How Do Urban Neighborhoods Influence Educational Achievement?

A Critical Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies From the Nordic Countries

Hanne Eikefet Mikkelsen
Ph.d. candidate, Western Norway University of Applied Studies
hanne.eikefet.mikkelsen@hvl.no

Rita Agdal
Associate Professor, Western Norway University of Applied Studies
rita.agdal@hvl.no

Abstract

The aim of the Nordic welfare states to provide equal opportunities permeates the discourse on access to education, starting with primary education through neighborhood schools. Education is considered a crucial resource for life chances and is closely associated with socioeconomic inequality. We conducted a critical systematic review of qualitative studies from the Nordic countries on the influence of urban neighborhoods on educational achievement. The search generated 7009 records in nine databases. Two reviewers selected the studies following the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA). The 17 peer-reviewed articles that were included were evaluated using EPICURE. Martha Nussbaum's capability approach was applied to discuss the findings and contextualize the perspectives in the included articles. Findings showed three main themes influencing educational achievement: social support from neighborhood agents, the role of attachment and place reputation, and how policies influence everyday life and educational achievement. Many of the included articles describe a complex interplay between schools and neighborhoods. Perspectives on social reproduction and social capital were predominant in the articles; this may have shaped their focus. The capability approach applied in this review considers a broader range of complexity than the included articles. Nussbaum's concretization of justice as a specific list of capabilities may be helpful for decision-makers and practitioners in community work, development and planning processes, and education. We suggest that the capability approach may contribute to neighborhood development to improve educational achievements, but also that this approach needs further operationalization for it to have a positive impact in practical terms.

Keywords
Neighborhood, educational achievement, socioeconomic status, Nussbaum's capability approach, community, school

Introduction

The aim of the Nordic welfare states to provide equal opportunities permeates the discourse on access to education, starting with primary education through neighborhood schools. Education is considered a crucial resource for life chances and is closely associated with socioeconomic inequalities (Arntzen et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there is a persistent gap in educational achievement between children raised in privileged versus disadvantaged neighborhoods (Andersson, 2004; Bergen kommune, 2019; Brattbakk, 2014;

Nordvik & Galster, 2019; NOU 2020:16; Thygesen et al., 2020). Based on registry data, Nordic studies indicate that the sociodemographic and physical contexts of adolescents' residential areas influence their subsequent socioeconomic careers (Andersson, 2004; Nordvik & Galster, 2019). In areas with a high number of inhabitants with low socioeconomic status, only half of the students complete secondary education (Bergen kommune, 2019; NOU 2020:16).

Neighborhoods' influence on educational achievement has been researched and debated, and possible mechanisms have been identified (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Huang et al., 2009; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). One of the reviews of the research on neighborhood effects (Sharkey & Faber, 2014) pointed out that many studies demonstrate that neighborhood effects matter, but not how. A systematic meta-analysis that included the literature from developed countries (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016) found that educational outcomes are linked to four neighborhood characteristics: neighborhood poverty, poor educational climate, the proportion of migrant groups, and social disorganization. However, they find that correlations vary between countries, and point to characteristics, such as different levels of income or ethnic segregation, that complicate comparison.

An empirical overview of the research from the United States underscores the complex relations between space and socioeconomic inequality and proposes a conceptual model of a spatial opportunity structure (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). This is suggested to comprehend how space can be a foundation for socioeconomic inequality in the United States, including differences in educational achievement. The authors emphasize that residential segregation has implications for children's schooling and educational achievement and that it works through many mechanisms; for instance, schools in poor areas can be under-resourced and with disruptive peers, with less support to leverage students' curiosity and intelligence into competence (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). Schools are central institutions in neighborhoods, but distinguishing the effect of the quality of the school from other effects related to the neighborhood is problematic, as there is a demographic overlap (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016). Considering the overlap, several factors tend to co-vary for disadvantaged populations, and these can be seen as part of a complex interplay of factors that influence educational achievement. A meta-study found that students' social capital, generated from their social relationships with parents, teachers, and peers, significantly affected their academic achievement (Huang et al., 2009). Both peers as socializing agents (Wang et al., 2018) and adults have been found to impact educational outcomes (Brattbakk, 2014; Huang et al., 2009).

Some of the factors that are more prevalent in disadvantaged populations and neighborhoods – such as reduced mental health (Brannlund et al., 2017), low birth weight (Dahl et al., 2006), alcohol consumption (Thorlindsson et al., 2007), living in crowded homes and rented accommodation, exposure to high noise levels, and residential mobility (von Simson & Umblijs, 2021) – co-vary with educational achievement. Studies in Norway and Sweden observed that students living in homes owned by parents, more prevalent in these countries than living in rented accommodation, have a higher probability of completing high school (Andersson, 2004; von Simson & Umblijs, 2021). Reduced access to areas of green space in neighborhoods during early childhood is associated with a higher risk of developing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Thygesen et al., 2020). These co-variations may, however, not be causal, and more complex mechanisms have been found in studies of coherence between neighborhood and educational achievement (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Galster, 2012, 2019; Huang et al., 2009; Kuyvenhoven & Boterman, 2021; Leckie, 2009; Sykes & Musterd, 2011).

