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Do neighbour relationships still matter?

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1 Introduction

This paper addresses neighbour relationships in different residential settings and their development over time. Neighbour relations are significant, as they make up a remarkable part of an individual's social network and their importance to the well-being of residents has been identified in several studies. For example, Jaśkiewicz and Wiwatowska (2018) concluded that neighbourly relations add to better mental health, better life satisfaction and more spontaneous constructive activity. According to them, relationships between neighbours also have a mediating role in the link between neighbourhood disorder and quality of life as neighbourly ties soften the causes of neighbourhood disorder. Good relations between neighbours increase the feeling of safety and seeking help from a neighbour is easier if she or he is even a nodding acquaintance. Promoting neighbour relations and improving a sense of community in neighbourhoods are also important goals for policy makers in many places (Forrest & Kearns 2001; Filipovič Hrast & Dolničar 2011).

However, in research, there remains some ambiguity about how the character of neighbour relationships has changed over time, and how the residential setting, including different types of housing and tenures, impact relations between neighbours. There is also a gap in the knowledge about troublesome neighbour relations in different housing types. According to summarized research results from various countries, neighbours on average constitute about 9–19% of an individual's personal networks, and 7–9% of an individual's network of strong ties (Völker & Flap 2007). Wellman (1996) discovered that the frequency of contact (interactions) was remarkably higher in the local than in the non-local ties. However, since his study, the Internet has significantly changed the ability to maintain frequent contacts also with non-local ties. Non-local social relationships formed on social media and the Internet have become very important, and much of the research on social relations is concerned with these non-local ties (e.g. Haythornthwaite 2011, Räsänen & Kouvo 2007).

There is a difference between different groups on the level of neighbour relations. Henning and Lieberg (1996) recognized the neighbourhood as particularly important for vulnerable and marginal groups and people who lack access to a more extensive social network.

Forrest and Kearns (2001) pointed out that the neighbourhood as a social arena continues to perform an important, but increasingly specialised role. Elderly people and those outside the labour force are relatively more dependent on local ties than others are. In the meantime, non-local ties are increasing and becoming more dissociated from forms of local interaction. (Forrest & Kearns 2001.)

In this paper, we aim to understand neighbourhood relations from three perspectives. First, with evidence from Finland, we seek to understand *how neighbour relations have changed over time*. As emphasized, for example by Forrest (2012), a common view in social sciences has been that the importance of neighbour relationships in contemporary societies has decreased. Nevertheless, there is little existing empirical evidence about long-term changes of neighbour relations and their role in the ensemble of individuals' social networks. Forrest (2012) has concluded that very few systematic studies have provided longitudinal

data that would be sufficient to verify declining neighbour relations. Moreover, the existing research is contradictory and seems to be context-dependent. Guest and Wierzbicki (1999), who investigated social ties from extensive time series data over 20 years (1974–1996) in the United States, found a decline in the importance of neighbourhood social ties in the American population. On the other hand, Dutch researchers (Mollenhorst et al. 2009; Mollenhorst 2014), based on panel data, found that the importance of neighbourhood relationships in informal personal networks increased somewhat, though contact frequency declined over a period of 13 years. The size of the neighbour networks increased for elderly, highly educated residents, people without paid work, homeowners, and people with initially small local networks. We demonstrate our results from Finland based on comparable, representative and quantitative data over a long period, from 1986 to 2012.

Secondly, the paper aims to grasp *neighbour relations in different residential settings*. The notion that neighbour relationships have declined is often built on nostalgic images of either rural or suburban everyday life. Rapid urbanization one century ago changed the social order, and sociologists such as Simmel (1903/1976) and Wirth (1938) perceived urban social life, compared to the social life of the countryside, as superficial, rational, non-personal and short-termed. In this view, in cities people became part of many social circles including the family, neighbourhood and work (Wirth 1938). Even later, several studies have argued that in metropolises, neighbour relations play a limited role (Schiefloe 1990; Guest & Wierzbicki 1999). Sampson (1988) summarized that urbanization is hypothesized to weaken community kinship and friendship bonds, social participation in local affairs, and affectional ties with the community – he calls this view "the linear-development model". On the other hand, the very essence of neighbourhood planning was the building of a community, and a common view has been, that there is a relationship between neighbourhood design and neighbourhoods (Gans 1971; Granovetter 1973; Sandercock 1998). In the Finnish context, suburbs with apartment buildings built sparsely in the 1950s and 1960s were considered to lack opportunities to build a sense of community, which is why there was a shift towards building denser suburbs from the 1970s onwards. Other studies have, nevertheless, shown that the physical structure of an area only has marginal effects on the sense of community (Schiefloe 1985). Gifford (2007) found that high-rise building residents had fewer neighbour friends but more neighbour acquaintances (weak ties) than low-rise building residents had. Although there are some qualitative studies arguing for the importance of neighbour relations among families in large European cities such has London (Butler & Robson 2003), Amsterdam (Karsten 2003) and Helsinki (Lilius 2018), little attention has lately been given to the existing neighbour relations in different residential settings (Forrest & Kearns 2001). This paper investigates dependencies between neighbour relationships and residential features, such as tenure, house type and the level of density/urbanity in the Finnish setting.

