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# Where's the community in community, work and family? A community-based capabilities approach

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## ABSTRACT

Community is a key dimension in the work–family interface as highlighted by the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Yet it is critically understudied by much work–family scholarship. We highlight and address crucial barriers preventing the integration of the community concept, developing an interdisciplinary community-based capabilities approach. This approach conceptualizes three components of community: local relationships, local policies and locality (place, space and scale). Local relationships include formal and informal relationships, networks, and a sense of belonging. Dependent on the broader socio-economic context, local policies and services can provide important resources for managing these relationships and work–life situations more generally. These relationships and policies are embedded in specific geographical localities, shaping and being shaped by social action. This interdisciplinary conceptualization of community allows relational, spatial, structural and temporal aspects of community to be integrated into a more broadly applicable conceptual approach. We base this approach on the capability approach, which allows for a pluralistic work–life framework of what individuals value and do. We further argue for a conceptualization of family as community, moving towards a work–community interface. The resulting conceptual approach is useful for explaining work–life processes for individuals with and without care responsibilities, and offers a new framework for studying the social trends intensely and rapidly highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Introduction

Community has long been recognized as an important dimension in the work–family interface (Kagan & Lewis, 1998; Kagan et al., 2000), particularly as the boundaries between work and family dissipate (e.g. Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2007). The communities in which individuals and their families live and work represent a context of options and choices they can make, as well as relationships and networks that structure their work and family lives (Heller, 1989). Communities can also offer potential resources

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individuals and their families can tap into when organizing their lives, as well as limit and direct such attempts. Yet despite its recognition as a crucial aspect of work and family, community remains understudied, or '*simply ignored* by most work–family research' (Minnotte, 2016, p. 289, emphasis added). The absence of community in work–family research can have significant consequences. At best, it means we are missing potentially important contextual factors shaping work–family processes and outcomes – that our theoretical and empirical arguments are incomplete. At worst, it means we are missing key determinants of social processes, allowing inequalities in work and family to perpetuate and remain unaddressed.

At least two factors appear to prevent the integration of community in work–family research. First, conceptualizing community is difficult (Kagan & Lewis, 1998). Despite salient attempts to operationalize the concept, the limited use of community in work–family research suggests current conceptualizations insufficiently allow researchers to capture the essence of community and the role it plays in people's lives. Second, and related, is the tendency to conceptualize community from a single disciplinary lens. A mono-disciplinary focus in the multidisciplinary work–family field limits our ability to theorize and integrate the concept of community. Multidisciplinary is arguably a great asset to the work–family field, yet ultimately one of its greatest challenges. Disciplines as varied as anthropology, demography, economics, employment relations, management studies, history, philosophy, political science, (organizational) psychology, public administration, sociology and urban geography study work–family phenomena (French & Johnson, 2016). Different disciplinary perspectives are attentive to various aspects of work, family and community, thus framing what and how we 'see' things in work–family research (Kossek et al., 2006). The result is a dispersion of theoretical approaches and concepts used in work–family research. This dispersion also continues to hamper the integration of community into work–family research. This is visible in existing conceptualizations of community in work–family scholarship, which recognize the importance of relational, structural, spatial and temporal aspects of community to varying degrees (Barnett & Gareis, 2008; Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2007). However, the incorporation of each of these aspects into an integrated conceptualization of community remains absent.

Drawing on multiple work–family disciplines, we propose a new, interdisciplinary conceptual approach incorporating community using Sen's (1992) capability approach (CA). The CA is advantageous for theorizing community in two ways. First, as a potential resource that may be used to reconcile work and life outside of work. Second, as a factor limiting or increasing people's abilities to choose among various ways of work–life reconciliation, and to use various resources to that end. As such, we incorporate the varying relational, structural, spatial and temporal aspects of community into a single, integrative approach. Before outlining our approach, we discuss existing literature on community, focusing on seminal work–family studies. We then provide an overview of CA fundamentals, outlining the advantages it offers in relation to existing conceptual approaches. In the sections that follow, we conceptualize community through a capabilities approach, offering empirical examples and setting an agenda for future research. This agenda includes potentially conceptualizing family as community, allowing for a shift towards a work–community interface.

## The role of community in the work–family literature

Community has been a fairly elusive concept in work–family scholarship (Kagan & Lewis, 1998, p. 7). According to the authors, ‘community may be linked to place (or a locality); it may be a state of being, a set of relationships or a source of identity; it may be found in families, at work or separate from them both but with an impact on them’ (Kagan & Lewis, 1998, p. 7). This definition, provided in the introductory editorial to the first issue of *Community, Work and Family*, illustrates the breadth of the idea of community. Community is simultaneously geographical, relational and structural, which creates significant difficulty in sufficiently conceptualizing it within a single theoretical approach. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to integrate these aspects, providing a solid foundation for moving forward.

