

## The Spatial Dimension of Household Resilience

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## Abstract

This working paper provides an analysis of the spatial dimensions of household resilience in Ireland. It was produced as the Irish national report for Work Package 7 within the FP7 Project, ‘RESCuE: Patterns of resilience during socio-economic crisis among households in Europe.’ This paper includes a qualitative analysis of key spatial aspects including crisis, health and well being; home; neighbourhood; and supra local scale. Health and well-being explores the impact of the crisis on the mind and body of participants, particularly men as they coped with a higher incidence of unemployment at the beginning of the recession. The theme of home reveals how participants strategised to maintain their homes and a sense of home with reduced resources as a result of the recession. To frame the exploration of socio-spatial dynamics of crisis, poverty and resilience we distinguish between the types of ‘communities’ that exist, the homogeneity of these neighbourhoods and the changes brought about from broader economic shifts. The constraining characteristics vary between urban and rural areas but similarities emerge in the everyday experiences of movement, attachment and change.

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## **1. SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### **1.1 URBAN AREA**

The urban area in which the fieldwork was carried out in Ireland is a large provincial town in the midlands (MUrb). The town is within commuting distance to the capital city, County Dublin. More recently, it has been identified as part of a link national gateway (National Spatial Strategy 2002- 2020).

Traditionally an agricultural market town, MUrb has been successful over the past number of decades in attracting foreign direct investment, predominantly from the United States. It also hosts a regional hospital which provides significant local employment. Rapid suburban development began on the outskirts of the town from the mid-1990s onwards. Between 1996 and 2002, during the first phase of the Celtic Tiger boom, population in MUrb increased by ten percent, with most of the growth occurring in the suburban environs (CSO, 2011). Since then, population in the town and its environs has continued to increase at a slower rate, increasing by seven percent between 2002 and 2011 (sources). Although classified as a large provincial town by Ireland's standards, the MUrb area includes small populations from the UK, Poland, Lithuania, other EU countries and the rest of the world comprising about 19% percent of the total population.

Amongst those gainfully employed, MUrb is comprised of approximately equal proportions of people holding professional, managerial and technical occupations (39%) and those holding skilled, semi- skilled and unskilled manual occupations (38%), with the remainder holding 'non-manual' occupations.<sup>1</sup>

Provincial towns like MUrb, located on the periphery of the greater Dublin area, attract some urban commuters who take the opportunity to move out of Dublin city but still commute to work. However, research by Corcoran et al. (2010) found that such long-distance commuters comprised a relatively small proportion of the employed population. Return migration, that is people returning to these urban commuter belts, is also a key feature of suburbanisation in the MUrb setting. Moreover, during the Celtic Tiger boom, areas like MUrb attracted people who wanted to experience country life or to take advantage of lower property prices. Corcoran et al (2010) found that participants expressed a feeling of "home" in the town, with a good quality of life, community life, amenities, facilities and resources.

<sup>1</sup> Excluding those whose social class could not be identified. Calculated from the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) Census Mapping Module, 2011, Theme 9-1, Social Class.

The population of the MUrb setting is ethnically relatively homogenous, with most immigrants originating in the European Union. Using Irish census categories, almost ninety percent of the population identified themselves as ‘white Irish’ or ‘other white.’ Irish Travellers comprised less than three percent of the population in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Table 1 provides details of participants interviewed for the RESCuE project.

*Table 1: Ethnicity and time spent living in case study area, Irish urban sample*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Time living in the area</b>
Andrew	White Irish	Whole life
Nora	White Irish	Approximately 40 years
Aisling	Traveller	Approximately 17 years
Jacinta	White Irish	Whole life
Sam	White Irish	Approximately 16 years
Jack & Melissa	White Irish	Approximately 34 years
Deirdre	White Irish	Approximately 9 years
Enid	Baltic country	11 years
Nancy	White Irish	Whole life
Bernard	White Irish	Whole life
Ben	White Irish	Whole life
Lisa	White Irish	Whole life
James	White Irish	Approximately 9 years

## **1.2 RURAL AREA**

The rural locations selected for the Irish case study incorporate the hinterland surrounding our urban setting. These areas are situated in the northeastern part of the midlands region. The most recent Census (2011) indicates that there has been a small increase (6%) in population since 2006 for the aggregate rural area of the county within which MRur is located. Some of this increase is accounted for by the development of ‘one-off’ housing units to accommodate newcomers from urban areas. MRur is characterized by extensive bogland with Bord na Móna, the semi-state body responsible for mining peat, being a key employer in the area. Other employers in the region include concrete works, quarries, factories, and local councils. Job losses have been experienced in all locations in the area of construction, while agriculture remains stable (AIRO/CSO:2011). These areas have a majority of small farms (less than 100 acres), although the land is of poor quality as it is an area of bogland. The great majority (about 90% or more) of the population in the MRur area are Irish. Table 2 summarizes the details of MRur people who were interviewed for the RESCuE project.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from the AIRO Census Mapping Module, 2011, Theme 2, Usually Resident Population by Ethnic or Cultural Background.

A recent Report (2013) by the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) examined rural areas nationally and recommended an integrated approach to rural economic development that would facilitate economic and community participation, increased accessibility, and focus on sector specific development. However, accessibility, economic depletion, high speed broadband, isolation and gender differentiation remain high on the agenda of rural needs.

*Table 2: Ethnicity and time spent living in case study of Irish rural sample*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Time living in the area
Rachel	White Irish	Approximately 7 years
Larry	White Irish	Approximately 17 years
John & Fiona	White Irish	Approximately 11 years
Barbara	White Irish	Approximately 35 years
Jane	White Irish	Approximately 13 years
Seamus	White Irish	Approximately 20 years
Sinead	Traveller	Approximately 5 years
Michael	White Irish	Approximately 20 years
Enid	White Irish	Approximately 7 years
Sheila	White Irish	Whole life
Rosie	Central European country	Approximately 3 years
Maria	White Irish	Whole life

As Tables 1 and 2 show, while a majority of the RESCuE sample in both rural and urban areas were of White Irish origin, more than half the sample were incomers to both areas where the research was conducted.

## **2. CRISIS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

The financial crisis is unquestionably a time of immense risk to the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals and their families. Falling income, poverty and deprivation are key determining factors of health and well-being. Conventional approaches to health and illness typically focus on the individual, their diet and lifestyle and perhaps family history. While health is unquestionably determined by issues such as lifestyle and exposure to various hazards, the trauma and upheaval inflicted by the financial crisis also represents a fundamental factor. Notwithstanding, it is also important to go beyond seeing the body as a site that is solely acted upon by external forces and instead, examine the ways in which the body and mind act as mechanisms for resistance and agency.

