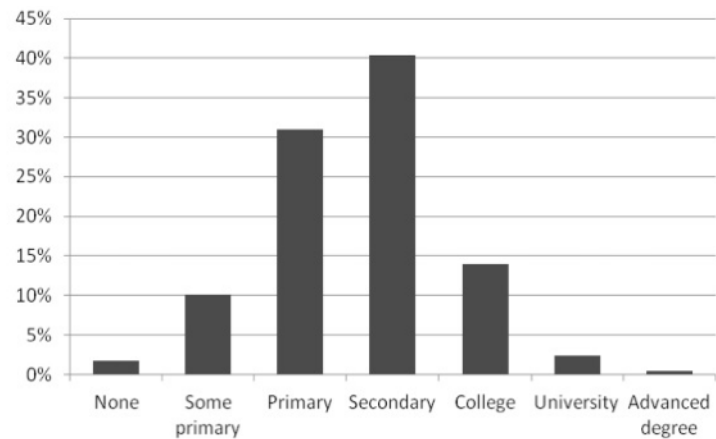


Figure 2.3: Education levels in Mathare. (source: Kovacic, 2014)

Although education levels are relatively high, formal income generating opportunities are few. 87 percent of the Mathare labor force work within the informal sector or are casual laborers. Only 10 percent of Mathare residents are formally employed and 61 percent of the residents work from within Mathare. Employment opportunities typically include washing clothes for women and infrastructure construction

for men. The former pays 100-200 KSH per day and the latter 200-250 KSH (Corburn et al., 2011). It has also been found that unemployment in Mathare is high, reaching up to 32 percent. This number decreases with age due to increased self-employment opportunities. Women are found to have higher rates of unemployment than men (Kovacic, 2014).

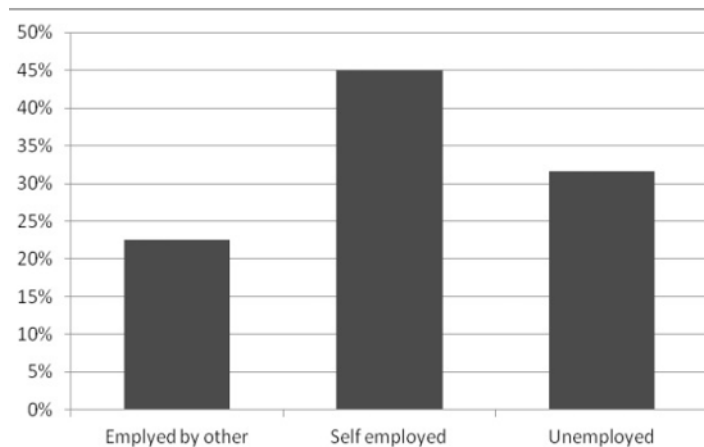


Figure 2.4: Employment in Mathare. (source: Kovacic, 2014)

Most people who reside in Mathare do it because they have no other choice. 66 percent of the residents claim they moved to Mathare due to economic reasons. This is also apparent when residents are asked about the transient nature of living in a slum. Many slum-dwellers believe that their stay in the slum is a temporary arrangement until better opportunities come by. This is backed up by data showing that over 54 percent of the respondents had lived in Mathare for 10 years or less (Spatial Collective, 2013). Researchers find that this transient nature could be a facilitating factor for the lack of investment and public interest in improving the slum communities. When people believe they are only there for a short amount of time, their ownership towards the community might not be strong enough to voice concerns and work actively for improvement (Isunju et al., 2011).

These temporal trends are reflected in housing structures. Mathare has a mix of less permanent structures, such as tin, wood and mud-shacks, and some high-rise buildings of a more permanent character. Roughly two thirds of people live in the less permanent structures, and one third live in more permanent buildings where service provision such as electricity, water and sewage is more available and reliable. The average household consists of 3,5 people, and both permanent and less permanent structures have an average size of approximately nine square meters (Spatial Collective, 2013). While shack structures are less robust, and have less access to public goods, they are also less penetrable by police forces in terms of being so densely built that you must know the area well to be able to navigate it. The pathways between the shacks can resemble labyrinths, and most shack dweller areas are unable to be reached by

motorized vehicles. This can work both as an advantage and a disadvantage for the people living there. While land ownership is often a fuzzy concept, ownership of the shack structures is in most cases clear. The permission to build on a piece of land can be granted by various agencies

or bureaucrats, making shack ownership a volatile affair considering permits can be revoked and disputes over who has a right to a given piece of land frequently occur (Andvig and Barasa, 2014).



Figure 2.5: Shack structures in Mathare. (Nathaniel Canuel, 2015)

Civil society engagement fills an important role in Mathare, and one third of the residents report that they are members of a CBO (Corburn et al., 2011, 16). A large proportion of this engagement can be linked to the financial support a member is granted through membership in savings groups. These groups do, however, serve as entry points for other forms of civic engagement. Other examples are women's groups and youth groups. The most well-known youth group in Mathare is the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), famous beyond the borders of Kenya for its sports for development programs which targets children and youth from all over Mathare (Corburn et al., 2011).

Political characteristics

Mathare constituency is formally divided into six wards, where each ward represents an electoral unit. Mathare constituency elects one member to represent Mathare in the Kenyan parliament. In addition, each ward in Mathare elects one member to them in the Nairobi county assembly (Softkenya, 2016). Apart from its formal electoral system, there are multiple ways that the state is involved in the governing the slum, as highlighted in a study of the political economy of Mathare by Andvig and Barasa (2014).⁴ Although slums such as Mathare have been termed the 'pockets of statelessness' (Joireman, 2011, 129), the state is indeed present on many levels. Andvig and Barasa distinguishes between what they determine as mechanisms of ruling from the outside and ruling from the inside. In their theory, the outside refers to the management of access to slums, allocation of property rights and determination

of geographical areas. Large scale instruments are in this regard evictions and the provision of public services such as electricity, water and sanitation, or maybe rather the lack thereof. The state's attempt to govern from the inside relates primarily to policing and attempts to govern and control illegal activity. Andvig and Barasa find that the state's efforts of ruling from the outside is less complex than attempts to rule from the inside. However, both forms of governing tend to make the inhabitants of Mathare view the state as something bad, or in their own terms, as a 'predator'. An example of this is how the state dealt with the violence that broke out during the elections in 2007. While trying to stop the eruption of violence from the inside of Mathare was difficult, if not impossible, governing from the outside was as simple as shutting off the slums from the rest of the city. The intense density of Mathare made this task fairly easy for the state (Andvig and Barasa, 2014). Interestingly, Andvig and Barasa's analysis highlights the internal and external expressions of the attempts at slum governance by the slum dwellers themselves. While the internal efforts at governance represent the demands to be secure from the crimes of other slum dwellers, collective external action are rather directed towards the states' predation (Andvig and Barasa, 2014).

2.3 Mlango Kubwa

“

My community is a good community. We have positive people, we have good people. I think, if given the chance, they can do great things. There is a lot of potential here” (young man 4, interview 20.05.2016).

”

⁴ The 'state' is in this thesis understood as all scales of public government in Kenya.

On asking the informants in Mlango Kubwa how they would describe their community, an overwhelming majority of the responses were in line with the quote above. The first reaction of the informant was in most cases to state that it was a good community, and then follow up with the realization that there are also some hardships that needs to be dealt with.

Mlango Kubwa is a part of Mathare, and is characterized as a slum rather than a low-income area like its neighboring ward Pangani. However, Mlango Kubwa has a higher ratio of high-rise buildings than the rest of Mathare, leading some researchers to assume the average living conditions and income levels to be slightly higher than in the rest of Mathare (Andvig and Barasa, 2014). Mlango Kubwa ward consists of approximately 38 000 inhabitants (Softkenya, 2016). The area of study in this thesis constitutes roughly one third of Mlango Kubwa. The area is located in the western corner of the slum, which also marks the western boundary of Mathare. For a more detailed overview, see figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 presented in the methodology and methods chapter. The following sections will provide a brief description to the relevant physical public spaces in the Mlango Kubwa area. This is in order to properly frame the important attributes of these areas as they will be treated in the analysis chapters of this thesis.

Pequininos Social Hall

The largest social hall in the Mlango Kubwa area is called Pequininos social hall is 'home' to Mathare Environmental Conservation youth group (MECYG). The hall has one floor

with a large common area, an ICT-center with computers, a kitchen and a toilet. On the roof, a provisional structure constitutes another meeting space, which is where the elders in the community hold their meetings. In addition, the hall has a backyard which originally was a football pitch, but is now mainly used for cooking. Women in the community cook lunch for the youth participating in the National Youth Service (NYS).⁵ The hall is used as a base for the NYS in Mlango Kubwa. It is used for meetings, both for MECYG and for other community groups in the area. On weekends, they screen English Premier League games on the TV in the common area and charge a fee from the audience (chairman 1, interview 16.05.2016).

The land where the center was built was originally a waste dump. Through consistent pressure on politicians, MECYG managed to get official clearance to use the space for a social hall. Eventually they also succeeded in removing the garbage. The current structure is the fourth structure on the plot of land, and the building was funded by the state through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for Mathare (chairman 1, interview 16.05.2016, UN-Habitat, 2015).⁶

⁵ The National Youth Service (NYS) is a government program for employing youth to conduct community improvement projects with mainly infrastructure projects such as improving roads and building public toilets.

⁶ Each constituency has its own fund for community development projects. The Member of Parliament for the constituency is the patron for the fund, and the fund has its own board and administration.



Figure 2.6: Pequíninos social hall. (Photo: Tone Standal Vesterhus, 2015)



Figure 2.7: Slum Soccer. (Photo: Tone Standal Vesterhus, 2015)

Slum soccer

The football field 'Slum soccer' is the centerpiece of community. It represents a rare occurrence in terms of being a large public space that has, despite various attempts, not successfully been grabbed and used for housing. The space is surrounded by high rise buildings, which gives associations to the Foucauldian 'panopticon'. Parents send their children to play there because they regard it as a safe space. Besides from mainly operating as a playground and field for football matches and tournaments, it is also used for community events, meetings, rallies and crusades by the church. The soccer field is located approximately 150 meters from Pequininos social hall.

Other public spaces

There exists one other youth hall in this area, Espana social hall, which belongs to Carambe environmental self-help group. Carambe environmental self-help group owns an old shack-like structure which was small compared to Pequininos, but similar in function. They were in the process of establishing a permanent structure at the time of the field work, but it was on hold due to disputes over the land it was being constructed on. The new structure is, like Pequininos, funded by the CDF for Mathare (chairman 3, interview 01.06.2016).

In addition to this, informants have mentioned the local church and a school as spaces they see as open for youth to use. Due to the institutionally restricted use of these spaces, I have not chosen to focus on them in this thesis.

It can also be worth to note that the streets in the area are public spaces that have various functions, for instance commercial functions that are income generating for the local inhabitants.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced background consisting of relevant events and processes for the creation and evolution of Mathare over the years. Understanding the legacy of the colonial rule, and the post-colonial politics since independence in 1962 is vital for understanding how

the widespread informal settlements, labor markets and politics in Nairobi have developed. The first section of this chapter, then, is meant to provide a wider context for the case that is subject to analysis in this thesis. The second section of the chapter introduced Mathare and Mlango Kubwa. Demographic, social and political characteristics of Mathare provide an understanding of the features of the population and its livelihoods. Finally, I have introduced the public spaces which are the focus for the analysis.

3. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

In this chapter I introduce theoretical perspectives that frame the study and will be used for analysing my empirical data. I apply theories from several disciplines along with branches in human geography. My analytical unit is youth and how their use of public space affects their relationship with the community surrounding them. The case makes it necessary to include perspectives on youth, informality and public space. To make this a comprehensible exercise, I have divided the chapter into two main sections, where each part is intended to answer a theoretical question.

The first section aims at answering the question: *What role does public space play in informal politics?* I begin by giving a conceptual introduction to urban public space, elaborating on how such spaces are made political through different modes of action. I then progress to explore how formal and informal politics is interconnected through various relations. The two sub-sections on public space and informality respectively provide the tools for answering the abovementioned question.

The second section of the chapter has the aim of answering the following question: *What role can public space play in enhancing young peoples' quality of life?* I open this part by conceptualizing youth, and examine their relationship with 'the urban' and public space. I continue by demonstrating what 'quality of life' can imply in the context of public space.

Here, as well, the sub-sections provide the theory needed to discuss the overall question of the section.

At the end of the chapter, the presented theory which be employed in the analysis will be summarized.

3.1 Urban public space

As with most urban research, academic conceptualizations of urban public space have been shaped with examples – and by scholars – from the Global North. Definitions of public space range from the 'actual', physical space that is open for the public, to the less physical 'public sphere', where opinions and discourses are formulated (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2009). Mitchell and Staeheli define it in the following way:

“

Public space is that space where 'the public' is formed and thus social and cultural rules governing public behavior predominate" (2009, 511).

”

Public space is inherently defined by its opposite, private space. However, there exists a range of distinctions of spaces in the span between them, with various degrees of public

and private. A space can be public *a priori*, if defined in such a manner by the governing body regulating it. This does not necessarily entail that the public, in its wide sense, has access to it. Even prior to 9/11, public spaces in New York were in the process of becoming restricted, or what Mitchell (2003) describes as 'fortified'. Presented as a means of making public spaces available for more people, surveillance cameras, stricter policing and behavior modification were put in place. The effect of this regulation of public spaces in New York was that 'inappropriate users' such as homeless, drug dealers, political activists and loitering youth were excluded from them (Mitchell, 2003). This serves as an example where space which is meant to be open for the public becomes exclusionary through the regulation of the space. Space can also be private as defined by government, for later to become public *de facto* through the use and struggle of, for instance, social movements (Mitchell and Staeheli 2009).

Another way to distinguish public spaces is through the dichotomy of close-minded and open-minded spaces (Walzer, 1986). The dichotomy refers to the degree to which a space has a predetermined and defined function, or if it is open for a range of functions to be defined by the user. While typically a park could be an example of an open-minded space, a shopping center could be considered close-minded. Similarly to the case of the New York City parks, open-minded spaces can be perceived as threatening and unpredictable (Walzer, 1986). They are, however, inherently more inclusive than close-minded spaces, whose use, and hence users, are predetermined.

The range of ways to understand public space illustrates the complexity attached to such spaces and the processes that concern them.

Jane Jacobs (1961) claimed that modernist urban design and homogenization posed a threat to urban public spaces. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that dominant groups tend to exclude certain elements or certain people in public spaces (Fraser, 1990). In this tradition, some scholars claim that *all* public space is exclusionary to some degree (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2009). An expression of how public space is explicitly used to exclude marginalized groups is through Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe's 'Operation Murambatsvina', which translates to "get rid of the trash". The aim of the operation was to remove the flea markets in urban public space. By removing markets and the people dependent on them with force and without providing alternative locations, the political elite made a clear statement on what activities, and hence people, were welcome in the urban public spaces of Zimbabwe (Donovan, 2008). Another way the government can exert power over urban public spaces is by altering the preconditions for a certain activity in the given space. In Colombia, informal street vendors were 'formalized' by the government by regulating their activities instead of banning them. This is also a political way of determining 'who's in' and 'who's out' in public space (Hunt, 2009).

The examples from Zimbabwe and Colombia illustrate how power from 'above' is exercised through public space. Inversely, power can be exercised from 'below' by the people who use them. Tonkiss (2005) looks at the micro

politics that are expressed in public space. By studying how individuals use and negotiate for public space, she claims we can enhance our understanding of power relations, social inclusion and urban structures. Similarly, Madanipour (2010) points to how relations in public space reflect the distribution of power in society. The dynamic between influence from above and below contributes to the production of space. Considering this, examining how public space is produced, and for whom, becomes important to uncover the social outcomes produced by these spaces.

Exerting power from above and below through public space is a way of making public space political. In addition to this, there are several other ways public spaces can be understood as political spaces. They can be conceptualized as fluid spaces that are continuously being negotiated by different stakeholders, from 'above' and 'below', such as demonstrated by the conflict between the state in Zimbabwe and the users of urban public spaces. They can further be perceived as spaces that reflect and effect existing power relations, and as arenas for performing citizenship and democracy.

The dialectic of public space

Public space is political because stakeholders continuously negotiate the meaning and content of it. This means that access to public space is not given, but is constantly changed and shaped by various forms of power. The concept of the spatial triad offers a way of understanding this fluidity. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is produced by the mutually constituting *spatial practice*, *representational space* and *representations of space*.

Spatial practice involves the production and reproduction of space as well as the particular location and characteristics of each social formation; it is space as we perceive it, the materiality surrounding us and the daily routines within it. *Representations of space* are spaces in the manner they are planned and thought out in an orderly way; the abstract space of planners, scientists and technocrats. While nonconcrete, representations of space exert great influence over lived spaces through the ideologies that shape the representations. *Representational space* are spaces in the way they are shaped by groups or individuals using them and providing meaning to them. It is the symbols and uses that provide meaning to the spaces that goes beyond spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991, 39-46)

Mitchell (2003) uses Lefebvre's distinction between representations of space and representational space to constitute *the dialectic of public space*, what he considers is as a constant negotiation between the two factors that shape public spaces. This dialectic makes public space negotiable, and ensures that the function and expression of public space is always predisposed for alteration. I adopt Mitchell's understanding as an analytical lens for the analysis in chapter six. Thus, I do not explicitly focus on spatial practice in the analysis.

Public space as democracy

It is widely argued that public space can be a platform for democratic politics and citizenship (Bodnar, 2015 & Collins & Shantz, 2009). The ideal of accessible public space is built on the ideals of democracy; they exist for people to be able

to express themselves, be seen and heard (Young and Allen, 2011). Collins and Shantz characterizes public space as:

“

Bastions for conveying political messages to large, diverse groups of people, which help to maintain democratic forms of citizenship” (2009, 518).

”

Access to these ‘bastions’ is then a question of access to ‘the public’, which can give public space a role as a regulating body for democratic access. Most commonly, one would associate public space politically with demonstrations, activism and protests; loud and visible, effective in conveying a message. Well known are the protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing or Maidan Square in Kyiv. But public spaces do not only serve the masses; they have political significance for elites as well. Bodnar captures this dual political function for both elites and the opposition:

“

“Public space is inherently political and potentially subversive; it is seen as both the manifestation of reigning political power but also as that of a more inclusive power that can reclaim it temporarily by occupying it for political purposes” (2015, 2095).

”

Through the lens of public space as democracy, we can see examples such as bans on begging as a tool to exclude entire groups from their democratic right to take part in ‘the public’, to express themselves, be represented and be

heard, and in this case, to prevent them from making a living. Mitchell (2003) characterizes this as a way of stripping marginalized groups of their legitimacy as citizens.