Arguably one of the most cited authors on community, Voydanoff (2001, 2007) develops the concept by building on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems model to account for varying work, family and community demands and resources at multiple levels. In this approach, individual roles and interpersonal relationships are located at the micro level, with linked microsystems (e.g. household, family) making up the mesosystem (e.g. linkages between family and workplaces). Ecosystems in which individuals are not directly involved are further differentiated from the overarching macrosystem, or institutional setting. Voydanoff conceptualizes community as its own microsystem consisting of six interlinking dimensions at multiple levels, including three structural factors (social organization in the community, social networks and social norms), and three relational factors (informal help and formal volunteering, one’s sense of community and community satisfaction).

In contrast, Pitt-Catsouphes and colleagues (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006) focus on structural and *locational* aspects of community, referring to ‘geographic communities’. Their work is an early attempt to bridge the gap between multiple disciplinary conceptualizations of community, tying together sociological conceptualizations (focusing on structural aspects) with urban planning conceptualizations (focusing on locality). Their focus is on locational and structural elements related to formal (e.g. programmes and services), informal (e.g. relationships) and institutional (e.g. community policies) resources, as well as normative rules and values. Similarly, Barnett and Gareis (2008; see also Gareis & Barnett, 2008) emphasize the role of community as a *resource*. Building on Voydanoff’s idea of community satisfaction, they develop a measure of community resource fit (primarily relevant to the US context). The psychometric measure contains 31 items categorized into work, public transportation, school, school transportation, after-school programmes, and after-school transportation. The measure provides key insights into how working families engage with the residential communities in which they are embedded, and how communities enhance or constrain people’s lives. For example, they find gender differences, with mothers being more reliant than fathers on community resources related to childcare. While the authors suggest avenues for developing the measure further to account for different family models, such as those with elder-care responsibilities, such measures have yet to be developed.

Earlier studies clearly demonstrate that community is a resource for many individuals and families; however, the geographical focus – with an underrepresentation of work–life research from the Global South – creates a relatively positive view of community.

Organizational psychology scholars such as Jaga (2020) demonstrate potentially negative effects of community in numerous contexts. In many parts of the Global South, but also in parts of the Global North, community may be characterized by social inequality, poverty and (domestic) violence (Jaga et al., 2018; Leschied et al., 2006; Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2018). In these spaces, community may not always be a positive resource, but also (or rather) a factor that limits individuals' abilities to reconcile work and life outside of work.

Alongside primarily mono-disciplinary conceptualizations of community there have been attempts to develop conceptual approaches that integrate community into work–family theory. For example, Pocock and colleagues (Pocock et al., 2012) adopt an ecological systems approach to shed light on the 'black-box' of work, detailing the interrelationships between the job, the workplace, the industry and the labour market. Their employment relations approach is the most comprehensive attempt to theorize work–family–community to date, and highlights the role of time, space, life course and power in all three domains of work, family and community, as well as intersections of these domains.

The socio-ecological systems models developed by Voydanoff (2001) and Pocock et al. (2012) are useful; however, they have several limitations. They both focus on work–family–community demands and resources. From this 'needs-based' perspective (Abendroth & Pausch, 2017), resources can be used to improve one's work–life situation (Moen, 2011; Voydanoff, 2001). Demands are viewed as pressures, constraining an individual in their work, family or community activities (Voydanoff, 2001). From a life course perspective, demands are 'claims' made on an individual's available time (Moen, 2011). The focus on resources and demands in relation to outcomes is highly relevant, but scholars have not yet uncovered the *processes* in which resources and demands produce such outcomes. That is, they have not yet demonstrated *how* these resources and demands – in interaction with other relational, spatial, structural and temporal factors – produce certain outcomes. Moreover, the assumption that demands are pressures or claims on an individual's time defines responsibilities and activities as inherently negative. Likewise, the assumption that resources provided by communities in all cases help individuals to reconcile work–life is questionable. By contrast, a capabilities approach to work–life views people's activities and responsibilities not only as demands but also as factors potentially contributing to one's well-being, particularly recognizing how these activities and responsibilities are embedded in a broader relational context (Abendroth & Pausch, 2017; Hobson, 2014).

