

In-between
Belongings:
Impact of Covid-19
pandemic on the
Lives of Syrian
Refugees in Scotland

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Overview of study

1. Context 1 – the Syrian crisis - the society of emigration
 2. Context 2 – Scotland - the society of immigration
 3. Research aims – beyond social capital
 4. Research approach – rhythm analysis
 5. Research method – visual auto-ethnography
 6. Findings – covid, in-betweenness and emptiness
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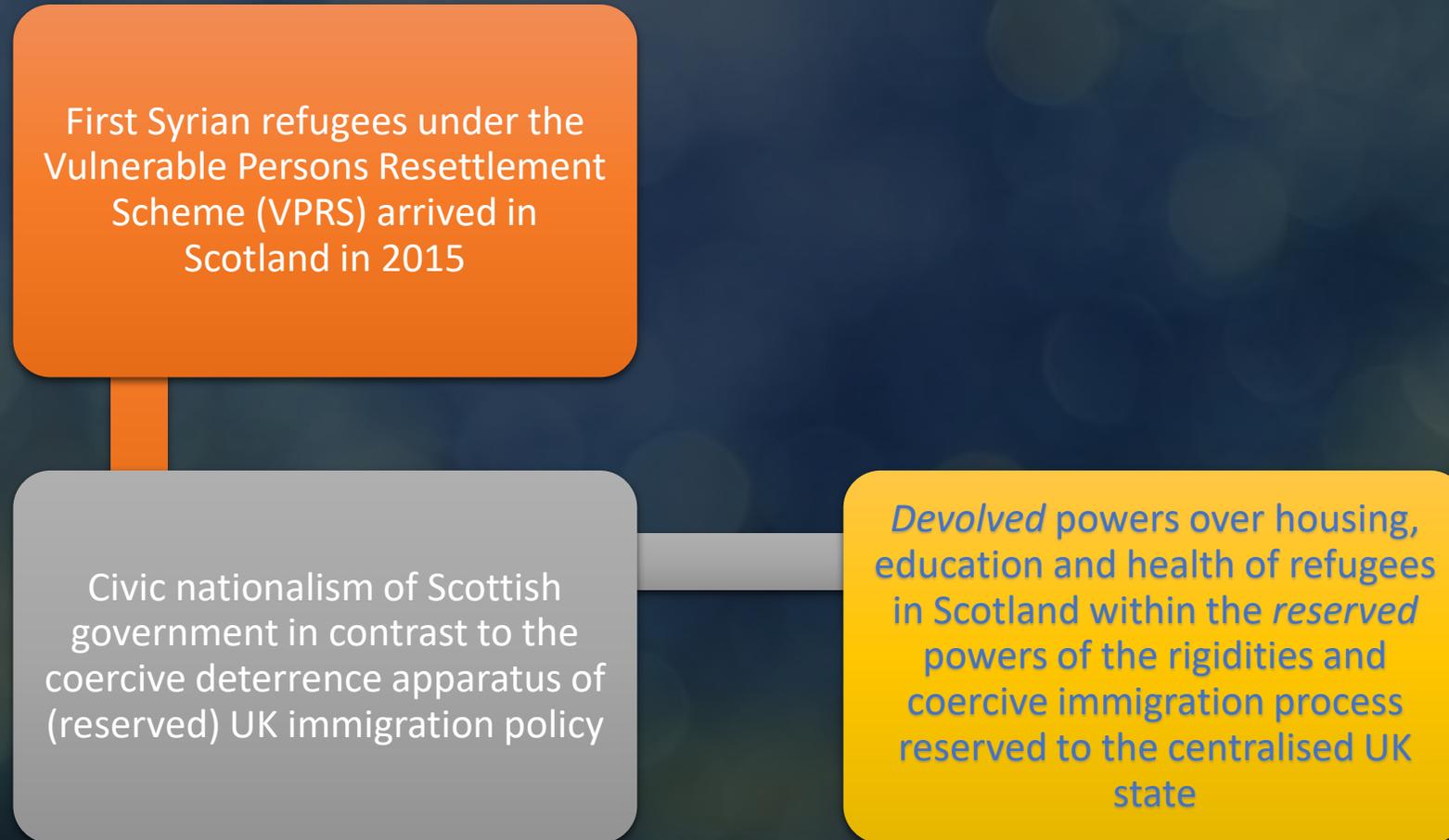