Urban public space in Sub-Saharan Africa

There is a strong general relevance to the academic concepts on public space introduced above. However, they are predominantly developed without empirical data from urban environments in the Global South. While acknowledging the usefulness of these theoretical concepts, and using them for my analysis, I also want to highlight some weaknesses that appear when using ‘western’ scholarship to analyze a case in Sub-Saharan Africa. AbdouMaliq Simone combines post-colonial literature with development studies in his research which points toward an inadequacy of modernist discourses to cope with the realm of contemporary reality in the non-Western urban world (Spatialagency.net, n.d). Much of this research focuses on cities in Sub-Saharan Africa and their inherent potential to thrive in contrast to the often used label as ‘failed cities’ (Edensor and Jayne, 2012). Similar to other non-western scholars such as Appadurai (1996) and Chakrabarty (2008), Simone (2001) points out that the colonial academic heritage labels non-western cities as less modern. The only road to development is supposedly along the exemplary path previously taken by Western cities.

Edensor and Jayne (2012) argue that making sense of urban life should not depend on the framework laid down by western scholarship. An example of how western scholarship can fall short when dealing with cases from the Sub-Saharan context is the privatization of space. A

prerequisite for privatization of space is the existence of publicly governed space but in Nairobi slums, this is not always the case. Although some may claim public ownership over many of the slum areas, the *de facto* governing of the area often consists of a myriad of cartels, gangs, corrupt police and community groups (Mutahi, 2011 & BBC News, 2009). This entails that the span between public and private space necessarily becomes different to the experience of government regulation of the New York City parks.

Taking note of these criticisms toward established theory, I argue that there is a need for further development of the theoretical concepts introduced above. There is undeniably a link between democracy and public space in cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the contrast between private and public space is a relevant lens also outside the West. While I do agree with Thrift (2000) in his statement that ‘one size does not fit all’, I also think that the established theories on public space benefit from being discussed in light of other examples than for instance New York and London.

3.2 The formal/informal nexus

The focus of this section is urban informality. However, informality cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon. While Nairobi’s slum dwellers livelihoods are mainly characterized by informality, there is undoubtedly also a strong link to the formal institutions and politics within the area I am studying.⁷ ‘Nexus’, from Latin, meaning “the

act of binding together” (Your Dictionary, n.d), refers in this context to the relations and actions that tie informal institutions and politics together with formal institutions and politics.

Conceptualizing informality

The term informality was coined by the International Labor association (ILO) and Kevin Hart in the 1970’s. Modernization theory was, according to Hart (1973), failing to grasp how a ‘marginal mass’ was not experiencing the benefits of industrialization. Hart adopted a structural approach to informality through characterizing it as a “world of economic activities outside the labor force” (1973, 61). At the time of its introduction as an academic concept, informality was used as a term to describe the organization of labor. Later, it has also been used in extent to describe territorial formation. Labor and housing, or settlements, are the two phenomena which have traditionally been the focus for studies of informality. In recent years, the general spatiality of informality has become a part of the academic debate (McFarlane, 2012). Definitions of informality often contain reference to its counterpart, formality. Whereas formality is characterized by being planned, legal and approved, informality is characterized by the opposite (Huchzermeyer, 2011). This creates dichotomies of planned/unplanned, authorized/unauthorized and legal/illegal.

⁷ A slum is by the UN-Habitat definition an area without access to safe water, sanitation and other infrastructure, with poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding and insecure residential status (Dupont et al., 2016) The term informal settlement is used as an umbrella term for various forms of substandard living conditions (UN-Habitat, 2015). Banlieues, shantytowns, urban subaltern, non-formal cities,

squatter settlements, favelas and substandard settlements are other examples (Beardsley and Werthmann, 2008, Roy, 2011). I recognize that the word ‘slum’ can be a problematic term in many contexts (Gilbert, 2007). I choose to use the term in this thesis interchangeably with informal settlement because it is the way the dwellers of Mlango Kubwa themselves characterize their living conditions. This is in line with Ekdale (2014), whose research explores discourses related to the slum Kibera, another Nairobi informal settlement.

These dichotomies make an impression of an extreme polarization between formality and informality, while the reality might look more like a spectrum (Dupont et al., 2016). In my aim to look at the ties between formality and informality it comes natural to use a 'spectrum lens' rather than a black and white definition. Among many definitions of informality, the definition of Roy is achieving increasing authority:

“

“Informality (...) is a heuristic device that uncovers the ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized. This relationship is both arbitrary and fickle and yet is the site of considerable state power and violence. It (...) serves to deconstruct the very basis of state legitimacy and its various instruments: maps, surveys, property, zoning and, most importantly, the law” (2011, 233).

”

Here, the nexus between formality and informality is revealed. Roy demonstrates how the state is both an inherent and enabling part of informality, in a mutual relationship where informality constitutes formality and vice versa. This definition opens for a third phenomenon that informality can be applied to: Politics.

'Informal politics' and how politics emerge and evolve through the lens of informality is key for this thesis. One way of understanding informal politics is through the perspective of people living in informality and how they

pursue political action to defend their way living or improve their lives. To see how marginalized people react in the light of their position within the informal sphere can enable us to understand the tensions and connections between formal and informal politics (Bayat, 1997). Examples of this are small acts of resistance such as claiming space on the sidewalk to sell food, or it can be more explicit political acts of resistance. Bayat (1997, 55) calls this 'free-form activism', and it constitutes what he calls the 'politics of the informal people'.

We can also study how political elites and governments are relating to informality, what tools they use in confrontation with informality and what outcomes these tools produce (Roy, 2012). In both contexts, whether studying informality through elites or by looking directly at marginalized people in informal settings, understanding the social, historical and political context of the place in question, is key. McFarlane (2012) and Roy (2012) view informality as a process that produces - and is produced by - various actors on different levels, from individuals to the political system. Roy (2012) argues that informality is a mode of spatial production and practice of planning, contrary to viewing informality as the faith of the dispossessed or a way of life. McFarlane (2012) encourages us to not see informality as pre-existing geographies, but as a practice that produces space. When I adopt the views of McFarlane and Roy in my thesis, it becomes necessary to keep in mind the different scales that constitute informality and how these scales interact with each other. Notably, I see informal politics as not only the 'politics of the informal people', but rather politics that emerge partly or completely on the outskirts of what is formally recognized or legal. This can also include informal

practices performed by 'formal actors' such as politicians or bureaucrats.

Labor, settlements and politics

I adopt a broad understanding of informality. Practices that are not formally recognized, documented or regulated by government constitutes the realm of informality. Within my research, this mainly includes three phenomena, or sectors; labor, settlements and politics. They are all important for this thesis, but play different roles in the research. Informal settlements are important because they are the backdrop and 'stage' for the case. While some degree of formality exists in the Mlango Kubwa settlement, it is still largely characterized by illegal and semi-legal construction and land ownership practices. Informal politics is a main theme of analysis in the thesis. I study informal political practices to understand how young people are advocating for development through public space. Informal labor, like settlements, also sets the stage to some degree, but has an additional role through its importance for income generation. Youth in Mlango Kubwa create informal labor opportunities through public space. Hence, informal labor can be described as a goal to achieve through informal politics, but also as a medium to achieve development.

Informality in Sub-Saharan Africa

When the newly emerging African states were introduced to informality in the 1970's, their goal was to regulate the informal sector through development policies. The collapse that followed in many of these states led to a boom in informality. Following this, neoliberal developmental

policies have shaped urban space in Sub-Saharan Africa. The so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were aggressive and demanded structural change in African countries. A consequence of SAP was that developed economies could maintain a degree of control over African governments (Johannessen & Leraand, 2017). Among other things, SAP incentivized the private real estate sector to provide housing to growing urban populations. Considering the liberal nature of these incentives, the construction of new housing was demand and profit driven, which resulted in rapid and widespread production of high-income housing. For economic growth, this was a successful strategy. However, it also assured an underproduction of low-income housing. Subsequently, large segments of the urban population in Sub-Saharan Africa had to resolve to alternative means of housing, sparking an eruption of informal settlements (Okyere and Kita, 2015).

Hansen and Vaa (2004) draw attention to the inevitable link between rapid urbanization and informality which characterizes urban Sub-Saharan Africa today. In some cities, up to 90 percent of new housing is provided informally and labor is predominantly within the 'informal sector' (Hansen and Vaa, 2004). The mutually reinforcing relationship between informal and formal is also apparent in African cities, and what Hansen and Vaa (2004, 9) call "the interface between the Formal and the Informal city" can be linked to what I refer to as the formal/informal nexus. This 'interface' are spaces of meetings between groups, practices, systems and beliefs. Hansen and Vaa (2005) argue that informality in African cities is not a question of a linear progression from the past to the present, or merely a product of post-colonial

developments. On the contrary, they claim that the social, political and economic context for most African cities has dramatically changed in the recent years, providing a new lens for studying informality.

What role does public space play in informal politics?

When we tie together the perspectives on public space and informality we see several factors regarding public space being specific to the informal context. I will highlight two of these. First, public spaces might be more important in an informal context due to the lack of private spaces and of formal government-owned public services such as town halls. Second, as a mean and platform to increase the status of marginalized people and to convey their political message.

As described above, the public/private dichotomy of public space has been an important analytical tool in studying public space. In some cases, the distinction between the two might seem straight forward, such the home versus the sidewalk outside it. Yet in informal settings, private spaces such as the home is what can be characterized as *informal tenure*. *Informal tenure*, often translates to *insecure tenure*. These characteristics imply low standards in terms of infrastructure and security related to attacks or robberies as well as forced evictions (Durand-Lasserve and Selod, 2009 & Obeng-Odoom, 2011). The safe haven of a home that many take for granted might not be safe in an informal settlement. The lacking infrastructure also means that public spaces can become a more important arena for self-fulfilment. A home lacking electricity and windows is a

not an efficient place for doing homework or other activities that might contribute to personal development. Public spaces can then become catalysts for fulfilling the need for development and citizenship for individuals.

Further, public spaces can be an important platform for regulating the political status of people living in informal settings. As demonstrated, public spaces can regulate who gets access to 'the public', and the amount of public space available can decide to which degree there exists a 'space for dissent' (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2009). This can on one hand be a reference to the type of 'free-form' activism described by Bayat (1997), ranging from small acts of resistance to monumental demonstrations. On the other hand, it can be the way people make use of the spaces in their community to improve their situation, and how this affects their status within the community and the formal political environment. An example of this 'the business of waste' in the Mathare slum, in Nairobi, Kenya. Overloads of garbage has led youth groups to arrange garbage handling services including removal of waste as well as recycling of materials. According to (Thieme, 2010) this can empower the youth in question and put them in a favourable negotiating position both towards the community and politicians. The youth become empowered through providing a solution to a problem that government neglect or fail to manage. The recycling process demands space, which is provided by the youth centre that will be a recurring public space in this thesis (UN-Habitat, 2015).

In addition, public space and informality are inherently interlinked through the production of space. Informality is a practice of planning that in dialectic with formal institutions

produces public space. Simplified, it can be argued that informal practices represent Lefebvre's representational space, and that formal practices represent representations of space. While informal and formal practices together produce space, they also constitute each other and their relation produce political outcomes. In this respect, it can be useful to think of the formal/informal nexus as a concrete expression of Mitchell's dialectic of public space.

3.3 The significance of public space for youth

In this section I give conceptual introduction to 'youth', and introduce how youth can be understood as an academic concept. I will demonstrate how youth have previously been placed within the context of the urban and in relation to urban public space. I will then provide a framework for understanding what quality of life can mean in the context of public space. My aim in doing this is to make use of theory to provide an answer to the question: *What role can public space play in enhancing young peoples' quality of life?*

The relationship between youth studies and urban studies

When examining the relationship between youth and urban public spaces, it is worth to zoom out and look at the current presence of youth in urban studies and vice versa. It can be noted that both areas of study have a strong basis for momentum, considering the force of respectively urbanization and growth of youth populations globally. Both urbanization and growing youth populations have

their center of gravity in the Global South. The global rural population is only expected to grow marginally toward 2030, while the total global population, and hence the urban population has a projected explosive growth. By 2050, two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas (Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009). Africa is the continent that will experience the most dramatic urban growth (Cohen, 2004).

Sub-Saharan Africa has been experiencing explosive urban growth since the 1970's. The urban population has gone from 10-15 percent in the 1950's to roughly 40 percent in 2015 (World Bank, 2017 & Hove et al., 2013). Much of this growth can be attributed to macro-economic policies post-independence in the region. Such policies have contained incentivizing large-scale establishment and capital-intensive industries in cities. Policies toward agriculture and food has kept the food prices low in cities, at the expense of farmers (World Bank, 1989). The policies have contributed to spark a fierce urbanization in the region (Hove et al., 2013).

In developed countries, there is a growing elderly population, while in almost all developing countries we see, and will continue to see a large growth in youth populations (Hansen, 2008, 6). Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 constitute nearly a quarter of the population in the developing world. Rural-to-urban migration is often dominated by young people. In countries with young populations and strong urbanization, such as Kenya and other Sub-Saharan countries, this often leads to bulges of youth in urban areas (Urdal and Hoelscher, 2009)

Youth is arguably an increasingly important urban demographic in Sub-Saharan Africa. Young people's relationship with urban spaces have long been investigated

by geographers (van Blerk, 2013). However, Hansen (2008, 6) argues that present scholarship relevant to the Global South either focuses on youth or the urban, but fails to highlight the connection between the two. When youth in the South are discussed in connection to the urban, it is often connected to crime and disorder, or as a group sensationalized as 'lost' (Davis, 2006 & Dillabough and Kennelly, 2010). Such is also the case for Sub-Saharan Africa, where concentrations of youth, and particularly young men in urban space often are associated with violence and disorder (Summers, 2006). Shoumatoff provides a characterization in his book *African Madness* of African cities as dreadful places due its young population:

“

“It is only when large cities begin to appear on the landscape, as they did in the [1970s], when eleven cities in Central Africa grew to have populations of more than a million, that a societal madness begins to occur; that detribalized young men, lost souls wandering in the vast space between the traditional and the modern worlds, can be heard howling in the streets of downtown Nairobi in the middle of the night; that stark naked aliénés can be seen rummaging in the ditches of Bangui.” (1988, xiv).

”

There is no lack of similar depictions of African youth (Kaplan, 1996; Cincotta, Engelman, Robert, & Anastason, 2003). These depictions align with the 'youth bulge thesis', which is explained by Summers (2006) as the assumption “[...] that large numbers of male youth inevitably sets the

stage for violence”. The youth bulge thesis then assumes that a relative growth in the youth population will spark urban violence. In empirical testing of this hypothesis, however, Urdal and Hoelscher (2009) find that there are no solid grounds for this claim when it comes to Sub-Saharan African youth.

Considering these contrasts there is a need for scholarship connecting youth and the urban more nuanced and in-depth.

3.4 Conceptualizing youth

An entry point to understanding youth is how it has been conceptualized in youth scholarship. However, it is worth to note that definitions of youth have extensively been based on experiences from the Global North and western scholarship. In understanding youth, biological age has been the dominant factor to determine this life stage. Such definitions will be influenced by the context in which they are adopted and by who the definition has been produced. For instance, Hansen (2008, 7) refers to the changing understanding of youth post what can be referred to as the institutionalization of the life course. Before the 1970's, modernity and socioeconomic shifts prompted large institutional changes. Development of educational institutions, legal regulations of working age, as well as expansion of nuclear families situated youth at the set stage between childhood and adulthood (Hansen, 2008, 7). A study comparing young people in Sweden, the United States, Germany and Sweden shows that youth as a concept does not uphold this clear distinctiveness today (Cook and Furstenberg, 2002). Youth has come to be understood more

fluidly, and is to a lesser degree a demarcated life stage. Instead, the transition depends on geographical, social, cultural, economic and political factors. This means that there are multiple trajectories towards becoming an adult, and that they depend on context (Hansen, 2008).

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) defines youth as the age group between 15 and 24 years (UNGA, 1995). The UNGA definition is adopted widely among various UN entities, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and other civil society groups and organizations. Within the age-definition lies a paradox. The experiences of young people will vary with the geographic context in which they are situated. Youth in the Global South do not replicate the patterns and experiences of those described in western studies, as is demonstrated in studies of mobility, demographic transitions and adulthood in the cities of Hanoi, Recife and Lusaka (Hansen, 2008).

Relevant to the case in this thesis, youth in sub-Saharan Africa is mainly understood as young men between the ages of 15-35. In rural contexts, girls, or women are hardly ever labelled youth, and if so, it is only for a brief instance while puberty bridges over to marriage and motherhood. In an urban context, however, poor young women will for longer and more often be labelled as youth (Hansen, 2008). In Kenya, The National Youth Council Act of 2009 and the National Constitution of Kenya 2010 define youth as people between ages 18 and 34. Other policy initiatives vary in their definitions, the broadest generally being ages 15-35, and the narrowest between ages 18-30 (UNDP, 2013). The geographical component is also highlighted in a report by UN-Habitat. The report states that young people

in the Global South often become youth at an earlier stage than in the Global North. Youth in the Global South have less education than those in the Global North, and their responsibilities within a household appears at an earlier stage (UN-Habitat, 2014, 7). The difference between the two youth groups is visualized in a striking comparison on two examples of youth:

“

“The term youth itself begins to exceed the definitional boundaries through which it is normally understood. When children become the primary foot soldiers of civil conflict and 40-year-olds with a college degree await their first formal job and the opportunity to start a family of their own, it is hard to tell where youth begins and ends” (Simone, 2005, 518).

”

As noted, Hansen (2008) claims that youth has become a less demarcated life stage since the 1970's. In other words, the age span constituting youth has for various reasons become harder to distinguish. The second reason for why the UN definition, and to some extent the arguments of Hansen, is problematic, is that by putting age as the primary marker for what constitutes youth, they reduce this life stage merely to involve age. There are arguments for keeping a definition that also entails a certain age span, such as for statistical purposes, or to delimit legal rights to a certain group. Hansen argues that you cannot define youth as one set thing because the contexts where youth reside and live their lives vary dramatically, which influences the nature of being youth. Another path towards understanding the

concept of youth could be to disregard the age-definition altogether, and focus on the common markers that constitutes youth regardless of geography, economy and social and political context. This view is also adopted in a report by UN-Habitat (2014) about young people's right to participate in governance. This could lead us towards looking at how youth is a transitional phase, and what this means in various contexts. Looking at it this way, it could possibly prevent the exclusion of groups or individuals who are perceived or perceive themselves as youth although they do not fit into the age category. Such an understanding could also give deeper insight into the ways and needs of young people, and might contribute to reduce prejudice and fight negative stereotypes about youth.

Youth as a transitional phase

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“Youth is an embodied social construction attached to young people [...] Youth is the category ascribed to individuals who are perceived to be neither still children nor yet fully adult” (Holt, 2009, 283).