### **The capability approach: the fundamentals**

The CA was developed as a normative and evaluative approach by Amartya Sen (1990, 1992, 1999). Central to Sen's work is human well-being and social justice, and the idea that individuals have different values in life. Human beings are thus seen to have a plurality of valued beings and doings and are embedded in societies with a plurality of equalities and inequalities. What is just or fair is therefore not simply a question of equal or unequal outcomes (Sen, 1992). Rather, Sen proposes focusing on individuals' freedoms to achieve a valued outcome. Critiquing Rawls' theory of justice, Sen argues that 'a theory of justice based on fairness must be deeply and directly concerned with the *actual freedoms* enjoyed by different persons – persons with possibly divergent objectives – to lead different lives that they can have reason to value' (1990: p. 112). The real opportunity to

live the life one has reason to value is what Sen calls ‘capabilities’, in essence ‘what people are effectively able to do and to be’ (Robeyns, 2005). Crucial in this definition is the word ‘effectively’: resources may increase the capabilities of some individuals but not others to achieve the life they have reason to value (Kurowska, 2018a) because of the different ways in which individuals are embedded in individual, environmental and social contexts.

To clarify, the CA rests on five key concepts: means, capabilities, functionings, agency and conversion factors (Sen, 1992, 1999). We briefly summarize these concepts here for reasons of space (for a more elaborate discussion, see e.g. Robeyns, 2005, 2017; Yerkes, Javornik, & Kurowska, 2019). *Means* are the social and economic resources individuals have at their disposal (e.g. work–life policies Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Kurowska, 2018b; Yerkes et al., 2019). Equal access to resources does not guarantee equal *capabilities*. Capabilities are what an individual can *potentially* achieve, which is not the same as what people *actually* achieve (the latter is, in Sen’s terms, an achieved functioning; Sen, 1992); that is, what a person actually manages to achieve, do or be. A certain work–life outcome – i.e. the particular way in which an individual reconciles work and family responsibilities at a particular moment in time – is an example of an achieved functioning (Hobson, 2014). Achieved functionings are a reflection of *capabilities* and *agency*. Agency refers to individuals’ ability to make choices within their own set of capabilities through a mutually constitutive process of perceiving, interpreting and responding to one’s social situation (Giddens, 1984; Mead, 1934). For example, as shown elsewhere (Korpi et al., 2013; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019), individuals from varying social classes may engage with family policy differently because gender and class shape their agency in varying intersectional ways. Thus agency, and an individual’s ability to make choices, is constrained (Robeyns, 2005) or ‘situated’ (Hobson, 2014). There is some concern that the CA focuses too much on the individual, without accounting for constrained or situated agency. Indeed, this criticism may be justified for some interpretations of the CA. By contrast, our interpretation of the CA, which is in line with scholars such as Hobson (2014) and Robeyns (2017), views relational aspects as crucial. We explicitly view individuals as embedded in varying personal, institutional and social contexts (*conversion factors*) (Hobson, 2014; Robeyns, 2005, 2017), which opens up space to integrate community in these contexts. In this manner, we overcome the agency-structure dichotomy by understanding conversion factors as relational factors which shape how individuals can convert formal rights and support into real opportunities to achieve the life they have reason to value (Annink, 2016). For example, social class limits the real opportunities parents have to access high-quality childcare, often interacting with gender (Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). Race/ethnicity<sup>1</sup> can also be a key conversion factor shaping individual capabilities (Collins, 2000; Kamenou, 2008) but knowledge about this relationship continues to remain limited. In her seminal work, Patricia Collins (1998) demonstrates how concepts like family are intertwined with mutually constructed understandings of race, class and gender, thereby creating and maintaining social inequalities. For example, ethnic minority fathers in Sweden are less likely than fathers born in Sweden to make use of parental leave, going against dominant fatherhood norms (Månsdotter et al., 2010).

Key to the CA is shifting the focus from whether or not individuals actually achieve outcomes to the mechanisms maintaining deeply entrenched social inequalities and individuals’ real opportunities to achieve what they have reason to value. Applied to work–family scholarship, this suggests shifting the focus away from whether individuals achieve a given

work–life outcome (e.g. work–life balance, enrichment, reconciliation; or similarly the avoidance of work–life conflict or role conflict) towards whether individuals have the real opportunities (capabilities) to do this and processes that lead to these capabilities. Earlier applications of the CA have brought important contributions to work–family scholarship (Abendroth & Pausch, 2017; Annink, 2016; Chatrakul et al., 2017; Hobson, 2011, 2014; Hobson et al., 2011; Hoogenboom, Kruiswijk, & Yerkes, 2015; Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018; McLean et al., 2017; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). For example, Hobson (2014) and others (Chatrakul et al., 2017; Takahashi et al., 2014) demonstrate the key role played by work organizations for parents combining paid employment with childcare. This work highlights two important mechanisms underlying individual capabilities: an individual’s sense of entitlement to make a claim (e.g. to work–life policies) and an individual’s perception of their scope of alternatives when making work–family decisions: what do they see as possible? We broaden these contributions by emphasizing the community aspect, which is absent in these applications, as well as by shifting the focus away from working parents to all employees, both with and without immediate care responsibilities.