Syrian crisis and human displacement

- Lethal state violence forced large numbers of people to abandon physical and cultural homes
- Personal and collective suffering of refugees
- Not only physical displacement but also ontological homelessness
- Fish out of water
- Alienated from unfamiliar spaces and disrupted temporalities
- Processes of place-making and restructured daily rhythms
- Not only a problem of social capital



In-between nature of Scottish refugee policy



Research aims

- Studies report generally positive experiences of Syrian under the VPRS scheme in terms of basic needs, cultural support, welfare services, and local integration
- Yet, refugees experience difficulties re-establishing daily rhythms of work, employment, leisure
- Routines of belonging as a structure of feeling acquired only gradually and painfully
- Our research aimed to examine the ways that refugees re-establish renewed rhythms after strenuous migratory journeys, disrupted connections and the socially isolating demands of the Covid-19 pandemic



Social capital and refugees

Refugee research tends to focus on social capital

Social capital is an important feature of labour market integration and ontological security

Social reciprocity and trust are core to a sense of belonging

Weak social networks have a detrimental effect on access to work and self-efficacy

Social capital is shaped by gender relations across a whole range of integration processes including employment, language, health, education, employment and housing

Vertical 'bridging' and horizontal 'bonding' social capital



Fractured lives and ambivalent dispositions

Refugee social capital is formed by the encounter of dispositions formed historically by the *society of emigration* with specific national and local economic, political, social and cultural conditions of the *society of immigration* (Sayad, 2004)

Embodied dispositions and schemas of perceptions acquired through the life course sociologists call '*habitus*' (habit, habitat, habitation)

Refugees experience a disorientating loss of function that can produce ambivalent and contradictory dispositions and modes of disorientation

Bourdieu called this a '*habitus clivé*', ('cleft habitus', 'divided habitus' or 'fractured habitus')

Photography as self-produced data

- Using a combination of qualitative methods, including timeline drawings, audio-narrated solicited diaries, and photovoice to explore the complexity of everyday life
- Supported by community organisations and network sampling, 20 Syrian refugees in Scottish urban areas as co-producers
- Asked to make audio and photo entries at least three times a week (using iPods - supplied) to collect the data about their daily lives
- Unique insight into everyday realities of marginalised individuals – what their lives were, what they are now, and how they may evolve in the post-COVID context