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The state of being in-between childhood and adulthood is the hallmark of being youth. This state means that the person living through is transforming from one thing to another. UN-Habitat characterizes this change as a transition from being a passive recipient, to becoming an active participant in their communities and society in general. An important aspect of this is how youth go from having no formal political rights, to being able to vote and take active

part in political systems. The transition between being a pupil or a student towards employment is another aspect that characterizes youth in most contexts. For many, it also represents a transfer from living at home, being provided for by one's parents, towards arranging and providing for one's own livelihood. While youth is a period of transition, it has also been described as a period of waiting (Rotevatn and Breivik, 2016). Youth are waiting in the sense that if the various transitions they go through for some reason does not run smoothly, they must wait and postpone their entry into adulthood.

Although there are valid arguments for maintaining a set age span in certain definitions of youth, this should be restricted to situations where it proves necessary, such as for statistical purposes. In this thesis, there is no such need, and when speaking of youth, I generally refer to people who are perceived as or perceive themselves as youth for various reasons. This does in most cases coincide with the definition of youth in Kenya, as will be demonstrated in the methodology chapter. A common feature for youth is that they are maturing and developing an identity. In becoming an active stakeholder in their lives and others, they need recognition, both formal and informal. Limiting the group to being defined by age is not fruitful in this respect.

Youth and urban public space

According to Hansen (2008, 5), there is a double dynamic of freedom and constraint as well as inclusion and exclusion that lies at the heart of youth's urban experience. There are many examples on how youth are attempted excluded from urban public spaces. In Cape Town, street youth have had

a strong presence in public spaces since the 1980's. Van Blerk (2013) shows how a shift towards contemporary urban governance practices are directly and indirectly reducing the visible presence of youth in public spaces. The consequences of this shift in governance is decreased mobility and further marginalization of youth. Van Blerk argues that this exclusionary praxis impacts the way street youth are addressed in a policy context. Worth (2013) examines how visually impaired young people struggle for independent mobility in the city. She notes that visually impaired young people are constantly 'marked out' of the city and its public spaces, and that this is preventing their transition towards adulthood. The works of both Worth and van Blerk points at a double disadvantage directed at youth that struggle with more than only the transition to adulthood. Such intersectionality of being poor or disabled and being youth can occur everywhere. Yet, Sub-Saharan Africa has a particularly large concentration of social and economic issues, putting youth in this region in a position of particular vulnerability.

Youth are victims of generalization due to stigma and stereotypes. As noted in the section on the relationship between youth studies and urban studies, Sub-Saharan African urban youth are commonly perceived as a threat, which makes them unwanted elements in urban public space. Although the literature mainly focuses on how youth are being excluded and marginalized, there are counterexamples of this. An example already mentioned is how Nairobi's youth use 'the politics of waste' to claim space in their societies. By providing garbage handling services to residents in Mathare, young people manage to employ themselves and raise their status in their communities

(Thieme, 2010). In Mlango Kubwa, a community in Mathare, this has empowered youth to be in a position where they can claim and develop public spaces for their own use (UN-Habitat, 2015).

3.5 Quality of life

This thesis is not a quality of life study. While the data material touches upon themes related to the youth's well-being and prosperity, it will not be a complete study of the quality of life in the Mlango Kubwa neighborhood. There are two main issues to be dealt with when answering what public space can mean in terms of enhancing quality of life. The first is what is meant by 'quality of life', and the second is in what way it relates to public space. I will use existing theory to as a framework for the analysis, and empirical data will complement and elaborate on this framework. This section will then be incomplete in the sense that the way I define quality of life will not become fully clear before the empirical data is brought into the mix. This will be done in chapter five.

In prevailing literature discussing the connection between quality of life and public space, a recurring issue is lack of data. Most studies focus on public space in the western world (Beck, 2009 & The Trust for Public Land, 2008). And if there is a lack of solid data in The UK and US, there is even less in urban Sub-Saharan Africa. While the quality and existence of public space is often mentioned as a factor that contributes to quality of life (Mieles-Barrera and Tonon, 2015; Tonon, 2010; McCann, 1999 & Ruiz, 2015), there are few studies covering the link between the two in-depth. An exception is a study synthesizing data from a range

of studies to see how the quality of public space relates to quality of life in England. It claims that well designed urban public space can play an important role for individual well-being, and add positive value to social, political, economic and environmental aspects of cities (Beck, 2009). A qualitative study from Colombia examines the quality of life for youth in respectively urban and rural communities. The results for urban youth finds that public space is of great significance to the subjective experience of belonging to a larger community (Ruiz, 2015). Outdoor public spaces in particular provide an environment for free, voluntary and spontaneous interaction, which enables the sharing of stories and experiences and enhances emotional connections between the community members. This subsequently leads to a shared and strengthened identity and territorial roots (Ruiz, 2015). The Colombian study also finds that the local football club, and not the state, functions as the primary social organization within this specific community. Young people see the community football club as a generator of sense of belonging, identification and trust in the community, and as such it generates an increased quality of life (Ruiz, 2015).

While quantitative methods are most common when researching quality of life, there are also a number of qualitative studies that have been conducted to examine how quality of life relates to other factors (Tonon, 2015). By using qualitative research to examine quality of life, we can understand how the environment is perceived and lived. Qualitative research can further counter the widespread use of 'objective categories' within quantitative studies of quality of life. Abaleron points to the need for contextual consideration in research about quality of life:

“

“Quality of life in a territory is the degree of excellence that a given society, precisely located in a particular time and a specific geographical space, offers in the supply of goods and services, in order to satisfy certain range of human needs for all its members, and the corresponding level of individual and group satisfaction or dissatisfaction, according to the perception held on that offer, accessibility and use, by the population involved” (1999, in Mikkelsen and Di Nucci, 2015, 78)

”

Objective categories are then problematic because contextual factors such as geography must be taken into consideration when studying quality of life. When studying quality of life through a quantitative approach, it is natural to look at measurable and objective indicators. Qualitative approaches allow us to capture the subjective experience of the well-being of an individual. The conceptualization of Casas is a foundation for how quality of life is studied this thesis:

“

“Perceptions, aspirations, needs, satisfaction and social representations that members of any social grouping experience in relation to their environment, and the social dynamics into which they are submerged, including the services that are offered to them and the social interventions to which they are eligible and which come from social policies” (1996, in Mikkelsen & Di Nucci, 2015, 82)

”

While this is the skeleton for the analysis, the indicators are defined by the empirical data. Descriptions of safety, opportunities for education and employment are among the themes that emerge when going into the connection between public space and quality of life in the data material. I return to this aspect in chapter five.

What role can public space play in enhancing young people's quality of life?

There are several ways public space play a role in influencing young people's quality of life. Without going deep into the role of public space as a catalyst for citizenship and democracy, it is worth to again note that this is a function that can indeed enhance the quality of life for young people. Consequently, the exclusion from public space can also reduce their quality of life. The discourse of the youth bulge thesis and the subsequent wish to keep youth out of public spaces can contribute to this regulation of youth's access to the public.

Further, Colombian urban youth state that their sense of belonging is connected to their access to public space. The spontaneous meetings that are facilitated by open-minded public spaces are perceived to have a significant effect on the quality of life of youth:

“

“They positively affect the subjective experience of belonging to a larger community, becoming a cohesive element that gives rise to the development of sense of community” (Ruiz, 2015, 164)

”

Considering this, there are multiple effects of public space on the lives of young people, hence access to public space is important for various reasons.

Public space can also play a role when considering the transition youth go through. If we look at being youth as a transition from the private space of home to a public sphere where children become adults through turning into active citizens, public space is an important realm where young people establish their way forward. When or if the transition succeeds, the period of waiting ends and the person can enter their own private realm that might entail their own home, a family and an income. Public space, then, could act as an arena where the success of this transition is decided.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter I have introduced theoretical concepts that are important for the understanding of the case that is subject to analysis in this thesis. My aim is to combine the theory with the empirical data to form discussions that provide answers to the research questions.

The chapter opened by introducing perspectives on characteristics of public space and informality. I demonstrated how public space is often seen as a spectrum between public and private space. Such spaces often become exclusionary through the regulation of them, both by exertion of power from ‘above’ and ‘below’. Importantly, I have highlighted how the production of space is constituted by a dialectic between formal and informal politics. In the analysis, I will use the *representations of space* and *representational space* represented by the formal/

informal nexus as an analytical tool for examining how space is produced in Mlango Kubwa. Further, I have demonstrated how public space can be a platform for democracy and citizenship. These perspectives will be key when analyzing whether youth in Mlango Kubwa strengthen their political influence through the claim to and use of public spaces, and if so in what way.

The second part of the chapter started by theorizing the concept of youth. This was done in order to understand youth as a group that has specific needs, but also specific

capacities. This background constitutes a basis for an analysis of how quality of life can be conceptualized within the context of youth in Mlango Kubwa. I further demonstrated how quality of life can be explored through qualitative research. The introduced framework for quality of life combined with the empirical data will form an understanding of what constitutes quality of life in the context for this study.

4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

For a research project to emerge, there must exist an interest to gain an understanding of a phenomenon, and an aspiration to document and convey the results of this research in a way that adds to existing knowledge. A prerequisite for this is a rigorous execution of the research and a reflected view on the methodological choices made throughout the research. In this chapter I will account for the methodology and the methods chosen to enable an answer to my research questions.

Selecting a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach for this thesis was quite clear from the beginning. The qualitative approach puts me as a researcher in the roles of both observer and participant in the study. Although objectivity is a goal that any researcher should strive for, the acknowledgement that one's position vis-à-vis the research has an influence on the outcomes, is important. Social phenomena do not occur in a vacuum, which is why it is always important to take note of the personal stories, perspectives and biases that the researcher brings into the research process. This *critical reflexivity*, that I critically analyze my own situation as if it were something I was studying (Dowling, 2010), will be present throughout this chapter and the research process as a whole.

This chapter will start with an introduction to qualitative research and the methodology that overarches my research.

It will go on to explain and discuss the methods used prior to, during and post-fieldwork, and the analysis that is an inherent part of the process from beginning to end. Ethical considerations are embedded throughout the chapter.

4.1 Qualitative research and methodology

One of the common goals of qualitative research is *giving voice*. Groups that fall outside the category of society's mainstream are often called marginalized groups. The voices of such groups are rarely a part of the public debate. If they are represented at all, misrepresentations are the rule (Ragin and Amoroso, 2011). Misrepresentations of people including youth living in Mathare, are common. By using techniques that can uncover subtle aspects, my goal is to contribute to a nuanced representation of the youth in this Mathare community, and through this, give voice to them. However, in recognizing that all researched is situated, I cannot proclaim that my representation is objectively 'true'.

Choosing a qualitative case study approach allows the researcher to understand phenomena and social terms that might not be quantifiable or measurable in the strictest sense. For instance, where does 'informality' start and end, and how would we measure it statistically? By working

qualitatively, I avoid the risk of 'conceptual stretching', where the researcher lump together dissimilar cases to get a larger sample. This can have a homogenizing effect on a population (George and Bennett, 2005). Instead, we get in-depth knowledge and the chance to address the complexity that lies within a single case, and at the same time an opportunity to contribute to a wider understanding of a phenomenon. George and Bennett (2005, 19) calls this a 'conceptual validity' and identifies it as one of the core strengths of case study methods. It is important, however, to note one cannot statistically generalize a case study to other populations or contexts.

My research design does not perfectly comply with an existing philosophy of science. I have rather chosen a hybrid methodological model, which has allowed a level of flexibility in the design. The analysis of data in this thesis is in part inspired by grounded theory. Countering the claims of qualitative research as 'unscientific', grounded theory emerged as a movement to systematically and rigorously produce and analyze data. The analysis of this data enables the possibility to develop theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 8). Grounded theory provides techniques for approaching qualitative data analysis, enabling legitimacy and rigor in the research. I do not practice grounded theory in its strictest sense, nor do I use it for the entire analysis. I use it as a set of practical tools for conducting a qualitative analysis.

The first part of the analysis is inspired by grounded theory and its methods. In chapter five, I use the empirical data to expand and define an understanding of quality of life

within the specific context of my case. I have taken use of an already existing definition and expanded from this. The analysis is in this context a hybrid between grounded theory and being informed by existing theory. In chapter six I have to a greater extent been informed by existing theory, thus the linkage to grounded theory does not apply in the same way as in the first analysis chapter.

4.2 Parameters and field work

This section will demonstrate the process of structuring and undertaking field work in Mlango Kubwa, which took place between 12 May 2016 and 9 June 2016.

The parameters of the case

I limited my geographical area of research to a village in Mlango Kubwa, a ward in Mathare. As discussed in chapter two, there exists multiple geographical distinctions of Mathare. For the sake of clarity, I determine in the following section what geographical area I speak when in referring to the case throughout the thesis. The distinction is made with a basis in the Mathare Valley zonal plan.

The square area with drawn-in houses in the left corner in figure 4.3 makes up the area of Village one and two, the spatial limits of the case of study. The case is also limited in temporal terms, to the period of the field work. However, comparisons by my informants between the situation today and how things were at previous times, became an important tool for my understanding of the field.



Figure 4.1: Zonal plan of Mlango Kubwa (Photo: Tone Standal Vesterhus, 2016)



Figure 4.2: Zonal plan of Mlango Kubwa (Photo: Tone Standal Vesterhus, 2016)

Sources of data

My primary source of data is in-depth semi-structured interviews with youth residing within the parameters of the case. As criteria for the selection, I strived for a balance of genders; youth from different youth groups, as well as youth that did not belong to any youth group. I conducted

15 interviews with youth in the area, consisting of five women and ten men between the ages of 18 and 35. 11 respondents were members of three different youth groups, and four had no youth group affiliation. In addition to the interviews with youth in Mathare, I interviewed one central politician in the area and three professionals working with respectively youth and public space in UN-Habitat.

In addition to interviews, I have collected data from two Whatsapp-chats and one exchange of e-mails. These were collected post fieldwork as elaboration on background themes that were unclear, and to elaborate on an event that occurred after the field work period, which I found relevant to the analysis.

Preparing for field work

Prior to my field work in Nairobi, the study had been reported to and approved the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). However, ethical considerations were both a part of preparations, and arising continuously throughout the research process.

When designing the study, I considered to what degree my data collection should be informed by theory. I chose to take a middle route. My choice to take inspiration from grounded theory was important in this discussion. A main principle of grounded theory is going into the field without a hypothesis or theoretical idea of what you will find (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The part of my analysis that treats quality of life is to a lesser degree theory informed. I chose this mode of analysis because I wanted to let the data speak for itself. Knowing that I did not aim to, nor had the capacity to undertake, an exhaustive quality of life study, grounding my analysis in the specific context of the case came natural. In this way, I let the data decide what was most important to examine regarding the quality of life of youth in the village.

The analysis of young people's political influence was on the other hand to a larger extent informed by theory. Theoretical concepts about informal politics and public space informed the data collection and the subsequent analysis. I chose

this mode because I found theoretical aspects such as the *dialectic of public space* to have the flexibility to enable a well-founded contextual analysis. At the same time, it provided a coherent framework for examine how youth exert their influence in producing space.

The qualitative research interview

I chose to use a semi-structured interview form, where there is to some a degree a predetermined order in the questions, but the researcher remains open to explore themes based on what comes up in the conversation (Dunn, 2010). The order in which questions are asked can have a significance for preserving rapport between the informant and the researcher. I chose to use a hybrid of a *funnel* and a *pyramid* structure, where the researcher begins with general questions and moves on to abstract questions, in which the more sensitive questions are asked towards the end (Dunn, 2010). My questions were generally uncontroversial, but I considered the questions about opinions on the political state of affairs to be the most sensitive. Choosing this strategy allowed me to be effective with my time in the field, simultaneously making the job of analyzing the data more straightforward than it would have been with an unstructured approach.

4.3 Data analysis

A guiding principle for grounded theory is the inductive way the choice of theory is grounded in the data produced (Thagaard, 2009 & Corbin and Strauss, 2008). There is no predetermined hypothesis or theoretical assumption regarding the findings in the field. Rather, the theory is

grounded in the data, letting the data determine the theory advancement (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory is in other words a deeply empirical approach (Clarke, 2017). I want to stress that this specific methodology has not been performed in the thesis, as I also actively use existing theory in parts of the analysis. My choice to take inspiration from grounded theory was in part embedded in the search for an efficient and rigorous process of analysis. Grounded theory is systematic in the way that the researcher balance data and analysis. It is a method that emphasizes reflexivity and creativity while at the same time ensuring rigor (Corbin and Strauss, 2008 & Clarke, 2017). Rigor refers to the trustworthiness of the research, and it depends on the ability to check the procedures of the research process. The systematic way to document and analyze data which is outlined by grounded theory facilitates for the kind of *hermeneutic cycle* where our participant and interpretive communities can check our work throughout the process and post research (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010).

Interpretation does not begin or end in the interview setting, neither in the processing of the data afterwards. Analysis is a continuous process that stretches from the very beginning to the very end of a research process. I began noting concepts in the interviews. When coming across phenomena relevant to my research questions, I used the information to develop my interview guide and the questions asked in later interviews. This was used as a method to enable patterns between my interviews that established a base for the coding and categorizing following the field work.

A technique typically employed in grounded theory is going from open codes to elaborating on their properties and

densifying them into analytical categories (Clarke, 2017). I chose to use the software Nvivo to code the transcribed interviews. I began coding with an open approach, where emphasis was on making descriptive codes. Later, I went back to the codes, categorized them into analytical categories. Throughout this process, I wrote *memos* on the codes and, later, what Clarke (2007, 424) calls *ambitious memos* about the analytical categories to describe their properties. Going back and forth between the material and my interpretation to deepen my understanding of it was an important foundation for the following analysis in the thesis.

4.4 Data quality

Towards the end of this chapter I want to share my reflections about the quality of the data with an emphasis on the reliability, validity and transferability of the research.

Reliability in positivist philosophy of science means that a study can be reproduced and gain the same results as the original study. This is not applicable to qualitative research and this thesis which emphasizes the researcher's subjectivity and its influence on the research. Instead, reliability is decided on the quality of the design, data collection and analysis and the openness regarding methodological choices (Thagaard, 2009). Validity in this context is measured by the degree to which the conclusions seem well-founded and convincing. Reflexivity is a key in reaching validity. Throughout the research process and this chapter I have consistently questioned and discussed my choices of methods and my role in influencing the process. I have strived to provide full transparency to ensure the rigor of the research.

Transferability is dependent on the explanations the research gives, and to what degree this is credible. One should not assume that results can be generalized within a qualitative case study. A way to ensure transferability in qualitative studies is to ensure that the theory it generates is neither too abstract nor case-specific (Hay, 2010). Through a hybrid model of grounding the theory in empirical data and analyzing it through the lens of established theory, my aim is that interpretation can also be relevant outside this case.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed my choices in methodology and methods. Throughout the chapter and the research, I have aimed to be conscious about my role as a co-producer of the data. Through the research design and execution, I have aspired to ensure a rigorous study. Emphasizing the complexity added by researching in a different culture than my own, I stay open to the fact that there are dimensions that can have surpassed my attention by me lacking full knowledge about the culture, society, and politics in Kenya

which is a complex mix of ethnicities, tribes, heritage from colonialism and many other factors.

