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The Finnish Breadline: Stigmatisation and the Social Power Struggle of Space

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This thesis calls to question what impact the public nature of the Finnish breadline has on the levels of stigmatisation, in combination with the socio and spatial impacts. The effects are concerned predominately with those that use the breadline, but also the general public and those that provide the aid.

Areas studied looked at how those using the food aid felt they were perceived by people around them and how it affected behaviour and emotions. Did it have any effect on the local social relations and class and how those with perceived higher status acted in return? Finally how did the queue directly impact the area?

The breadline studied was in Kallio, Eastern Helsinki; a mixed area known for being a traditional working class area with a reputation for being slightly rough, but also a trend setting area with low level gentrification. This and other breadlines have been a focus of media interest, generally concerned with how so many people are being forced to turn to it for help in spite of the reputation of solid welfare state. The lines involve a long wait, and hence become very public affairs due to often being in busy, town areas. In comparison the British system of food charity is a more private affair. Provisions are made through the use of food banks with no large queues, which removes the element of public view; would those in need of food aid find this a more acceptable method for help?

The main form of research was through the process of immersive observation and observations combined with the use of a small-scale questionnaire. A thematic analysis revealed several common themes and methods with which users of food aid were able to utilise in order to help deal with some of the stigmatisations and their created societal class.

The results led to a conclusion that the use of public space is problematic in terms of welfare aid. Not only does it does it further increase stigmatisation of the people in the line and how they deal with it, but also it directly effects the area. There is further evidence to indicate there is a power struggle for ‘ownership’ of the area between the general public, those using the breadline but also those that provide it. The area of study has become a home for social friction.

In conclusion there are good grounds and supportive evidence, both in practise and from breadline user preference, to favour a different practise of food aid.

**Keywords**

Breadline, Finland, Stigma, Social Class, Inequality, Space, Power
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1. Preface

I grew up in Blackpool, in the north-west of England. It was once a thriving seaside resort but over time became more renowned for its high levels of social problems and poverty. I was very aware that poverty was a large problem but the largest apparent indication of food help was that children in low income families were entitled to free lunches at school; while the soup kitchens were directly targeted at feeding the population of homeless people. There were and still are food banks but they were organized in a way which I felt allowed the user as much dignity under the situation as possible, an almost ‘invisible help’

The first time I saw a breadline in Finland I was shocked. A country known for its great welfare system had scores of people queuing in public for food aid. Immense queues as a clear identifying marker of poverty. How could this really happen? It was certainly a time of emotional turmoil to feel anger that the state freely let so many people struggle, to feel embarrassed for the people in the queue and for myself to be such an intruder on that moment. Wondering where and why the people had been scrapped of their dignity so harshly when there was clearly a different but potentially better system in practise.

It was such strong feelings and pure shock which sparked my interest in this area which led me to researching this matter further. The breadline dependency is also a topic that is gaining increasing media coverage within Finland, but also abroad as the possible illusion of a welfare state in all its glory starts to crack at the seams.
2. The Aim of the study

The Finnish breadline is a very public affair, it is frequently seen in media, in social media, and in public if you pass by one.

The purpose of this research is to address what the public nature of this queuing system has on several factors. There are the immediate stigmatisations of queuing for charity to consider, as it potentially marks or highlights those in line as being poor. How does the breadline influence the area itself, those social conditions and the relationships within the area? Has the area around the breadline been used to play out a public social battle of ownership? The questions to consider are:

What are the breadline’s effects on social stigmatisation and how do they affect people’s views and feelings?

How does the breadline influence the area itself and the social conditions and relationships with the area?

Is there any sort of power battle for ownership of the area?

Is there another option to the breadline? Would it seem preferable to those using the food aid?

The scope of the research draws upon some comparisons with the UK where a food bank system is in operation. This system provides food aid, but it is away from the public eye, potentially helping to ease some of the stigmatisations. Would this system be another option to the public queuing, would those using Finnish breadlines find the theory preferable? Would this option have the ability to improve community relationships?

The research is concentrated on one breadline in the location of Kallio, Helsinki. This is a district on the Eastern side, an old working-class district currently at odds in reputation against some low level gentrification.
3. Literature background

In this section we look at previous academic work that provides the background knowledge surrounding the topics involved in the aim of the study.

3.1. What is poverty?

While we can accept poverty for what it is at face value, there is no doubt that it is inequality between populations the world over. The terms rich or poor alone are “functions of social inequality” (Melrose and Dean, 1999). There has always been this inequality and it’s easy to see within any period of history. Those standing in a breadline are doing so in the face of poverty and need. Perhaps it would be wise to define what is meant by poverty; so how exactly can we define a person, community or city as poor? We can all identify poverty when we see it but academically it’s a little harder to define. Poverty is very clearly not having enough to provide the basics for acceptable living; the collective agreement is that it means not having enough in order to be able to get by to a specific standard of living (provisions of food, shelter, clothing) which varies by country but we can say generally poverty is linked to not having enough money on a simple level but in reality it is more complex. Within this there are also degrees of poverty such as absolute but in this case the simple definition of poverty is sufficient. It should also be remembered that poverty is also a dynamic structure it is not necessarily a constant but it is possible to move in and out of poverty at any stage of life.

Specifically poverty has been defined as a multi-fold, complex situation rather than a simple lack of finances:

“Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.”
Townsend is one of the most commonly known scholars in the area of poverty research who provided one of the most well-known definitions of poverty widely accepted and still in use is

“Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.” (Townsend, 1979:31).

This definition from Townsend acknowledges that poverty is so much more than the monetary aspect; it’s about home life, social resources, activities and having that ability to join in and function like any other member of society and importantly it reflects upon allowing for cultural differences.

It is these other implications of poverty that will be concentrated on, specifically as income is used as a direct measure of poverty but yet is just one part of a host of ‘cluster of conditions’ (Davies and Imbroscio, 2012:173) which go to impact upon social exclusion. A lack of capabilities to be fully active within society can only set to exclude those struggling with poverty further and potentially marginalize them further from active life. Sassen (2001), talks about city life being fully of inequalities predominately down to financial resources, but in turn this creates urban areas of wealth while the poorer members of society become grouped together. In effect a monetary divide creates segregation by the ultimate means of the built environment.

In 2009, you were classed as poor in Finland if your income was less than 1080 Euros per month (Yle, Finland’s poor..., 2014) and the current accepted figure is that you need 38€ per day to meet minimal requirements. This figure is country specific being directly
relative to living costs and expectations. It should also be kept in mind bearing Townsends definition that a person’s income or resources needed to cover all minimum aspects of life including participation in social activities.

3.2. The downfall of a welfare system

Finland has prided itself on being a stronghold in the Nordic welfare system. During the 1970’s and 80’s, Finns became reliant and expected the welfare system to do its job and ensure every member of society remained on an equal level as far as a basic standard of living was concerned (Riches and Silvasti, 2014:72). Kautto et al describe the 80’s as the “Golden Era” for the Nordic model (1999:1).

However, Finland suffered a big recession in the 1990’s; a period of recession is an influence that brings many changes in the social geography of a city. It was at this time that the first ever large scale need for food charity was established as the welfare system began to struggle under a heavy burden. State benefits were not enough to provide for its hungry citizens and hence the bread line was born as there was a real and desperate need for private means of support. Those providing and using the food charities were hopeful that this was to be a temporary solution under duress. Predominately it was from this point in time that “social problems and exclusion, especially among the long-term unemployed, presented a serious challenge both to the welfare state and to social research” (Gordon and Townsend, 2000:199), as the general public struggled to adapt to such a great change in circumstances.