## 2.1 INCOME, UNEMPLOYMENT & HEALTH

The financial crisis resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of paid jobs, as well as significant cuts to wages and household incomes for those who retained their employment. The Irish rate of unemployment increased sharply during the first five years of the crisis, from 4.5% at the end of 2007 to just under 14% at the end of 2012 (CSO 2013). The impact of loss of earnings through job cuts and redundancies, however, reached far beyond the fiscal domain, and constituted a major external force affecting the human body and mind. While conventional approaches consistently analyse the financial crash solely through a financial prism, our research reveals the many other virulent consequences and side-effects of job losses and financial worries. The interview data clearly indicate that the body and mind absorbs much of the physical hardships, stress and psychological damage caused by the financial crisis.

Unsurprisingly, substantial research has revealed that people who experience unemployment, impoverishment and family disruptions have a significantly greater risk of mental health problems, such as depression, alcohol use disorders and suicide, than their unaffected counterparts (NESC 2013, pp. 111-114). In particular, men are at increased risk of mental health problems and death due to suicide or alcohol use during times of economic adversity (Walsh & Walsh 2011). Unemployment contributes to depression and suicide, and young unemployed people have a higher risk of getting mental health problems than young people who remain employed (Corcoran & Arensman 2009). Evidence indicates that debt, financial difficulties and housing payment problems lead to mental health, as Larry describes below:

"I don't know what happened and I'm after getting a few bills there and they're outrageous with the phone and that. Usually they'd ring you the minute something happens. Now I did stop for a while, I got to the stage where I couldn't open a bill and I suppose I did shut down for a couple of weeks or a couple of months, I don't know how long it was. You do get very.....I wouldn't say depressed but I suppose it could be but I just couldn't open an envelope" (INT.HR.002, male).

One family recalled how the stress caused by the financial crisis, and specifically the pressure being applied by the banks, led to their father's heart attack. One evening he collapsed in the sitting room where his heart stopped beating. He spent nine days in hospital and fully recovered however the deleterious effects of the financial crisis on his physical and mental well-being continue to be felt.

An analysis of European suicide rates and unemployment increases following the economic crisis (Stuckler et al. 2009) showed that the steady downward trend in suicide seen in European countries before 2007 “reversed at once in 2008” with a small increase in 2008 and a further increase in suicide rates in 2009. This increase corresponds with “a swift increase in unemployment rates” in 2009 to a rate that was 35% above the 2007 level in Europe. It is important to note that the countries facing the most severe financial reversals of fortune, such as Greece and Ireland, had greater rises in suicides (17% and 13%, respectively) than did other European countries.

Economic adversity, and more specifically the experience of recession specifically have been shown to result in an increase in suicide rates. Housing insecurity, loss of employment and falling household incomes are salient factors increased suicide risk. Moreover, studies demonstrate that unemployed people are two-three times more likely to die by suicide than those in employment [sources?]. A recent study in Ireland has shown that rates of suicide among males and female during the economic ‘boom years’ of the Celtic Tiger were relatively stable, yet rates of suicide among unemployed males during this period increased significantly (Corcoran & Arensman, 2010). During the financial crash, Seamus and his family found themselves under immense pressure from the banks and other financial lenders.

"So at Christmas time in 2011 we had no money, we had nothing and the building society was banging on the door and I went down to the Social Welfare Office in [Midlands town] and told her my story. At this stage now I was going through clinical depression because the doctor was treating me and I was on these, and only for my wife I probably would have committed suicide. After eleven months of that and Rebecca trying to get me out of depression which she was fighting with me every day to not end up committing suicide because I thought logically if I commit suicide she'll get the insurance and the house is paid. And there's no more worries, worries are all gone. The kids will be well looked after because we have a big death policy so we would have got around €150,000 and everybody would have been looked after and I would be no more worries, that was my logic but no she wouldn't have that so I ended up going to a psychiatrist as well and he talked to me but I found my own doctor better" (INT.HR.002, male)

Similarly, John recalls the increasing levels of mental illness among his work colleagues during this time:

“There are people, I have mates who come in and committed suicide, friends of mine committed suicide over it which there was no need for whatsoever. If the government only stood in because more or less they were like myself. Their businesses went down, they were hard workers, they had families, they had nowhere to turn, absolutely no place to turn. A simple little case, a chap up the road, I worked with him for years. He



got into trouble, he was owed thirty odd thousand euro, I said calm down, we'll get out of this and he turned around of a Friday, he organised the wife to go to Dublin to do a bit of shopping of a Sunday. He had all day Saturday to think about it, Sunday morning he rang his brother in MUrb, he said do you mind if I leave my child in with you, I want to clean out my shed and the brother said fire ahead. He drove from out there, all the way to MUrb back out again and hung himself. Now where do you go after that because there was no one there to help him. And there was a lot more. That's one person we kind of knew. He actually done the plastering in here. I knew a few lads down the town and the same down in [Midlands town], your man down in [Midlands town] as well. Wasn't there one man as well who drowned himself on the site in a puddle. Now it was a big puddle on a building site. He couldn't take anymore, he had enough. I am still a firm believer that the government is.....they should have stepped in when they seen what was happening they should have but no one stepped in" (INT.HR.002, male).

While evidence of decreasing mental health was most prevalent among male respondents, there were also instances of mental health issues among female interviewees. Deirdre relocated from Dublin to MUrb to work in a new job during the so-called boom years of economic growth. Thereafter, the increasing threat of redundancy in the wake of the financial down-turn was taking a significant toll on Deirdre's health.

"...there was a lot going on then for me and I ended up actually going out sick a month before I was made redundant because I collapsed in there, I blacked out and all and it was just due to the stress of everything that was going on in the job. I was actually out sick when they rang, I didn't even get a phone call to say there was a meeting. I got a voice mail to say that I was being made redundant. And it would be immediate effect so I never went back to work, I couldn't face going back to work at that stage. I had had another baby since then, I'd had Joseph and I'd had a bad time with Joseph because before Joseph I'd had a miscarriage so I was suffering from depression all the way through that pregnancy and then when he was born I had bad depression as well. So that kind of made things plummet more as well because I had no security to go back to" (INT.HU.004, female)

Everyday approaches to illness and the body see sickness as a random episode, typically linked to our physical environment or lifestyle choice. While physical and mental health are of course shaped by factors such as age, gender, social class, occupation, among many other factors, our data reveals the inextricable links between the financial crisis and the high levels of diminishing health among those adversely effected by it. As per C. Wright Mills (1959) health and sickness are not merely private and individual issues, but are in fact fundamentally shaped by larger forces, structures and institutions. The stories, experiences and perspectives contained in our data therefore call our attention to the limited and partial ways in which times of financial crisis are typically measured and analysed, and force us to broaden our analytical lens to

encompass the effects of financial adversity in a more holistic way. By examining and including the physical and mental strains caused by fiscal hardship, we certainly yield a more comprehensive understanding of the financial crisis and its consequences for resilience.