The analysis in chapter five consists of a hybrid methodology in which grounded theory is only one of the elements included. Further, in chapter six, I have actively used existing theory to analyze the empirical data. My choice of using semi-structured interviews as a collection method was accounted for, and grounded in the goal to find meaning and significance in the case I am studying. Throughout the chapter, I have described the ethical considerations which are included in the process. The analysis has been a part of the work throughout this thesis, and the coding and categorizing of the interview transcripts have contributed to an efficient and systematic process.

The claims I make about my data is explained through validity, reliability and transferability, and providing transparency also aims at enabling the reader to make own assessments of the quality of the data.

5. SPACE-DEPENDENT QUALITY OF LIFE?

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“We need the spaces to come up with ideas. [...] When we come together we bring peace. We understand each other. Bringing love, being one (young woman 5, interview, 22.05.2016).

”

This chapter has the aim of providing an answer to the first sub-question posed for this thesis: *What role can public space play in enhancing the quality of life of youth in Mlango Kubwa?* Approaching this question theoretically and empirically was a challenging task. I wanted to consider the specific context and situation of youth in Mlango Kubwa without undermining existing knowledge about what constitutes quality of life. This means that my framework for defining quality of life represent a hybrid between an existing framework of quality of life and my own empirical findings. The theoretical concept that frames my understanding of quality of life in this context is based on the views of Casas:

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“Perceptions, aspirations, needs, satisfaction and social representations that members of any social grouping experience in relation to their environment, and the social dynamics into which they are submerged, including the services that are offered to them and the social interventions to which they are eligible and which come from social policies” (1996, in Mikkelsen & Di Nucci, 2015, 82).

”

In this chapter I will introduce the themes that emerged when talking to youth about how the public spaces in the community *can* improve their lives. *Can*, in this context, refers to two factors: the *experienced* improvements in quality of life through public space, and the *potential* improvements that public spaces can have, as perceived by youth. The chapter and analysis is divided into three main parts. I start by presenting what challenges are perceived to be the most pressing for young people in this area. I find these to be unemployment, lack of education, crime, substance abuse and insecurity.

Based on the findings in the first section, I further discuss in what capacity public space can contribute in reducing these challenges. This second discussion is divided in two segments. I first discuss how public spaces can *advance* employment and education opportunities. I then analyze how public space can *reduce* or exclude substance abuse and crime, and how this in turn can lead to increased safety in the village. This section of the analysis, then, represents respectively the *presence* and the *absence* of elements that contribute to constituting quality of life.

The third and last section of the chapter discusses who has access to the public spaces in the village. If public space does play a role in enhancing the quality of life for young people in slums, then access to these spaces is important. I problematize the inclusiveness of these spaces, and discuss how certain groups do not gain access to the benefits produced in and by the public spaces in the community.

5.1 Challenges for youth in Mlango Kubwa

During the fieldwork, I had the aim of identifying what the public spaces in the community are used for, and how these activities and uses could help improve the quality of life of young people. Referring to the definition of quality of life introduced in the theory chapter and in the introduction to this chapter, I focus on perceptions that members of a social group experience in relation to their environment. In the interviews, I wanted to explore what my informants regard as challenges for youth in the community. Further, I examined what the public spaces are used for. Through mapping how the public spaces are used, I can

analyze whether the use of the public spaces contribute to reducing the challenges youth find most pressing. This analytic movement between perceived challenges and youth perspectives on public space usage constitutes the core of the analysis in this chapter. I categorize the challenges into elements that are generally beneficial to increase, and elements which communities and individuals typically want to reduce.

Lack of opportunities and individual initiative

Although education is an established human right, the quality of the education, and the preconditions for completing the education, vary significantly. Though progress was accelerated due to the implementation of the UN millennium development goals in Kenya, millions are still not seeing the benefits of this progress. This is particularly affecting the marginalized poor (UNESCO, 2015).

The dispersion of progress also becomes apparent in my empirical data. Many of the informants specifically points out *lack of education* as a challenge in the community. They highlight how youth not enrolled in education typically engage themselves in crime and drug abuse. The lack of education can largely be explained in two ways. One explanation focuses on how lack of education among youth is based on individual choice, where disadvantaged youth chooses actively not to take advantage from the education opportunities that exist. Supporting this view is young man 7 (interview, 19.05.2016) in his answer to the question on what the main challenges for youth in the community are: "It is basically lack of education. They don't

like engaging in education". The other explanation for why some youth lack education is the absence of opportunities offered by the government (young woman 4, interview, 22.05.2016). Considering lack of education as one of the primary challenges identified by youth in Mlango Kubwa, it is reasonable to assume that an increase in the level of education among young people is a wanted development outcome for the community.

Another challenge that recurs in the interviews is *unemployment*. As highlighted in the background chapter, youth unemployment rates in Mathare are high. The unemployment average is estimated to up to 32%, although distinctions are difficult to make because most of the work carried out by Mathare dwellers is within the informal sector. While many informants in Mlango Kubwa talk about unemployment as a general issue, two informants take it as far as saying that "most" and "90 percent" of youth in the community are unemployed (young woman 1, interview, 17.05.2016, young man 7, interview, 19.05.2016). Explanatory factors are not offered besides the inability of the government to offer jobs. On the first day of my fieldwork in Nairobi, the 'rebirth' of the previously mentioned NYS government program was celebrated in Mathare. The program was shut down in 2015 due to the discovery of severe corruption (Kenya Today, 2015). At the relaunch event, expectations were high as to what a relaunch could mean in terms of individual employment opportunities and improving the security in the community.

Perceptions of inaction

Youth that have neither employment nor education to attend daily are commonly labelled as 'idle' youth in

the interviews. Idleness is in the dictionary described as "laziness" or "a state of inaction" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). There are mainly two ways that idle youth are characterized by the informants in the interviews. The first narrative includes an expression of hopelessness regarding the sensibility and usefulness of idle youth in the community:

“

"Many of the youth in this community are idle minded. They are not willing to work even if you have something, even if you try to help they just want to steal money. They cannot volunteer, they do not like to sweat or get tired. I hate to see someone just sitting doing nothing" (young woman 3, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

This view expresses idleness as something constant, where the idle person is locked in this state by own choice for the foreseeable future. Here, it is worth drawing a parallel to the theory presented earlier; the discourse of 'lost' youth, where bulges of young African men in the urban context constitute a threat (Davis, 2006 & Dillabough and Kennelly, 2010). The empirical data illustrates how this stigma appears in Mlango Kubwa, and it also demonstrates how the 'lost' label is not only applied by external forces such as media and academia. Rather, the sensation of 'lost' youth is reproduced by peers, from within the communities where these youths reside. As emphasized in the theoretical assumptions, the youth bulge thesis has not been empirically proven. It becomes apparent, however, that expressions of such a theory can emerge when the production and reproduction of it occurs as both

an 'outside' and 'inside' job, with the potential of reinforcing each other.

Importantly, the labelling of idle youth as 'lost' is not the dominant view in the collected material in this thesis. Although the 'idle, thus lost' view is voiced in several interviews, the majority of my informants speak of idleness in terms differing from this view. They rather describe idleness as something that is imposed on young people due to lack of opportunities, and not something explained by individual choice or laziness. Although idleness is viewed a 'state of inaction', it can in this view be removed if employment or education opportunities emerge. This view is for instance expressed by young man 4:

“

“When they are busy they do not have that idle mind. The mind is occupied, to they do not think about negative things” (interview, 20.05.2016).

”

I have not explored in depth how these variances in perceptions amongst youth have evolved. I did note, however, that some informants chose to identify themselves with idleness through the use of the pronoun 'you' when describing how they perceived idleness in the community:

“

“[...] when you engage in something your mind will be busy. But when you sit idle, you just think of taking one phone here or robbing someone's house. But when you are busy [working] with security or garbage, it is changing the lives of people here” (chairman 2, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

Contrasting this is the 'othering' expressed in the opposing view, where idle youth are referred to as 'them'. This might indicate that a less discouraged view on idleness could be connected to an ability to relate to idle youth, either through empathic ability or own experiences. Own experiences could also be a factor in evolving the 'lost youth' perception.

Unemployment and lack of education are considered challenges for youth in the community, and whether these challenges are perceived to be self-inflicted or not, they evidently lead to idleness. This idleness, in turn, can have negative outcomes, which are highlighted in conversations with youth in the community. We will look at these outcomes in the following section.

An idle mind is the devil's workshop

“

“Crime, lack of education and [lack of] jobs. It is like this for most youth. They lack opportunities so they involve themselves in crime” (young man 5, interview, 22.05.2016).

”

Two main themes emerge when talking about what idleness leads to; *criminal activity* and *substance abuse*. Informants also express a strong linkage between these two themes. I choose to pair these challenges into the category of *insecurity*, or lack of safety. There are two sides to this, though. On the one hand, many informants explicitly acknowledge that engaging in alcoholism or drugs is an individual challenge for those who do. The other side of this is what these activities may entail for those who are not engaging directly in substance abuse, but are still affected by it, through the reduced security it imposes. To my knowledge, the informants I spoke with in Mlango Kubwa fall into the latter category. It is subsequently necessary that their security, or their lack of, becomes an important theme when discussing crime and substance abuse.

Substance abuse

Eight informants express that drug abuse and alcoholism are among the biggest challenges in the community. Research supports the extent of this issue, particularly among the urban poor in Kenya (Ngesu et al., 2008). There exists a range of substances that are abused among youth people in Mlango Kubwa. Through understanding what these substances are, we can comprehend why youth use them. The most common drug is a thick, industrial glue that is contained in a bottle. The user sniffs or inhales from the bottle until there are no more fumes to be released from the glue. The glue costs around 25 KSH, which represent a small amount in Mathare, meaning that it is highly accessible. The use of glue can cause brain damage and in some cases, sudden death. The glue takes the user into a high where reflexes and attentiveness is severely reduced (Cottrell-

Boyce, 2010). Another common substance is 'chang'aa', which literally means "kill me quickly". It is an alcoholic drink which is brewed illegally using the polluted water from Mathare River. Jet fuel is often added to speed up the fermentation process. A shot of chang'aa can cost one fifth of a glass of beer, and has the alcoholic level of distilled whiskey (Kamande, 2000). Many street children and youth abuse drugs and alcohol to numb hunger. Feeding yourself is more expensive than taking the hunger away with a cheap high, which can be an explanatory factor to why many become drug addicts at a very young age.

In many ways like the perceptions on the themes discussed in the sections above, conflicting perceptions of drug abuse also exist in the material. This is exemplified by two conflicting quotes:

“

“The biggest challenge is drug abuse. Most of the youths involve themselves in drug abuse. Most of them waste their time taking the drugs. [...] [M]y biggest dream is to help these youths when I grow up. Most of them are children, under 18. I want to help them so that they can become leaders in the future” (young woman 1, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

Drug abuse is here acknowledged as the biggest challenge in the community. However, drug abuse is in this perspective something you can be guided out of, as reflected in her own wish to help children and youth with drug issues. Opposed to this, some informants see drug-addicted youth as a 'lost'

case: “When youth engages in drugs, you cannot advise the youth, you cannot do anything about it” (young woman 5, interview, 22.05.2016).

Crime

As illustrated by the informants above, substance abuse is perceived to be closely connected with criminal activity. The link between the two is described as a cause/effect relationship, where drug abuse leads to criminal activity, and criminal activity can reinforce drug use through financing it. Such a cause-effect explanation can be traced in the terms of young woman 3:

“

“When [the youth] are idle, they use drugs, they are drug addicts. So, whoever uses drugs is not normal. Their work is just to steal. Theft is on a higher level. So that is a big challenge” (interview, 18.05.2016).

”

There is a variety of criminal activities that are mentioned to be a challenge in the community. Theft and robberies are common, and they are also linked to more serious and violent crimes. It is normal that thieves carry weapons, most commonly varieties of knives, but there are also frequent occurrences of criminals carrying firearms (young woman 4, interview, 22.05.2016). Killings occur on a regular basis, and during my four weeks of fieldwork there, two people were killed in this area or close by. These “gangsters”, as they are labelled by one informant, are often seen as the cause of these murders. The other cause is police violence, where

the gangsters themselves or unlucky bystanders become the victims (young woman 4, interview, 22.05.2016).

The challenge of crime is shown to be ubiquitous through the many illustrative examples provided by the informants.

“

“We have been having muggings, we have had people killed around here [...] There were some college students that were raped. They bring guns, take the girls and rape them. I understand that the two girls that were raped two weeks ago, they died” (young woman 4, 22.05.2016).

”

There is no lack of personal experience such as with the example above, and several informants express that they have lost a youth group colleague, friend or family member to violent crimes.

In the first main section of this chapter I have introduced the challenges that young people in Mlango Kubwa identify. Altogether, the challenges as perceived by youth constitute *needs*, *aspirations* and *social representations*, as outlined in the definition of quality of life. The informants speak of challenges that are both self-lived and observed. These challenges represent the basis for what factors need to be improved to achieve increased quality of life in. Following this, I have developed a contextual definition of quality of life as a framework for the remainder of the chapter:

“

Quality of life for young people in Mlango Kubwa is the presence of opportunities for personal development, primarily within education and employment. It is also the absence of factors that decreases the security in their community. Crime and substance abuse are the two main challenges for security, and these factors also reduces the quality of life for those who engage in them.

”

5.2 Creating opportunities through public spaces

After looking deeper at perceptions of challenges and needs in the community, a next step in the analysis is to explore how, and to which degree these needs are being *satisfied* and in what ways these challenges are being met. In this section, I will consider how public spaces can contribute to this. Throughout the section, I consider whether these spaces themselves provide higher quality of life, or if they play a minor role compared to other factors. I begin by looking at education and employment opportunities that have been created in relation to public spaces in the community.

Advancing education opportunities

Lack of education being a large challenge for the Kenyan urban marginalized population holds significant support in evaluation of the millennium development goals (UNESCO, 2015). Many of the informants speak of “lack of education”

and “lack of knowledge” interchangeably. For instance, chairman 2 (interview, 18.05.2016) stress the need for youth to be educated about “the real meaning of life”, for instance through seminars enhancing knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other relevant themes. This indicates how education is viewed in broad terms within this context, and not only including the formal education system. Non-formal and informal education will consequently also be discussed in this section.

Formal education

Formal education is what we know as the institutionalized learning that typically takes place at school, from primary to higher education.⁸ In most cases it is structured, prearranged, and compulsory. This type of education is teacher-lead, and learning is evaluated (Eshach, 2007, 174). The evaluation is normally based on several forms of work, one of them being homework that the pupil does outside of school hours and away from the school itself. A challenge for children and youth living in slums is lack of adequate space to do homework. Electricity and lighting in slum dwellings is fragile, and in some cases non-existent, making it difficult to work even when there is enough space. According to Sheuya (2008), such challenges may directly affect the education of people in slums. It is in the frame of this context I argue that public space in Mlango Kubwa can have impact on the formal education opportunities of young people in the community. One informant speaks about how she sees lack of space as an issue for children in the community.

⁸ There are a number of definitions and distinctions proposed to describe formal, non-formal and informal education. In this thesis I chose to echo Eshach's (2007) definitions.

“

“At home, there is not space to do homework. There is not electricity in all the houses in the slum, so they don’t have power, they don’t have light. That is a major challenge” (young woman 3, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

The same informant rented a space in one of the local churches and invited children to come there after school to do homework and eat. What started out with four children quickly grew to over 50, reflecting the demand for such a space. Although this was a space for children, who are outside of the scope for this thesis, I argue that the situation is transferrable to youth. This is supported by statements from other informants. Youth halls in the community are currently only to some extent used for doing homework. However, several informants voice a wish for the establishment of a library in Pequininos social hall. At the time of my fieldwork, there were concrete plans of building another floor on the youth hall which would allow establishing such a space.

“

“We have partnered with [chairman 1] for almost 20 years. I would like if [he] could make this place be a bigger one, a resource center with more youth groups. Kids can do their homework here, like a library. We pray for [him] to build a bigger one. [...]” (chairman 2, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

Space for doing homework is considered important by several informants, but the current spaces are not extensively being utilized for this purpose. Their respective conclusions on the subject, then, is not based on extensive experience with using public space for doing homework. In this context, it is hard to fully determine the role of public spaces in enabling increased formal education for youth in the community.

The quality and accessibility of the educational institutions themselves are therefore arguably the most important factor in determining the individual level of education. We know from research that infrastructure is an important factor in determining whether schools are accessible. For instance, the provision of toilets separated by gender has by some studies been argued to be a factor in providing girls access to education (Birdthistle et al., 2011). It is in such a context we should see the case of providing infrastructure for doing homework. I base the conclusion on the capability of public space on education opportunities on previous knowledge (Sheuya, 2008), and beliefs that informants hold about the potential of a library. As such, a cautious conclusion is that space *could* be a factor in enhancing formal education through facilitating spaces for doing homework, while not undermining the assumed superior role of the quality of the school itself.

Non-formal education

Non-formal education can be explained as structured education that happens within an institution, but apart from the formal education system. It is typically prearranged by organizations, businesses or the like. Participation in such education is usually voluntary, and learning is in most cases

not evaluated (Eshach, 2007, 174). Following this definition, I chose to ask whether the informant thought that the spaces in the area could be used to enhance the skills of youth. All answers to these questions came out positive, with a few variances in examples of how they could enhance skills. Some informants focused on sports, particularly highlighting the opportunity to become good at playing football due to the establishment of the Slum soccer football field. The previous alternatives to this field were insufficient. There are now organized teams with coaches for both girls and boys. Young man 4 describes the current situation:

“

[...] Like in sports. In the future, we can have great players coming from this place. Because of the public spaces, because of this field. Before we had to go far to have a playing ground. The accessibility can help” (interview, 20.05.2016).

”

Various expressions of art are other elements mentioned as a way to improve skills. Both dancing, singing and acting are activities that take place at Pequininos, and there are organized classes that youth can participate in, such as those highlighted by Chairman 3: “Youth can use [the public spaces] to improve for example through dancing or acting” (interview, 01.06.2016).

ICT-related knowledge is in demand, and the computer lab in Pequininos social hall is a welcomed arena in the community. When asking about how the public spaces in the community can improve skills among youth, most of the youth mention this arena as an important one:

“

“They teach us a lot. They have the computer class. I tell my youths to come here and take the class, I talk to [chairman 1] and he admits them. They become more busy. So it is a way to enhance knowledge. We cannot afford classes anywhere else. It costs 6000-7000 [KSH] for an introduction class. Here it is free” (chairman 2, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

In addition to gaining general ICT-skills through classes at the youth center, mapping classes are also provided for the youth in the community. For instance, a geodata firm comes to the ICT-center in Mlango Kubwa and teaches youth how to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map undocumented slum-areas. In some cases, this leads to the youth being employed by the firm to gather and register data in various projects:

“

“[...] I have also learned mapping here. It helps me a lot. Two weeks ago, we were mapping in Kayole. I never knew how to map things, now I am good at it” (young man 2, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

The ICT and mapping classes are examples of concrete skills that educate youth, and provide them with tools that improve their chances of getting a good job. Other types of classes provided at the youth centers, for instance related

to enhancing knowledge about sexual health, are also educating, but might have a less clear direct link to future employment opportunities.