Unfortunately the need for food aid never subsided under a struggling welfare system and it would appear that the need is growing with an estimated 20,000 people receiving help in 2014 (Yle, Finland’s poor…,2014), more recently the most well-known Hursti charity in central Helsinki now cited that they receive around 2800-3100 people in the queue every time which is twice a week (Iltalehti, Ruokajonot…, 2016). There is no escaping the clear intention and need of those people. The benefits they receive are not enough to manage on and they are forced to seek help though alternative measures. As Knox and Pinch (2000) point out these fundamental changes in economy affect many areas including class structure and community organization and the breadline is just one indicator of these modifications.
Very clearly the original values of a welfare state have dissolved over recent years. Some of those characteristics have been listed as:

“*The scope of public social policy is large. It encompasses social security, services, education, housing, employment etc. with an aim to meet most basic needs.

*The Nordic Welfare is based on a high degree of universalism, meaning that all citizens/residents are entitled to basic social security benefits and services, regardless of their position in the labour markets. There are also targeted measures, but they are applied only as a last resort safety net.”

(Kautto et al, 1999)

In more recent years the clear needs of the population have lesser importance to that of the affordability of the benefits system for the state. The welfare state has become quite a fragile safety network as the Finnish government are making further budget cuts for 2017, child benefits will be cut as will student allowances for example. Child benefit was first cut in 1995 (Timonen, 2003) which affected families hardest, it since hasn’t been reversed only cut further and news report declare a number of families standing in the breadline (Iltalehti, 2016; Yle Uutiset,2017) Yle News reported that there is now a record number of children living in poverty “Five percent of children in Finland were found to be from families subsisting on basic social security alone in 2014, the year of the survey.” (Yle, THL: Tenth…, 2016). This study information now being released shows that the budget cuts and rising taxes are really hitting the population hard and likely the upcoming year is going to see a growing number of people living on the poverty line. The breadlines are made of all walks and sectors of life, families with children, pensioners, students, unemployment, and the common theme that they are struggling and need more help. (Yle, Leipäjonoihin…, 2017) The breadlines are acting as a marker of poverty and reflecting the everyday struggle of those living with a lack of resources.
The year 1996, saw Finland take its first batch of EU food aid, and has been the only Nordic country to do so. The acceptance of this food aid is still continuing and July, 2014 saw a new Fund for ‘European Aid to the Most Deprived’ replace an old system. The right to food is included as a normal part of income support, which is a constitutional and legal right for everyone living permanently in the country (Riches and Silvasti, 2014). It could well be this reason or argument is the reason the Finnish government has done nothing further besides sign up to the EU food aid as the provided benefits are viewed to be adequate.

The apparent failure of the welfare system has made itself known across Finnish media sources but also internationally. The Finnish paper Ilta-Sanomat (Skottitutkija tyrmistyi…, 2016) recently picked up on a blog post from a Scottish poverty charity from a researcher and academic student. MacLeod had visited Finland and seemingly horrified at the concept of queues and of the breadline here also took it that they were accepted by society as standard:

“The long lines of people queuing for food have become an accepted feature of everyday life in Helsinki. After 20 years the initial public outrage and motivation to seek solutions has all but vanished. The issue is largely absent from policy or political debate, media interest in the once sensational images of the breadlines has largely worn off. In Finland, a country so revered for much of its social policy, there is generally an uncritical acceptance that food aid is here to stay” (MacLeod, 2016).

It can be argued that MacLeod is clearly biased towards her own cause of promoting antipoverty action in her own country but it is conceivably thought-provoking that she has developed the opinion that Finnish people have become resigned to the fact that the need for various forms of food aid is permanent. It also goes against the belief of Finnish scholars whose research has shown that it is not acceptable. Ohisalo and Saari (2014:85) discuss how the outcome of their research has shown how people very much expect the system to make provisions and provide services for all who reside in the country and are eligible for benefits. The breadline is described as a bleeding wound in
the system; strong words which by no means are accepting of the breadlines. Very simply Silvasti (2015: 480) sums it up “charitable food aid cannot be accepted as a viable solution in the Nordic welfare regime.”

In terms of the need for food charity regardless of country, it is summed up that the fault essentially lies with a lack of governmental action:

> We must seriously examine the role of food banking, which requires that we no longer praise its growth as a sign of our generosity and charity but instead recognize it as a symbol of our society’s failure to hold government accountable for hunger, food insecurity and poverty.”

(Winne, 2009:184)

In spite of some very strong conflicting views, opinions and actions the actual need for the breadline itself cannot be disputed.

### 3.3. The British foodbank system

The UK has a long history of poverty awareness and related problems and therefore is something that has always been under the spot light. As early as 1601 there was a Poor Law introduced in England which set those deemed to be ‘deserving’, apart from ‘non deserving’. For example, those classed as too old, sick or young were provided for while those capable of work were begrudgingly given the lightest form of relief. Already at this stage a person’s abilities were given moral judgements by society and it affected their treatment (Walker, 2014:11).

Poverty and hunger have always been a problem and likely will continue to be so. The British government have measures in place such as benefits aimed at directly tackling problems (but it is not a welfare state); however as per the Finnish case they are generally not enough and require supplementary measures.
Food aid takes places in a very different environment in the UK as a food bank system is operational. Many foodbanks are small scale, and run by churches and small charities but one large foodbank provider in Britain is the Trussell Trust foodbank, this charity network has over 400 foodbanks across the UK. The trust provided aid to over 1 million people in 2014/2015, to be specific their website claims “In the last year we gave 1,109,309 three day emergency food supplies to people in crisis” (The Trussel Trust, 2017). There is an estimated current 1, 400 foodbank centres across the UK, a foodbank may operate several centres or locations in a city for example.

Those in need are usually required to gain a requisite referral from social services or the doctor for example; but then can pop into a food bank without standing in a lengthy queue. The food banks are also charities, and those working there volunteer and try to operate a friendly and helpful service, some even offer tea, biscuits and time to sit and chat (Garthwaite, 2016). This helps to take care of the some of the related social needs in severe poverty but also provides support and understanding with compassion. As well as the social support the volunteers are trained and are able to offer practical guidance if so wished.

People are able to walk away with a couple of bags of food to cover full meals for a set amount of days. The food is in date, usually tins and packets for example but the contents are aimed to be balanced to cover the full nutritional needs and even a list of suggested meals and recipes is included to help. At the Trussel Trust, they put together the bags specifically to the individuals need, taking into account the amount of adults and children in the household and even dietary needs to ensure that everything in the bags is suitable for use.

The food provided is for a minimum of three days requirements; the standard selection from the Trussel Trust (2017) is:

- “Cereal
- Soup
- Pasta
- Rice
- Pasta sauce
- Beans
- Tinned meat
- Tinned vegetables
- Tea/coffee
- Tinned fruit
- Biscuits”

The food banks usually supply hygiene and toiletry products such as toothpaste and washing powder too as it is stressed that such products help with general wellbeing and self-esteem. They try to supply ‘treat’ items like pizzas, baked items or chocolate as much as possible as they are deemed luxury items that are generally unobtainable on strict budgets but are still highly desirable. At certain times of years there are also items that mark the holiday season such as Easter eggs for children, or the usual Christmas delicacy items.

A large proportion of the food donations for Finnish breadlines come from supermarkets and is expiring or expired food, while some does come from the producers. In comparison, in the UK it is the opposite, a good amount direct from the production line and then charity contributions. Several major supermarkets and producers have also partnered up with the food banks (Garthwaite, 2016).

For public donations it is very common to see a labelled shopping trolley at the back of the supermarket just past the tills. Shoppers are able to drop in any size food donation plus toiletries; they are then distributed at the food bank. The shopping trolley concept is well supported as over 90% of donations come from the general public.