## **2.2 CHANGING PATTERNS OF FOOD CONSUMPTION**

Rising unemployment and the sharp decrease in household income invariably shaped the quantity, and equally as important, the quality of food and sustenance for families affected by the crisis. Household incomes and poverty rates were drastically affected, with household incomes falling by over 12% in nominal terms, the “at risk of poverty” rate increasing from 14.4 to 16.0% and the proportion of the population experiencing two or more types of enforced deprivation (e.g. without heating in the last year, unable to afford a hot meal, etc.) increasing from 13.8 to 24.5% over the period 2008 to 2012 (Nolan et al. 2014). Given that this research is concerned with those families facing adversity during the financial crisis, it is therefore unsurprising that the overwhelming majority of respondents reported making sacrifices on the quantity and quality of their food. An urban respondent, Melissa described a typical scenario when planning and cooking daily meals:

“We would work with what [food] was there. If there is any meat left over or if there is any veg left over or whatever you would rustle up just a meal.....we would do without breakfast and lunch.....and just have the dinner. There is days there I wouldn't eat at all. There was actually days there, there was one week there I didn't eat for four days. I gave it to the kids instead and I gave it to him because he is at work and the kids need it for school. I didn't eat, and I just told the kids I wasn't hungry but I was but I just gave it to them instead. I would rather give to them, I would rather for them to eat, they need it for school and he works, I do without it. I'm used to that. It doesn't bother me now. There is more days like that than you think 'I could go, this week now tomorrow I won't eat anything'. Whatever is there I will let the kids and Jack have it. I won't eat anything now until he gets paid on Friday so it doesn't bother me, I'm just used to it at this stage. It's not a nice way to live but you are not given much choice” (INT.HU.007, female)

Many interviewees stated that the downturn resulted in a direct change in shopping patterns and food consumption. Larry, a rural respondent described:

"We lived on eggs. I remember the Aldi chips were great, for 2.5 kilo you can get €1.49 and we lived on chips and eggs or scrambled eggs or what way you can do eggs. Now I have spaghetti up there, they do spaghetti for 45 cent and a tin of that goes on chips, still shite [sic] food from what I was on when you're training. So things went really bad in the last few years...and then you've no money to buy food to eat. Now I love Corn Flakes and stuff and I had them there now, I get them in Aldi but I went to porridge, porridge is €1.40 and I get a lot of breakfast out of it and some days I'd have a bowl of porridge in the morning and then you'd come home and what are you having at night,

these fucking make shift beans and chips. So your quality of life at the moment is bad but it's bad all round with everybody" INT.HR.002, male)

Despite the obvious hardships described by Larry and many other interviewees, there are recurring instances of interviewees responding to these challenges, learning to manage their food with less income. However, respondents are also critically aware of the substandard quality of their daily food intake. Rural interviewee Maria stated that:

[I]t's actually really expensive to eat healthily. I know that sounds stupid...I mean I could do a shop for €20 that would last us, and would do everybody but it's full of sugar and full of everything for the same shop to do it freshly you would be talking about €200. You can't buy healthy food what you should be buying if you know where I'm coming from. You need to buy healthy but they don't make it easy for you because it's dear and you don't have the money to meet it so you have to buy whatever you can afford which is the non-healthy stuff. That has an impact on their health as well so you are kind of going around in a vicious circle" (INT.HR.012, female).

Notwithstanding the insidious effects described above, interviewees often spoke about the 'opportunities' offered by the financial crisis to alter diet and lifestyle. Some respondents had noticed the indirect benefits of the economic down-turn. Rachel speaks of the hardships involved with a household comprising of one working parent, which takes its toll on their social life. She explains that she and her husband have no social life whatsoever due simply to the cost. However, Rachel later reveals that she has returned to Slimming World:

"Slimming World on a Monday night! Now I didn't go back to that since Felix was born so I'm going to go back to that now, it's great to meet up with the girls and friends.....[it is] so busy running round all day trying to clean and do houses" (INT.HR.001, female)

In addition to some of those taking up exercise as a direct response to the crisis, there is a recurring pattern across many interviews indicating a decrease in take-away meals and restaurants in favour of what participants see as healthy, nourishing home cooking:

"No it's great, we go to fruit and veg shop there to get our fresh veg, we don't do it in Aldi anymore. The woman gives us everything there for €15 a week so it's grand. And we love cooking, we don't get a lot of take aways now. We cook on the range as you see there, stews and that." (HR.001)

Respondents were asked if they changed their shopping habits or if they shop differently now in the wake of the crisis:

“Oh the last eight to nine years God definitely. I would never have shopped anywhere only Tesco's and I mean I wouldn't say I wouldn't look at the prices of things before things started to go bad...I wouldn't have worried if my shopping cost me €250. I can do my full weeks shopping now for six of us, actually seven if you include Sam's girlfriend...she's here all the time for €130...that's from cutting down...I cut it down to the bare...but it's just I changed how I shopped and I changed what I buy. Like I don't buy a pile of cereal the way I used to buy, I buy my rice crispies and my cornflakes and my Weetabix and they can like it or lump it. It's little things like that” (INT.HR.012, female).

It is a common pattern, echoed across the majority of interviews. Melissa, an urban respondent describes how his family have adapted their shopping habits:

“I use Aldi, I used to go to Dunnes and Tesco but I think Aldi is cheaper so I go to Aldi, I go for the cheaper. Yeah well when I go to Dunnes [Store] I go to the reduced section and buy all the cheap food because I can't, I don't do a big weekly shop because I can't afford it, I work on a day to day basis. I can't. I used to be able to go in and do a big trolley shop but you can't anymore. You can't plan because you don't have the money to plan and you don't have the food to plan. Today is grand, we have money, we had just enough to get by. Tomorrow and Wednesday the presses will be bare. Whatever is there you have to work with which is very little” (INT.HU.007, female).

The eclectic nature of grocery shopping is a common thread across most of the interviews. While prior to the financial crisis almost all respondents conducted their weekly food shopping in a single large-scale store, the years from 2008 onwards has seen the weekly shop transform into a time-consuming and laborious task, involving much planning and shopping in up to three or four separate stores in order to stretch food budgets further. James' list of the multiple stores involved in his family's weekly shop illustrates the time and labour involved in order to stretch household incomes:

“Well I go to Buckley's, I go to Dunnes, sometimes there's Aldi up there does the nappies, so you get the Pampers, sometimes they do them, also go to Tesco, that's pretty much it.”