Thirdly, our paper not only covers local ties in the positive sense, but also deals with *problematic neighbour relations*. These various types of relations are very seldom investigated together and in a comparable way. Nevertheless, negative relations are also an essential part of the overall picture of a neighbourhood. As Forrest (2012) has put it, "Whether neighbouring is positive or negative, whether it is friendly or hostile, it still constitutes social interaction and is thus part of local social life." In Parker's and Kearns' (2006) research there was

a significant association between serious neighbour disputes and the poor state of health, especially in the older age groups. Glanville & Paxton (2007) argued that negative interactions between neighbours could have broader effects, for it can undermine generalized trust in the society. Problematic neighbourly relations have been rather neglected in research, and accordingly, the paper will argue that problematic neighbour relations play a key role in defining how neighbour relations turn out in various residential environments and between various subgroups of residents.

The paper is guided by the concepts of *weak and strong ties*. Granovetter (1973) dichotomized social ties into two types. Ties between family members, close relatives, and close friends are considered strong ties. Weak ties include social relations based more on acquaintance than on deep friendship. Weak ties are more superficial than strong ties, and a person does not give them as much time or engage in them with as intense emotions as they do in relationships with strong ties. According to Granovetter, weak ties play an important role: they can be bridges that connect groups formed by strong ties. Relations with neighbours (occasional day-to-day meetings and so on) are considered mostly weak ties. (Henning & Lieberg 1996, Schiefloe 1990.)

In the research literature, weak and strong ties are defined somewhat inconsistently. Henning and Lieberg (1996) defined helping relations with neighbours as weak ties, whereas Vervoort (2012) defined them as strong ties. We interpret the concepts of weak and strong ties as "ideal types." In real life, it is not possible to divide social ties strictly into these types. The strength of social ties is more like a continuum in which "middle range ties" are also common. In our research, however, we simplified the real situation and dichotomized the type of neighbourhood ties.

This distinction has a connection to two types of social capital: *bonding and bridging*. According to Putnam (2000), the concept of social capital includes social networks, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. The bonding type of social capital is typical of closed local communities, while the bridging form of social capital is typical of open and tolerant environments. These two types of social capital, however, have a positive correlation: people who have many weak ties tend to have many close friends and strong family ties. (Lewicka 2011.)

Neighbourly relations are also considered a specific form of social capital, an *intermediary*. Strong commitment to the *intermediary groups*, like high degree of neighbourly relations and voluntary participation in local group activities, has more general positive societal effects. Namely, trust experiences in neighbourhoods are a particularly important factor in the formation of generalized trust in the society. In fact, trust is initially learned in local, intermediary groups and then generalized to broader context. (Yosano & Hayashi 2005, Glanville & Paxton 2007.)

Our paper is not concerned with hypothesis testing but is exploratory and we ask:
1) How prevalent are different kinds of neighbour ties among the respondents? How do they vary according to, e.g., age, house type, tenure status or urbanity of the residence? Which variables remain significant predictors when the others are controlled for?
2) How prevalent are problematic neighbour relations? Which is their relative role compared to positive or neutral neighbour ties? Which variables predict their prevalence?
3) Are there changes in the frequency of various types of neighbour ties as well as problematic neighbour relations, compared to the data from 1986?

The paper is structured in the following way. First, we introduce context, the methods and data. We then present the results on various neighbourhood relations (weak ties, strong ties and problematic relations) and their relation to tenure, housing type and various residential environments. In addition, we render a brief logistic regression analysis in order to investigate each variable's independent explanatory power concerning the prevalence of various neighbour relations. Finally, we draw some conclusions and further discuss the results.

2 Context

In Finland, a sense of community and close neighbourhood relationships have been mainly connected to rural settings, and Finnish cities have been considered to lack a sense of community, at least not in the same sense as in rural areas (Lapintie 1997). This may relate to the fact that Finland is one of the European countries that urbanized late, not until the 1960s. The building stock of Finnish cities and towns is relatively new and for long, there have only been small proper urban areas with a high density of buildings and population.

The level of home-ownership is high in Finland, and typically increases with less density and in small localities, while renting is more common in more urban environments. Renting is also more common among younger generations and among lower income groups (Official Statistics of Finland 2015 and 2016). The rental market consists of private market rentals and state subsidized rentals. The tenant selection in the latter is regulated. The private rental market of small apartments has grown since the 1990s when rent regulation was withdrawn. Home ownership in apartment buildings and semi-detached houses is arranged through limited liability housing companies. Each share of the company provides the right of possession to specific apartments in the building and the shareholder has the right to transfer the apartment to someone else. Therefore, a remarkable share of rental dwellings are situated in buildings with owner occupation apartments, as the owner of an apartment may also rent it. (Lujanen 2004.)