To change the focus from a limited number of factors affecting educational achievement, Sharkey and Faber recommend exploring complexity and questions of how, where, when, and why neighborhoods influence educational achievement (2014). The complexity of the influence of neighborhood on educational achievement is acknowledged in more recent reviews (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016) and is a starting point for this review. We include qualitative studies that can be explorative and which may include the interplay between neighborhoods, their schools, and other characteristics as part of complex processes and pathways. In line with previous reviews, it is a premise that access to schools and education is part of the spatial opportunity structure (Galster & Sharkey, 2017) and that schools are central institutions in the neighborhoods (Huang et al., 2009; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). We limit the search to Nordic studies because of the similarities between Nordic educational and welfare systems and policies to reduce social inequalities. Following this, we ask: What can research from Nordic countries tell us about urban neighborhoods' influence on educational achievement for youth? Rather than focusing on processes within the educational institutions, we aim to explore the influence of processes in the neighborhood, including the interplay with its central institutions, such as schools, on educational achievement.

Furthermore, we will identify central perspectives in the articles and discuss the findings with reference to Martha Nussbaum's (2011) conceptualization of capabilities. We ask if this may contribute to the operationalization of education as part of the spatial opportunity structure and conditions for justice. Nussbaum's research on capabilities includes education (2011) and has been employed by other researchers in this field (Gluchman, 2018; Robeyns, 2006). By employing the capability perspective, we aim to emphasize access to resources for educational achievement rather than the formal rights to education. We will return to the capability approach (2011) under the section about theoretical perspectives.

Methods and materials

We conducted a critical systematic review. Haddaway et al. refers to this as "systematic review" (2022). In contrast, Malterud referred to this approach as a "qualitative meta-synthesis" (2017). The PRISMA checklist was applied as far as possible; as for qualitative studies, not all the items are relevant.

Search strategy

We planned both an initial scoping search and a systematic search with a university librarian to develop a search string and select relevant databases. The search string was limited to Nordic studies consisting of synonyms of "neighborhood" combined with "education." Since the term "neighborhood effect" generated mainly quantitative results, we added terms such as "community", "living conditions", "socioeconomic," "social reproduction", "social mobility", "segregation", and "peer". We then combined these terms with those related to education, such as "school dropout prevention", "educational achievement" and "academic attainment", and "scholastic success." We conducted the literature search in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Figure 1). We searched the following databases, covering both the educational and social science aspects of the topic:

1. SocINDEX
2. Scopus
3. Web of Science

4. Sociological Abstracts
5. International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
6. Academic Search Elite
7. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global
8. Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
9. Teacher Reference Center

The searches in databases 1–7 were conducted on February 8, 2022, and in databases 8–9 were conducted on February 14, 2022. Manual searches were conducted for publications written in the included Nordic languages because we expected that some articles lacking an English abstract would not appear in the main search. These were performed on March 16, 2022, in Oria, Libris, Royal Danish Library, and Google Scholar. The Google Scholar search was limited to the first 200 results. The librarian performed all the searches. We did not include any articles published after the searches were conducted.

Study selection

The searches generated 8045 texts, which were then imported to the online program Rayyan, where duplicates were removed, resulting in 7009 texts. After the initial screening, we read the titles and abstracts and, using the exclusion and inclusion criteria, unblinded the results in Rayyan to compare the suggested decisions. A discussion between the two authors resolved conflicts involving four papers. We included only primary qualitative studies; 62 papers were examined by reading their titles and abstracts. Further, we read the full text of the articles considering the following exclusion criteria: published before 2000; "neighborhood" without "education" or "school," and vice versa; population age under 10 and over 30 years; non-Nordic countries; rural contexts; nonacademic papers; reviews, student papers, and doctoral theses; quantitative methods; and texts in languages other than English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish. After excluding the doctoral theses, we manually searched for relevant studies by the authors and included three peer-reviewed articles based on the data collection from the doctoral theses. Of the 62 articles, 23 were excluded for being based exclusively on quantitative data, three for being situated in rural contexts, eight for examining only schools or only neighborhoods, eight for not being peer-reviewed, one for being situated outside the Nordic countries, and two for being student assignments. This selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Following the set criteria list, we included 17 articles describing different aspects of how neighborhoods influence educational achievement: six articles from Sweden, six from Denmark, four from Norway, and one from Finland. These were published in peer-reviewed journals in education, urban studies, sociology, and public health and were based on primary studies, with four of them based on and summarizing the author's doctoral thesis (Lindblad, 2018; Ryom, 2017; Schwartz, 2014; Østergaard, 2011).