The Trussel Trust will then refer those in need to further means of help, support and resources; such as the More Than Food Programme (2017) which looks “to help foodbanks develop into community hubs” and FareShare (2017) who “redistributed enough food for 25.8 million meals”. The food bank networks are much than the immediate nutrition needs, it is support, advice and social interaction. Other foodbanks
outside of this particular trust continue to offer long term food support as needed plus offering further help as far as each charities individual capability.

A foodbank trolley in the supermarket. Fleetwood, Lancashire, UK (March 2017)

3.4. The Stigma of poverty: Finland

There is clearly a stigma attached to use of food charity both given by bystanders and those in need of the aid themselves at a time when perhaps extreme hardship brings emotional issues on top of daily struggles. Generally poverty is seen to be the direct fault of the person experiencing it, due to factors such as a lack of intelligence or poor choice of lifestyle (Niemelä, 2008).

Stigma has generally been associated with issues such as a loss of dignity, shame, embarrassment, labelling, and an indication of failure (Spicker, 1984). What do the
users of the breadline really feel about their situation? Is a self-inflicted stigma or one from the general public if let alone there truly is one at all? Scholars of sociology talk about conditions of polarization and dividing urban communities. Does the breadline do this? Has it inadvertently created a case of rich versus poor, or them versus us? It can be strongly argued that an individual’s perception can strongly influence how they interact with poorer members of society (Bullock, 1999; Nimelä, 2008; Reutter et al, 2006). It can assumed those stigmatizing opinions are generally negative, and the sum impact can be much greater than a bruised ego;

“The significance of shame and humiliation is not to be underestimated. They play an important role in maintaining inequality and social hierarchy. They are painfully injurious to identify, self-respect and self-esteem, in other words to how we feel about ourselves” (Lister, 2004:119).

Those inequalities and social hierarchy greatly affect segregation within communities and can even add to whole areas being stigmatized due to poverty. Large breadlines are becoming targets of media sensationalism in Finland and abroad, while arguably adding to the negative labelling process which has a potential to affect how people are treated due those stigmas.

Those using the breadline are doing so because they don’t have enough money to provide adequate basic resources. The modern way of living has evolved into a very strong consumer society, bombarded with adverts and shown what we should be buying or what our lifestyle should be in order to confirm our social standing. In reference to the UK, Clarke (200: 22-23), commented that those going without or seen as undeserving poor were further excluded largely down to their lack of spending abilities or consumer power. Atkinson (1998) further comments that an inability to join in with consumer activities also weakens social bonds. In the Finnish case this is further expanded upon as it becomes so apparent those in the bread line are lacking even basic purchasing powers.

An article was printed in the National newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat on the 24th, January 2012, the title translated to “Clothing usually reveals a person’s class, even
when they try to hide it states a researcher – This looks and feels like poverty in Finland.” The headline was immediately followed by a large photo:

(Photo: Helsingin Sanomat: Vaatteet paljastavat...2017)

While the photo is not credited to a location or action in the article it looks to be a typical breadline photo as people queue patiently, generally alone with the odd pair and waiting for their turn, prepared with bags and shopping trolleys.

The article continues to point out how poor people wear worn and unfashionable clothing, the photo example being of a breadline where people have had no choice but to queue in public and therefore have been stigmatized purely for being poor. The breadline has been nationally highlighted and a prime example of poverty, not only are they clearly poor for needing food help they are also look poor. To enhance the stigmatisation person the researcher in the article, Begroth is reported to have said “Arvokkaat ihmiset käyvät töissä ja kuluttavat.” – Valuable people go to work and consume. Indirectly this has implied that those people standing in the breadline are invaluable, they are poor, unemployed, they dress badly and they need food. If this article is to be compared with statistical research (Ohisalo and Saari. 2014), it has been found that within the Helsinki breadlines 8.7% of those standing were actually employed either on fixed term contracts, part-time contracts or with permanent work. A
further 3.4% were students and 34.7% were actually retired. These figures indicate that nearly half of the breadline has worked, is working or is studying to create a better future for themselves. Half of a breadline has been indicated to be invaluable and worthless in the national press; a prime example of stigmatisation within Finland. The press also choosing to directly take a breadline photo in a clear case of what Garthwaite (2016: 137) refers to as “media-led ‘poverty porn’” which only pushes the aspect of stigmatisation. Various media sources are using the breadline as a prime example of poverty and it is further creating the division of ‘poor’ and ‘rich’, it sets those on the breadline apart from the rest of society.

The latest and biggest piece of research on the situation in Finland was conducted by Maria Ohisalo and Juho Saari and published in 2014 (only in Finnish) and entitled Kuka seisoo leipäjonossa? or Who is standing in the Breadline? They were able to collect surveys from just under 3,500 respondents across Finland with approximately 300 responses from every municipality. That alone is a vast number of replies, and required researchers standing for days and visiting places providing food aid in order for some degree of trust to be gained and in order to collect so many responses, information about the survey was also sent out beforehand. The majority of surveys were carried out independently, however some were carried out with the help of a researcher due to factors such as poor eyesight (2014:18). In the cases where there was direct intervention by the researcher there will have been some margin of error as respondents may not have replied completely truthfully perhaps to save their own embarrassment or even to please the researcher as they felt the given answer is what it should be. Ethically however, the survey was anonymous and collected no form of identifying information which would certainly be an encouraging factor in collecting strong data.

The research from Ohisalo and Saari (2014: 81) highlighted some similar strains of thought as those in the UK. Strong perceptions towards stereotypical users of the breadline being those who were saving food money to go towards purchasing substances for intoxication, holidays or simply too lazy to work. This has also been emphasized further as “it was hinted that the reason for food insecurity or actual hunger was undoubtedly the fault of the individual – some personal qualities or individual behavior.” (Riches and Silvasti, 2014)
It would appear that in a sense some perceptions of the breadline users are based on who is actually ‘worthy’ of the food charity. It is accepted that food is a necessity to life and a basic human right, but how has a necessary charitable process become a tool in placing someone in a social status? The simple public placement of a queue allows poverty to be clearly identifiable and for the general public to be judgemental.

3.5. Poverty and stigmatisation in the UK

UK modern society would generally like to think of itself as progressive and hence the idea of a classless society is generally anticipated, however the general public is still increasingly interested in what their position or place in society is. Far from the equality of a classless society, the UK has moved to set itself further into segregation as recent work from Professor Mike Savageat, at the London School of Economics found the general 3 class tier system outdated and created a new seven layer social structure. The traditional sense of working class, now had two layers below them. The bottom class being:

“Precariat - The poorest and most deprived social group. They tend to mix socially with people like them and don't have a broad range of cultural interests. More than 80% rent their home.”
(The Telegraph, The seven…, 2015).

The article continued with some interesting statistics, apparently only around 6% of the populate would be the elite, the highest level class possible, but 22% of those that took a survey to test a person’s class level came out on top. Meanwhile this bottom layer of class, the precariat made only 2% of the survey total. It was presumed that this class level would find the survey “intimidating” however; could it be possible that it was very simply the potential stigmatisation from a survey labelling you as particular class? Higher class levels are generally seen as being positively associated with affluence and good educations, those in the bottom classes are generally seen as poor, unemployed etc.
British Social Attitudes (The NatCen for Social Research, 2015) looks into the views and opinions of the general public. In the latest research they looked at what people felt was their own class in society in relation to general opinions about class status. Those that saw themselves as working class saw the population divided between a large disadvantaged group and a small group of the elite. Kate Bell undertook a study in the UK entitled, “Poverty, social security and stigma”. This was commissioned by a poverty action charity and therefore I would expect naturally to find that the reported situation was more severe as there is further chance for there a motive behind the research. The main outcome of the work identified three types of stigma:

- Personal stigma: a person’s own feeling that claiming benefits is shameful.
- Social stigma: the feeling that others judge claiming benefits to be shameful.
- Institutional stigma from the process of applying for benefits.