### **Community: local relationships, local policies and locality**

Central to our approach are three concerns. First, the real opportunities individuals have. Not just in work and family, but – and this is the second critical concern – for a plurality of valued work–life activities/scenarios. Third, we seek an *interdisciplinary* understanding of the role of community in creating and shaping these capabilities alongside other personal, environmental and societal factors. Such a conceptual approach can be considered ‘weak’ insofar as it does not ‘tell us what to expect when we begin analysing a system, or how change in one domain will necessarily affect one another’. Rather, the approach we propose will ‘point to domains that matter, interactions and factors that are likely to be significant, and the need to locate analysis in a larger macro social and political context’ (Pocock et al., 2012, p. 406). We start by outlining our conceptualization of community, integrating the three components of local relationships, local policies and localities. We then construct a community-based capabilities approach, demonstrating the relational, spatial, structural and temporal dimensions of communities from a capability perspective.

#### **Local relationships**

The first key component of the concept of community includes local relationships. This component has also received the most attention from extant work–family scholarship (Barnett & Gareis, 2008; Gareis & Barnett, 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006; Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2001, 2007). Conceptually, local relationships can include both formal and informal relationships, including informal help and formal volunteering (Voydanoff, 2001, 2007); community-based social networks (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006; Voydanoff, 2001), or more generally support or interaction outside work and/or the household (Pocock et al., 2012). Depending on local relationships, individuals are more or less satisfied with the community (Barnett & Gareis, 2008) and feel a greater or lesser sense of belonging (Williams & Pocock, 2010). Moreover, local relationships act as a filter through which community benefits are experienced (Hostetler et al., 2012). Local

relationships are organized and structured, with community norms and pressures shaping one's behaviour (Barnett & Gareis, 2008; Gareis & Barnett, 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006; Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2001, 2007). From an ecosystems approach, social networks and community organization are the structural level at which interpersonal local relationships take place (e.g. volunteering, sense of community; Voydanoff, 2001). Community norms can act as social controls, making individuals and families feel more or less welcome, for example in relation to family diversity (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006). The social organization of communities shape what constitutes 'helping' in local relationships as well (Heller, 1989). As demonstrated in the next section, from a capability perspective, local relationships can function as a *conversion factor* as well as a *means* (resource). Whether they are conversion factors or means will depend on the context.<sup>2</sup>

Empirical studies on the role of local relationships suggest that the ways in which local relationships matter differ across life course stages (Barnett & Gareis, 2008; Sweet et al., 2005), mirroring the emphasis on life course fit in other work–family studies (Moen, 2011; Pocock et al., 2012). Real opportunities to engage in local relationships at the community level can be of significant value to individuals, for example, to provide community service, to contribute and to enjoy (Hall et al., 2013). However, important changes to the work–life interface, such as increased time spent on paid work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), are impacting such social participation (van Ingen, 2008). Work increasingly takes place in multiple and changing locations (including 'new' ways of working; Peters et al., 2009), yet employees' everyday lives, care and household tasks remain in the local environment (van der Klis & Karsten, 2009), emphasizing the continued importance of local relationships to the concept of community.

### **Local policies**

The second component of the concept of community is local policies. Understanding capabilities for work–life means understanding people's ability to access resources in the broadest sense. In general capability terms, 'means' (resources) are seen to be either economic (i.e. income) or non-productive (e.g. household production; Robeyns, 2017). However, social policies (e.g. welfare state arrangements and services as well as private and non-profit services and arrangements) also provide key resources to individuals and families (North, 1990) and can, in this sense, be viewed as *means* from a capability perspective (Kurowska, 2018a; Yerkes et al., 2019). The role of local policies has grown increasingly important given the advanced devolution and decentralization of welfare state arrangements in services in many countries (Martinelli et al., 2017). Recent trends of territorial reorganization of social policies across Europe have led to new roles and responsibilities for regions and municipalities, and diversification of policy delivery and outcomes at the local levels (Kazepov, 2010). This means that policies, be they national, regional or local, are shaped by local politics and embedded in local political contexts, practices, specific and diverse regulatory frameworks, institutional traditions, and specific socio-economic and geographical conditions (Dogan, 2004). Namely, decentralization has further shifted responsibility for welfare services from national to regional or local levels; this trend has significantly impacted the provision and availability of services within communities, such as the provision of informal care and long-term care (Kispeter & Yeandle, 2015; Martinelli et al., 2017).