Systematic search: challenges and weaknesses

We observed that the terminology in this field is inconsistent and thus included several terms associated with "educational achievement" and "neighborhood" in the search strings. Nevertheless, we could not guarantee that all relevant terms were included in the search string. The manual search generated a high number of titles that were unavailable in English, which may indicate that a more extensive manual search might have provided more results.
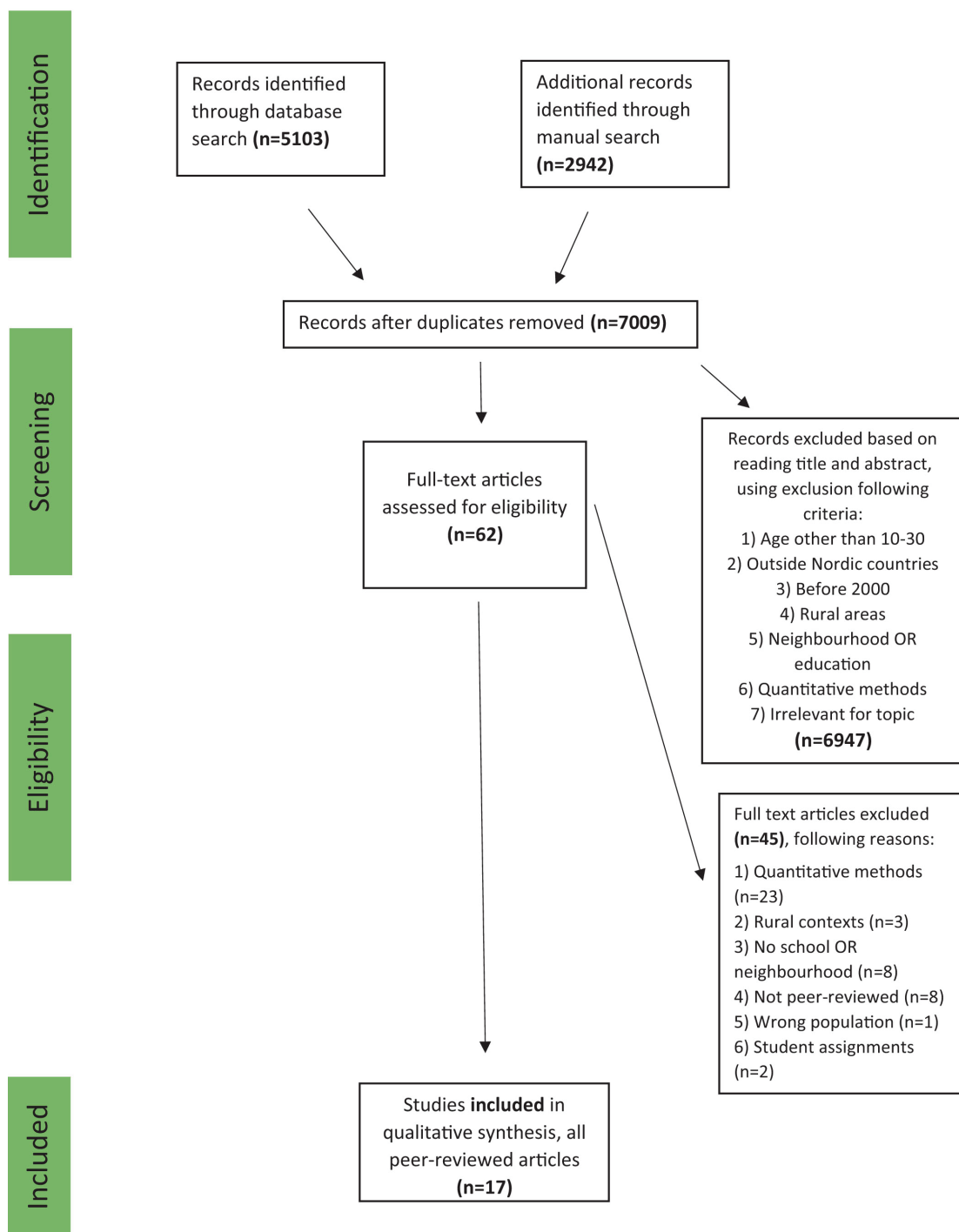
Identification

Records identified through database search **(n=5103)**

Additional records identified through manual search **(n=2942)**

Records after duplicates removed **(n=7009)**

Screening

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility **(n=62)**

Records excluded based on reading title and abstract, using exclusion following criteria:
1) Age other than 10-30
2) Outside Nordic countries
3) Before 2000
4) Rural areas
5) Neighbourhood OR education
6) Quantitative methods
7) Irrelevant for topic **(n=6947)**

Eligibility

Full text articles excluded **(n=45)**, following reasons:
1) Quantitative methods (n=23)
2) Rural contexts (n=3)
3) No school OR neighbourhood (n=8)
4) Not peer-reviewed (n=8)
5) Wrong population (n=1)
6) Student assignments (n=2)

Included

Studies **included** in qualitative synthesis, all peer-reviewed articles **(n=17)**

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.

Quality assessment of studies

We evaluated the scientific quality of the included texts by employing the EPICURE rating tool, which includes seven elements: "engagement, processing, interpretation (…) critique (…) usefulness, relevance, and ethics" (Stige et al., 2009). This tool recognizes that research is situated and allows for a nuanced reflection and assessment of reflexivity and dialogue. Most articles that build on previous studies do not fully describe the methods, materials, and ethical issues. The quality of the articles was satisfactory, and most were rated as having an average scientific quality.

Analysis

We read the articles several times to identify explicit and implicit notions of how neighborhoods influence educational achievement. Our research question informed our search for categories in the included articles that referred to how neighborhoods influence educational achievement. Because some studies discussed several aspects of *how* neighborhoods influence education, whereas a few focused on only one specific aspect, we used overarching themes to discuss how the identified categories influence education. Through deliberation, we developed three overarching themes found in the included studies.

Theoretical perspective and methodological premise

There is a consensus that neighborhoods influence educational achievement in complex ways (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Huang et al., 2009; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). Nussbaum states that basic education enhances options, for instance, due to access to employment, political participation, and other forms of socially productive interaction (2011). Her capability perspective (2011) suggests concretizing conditions for justice based on the question, "What is a human being able to do and be?". By this, the approach points to preconditions to enable capable of living worthy, dignified, good quality lives in just societies. Nussbaum's perspective (2011) is normative, like many justice approaches (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Rawls et al., 2003). However, the concretization of capabilities needed to achieve justice and equal access to education sets it apart from other justice approaches. It has been criticized for being normative and for an individualistic focus (Gluchman, 2018). On the other hand, it has been argued that promoting people's capabilities to live good lives involves a collective responsibility (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018) and that access to resources influences the ability to participate in social and civil life. Thus, we will apply Nussbaum's concretized capabilities (2011) that she sees as a minimum standard to a worthy life, being: 1) a life of normal length; not dying prematurely, though before life quality is so reduced that life is not worth living, 2) bodily health; to have good health, with adequate nourishment and shelter, 3) bodily integrity; being able to move safely from place to place, secure from violent assault, including domestic violence and sexual assault, 4) senses, imagination and thought; being able to imagine, think and reason in an informed and cultivated way. Freedom of expression, both political, artistic, and religious, 5) emotions, and being able to have attachment to others, and not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety, 6) practical reasoning; to engage in critical reflection when planning one's life, 7) affiliation; being able to live with and toward others, engaging in social interaction, and having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation and being treated as a dignified being equal to others, 8) other species; being able to live in relation to and with concern for animals, plants and nature, 9) play, laughter, and enjoyment of recreational activities, and 10) control over one's political and material environment (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2017). Making sure inhabitants can develop their capabilities is a premise for a just society, and the perspective acknowledges both the complexity and potential of social context (Nussbaum, 2006; Nussbaum, 2011).