While the main point of this research was regarding the access and eligibility to welfare benefits and related attitudes, on a broad scale it is related to those in poverty and hence the group were more likely to turn to food charities such as food banks while benefit claims were being processed, a point highlighted by Garthwaite et al (2016:2) “rising demand for the basic need of food has coincided with an increase in those seeking help following benefit sanctions or benefit delays.”

At the start of 2017, there was a change in the governmental body that handles extra claims for social assistance within Finland. The changeover process has been flawed and has left many without vital income (Yle, Kela…, 2017), meanwhile they have also had to turn to the breadline for help, just as many in the UK have also turned to the foodbanks as similar problems and benefit sanctions have been applied. Interestingly while the UK does not operate to the model of the Nordic Welfare state is does have a strong welfare system in place that all citizens can have access to though many of the benefits are also means tested such as housing or income support. The research by Bell has highlighted that benefits in the UK do come with a perceived negative stigma (institutional stigma) while in Finland it is almost the opposite as citizens would expect the state to come to the aid first and foremost over charity (Silvasti, 2015).
Just as in Finland, there is a stigma attached as to the perceived ‘type’ of person that goes to a food bank. There is still the problem of ‘poverty porn’ in the media as it is a sensualistic approach to selling newspapers, The Times (2016) for example print grabbing headlines such as “White collar workers use food banks” to draw readers in. The media and politicians have focussed on poor personal choices and behaviour rather than just a factor of unfortunate circumstances amalgamating. The need for food bank use has been blamed on poor financial management; using drugs and alcoholism as politicians have been accused for not taking the matter seriously in needed debates (The Independent, Iain Duncan Smith…, 2013).

Turning to a food bank in the UK is still fraught with emotions and worries, the process of walking through the door itself is still hard, but there is no public queuing aspect to contend with. The stigmatisation of poverty is still very clearly affecting the people that use the foodbanks, but the nature and social aspects help to make the process a little less emotive and may even lead to people feeling a little easier after a warm welcome. Garthwaite (2016: 32) worked as a foodbank volunteer for research purposes. She described how new people clearly struggled with the embarrassment of walking through the door:

“I flinched at people’s nervous embarrassment as they blushed, crimson red, identical to the colour of the voucher as they handed it over to me. I would sit and watch people’s dignity slipping away as they asked if I could give them sanitary towels or toilet rolls to go in the parcels. But slowly, people came out of their shells, laughing and smiling a little, relaxing over a cup of coffee…”

Although there is clearly still a barrage of emotions taking place in turning to a foodbank, the nature and approach means it goes a long way into making the experience more bearable.
3.6. The concept of space

We generally go about our day without much thought. It is fair to say a large number of us have a similar routine of how we travel to work or school, where we shop, where we socialize or use our leisure time, which is what Lefebvre refers to as spatial practice (1991). Unconsciously the space around is and how we use it is political, we may walk one path but not another as it is nicer or feels safer, perhaps one area is simply more pleasant to visit or another may have a rough reputation. It’s about the technicalities and built environment but also about the feelings created and imposed upon it. Thompson (2000: 233) explains how the spatial and social collide “challenging notions of tolerance and feelings of belonging”. Pain (2001) explains how much of our perceptions, use and fear of areas depend heavily upon our own individual social identity. The social and spatial cannot be taken as separate entities; they overlap, mix, crash and affect each other. Forms of exclusion for many and any reason in a place only serve to create further degrees of social segregation.

Urban space can be immediately thought of in two direct ways as Colquhorn (1989: 223) gave the definitions to be social space and built space. However, the way we build our towns also reflects upon the building of society. For example building a technology park generally attracts a high percentage of academics, for example Silicon Valley. While the architecture of an area does create a strong ethos; there are also are many external factors that should also be considered as influences in the use of space and how areas evolve, those such as: international economies, national and international politics and global trends. It is very easy and common place to label an area as rough, posh, a ghetto etc. there is more than one outside influence to consider and “that the fortunes of individual places cannot be explained by looking only within them.” (Massey, 1994: 20) A pocket in a town is not created as a ghetto from the start for example; but there is a multilayer process built of many factors which create it. In the same sense the process of gentrification has so many driving factors behind it both economic and social.

Singularly or collectively we develop a sense or attach an emotion to a place. However, setting aside the architecture of the place it comes down to issues of society and social relations. Low (1999) clarifies that the spatial area is a result of social, economic,
ideological and technological factors. However, Massey (1994) explains the matter further as to how society is very much a power struggle between classes and it is this which becomes the spatial structure. Our perceived and realized social status give us power within an area and it affects how each individual or group use an area and the interactions that take place. Our social status creates the spatial inequality. In a sense it is an area concerned with the behaviour and processes of a community of people within an area. Society and social relations are never stagnant they change at varying speeds due to many factors and therefore it allows change though any previous labels given to an area can be hard to shake off, especially those with negative connotations.

Once the issue of space has been broken down into the built and social it can be further broken down as Lefebvre (1991: 38-44) makes the division three ways over the “perceived, conceived, and the lived.” Furthermore he advances to highlight that users of space “passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them”. In this sense the actors have been the government and the food charities being indirect producers of the space and the general public acting as the users of space.

3.7. Space as a factor in social exclusion

In Finland the queues in breadlines are long and those waiting are clearly there for the purpose of collecting food, they are not social events or wanted occasions. The breadline has become a marker of poverty and it labels the area it is in a poor area, the area is labelled and develops a stigma which can hinder future development and employment potential. The breadline is clearly visible and unmistakable and can leave those standing in it open to strong examination and judgement in that public area.
One of the battles with public areas is that everything is there for viewing, being an open space. However, there are still private moments within that area which are therefore open to be scrutinised:

- “Activities that take place in public spaces are open to the gaze and perception of others;
- the kinds of activities that belong to public space interest the ‘public –at-large’, and address broader issues beyond persons and personalities;
- public space is inclusive; participation is relatively unrestricted that is, participation is not limited to an exclusive class, occupation, group or status of people;
- public space implies free-access; it is open to the enjoyment of anyone free of charge.”

(Nystöm,1999:140)

These four points are a good guideline for the use and availability of public space but it would seem that the concept of a public breadline goes against the grain. In a sense the
breadline creates a spatial conflict between the rich and poor. Those living and working nearby can resent the breadline and the ‘type’ of people it attracts, while meanwhile those waiting in line can feel exposed and vulnerable. The breadline is there as means of aid and yet it may indirectly create further problems for those that need it the most. The breadline could potentially both indirectly and inadvertently cause restrictions on the space.

While there is evidence that Finnish breadlines are used by people of varying backgrounds it cannot be denied that there is often a stereotypical view. Users of food charity can be deemed ‘unworthy’ and labelled as substance abusers, lazy and work shy for example. These labels can be used freely and while they stigmatize those in the line it develops further and becomes one for the area. The breadline acts as marker of poverty for those in it, but it stretches out further and labels the area it is located in with several causal effects.

3.8. The Effect on those in the breadline: social exclusion

Firstly, because the breadline itself is a stigmatisation it affects the behaviour of those in it. They are expected to be almost ashamed to occupy space as those passing by lay a quiet judgment. This in turn affects their outward behaviour. They may bow their heads, feel they must be quiet and meek and try to pass the waiting time as quickly and as imposing on the time and place as possible (Walker, 2014).