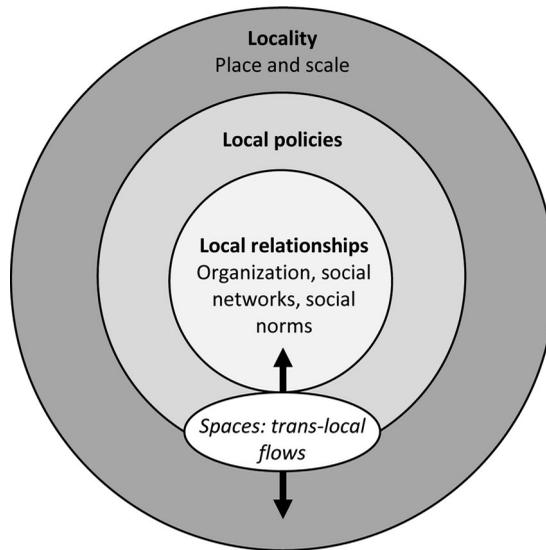
### **Locality: place, space and scale**

This last component represents the localities in which individuals are embedded. Locality has long been viewed as a component of community in academic scholarship (Heller, 1989) but remains underdeveloped in work–family literature. Voydanoff (2001, p. 139), for example, argues that ‘territorial criteria for community are too limiting for integrating community with work and family’. Similarly, Pocock et al. (2012, p. 397) suggest that *relational* definitions of community that emphasize the relationships making up work, family and community should be favoured over *spatial* definitions of community that emphasize places of work, family and community because they are more inclusive. Within the capabilities’ literature, however, environmental factors (in a broad sense) are seen as crucially shaping what individuals are able to do and be (Sen, 1992; Robeyns, 2005, 2017).

Understanding the localities in which individuals are embedded requires drawing on multiple disciplines. From a sociological perspective, significant research exists around mobilities (e.g. Elliott & Urry, 2010; Urry, 2007). Similarly, organizational scholars have attempted to understand locations of work. Felstead et al. (2005) conceptualize work across varying socio-spatial contexts, including office spaces, at home and on the go. Urban geographers and employment relations scholars offer a particularly useful conceptualization of locality, which allows us to expand work–family epistemology by incorporating the place, space and scale of communities, as well as the governance of these localities (Ellem & Shields, 1999; Herod et al., 2007; Ward, 2007).

*Place* refers to a specific location, independent of scale. *Space* represents the all-encompassing set of ‘trans-local’ relations; the flows between specific places and the impact of scale. And *scale* is most easily thought of as the extensiveness of relationships at different levels, e.g. lived places (home, office), local, regional, national and global places (Coe et al., 2007). *Place* shapes and is shaped by social action (Ward, 2007). Geographical places are the physical and social context in which local relationships are embedded and are affected by these local relationships and interactions in a recursive and dynamic process. *Place* emphasizes the spatial aspect of community drawn by geographical boundaries, for example the physical boundaries of towns and cities (Coe et al., 2007). *Place* also emphasizes the relational, as being ‘open and permeable combinations of social relations that originate inside and outside them’ (Ward, 2007, p. 270). *Space*, like community, has proven difficult to conceptualize within geography (Whaley, 2018). Some contemporary geographers see it as socially constructed, in a manner similar to place (Ellem & Shields, 1999; Ward, 2007). *Space* represents flows between places, the interactions between places, emphasizing the relational aspect of locality. It is made up of ‘interlocking’ sets of human relations (Ellem & Shields, 1999; Sack, 1993); with such a construction of space reflecting how spaces are perceived, conceived and lived (Whaley, 2018). Locality as a component of community is further impacted by *scale*. Drawing attention to the concept of community suggests a focus on the local scale of place and space. However, this cannot be done without recognizing other, related scales.