Today Finland is facing strong internal migration of people to a few core areas, which makes the question of existing or non-exiting neighbour relationships – and possible changes in them – very current. Young adults' migration to Helsinki Region (the capital city) and a few other bigger urban areas has been substantial. This has implications also on neighbour relations. Many young adults have to rebuild their network of social ties in a new place of residence. Immigration flows have also increased remarkably especially into bigger towns in Finland. Until the 1990s, Finland was ethnically a very homogenous country, and Finland still differs largely from the other Nordic countries in terms of homogeneity. Only 6 % of the population are immigrants.

3 Data and Method

To understand how weak and strong ties between residents have developed over time, and how these relationships are distributed spatially and within different tenures, we collected representative survey data. Our data were collected in 2012 through a nationwide survey, with a simple random sample (2,000 persons) of the adult population of Finland. The survey was implemented by post and a reminder letter with a copy of the questionnaire and a new return envelope was re-sent after a few weeks. A total number of 760 responses were received resulting in a 38 % response rate.[1]

The survey data were analysed in two ways:
1) Via an internal comparison through different background variables (e.g., age, house type, tenure status, level of urbanity). We tested differences between various respondent groups with the Chi Square test of Independence. In addition, we carried out logistic regression analyses, with the prevalence of different neighbour relations as dependent variables.
2) Via an analysis of change over time. We utilized Statistic Finland's Living Condition survey from 1986 as reference material (Sauli et al. 1989). The old data were collected via extensive interview survey (10,737 responses).[2]

4 Results

4.1 Chatting with neighbours and having friends in the neighbourhood

In our survey, we operationalized weak ties as chatting with neighbours ("How many neighbours do you chat with when you meet occasionally?") and strong ties as being a "friend or otherwise important person." This phrasing of the questions meant that there was some overlap of the numbers of various ties. However, with this phrasing we obtained the best possible comparability with the 1986 survey, because the definitions were similar to those used in it.

Despite a common interpretation that Finns do not talk to their neighbours (Eskelä 2015), it turned out that chatting relations were highly prevalent: almost all respondents had at least one neighbour with whom they chatted (Table 1). Nevertheless, the number of chatting relations with neighbours has declined somewhat since 1986. In 1986, half of the respondents had more than three chatting relations; in 2012, this share has reduced to 37%.

Table 1

Young respondents had significantly fewer chatting relations than the elderly. It is evidently partly a matter of the phase of life: young people will probably build more chatting relations in the future when their life situations and housing conditions stabilize. However, we also identified difference between generations: respondents under 45 years old had remarkably fewer chatting relations in 2012 than in 1986. In the older age groups, the change was not as

unambiguous: fewer than before had 4+ chatting relations but also fewer than before had none.

British researchers Mulgan and Burdett (2005) got parallel results concerning differences between age groups. They discovered that residents over the age of 70 knew twice the number of neighbours compared to residents under 30 years of age; forty percent of residents over 70 but less than a fifth of residents under 30 years old chatted daily with their neighbours (Morgan 2009). In our survey 42% of people over 70 but only 10% of those under 30 chatted daily with their neighbours.

Our results imply that there may be a change in the overall neighbouring culture, in which getting to know your neighbours at least well enough to chat with them has diminished. We will return to the issue later in the paper when we look more closely at the impact of housing tenure types and the density of the neighbourhood.

What about the general trend when it comes to strong ties then? Our data suggest that also strong ties in the neighbourhood have diminished, and that personal networks have moved from the local towards a non-local direction. Table 2 presents the numbers of the respondents' friends or other important people for the respondent in the various spheres of life in the two surveys. These categories may sometimes overlap: e.g., a neighbour may be also a relative. Our data, however, did not enable us to investigate this kind of overlap.

Table 2

Our results show that strong ties with neighbours were quite common in 2012: more than half of the respondents had at least one strong tie in their neighbourhood. The vast majority of strong ties, however, were in other spheres of life: with relatives, co-workers etc. Since 1986, strong ties have diminished a little in the neighbourhood, whereas in other spheres of life, they have become somewhat more common.

As with the chatting relations with neighbours, the age of the respondents was a significant explanatory variable also for the prevalence of strong ties with neighbours (appendix, table A1). We discovered again differences between generations also concerning strong local ties, but only in later generations. In the younger age groups in 2012, the prevalence of positively important people in the neighbourhood was substantially lower than in the corresponding age groups in 1986 or in older age groups in 2012. In the 25–44 year age group, the share of respondents with at least two neighbour friends was 51% in 1986, but only 28% in 2012. In contrast, in the oldest age group, there was hardly any change.