Social exclusion is a concept widely discussed in academic literature. It is about social requirements and marginalization rather than material needs. Atkinson (1998) highlights how social exclusion is due to an accumulation of process but also a state. By accumulation of processes it could be job less resulting in stress, breakdown of a relationship and loss of home for example, an amalgamation of events. Fahmy et al (2012) describe social exclusion as a process of factors that are “preventing people from being able to fully participate in activities and lifestyles which are widely enjoyed, or at least condoned, within wider society.”
A lack of financial resources means that there is the inability to join in with community opportunities which sparks the isolation. This is social exclusion as a person becomes unable to join in with activities and it may also cause them to feel isolated from those around them.

It is a constant reminder that disadvantage is relative to someone’s own personal experiences and to collective groups. In affect it’s a fragmentation of society as there becomes public division of individuals and groups whether it’s for political, race or class issues. It creates that unwelcome sector of society as they are seen as ‘undesirable’. The breadline creates a very clear display of those that are easily seen to be poor. Social exclusion is the division between what is seen as ‘expected’ versus ‘unexpected’ or undesirable when an individual or group don’t fit into given social norms. “Generally, it is about (expected) non-participation versus participation.” (Murie and Musterd, 2004).

A report by Flaherty (2008) in Scotland, highlighted such how poverty influenced social exclusion as one participant in the study was quoted as saying:

“Things are expensive in the Borders and people will ask you to go somewhere and you think oh no, I haven’t got any money and pretend you’ve got a hospital appointment or something, you make an excuse. And then people stop asking you.

[Eyemouth, Female, health problems, 40’s]”.

This highlighted how the lack of resources turns into social exclusion; it’s a very simple, uncomplicated process. It also highlights the stigma as poverty as those struggling makes excuses rather than admit to their challenges. Castells (1996) coined a term ‘structurally irrelevant people’; it is used to describe those that have been excluded from the general social networks and easily fall through the cracks.
3.9. The Effect on those that live and work in the vicinity

Those that live in the locality may well feel resentment as it impacts upon their daily life but also long term situation, the NIMBY effect (not in my back yard). A well-known breadline may negatively affect value of a property; the stigma of poverty upon an area may be a factor in preventing new employment by companies. In turn a large food aid distribution will likely bring beneficiaries to the area which means that in a positive way a group of socially excluded may develop their own support network. However, in Finnish society there are problems regarding what could be seen as a “social underclass” or the undesired; for example small groups congregating to drink alcohol with further adds to the negativity.

“Thus, the social construction of space is the actual transformation of space – through people’s social exchanges, memories, images and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning.” Low (1999: 112).

It is these points exactly that create feelings and attitudes towards an area. When the stigmatisation of the breadline is so strong for all parties is the public situation creating further problems and feelings towards the actual line and the social placing and attitudes of and towards those in the queue?
4. Research design and methodology of data collection

When looking at the best way to collect suitable data, the most suitable starting point is to consider the questions that need answering; therefore the aim of the study is revisited.

A general overview looks at how does the use of public space for welfare purposes affect interactions, social standings and stigmatisations? It can be broken down further by looking at:

What are the breadline’s effects on social stigmatisation and how do they affect people’s views and feelings?

How does the breadline influence the area itself and the social conditions and relationships with the area?

Is there any sort of power battle for ownership of the area?

Is there another option to the breadline? Would it seem preferable to those using the food aid?

These types of questions invest heavily upon people’s opinions, experiences, feelings and emotions. Therefore, it is sensible to take an ethnographic approach to collecting data. Various methods such as observation and questionnaires can help gain a wider span of knowledge. The opinions and outcomes are collaborated and analysed to find themes and similar thoughts and experiences.

4.1. Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research plays a large part in collecting suitable data when considered with reactions and behaviour of people. It allows people to be observed with as close to natural behaviour and processes as possible in an environment or location. It’s about observing the collective groups of people to see their conduct, activities, customs etc. Furthermore it is important to remember to take note of things that are unsaid or not done, as ways of unwritten community rules. The work needs careful consideration, objective planning and strong ethical consideration.
The research in this case, in summary, can be placed into the three following areas:

1) Immersive observations: joining the breadline to see how people are using, interacting or avoiding the space. For example; how are those in the breadline behaving? Observing physical behaviour typical to stigmatisation (bowed heads etc.). Are there social interactions from any parties? Are any groups forming socially outside of the breadline?

2) Informal questionnaires: approaching people in the queue to gather some of their thoughts and opinions. Ideally short and a few questions.

3) Third party input: potential interviews with a food charity, poverty charity or Member of Parliament.

4.2. Immersive observation methods

Collecting information by means of observation is a form of empirical research; it can be either direct or indirect. In this type of immersive observation it is necessary to place yourself as the researcher, directly in the role of standing in the breadline. This type of position means “the complete participant (the researcher is totally immersed in the community and does not disclose his or her research agenda” (Angrosinom, 2011). This is especially important in researching an area that comes with a high level of stigmatisation attached to it, as it is important not to cause ill-feelings upon those standing in the line. But by not revealing the true identity or purpose of the practise, it means the experience can be directly lived and experienced as those around do so.

It is vital to plan immersive observation beforehand in order to gain the most from the experience, having a general idea of what to expect and areas to look out for can be especially helpful in the first observation. Being aware and prepared of what to expect can make the research smoother and more efficient.
There are general practicalities to consider; in this case, the time, days and location of the breadline. A pre-visit could be recommended to be comfortable in the location if it is previously unknown outside of the study material.

As previously mentioned, ethnographic research is about being observant. In this case the immediate observations would be those that were transparent by considering body language of those in the queue, those passing by and possibly staff at the breadline. General demeanour, groups or individuals social interactions, space that is occupied etc. are all areas to look at.

When moving past the clear physical processes, smaller nuances in behaviour and interaction can be looked at. Are there quiet processes that go on because it looks to be an expected behaviour or unwritten rule or unspoken code of conduct? For example in the breadline, is there a specific way of queuing? Is there some way people do or do not acknowledge each other?

The area itself should also be considered, looking at the facilities, how well kept the area is. Does it offer space or encourage social interaction or is it purposely set to limit time that is spent in the area?

Safety is also an important aspect. In these observations it would be wise to dress accordingly in order to ‘blend in’ so expensive brand new trainers may be considered to be making a mockery of the process to those observing in passing.

How to record information should be considered wisely. In this case would it be suitable to make brief notes on a phone? Writing paper notes would clearly not be a suitable option as it is a process which sets the researcher apart from the rest of the line. Attempting to make mental notes until a suitable point or location is reached to write could be a sensible option; however these are possible subject to memory skills and may not be as clear in recollection. Under the circumstances it was decided to opt to write points later however, if the situation was agreeable the use of short notes on the phone was to be the primary option.

Ethically there are many considerations in such a sensitive area of research. When the subject matter is also emotive for those involved, it becomes vital to consider all
aspects. As already mentioned; choice of clothes and use of phones play a part as it is
vital not to undermine the breadline situation and process for those involved. Under
these circumstances it would be clearly unethical to take the food aid unless it was
needed. As the position in the queue was near to the front, it was a suitable point in
which to make an excuse to leave the line. A simple solution here would be to pretend
to take an important phone call and walk away.

Further to the direct observation, there was also a case for indirect observation. After
leaving the line, a suitable position was to be taken across the road. The positive aspect
of this is that is allows the breadline to be viewed as a whole process, but also under less
emotive circumstances. With the direct observation method, the personal feelings and
experiences play a huge part in the proceedings. Indirect viewing means the experiences
are more neutral observations. The flow and progression of people in the line can be
seen. What do people do when they come out? Do they talk to anyone or try to move
from the area quickly. How do people leave? How many people pass by the line and can
others purposely be seen to change direction to avoid the line for example.

Both the immersive and non-direct observation methods should be written up in a
narrative form as soon as possible to completing the fieldwork. Information remains
fresh and it is easier to recall events with clarity.