In summary, community comprises three components: local relationships, local policies and services, and locality, with each component emphasizing relational, spatial, structural and temporal aspects (see Figure 1). Local relationships are embedded in localities (place/space), and are partially structured by local policies and services, as well as community



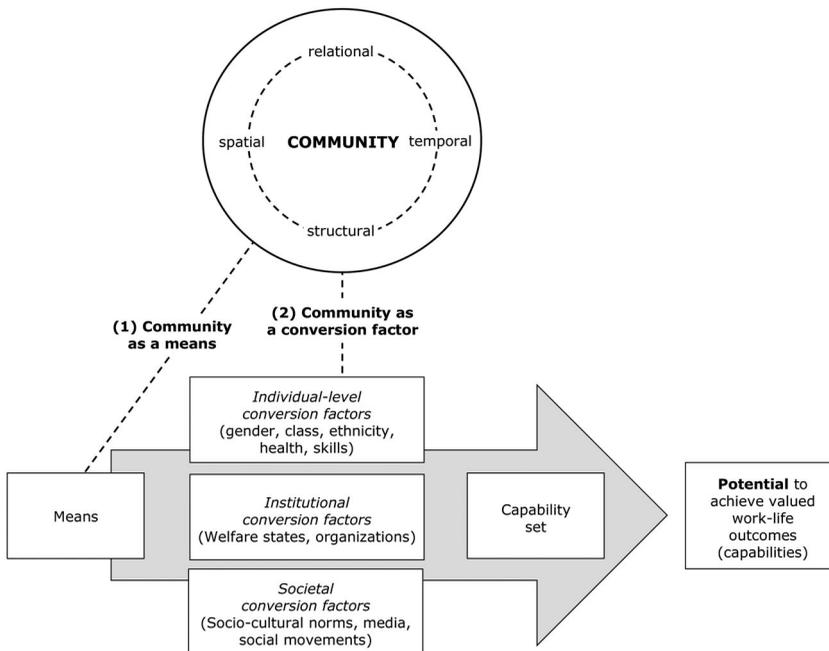
**Figure 1.** Community defined as local relationships, local policies and locality.

Note that the arrows in the figure do not represent causal relationships as they do in *positivist* social science. In line with Robertson (2016, 86), we argue ‘that the capability approach is not neatly pigeon holed as *positivist* or *anti-positivist*, *interpretivist* or *objectivist*. The researcher therefore must seek a philosophical approach that transcends these dichotomies’.

organization and/or norms. For conceptualization purposes, we separate out the three components and consider them one-dimensionally. In reality, they can interact in various ways to create the community context in which individuals are embedded, in a dynamic process of structure, agency and capability developing across time. For example, Hostetler et al. (2012) suggest the services and policies provided as community resources for working parents ultimately become resources through parents’ local relationships with community members. Similarly, Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2006) suggest subjective perceptions of local relationships are related to the use of community resources (local policies), which ultimately affects parents’ psychological well-being. Such separation of local relationships, local policies and locality for conceptualization purposes is artificial; in empirical applications community will likely be a complex interaction of all three.

### **Integrating community from an interdisciplinary capability perspective**

In this article we do not aspire to present a conclusive conceptualization and integration of the concept of ‘community’ into the work–family debate. Instead, we seek to demonstrate how the CA can clarify the various ways in which communities influence the work–life interface, and which dimensions of community influence the various ‘steps’ along the ‘route’ towards work–life capabilities. Taking a community-based capabilities approach allows us to conceptualize the layered, dynamic components of community and the ways in which they interact with personal, institutional and societal factors to create, enable, or constrain real opportunities at the work–life interface (see Figure 2). From a capability perspective, community can affect individuals’ work–life capabilities in two distinct ways: as a ‘means’ within the work–life interface, and as ‘conversion factors’ shaping their capabilities.



**Figure 2.** A communities-based understanding of work–life capabilities adapted from Hobson (2014), Hoogenboom et al. (2015), and Robeyns (2017).

### **Community as a means**

In our conceptualization, community is considered as a means, i.e. as the social and economic resources individuals have at their disposal to reconcile work and family. *Local relationships*, when viewed as support or interaction outside work and/or the household (Pocock et al., 2012), are a resource (means) that, like time or income, can be used to help manage the work–life interface. Partners and social networks can be a resource for arranging care, for example (Kruijswijk et al., 2015). *Local policies* and services are also potential means. However, they can potentially create inequalities as well because public access at local levels can be uneven (Bookman, 2005; Jarvis, 2005) such as spatial differences across neighbourhoods (e.g. varying school and childcare options; McDowell et al., 2006).

### **Community as a conversion factor**

Community can also be a conversion factor. Conversion factors shape the ways individuals translate means into capabilities and, taken together, form the context in which individuals are embedded at the personal, institutional and societal level. *Local relationships* function as conversion factors when they enable, hinder or direct individuals' ability to translate other resources into real opportunities to lead valued lives. For example, local relationships form a foundation for developing future social capital (Williams & Pocock, 2010), which can help individuals access and navigate policy resources (Yerkes et al., 2019).