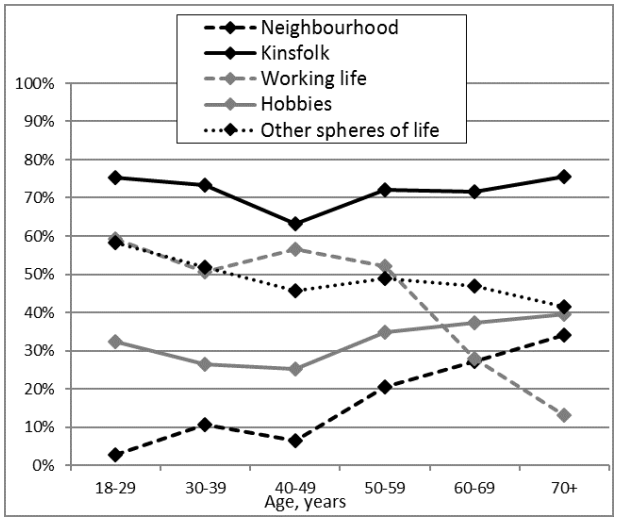

Figure 1. The share of respondents with at least four important people in their sphere of life, according to age, in 2012.

Figure 1 presents how the respondent's age is associated with the significance of various life spheres in the network of strong ties.[3] The figure shows that the significance of kinship is high in all age groups. A substantial majority of the respondents had at least four very important relatives. A majority of the 18–60-year-old respondents had at least four friends also among fellow workers or fellow students. When a person retires (age groups from 60 years onwards), the significance of working life naturally declines. The significance of hobbies is a little higher and of neighbours remarkably higher in the oldest age group than in young age groups. In "other spheres of life" the young respondents had the largest number of strong ties, whereas the oldest respondents had the smallest number. This category is of course very heterogeneous. It may contain old friends from earlier life history, for example. One significant difference between 1986 and 2012 is the Internet, which has become an important means of maintaining friendships. Facebook, and other social media are new phenomena, and may well be more common among younger generations and thus at least partly explain the results of this study. The results for the older generations is not very surprising as residents who spend a lot of time in their neighbourhood or who have limitations to their mobility generally tend to have stronger ties with their neighbours than other residents have.

To understand the changes in the weak and strong ties between neighbours, we also wanted to see how they correlated with the population distribution in Finland. There have been remarkable changes in it, as the Helsinki region and other big cities increased their population, while the countryside lost much if its population. In the 1986 data, 22% of the respondents lived in the countryside, but in the 2012 data, this share was only 15%. We controlled for this background change by examining the most urban and the least urban residential area. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

We found that the trends have been quite similar in very different residential environments: in the most urban metropolis and in the countryside. Weak and strong ties have eroded similarly in the different environments.

Finally, we checked whether there was any correlation between the numbers of weak ties and strong ties with neighbours. We found a remarkable positive correlation (r=0,41). This supports the results of earlier studies about bridging and bonding social capital (Lewicka 2011).

4.2 Problematic neighbour relations

Our results imply that the sense of community in terms of knowing and chatting to your neighbours has decreased over time. Problematic neighbour relations have however also been connected to the diminishing sense of community (Landry & Bianchini 1995). We thus investigated if the prevalence of them has changed over the period of 26 years until 2012. Problematic neighbour relationship was operationalized through the statement "a person with whom it is sometimes difficult to get along with" in the neighbourhood as well as in other spheres of life (Table 4).

Table 4

The data show, that generally positive neighbour relations are much more common than negative ones. No more than 25% of the respondents had a neighbour with whom the relationship was sometimes problematic. It was remarkably more common to have problematic relations among relatives and in the work sphere than in the neighbourhood or in connection to a respondent's hobbies. This result is likely to be related to the extent to which relationships are "voluntary" or "given". It is often easier to affect how much you interact with your neighbours and what you do during your free time than who your relatives are and with whom you interact in your work sphere. However, we discovered that problematic neighbour relations had become slightly more common since 1986, when 16 % had at least one problematic neighbour. Simultaneously the number of problematic human relations in the other spheres of life have also become more prevalent. The change was strongest in the younger age groups (appendix, table A1). The under-45-year-old respondents in 2012 had remarkably more frequently problematic neighbour relations than the under-45-year-old group in 1986. In the older age groups, the change was not as dramatic.

Figure 2 presents the prevalence of problematic relationships according to age, covering all spheres of life.

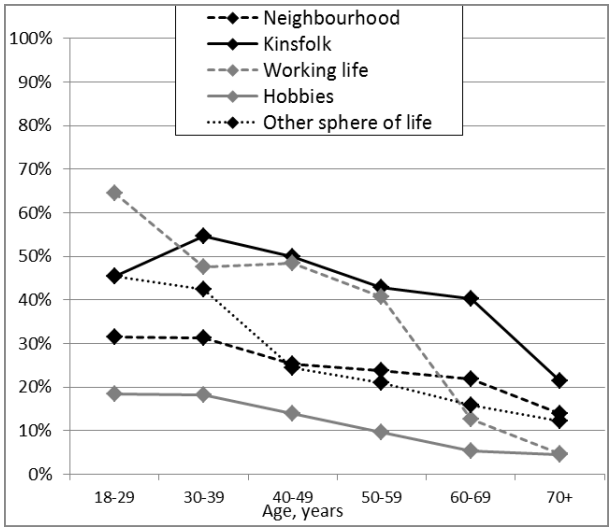

Figure 2. The share of respondents with at least one problematic human relationship in various spheres of life, according to age, 2012.