Interviewer: Yeah, and would you shop around food-wise as well?

“Yeah. I just always do the same shopping and then just do the washing powder as well, I shopped around for that. The best price for the washing powder is in Buckley's. Best price for the food and the nappies is in Dunnes. So, kind of know all my way around things as well like” (INT.HU.011, male).

The effects of the current economic crisis reach well beyond the fiscal domain and fundamentally impact upon the health and well-being of individuals and their families. Lower incomes, poverty and the effects of austerity are key contributions to the decline in health and

mental well-being among research participants. It is evident from the data that the body and mind absorb a substantial quantity of the stress and anxiety directly caused by the financial crisis. However, it is equally evident that the mind and body are also resources for coping with and responding to the challenges brought on by the crisis since 2008. Decreasing quantities and standard of food and subsistence is widely evident across the data sets. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that there are more than tentative links between declining standards and quantity of food and levels of physical and mental well-being.

### **3. THE HOME**

The economic boom years, dubbed the Celtic Tiger, represented a unique period of Irish social and economic history. Ostensibly, Ireland had shed its previous ‘poor cousin of the EU’ status and transformed its economy into a widely-lauded success story, not only for the EU and but also for unbridled neo-liberal capitalism (Ó Riain 2014). A key under girder of this remarkable economic growth was the housing and property market. Although property was also a distinct feature in other economies experiencing fast-paced growth in the EU, Middle-East and the United States, Ireland’s housing and property bubble was unique in its dramatic and seemingly unstoppable rise. House prices had begun rising steeply in 1994, driven initially by rising incomes and demographic change, but also by an abundance of cheap credit from lending institutions (Ó Riain 2014, p. 85). Between 1996 and 2006, average house prices increased by 292% compared to a total rise of just 30% in the consumer price index. To put it into context, house completions went from 19,000 in 1990 to 50,000 in 2000 to 93,000 in 2006. While the abundance of cheap credit undoubtedly played a fundamental role in fuelling the housing and construction boom, Ireland’s previously under-developed housing and property sectors ensured that the growth in housing and construction was unprecedented. The construction of housing became an integral component in Ireland’s seemingly miraculous economy, specifically through employment and the vast revenue generated for government coffers through VAT, Stamp Duty, among others.

While the urban centres along the well-developed eastern half of Ireland appeared to be the greatest beneficiaries of the housing boom, house prices generally witnessed unprecedented growth across Ireland. In Dublin, property prices were spiralling at a rate that pushed average house prices in the capital well beyond the financial reach of many working families. Consequently, many urban workers, families or those previously renting or living with family in the capital looked to provincial towns and rural areas that were located within what is

described as the ‘commuter belt’. Dublin’s neighbouring counties, including Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Louth experienced an influx of ‘new residents’ flocking to the ‘more affordable’ housing developments under construction in these regions. The RESCuE study area, incorporating a large provincial town (MUrb) and its rural hinterland (RUrb) experienced seismic shifts in its housing stock and prices during the boom period.

### **3.1 MORTGAGE, RENT AND WELLBEING**

By early 2007, there were clear indications that Ireland’s housing and construction boom had peaked and that new housing units were indeed beginning to fall in quantity and value. Ireland’s economic over-reliance on housing construction meant that the end of the housing boom impacted its economy more adversely than other EU countries. House prices fell by 31.2 per cent between 2006 and 2009 and housing output contracted by 65.2 per cent concurrently. Although 2013 witnessed something of a recovery in the housing market, the dramatic fall in housing construction is clearly evident in the latest CSO figures on the RESCuE study area. At the height of the boom in 2005, some 7,100 houses were granted planning permission, contrasting sharply with the 2014 figures showing planning permission awarded to just 20 houses (CSO 2014).

The post-Celtic Tiger period witnessed mass government austerity, a state bail-out of the banks, an EU-IMF bail-out program, vast levels of unemployment and a completely flat housing market. Increasing unemployment, coupled with declining incomes due to pay cuts, tax increases and interest rate increases have produced a marked rise in mortgage arrears. 3.3 per cent of mortgages were in arrears of over ninety days in September 2009, this increased 4.1 per cent in March 2010 and to 5.1 per cent in September 2010 (Central Bank, 2010). The housing and construction boom of the Celtic Tiger period bequeathed some painful and insidious legacies, including high mortgage arrears, increasing rents, home repossessions, as well as the ‘ghost estates’: hundreds of unfinished housing developments which blighted particularly the rural Irish landscape, one of which is in the RESCuE study area. The Midlands region has suffered greatly in the financial downturn and is widely cited as the region which suffered the most in terms of the dramatic fall in house values. That said, the RESCuE study area weathered the property crash comparatively well, primarily owing to its relatively commutable distance to Dublin. In mid-2015 the price of an average three bedroom semi-detached house in the area has risen by 2.04% to €125,000. The average semi-detached house nationally now costs €186,968, however, the price of an average three-bed semi in Dublin city is €362,500.

By mid-2011, Irish house prices were almost 43 per cent below their peak levels of early 2007. The significant decline in residential house prices since 2008 has meant that a number of households found themselves owing more on their mortgage than their properties are currently valued, typically termed ‘negative equity’. At end-June 2012, there were 761,533 private residential mortgage accounts for principal dwellings held in the Republic of Ireland, to a value of €12 billion. Of this total stock of accounts, 83,251, or 10.9 per cent, were in arrears of more than 90 days. This compares with 77,630 accounts (10.2 per cent of total) that were in arrears of more than 90 days at end-March 2012 (Central Bank 2012).

The number of mortgage accounts nationally that were in arrears of more than 180 days was 65,698 at end-June 2012, equivalent to 8.6 per cent of the total stock. At the end of March, the number of accounts in arrears of more than 180 days was 59,437, or 7.8 per cent of the total stock. Notwithstanding the fact that MUrb appears to have fared relatively better than those towns and cities located elsewhere in the Irish midlands, negative equity, mortgage arrears and mortgage restructuring programs with banks are common themes across many interviews. While homelessness or the threat of homelessness appears relatively infrequently in the RESCuE interviews, the pressure to maintain high mortgage repayments on incomes based on social welfare benefits or decreased wages exerts a significant amount of pressure on many respondents. Repossessions and the threat of repossession of family homes are prevalent themes. In 2008, Nancy’s home was repossessed: “...it was hard because I was after putting so much into it. At the end of the day you have to, you can't afford it like. The banks were trying to say we'll help you ... But they were putting an awful lot of pressure” (INT.HU.001, female). Nancy and her children are now living in social housing.