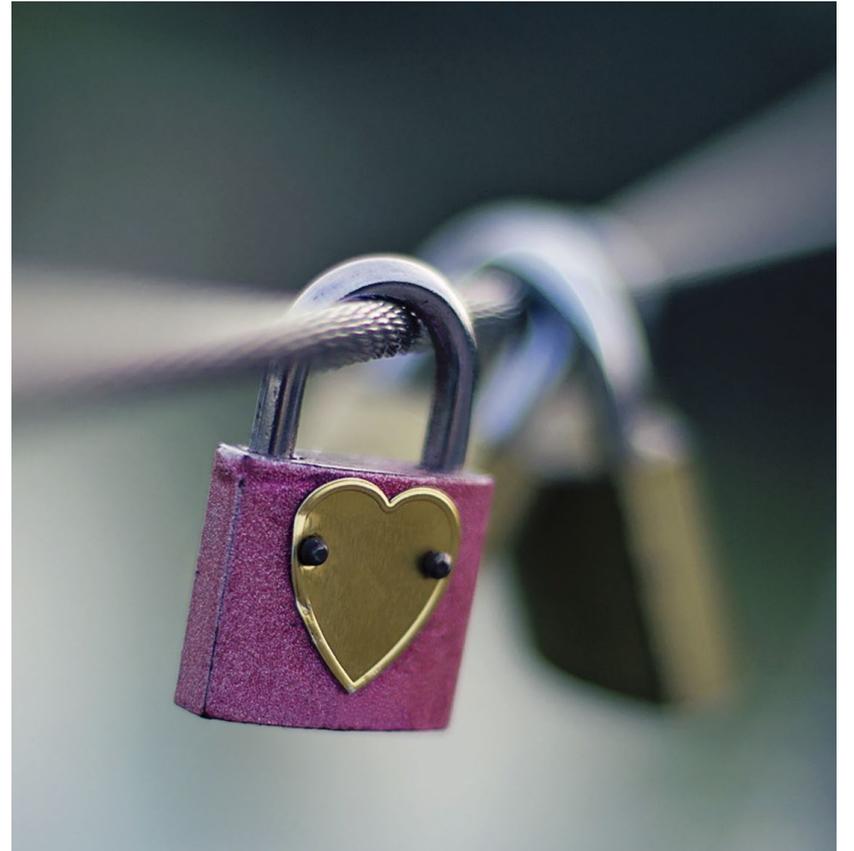


Photography as research method

- Photography is ubiquitous today, mundane aspect of everyday life
- Photography as a research document of the optical unconscious
- Inscribed with both intentional and unintentional meanings
- *'Adequately understanding a photograph, whether it is taken by a Corsican peasant, a petit-bourgeois from Bologna or a Parisian professional, means not only recovering the meanings which it proclaims, that is, to a certain extent, the explicit intention of the photographer; it also means **deciphering the surplus of meaning** which it betrays by being part of the symbolism of an age, a class or an artistic group'* (Bourdieu, 1990: 6–7, emphasis added).

Visual auto-ethnography

- Photographs freeze a specific moment in time at a specific place from a particular viewpoint
- Visual meaning lies in the relationship between the image, the context, viewers, and possible interpretations of its codes
- Self-produced images
- What and where is attention focussed?
- Why these spaces and bodies?
- Images of interiors and exteriors, domestic and public, social and individual, informal and ceremonial, proximity and distance, spontaneity and composition
- Poignancy of estranged places, of dislocation, of in-between, of physical survival and spiritual homelessness



Burden of the refugee label

- Socio-economic capital accumulated in Syria is neither recognised nor acknowledged within the new reality
- For instance, one of our participants was a lawyer in Syria
- However, lived experiences in Scotland reduced their identity to the category 'refugee'
- Neighbours, government documentation, local authorities and community groups tend to strip away all other identities that accompany refugees before, during and after their displacement

Rhythmanalysis (Henri Lefebvre)

- 'Rhythmanalysis' as a mode of orientation that goes beyond categorising refugees in terms of juridical status or material conditions
- Rhythmanalysis is concerned with the triad of human controls – biological, psychological and social – across the time and space continuum of daily routines and repetitions, habits and habitation
- Perpetual interaction of different rhythms tend to find a quasi-stable balance in everyday lives
- Rhythmic balances usually restored but can be thrown out of kilter by severe crisis
- Bodies may be in space but feel out of place