*Local policies* can also shape the ways in which individuals are able to translate resources into capabilities. For example, the retreat of the state as provider of services in various domains (e.g. care, but also transport, housing, children and family services, community-based health services, fire-safety) means services and arrangements that once were public can become private (or mixed-economy models), leading individuals and families to 'compete' for resources/services. Inequalities can arise from differences in people's ability to navigate facilities, arrangements and policies on their own required to compete effectively for resources (i.e. functional literacy; see Yerkes et al., 2019), as well as their financial ability to access these resources. Similar to the component of local relationships, effectively incorporating local policies and services into a community-based capabilities approach requires conceptualization of community as a potential resource as well as a conversion factor, dependent on the context (Hoogenboom et al., 2015; Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2017; Kurowska, 2018a; Yerkes et al., 2019). However, local policies can also be a barrier to individuals' ability to make full use of policy resources provided at the *national* level. For example, if national governments provide childcare subsidies, but local childcare services are unable to meet demand leading to long waiting lists, parents may need to seek alternate forms of care (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). Thus, local policies derive importance on their own, but can also be important given the interplay with national policies (e.g. Jensen, 2017).

Finally, various aspects of *locality* can also act as conversion factors that shape capabilities. Seen from the spatial-relational perspective, space helps to highlight power differences in the concept of community. Where social relations and interactions exist, so too do power differences. Industrial relations scholars use this social conceptualization of space to highlight power differences reflected in divergent notions of space for capital and labour (Ellem & Shields, 1999; Herod et al., 2007; Ward, 2007). Similarly, the construction of space has important implications for community, and its role in the work–family–community interface (Williams & Pocock, 2010). It tells us about how community life and social relations from place to place are constructed and organized, and the ability of different individuals and groups to act within social spaces.

Geographical and employment relation understandings of place, space and scale have a temporal dimension (Ellem & Shields, 1999; Ward, 2007). Drawing on McDowell and colleagues, 'place is not a static, bounded container for social relations but is instead the coincidence of a range of interconnected social processes operating at different scales over different time-periods' (2006; p. 2163). For example, Jarvis' (2005) study on the time constraints of workers living in London demonstrates inequalities arising from the coordination of everyday life within the temporal and spatial parameters of the city. The shaping and re-shaping of social relations and activities within this locality are viewed as the 'infrastructure of daily life' (Jarvis, 2005), reflecting real opportunities and options available to Londoners (capabilities). Applying such reasoning to the concept of community thus highlights how temporal and spatial aspects of community interact to shape what individuals are able to do and be.

Besides their separate workings (which in itself is merely an analytical construction), local relationships, local policies and locality also exert combined effects on the abilities of individuals to reconcile work–life. As previous capability perspectives in the work–life literature demonstrate (Hobson, 2014), the intersection of conversion factors between multiple levels but also the intersection of factors within any given level matter. Empirical

studies on community highlight the intersectional gendered nature of community. For example, that fathers' and not mothers' local relationships (i.e. neighbourhood friends) are a potential resource for families (Hostetler et al., 2012). Women and men are also embedded differently in communities (Williams & Pocock, 2010), meaning place and space can be gendered. The presence and absence of local policies and services can also be seen from a gendered lens. Families tend to settle in communities based on the compatibility of policies and services with men's breadwinning roles and women's caregiving roles (Sweet et al., 2005). The absence of local transport and/or local employment options is also a driver of women's self-employment (Williams & Pocock, 2010). In these and other studies of community (e.g. Lilius, 2017), the ways in which gender intersects with community differs across the life course.

Similarly, empirical studies highlight the intersection of community not only with gender but also social categories of class, race and ethnicity. In the Netherlands, the cargo bike, a bike with a cargo section up front often used to transport children, has become a symbol of middle-class motherhood within urban spaces (Boterman, 2018). Some scholars find that place is less important for middle-class mothers, suggesting the importance of place varies in gendered and classed ways (McDowell et al., 2006). Race/ethnicity can also be crucial for how community expectations shape women's work-life experiences, with women from ethnic minority backgrounds experiencing differing community, religious or cultural demands than white women (Kamenou, 2008). Future research requires a focus on such intersectional aspects. For clearly while we know about some of the ways in which gender intersects with community, we know less about other ways in which individual, institutional and societal factors intersect.