Seamus and his young family returned to Ireland from the UK in the mid-1990s and purchased a site to build a new family home. They re-mortgaged the house under construction a number of times, trying to minimize the overall amount without extending the duration, with the result that their repayments were comparatively high. Unfortunately Seamus’ business collapsed in the recession leaving him unable to make his mortgage repayments. Following a difficult battle with the bank he was able to re-structure his loan. John and his wife Fiona had been able to negotiate an agreement with their bank that enabled them to cope with the mortgage on their house after their business collapsed.

Despite their low household income, Jack and his wife Melissa were able to secure a mortgage in 2008 because they had a house to sell, one which had been inherited by Melissa. They moved to a larger home, but almost immediately found that the size of the repayments was ‘killing’ them, especially once additional charges (for property and water) were introduced by the government, leading to severe hardship for themselves and their children. The house needs renovation and they can’t afford to do it up: “...to me it’s just bricks. It’s not even a house because I can’t do anything in it. I don’t have the money to do anything in it. You couldn’t bring anyone into it” (INT.HU.007, female).

As described in Section 2, many respondents have suffered and endured ill-health caused by the stress of mortgage repayments or rent payments to landlords. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of banks were bailed out by the citizens of Ireland, many interviewees were struck by the overt belligerence and ruthlessness of banks and lending institutions in pursuit of monthly repayments and mortgage arrears.

The majority of respondents are homeowners and have had to cut back on essentials such as heating, electricity and food in order to meet mortgage repayments. A similar pattern is evident among those who are tenants. In some instances, interviewees have had to rely on the financial support of relatives, typically parents, in order to keep up mortgage repayments, household bills and rent. Unsurprisingly, those respondents who started a family and/or purchased a house during the latter years of Ireland’s economic boom are those who are now enduring much of the hardship related to housing. With higher levels of mortgage debt when compared to their parents’ generation, many of these respondents have sought or received assistance, typically monetary, from their parents in order to repay mortgages or make rent payment.

Sheila lives in rented accommodation with her mother and siblings. Like many of those respondents who rent, she described a dwelling that is sub-standard and not fit for the purpose of a family. It was her father who intervened to help out in a way that would yield a meaningful and long-term fiscal benefit. Her father installed a stove which would produce hot water in a shorter time when compared to electricity and moreover, would save significantly on electricity and heating bills:

“And my father said ‘I’m not going to leave you without a stove. I’ll get yez timber, I’ll put in the stove.’ He put in the stove, my mother bought it and she was like...she had



to email our landlord, cos he was in Australia, and he was like ‘I’m not coming home, do what you want like’. So Daddy put in the stove and Mammy was like ‘Oh my God, do you know what it’s actually great like.’ So it saves electricity like, our immersion takes forever to heat because we have a solar tank, is that what you call it? If you turn on the immersion, the whole tank has to heat before you can have an actual bath, so it takes about four or five hours. And then you’re looking at the electricity like “Oh my God, that takes some amount of electricity”, and we have electric showers, and with all of us in the house it’s like nothing’s ever off. It’s like electricity, electricity, electricity” (INT.HR.010, female).

Other research participants also described some innovative ways in which to heat their homes and cut down on household bills. Melissa stated that one of their primary sources of fuel is truck pallets that Jack sources from one of the local major stores in the town:

“Pallets. He gets pallets out of [Department store1]. That’s basically, that’s not telling you a lie and break them up because I don’t like to buy, if I buy fuel this week I have to compromise on food or a bill and I don’t do that. I always make sure the bills are done first. Then whatever is left goes on food or whatever the kids need but that’s, it there is no luxuries, there is no outings, there is no nothing which I would like to do. I never go out, I never can go out because I don’t have the money to go out. I’m always stuck in” (INT.HU.007, female).

Cutting turf from the local bogs is a significant theme running across many interviews, particularly amongst the rural respondents. Turf is dried out peat and historically it was a primary source of fuel and heat for Irish families for centuries. Cutting turf from the bog and stacking it to dry is a particularly labour intensive task and unsurprisingly, most turf today is cut using machinery, although stacking and drying continues to be carried out by hand. While many of the respondents’ homes are modern dwellings with gas or oil burning heating systems, many have turned back to the ‘traditional’ fuel of turf as a means of reducing their household bills. Some interviewees cut turf manually from a local bog in small quantities, enough to produce fuel for a couple of weeks. In addition to the turf cutting, others describe further ways of obtaining fuel:

“He [interviewees father] gets timber and yeah, cuts timber and we get most of it [laughter], so it’s not too bad.”

*Interviewer:* Great, so he’d give it to family members?

“Yeah, or like if he knew somebody that was looking for it like. My father knows everyone. You can’t go anywhere but he’s like: ‘Oh, well how are you?’ stands for about

an hour talking. But like people he knows, if they ask us where to get like fire and stuff, he'd be like 'I'll drop you up some' and..."

*Interviewer:* Would he get money for it?

"Yeah, sometimes like, yeah. Not all the time but sometimes."

*Interviewer:* And it's probably the same with the turf is it? Gives it to family members and friends...

"Yeah" (INT.HR.011, female)

It is interesting to note the sense of communal solidarity and informal networks among friends, extended family and neighbours as a means of tackling the financial challenges. Despite the hardship involved in rents, mortgage repayments, and arrears, many respondents are happy with their home and its location. In particular, some interviewees expressed their contentedness in the outdoor space of gardens, the streets where they live, the places in close proximity to their homes, among other features of where they live. This was particularly evident amongst those who moved from urban areas such as Dublin to the case study area. Many articulated a strong belief in the solace offered by relatively bigger houses and larger gardens as a coping mechanism during the financial crisis. One of our youngest respondents, Lorraine outlines her happiness in having a home with a garden as a means of coping with stress within her family:

"I play my guitar in my spare time. I kind of play my guitar at home, and then I'm on the laptop all the time, always on the laptop. And where we moved now, before we didn't have a back garden, and we moved now so we have a big back garden, so I like to go out and kick the football around. We moved because we hadn't got a lot of ground, and we have a lot of animals like, and we want to get more and stuff. So we needed the ground like. So everyone's much happier where we are now. We have chickens and ducks, and two dogs, and there's loads of other little chicken yokes" (INT.HR.009, female)

The financial crisis and resulting recession and government austerity has forced families to look elsewhere for cheap sources of food. While, as we have seen, one response is to turn to cheap, low- quality, sub-standard food as explored in Section 2.2, another response sees many turning to growing their own fruit and vegetables, as well as to keeping hens and chickens in the back garden. The years of the financial crisis witnessed an immense interest and demand for chickens and hens, and this is quite prevalent among many respondents (Gallagher, 2011). Larry found that the use of hens and chickens provided a primary dietary staple during this period, saying, "the hens used to give us eggs, I got one a day. We lived on eggs." In addition, many others, like Andrew, were utilising their garden space a food resource:

"Yes, we put in raised beds about three years ago. A mixture [of herbs and vegetables] now, she [interviewee's wife] has got some winter garlic is it? And winter broccoli is it?"