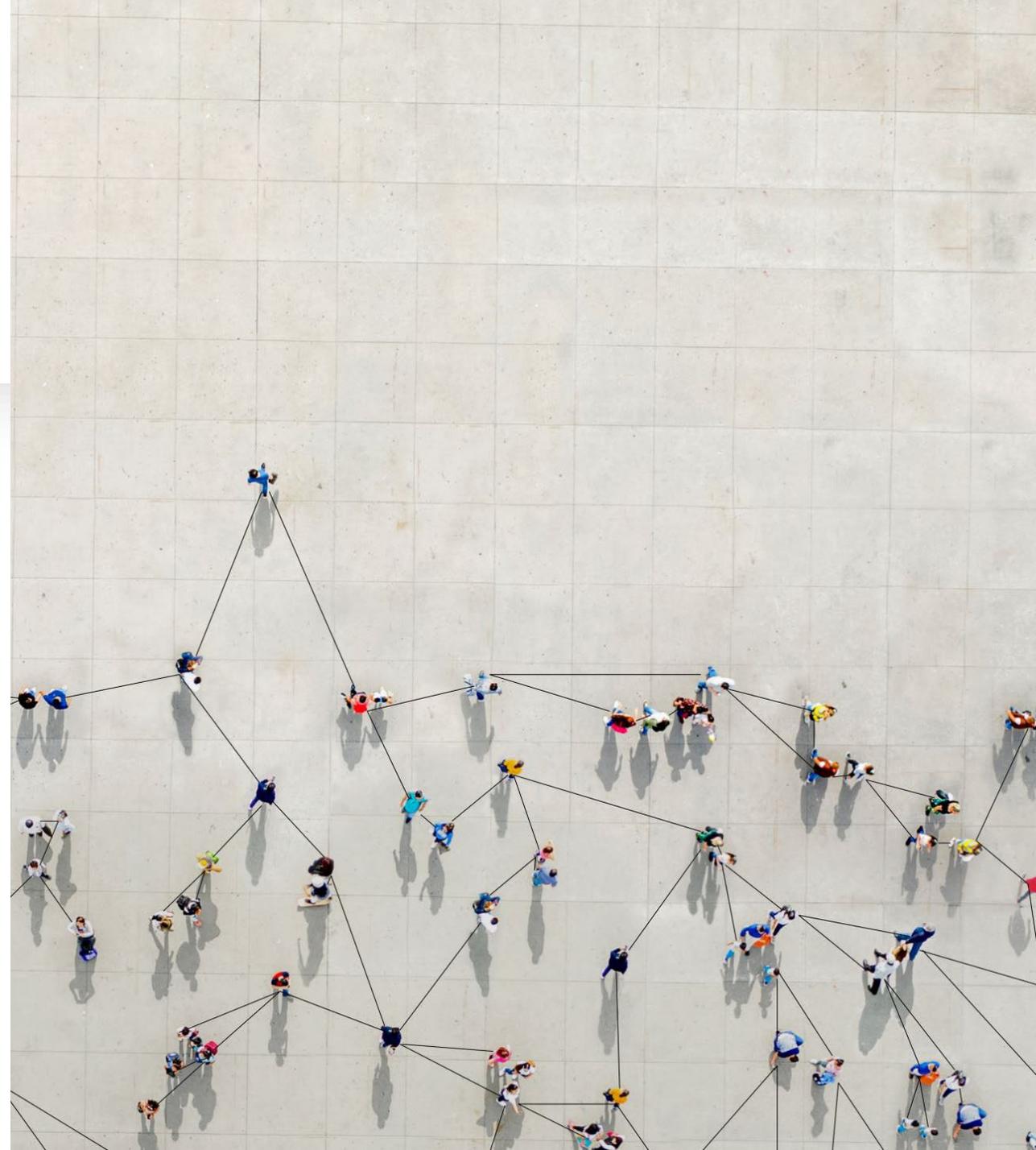
Cyclical and linear rhythms

- All humans embody rhythms of repetition, habit, routine, and difference in two basic ways:
 - i. Natural or cyclical repetition of bodies through cosmic or calendar time: days, seasons, years, etc
 - ii. Social or linear repetition of work practices, ritual, leisure
- Always combined in, mediated by the 'third nature' of the habitus
- Emerging rhythms of refugee daily life interrupted and deflected by Covid



Disturbances of double migration

- The seasonality and rhythmic structure of the socioeconomic and cultural life of refugees in context of a double migration.
 1. 'Flight migration' from Syria to intermediating country
 2. 'Resettled' migration from a refugee camp to the UK
- Produced a continuous state of disruption to the rhythms and rituals of life
- Constant adjustment and mediation of a reality full of contradictions, dichotomies and paradoxes
- Periodically and dramatically tested and altered the acquired dispositions and codes of perception of refugees
- An unremitting flow of disharmonic and arrhythmic flux of existence of Syrian refugees in Scotland



Covid: isolation, emptiness and ambivalence

- A fractured sense of time and space fundamentally shapes refugee sense of belonging and notions of home
- ‘Something is always missing’ within the lived social experiences of refugees in Scotland
- An ‘absent presence’ feeling of cultural as well as physical loss
- Simply meeting friends in a café could be overshadowed by the past experiences in Syria
- Memory implicated in disrupted rhythms
- Covid imposed a retreat from public space, place-making and new rhythmic balances