We found a clear trend: the prevalence of problematic human relations diminished along with age not only in the neighbourhood, but also in the all other categories.[4] The only minor exception were problematic kinship relations, which were the most prevalent in the age group of 30–39 years and diminished after that point.

Here again we found that the trend towards slightly more common problematic neighbour relations has been quite similar in very different residential environments (see table 3 before). However, in 2012, positive neighbourly relations were still much more prevalent than negative ones in the most urban metropolis and in the countryside.

4.3 Neighbour ties of renters and urban dwellers

We concluded earlier that the number of weak and strong ties in the neighbourhood were connected to age. Tenure status was also a significant explanatory variable for the number of various ties with neighbours. Tenants had fewer greeting, chatting, or friendship relations with their neighbours. This was not surprising because the turnover of residents is much higher in rental dwellings than in owner-occupied dwellings. Low residential turnover has a positive impact on the formation of neighbour relationships (Völker & Flap 2007). What was noteworthy, however, was that a rather large number (46%) of tenant respondents would like to know their neighbours better. This was a significantly higher percentage than among owner respondents (31%).[5] Thus, the subjective "neighbour contact deficiency" was more common among tenant respondents. Here we also found that the density, or urbanity of the residential environment was a significant explanatory variable especially regarding the prevalence of strong ties, but also regarding several other responses (Table 5).

Table 5

We found that in the densest areas, the sense of community and mutual responsibility between neighbours was a little less common than elsewhere, but quite common nonetheless.

Urban housing strongly predicted the prevalence of strong ties: the less urban the neighbourhood was, the more prevalent the neighbour friendship relations were. In larger cities, regular neighbourly help was a little less common than elsewhere. Chatting with neighbours was most common in small towns and villages but was rather common in the most urban areas as well. Urbanity did not significantly predict the prevalence of problematic neighbour relations (not in the table). We can expect to find a correlation between age and dwelling environments, i.e. that more young people also dwell in the more urban environments. As stated earlier, young people generally also rent their apartments, which could explain why they have less ties to their neighbours.

4.4 House type and the connection with neighbour relations

Last, we also wanted to understand the connection between the house type and neighbour relations. House type is an important background variable concerning the housing environment. We classified house types as block of flats, semi-detached houses and detached houses. It is common to assume closer neighbour relationships exists in semi-detached and detached houses. However, common spaces such as a yard with a playground for all residents in the building exist in practically every block of flats in Finland.

We found that 33% of the residents in semi-detached housing had at least one problematic relationship with a neighbour. This was significantly more than those living in flats (23%) and detached houses (23%). However, those living in semi-detached houses chatted significantly more with their neighbours. In semi-detached houses 76% of residents chatted at least weekly, while only slightly over half of the respondents in flats (55%) and detached houses (60%) did so.[6] While residents in semi-detached houses and blocks of flats share spaces, it could have been expected that they would have more problematic relations with their neighbours, which could for example be connected to the use of the common spaces. On the other hand, living in blocks of flats enables neighbours to meet on a daily basis, in the yards, staircases, common wash houses, saunas etc. From this perspective the results are surprising.

In summary, we found several dependencies between the background variables and the frequency of the various types of neighbour relationships. We also used *logistic regression models* to predict the prevalence of various neighbour relations. Potential predictors included the age and the residence time, which have been found to predict neighbour ties in many studies. Our special interest was to investigate whether the tenure status, level of urbanity or the house type had independent predictive power when the age and the residence time were controlled for.

Table 6 presents the results of predicting *the prevalence of chatting relations*.

Table 6

At first, we made logit-models (1–5) with just one independent variable at a time. The higher age of a respondent and a longer time of residence predicted more chatting relations in the neighbourhood. A rental dwelling predicted fewer chatting relations. Statistics in the last two

rows (Nagelkerke and -2 Log Likelihood) indicate that these three variables were the strongest predictors. In addition, an urban area of residence and living in a flat predicted fewer chatting relations, but these were weaker associations. When we put all five variables together in model 6, the house type was no longer a significant predictor. The level of urbanity lost some of its predictive power, but remained barely significant. The tenure status remained a very significant predictor. This model correctly predicted 66% of the cases.