Or cabbage, winter cabbage, she has put a few things in there last September/October, I don't know when it's going to be ready, but I'm leaving that to her. So we have chives and parsley, she has one section there, she has a few herbs and that, but last year we did beetroot, carrots didn't do very well. Cabbage did quite well, but the slugs loved it. The year before we did quite a lot of potatoes...small enough, we have only a section of the garden. And to me it's too bulky a vegetable, I think it takes up...to get any sort of...we use to take onions and scallions out of it for so long. And whereas potatoes one drill of them, and probably get by lucky if you got 40/20/30 kgs out of it, which wouldn't last terribly long. So I think it takes up too much room for a small amount. But so that's...variety of stuff" (INT.HU.008, male).

One of the more positive outcomes of the crisis has been the widespread turn towards gardening and vegetable growing, albeit by necessity as opposed to choice. The shift by many respondents away from mass-produced supermarket vegetables towards growing their own food is indicative of the financial strains and pressures on households. However, all of those research participants involved in growing their own food expressed a genuine sense of delight and satisfaction in doing so. In addition to the cost benefits of gardening, many also described the benefits of simply spending time outdoors, or the satisfaction of growing and nurturing a plant from seed to finish.

Others also saw opportunities to use their homes as a source of generating income. Some respondents described how they would mind friends or neighbours children in their own home. Some would take neighbours' children after school while waiting for the children's parents to return from work. Others would take children as young as one or two years old for a couple of hours each day in order to allow the parent to engage in part-time or precarious paid employment. Universally all of this childcare was done on an informal, often ad-hoc basis, yet it did, nevertheless, provide a source of financial income. In other instances, rooms in the home were 'converted' to places of informal paid employment. Shelia described how in the face of the cuts to her pay, she decided to do some hairdressing in her home as an additional source of income. She says "I do hairdressing at home... it's only in the evenings, and some of them [clients] work and they're like "I don't have time to get it done in the morning", or whatever, and I don't have time to do it because I'm in here, so I just do it in the evenings and then on a Sunday" (INT.HR.010, female)

Housing construction and the home were initially an integral factor in Ireland's phenomenal economic growth between 1996 and 2008. They were, however, an equally salient factor in the cataclysmic demise of that economy in the years after. The legacy of that housing construction boom is one in which many families are struggling to meet the payment demands of

mortgages and spiralling rents. From our interview data it is abundantly clear that the cost of owning and maintaining a home is a significant burden and source of anxiety, particularly for those who bought or re-mortgaged their homes during the peak of the property boom, from 2004 to 2008. Notwithstanding, the interview data also points towards the innovative ways in which citizens can and do respond to the challenges posed by the financial crisis by using the home as a source of income or by generating alternative and cheaper forms of fuel and heat.

## **4. NEIGHBOURHOOD**

To frame the exploration of socio-spatial dynamics of crisis, poverty and resilience we distinguish between the types of ‘communities’ that exist, the homogeneity of these neighbourhoods and the changes brought about from broader economic shifts. The constraining characteristics vary between urban and rural areas but similarities emerge in the everyday experiences of movement, attachment and change.

### **4.1 SPATIAL CONSTRAINTS**

Spatial constraints have a great influence on individuals’ movement and engagement in wider society. Jessop et al.’s (2008) *principle of sociospatial structuration* highlights the importance of people’s ‘proximity’ to various social, economic, political or cultural opportunities. The ‘areal differentiation’ in where these opportunities are ‘spatially embedded’ constrains or enables households in the process of developing resilient strategies.

Respondents in both rural and urban areas spoke of transport as the key dimension constraining or enabling their social and economic activities. James a young father of one, who lives in MUrb cycles one and a half hours to his FÁS course daily, otherwise he has to rely on extended family for transport.

“I cycle...there's no bus from [Midland town] coming here...I get my mother to come in, or I get my cousin to bring me...There’s not many jobs going round in the Mullingar area. You really need to get transport to get a job” (INT.HU.011, male).

The consequence of poor transport systems in both rural and urban areas is a constraining feature of modern Ireland. The need for a private mode of transport (i.e. owning a car) is crucial to employment opportunities. The current situation, that is the lack of, or infrequent nature of the public transport system, means that people have to rely on others for travel or purchase a car.

Sheila explains that the small town in RUrb where she lives is isolated in terms of its proximity to urban areas, and because of this their choice in which college to attend is limited.

“I don't know if I'd like to go to [Mid-west town], or maybe [North-east town]... whereas [Mid- west town] is closer to me... I was saying to my sister, if you don't get a course in [North-east town], you can get a course in [Mid-west town] and I'll go down to you all the time [sister has car, travel to college with her]” (INT.HR.010, female).

This is not exclusively a ‘rural problem;’ but urbanites require their own mode of transport to go about their daily lives i.e. leaving children to school or crèche, travel to and from work. The geographical and spatial layout of towns and villages constrains people’s mobility. This issue also limits people’s opportunities to socialise and some turn to social media as a site for interaction. Nancy, single mother from the urban area explains that Facebook is a space where she can procure local news and a mechanism through which she can keep up-to-date with a wide variety of people, ranging from close friends to acquaintances.

“I’m a fucker for Facebook. That’s my social life, that's the only gossip I get. I go on Facebook” (INT.HU.001, female).

The cost of purchasing a car in order to circumvent this problem is a huge factor, particularly in times of financial crises. Respondents from both rural and urban areas stated that purchasing a car is a priority but it will take some time to save, or alternatively, others project that they will borrow to do so.

You need the car for appointments and if they get sick then or anything during the night which the majority of the time I would end up sometimes in the hospital you need it. To fork out money for taxis is not feasible either. Even with the kids now when Jack is working, he would drop the three oldest ones to secondary school but if he can't I have to walk from my house out to the school in the cold. Like there two years ago the real hard snow I had to walk out in that snow most mornings to bring my little one out, go back out, walk back in, go back out at 1pm in the snow and collect her and walk her home because I couldn't get a taxi and he was working and that was the means of transport I do have. I still have to do that to this day. I still have to walk out. If there is days there that's wet and windy, the real bad weather there I had to walk out and collect her and she got soaked. I had to walk in and walk out and it's a good, it's nearly a good hour walk. (INT.HU.007, female)

Transport, in particular owning a car, enables the compression of space and time and provides people with greater access to opportunities within the neighbourhood; it not only enhances their ability to obtain employment (ease of travel to and from work) but also to socialise and create wider networks and relations with the outside world.