Emptiness of in-between

An overarching theme within the photo diaries was 'emptiness'

Participants suggested that the time and space had merged with their idea of belonging and notion of home

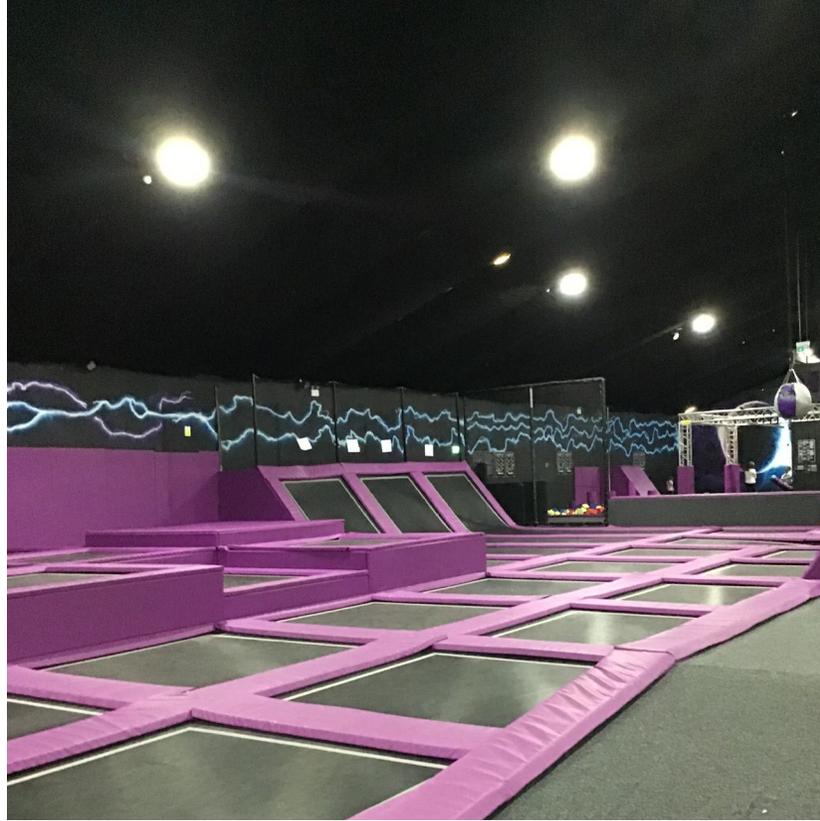
Our participants actively engaged in the restoration of everyday rhythms in new conditions

Covid-19 lockdown and post-Covid-19 produced an elongated cycle of formation, deformation, reformation of everyday rhythms and tension balances for Syrian refugees

Ontological security of refugees involves mediating overlapping configurations of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital accumulated in Syria, during their migration, and within Scotland

'Displaced presence' of refugees

- A gap between refugee social capital and economic skills, and local economic opportunities.
- An absence of socioeconomic opportunities devalues the social, cultural and symbolic capital accumulated in Syria
- Producing a feeling of 'displaced presence' (Sayad 2004: 283)
- Double displacement and expressions of alienation are the biggest hurdles for re-establishing secure bio-social rhythms of place-making for Syrian refugees
- Still, also evidence of refugee resilience to seize what lies nearest at hand, especially informal social networks and formal support, to restore meaningful rhythms in a different national and local context