In the next analysis (Table 7) the dependent variable was *the prevalence of neighbour friends.*

Table 7

Again, we began with five one-predictor models (1–5). Also this time, the strongest predictors were the age and the time of residence. Older respondents, those with a longer residence time and dwellers in detached houses more probably had neighbours who were friends. Renters and urban dwellers had fewer neighbours who were friends than others did. Next, we put all five predictors in the same model (6), in which the house type and the tenure status were no longer significant. The most significant predictor was the age. The level of urbanity and the time of residence lost some of the explanatory power, however remained barely significant predictors. The final model correctly predicts 67% of the cases.

The main result of these two analyses was that the house type did not predict the prevalence of weak or strong ties when other available predictors were controlled for. Living in rental housing predicted weak ties (very significantly) but not strong ties, whereas the level of urbanity predicted both, although only weakly.

We also conducted a logit-analysis to predict the prevalence of *negative neighbour relations*. Table 8 presents the results.

Table 8

Only two variables had a significant association with problematic relations: the age and the house type (models 1–5). The older the respondent, the fewer problematic relations they had with their neighbours. Semi-detached house dwellers had a little more probability of a problematic relationship with a neighbour than other respondents. Both the age and the house type had independent explanatory power when controlling the other variables (model 6). However, the Pseudo R Square value of the final model is very low (0.05). We concluded that the available variables did not illuminate the background factors behind negative neighbour relations very well. Maybe the biggest factors behind this phenomenon have occasional and random characteristics, which are not possible to determine with any statistic modelling. Perhaps the most interesting result here was which variables did *not* predict problematic relations. Negative neighbour relations had no dependency on the residence time, tenure status or the level of urbanity.

5 Discussion

This paper has added to the often contradictory and context-specific literature on neighbour relations. It firstly argued that the number of neighbourhood relations has decreased over time. Our data represent the Finnish population, but congruent societal background changes (urbanization, increasing mobility, new communication technology etc.) have taken place globally. People in the 2010s have fewer ties in their neighbourhood than people of the 1980s had. Nevertheless, it is specifically noteworthy that while networks of weak ties have declined only a little, covering all generations in this study, the reduction in strong neighbour ties had concentrated specifically on the younger generations. The changes in the number and character of neighbour relations were nationwide, and thus were not only an effect of urbanization, which has traditionally been used as an explanatory component for the erosion of strong social ties. The developments in the Helsinki metropolitan area and in the countryside were very similar. Putnam (2007) has argued that increasing ethnic diversity erodes neighbourly social ties, but this factor cannot be the main reason behind our findings, because immigration into Finland has been very low until recent years.

It is evidently partly a matter of the phase of life: young people will probably make more relationships with their neighbour in the future when their life situations and housing conditions stabilize. However, we also identified differences between generations: under 45-year-olds in 2012 had remarkably fewer neighbour relations than the under 45-year-olds in 1986. These results call for more research and qualitative methods to understand if and what could be done about it. With the number of young people moving into cities and the emphasis in planning, and the body of research emphasising the importance of neighbour relations for the well-being of residents, the result should raise some concerns.

Generally speaking, the younger respondents had an equally numerous network of strong ties as the older respondents had, but their ties were situated differently. Non-local ties had partly substituted local ties along with time and with new generations. An interesting result was that the importance of kinship had not diminished over the generations. However, it is probable that the physical distance between relatives is often longer today than before, due to the abundant migration to larger cities and increased mobility. Thus, also this component of personal networks has moved in a non-local direction.

Secondly, although it has been argued that urbanization and an urban lifestyle also reduce the importance of weaker neighbour relationships, this paper has shown that the level of urbanity had only a weak association with the prevalence of local chatting or friendship relationships. Urban dwellers and renters had fewer neighbours who were chatting fellows than other respondents even if the age and the time of residence were controlled for. Our results concerning the tenure status were in line with Manturuk et al. (2010) who found that homeownership gave low and moderate-income residents more extensive social networks in their neighbourhood, even when the length of residence was controlled for. Our study also showed that although tenure had an effect on weak neighbour ties, tenants were by no means indifferent to the social life in their neighbourhoods. In fact, they wanted to get to know their neighbours better more commonly than homeowners did. This is an interesting result with policy implications. The number of people renting their homes especially in urban areas may be

growing due to increasing housing prices, but also due to the increasing supply of private rentals. Currently there is a growing emphasis in urban planning in Finnish cities, to enforce apartment developers to provide indoor common spaces for residents to socialize in. Our results indicate that there is a need for such spaces were residents can meet. A high turnover of residents undermines neighbour relations and thus it should be restrained, especially in tenement blocks. Recent studies had shown that neighbourly relationships have more importance than it had been previously considered (e.g. Jaśkiewicz & Wiwatowska 2018, Glanville & Paxton 2007). Promoting neighbourly relations may have positive effects both on individual well-being and on general trust in society.

Thirdly, although we first found a correlation between the residential house type and neighbour contacts, this association disappeared when we controlled for the influence of the other variables of the analysis. This result is particularly interesting when considering the strong emphasis towards block of flats that we can see globally. It would imply, that there are good opportunities for ties between neighbours also in consolidating cities. However new research shows that more families are also living in blocks of flats (Easthope & Tice 2011; Karsten 2015). Will there be a stronger sense of community in blocks of flats in the future, as families commonly know their neighbours?