The empirical data suggests that non-formal education is the type of education that has the strongest link with public spaces in the community. The examples that the informants provide demonstrate that there are a range of opportunities that exist in these spaces. Even so, one should be cautious about drawing a definitive and direct line between the existence of these spaces, and the provision of non-formal education opportunities. Yet, the data points towards the fact that space is an important prerequisite for such opportunities to arise. However, what the data collected on this subject cannot determine, is whether there are other factors besides space that are as vital or more important to enable such opportunities. Nevertheless, I conclude that the public spaces contribute to enabling non-formal education in Mlango Kubwa. The existence of these spaces and the non-formal education activities that are offered there, are perceived to directly impact the future opportunities of young people that take part in them.

Informal education

The lifelong process which shapes a person's values, attitudes and skills occurring outside the school system is usually referred to as informal education. It is unstructured, spontaneous and usually led by the one who also benefits as the learner (Eshach, 2007, 174). Informal education is a broad term that can mean anything from influence from friends and family, to the values you internalize from watching movies. It can be divided into three main arenas of influences; the workplace, instruction from parents or

guardians, and daily experience (La Belle, 1982). I will point to one main element that can have an educating effect in the context of Mlango Kubwa, as going broader would require deeper analysis:

“

“[...] when you want to change something you must meet and talk. So these are spaces for discussion about how we want things to be done. Without that, we can't improve. Talking together is the most important thing, without that, there is nothing. We need space for these discussions” (young man 2, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

Spaces that facilitate meetings and interaction among people are important in the views of many informants. As demonstrated above, there exists a strong belief that resolving issues and creating change is facilitated through dialogue. This dialogue, in turn, is enabled by having space to actively engage in it. It is within the daily experience, as mentioned above, that this can influence learning. Thus, one can argue that informal education can be enhanced through the use of public space because such spaces facilitate for meetings, networks and activities that have a positive goal or outcome. Without these spaces, it is likely that creating such arenas would be more difficult. With reference to the discussion about perceptions on idleness, many informants believe that lack of activities will lead to idleness. In this case, idleness is assumed to be a less educational state, and replacing it with dialogue is preferable.

Creating income generating activities

Unemployment and underemployment is a major challenge identified both in the empirical data and by previous research, as referred to earlier. Subsequently, a goal for the youth groups in the area is to create income generating activities for young people while adding value to the whole community. As will be demonstrated, the youth groups have managed to create jobs for young people in the area. The question that remains and will be discussed in this section is whether these opportunities could have been created without public spaces. I distinguish between opportunities directly created by the youth groups themselves, and opportunities created by the state.

Youth-led employment

There are mainly two employment schemes that youth groups in the area have created and maintained. There was a combination of unemployment and the challenge of waste in the community. Youth in the area wanted to reduce these challenges. Through work that included convincing hundreds of households in the area, the groups created a system where they charge a set fee for each household in return for picking up their garbage twice a week and removing it from the community. In addition, there was previously a recycling unit in one of the youth centers, where plastics were recycled and sold for industrial use. Street children could collect plastic, and get paid per unit by the youth group. This part of the waste management program was shut down due to lack of space (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

The other youth-led program is an initiative to enhance the security in the area. The organization running it is called

Mlango Kubwa Landlords and Tenants Association (MLATA). Youth groups in the area mobilized landlords and youth to join hands in fighting crime. In the same way as with waste management, the households pay a small fee to employ youth which become stationed in high-risk areas of the community. Stationing the youth in these areas means they can patrol the area, and increase the communal feeling of security. MLATA is an umbrella organization for the CBO's in the area, and the chairman of MLATA is also a local youth leader. In addition to regular security patrols, they provide security for special events such as missions with politicians or foreign delegations (chairman 3, interview, 01.06.2016).

State-led employment

The National Youth service program was mentioned in the background chapter. It employs youth to work with local development projects, mainly within infrastructure. What is important to know in this context is that allocation of jobs within the national youth service is not necessarily equally dispersed among jobless youth in Kenya and Nairobi. Rather, politicians bargain to secure NYS jobs to 'their' constituency, as reflected in an interview with a member of parliament:

“

“I use my connections, the national government. NYS is at the courtesy of the president. I went to him and begged him to bring NYS to my constituency. Luckily, he agreed” (politician, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

The Kenyan National Assembly is primarily made up by representatives directly elected from the 290 constituencies

in Kenya. Subsequently, there is a strong expectation that the Member of Parliament will work actively to improve the situation in their constituency. 2600 jobs were allocated to Mathare at the official relaunch of NYS, and 432 of these were allocated to Mlango Kubwa (Politician, interview, 18.05.2016). Pequininos social hall is used as a base for NYS in Mlango Kubwa. This is where youth register for work every day, and where lunch is provided. In addition, the youth group based at Pequininos has a role in administrating the program. For instance, the chairman of the youth group has an important function in the workforce selection:

“

[...] the selection was done public at the Slum soccer pitch, but I was selected as one of the leaders who was recruiting the youth because I could identify them if they belong to our village” (chairman 1, Whatsapp-chat, 21.04.2017).

”

Returning to the question of whether public space is important for employment opportunities to arise in the context of Mlango Kubwa, my conclusion is twofold. Concerning the youth-led programs, I find it difficult to conclude that public space has been a determining factor in their creation. In strict physical terms, the activities do not require public spaces other than the streets they walk on when transporting the waste to a dumpsite, or patrolling the area for security. I cannot exclude the possibility that public spaces such as the youth halls have contributed to creating the programs through facilitating for discussions, and enabling the organizations to remain sustainable. However,

I do not have the data to make assumptions on whether such public spaces play a crucial role in the establishment of these programs. This does not mean that the programs are unconnected to public space. Rather, the programs themselves have an important protective effect on the public spaces by keeping them clean and safe. Most of my informants find that the public spaces are, indeed, safe. The community is also perceived to be a clean community. This stands in contrast to perceptions from an inhabitant of how the sanitation in the community was before the program started:

“

“This center was a big heap of garbage. We used to play here when we were young, and that was not a good thing for us. People would throw very bad things, even aborted babies, and there would be dogs eating the corpses. For us, this was not a good thing to see, and it was not a good neighborhood to grow up in” (UN-Habitat, 2015, 14).

”

Regarding the state led programs, one can argue that public space has been a determining factor in making this community the Mlango Kubwa ‘hub’ for NYS. The bureaucracy that the NYS requires on a daily basis would be difficult to convene without a fitting space for it. It is reasonable to expect that the base would be placed partly according to where there was such a space available. The small football court in the backyard of the social hall also enables a space for cooking food for over 400 youth every day. As demonstrated, the space does not only enable the

youth group to become a hub for the program, it also gives them the power to select who gets to work. Considering this, the state led employment opportunities that are enabled through the existence of public space in Mlango Kubwa are significant.

Counteracting root causes

In this section I have looked at how public spaces within the geographical parameters of the case can increase elements wanted by youth, respectively education and employment. I find grounds to say that in some cases, the public spaces can increase the level of education and enable the provision of income generating opportunities. Judging from the empirical data, the alternative to education and employment is idleness, which in turn can lead to crime and substance abuse. It can be argued that when the public spaces work like this, they deal with some of the “root causes” of crime and substance abuse. The root cause way of dealing with these challenges might prove effective because they deal with both the individual issue of being unemployed or out of school, but at the same time it reduces the security risk for the rest of the community which is sometimes imposed by ‘idle minds’. In the next section, I will look at what role the public spaces play in providing security for the community.

5.3 Public space as safe spaces

As outlined in the section on challenges for youth in the community, crime and substance abuse are considered to be issues that affect the security in the area in a negative way. When I cross checked all the codes from my empirical data with the code “public space impact on the community”,

the code “safety/security” is the most common recurrence. This leads to a justification of the argument that while insecurity imposed by crime and drugs is a large issue in the community, it is also believed that public space can play a significant role in reducing this challenge in terms of providing ‘safe spaces’. I will explore the various narratives regarding public space and security that emerge in the interviews, and continue to consider the role of public spaces in improving the quality of life for youth in the community.

A busy mind has no time for crime

I asked my informants whether they believed that the establishment of public spaces such as Slum soccer and the social halls has had an impact on security in the community. Most informants firmly believed that they have. They provide various explanations for why. One explanation can be related to the previous discussion on creating opportunities for youth. The narrative is based on the idea that giving youth opportunities leads them to stay busy and avoid falling into idleness, and thus crime or substance abuse. One informant answers the question of whether the spaces has changed security in these terms:

“

“Yeah they have, a lot. For instance, before we had the Slum soccer there was nowhere. [...] We also have the ICT center where we are bringing them. At least they get knowledge about computers, internet. Their minds are staying busy” (young man 3, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

Since some of the mechanisms explaining how public space can provide opportunities have already been explored in the previous section, only a short conclusion is provided here. Considering how the informant's perception of safety is directly connected to the absence of crime and substance abuse in the community, one can argue that public spaces prevents insecurity in Mlango Kubwa through the prevention of root causes of substance abuse and crime, here understood as idleness and lack of opportunity. As mentioned earlier, this is the type of response to challenges that goes to the root of the causes, and can both enhance security and reduce challenges for the youth that engage in crime and substance abuse.

The idle boys are no longer here

Another important explanation relates to how public spaces provide a 'safe haven' in themselves, thus enhancing the sense of security in the community. The essence of this argument is that through the introduction of defined public spaces access to such spaces can be managed and restricted. The youth group's presence in the area is strengthened by the fact that they have their own spaces. Although the youth halls are meant to be open to the public, there are formal and informal rules that regulate who gets access to them. For instance, you are not allowed to enter the social hall if you are visibly high on drugs (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016). My own observations suggest that this primarily concerns heavy drug users, while smoking marihuana is not necessarily a crime that qualifies for exclusion. One informant captures this argument in her reply regarding the public space's ability to enhance safety:

“

[...] It has really changed the safety of these places. Before Pequininos was built it was just an open space where youths, under 18 [would] hang around here, used drugs, injected themselves. But now there are no more such boys, it is very rare finding these boys injecting themselves here” (young woman 1, interview, 17.05.2016)“.

”

While the quote from this informant provides a record of the current situation, another informant tells us more about how he perceives that this reduction in presence of drug addicted youth has happened:

“

“The big problem is that these young boys, they always do some bad things. For example, they come and find somebody. Like you, here you are safe, you are in very good hands. But I cannot advise you to go down there without [Chairman] or me or anybody from this group. We know these people. Maybe they will look at this phone of yours, maybe they will take it. But here, they cannot. They are afraid here because they know that people here do some physical fitness. We protect you” (young man 1, 19.05.2016).

”

In light of this, public spaces are perceived to enhance the security in the area, because the spaces themselves

and the areas surrounding them are protected by the presence of the youth groups. The empirical data suggests that such regulation is primarily done through dialogue. However, there are also instances where confrontations get physical. When a thief is caught red-handed, he can risk getting beaten up by bystanders (Chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016). This, combined with the security provided by MLATA gives associations to vigilante-like security arrangements. While the comparison between youth groups and vigilantes might seem extreme, their common denominator is that they take security into own hands where the trust in the ability of the government to ensure the safety of their citizens is low.

Young woman 5 supports this:

“[...] many young men have engaged themselves in security measures. They help out to prevent killings, they do security work. They act like police. Police have also given them the right to do this, they were the ones who suggested that young men in the area come up with security measures. You cannot do anything here without police knowing about it. The reason why they told men to do security is that they know this area better” (interview, 22.05.2016).

Another aspect considering the regulation of space in the village, is how the Slum soccer pitch represent a space that can be easily surveilled. As shown in figure 2.5, the pitch is located in between high-rise buildings. This means that

when you are there, the chance are of being observed by the surrounding apartments is high. Subsequently, parents send their children to play here because they regard it as safer than playing in the streets.

“The kids used to play on the roadside, but now the parents know where to go looking for their kids. They don’t have to go around the whole community to find their kids; there is a safe space where the kids can play” (UN-Habitat, 2015, 15).

Considering that the Slum soccer pitch is perceived to function as a ‘panopticon’ makes it a less attractive target for gangsters and thieves. Public spaces such as this, thus enable the people in the area, such as youth groups, concerned parents and random neighbors to actively or passively become the guard dogs of the village.

Dialogue prevents violence

“Yes, when you want to change something you must meet and talk. So, these are spaces for discussion about how we want things to be done. Without that, we can’t improve. Talking together is the most important thing, without that, there is nothing. We need space for these discussions” (young man 2, interview, 17.05.2016).

An argument that was made by many informants was that without dialogue in the community, there is no real basis for progress. This argument is also specifically used when talking about security in the area. Public space facilitates this dialogue. Although the youth halls are governed by their respective youth groups, other organizations and members of the community can use the spaces without having to pay rent (chairman 2, interview 18.05.2016). This ensures that the spaces benefit a larger proportion of the community. In the theory chapter, a summary of a quality of life-study among Colombian youth was provided. The study found that public spaces were important to strengthen a sense of community and emotional connectedness between people in the community. It was also found that public spaces strengthened identity and territorial roots (Isunju et al., 2011 & Ruiz, 2015). In the interviews, I had an aim of exploring connectedness in the community. I did this through asking how youth believe they are perceived by the community elders. I found that while many informants believe that most youth are still being perceived of as bad, some informants also emphasized how this perception has changed due to the youth group's ability to organize and contribute to security in the area:

“

“Before MLATA, the youth used to involve themselves in crime. After we started MLATA we joined hands with the elders and everyone. We come together and build the youth. It is better that they come together. How they see [the youth] has changed” (chairman 2, 18.05.2016).

”

As discussed in the previous section, it is difficult to firmly establish whether a security program would be non-existing without the public spaces. I do argue, however, that the existence of public spaces has enabled the community to come together and deal with issues through dialogue, rather than through violent and non-communal behavior. As illustrated in the quote above, it can be argued that the public spaces have in this sense laid the ground for youth groups to contribute positively in the village, which in turn has led the elders to perceive the youth in a more positive way. Through this strengthening of bonds across age groups in the community, it can be argued that an increase in emotional connection and trust between people in the village occurs. Strengthening territorial roots and identity can increase people's ownership for the community. As highlighted in the background chapter, the transient nature of slum dwellings can lead to a lack of ownership among its inhabitants (Isunju et al., 2011). By counteracting this lack of ownership, the village can become safer because its people act on a perceived obligation to improve it and to keep it safe. Another parallel to the Colombian case is the local football club as a generator of trust in the community (Ruiz, 2015). The youth groups (who also have their own football clubs) and their respective social halls become a centerpiece for activity and discussions, and in this respect, they generate a dialogue that can prevent insecurity.

“Space is not enough to keep us safe”

“

“As of now, because of the cartels, the public spaces are not safe” (chairman 3, interview, 01.06.2016).

”

Not everyone believes that the public spaces in themselves are enough to keep the citizens safe. Certain externalities, such as cartels of organized crime represent such a strong force that the regulation of public spaces might become irrelevant. This is stressed by examples of how the social halls have been attacked and vandalized, and incidents where people have been shot by gangsters while watching football in the social hall (young woman 4, interview, 22.05.2016). An incident early in 2017 also demonstrated how these spaces can be vulnerable. A group of gangsters vandalized Pequininos youth hall and other locations in the village. The attack was said to be provoked by jealousy. The gangsters were unhappy with the amount of benefits the youth in this particular village got, compared to other areas (chairman 1, Whatsapp-chat, 18.02.2017). This demonstrates how in some cases, being the recipients of development benefits can be a risk.

There are, in other words, multiple aspects related to the security of the public spaces. While in most instances informants argue that they improve the security in the village, there are also cases of the opposite, where the spaces produce insecurity. This is connected to the internal politics and hierarchies of Mathare. As this dynamic requires a more nuanced analysis of micro politics within the Mathare slum, this discussion will be returned to in chapter six.

Safe haven solutions

Reducing insecurity is a goal for improving quality of life among youth in the community. Earlier in this chapter, I concluded that public space to some extent can counteract the root causes of challenges in the community. Considering

security, the reduction of idleness is a factor perceived to be important among the informants, and hence providing activities to relieve idleness becomes a priority. In addition, public space provides solutions that go less to the root of the cause, but rather create safe havens as a defense mechanism towards insecurity. Through regulating space, creating trust and emotional connectedness between the people in the community, they are creating spaces that perceivably become pockets of safety in an otherwise unsafe environment.

5.4 “Here they will be challenged”

According to the analysis in this chapter, public spaces play a role in enhancing personal development and reducing insecurity. Granted this, access to these spaces can be considered a benefit. However, there are norms which regulate the access to these spaces. Subsequently, some people are left out of these public spaces, and thus the benefits that come with them. In this section, I explore who these excluded youths are, and what explanations are provided for why they do not have equal access to the public spaces.

Idle youth

It has already been discussed how public spaces are regulated through youth group regulation and a type of internal justice system. As argued, creating safe spaces is on the one hand about dealing with root causes, and on the other about creating safe havens. It is in this last instance we can trace an exclusionary practice towards a share of the youth population in the area. Youth engaged in drugs,

alcohol abuse and crime are not invited into the youth halls or Slum soccer. One member of MECYG and Carambe, the two youth groups that have social halls in the village talks about the restricted access to these spaces:

“

[...] Not every youth in this community comes here. They are in other places, someone should go and talk to them. They are idle youths, what they do is not good. So, they cannot come here, here they will be challenged” (young man 2, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

As demonstrated in this quote, some informants believe that the idle youth are not their problem, and that their task is rather to keep the village clear of such youths. This is an example of an exclusionary practice rooted in the youth group’s regulation of the public spaces in the village. However, not all informants take such harsh stance on the matter. Some informants claim that they try to include idle youth in the activities that are provided at the public spaces. Their understanding of the issue is, rather, that idle youth do not show an interest in being helped:

“

“We try to invite them to join us here but they do not want to. The elders say that we are leaving these boys behind, because here at this ward we always get some things done, but we are leaving others behind. No. We always tell them to come, let us help one another. Everybody come” (young man 1, 19.05.2016).

”

As illustrated in the experience of this informant, a common denominator when it comes to including idle youth in activities, is the belief that they are not receptive to help. Based on this perception, it is comprehensible how the youth groups decide to not go out of their way to include idle youth. When dealing with the general hardships of being marginalized youth, it is understandable how helping idle youth does not become a priority. Nevertheless, it is a practice which ultimately ends up relieving a sizeable share of the youth population of the benefits of public spaces.