One further method for recording observations is also to take photographic evidence,
the process itself being self-explanatory. It can, in this case include elements of the
queuing process, striking factors of the surrounding area, and snapshots of behavioural
actions. However, it would be unethical to take photos that show faces clearly, and
likewise personal distinguishing elements should be avoided as far as possible. While
taking photos it would be wise not to draw attention to the fact in order not to cause
upset, especially if there is need to take a photograph from the position of the breadline.

Three sessions of immersive and indirect observation were to be carried out with care to
aim for different times of day and if possible weather circumstances in order to gain
more variation.
4.3. Analysis of observation data: a thematic approach

Observational data should be studied to identify any regular or predictable patterns or approaches that are undertaken and for the possible explanations. Angrosino (2011) highlights the two main methods of analysis as a descriptive analysis or a theoretical approach. A descriptive analysis is directly looking for those patterns or key themes in the data collected. For example do those in the breadline often have a particular way of standing or positioning themselves? Maybe some form of common behaviour?

The theoretical analysis then looks to see how things may be related. So for example, do the people stand a particular way because it’s down to cold weather or is it a typical characteristic of shame represented in body language? Analysis becomes a multi fold approach of taking the data apart in layers and building it back with the perceived reasoning or explanations in place.

It is important to keep in mind that a lack of expected evidence or observations, are also just as important. What are the potential reasoning’s for what has remained undone or unsaid?

4.4. Questionnaires

Collecting data for questionnaires is likely to be the hardest part of data sampling. Questionnaires are a predefined set of questions to be posed to the respondent, in this sense it would be aimed at those that have directly just visited the breadline.

The questions should be formulated carefully, be concise but not leading so that the respondent is encouraged to answer with their own opinion. Keeping the questionnaire informal and short would also encourage active participation. While asking for some basic information such as gender or age is quite ethical it was decided that asking no identifying questions should be asked in order to help maintain anonymity, but as it may also encourage people to respond. I had some questions in mind before carrying out the observations but did not make a final selection until after this was completed; which meant the most suitable and relevant data can be obtained. Overall, it was
understandable that open ended questions would be the best format; this means that the respondents can answer or not answer a question as they wish rather than choosing from a set selection of answers.

To begin the questionnaire process I explained who I was, and what I was studying. I also gave a very general overview of British foodbanks to explain a referral was needed; but then there was no queuing, food was provided for several days and was aimed at being nutritionally balanced.

After deliberation the chosen questions were as follows:

1) Do you visit this area for other reasons outside of the breadline?
2) Do you think this is a good (nice) area to visit/socialise in?
3) What do you think passers-by think of the breadline?
   (If needing prompting - Do they act a certain way? - Do you feel they have certain thoughts/feelings?)
4) How do you feel when people pass by you in the line?
5) Do you worry about being recognised in the queue?
6) Would you prefer a different system for getting food aid?
7) What do you think to the British system?

Due to the nature of the topic, it is to be expected to have problems collecting a suitable amount of data. To be statistically relevant a good sample size would be needed but hard to obtain, an aim for 30 responses was set. It is ideal to run a trial sample set first but under the emotive circumstances and perceived difficulty collecting data this was decided against.

In terms of analysis, results from interviews are firstly coded. This means looking through the text, such as a transcribed in-depth interview and identifying sentences or words with a common theme that can be linked together and categorized. This is a simple explanation of what Have (2004) refers to as ‘grounded theory’.

It can be a time consuming process and possibly one that has to be redone several times but clear coding structure enables ease of further analysis and drawing of conclusions further along the line. However, it is important to remember at this first stage of coding
the “process is still ‘open’: data-driven rather than guided by preconceived theoretical ideas.” (Have, 2004:136)

When coding data it is important to keep an open mind as Have mentioned, there are many aspects and areas that should be considered, for example as Ryan and Bernard discussed (2003):

- Repetition: commonly used words and words whose close repetition may indicate emotions
- Indigenous typologies/categories: terms used by the respondent with a specific meaning and significance
- Metaphors and Analogies: a way of indicating the way they feel or believe something to be
- Missing information: underlying themes, what is not being said but implied

It should also be kept in mind that it is impossible to set the themes before any interviewing as it is impossible to say what will come up in discussion.

The second phase of analysing this data is a little more complicated. In a sense it is taking all the separate parts that are coded and treating them as individual data sources rather than a whole interview experience. They can then be grouped together and it may be possible to the break those codes down further by creating smaller sub-groups of codes as the relationship between codes is scrutinized. While the process may seem complicated and even tedious the ideal outcome is that it makes the final sets of data easier to analyse.

The easiest way to catalogue and analyse the data is using a specialist took such as the computer software ATLAS which is designed especially for qualitative analysis.
4.5. Limitations of questionnaires

Those using the breadline are predominately Finnish speaking, therefore it is vital to prepare the questions in Finnish and English. My own Finnish skills are a drawback for this situation, there are terms I’m not familiar with and my speech can at times be slow if struggling with pronunciation or grammar issues. Therefore I had planned to write a short background paragraph and the questions in English, then having the translation checked to make the process easier. It also meant that if my Finnish pronunciation was not ideal the respondent could also read at the same time. As a further element being able to show the written form of the questions could be a helpful way to show that it would be a very quick process.

As previously mentioned, a good level of response is also vital to process any statistical analysis which may be hard to achieve under an emotive topic.

4.6. Presentation of the results

The actual presentation of the results is just as vital if not more so, as explaining the methodology, reasoning and conclusions. The results from all the data need to be relayed in a clear, concise and user friendly manner and further more they allow the reader to the drawn conclusions much easier. This area is the key part in communicating findings and the back bone to proving or disproving the original research questions.

The results, analysis and reasoning will be relayed predominately through text. There is also scope to use various other methods of representation such as tables and appropriate graphs such as bar charts when showing the results of the survey data, however, this does depend on a suitable data pool.

While text is vital, clear and concise visual forms can make a greater impact in showing results but also can be easier to read, so presentation should be carefully considered. Some observational data can be shown with photographic evidence. The observational data and survey results will be co-presented as though separate data forms they work collectively to prove or disprove.
4.7. Realised problems and limitations of data collection

Before setting out to make the first observational data collection, I was aware that it would be an emotional experience, and it certainly was. I was also aware that the process of collecting survey data would be extremely hard, especially considering that this was a highly stigmatized area.

Unfortunately, collecting questionnaire results was a much harder process than had been anticipated and I was only able to collect ten responses over many hours. The lack of willing respondents was not even due to language barriers which had been anticipated, but down to the fact that people did not wish to talk to me. It can only be presumed it was down to the stigmatisation of the breadline and poverty in general or just people not feeling social and wanting to talk to a stranger. While originally I had been willing to make several visits, I was subjected to some aggressive behaviour from the breadline staff which made any future visit feel impossible.

While the stand alone results are very valuable in conjunction with the observational data, it does unfortunately mean that any statistical analysis is not suitable. However, the questionnaire results have proven to work in tandem with the thematic outlines of the observational data.

For further opinions I also contacted third parties, whom then agreed to answer a few questions. Unfortunately, at that moment in time it coincided with the run up to municipal elections and promised responses were not forthcoming. However, these factors are common problems in research and it is important to think of ways to circumvent lack of data and look at other options. In this case, I decided to utilize online options, creating the same survey though the google survey program and advertised it in several places online with a short explanation about myself and the reason for study. However, it was meant with no responses:
A screen print of the response page for the online questionnaires (30 March 2017)

While that survey received no responses itself, it did prompt one very lengthy email from someone very scared about the prospect of being on the breadline. So while the original concept had not been met, it still provided valuable information. In research it perhaps not wise to look as lack of data as an obstacle, but consider that it becomes part of the data itself.
5. Analysis of Results

When looking at the data collected it becomes apparent that what initially looks like a simple breadline with some degree of stigmatisation is highly complex. There are many varied methods of coping strategies which are methods people adopt or situations that are created in order to make the situation easier to deal with.