Term clarifications

The term "socioeconomic status" (SES) refers to economic and social status, including measures of education, income, and occupation (Baker, 2014). This concept has two aspects: an individual's actual resources, in terms of education, occupation, and housing, and relative ranking or status related to their access and consumption of goods, services, and knowledge (Krieger et al., 1997). The term "educational achievement" refers to a broader range

of personal, social, and life skills, as well as a long-term impact on the individual, whereas "educational outcome" primarily refers to academic success and specific learning outcomes.

Results

Through the findings from the articles, this section will propose some answers to the question: What can research from Nordic countries tell us about urban neighborhoods' influence on educational achievement for youth? The majority of the articles employed social science theories (Bunar, 2011; Gravesen, 2015; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018; Osman et al., 2021; Ryom, 2017; Staven, 2021; van der Burgt, 2010; Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020; Østergaard, 2011), mainly social capital theories from Bourdieu (1986; 2006), Putnam (2000), and Coleman (1988). Most articles described the dynamics of the social reproduction of inequality and aim to contribute explanations. In the included articles, the representation of the youth's perspective was the most prominent aspect (Bernelius et al., 2021; Bunar, 2011; Eriksen, 2019; Gravesen, 2015; Ingholt et al., 2015; Kaas & Canger, 2018; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018; Lindblad, 2018; Osman et al., 2021; Ryom, 2017; Schwartz, 2014; Staven, 2021; van der Burgt, 2010; Østergaard, 2011), and in some articles other viewpoints are represented, such as school staff (Bernelius et al., 2021; Bunar, 2011; Eriksen, 2019; Ingholt et al., 2015; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018; Schwartz, 2014), parents (Bernelius et al., 2021; Bunar, 2011; Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019), community leaders (Buch et al., 2021; Bunar, 2011), volunteers and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives (Ryom, 2017; Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020; Østergaard, 2011). Seven articles were based on perspectives from two or more of the groups mentioned. Three recurrent topics in the articles were highlighted as central to social reproduction: social support, representation of place, and policy. These topics are not mutually exclusive.

Table 1. Overview included articles

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Osman et al. (2021) Recipe for educational success: A study of successful school performance of students from low cultural background	Sweden	To analyze the students' perceptions of the type of support that allowed them to facilitate a successful school experience.	Students identified these essential kinds of support: 1. Unconditional emotional support (parents/family) 2. Peer support 3. Teacher support	Interviews with secondary-level youth from families with poor educational capital but with good grades.
Staven, H.D. (2021) Social capital and boundary work in "The West End's East End" – social mix policies in a Norwegian context	Oslo, Norway	To demonstrate how social arenas could help bridge different SES groups. Further, the article discusses social mix policies and urban area programs in a Norwegian context to determine whether the assumption of social mix is realistic.	The findings showed that differences in class hinder social relations and resource exchanges across classes and ethnicities. Symbolic boundary work based on an intersection of class, ethnicity, and residency can obstruct youth's sense of belonging to groups/places. Structural and contextual factors must be incorporated in developing policies and measures to improve neighborhoods.	Case study of the opening of a youth club. Participant observations and semistructured interviews.

Table 1. (*Continued*)

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Bunar, N. (2011) Multicultural urban schools in Sweden and their communities: Social predicaments, the power of stigma, and relational dilemmas	Sweden	To analyze some main features of two identified challenges in multicultural schools: (a) the stigmatized and economically impoverished communities that the school serves, leading to growing concerns regarding the quality of education, lack of credibility, and outflow of students, and (b) ambivalent relationships with students' parents and with the broader community, such as public authorities and universities.	The article found the need for a more relational approach that links the interests of different groups, policy changes, modes of representation, and educators' practices.	Interviews with principals, elementary students, parents, and local community leaders.
Bernelius et al. (2021) "Notorious schools" in "notorious places"? Exploring the connectedness of urban and educational segregation	Helsinki, Finland	To examine how reputation can mediate the connection between residential and school segregation.	The authors found a link between neighborhood and school reputation as schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods are strongly viewed through perceptions attached to the place. Despite schools' institutional quality and performance in educational outcomes, there is a consistent pattern of struggle among schools with negative views of neighborhoods.	1. Quantitative GIS data to analyze the sociospatial structure of the school catchment areas. 2. Qualitative ethnographic interview data (school staff, parents, and pupils from two related research projects: "well-functioning local schools" and "mixed classes and pedagogical solutions MAPS").
Larsson, E., & Hultquist, E. (2018) Desirable places: Spatial representations and educational strategies in the inner city	Stockholm, Sweden	To examine how the outcomes of neoliberal educational reforms have affected urban schooling in the inner city, and the article aims to examine how place and space have become major distinctive criteria in inner-city students' educational strategies.	The growing commodification and upward sociospatial homogenization of the inner city affect both the way schools use spatial representations in their marketing and the strategies deployed by students in their school choice.	Interviews with students and educational staff, fieldwork, and analysis of web pages and marketing booklets from upper-secondary schools.