Other youth groups and non-members

Another element that can be mentioned when talking about the inclusion/exclusion dimension of these public spaces, is to what extent other youth groups and non-members are included. I conducted interview with two leaders from community groups that do not have their own space. Both expressed that the groups with social halls let other youth groups use their space to conduct meetings and activities. However, one chairman highlights that this is not necessarily always enough to keep everyone satisfied:

“

“In slums, most of the time the security is not 100 percent. People are poor, they want to earn a living, and when they see a place like Pequíninos they feel that the people who run that organization have a lot of money, and that they have discriminated them” (chairman 4, interview, 18.05.2016).

”

It is known from incidents such as the previously mentioned attack that vandalized one of the social halls that rapid developments can become a security hazard. This balance evidently requires sensitivity. In an email exchange about a donation of football equipment, one of the youth group members explains the attack and how they plan to deal with the issue going forward:

“

“[...] our plan is to donate the new equipment to other youth groups in the community to show that they are not neglected. The attack was due to our large profile in the community that have left many youth groups feeling left out. This is the result of our hard work trying to create a better future for the community that has made other groups feel as though our group is taking all of the opportunities. We believe that our group has benefited well from this relationship and it's time to share the fruits of our labor” (young man 6, email, 15.02.2017).

”

The relationship the informant refers to is a relationship between a Norwegian municipality and MECYG. The introduction of this relationship was made by an initiative through UN-Habitat. Such connections have arguably benefited the youth in the village. However, it is evident that complete inclusion of all youth who wants access to the public spaces is not fulfilled. This leads to friction where some youth and youth groups perceives themselves as left out of the development opportunities provided by the public spaces and the youth groups running them.

The gender dimension

Concerning the element of equality, there are multiple dimensions that could have been explored, such as youth with disabilities or equality between tribes. I chose, based on themes that emerged in the first interviews, to explore the gender dimension. I asked whether young women and men have equal opportunities in the public spaces. Much of the empirical data show that most youth interviewed recognize that women have less opportunities within the spaces and activities that the youth groups provide, such as in this answer:

“

“There are more opportunities for boys than for girls. They pick the males when something is being done, like for jobs. The women just stay in the house. The males then, have more opportunities (young woman 1, interview, 17.05.2016)”.

”

Although this was the view of most informants, some informants also claimed that gender equality was not an issue in this community. One informant put it in these words:

“

“Just because you do not see any women around does not mean they do not participate. They are the ones who do the cleaning and the cooking for the feeding programs. This place has a football team - when the kids come back from the football it's the women's responsibility to take

care of them. [...] So, the women are equally involved (young man 3, interview, 17.05.2016).

”

As demonstrated by this quote, the context in which women are perceived to have equal opportunities is within a frame of traditional gender roles, where women do the cooking, cleaning and childcare. Notably, the informants claiming that girls and boys have equal opportunities are male. None of the female informants in Mlango Kubwa spoke about the abovementioned activities as opportunities for themselves. They rather requested extra space in the youth halls so that there could also be activities targeted at them.

UN-Habitat official 3 (interview, 26.05.2016) supports the dominating view that girls do not to the same extent as boys benefit from public space. Within the work that UN-Habitat does in establishing youth centers, the biggest problem has been involving women in a meaningful way.

“

“[Chairman 1] have created stuff for girls, but it is still the guys you sit down with when you meet them. Oddly enough, when you go to Somalia, the women are involved big time, really big time. Women there are very powerful. Saudi-[Arabia]? Same thing. It's fascinating. [...] I know a lot of strong Kenyan women, but when it comes to public space they are left out. It could be a safety issue. This can be a very violent society” (UN-Habitat official 3, interview, 26.05.2016).

”

If we draw attention to the statement that it is the guys that you sit down with for meetings, it is implied that women do not posit leadership positions within the youth group, at least not important enough positions to join in on external meetings. This is a commonly used explanation for why women are not equally involved in the activities in the youth group. Several informants claim that women should be, and could be involved, they just currently lack someone stepping up and taking leadership.

“

“Yes, some of the activities only attract men. I think that if they can get women leaders that can bring them together, something can be changed. In the NYS the ladies are very hard working, and the men are not. Something is lacking, that is leadership (chairman 1, 16.05.2016).

”

I find that this narrative is revisited in most informants' views on equality between women and men. Regardless of whether they believe inequality to be a challenge, the responsibility for creating opportunities is believed to lay with the women themselves. This is in line with a mentality promoting that opportunities can be “grabbed” by whoever steps up to take them. No informants in Mlango Kubwa point towards structural explanations for why women might be seeing less benefits from the development of public spaces in the community.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has had the aim of answering the research question: *What role can public space play in enhancing the quality of life of youth in Mlango Kubwa?* My methodology in approaching this question was to identify perceptions on aspirations and needs of young people in the village, through the identification of perceived challenges. Then, I examined to which degree these needs and aspirations were being satisfied and enabled through public space.

The first section identified challenges for youth in the area that my informants experience. The most frequently mentioned challenges were lack of education, unemployment, substance abuse, crime and insecurity. Based on the perceived challenges, I developed a contextual definition as a framework for the analysis.

The second section examined to what extent, and through what capacity the public spaces in the area can satisfy the challenges identified in the first section. I found that the spaces are an important arena for providing non-formal education. Further, I found that public space is perceived to have a minor effect on formal and informal opportunities. I also found that youth perceives that public space facilitates job opportunities in the village, most notably jobs provided by the

Further, I found that public spaces perceivably contribute to enhance security in the area. First, through creating the abovementioned opportunities that contribute to reduce idleness. I label this way of reducing challenges *root cause solutions*. On the other hand, it has improved security through regulating out unwelcomed youth from the public spaces. I call this *safe haven solutions*.

In the last section, I discussed whether the public spaces and the opportunities provided by them are open to all youth. I found that they are not. For safe haven solutions to arise, there must exist a perceived need to exclude unwanted elements. Consequently, idle youth, are excluded to the best of the youth group's ability. I also find that other youth groups and women are perceived as not full benefactors of the experiences that these spaces create for some. The discussion of access to public space is a theme throughout the remainder of the thesis. Hereafter, I refer to youth that has full access to public space as 'organized youth' or simply 'youth groups'. The terms refer to youth that are members of or affiliated with youth groups in the village. Youth that experience severe restricted access are referred to as 'idle youth'.

Safe haven solutions could be keeping idle youth from achieving the benefits of the root cause solutions, provided that access to public space enables root cause solutions. While many organized youth in the area arguably benefit from the existence of public spaces, safe haven solutions could possibly be blocking the root cause solutions from reaching the youth who have the most pressing problems. An important note on this, however, is that the lack of government institutions and solutions forces such a situation. It is not the organized youth who do not want to solve the issues for idle youth, they are merely working for improvement in the areas that are within their reach. In conclusion, I argue that public spaces play a role as one of several determining factors needed to improve the quality of life for organized youth in Mlango Kubwa.

6. SPACES OF POLITICS

“

“These youth are hyper connected. [...] Look at someone like [chairman 1], who accesses all levels of power, above and below him. He is talking with me, with [members of parliament], with [international NGO’s]. He is brokering. He has an immense ability to broker all these different fractions across class lines, race lines, everything” (UN-Habitat official 3, interview, 2).

”

In the previous chapter, I examined how opportunities for increased quality of life for youth are created through public spaces. In this chapter, I will explore the political dimension of these spaces. My aim is to answer the following research questions:

How are public spaces in Mlango Kubwa produced, and does public space enhance the political influence for youth in the community?

Central to this chapter will be to understand how organized youth, through the informal/formal nexus, contribute to the production of space. An important aspect is also whether this production of space empowers young people politically, and how. In the first section of the chapter, I will examine the micro-politics that contribute to constituting the internal

hierarchy in the village. I will continue by exploring the relations between informal and formal politics by looking at perceptions that youth have about the formal political system. The relation is further explored by looking at the concrete strategies youth use when negotiating for public space.

After presenting empirical data about the political relations that emerge and evolve through public spaces, I will discuss the data material in light of theory introduced in chapter three. The theory, *dialectic of public space*, treats negotiations between *representations* and *representational space* as an analytical tool to examine the production of public space. Lastly, I examine the outcomes of the formal/informal nexus, and discuss if public space can increase the political status and influence of youth.

6.1 Micro-political realities

Understanding the internal hierarchy of the village is relevant for understanding what, if any, position youth are in to negotiate for development in the community. In the interviews, I explored how the community perceive youth, in the opinions of my informants. This was also touched upon in the previous chapter. What I found was that the elders in the community have gradually started seeing organized youth as a resource for the community. Albeit,

my material also suggests that many community members still perceive idle youth to be a challenge for the community. The progress promoted by youth groups in the community introduced in chapter five, has increased the status of particularly organized youth. The security program and waste management has helped create a status for the youth groups as community organizers. In creating these programs, a success factor was their ability to convince all households to contribute economically to the program. In doing so, the youth groups were not only providing a solution to a challenge felt by all dwellers in the village. They were also establishing bonds of trust between them and the rest of the community, implicitly stating that the youth groups could be trusted as the entity in the village to solve such issues.

“

“We had to go to each and every building, each and every floor and each and every door and knock, and speak to them about our idea. There was a lot of challenges. We spoke about how they could create opportunities for the youth so that the crime rate would go down. That’s how we started” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

It can be argued that when youth manage to solve a challenge that has otherwise failed to be solved by the government, it puts them in a favorable negotiating position. This is demonstrated by the ‘business of waste’, which was outlined in the theory chapter. On the one hand, their ability to solve problems alters their negotiating position vis-à-vis police, and the formal political system. On the other hand, it puts them in a position of power within

the hierarchy of the village. This is demonstrated by how one informant talks about the position of a youth group leader in the community:

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“[The police] can take you away even if you don’t take anything. These small boys are always being chased by the police. Sometimes [chairman 1] will come, we go to the station and tell them that this is not right and not all [youth steal]. They understand that some youth are doing good things in the community. They are around here, they even come and watch the games on Saturdays and Sundays. But some of the police are different kinds of human beings” (young man 1, interview, 19.05.2016).

”

Now, when youth in the community experience harassment from police forces, youth group leaders find themselves in a position where they can challenge the police. This is corroborated by chairman 3 (interview 01.06.2016). He states that the youth groups work hand in hand with the police, and that the gap between them is decreasing. He claims that the arresting of youth on no solid grounds were more frequent earlier, and that there was no room for negotiations with the police at the time. Notably, it is the chairmen of the youth groups who are mentioned when the theme of youth’s negotiation position emerges. This points towards a hierarchy where youth group leaders are not only leaders of their respective youth groups. They also become community leaders, and serve as a link between the village and external forces, such as politicians.

Another aspect of the observed hierarchy, is how the organized youth in this area are viewed as pioneers among youth in Mathare. They received official recognition through being awarded the Top Environment Conservationist award by the Ministry of Youth in 2011. Youth groups in Mlango Kubwa have travelled all over Kenya to teach other youth groups about waste management (UN-Habitat, 2015). Within Mathare, other youth groups look to them when they want to develop public spaces in their own villages:

“

“[...] there are a few spaces but the majority has been grabbed by private developers. If it wasn't for us, all of them would have been grabbed. Building the center, securing the soccer pitch, it has really made other areas want the same. Just like the waste management where others followed us. People are now telling me “ey, how did you get that pitch. We have a space and would like to build one, how do we do that” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

Achieving status as community leaders, then, comes both from within and from the outside. In addition to making both big and incremental changes within the community, their hyper connectedness with the outside world, as it was put by the UN-habitat official, reinforces this status. This status, again, ensures that the youth groups themselves define the public spaces in the area, both through the planning of them and through their daily use of these spaces.

6.2 Youth's perceptions of the formal political system

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“They only use the youth. Remember, politicians always want to take advantage. Give them 300 KSH, use them, pay them to get votes [...] they only come here during elections. That's the only time we see them. The term is five years. For the first four years, we do not see them. The one year remaining, that is when they come” (young man 7, interview, 19.05.2016).

”

In general, the empirical data demonstrates a strong distrust among youth towards politicians. This is common for both organized and unorganized youth which were interviewed. Such distrust can be explained by several factors. One such factor concerns how the election campaigns are held. Many informants speak about how politicians give cash handouts in exchange for votes. The frustration amongst the informants towards this is closely linked to how such bribery does not lead to real change in the community:

“

“Instead of just giving the idle youth money to elect them, they should do something else, this is not good. Go and ask those youths: What do you want me to do for you? If they want carwash, boda bodas, buy it for them. If you give these youths something that they can do and be busy,

you will never see anybody going and stealing. Our politician is failing us" (chairman 2, interview, 18.05.2016).⁹

”

Another factor is the perception amongst informants that promises made by politicians are seldom followed up on. If they follow up on promises, it occurs as smaller measures with low impact when re-election is due. The labelling of politicians as corrupt recur in the interviews, and is often connected to what is perceived as back-room deals between politicians or bureaucrats and property developers. Access to land is sought after, and there is a strong perception that whoever achieves to claim land have learned how to work the system to their advantage. However, claiming land is also a prerequisite for the youth groups in the community, in order to achieve their goals. This means that the youth groups also must work the system to their advantage. What is interesting in this regard, is that back-room deals between developers and city council politicians or officials are characterized as corrupt. When it comes to youth groups using the system to their advantage, it is characterized as a success. This duality is illustrated by statements made by an informant telling the story about land grabbing in the community:

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“Previously, some of the space was left for parks and open spaces, but the majority of them has been grabbed and turned into buildings. Because of corruption, some of the city council guys just make sure they change the map and try to grab all the public space” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

The narrative is that land grabbers who use the system to their advantage are a problem, and that the city council enables this problem. However, this does not prevent the youth groups from using the system themselves: “If he is corrupt, then we will make sure that we also get a piece of the cake” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016). In such statements lies an understanding that even if the system is corrupt, you must use it if you want to make developments in your community. How youth groups employ their strategies for claiming public space, and thus engage in the political system, will be demonstrated further in the following section.

⁹ *Boda boda is the commonly used name for motorcycle taxis in East-Africa. They are popular as an income generating activity. There is demand for boda boda's because they can offer reduced cost and time in traffic compared to ordinary taxis.*

6.3 If you can't beat them, join them

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“You have to know how to maintain a relationship with politicians. The person we support, we have to make sure he is on the winning side of an election” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

Based on the perceptions that youth have about the political system, a potential outcome could be that youth groups choose to distance themselves from the system. They have, however, chosen a different strategy and learnt how to work the system, and use this strategy to promote change through public spaces in the community. Returning to the introductory quote of this chapter, a UN-Habitat official characterized the youth in Mlango Kubwa as ‘hyper connected’. The background for this is how organized youth in the village have managed to access and use several scales of government and international organizations to their advantage. In this section, I explore these strategies and what characterizes them, and how they are employed.

Scales of influence, networks of loyalty

According to UN-Habitat official 1 (interview, 26.05.2016), youth represent an asset in development projects because of their broad range. When you get older, you often specialize in a niche, and your connections naturally limit themselves as a result of that niche. Youth, on the other hand, are at a point where their networks are at the broadest. Youth

groups in Mlango Kubwa represent an example of using such a broad network, in leveraging multiple levels of government in their strategies to secure and develop public spaces in the community. A key strategy when brokering with the various levels is using their ability to steer votes in a certain direction:

“

“The first politician we came across when we started our group was chosen as the Chairman of land in Nairobi. We told him we wanted this space, and asked him to give this space to us youths. He told everyone that this space belongs to these youths because they are supporting me” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

The youth group's position in the community provides them with a unique power to deliver votes to the politician that they want elected. For one, they are already a large group of youths that automatically votes for the candidate that is most likely to fulfil their demands. Second, they use their networks actively to get the candidate of their choice elected. This is a substantial advantage for the candidate considering it is a relatively cheap method of election campaigning.

Several informants talk about how they have used the local level of government, the Nairobi City County Assembly, to claim and maintain public space. Compared to the resources of the central government, the funds available for allocation from the local level of government are limited (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016). However,

just as important as securing funds to build, is to secure the rights to land which can be built on, and this is what youth groups focus on when bargaining with the local level of government. Securing land for Pequininos and Espana social halls have been dependent on the support of the local level of government. Support has been provided either by the Chairman of land, or by the Mlango Kubwa member of Nairobi City County Assembly. Their concrete strategies in securing this land is twofold. Take for instance the establishment of Pequininos social hall. As emphasized, promising votes in exchange for land was the core of the strategy. Getting to this point, however, depended on gaining knowledge about the area and its potential to serve as public spaces. A key development in the advocacy work of the youth group at the time, was gaining access to the zonal plan for Mlango Kubwa in order to see what land was allocated to whom. They circled out a space which was owned by the city, which was being used as a waste dump at the time. This put the youth group in a position where they could challenge anyone who claimed ownership to the space. Because they knew that the city owned it, and that it was not yet set aside for housing purposes or the like, they could argue that the space should be used as a public space for the community. It further enabled them to take their claim to an influential politician (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

To build the social halls, the youth groups depended on funds from the CDF for Mathare. The MP for Mathare is the patron for this fund, hence the youth groups needed to influence the MP to materialize the social halls. Here too, the strategy employed to provide votes was key for the promise of funds:

“

“That is also how we got to build the permanent structure. Before the last MP won, she came here and wanted votes. I got a chance to speak in front of people around here. My request was that she makes us a nice hall if she wins. She promised that, and by supporting us she won. I had to make some follow ups to make sure she would actually build the center though” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

The core of the strategies that youth groups use to claim and develop space is influencing multiple levels of governance through backing candidates in elections. We will return to the potential consequences of this type of strategy in the concluding section of this chapter.

Cultivating relationships

Considering the lack of resources for development projects at the local level of government, the youth groups have had to seek other financial sources to follow through with building of the youth halls. As demonstrated, the current Pequininos social hall was funded with means from the Mathare CDF through support by the previous MP. Before this, however, there were several less permanent structures on the same land, which were constructed with funding from an international NGO. The organization got in touch with one of the youth groups in the area through a UN contact, and they are still supporting youth groups in the village. This, too, shows that there are multiple dimensions in the strategies of gaining and maintaining financial and

political support. We have seen that creating a knowledge base about the area empowered organized youth to broker with the local politicians. Similarly, the maintenance of a relationship with an international NGO demands a level of trustworthiness and demonstrated ability to follow through with development projects. Both of these aspects concern the credibility of the youth groups. The youth groups in Mlango Kubwa have learnt to understand this dynamic, and use it to their advantage. They cultivate their relationships with their partners, and make sure that they make the relationship worthwhile for the other party. An example of this is how one of the youth groups have developed strong linkages to the parliament representatives over time:

“

“I believe you need good leaders. The former MP [...] is a good leader. She is the mother of [the current MP]. That is why the relation is still there. Whenever there are allocations from the CDF, they make sure we have a portion (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

The ability of the youth groups to strengthen such relationships is reiterated by how a politician talks about the chairman of MECYG: “You are in good hands. I have even been at UN-Habitat at the courtesy of this one” (politician, interview, 18.05.2016). The organized youth, then, enhance their position through adding value to the relationships. The politician stresses that they have together found a recipe for success. He claims that whenever he allocates money to development projects in the village, he makes sure that the youth group’s own wishes and ideas are fulfilled when

funding the project. He argues that when politicians force a project on a community that has not participated in deciding the final outcome, it is most often a failed project (interview, 18.05.2016). This is corroborated by chairman 3, which at the time of my field work was in the midst of constructing a new social hall:

“

“The CDF appoints a contractor to come and build it. We do not handle any cash. Our job is to oversee what the contractors are doing what we agreed” (interview, 01.06.2016).