## **4.2 ATTACHMENT TO LOCAL AREA AND COMMUNITY**

Many respondents in both rural and urban areas expressed a strong sense of community solidarity but, for some, these were drawn along class and ethnic lines. Multiculturalism is much more evident in urban areas than in rural communities. Attitudes of intolerance or negative perceptions arise around issues such as entitlements, economic and social issues. In their formation of attachment to the local area they distinguished between who did and did not belong.

I'm not being not nice or anything, but if I was an unmarried mother, Rose would have a medical card, she would have had her fees all paid, I'd have free or fuel allowance, whatever they get. They will not help say myself and Nate. Once you're earning a certain figure or a certain amount, you're pinned to the wall. You pay absolutely everything. Absolutely everything" (INT.HU.003, female)

Significantly, these ideas of in-group versus out-group stemmed from participants' interaction with public institutions in the local area and their perception of how certain groups (i.e. 'foreigners') had, as they believed it to be, preferential treatment. Nancy a single mother of three children, from MUrb provides an example of this –

"I know another girl [a foreign women living in the area] who went over and said she needed a load of stuff for her kids, she didn't even need it at all and your one just handed her over a cheque. Where I go over genuinely look for stuff...your one laughed at me and said sure you're working you should have been saving your money and they wouldn't give me a penny" (INT.HU.001, female).

This has led to the creation of prejudiced perceptions of ethnic minorities in the community. In turn, this has had a knock-on effect in that it strengthens homogenous networks within the community which exclude certain people.

Some respondents spoke about the lack of 'community' in the urban area. The change in occupational structures (i.e. women in paid labour), the diversity and growth of the population and the expanding boundaries of the area contributed to a shift away from 'traditional' perceptions of community and support networks.

"But the heart of the town is gone. The day of neighbours and that kind of thing, that's all gone, you'd never see...now even up here, this would be a very old part of the

town, and you'd never see anybody running in and out of other people's houses"  
(INT.HU. 002, female)

Although Nora identified a shift away from traditional relationships above, she noted that community groups and activities are available and these play a vital role for the area and "are great for the community". In the rural areas respondents spoke about their strong connection to the area, regardless of whether they were from the area originally. They exhibited a deep connection with place and people. Rachel, a mother of three explains this new sense of belonging and attachment -

"I felt so welcome when we moved out... The girls on the street, they have a little residence area, we have a big involvement in that as well. We do the lotto every week, it's so good out here, if anything goes wrong you just call her, it's a Garda elect in case anything happens. We were welcomed with brown bread and apple tarts and it was lovely, completely different to [MUrb], I had great neighbours and friends in [MUrb] but it's completely different" (INT.HR.001, female).

#### **4.3 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE**

There is evidence of some forms of social polarisation within neighbourhoods both in rural and urban areas. Respondents spoke about certain areas as 'no-go places' or pointed to certain elements within areas contributing to the breakdown of local communities. Sheila, an eighteen year old female spoke about avoiding the nearby village as she is subjected to abuse when out walking.

"There's a real kind of different divide between...they're the people that sit and talk about others, and cause arguments...went walking down the village, they'd be like "Oh, look at her", and they'd probably make up a rumour like and just say "Oh yeah, she done this, she done that", so. That's how they are yeah" (INT.HR.010, female).

The Traveller community faces many hardships, least of all social exclusion. One member of this community spoke about the rising unrest amongst Travellers themselves which serves to further increase the disconnect between Travellers and settled people.

"There is a bit of trouble going on up here between travelling families. Really and truly it does affect everybody. Terrible atmosphere in the place...maybe 30-40 people ran at each other out on the green with weapons. They were throwing hatchets, shovels, they were throwing everything, rocks were coming flying in to my window and I was saying if they come in my windows I can't afford to go put in new windows. Do you know what I mean and if my windows accidentally were put in people might think I was involved in what was happening even though I have nothing got to do with it" (INT.HU.005, female).

Aisling doesn't want to be associated with the violence and condemns these actions as it damages public perception of the Traveller community, particularly within the town. The rise of violence amongst Travellers, Aisling argues, is linked to the financial crisis and the social and economic changes that it brought about.

"I'd say it [recession] probably did. Because a lot of them has took to drug dealing. And I don't know, maybe I'm wrong but I feel it's part of a drugs war... kids robbing, maybe to feed their habits or I don't know, maybe it's just for money" (INT.HU.005, female).

There was also a sense of increasing social polarisation between the rich and the poor which had begun before the financial crisis. It has become much more evident since the crisis with unemployed and ethnic minorities being linked to "rough areas" (Deirdre,INT.HU. 004). Individuals and residents in the community distinguish between certain areas, which leads to the spatial division of communities. The labelling of certain areas, or inhabitants within certain areas, has increased social polarization, as Nora explains-

"...Down the end of the town. Now that would be a very...an area that would be an awful lot of unemployment in. And there would be an awful lot of itinerants [Travellers] in it as well" (INT.HU.002, female).

Respondents spoke about the social change in their communities. Urban and rural inhabitants mentioned the increase of crime and violent behaviour and how this is fast becoming a feature of some locales. The social and economic changes within areas have resulted in a breakdown of local communities. With social bonds having been altered or eroded some people wanted to leave their communities. Deirdre explains

"...There was a burglary and a stabbing of...do you know the Mormons that come around the doors...the lead up to it there was a lot going on, it was getting a bit rough and Mam and Dad wanted out" (INT.HU.004, female).

Local communities have faced many economic changes, particularly since the financial crisis. There has been a rise of unemployment and respondents feel quite pessimistic for their future prospects. Melissa, a mother of four from the Murb area, puts it quite simply:

"Realistically I would like just to get out of MURb altogether because there's no future here for the kids at all" (INT.HU.007, female).

Emigration has brought about significant changes to the social makeup of rural and urban areas. The large volume of people moving to larger cities and countries, especially younger men and women, has left its mark.



“People say "Oh, they should be out working, they should be out working", but there's no jobs, so how can someone go out and work? So there's a good few people like [who have emigrated]. As soon as everyone heard: Oh! Australia, loads of money, go over there and work, everyone's gone like” (INT.HR.010, female).

Detachment is a key dimension for understanding the breakdown of local communities. Respondents linked this sense of detachment with an influx of ‘outsiders’ or non-Irish nationals. The increase of immigration to these areas has led to diversity where once only traditional homogenous communities existed.