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Ingholt et al. (2015) How can we strengthen students' social relations in order to reduce school dropout? An intervention development study within four Danish vocational schools	Denmark	To investigate the relations between the social environment within the schools and institutional structures to analyze reasons for dropping out. To investigate the importance of well-being, the authors also emphasized the influence of cigarette smoking and substance use.	The project on which the article builds has suggestions for improving how teachers welcome new students, enabling greater integration of social and educational activities, and enhancing teachers' and counselors' capacity to deal with drug use problems among students.	Qualitative interviews and focus groups with students and fieldwork with participant observations at four vocational schools, including informal interviews and discussion meetings with managers, teachers, counselors, and students.
Danielsen, H., & Bendixsen, S. (2019) Dealing with diversity, hoping for inclusion. Parents' involvement in urban schools in Norway	Bergen, Norway	To investigate parental involvement in multiethnic and class-differentiated urban public schools in Bergen and how some parents address diversity and social inequality in a socially mixed urban area in Norway and Europe today.	Parents engaged in public bodies in schools motivated by contributing to a more inclusive society, based on values such as equality and inclusion.	Participatory observation during monthly meetings in the parents' committee and through other activities such as neighborhood gatherings.
Vedøy, G., & Vassenden, A. (2020) The contribution of immigrant organizations and congregations to immigrant students' educational outcomes	Norway	To investigate and identify the contribution of immigrant organizations and congregations to immigrant students' academic achievement.	Immigrant organizations and congregations establish language tuition, homework help, and measures for parental empowerment. They offer a substantial but overlooked contribution to furthering immigrant students' educational outcomes.	Qualitative interviews with representatives from immigrant organizations and public officials.
Buch et al. (2021) Open school in Region Zealand (own translation)	Sjælland, Denmark	To describe the work, strategies, and efforts within the region's municipalities on the implementation of open school and how schools are cooperating with the community outside school.	In general, municipalities in the Zealand region are currently working on implementing open school. Vast differences exist between municipalities with varying degrees of implementation.	Interviews with official municipality representatives. Data collected from municipalities' homepages.

(Continued)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Østergaard, C. (2011) Where should unaffiliated children go to play sports after school? (own translation)	Denmark	To present reflections on the organization of activities of Project School Sports and Sports and Togetherness (ISA), which focus on those who do not fit in traditional organizations and therefore tend not to participate.	The traditional organization of voluntary sports associations aiming for achievement and competition makes it difficult to include some target groups. To increase parents' trust, activities should be organized at schools. Activities also seem to reduce vandalism and bullying, and children appear to build social capital when participating in these projects.	Fieldwork involving the observation of sports activities for children at schools and in their spare time organized by voluntary organizations. Interviews with school staff, other employees in the municipality, and volunteers. Survey and focus groups with children.
Ryom, K. (2018) Young people, team play, and citizenship: Bad company? A local action research project in Ydre Nørrebro (own translation)	Ydre Nørrebro, Denmark	To understand the participant boys and their experiences and opinions. The project aimed to connect the boys with adults who believed in them, and to strengthen communities.	Primary participants experienced stronger self-esteem, increased physical competence, strengthened social network, and better cooperation environment in class. Social capital increased as well.	Action research–inspired community project. Researchers, boys, the school, sports associations, and volunteers developed new frames for the young boys in the area. Inspiration from the community psychology tradition.
Van Der Burgt, D. (2010) Friendship, mobility, and a sense of home—What role do residential areas and schools play? (own translation)	Sweden	To demonstrate the preconditions of children from different neighborhoods resulting from their participation in and emotional attachment to social and spatial environments.	Differences were observed in the neighborhood regarding how the children attach to their social and spatial environments. Those who attended schools in more unpopular areas have closer networks and fewer friends than those in popular schools. This results in more time at home as well as less time on organized activities. Children with friends outside their neighborhoods get attached to areas other than the one closest to their actual homes. These mechanisms showed that the school one attends affects their degree of segregation and consequences for their networks.	Children wrote activity diaries and maps to demonstrate where they spend their time and meet their friends as well as where they feel at home.

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Schwartz, A. (2014) The significance of place and pedagogy in an urban multicultural school in Sweden	Sweden	To present how a school in a multicultural suburb on the outskirts of a large Swedish conurbation used a particular pedagogy with strong classification and framing to address academic failure among its pupils.	The chosen pedagogy positions pupils between two discourses that influence their opportunities to develop as learners and participate equally in education and society in the future. The analysis showed that the pedagogy was chosen based on the assumption that pupils must be "saved" from their backgrounds and the assumed characteristics of their neighborhoods and that its inhabitants lacked positive pedagogical resources. A disparity was observed between the assumptions and statements made by the pupils.	Ethnographic method, taking part in the daily life of the school, observing, and documenting the activities taking place and talking with those present about their views.
Eriksen, I.M. (2019) Tough femininities: Ethnic minority girls' aggressive school opposition	Norway	To examine school resistance among ethnic minority girls and psychosocially understand the relation between young people's practices, narratives, and emotions tied to their school experiences.	The girls' school opposition was considered as an affective practice, a perspective that interlinks the psychological and the social. Their aggression was also fueled by their experience of disentitlement from success in a school perceived as being for Norwegians only and not for minority pupils. They acted in a way that is locally accepted though still in opposition to the larger society.	Interviews with pupils in upper-secondary school and ethnographic fieldwork.
Gravesen, D.T. (2015) From where? The significance of the neighborhood for young people's educational choices and future life chances (own translation)	Aarhus, Denmark	To examine the geographically anchored everyday life of youth living in different neighborhoods in Aarhus and what place means for their choices because of education and life path.	The informants all related their chances and potential to their own origins and were influenced by local processes when choosing their future life path. The more privileged ones did not experience social distress in their neighborhoods and had opportunities and cultural capital to choose a more prestigious education. Youth from mixed and low-SES neighborhoods navigated their education choices toward the more accessible kind.	Interviews with youths from diverse neighborhoods in Aarhus, with different family backgrounds and education choices.