”

Reinforcing positions through public space

Chairman 1 (interview, 16.05.2016) explains that they have gradually advanced their methods in advocating for development in the village. Although he labels their exchange of votes for concrete development projects as their “secret weapon”, there are additional factors that make their strategies holistic. Sustaining relationships through various means, is an example of one such factor. Another factor is how they use the space that they have already claimed, in order to further advance their position as political actors to be counted on:

“

“When there is election and there will be five candidates or more. We bring them to this hall to sit them down and ask questions, we make a debate. We ask them what they will do if we elect them. We make our suggestions and

they get to answer to how they see them. If you if the right person we will give you the vote” (young man 1, interview, 19.05.2016).

”

It can in this case be argued that the organized youth reinforce and strengthen their position through the already established public spaces. It becomes the natural place to hold events during elections, and the youth groups become the ones that facilitate and promote demands on behalf of the community. In this case, the development of public spaces can potentially have a cumulative effect on the position of organized youth both within the internal hierarchy in the community and vis-à-vis the politicians, and thus the formal political system.

6.4 Formal/informal production of public space

The first component of the research question that frames this chapter is: *How are public spaces in Mlango Kubwa produced?* In the foregoing sections, I have examined the strategies that youth groups use to claim space, and the relationship between the informal politics shaped by organized youth, and the formal political system. In the following section, I analyze these strategies in light of theory introduced in chapter three.

The dialectic of public space

Mitchell (2003) characterizes Lefebvre’s representational space and representations of space as the dialectic of

public space. In this conceptualization, it is implied that the production of public space is subject to negotiation between various actors and actions. Representations of space become then how spaces are planned and thought out in an orderly way. Representational space is how the spaces are shaped through the actors who use them, and provide symbols and meaning to them. (Mitchell, 2003).

As discussed in the theory chapter, the dialectic of public space and the informal/formal nexus can be connected as a means to analyze the production of space in Mlango Kubwa. As a mode of analysis, the practices of formal institutions of politics can be seen as the representations of space. Subsequently, the informal practices and politics represents the representational space. Within this theoretical context, it can be argued that organized youth in Mlango Kubwa shape the public spaces through their everyday use of these spaces, and through their negotiations for these public spaces. The informal nature of their livelihoods and daily practices shape this production in what can be seen as the exertion of power from ‘below’. On the other hand, the representations of space can in this context also be created by governing institutions such as Nairobi City County Council and by the state, represented by the MP for Mathare. UN-Habitat and international NGOs can also be placed in this category. Their regulation plans, funding schemes and programs for spatial development are the representations that expresses and exerts power from ‘above’. As discussed in the theory chapter, the distinction between ‘below’ and ‘above’, refers to various ways that power is exercised through public space. It is a useful distinction in relation to the dialectic of public space because the exertion of power, be it from above or below, contributes to the production of space.

Negotiations between these ways of exerting power will contribute to how public spaces are shaped and reshaped.

The dialectic of public space, formal/informal nexus and the dichotomy of 'above' and 'below' are useful analytical tools. However, it is worth keeping in mind that these are ideal types, meaning they do not represent the entire complexity within the myriad of space production in this specific context. Despite the distinctions made above, there exists nuances that reinforces the idea that the informal/formal nexus is a spectrum rather than a black and white concept. Considering this, the dialectic production of public space might also be more accurately described when seeing it through a similar spectrum lens. In the two following sections, I will demonstrate the complexity that characterizes both the representations of space and representational space that constitute the production of public space in Mlango Kubwa.

Representations of space

There are multiple tools that constitute the representations of public spaces in Mlango Kubwa. Several scales of government are, as demonstrated, involved in the planning and creation of these spaces. In addition, external forces such as UN-Habitat and an international NGO contribute to representations as well. When looking at the three spaces of focus for this thesis, the Slum soccer pitch, Espana social hall and Pequininos social hall, it becomes apparent that the various scales of government play different roles in creating representations.

The local level, represented by the Nairobi City County Council, play an important role regarding the allocation of

land. This is mostly through their ownership of the Mathare zonal plan. The zonal plan for Mathare is an important tool to establish who owns the land, and what the spatial distribution in the communities is thought out to be. Evidently, the original purposes for each plot of land is not followed according to plan. This is largely due to corrupt practices where land grabbers can bribe city officials or politicians to alter the purpose of a plot of land through "looking the other way". It is, of course also due to the spontaneous and planned use of these spaces, a practice which will be revisited in the section on 'representational space'. One can argue that, although the legality of bribed alterations in land use is clearly contested, such corrupt practices contribute to the representation of space. Relatively speaking, this practice can also be seen as a way of exerting power from 'above', considering both land developers and the formal political system can be labelled as external forces.

10

They represent an elite in the sense of holding considerable political power as well as significant capital power. Through their practices, which strictly speaking are illegal, they constitute a top down representations of spaces in the community. An interesting case in this light is the establishment of the new Espana social hall. Chairman 3 highlights how the ongoing dispute over the land it is being built on is a matter of private versus public interests:

10 *Land developers are not in all cases external in the sense that they have no physical connection to the village. Some developers reside within the village, and are a part of the community in this sense. The argument behind labelling them as external forces is that they, in cooperation with government, impose developments in the community solely for the purpose of generating a revenue for themselves. This is a contrast to the development of public spaces, which are generally thought to benefit the community in a much broader sense.*

“

“As we talk now, there is a case. This space, someone got a lease for it in 2007. After we built this hall, they went to court, they took me to court. As we talk, there is a case between Redeemed Gospel [church] and [chairman 3]. But the space does not belong to [chairman 3], the hall does not belong to [chairman 3]. It belongs to the community. I went with the MCA to talk with the person in charge of lands in Nairobi City County. They want to write a letter to lands commission to revoke that lease, because the land belongs to the community. Redeemed does not represent the entire community” (interview, 01.06.2016).

”

In this case, production of space is still being negotiated by various representations of the space. The conflicting representations have different purposes, and the actors on each side have different segments of the population supporting them. What is interesting is that the youth group and the church achieve such central roles in negotiating the representations of space. Similar to this is the construction of Pequininos social hall. In that case, the central level of government is involved through funding the construction. As discussed earlier, politician (interview, 18.05.2016) express how development of the CDF projects must happen in close collaboration with the youth, as they are the end users of the spaces. Thus, he invites them into the planning processes, in order to contribute to shape the representations of the public space. In the public space projects that are supported by non-governmental actors such as UN-Habitat and NGOs, this practice is thoroughly institutionalized. For instance, a recent sustainability plan

for Pequininos social hall and the Slum soccer pitch was based on a workshop consisting of both experts and local youth (UN-Habitat, 2017). In this way, organized youth are given the opportunity to contribute to the representations of public spaces. However, the complexity of representations of space also reveals itself in cases such as these. The examples demonstrate how the representations of public space are created through negotiations between actors that exerts power from above, and actor that exert powers from below.

Representational space

I began the last section by establishing organized youth in the village as the main actors that create the representational production of space. However, as is the case with representations of space, the micro politics of public spaces becomes more complex when one starts examining it.

One factor that evidently constitute the representational space of the public spaces, is the youth group's actual usage of these public spaces. The various practices of the youth groups which are connected to these spaces, contributes to fill these spaces with meaning and reshape their purpose in negotiation representations of space. In Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of the spatial triad, the observable use of space would be labelled spatial practice. However, in Mitchell's (2003) dialectic of public space, the various uses of public spaces are directly attributed meaning and symbols, and hence go under the distinction of representational space. Adopting Mitchell's view, I see the daily uses of the public spaces as practices that have meaning attached to them, hence what is perceived also has an underlying meaning.

One example of this is the Slum soccer field. The idea of Slum soccer emerged because a group of young boys wanted a proper place to play football within their own neighborhood. It was completed with funding from an NGO, and the mobile operator Safaricom. Later, the electronics company Philips also provided flood lights for the pitch (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016). Although the pitch is planned and thought out as a football field, the daily uses of this space ranges a much broader spectrum of meaning. As previously mentioned, parents send their children to play at Slum soccer because the potential of surveilling the field from its surrounding high rises. Thus, this space becomes a safe haven as much as a place for sports. As this additional use of the Slum soccer pitch was created through the need for security in the community, it becomes an example of how representational space represented by young people's use of the space attaches new purpose and meaning to a space. However, there are also other ways in which slum soccer is used. For instance, the space is used for political events, particularly during election periods. Candidates use the pitch to gather large amount of people to convey their political messages. Through this way of using the space, new meaning is attached to it. The space can potentially be experienced as a representation of a certain political view, or as an arena for democratic politics. This can be

characterized as a way of creating representational space through exerting power from above. The formal political system, then, extends its influence on these spaces through representational space. Another way power is exerted from above through these spaces, is by the practices of police. According to young man 2 (interview, 17.05.2016), the police change their behavior towards youth within the parameters of these spaces: "Now they cannot beat or harass you. Cause if they find you here, they know you are a good person". Considering how police are perceived of as being connected to violence and harassment outside these spaces, their change in behavior towards people within the public space shape these spaces by reinforcing them as safe havens for those who use them.

As with representations of space, the actors and actions that constitutes the representational space are many, and consists of power exerted both from below and above. My analysis aims at highlighting how formal and informal practices shape both representations of space and representational space. I have discussed how representations of space and representational space is created by a double dynamic of influence from below and above. Figure 6.1 represent as illustrative model of how one can understand the dialectic of public space in Mlango Kubwa, and is based on the experiences of the informants interviewed.

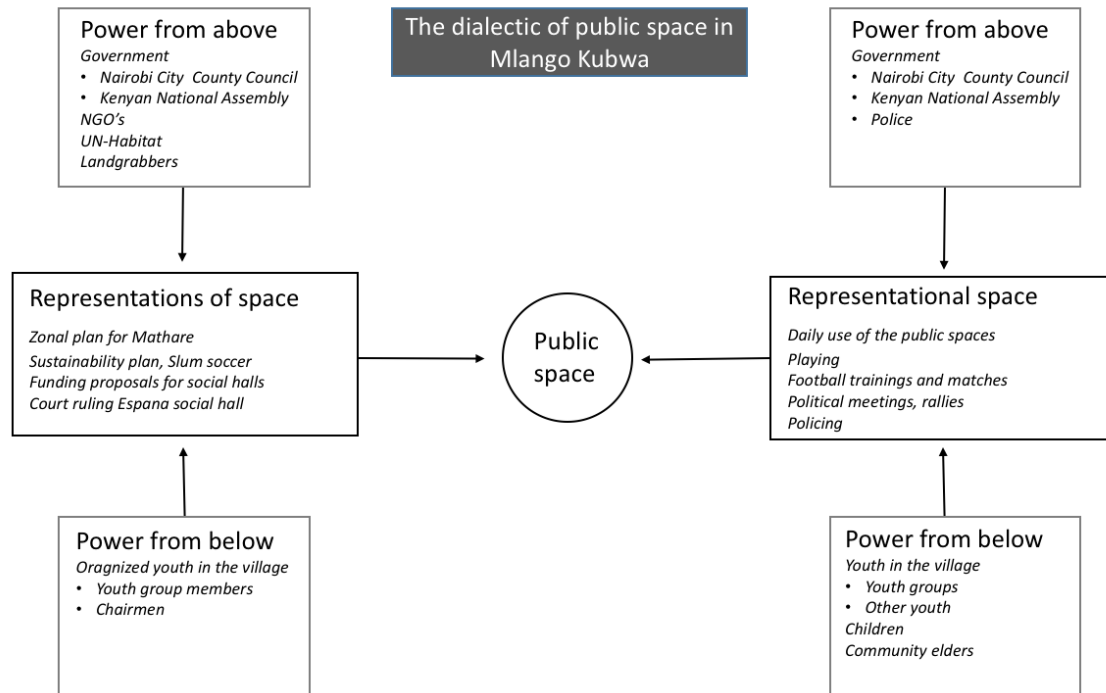


Figure 6.1: The dialectic of public space in Mlango Kubwa

The core message of this model is to emphasize how creation of spaces happens through negotiations between representational space and representations of space. I return to the example of Slum soccer to demonstrate how this negotiation is continuously shaping the space. The meaning of the soccer pitch as public space has been reshaped from its original representations through using the space as a safe playground and hang out spot for children and youth. At the time of writing this thesis, new representations of Slum soccer space are being shaped through a sustainability plan for the soccer pitch. The plan is being created with input

by both youth and experts, and is facilitated by UN-Habitat. One of the long-term wishes for the pitch has been to put a proper turf on the ground to increase its quality. Other quality upgrading measures such as mending fences and installing proper drainages are also suggested. Currently, the ground is not much more than an open space, with football goals installed on each side. With the potential of a turf and other adjustments, it can be argued that the plan is reinforcing the representation of the space as a football field rather than an open square. Here, I refer to the theoretical distinction between “open-minded”

and “close-minded” spaces presented in chapter three (Walzer, 1986). It can be argued that the representation of space is pulling Slum soccer towards the “close-minded” end of the spectrum, through the process of defining its use in development plans. Yet, the field might continue to be used as a playground, a political arena, or new uses might appear. This shows how the public spaces of Mlango Kubwa are continuously subject to negotiations between representations of space and representational space.

6.5 Spaces of influence

The second component of the research question being discussed in this chapter is: *Does public space enhance the political influence for youth in the community?* I examine the question in light of the empirical data and theory about public space as political space. I focus on two main factors from the themes that emerged in the interviews. First, I look at characteristics of the informal politics conveyed by organized youth through the public spaces in the village. Second, I examine how the features of the relationships between youth groups and formal political institutions have outcomes on various scales.

Bastions for conveying politics

In the theory chapter, it was highlighted how public spaces can function as platforms of democracy and citizenship. The ideals that public space is built on mirror the ideals of democracy: as an arena of expressions and as a place to be seen and heard (Young and Allen, 2011). Collins and Shantz (2009) describes public space as bastions for conveying political messages. I argue that the public spaces in Mlango

Kubwa have become such bastions, both as physical arenas for politics, and as symbols of the increased status of youth groups in the village.

I have demonstrated how public spaces are used for political purposes by physically enabling political events. Such events become arenas for politicians to promote their policies or election promises. More importantly in this context, however, is that such events also become arenas for members of the community, and youth groups in particular, to convey their wishes and demands to the formal political institutions. An example of this is a political event held at Slum soccer prior to the election of the previous MP:

“

“[...] before the last MP won, she came here and wanted votes. I got a chance to speak in front of people around here. My request was that she makes us a nice hall if she wins [...]” (chairman 1, interview, 16.05.2016).

”

Here, the youth group represented by its chairman invite a politician to their space, and subsequently use the space to promote their politics. They convey their politics to a potentially influential representative of the formal political system. At the same time, they reinforce their status within the micro-political hierarchy of the slum through demonstrating their influence on formal politics. This elevated internal status can again increase the youth group’s legitimacy as a political actor to be counted on by the formal political system. What appears here, is a dynamic where legitimacy from within and from the outside has the

potential to reinforce each other. This dynamic is facilitated by having a physical public space which can be used for such events. One can argue that this contributes to allowing the organized youth in the village to express their democratic citizenship through their extended access to 'the public'. Considering the shortage of public space in Mathare, politicians choose to hold their rallies and speeches at these spaces instead of somewhere else in the constituency. This increases the influence of the youth groups as facilitators and providers of space, and allow their opinions to be expressed to a larger degree than if the events were held elsewhere.

Slum soccer is not directly comparable to the cases of Tiananmen or Maidan square which were used as examples in the theory chapter. These examples were monumental, and the messages conveyed demanded fundamental changes in their respective societies. The organized youth of Mlango Kubwa seek changes for their own community through their public spaces. Some of these changes are incremental, such as repairing the fences at Slum soccer. Some demands are broader, seeking employment for youth and lower crime rates. However, to echo Madanipour (2010) and Tonkiss (2005), relations in public space can reflect social structures in society. Then, the expressions that are formally and informally conveyed through public space will often reflect a larger political context, and hence vary with its geospatial context. After having studied the strategies and influence of youth, I claim that both monumental expressions and more subtle expressions, such as in Mlango Kubwa, can be expressions of increased political influence.

Elites legitimizing informal politics through public space

Bodnar (2015) draws attention to how public spaces have significance for elites as well as for marginalized masses who convey their messages. In the case of Mlango Kubwa, politicians have made their claim to the public spaces through representations that includes funding and plans for the spaces. They also make their claim to the public spaces through their physical use of these spaces to convey their political messages during events. I argue that in both cases, these politicians' actions contribute to legitimizing the politics of youth groups in the village. When agreeing to fund the development of a public space, the politicians explicitly accept and encourage the demands of the youth groups. Similarly, the politicized use of their public spaces includes accepting that it is the youth groups who facilitate and enable the event. Through being receptive towards their voiced concerns and political demands during such events, the politicians recognize and legitimize the organized youth. This legitimization of organized youth's claims enables a widened space for political influence.

Influence for who?

Access to public space can be a matter of access to 'the public', and exclusion from public space can mean a decreased ability to participate in the public sphere. A timely question in this case is then: Who has access to the political influence enabled by the public spaces in the village? First, I want to refer to the discussion about inclusion and exclusion in the public spaces from chapter five. I found that while public spaces benefit many youth in the area, they are still

somewhat exclusionary towards idle youth. It can in this respect be argued that idle youth have less opportunities to fulfill their democratic citizenship through public space. The exclusion of idle youth in public space, then, does not only regulate their access to education, employment and safe spaces. It also regulates their political influence and access the public.

Who gets access to participate in the influence enabled by public space, is linked to the characteristics of the relationship between youth groups and politicians. Earlier in this chapter, I presented the strategies that youth groups use to bargain with politicians. It was demonstrated how youth groups leverage multiple scales of government to work to their advantage. Their use of public space for conveying messages has been an enabler of a close relationship between youth groups and politicians in Mlango Kubwa. The core element of their strategy has been exchanging votes for promises of developments in the village. This method of 'quid pro quo'-politics can be characterized as political clientelism. Clientelism is most commonly understood as the exchange between votes and goods. Boix and Stokes define clientelism as:

“

“The proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?” (2009, 609).

”

Clientelist relationships have a contingent nature, meaning both parties of the exchange gain something from it. In addition, such relationships are commonly characterized by

an uneven hierarchy between patron and client. It is further common that the relationship persists over time, and that one of the parties can break it off should the agreements not be fulfilled (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

The relevance of clientelism for the question of democratic citizenship appears when looking at the outcomes of clientelist relationships on various scales. On a micro-scale, the outcomes of such a relationship is favorable for the youth groups and their communities. They achieve developments within public space and employment for the relatively low cost of supporting a politician through an election. It can even be argued that relatively speaking, this practice enhances the influence of organized youth, and hence the ability express their democratic citizenship. The politician receives support and the potential to win an election. However uneven the relationship between patron and client might be in this case, it can be argued that the outcomes benefit both parties.