Fourth, the paper has argued that problematic neighbour relations are not very common, but they do exist slightly more in the 2010s than they did in the 1980s. In the younger generations in 2012, the prevalence of problematic neighbour relations was remarkably higher than in corresponding age groups in 1986 or in older age groups in 2012 and 1986. The younger age groups had more problematic relations also outside their neighbourhoods than the older age groups had. The logit analysis we conducted showed that only the age and living in a semi-detached house were significant predictors of the prevalence of problematic neighbour relationships. Negative neighbour relations had no direct dependency on density (urbanity), tenure or the time of residence. These results were slightly surprising.

Residents in semi-detached houses reported higher chatting frequencies, while at the same time, more problematic relations than the residents in flats or in detached houses reported. Semi-detached houses are typically owned by small housing companies comprised of the home owners, where social closeness and common affairs offer the potential for both positive and negative human interaction. In small companies, problems may easily be personified, unlike in large ones. In addition, common or shared maintenance duties can often be subjects of conflicts in small companies whereas in large ones these duties are usually outsourced.

Appendix

Table A1. The prevalence of various neighbour relationships according to the respondent's age 1986 and 2012, %

Year/ age	Friends and other important people					Problematic relationships			
	Nobody	One	2-3	4+	Total	Nobody	One	2+	Total
1986:									
-24	37	14	29	20	100	82	8	10	100
25-44	35	14	31	20	100	83	10	7	100
45-64	29	12	29	30	100	86	8	5	100
65+	32	13	24	31	100	87	8	5	100
2012:									
-24	66	21	10	3	100	71	16	14	100
25-44	54	19	20	8	100	69	16	15	100
45-64	35	20	25	20	100	77	15	8	100
65 +	30	13	26	31	100	82	14	4	100

Notes

[1] The analysis of nonresponse showed that young age groups were underrepresented and middle-aged groups overrepresented in our data. We weighted the responses according to the age group to correct the nonresponse bias. We also checked the size of the locality: the distribution of the data matched the distribution of the population very well.

[2] The survey was based on a random sample of 13,876 persons from the adult population of Finland. The response rate was very high—86%. As only published statistical tables were available for the old data, it was not possible to use complex statistical methods for it. Instead, we could compare distributions from our data and the old data. The age ranges concerning lower age limits were a little different in the 1986 survey (15+ years) and in our survey (18+ years). There were no upper age limits in the surveys, but only the dwelling population was included.

[3] Test results of the age group differences in the number of strong ties (Chi-Square Test Statistic,df,p-value): neighbourhood 104.8,df=15,p=0.000, kinsfolk 23.7,df=15,p=0.070, working life 236.3,df=15,p=0.000, hobbies 30.7,df=15,p=0.009, other spheres of life 36.0,df=15,p=0.006.

[4] Test results of the age group differences in the prevalence of a problematic relationship (Chi-Square Test Statistic,df,p-value): neighbourhood 13.9,df=5,p=0.016, kinsfolk 28.6,df=5,p=0.000, working life 139.0,df=5,p=0.000, hobbies 23.2,df=5,p=0.000, other spheres of life 58.8,df=5,p=0.000.

[5] Chi-Square Test Statistic=12.6,df=1,p=0.000

[6] Test results of the house type differences (Chi-Square Test Statistic,df,p-value): Problematic neighbour relationships 7.1,df=2,p=0,028; Chatting frecuency 17.3,df=2,p=0.000.

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Tables

Table 1. The number of chatting relations with neighbours according to the age group 1986 and 2012, %

	Nobody	One	2–3	4+	Total
All respondents					
1986	9	8	31	51	100
2012	9	10	43	37	100
According to the age					
1986:					
-24	19	12	39	29	100
25-44	8	8	33	51	100
45-64	5	5	27	63	100
65+	7	7	25	61	100
2012:					
-24	33	24	31	12	100
25-44	14	14	43	29	100
45-64	2	7	47	44	100
65+	3	6	40	51	100

Test results:
Difference between 1986 and 2012: Chi-Square Test Statistic=64.2,df=3,p=0.000;
Difference between the age groups 2012: Chi-Square Test Statistic=139.0,df=9,p=0.000.

Table 2**.** The number of friends or other important people in various spheres of life 1986 and 2012, %

	No-body	One	2–3	4+	Total	Chi-Square test Statis-tic, df, p-value
In the neighbourhood						
1986	33	13	29	24	100	
2012	43	18	22	17	100	62.2,df=3,p=0.000
Among kinsfolk						
1986	5	6	29	60	100	
2012	3	4	21	72	100	42.6,df=3,p=0.000
In the working life						
all respondents 1986	36	7	23	33	100	
all respondents 2012	27	6	23	44	100	36.5,df=3,p=0.000
working respondents 2012	8	7	31	55	100	
In the hobbies						
1986	44	6	16	33	100	
2012	34	11	22	33	100	59.0,df=3,p=0.000
In the other spheres of life						
1986	39	7	19	35	100	
2012	17	8	26	49	100	142.7,df=3,p=0.000

Table 3. Prevalence of various neighbour relations in the Helsinki Region and in the countryside 1986 and 2012.