(Continued)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

First author, year, title	Place	Aim	Results	Methods
Canger, T., & Kaas, L.A. (2018) Marginalized young people's stories about school and spare time (own translation)	Denmark	To demonstrate how narratives about school and spare time can help us understand marginalization processes: why school can be experienced as unsafe and dangerous and further on marginalizing—lack of trust in schools/ educations.	Behind marginalization, there is a history that the school should show more interest in. The youth interviewees showed that marginalization is much more diverse than just a question about low SES. Therefore, it is important to understand the complexity of youths' lives and the other arenas that represent community and safety for them, to better comprehend their experiences and perspectives.	Narrative, life-historical interviews with youths who experienced challenges in completing lower-secondary school.
Lindblad, M. (2018) Young adults with migrant background on school failure and transition between school and work (own translation)	Sweden	To understand how structural assumptions interact with actors in the transition from school to work life and how this transition forms life chances.	Complex explanations of dropping out of school: lack of motivation, other individual factors, as well as parents and how they motivate their child. Several missed knowledge about the Swedish education and labor market. Support from other family members such as older siblings and other relatives. The article demonstrated that both individual and structural factors are important for pupils' school time.	Interviews with minority youth who did not complete high school.

Local social support from a wide range of agents

Eight articles highlighted the importance of how various agents provide social support (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019; Ingholt et al., 2015; Lindblad, 2018; Osman et al., 2021; Ryom, 2017; Staven, 2021; Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020; Østergaard, 2011). Consistent with other studies, younger participants considered parental support essential (Bourdieu, 1986; Huang et al., 2009). Osman et al. investigated the kind of support received by high-achieving Swedish upper-secondary students from families "with low social and educational capital" (2021) and found that the students emphasized the unconditional emotional support of their parents, that it matters who their peers are, and that teachers can make a difference. Staven investigated how a youth club worked as a social support setting and found that the participants mostly had the same SES; therefore, little bridging across groups tends to happen in the youth club (2021). Those who participated at the club did not meet their counterparts from other SES groups there. The study found that inequalities hindered social relations and the exchange of resources across class and ethnicity. The symbolic boundary work that youth conduct based on an intersection of class,

ethnicity, and residency can obstruct their sense of belonging to both groups and places. The study concludes that structural and contextual factors must be incorporated into neighborhoods improvement strategies. Danielsen and Bendixsen investigated parental involvement in multiethnic and class-differentiated urban public schools and how parents dealt "with diversity and social inequality in a socially mixed urban area in Norway" (2019). The authors found that parents engaged themselves in public school bodies, motivated by contributing to a more inclusive society based on values such as equality and inclusion. Ingholt et al. investigated how social relations influenced the completion of vocational high school. They found that the youth regarded their relationships with their peers as essential for their well-being at school (2015). Their teachers were more concerned with professional education as they understood this as the main reason for not completing school.

An exploratory study (Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020) found that immigrant organizations, including congregations, contributed to immigrant students' academic achievement by organizing language tuition, homework help, and parental empowerment measures. The authors (2020) point out that this substantial contribution is often overlooked. Another study on voluntary organizations (Østergaard, 2011) found that organizing spare time activities at school increased immigrants' positive view of voluntary associations (2011). In an action research project involving sports associations, teachers, and volunteers in a low-SES neighborhood, the participants aimed to improve collaboration with boys aged 12–16 (Ryom, 2017) by connecting them with adults who believed in them unconditionally. Initially, they experienced challenges related to school and society, and many of them felt an insufficient ability to succeed in school. The boys increased their self-esteem and physical competence through the project, strengthened their social networks, and experienced a better cooperative environment. An interview study with youth in their twenties with minority backgrounds found various reasons why they did not complete high school, such as lack of motivation and parental support (Lindblad, 2018). He found that parents lacked a good understanding of the educational system and labor market. Besides parental support, other family members influence the motivation to complete high school and underscore that individual and structural factors are essential for educational achievement. These articles highlighted family and school, peers, associations, and volunteers as essential sources of social support.

The role of attachment and the reputation of places

Eight articles emphasized the representation of place. Not surprisingly, some studies (Bernelius et al., 2021; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018) found a link between the reputation of neighborhoods and schools, as schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods are strongly viewed through the perceptions attached to the place. Despite good institutional quality and educational outcomes, some schools consistently struggled with negative views about the neighborhoods, which affects their reputation, according to the authors (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). This has two sides, as schools in neighborhoods that are being commodified and gentrified have also been found to use the improved status of the neighborhood in their marketing (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018).