However, this is a practice that can have unfavorable outcomes on a larger scale, for democracy as such. I cannot demonstrate a causality between micro-level clientelism in Mlango Kubwa, and outcomes on a higher political scale. Albeit, practices that reinforce the reigning political institutions through such deals, can enable a weak political and institutional system. There is an inherent connection between the public resources that are allocated to this specific village, and other areas in Mathare, Nairobi and Kenya. The totality of clientelist malpractices is then an obstacle to the implementation of holistic policies that allocate funds based on set criteria rather than election-time backroom deals. In conclusion, youth that access the public spaces created through clientelist exchanges have a

relative benefit of increasing their political influence. The benefit is relative because they compete with other areas over funding, and have until now managed to attract more investment than other areas in Mathare. On the larger scale, however, their practices can constitute a threat to achieving a truly democratic political system. The entirety of the system does clearly concern the youth in Mlango Kubwa such as it does all citizens of Kenya.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have explored how public space enable a political dynamic that affects the political status and rights of youth in the village. The two research questions had the aim of respectively exploring how public spaces are produced, and whether these spaces can function as platforms of democracy. I began the chapter by introducing empirical data about the relationship between organized youth and the society surrounding them. I demonstrated that their status within the village has increased through their self-proclaimed role as community organizers. Their lasting connections with formal politics indicates that their strategies in claiming and maintaining public spaces have been effective. Effective in the sense that they have successfully claimed the spaces and securing funding for upgrading, but also in creating arenas that can be used to further advance the political demands of youth. I find that there is a dynamic where their role within the community strengthens their position when facing actors such as politicians or NGO's. Likewise, their relationship with these external actors is likely to strengthen their position within the village.

When coupling the empirical data with the theoretical assumptions, a pattern emerges in terms of how informal and formal politics negotiate in establishing both representations of space and representational space. These representations of space and the representational space then continuously negotiate to produce the meaning and function of public space. The analysis reveals a complex web of influences on public space from 'above' and 'below'. However, it also reveals how organized youth have gained a position from where they can influence the shaping of public space through formal channels of representation, as well as playing the main role in shaping these public spaces through their use of them. This supports the statement that some youths are 'hyper connected', perhaps especially the organized youth.

Thus, I argue that isolated, the political influence of organized youth in Mlango Kubwa can be increased through public space. Youth groups actively use their public spaces for conveying their messages, and their claims are legitimized by recognition from politicians. When their political status is increased, their space for performing their democratic citizenship increases. However, it must be noted here, too, that a segment of the youth population does not have access to gain influence and increased status due to their exclusion from public spaces in the village. Also, the clientelist relationships between youth groups and politicians can potentially produce outcomes that reinforces undemocratic traits of the political system. In this sense, the outcomes of the informal politics that youth groups promote through public spaces have favorable outcomes on a micro-level. However, they put a strain on the political system as a whole.

7. SUMMARIES AND REFLECTIONS



Figure 7.1: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at Slum soccer

On the 8th of March 2017, António Guterres made his very first field mission as secretary general of the United Nations. His choice of field was identical to mine: public space in Mlango Kubwa. There is undoubtedly something about the youth in Mlango Kubwa that attracts people. Guterres' visit was facilitated by UN-Habitat, working in partnership with one of the youth groups that have been subject to analysis in this thesis. Prior to the mission, the youth groups cleaned the community for two days straight. After the mission, something miraculous happened: Trucks showed up dumping materials for paving a road. The youth groups had requested the road be paved for several years. Youth in the community were hired and got to work building the road. The new road was at the courtesy of the MP for Mathare, who had also been present during the visit of Guterres. Once again, the hyper connected youth of Mlango Kubwa had done it.

7.1 Revisiting the research questions

The aim of this thesis was to explore what role public space can play to improve the lives of young people living in marginalized conditions characterized by informality. Youth in a village in Mathare, Nairobi, has been used as a case to reach this aim. The overarching research question that has framed the design for the thesis is:

1. Can public space improve the lives of youth in Mlango Kubwa?

I chose to approach this question through following two paths: expressions of quality of life of youth in the area, and

how the public spaces used by these youths have impact on their opportunity for political influence. In order to provide a tangible answer for the overall research question, I posed then two sub-questions based on the two paths. In the following two sections of this chapter, I will deliberate on the findings for these sub-questions before I discuss them in light of the overall research aim.

Public space-enabled quality of life

The first sub-question that framed the analysis had the aim of exploring how public space has improved the quality of life for young people in Mlango Kubwa, and how the spaces can potentially further improve their lives.

a) What role can public space play in enhancing the quality of life of youth in Mlango Kubwa?

When analyzing this question, I chose to take inspiration from grounded theory, where the theory is grounded in the empirical data. I adopted a hybrid model where a definition of quality of life guided what types of expressions I looked for in the data. The youth's perceptions, aspirations, needs, social representations and satisfaction was examined by coding the interviews in several rounds and arranging the codes into theoretical themes. What I found was that the themes that youth talk about could be divided into two categories: Factors that are attractive and whose increase will positively affect quality of life, and activities that are threats to achieving good quality of life. Through a discussion of what the perceived challenges in the community are, I developed the following contextual definition of quality of life:

“

Quality of life for young people in Mlango Kubwa is the presence of opportunities for personal development, primarily within education and employment. It is also the absence of factors that decreases the security in their community. Crime and substance abuse are the two main challenges for security, and these factors also reduces the quality of life for those who engage in them.

”

I found that the public spaces enable the provision of employment schemes, in particular schemes that are organized by the government. I further found that non-formal education is provided through public spaces, and to some degree also informal education. There is also a perceived potential for public space to enable formal education opportunities. Through these opportunities, there is a potential to reduce crime and substance abuse. Another way of reducing the consequences of crime and substance abuse is through the regulation of public space. Youth groups, in the analysis regarded as organized youth, regulate who has access to the public spaces. Hence, they can to some extent keep idle youth, perceived of as those youths who engage in drugs and crime, away from using the public spaces.

One of the main findings in this chapter was that the different solutions to increase quality of life represent different approaches to dealing with the challenges in the community. I thus identified the provision of education and employment opportunities as root cause solutions. Solutions such as these go into solving the core causes of

the challenges that are listed in the chapter. The regulation of space to increase safety in the community, is labelled a safe haven solutions. While contributing to safety for those who have access to the public spaces, they exclude a segment of the youth population. My conclusion is that safe haven solutions could be reducing the access to root cause solutions for youth who need it the most. However, it is important to note that the rationale behind creating safe haven solutions is justified by a need to stay secure within their own neighborhood. Such is the case with several advancements in the community: they were created by youth groups when government failed to tackle the problem. Be it security patrols or waste management, these are attempts to improve the quality of life in the village where alternatives are absent. It would be unreasonable to expect of the population to tackle all root causes for grievances in the village. Besides, it would be ignoring the structural explanations for why marginalization occurs.

Nonetheless, my findings point towards a larger tendency: For equal distribution of benefits, there needs to be a structure in place which can assure the inclusion of all people in the community, and that marginalized people are met with measures according to their challenges, and not lumped into one category of marginalization. For such an equal distribution to occur there is a need for institutions who can address these challenges. When such institutions do not adequately address challenges for the population, it becomes a situation where every man is left to fend for himself. Or, as in the instance of this case, every community for itself. Within this context, it is comprehensible to interpret why safe haven solutions arise, even if they do exclude a segment of the population.

In conclusion, I argue that public spaces do play a role in providing solutions to challenges that stand in the way of achieving better quality of life for youth in Mlango Kubwa. To some extent, public space is a prerequisite for providing opportunities, rather than a prop that neither enables nor hinders development. An important note to this conclusion, however, is that the developments that emerge through public spaces are not open to all youth in the village. Idle youth, women, and youth that do not belong to a youth group still have less opportunities to prosper with the benefits provided by public space.

Platforms for political influence

The second path to analyzing the overall research question was to explore the political aspects of youth's use of public space. My aim was to understand whether youth, through public space, could increase their political influence and subsequently widen the use of their democratic citizenship. The sub-questions that framed this theme was:

b) How are public spaces in Mlango Kubwa produced, and does public space enhance the political influence for youth in the community?

In contrast to the analysis about quality of life, existing theory played an important role in shaping this analysis. In chapter three, I introduced the theoretical assumptions that provided a framework for the analysis in of this research question in chapter six. To discuss the first part of the sub-question, I chose to adopt Mitchell's (2003) dialectic of public space as an analytical lens. I found that representations of space and representational space is produced through a dynamic relationship between informal

and formal actors, and the power exerted from 'above' and 'below'. An interesting aspect of this finding, is that organized youth are able to influence politics from several angles. They manifest their position in representational space to influence representations of space. Bayat (1997) claims that 'politics of the informal people' is constituted by various acts of resistance, either through claiming space or through more explicit acts of political resistance. What I find in my analysis, however, is that the strategies of youth groups in Mlango Kubwa differ from this view. Their focus is not only on explicitly expressing resistance. Their strategies are rather based on using the formal political system, and other external actors effectively to achieve one advancement at a time. They establish relationships with NGOs, politicians and UN-officials that manage to survive due to the mutual benefits produced by these relationships. Through doing this, their political and social status increases, both within the community and externally. My argument is that through this position, they achieve influence on the production of public space in the village, and through this achieve immense change.

The elevated political and social position of organized youth in the village further increases their political influence. They use the public spaces to promote their causes, and in this sense the public spaces become their 'bastions for conveying politics'. In addition, they invite politicians to their spaces which contributes to legitimize their claims and demands. Through legitimizing the youth group's politics, their voices are recognized as 'applicable' to the public political debate. However, the relationships between the youth groups and politicians on both county level and the national level, have a shadow side represented through the quid pro quo politics

that enables a dysfunction in a larger political system. The clientelist nature of their relationships ensures favorable outcomes on a micro-level, through providing the village with public spaces, jobs and money for construction. They benefit the politicians who get elected as a result of the deals they make with the youth groups. The cost of this, however, are the potential outcomes of these arrangements on the macro-level. The reinforcement of a dispersed political system can stand in the way of holistic policies and truly democratic politics.

Transitional youth, transitional space

In chapter five, it was demonstrated how organized youth gain access to employment and education through public space. In chapter six it was argued that organized youth express themselves politically and have these expressions heard and recognized through public space. I want to

consider the transition between childhood and adulthood in light of this. In the theory chapter, I stressed that youth must be understood as a transitional phase rather than a set age span. I emphasized that, when transforming from child to adult, there is a period of waiting in which youth explore their identities and prospects. In this period, most youth move out of the private realm where they spent their time as children, and into the public sphere where their identities are evolved. After a period of transition, the goal and outcome for most youth is to transcend back into their own private space. This space may contain their own family, a job and a home; a livelihood on their own premise. On what point this journey occurs depends on the success of the transition. In figure 7.2, I have outlined this transition and how it can look in spatial terms. In addition to private and public space, I have added 'institutional political space', which has emerged as a relevant space throughout this thesis.

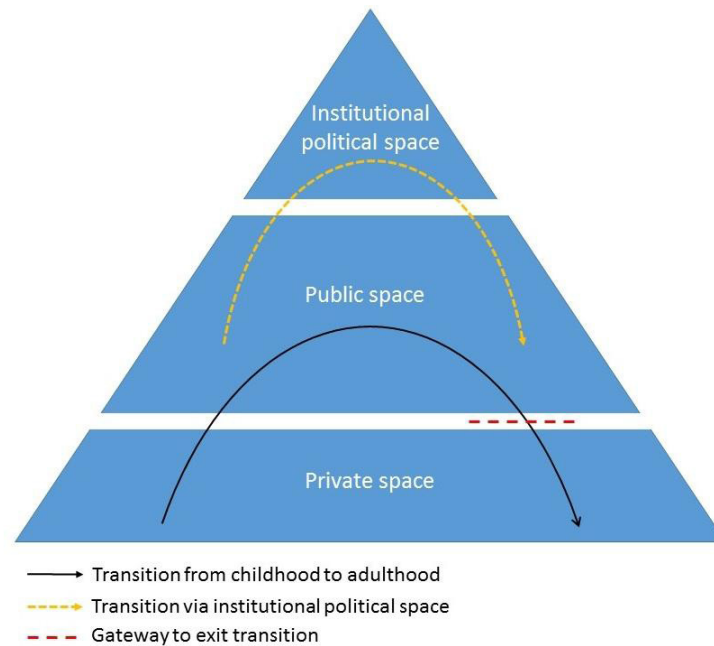


Figure 7.2: The spatial transition from childhood to adulthood

What this model illustrates, and I argue, is that organized youth in Mlango Kubwa have the ability to access an elevated political space through their use of public space, an opportunity they employ to the fullest. Their extended access to public space functions as a springboard to access an elevated level of 'public', represented by the institutionalized political system. While their public spaces provide opportunities such as employment and education, the top of the pyramid give them tools that further increase their opportunities in public space. They do this through using the institutional political space to create more opportunities in

public space. It provides them with a mobility which is higher than experienced by most slum dwellers. The tools they gain in institutional political space, then, increases their ability to successfully transition to adulthood. Institutional political space as presented here is not a seventh heaven that can lift all young slum dwellers who engage in a youth group out of marginalization. Rather, I argue that when accessing this space, exiting the transition, transitioning to adulthood (represented by the red line in figure 7.2) becomes less of an obstacle than for most marginalized youth. Through using the institutional political space to improve their quality

of life, organized youth in Mlango Kubwa have a better chance at transcending the red line that for some block the entrance to adulthood. On the contrary, idle youth, whose access to public space is generally more limited, might face a substantial struggle transitioning into adulthood.

The model of spatial transition from childhood to adulthood provides an answer to the overarching research question. Public space does improve the lives of *some* youth in Mlango Kubwa. Their lives are improved through the enhanced quality of life that is enabled by the organized youth's access to institutional political space. They accelerate their own transition to adulthood by improving their quality of life through institutional political space.

7.2 Concluding remarks

This thesis has had the aim of examining whether public spaces play a role in improving the lives of young people. Finding out if public space is a prerequisite, or merely a prop in the developments that have occurred in this village in Mlango Kubwa has been an underlying question throughout the thesis. Because while concluding that public space certainly does play a role in advancing this community, the political strategies and diplomatic abilities of the young people in the village are at the core of these advancements. Their use of public spaces within their strategies, emphasize how these spaces represent platforms for advancing both quality of life and political rights. In this respect, the answer to the overall research aim is that public space can, and does improve the lives of young people in Mlango Kubwa.

The mobility of the organized youth in Mlango Kubwa represent something unique in the Kenyan context.

Contrary to the lack of mobility that is often experienced by marginalized youth, these youths are in the offices of government, at the UN and at international events outside of Kenya. At the same time, they recognize the crucial role of the spatial dimension within their own community. They use their access to institutional political space to advance their communities. They understand that for youth to prosper, they need environments within their own parameters that enables them to do so. The organized youth in Mlango Kubwa are fearless in their endeavor to develop their community for the people in it. It seems appropriate to conclude this thesis on an informant's note on young people's role in the urban Kenyan context:

“

It is messy, I always say that Nairobi is messy. It's messy, noisy, and has fumes all over. But I always tell the youth when I facilitate them that out of all this mess, we have some gold. Crime is not the answer. Youth is our gold. Out of the fumes, the garbage, the blocked drainages, there is some gold” (young man 7, interview, 19.05.2016).

”

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APPENDIX I: INTERVIEWS AND INFORMANTS

Chairman 1

Chairman of a youth group in Mlango Kubwa. Interview conducted 16.05.2016 and Whatsapp-chat 18.02.2017 and 21.04.2017.

Chairman 2

Chairman of a youth group in Mlango Kubwa and garbage collector, interview conducted 18.05.2016

Chairman 3

Chairman of a youth group in Mlango Kubwa. Interview conducted 01.06.2016

Chairman 4

Chairman of a civil society organization in Nairobi, living in Mlango Kubwa. Interview conducted 18.05.2016

Young man 1

Youth group member and informal salesman. Interview conducted 19.05.2016

Young man 2

Youth group member and Matatu worker. Interview conducted 17.05.2016

Young man 3

Youth group member and university student. Interview conducted 17.05.2016

Young man 4

Youth group member, business man and football player. Interview conducted 20.05.2016

Young man 5

Unemployed, no youth group affiliation. Interview conducted 22.05.2016

Young man 6

Youth group member and freelance filmmaker. Email received 15.02.2017.

Young man 7

Vice chairman of a youth group in Mlango Kubwa. Interview conducted 19.05.2016

Young woman 1

Does local jobs, no youth group affiliation. Interview conducted 17.05.2016

Young woman 2

Unemployed, no youth group affiliation. Interview conducted 20.05.2016

Young woman 3

Youth group member and athlete that works for charity. Interview conducted 18.05.2016

Young woman 4

Youth group member and sex worker. Interview conducted 22.05.2016

Young woman 5

Youth group member and university student. Interview conducted 22.05.2016

Politician

Politician with Mathare affiliation. Interview conducted 18.05.2016

UN-Habitat official 1

Works with public space in UN-Habitat. Interview conducted 26.05.2016

UN-Habitat official 2

Works with public space in UN-Habitat. Interview conducted 26.05.2016

UN-Habitat official 3

Works with youth related issues in UN-Habitat. Interview conducted 26.05.2016

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

GENERAL:

How old are you

gender

What do you do (for a living/school?):

Where do you live?

Do you belong to any youth group or organization?

The community and youth

How would you describe your community?

What are the biggest challenges for you?

What are the biggest challenges for youth?

How do you think youth is looked at by the older members
of your community?

How do you think youth is looked at by the politicians?

Public spaces in Mlango Kubwa

What places in Mlango Kubwa is open to use for the
community? (e.g parks, hangout spots, buildings where
people can be)

Which of these spaces are used by youth?

Which of these spaces do you use?

What do you do when you are at these spaces?

*RQ; How can public space enhance the quality of life for
youth?*

Why do youth use the public space

When you think about the space xx, what is a good way to
explain the space?

Do you feel safe at this space?

Can you enhance your skills in any way through using these
spaces? (how?)

What do you value about these spaces?

What can be done to improve the spaces?

How can the public spaces of Mlango Kubwa can help youth advance?

RQ 2: What role can public space play in informal politics?

How are the spaces used by youth to promote change

Have you worked politically to improve your community?
How?

What channels do you use when trying to improve your
community?

If any, what physical spaces do you use to improve your
community?

Do you think public spaces can help youth to promote change in the community? (In what way?)

What do you do to improve your community?

Are there any questions I should have asked you that I have not already?

Is there anything you would like to add?