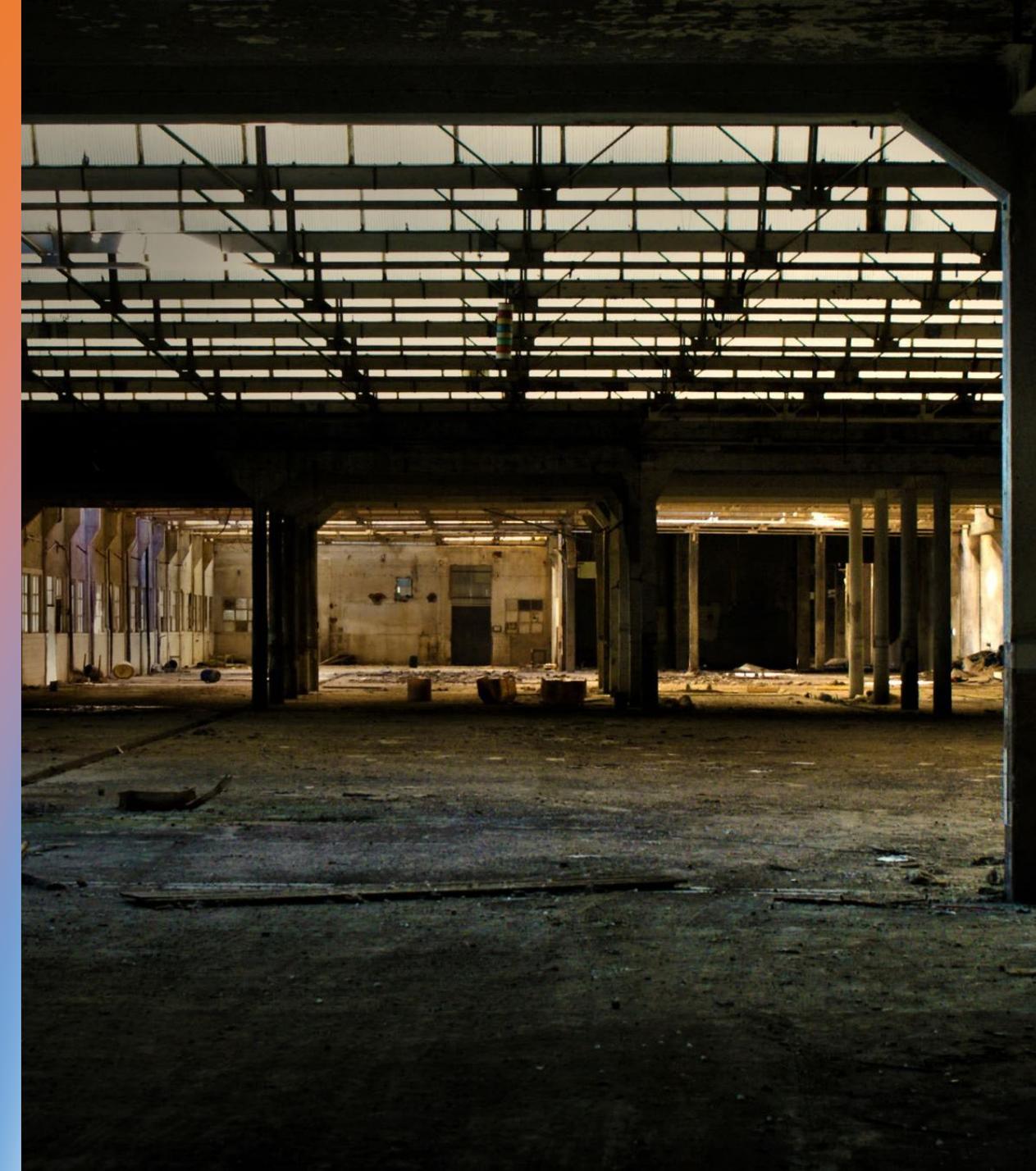
Samples from Picture Diary





Covid stories – disrupting and restoring rhythms of place-making

- *I live in the building which looks at cycling circuit. I was recording cycling circuit which was empty from people who were enjoying cycling. I was recording it as video and picture. The pictures and video were taken during the lockdown. After removing the lockdown I took the picture and video of the same place. There was a person who was cycling and the view was wonderful.*
- *I had also an opportunity to take pictures of Zara shop for clothes and shoes for man and women. The place was locked during the lockdown and when it opened I took the pictures. After the lockdown the place was crowded with people who looked happy.*
- *I also took a picture of Nero coffee shop when it was locked (during the lockdown) and after it open. The chairs were installed outside for people to sit. This lockdown had a huge impact on the people as they were not able to visit each other neither to go to coffee shop or even to cycle in cycling circuit.*



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Day 41 – There is nothing and I am alone



“Please note someday I didn’t take photos because it was a similar day - boring - and shows the same routine.

Wish me luck”

Thank you for listening.