A study emphasized how youth between ages 11 and 15 relate to places outside their neighborhoods (van der Burgt, 2010), influenced by age and socioeconomic background, the school districts' admission area, and school popularity. When a school was chosen or rejected, it influenced where the child felt attached and where they felt at home (2010). This implies that school selection can increase inequality and negatively affect children

attending less popular schools and further segregation. Segregation can also be upheld by local norms, as Eriksen (2019) found in a study of girls in upper-secondary schools with minority backgrounds. Their oppositional and aggressive behaviors were within local norms while exceeding norms in the larger society. The behaviors were described as reactions to exclusion but could amplify their exclusion in contexts outside their neighborhood and their experience of "us" and "them" categories (Eriksen, 2019). A study from Århus found that place is significant for youths' choices and possibilities of education and further life paths (Gravesen, 2015). A study that focused on narratives about school and spare time (Kaas & Canger, 2018) can add to the understanding of marginalization processes and impact the school experience as unsafe and dangerous. This points to narrative and symbolic representations as part of marginalization processes, emphasizing the multiple layers that influence why some feel marginalized and unsafe in school settings (2018). Bunar observed that urban schools in low-SES areas lack credibility and suffer from an outflow of students (2011). The author emphasized the need for a broader grasp of schools and their role in the community to understand why students choose to go to school elsewhere and the need for a relational approach that links "the interests of different groups, policy changes, modes of representation, and educators' practices" (Bunar, 2011, p. 141) to meet the significant challenges of multicultural urban schools in Sweden. To address academic failure, the implementation of the Monroe pedagogy, based on the notion that the pupils needed to be "saved" from their backgrounds and the assumed characteristics of their neighborhood, was examined (Schwartz, 2014). The author found that schools and authorities focused on deficiencies and failed to recognize the pupils' affiliation or resources in the area, which could be understood in relation to the top-down decision-making with a high risk of failure due to the lack of involvement from those concerned.

Policies shaping everyday life

Four articles discussed how policy influences schools and neighborhoods. In one of them, liberal school reforms were found to affect neighborhoods by increasing homogenization and segregation (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018) making place more critical for young people's choice of school.

The 2014 school reform in Denmark included a measure to increase the interaction between schools and their local agents and communities, including sports and culture organizations and associations. Buch et al. examined how the reform has been implemented by municipalities in the Zealand (Sjælland) region and found vast differences between municipalities regarding degrees of implementation and which organizations the schools are cooperating with (2021). A study from Norway focused on consequences of social mix policies and how this is applied in specific neighborhoods (Staven, 2021). There was a gap between the political intention of social mix and the ability to increase interaction between groups with stereotypical images of each other (2021). The need for policy changes to strengthen the relational approach by linking the interests of diverse groups was emphasized in another study (Bunar, 2011).

Although the studies that illustrate how policies shape neighborhoods, everyday life, and conditions for schooling and educational achievements only present fragments, they point to intended and unintended effects.

Discussion

The studies describe the reproduction of social inequality in neighborhoods related to educational achievement and implicitly consider access to essential resources. Whereas some

of the underpinning theories, specifically on social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), have been employed to develop strategies for social change elsewhere (Beck & Purcell, 2013), the included articles sporadically suggest strategies. In the following, findings related to the variations in social support, place representation, and how policy decisions affect neighborhood and local communities will be related to Martha Nussbaum's capability approach (2011).

Potentials of social support and capabilities

The importance of social support from different community agents is emphasized in eight articles (Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019; Ingholt et al., 2015; Lindblad, 2018; Osman et al., 2021; Ryom, 2017; Staven, 2021; Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020; Østergaard, 2011). A recurrent theme is the consequences of increasing spatial clustering of socioeconomic groups, linked to segregation and social support (Eriksen, 2019; Osman et al., 2021; Staven, 2021), previously known from analysis of registry data (NOU 2020:16). Social support can be considered as an aspect of the capability of affiliation, which takes different forms, for instance showing concern for each other and treating each other with dignity and equality (Nussbaum, 2011). The findings underscore the need for universal access to social support and the need to compensate for those who, to a lesser extent, receive adequate social support from home or peers. The capability of playing and participation in recreational activities is in line with the findings of social support (Ryom, 2017; Staven, 2021; Østergaard, 2011), where schools and the local communities have aimed to facilitate the possibilities to play. The included studies demonstrate how conditions and norms in segregated neighborhoods can influence education and life chances (Bunar, 2011; Eriksen, 2019; Gravesen, 2015; Ryom, 2017; Schwartz, 2014; Staven, 2021; van der Burgt, 2010). Social mix has been seen as a contrast to segregation and portrayed as what a local community should be, with opportunities for people to support and learn from one another (Staven, 2021). The opportunity to receive social support can affect an individual's opportunities in terms of both being and doing, according to Nussbaum (2011). Youth in privileged and segregated areas do not have the same need for neighborhood agents to compensate for the lack of social support in the family and others who know the educational system. Thus, the capability affiliation could give access to "tacit" knowledge, like understanding the educational system and accessible opportunities within education, as well as facilitation and assistance with schoolwork (Vedøy & Vassenden, 2020). Although the school system is formally based on equal access, it has long been known that social context influences real-world chances, as Bernstein (1970) and Bourdieu (1986) theorized. It has been argued that the educational system has cultural traits familiar to middle-class children and consequently contributes to the reproduction of inequality (Bourdieu, 1986).

Representation of place and capabilities

The social constructions of places can contribute to widening the gap between communities by presenting them as different and dangerous (Bernelius et al., 2021). The dynamics of place, consisting of material, social, and cultural dimensions (Cresswell, 2015), are prominent in processes of gentrification and segregation. These socio-geographical processes matter for individuals' life chances and possibilities of choice (Eriksen, 2019; Gravesen, 2015). For youth, place is particularly influential because it contributes to their self-identity formation, and both social and physical factors, such as school, neighborhood, and family, play a role in this process (Prince, 2014). Negative representations of

place could influence what Nussbaum lists as the capability of bodily integrity, as representations of place influence whether people can move around and experience that they are safe in doing so (2011). The representation of places affects how neighborhoods are experienced, including the distance between them and how free young people feel to use the outdoor areas.