Rachel, a mother of two, from the MRur area spoke about the sense of unfamiliarity within the community.

“I can’t work in MUrb anymore, I don’t know anybody in there. I would be afraid to walk up the main street on my own anymore because I feel like I’m in a foreign country” (INT.HR.001, female).

We can conclude that, although there are spatial constraints and a growing sense of social polarisation in urban and rural areas, households demonstrate an ability to negotiate resilient strategies to overcome these challenges.

## **5. SUPRA LOCAL SCALE**

One key dimension of globalisation is the patterns of immigration and emigration in any given locale. Ireland experienced rapid growth in immigration at the turn of the century, perpetuated by the Celtic Tiger. Although this trend has continued, at a much reduced rate, since the financial crisis Ireland has experienced mass emigration. These global links, albeit through immigration or emigration, restructures our understanding of place and boundaries. The forging of global connections develops a ‘progressive sense of place’ (Massey 1994:257). The residual effect that these processes have on a locale sheds light on the socio-spatial dynamics of resilience. Research shows that patterns of immigration vary strongly between rural and urban areas, with urban areas much more popular among immigrants (CSO 2006:11).

However, both rural and urban areas experienced a great deal of in-migration from other parts of Ireland, driven by unemployment (rural-to-urban movement) or by the need for a change from city life or in pursuit of lower property prices (urban-to-rural movement).

Enid, a mother of one moved from her home country in the Baltic to a Scandinavian country and then eventually came to Ireland in 2005. Like the other immigrant respondents, she chose

Ireland as it offered more opportunities. Moreover, she could rely on her social capital (friends from home already residing in Ireland) to provide her with information and assistance.

“I think this country is more safe...My brother lives very near me...and my ex-husband lives near me as well...I know a lot of [immigrants]” (INT.HU.009, female).

The multi-ethnic character of certain towns was an attractive feature for some migrants. Enid spoke about fellow immigrants residing in MUrb and how this helped her ‘feel at home’. These networks provide a sense of security (i.e. knowing there are others who have gone through the same adaptation process) on the one hand, and on the other hand, offer multiple resources and support mechanisms. These global networks enrich the local area and increase interconnectivity.

There was evidence of international immigrants residing in rural areas also. Rosie and her husband, both from Central Europe, moved to Ireland for personal and economic reasons. As European citizens, they faced no restriction upon entering Ireland, thus they did not have any interaction with the immigration authorities. Evidence from their interview suggests that the couple had tacit knowledge, ascertained through social networks (i.e. a friend’s brother lived in Ireland), of Ireland and the opportunities available. Rosie’s husband was an entrepreneur who owned a number of businesses in his home country. He moved first to a Mediterranean state and opened a business for a short time before finally moving to Ireland. His skillset, in addition to their economic capital, afforded him the opportunity to rent a house immediately and study to become a taxi driver. He experienced some difficulty with the bureaucratic process of dealing with An Garda Síochana [Irish police force] regarding paperwork for his SPSV licence.

“It was really difficult for me because after I get exam I was applying for my PSV licence, SPSV licence and I was going at the local Garda station living in [Dublin area 1] I was dropping the docs at the [Dublin area 2] Garda station and the guy from the guards, a really nice guy...you know I don't really have any problem with that one...he was telling me after two and a half, three weeks; 'look my friend I was sent them out...I sent all the paperwork...All the paperwork to the Kevin Street Garda Station, which is the main Garda station for the area and all you need is just the signature of the superintendent on that you are right, with my docs in the month I was applying because I'm a wise man and I know the paperwork and all the things you know...they can find any reason to reject your docs or to do something. I was applying with one of the...I was bringing from my country the criminal record like and I have translated and I put it with the docs... They don't ask for that but I was putting it in to make them understand I'm not a criminal. All I need is just to do my job to have a life, to work and to live like any other normal, regular citizen in this country because anyone in Ireland can say we are Europeans I can say; 'I'm European too' so in this case we share the same rights. It took them three months...three months” (INT.HR. 011, male).

The impact of this goes much further as it affected Rosie's husband's (ability to support his family financially).

“I tried to make that lady to understand I'm the only one in my family who can have a job and I don't have a proper job...I just want to make that lady understand my situation and she didn't care” (INT.HR. 011, male).

Immigrants' experiences, in particular, demonstrate the supra local scale of movement. The ease at which individuals and families can relocate within Ireland is an important dimension. For example, Rosie and her family were able to move from Central Europe to a Mediterranean state to Ireland, and within Ireland moved from Co. Dublin to the midlands with relative ease. Personal reasons motivated this move from an urban to a rural area. Again, social capital and the ease of movement was a feature in this relocation.

“We have a friend who lives in [MUrb] and we visited him for a few times and we decided this is a great area. This is great. This is where we should raise our daughter because we feel good here. Then we found a house in [MUrb] and we moved the same evening that we found a house” (INT.HR. 011, female)

Local migration is a feature of Irish society. Family separation is an aspect driving local migration. Respondents spoke about moving between counties in Ireland when their parents separated. James from MUrb spoke of living in multiple counties during his teenage years.

“They split, yeah, they split when I was eleven. My ma moved up to Dublin first with us, and my father came down and collected us, they got back together then for a while. Too much argument going on, so they split again. Me ma moved up to [a midlands county] and moved into a cousin's house, moved out for a while and then we got a flat together, and then we got a house” (INT.HU.011, male).

The geographic proximity of major cities to other urban areas in Ireland facilitates a unique 'commuter life'. One key feature is the integrated labour market of Dublin, that is, how commuter belts enable individuals to live in one county and work in another. Bernard from MUrb commuted to Dublin daily and spoke of the employment opportunities available in the city; thus commuting the hour long drive to Dublin is necessary.

“I'd never experienced the life in Dublin, working in Dublin and when I moved, I didn't move to Dublin I lived in MUrb, I worked in Dublin...Just to get the money” (INT.HU.010, male).

The close proximity of the midlands to Northern Ireland and the east coast of Ireland, facilitated by the infrastructure (M1 motorway) that connects both countries is also an important feature.

Respondents spoke about travelling 'North' for employment and shopping. Again, this level of connectivity and the links and scale that people go to demonstrates the dynamic resilient strategies adopted by some.

“From MURb to Newry, it was 80 miles every day up and back so I was travelling 160 miles every day” (INT.HU. 010, male).

These types of activities are commonplace in Ireland, and in essence gives rise to how closely connected specific areas are to the rest of the country. Personal, economic and socio-political reasons are factors driving migration, on different scales, and this establishes local, national and global links.

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