Lefebvre (1991) pointed out that public areas can be shaped by how we use them, but also our own behaviour reflects on them in return, this is something that should be given full reflection when looking at what is happening with the breadline. How does the public nature of the queue influence how the area is used, and in return how do people then interact in that space?

All data is available in the Appendix section.

5.1. The breadline and the lack of privacy

I continued to walk past the line, those in the queue were facing me. I couldn’t quite bring myself to look at anyone directly in the face. I was embarrassed for myself, I was embarrassed for them. How could it be that they had to stand so publicly to be scrutinised? Have we really lost all sense of human decency that we can’t allow this to be more private moment? (Observation data, 2017)

The quote is from the first immersive observation visit. The clear public nature and open viewing of the breadline hits hard with embarrassment, feelings running strong about both sides of the line; empathy, embarrassment and judgement.

The breadline is clearly in an open public area, at the intersection of main road in a busy city area, a tram lane lies right in the middle of the street with a stop directly opposite. It is overlooked by businesses and towering residential buildings. The placement of the
breadline was the most immediate and noticed aspect. In the centre of a busy city area, it was unmistakable.

Bringing the breadline into the public space forces the people’s hands in making a public declaration about their financial status; it turns a private problem into a social issue. Professor Dowler was quoted in an article highlighting how the lack of food itself was itself shameful but then it could be managed at home:

“Not having enough food is a very private issue. It is a private sector issue. Food production, distribution and even the regulation of food does not involve the government a great deal. It is an issue of private shame. People eat mostly within the home, and so what people eat, and the ways in which it is inadequate, people keep to themselves. And it is an issue of private suffering.” (Harrison, 2014)

In private, we can do as we wish and what we are comfortable with. Standing in a breadline is a public declaration of dealing with poverty and in turn not having enough food, the clear choice and ability of consumerism has been removed and the only option is what is available rather than what can be chosen.
Our public and private personas may be very different, in public many of us may choose to be more reserved. Allen et al (1999) commented that in public what is seen or on show is limited, and is generally the routine of everyday life or behaviour. The public nature of the breadline is something separate from this. It forces strained relationships in the area between those in the line, those operating it, the general public and nearby businesses. It also forces opinions and emotions. It has an effect on social constructions and what Saraga (in Lister, 2010:151) describes one result as “how people see themselves and their position and how others see it”. The need for food charity is increasing and growing lines may just cause for further feelings of resentment and alienation from all parties involved.

Massey (1994) explains the spatiality of power as a breakdown of how we each use and interact in the space surrounding us. In the process of this, how does it reflect upon our individual social status and our perceived social status? In the face of financial hardship some people have turned to gain help from the breadline, however in doing so it’s a case of being forced to publicly admit they are facing monetary limitations. Dealing with the situation at home allows the individual control over who to pass the information too, or where or whom from to seek support. In joining a well-known and public breadline the sense of what Spicker (1984) refers to as ‘information management’ has completely dissolved. Taking a step to ease some of the daily problems has in a sense created the potential for other issues regarding potential stigmatisation. It is a public show and acknowledgment of poverty for each individual standing in that bread line; they stand to the side of the pavement so not to cause an obstruction, quietly the line reflects upon a lower level of spatial power. Those waiting in line have neither the economic power nor spatial power with which to make a strong presence known.

Seeing the flow of people and traffic around the breadline relates how ‘normal service’ is still continued by the general public in the same area. Allen at al (1999) look at those daily movements and activities and note that they do divide space unequally. They specifically point out that “the worlds of different groups in the city may routinely overlap yet remain apart from each other.” This becomes very evident in the breadline; those in the line remain to the side of the footpath and rarely interconnect with those
passing by. This also adds to the risk of exclusion as there is a clear lack of interaction; both parties seem intent on trying to avoid acknowledging the other. City life is usually a collection of expected activities and movements, people going to work, school, shopping, waiting for a bus etc. Standing in an obvious breadline is not a usual activity of every day city life and therefore stands out as being even more shocking.

In this case it is unclear if the public queuing system is down to a preference of those that run the breadline or just down to the limitations of their facilities. However, what it does succeed in doing is highlighting those polar extremes, them versus us or rich versus poor. It creates what Marcuse (1989) refers to as an hour glass pattern, where there are the two extremes of population held together by a narrow band. In order to ascertain whether this was indeed the population structure of the Kallio area it would need further investigation over income, employment figures, education achievement rates etc. However, the public nature of the breadline certainly creates that impression as we are not subjected to any natural middle ground when in reality we are far more likely to see a spread of income distribution and classes, indicative that the largest part of the population would indeed be more ‘middle class’. When we as the general public are witness to such a display of need, it does create the illusion that the predominant class for the area is the lower class, the poor.

In the survey, one questioned posed was; how do you feel when people pass by you in the line? While six of the ten respondents clearly stated they didn’t care, there were also some strong remarks against the public nature. A woman aged around forty replied:

“Its shame, I feel ashamed. I have friends who don’t know I use the breadline, so I avoid it by wearing sunglasses and a big hood. It’s not nice.” (Questionnaire data, 2017)

In comparison one further remark from a woman in her late twenties was “I don’t care anymore, it’s so bad for us. My feelings have changed, I now see it as free food and we take what we can get” (Questionnaire data, 2017). The older woman clearly feels a strong sense of stigmatisation and evident dislike towards the lack of privacy.
Meanwhile the younger participant has clearly become acclimatised to the situation, almost resigned herself to the situation and altered her feelings to ease the stigmatisation of the situation. Yle Uutiset (2017) recently reported the circumstances of one man using the breadline, his wife worked while he stayed at home to care for their four children. Quite simply their income is not enough to stretch and they have been using the breadline for approximately a year, he said that “Ensimmäiset kerrat olivat vaikeita, mutta tarve oli suurempi kuin häpeä. – The first times were hard, but the need is greater than the shame.” It seems acceptance and treating the breadline as a necessity are a means with which to cope.

While the survey results were not statically viable they can still indicate feelings on that particular breadline when in comparison with other large scale research. Ohisalo and Saari (2014: 89) posed a question asking if the respondents felt that using a breadline was humiliating. For the Helsinki municipality, 15% strongly agreed with this meanwhile 40% completely disagreed. It is that 40% that feel no stigmatisation or negativity in joining the breadline that appear to fall outside of what is seen to be an academically highly stigmatising action, and we should question why this is. Are they already socially excluded from society and fallen so below on the level of social viability? Do their reasons relate to the twenty-something female? Are there problems of intergenerational poverty that have become so integrated into the local society that the breadline is seen as normal way of life considering this particular breadline has now been active for fifty years?

A different question was posed to ask what the respondents what they thought the passers-by thought about the breadline. The responses were very different from what they themselves proclaimed to feel, “it is widely accepted that statements about what ‘other people’ think are indications of the respondent’s own opinions.” (Spicker, 1984: 29). Only one reply gave a solid “I don’t think they care” (man in late 20’s), a couple replied that they didn’t know and it was largely pointed out to be an uncomfortable situation. If we use Spicker’s reflective approach we can actually deduce that those standing in the line are actually not comfortable at all, they have tried to put their own emotive aspects aside in order to survive the process of standing in line. If we consider
the public nature of the breadline to be a power and class struggle then clearly those standing the queue are losing. There is a stigmatisation attached to the breadline and the only way to attempt to deflect it and in effect for those to make it bearable is to attempt to exclude that part of emotive procedure, to treat it as a functional process. “It is possible that an admission of stigma is itself stigmatising. People may be eager to deny that they feel any stigma.” (Spicker, 1984: 28).