## Discussion

An interdisciplinary community-based capabilities approach offers a promising way forward for integrating community into work-life research. At a policy level, a community-based capabilities approach can be used to demonstrate the normative reference points of work-life policies. For example, several authors use the CA to highlight the gendered and classed expectations inherent in many parental leave policies (Javornik & Kurowska, 2017; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2018). Similarly, at the organizational level, while policies can be a resource, they dictate implicitly or explicitly who is entitled to make use of policies (Abendroth & Pausch, 2017; Chatrakul et al., 2017; Hobson, 2014; Moran & Koslowski, 2019; Takahashi et al., 2014). Further research is needed to understand the normative reference points of *local* policies. Our approach can also be used to investigate how the interdependencies of local policies (e.g. with national level policies) affects work-life capabilities. For example, how does the decentralization of care (e.g. with national regulations, but local implementation) affect the work-life interface? Research in this area can help to unpack complex and tenacious social inequalities in relation to social structures of place, space and scale.

A community-based capabilities approach can also be applied to investigate how individuals engage with policies and services at multiple levels, resulting in varying work-life capabilities. Such empirical analyses are underdeveloped in the work-family literature, possibly because of difficulties in operationalizing capabilities (Robeyns, 2017). A recent example of such analysis at the organizational level includes Chatrakul Na Ayudhya et al.'s study of Greece (2017), demonstrating how the economic crisis affected the agency of professional

and managerial workers, reducing their quality of life and impacting work–life balance. We know less about such processes at the local level. A further empirical avenue could consider the role community plays in what people value (*valued functionings*) and/or what they achieve (*achieved functionings*) (see, e.g. Kurowska, 2018b).

In this article we have argued that community affects individuals' work–life capabilities in two distinct ways: as a means (resource) for potential valued work–life outcomes, and as conversion factors, shaping individuals' potential to achieve valued work–life outcomes. However, it can also be argued that, analytically, 'families' are 'communities'. If we accept that a family is a community in its own right – with its own relationships, social 'policies' (informal care, cash transfers, etc.) and specific locality (in terms of place, space and scale) – we need to reconsider the work–family debate altogether. From this perspective, the debate moves beyond questions of how individuals reconcile work and family, towards recognizing a broader range of significant others in their lives, who – analytically and, in many cases, also practically – can hardly be distinguished from nuclear family members. In other words, conceptualizing families as communities in the work–family debate can help us to look beyond the nuclear family 'myth' (e.g. see Cogswell, 1975) and recognize the multiple ways in which nuclear families are intertwined with other social networks, shaping individuals' work–life capabilities. We then no longer merely analyse the work–family interface, but the work–community interface, which encompasses many more individuals and many more interrelations.

By conceptualizing families as communities the debate is considerably widened to not only include the work–life struggles of individuals in the post-industrial Global North, but also of individuals in the Global North and beyond who may not live and raise their children in 'traditional' nuclear family structures but in alternative social entities, like families with more than two parents, communes and 'blended families'. In addition, it opens up the possibility to include lived experiences of individuals in the Global South and migrants in the Global North, many of whom live their (transnational) lives in extended families, making it a truly inclusive debate.

## Conclusion

Community is a key aspect of people's everyday lives. Historically, in both political philosophy and sociology, it has been viewed as essential for perceptions of societal justice and solidaristic behaviour within societies (Stjernø, 2009). Communities were a resource as well as a structure shaping social norms and values. As societies transitioned into capitalism and the industrial revolution and the nation state took hold, communities were seen to decline in importance, marking a shift from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (civil society) (Durkheim, 1933/1997; Tönnies, 1887/2001). Many societies are currently undergoing the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016) / Society 5.0, whereby advancements in information and technology 'will fundamentally transform the entire structure of the world economy, *our communities* and our human identities' (Benioff, in the forward to Schwab, 2016: viii; emphasis added). Scholars suggest that the advancements in information and technology will not only fundamentally transform our communities, their impact on the continued dissipation of boundaries between work and family (e.g. Pocock et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2007) will likely result in a shift away from *Gesellschaft* back to *Gemeinschaft*. Developing an integrative and inclusive community-based

theoretical approach is therefore essential in order to conceptualize new societal trends, intensely and rapidly highlighted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

We suggest doing this by taking an interdisciplinary lens to understanding three components of community: local relationships, local policies and locality (place, space and scale). Such conceptualization integrates the relational, spatial, structural and temporal aspects of community long recognized by work–life scholars as independently important, but until now, not brought together in a single, conceptual framework. Developing a community-based capabilities approach, we focus on individuals in their broader institutional, societal and *community* contexts. This approach helps to clarify the multiple ways in which communities influence the work–life interface, offering a more inclusive work–community framework.

## Notes

1. Scholarship differs in the use of race and ethnicity as concepts. Crucial to either is using them in a manner that reveals power differences and ensuing social disadvantage, particularly given the racialization of various ethnic groups (Weiner, 2012).
2. Similarly, empirical researchers may see the same variable in different ways, as antecedents, moderators and/or mediators.

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