	1986	2012	change, pp
The Helsinki Region			
At least four chatting relations	44%	31%	-13
At least one neighbour friend	55%	47%	-8
At least one problematic relation	15%	29%	14
The countryside			
At least four chatting relations	63%	47%	-16
At least one neighbour friend	79%	71%	-8
At least one problematic relation	16%	23%	7

Table 4. The number of problematic human relations in various spheres of life in 1986 and 2012, %

	Nobody	One	2 or more	Total	Chi-Square Test Statistic,df, p-value
In the neighbourhood					
1986	84	9	7	100	
2012	75	15	10	100	39.0,df=2,p=0.000
Among kinsfolk					
1986	61	16	23	100	
2012	58	20	22	100	11.1,df=2,p=0.004
In the working life					
all respondents 1986	71	10	19	100	
all respondents 2012	63	16	21	100	32.7,df=2,p=0.000
working respondents 2012	53	23	24	100	
In the hobbies					
1986	93	2	5	100	
2012	88	8	3	100	118.5,df=2,p=0.000
In the other spheres of life					
1986	84	4	12	100	
2012	73	10	17	100	84.4,df=2,p=0.000

Table 5. Responses according to the urbanity of the residence.

	Big city, centre	Big city, other area	Medium-sized city	Small town	Vil-lage	Country-side	Chi-Square Test Statistic,df,p-value
Statements, fully/somewhat agree:							
"There is sense of community in my neighbourhood."	40%	51%	51%	52%	58%	59%	40.9,df=20, p=0.004
"My neighbours feel responsibil-ity for each other."	40%	44%	49%	56%	67%	65%	50.4,df=20, p=0.000
Ties with neighbours:							
Chatting with neighbours at least weekly	51%	54%	63%	70%	70%	56%	18.8,df=5, p=0.002
Mutual help at least monthly	21%	24%	30%	38%	34%	32%	11.8,df=5, p=0.038
At least one neighbour friend	35%	50%	57%	63%	61%	71%	27.5,df=5, p=0.000

Table 6: Odds Rations (ORs) of six logit-models (p-values of Wald Test in parentheses)

Dependent variable: prevalence of neighbour chatting relations, encoding: 0=less than four, 1=at least four.

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Age	1.03(0.000)					1.02(0.007)
Time of residence		1.04(0.000)				1.02(0.031)
Tenure status						
Other dwelling			ref.			ref.
Rental dwelling			0.27(0.000)			0.35(0.000)
Level of urbanity				0.83(0.000)		0.88(0.047)
House type						
detached house					ref.	ref.
semi-detached house					1.00(0.979)	1.16(0.554)
flat					0.53(0.000)	1.55(0.071)
Nagelkerke R Square	0.077	0.071	0.072	0.026	0.029	0.145
-2 Log Likelihood	937.9	856.0	955.1	973.6	997.2	805.4

Table 7: Odds Rations (ORs) of six logit-models (p-values of Wald Test in parentheses)
Dependent variable: prevalence of neighbour friends, encoding: 0=none, 1=at least one.

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Age	1.03(0.000)					1.02(0.000)
Time of residence		1.05(0.000)				1.02(0.029)
Tenure status						
Other dwelling			ref.			ref.
Rental dwelling			0.35(0.000)			0.72(0.165)
Level of urbanity				0.78(0.000)		0.88(0.043)
House type						
detached house					ref.	ref.
semi-detached house					0.57(0.007)	0.75(0.258)
flat					0.45(0.000)	0.76(0.254)
Nagelkerke R Square	0.091	0.093	0.060	0.044	0.043	0.151
-2 Log Likelihood	950.0	878.2	985.1	987.7	993.6	834.6

Table 8: Odds Rations (ORs) of six logit-models (p-values of Wald test in parentheses)
Dependent variable: prevalence of problematic neighbour relations, Encoding: 0=none, 1=at least one.

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Age	0.98(0.000)					0.97(0.000)
Time of residence		0.99(0.370)				1.02(0.083)
Tenure status						
Other dwelling			ref.			ref.
Rental dwelling			1.01(0.954)			0.72(0.212)
Level of urbanity				1.03(0.609)		0.96(0.567)
House type						
detached house					ref.	ref.
semi-detached house					1.77(0.011)	2.22(0.003)
flat					1.08(0.662)	1.47(0.181)
Nagelkerke R Square	0.025	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.013	0.051
-2 Log Likelihood	808.9	758.4	833.3	830.4	826.2	726.0