Because the representation of a place and its reputation could affect choices, segregated communities may emerge through territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2007). Consequently, when a place is subject to stigmatization (Eriksen, 2019; Gravesen, 2015), boundaries would remain, and opportunities to meet people with diverse backgrounds would diminish. Subsequently, this could lead to incorrect assumptions from policymakers, as Schwartz demonstrates, with the decision of the Monroe pedagogy to compensate for students' backgrounds (2014). In this case, the capability of practical reasoning could have been applied by ensuring the participation of those concerned rather than relying on top-down decisions, as Schwartz (2014) describes. In this case, the capability approach could augment the understanding of injustice by identifying distinct capabilities that are premises for making good choices to develop dignified lives. Living in a low-SES area could foster a sense of segregation and amplify an experience of "us" and "them" or the idea of being an outsider, as well as weaken inhabitants' affiliation toward the larger community and its norms. Instead, corresponding to the findings, the capability of affiliation and control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011) could be strengthened. Youth should have access to participation locally and in wider society, as they need to belong (Eriksen, 2019). The included articles support the notion that opportunities in life are unevenly distributed, in line with the capabilities of bodily integrity and control over one's environment and affiliation (Nussbaum, 2011). Understanding these capabilities could, therefore, be applied to improve neighborhoods and life chances.

The impact of policies on everyday life and capabilities

Policy decisions may have intended and unintended impacts on educational achievement. Parallel to the capability of control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011), the included articles point to the fact that top-down policies affect local conditions, and that effective participation in policymaking is lacking (Bunar, 2011; Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018; Schwartz, 2014; Staven, 2021).

When schools in low-SES areas grow in popularity due to policies and gentrification (Bunar, 2011), competition may lead to local youths losing access to local schools (Larsson & Hultqvist, 2018). This may cause a forced outflow of students living near these schools if their school results cannot compete with youth from other areas and, in turn, generate changing forms of segregation. According to Nussbaum, a society cannot call itself just until all capabilities are available for everyone (2011). This implies that the distribution of benefits must be uneven to achieve equity (2011). Additionally, the impact of school policy decisions must be understood broadly, affecting not just education itself but also the complexity of the interplay between neighborhood and school. According to the capability approach, policies should be developed to facilitate peoples' life chances, particularly for those who need it most.

The additional capabilities

The capability of bodily health, which includes a safe place to live and nutritious food, is not emphasized in the included research, though having a home where youth could bring friends and, for instance, eat together is mentioned in Staven's study (2021). The

capability of other species is not identified other than local schools' limited cooperation with nature schools (Buch et al., 2021). The capability of senses, imagination and thought is absent in the material. Neither the capability of emotions, including not having the emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety, nor the capability of life was identified. However, these capabilities are often seen in context with poverty, and corresponding themes are, for instance, emphasized in a report from Norway (Hyggen et al., 2018). Emphasizing Nussbaum's capability approach to a full extent could facilitate a broader insight into the spatial opportunity structure and how it relates to access to education.

Concluding remarks

The literature demonstrates that complex processes in the neighborhood influence educational achievement. Three main themes were identified: the influence of social support, representation of place, and policies. The literature points to the complex interplay between neighborhoods and their schools. Although scholars have suggested complex models to understand the impact of place and neighborhood, the complexity has yet to be described and operationalized (Galster & Sharkey, 2017). In addition to models, we suggest that there is a need for theories for action prompting justice regarding inequality in educational achievement. Although the perspectives are linked to social capital, in particular Bourdieu's theory that highlights inequalities and points to the possible conversion of capital, the perspectives employed in the included articles do not provide theories for change or action. In addition to the broad research field of neighborhood effects in general, and specifically educational achievements, Nussbaum's capability approach aligns with the findings in the reviewed literature. It offers further suggestions of capabilities to consider operationalizing justice and inequalities that have consequences for education. (2011). Seven of 10 of the capabilities were touched upon, including the capabilities of affiliation, practical reasoning, bodily integrity, play, control over one's environment, bodily health, and other species. The additional capabilities should be considered to gain a broader perspective for the development of supportive neighborhoods that can contribute to improved educational achievements. With this as a goal, general conditions in neighborhoods could also be improved. Furthermore, Nussbaum's capability approach could be applied to capture rich descriptions and philosophical and normative perspectives of how the formal right to education is sometimes inadequate for educational achievement due to other obstacles (Robeyns, 2017, pp. 33–34). This could also enrich the social capital perspective and offer concretization of the complexity that has been called for (Galster & Sharkey, 2017; Huang et al., 2009; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). The concretization of justice through focusing on capabilities may be helpful for both decision-makers and practitioners within the fields of community work, developmental and planning processes, working with neighborhoods and education.

In line with previous reviews, this review of qualitative studies from the Nordic countries indicates a need for a more comprehensive perspective on the complex influence of neighborhoods on educational achievement. However, there are challenges related to Nussbaum's capability approach, such as cultural sensitivity (Pandey, 2021; Robeyns, 2017). Nussbaum's concretization of capabilities has also been criticized (Robeyns, 2005, 2017). We conclude that the capability approach should be further explored and operationalized for it to be employed in further research regarding the influence of neighborhoods on educational achievement, and for its application in development work with neighborhoods and communities.

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