It would appear that the breadline has created a unique situation where it has by all intense and purposes tried to provide for those that are financially struggling; but in the process it has managed to further exclude one sector of society by the process of inclusion. If we were to consider the level of social capital of those in the forty percent from Ohisalo and Saari’s research (2014), we could take a strong estimate that it would be low:

“residents of extreme-poverty areas have fewer social ties but also that they tend to have ties of lesser social worth, as measured by the social position of their partners, parents, siblings and best friends for instance. In short, they possess lower volumes of social capital.”

(Lin and Mele, 2013:132).

Some of those standing in the breadline are clearly worried about being recognised and there is clearly some level of stigmatisation and judgement about the situation, one respondent said “I have friends who don’t know I use the breadline, so I avoid it by wearing sunglasses and a big hood. It’s not nice”. On the second observational visit it became apparent that it was fairly easy to recognise people, especially if they had some stronger characteristics:

“I walked down the line and was shocked to notice that I fully recognised one person in the line from being there two days ago. The man had some very clear distinguishing features and I could make no mistake. I noticed I also fully recognised a further two people but quickly found myself questioning others.”
While we may not think twice about recognising people outside of a certain environment, it could be problematic in this case. The survey respondents overall were not worried about being recognised however, one was slightly worried and for two respondents it was deeply worrying, one response stated strongly “I don’t like this! I don’t like this!” The public nature of the breadline means that all who stand in it are in the public eye, it should be considered how this may reflect if for example, someone goes for a job interview and the interviewee recognises the person from the breadline. It places someone in a position where they immediately loose that chance for fair equality of opportunity. This follows Fraser’s (2008) concept of ‘status inequality or misrecognition’. It is a cultural value that denies people their place in society, due to negative stereotypical views or judgements.

Florida (2015) wrote an article based on research that collaborated global city standings; Helsinki came out at joint 14\textsuperscript{th} place for the title of ‘the world’s most economically powerful cities’. As a side effect competing for a top city position also means that the levels of social inequalities and the poverty rate escalate (Lin and Mele, 2013). This also enforces Sassen’s (2001) concept of polarization in global cities, the rich are well paid in good employment while lower paid jobs such as the service sector are poorly paid but the cost of city living causes a squeeze on low incomes; “this outcome can still coincide with growing inequality inside global cities.” (Sassen, 2001:249).

Negative opinions can be reflected onto the area and therefore; it can be rightly or wrongly highlighted as a ‘poor’ area; the locale takes on the stigmatisation that has been placed upon the people in the line. Musterd and Ostendorf (2000) point out how that stigmatisation of negative stereotyping is then transferred on to the people again. It turns into a vicious circle of negativity and labelling.

Massey (1994) explains how the sense or reputation of a place is built upon the sense of community reputation combined with the actual. The breadline cannot be avoided in that area, it has a 50 year history and not only is it known in the area, it is used as a prime media example; due to this, on the first observational visit there were three separate photographers clearly visible. Their origins were unknown, but it would be fair
to assume it was for media or personal use; however they were there clearly to photograph the breadline.

5.2. Emotive aspects regarding food aid

For those standing in the breadline, they are struggling. Clearly financially, but also dealing with hidden problems, personal situations and emotions. Each individual has ended up in the breadline for a variety of complex reasons:

“Myself. Can I tell you something about my situation? I’m a single mother and errr, I’m errr an artist, a visual artist and I used to work. I used to work sometimes but now I can’t as I’m alone with the girl and then I got some illness. I got a depression, a real deep depression.

And that’s why I’m here now.

It’s so wrong that people have to stand here.”

(Questionnaire data, 2017)

Creating a public situation with the breadline means that all sense of privacy is dissolved, there is no choice but to be exposed to different opinions, attitudes and behaviours.” But exposure also has another meaning, one that has come to be overwhelming-vulnerability, exposure to hurt and danger, unsafe because not inside.” (Bickford, 2000). It is this exposure to others and to our own situation in the line that create mixed feelings. How we feel in a place can also reflect upon how we conceptualise an area, it shapes social interactions and memories. The public nature of the breadline allows people to be exposed and simultaneously judged, almost by invitation:

“It became apparent that by exposing the people to standing in the breadline it created a position where it was almost impossible not to wonder about someone, what their situation is, why where they in the
line and how. Knowing that it had a created a situation where it becomes too easy to pass judgement on a person without knowing anything concrete apart from the fact they need food. “

(Observation data, 2017)

In an email received in response to the online questionnaire, Ms F is facing a return to Finland and is worried about her circumstances and ending up on the breadline;

“Do people end up at the breadline because life is that tough in Finland when unemployed, foreign and alone or is it only people who already have serious mental health, gambling or addiction issues?” (Further data, 2017)

This is one person’s genuine concern, but it clearly shows that while unsure about who is standing in the breadline she can already build some soft line assumptions and judgements.

The first visit to the breadline had been rather expressive in turns of dealing with emotions created through the stigmatisation of poverty. The first thoughts were dealing with issues of belonging and acceptance;

“I felt horribly nervous that morning. I was nervous about how I would be accepted into the line, would I stick out in some way? Would those passing by stare at me? Would anyone try to pick an argument?”

(Observation data, 2017)

Concerns are largely placed upon what other people would think, while it would be expected to be concerned with thoughts from the general public it was also issues related to fitting in with the expectations and behaviour patterns of those in the line. Though nothing is said by those either in the line or passing by it is perhaps that which remains unsaid which creates the clear sensation of being judged which stirs up emotions. It remains unsaid, but immediately clear:
“As the line slowly shuffled forward I was quickly and rudely thrown out of my thoughts by a door banging closed as I realised a woman had come out of a residential doorway. I stepped to the side to allow her through and she didn’t acknowledge me in anyway. I think of all the times I’ve held a door open for someone or done that funny side-step dance when two people try to pass but end up stepping in the same directions and there is a little giggle and you continue on your way. The woman was around 60, she didn’t say thank you, give half a smile or little look to acknowledge me letting her through. I pondered over her apparent lack of basic manners but then realised she actually only saw me and the breadline as a massive inconvenience. We were blocking her doorway, we were eating up her personal space and access. We were unwanted.” (Observation data, 2017)

While someone’s lack of manners may not appear to be such a big issue, it creates negative feelings and especially under such stigmatizing circumstances they are heightened. It reflects upon a strained relationship and immediate power battle of the space, between two classes or the two groups; rich versus poor. It becomes a role play between status and social class.

In breaking down the area dealing with concerns as to what other people think, it means dealing with judgement, shame and embarrassment. Embarrassment is generally over relatively quickly and usually the product of failing to meet a social convention and is often the result of a humorous situation (Walker, 2014). It generally implies light of the situation when in serious cases the real emotion is shame which implies a negative situation and event. It is this feeling of shame which was stigmatized the breadline. Walker (2014: 34) continues that the physiological attributes or the body language of shame are a stooped manner, lowered heads and averting the gaze. This was clearly evident in the body language of those standing in the breadline but interestingly also evident in those passing the line.
It can be seen in this photo that those standing in line do tend to adopt a certain type of body language in accordance with Walker’s description. The heads are slightly bowed and all facing forward allowing each other a good degree of personal space but yet the line is organised or formed to be as non-invasive as possible to the surrounding area.

Those passing the line also adopted a similar pattern of behaviour, heads bent low, staring bleakly into the distance or at the opposite side of the road:

“As I moved forward the passers by continued to walk I started to get annoyed that no one was willing to look at me. I decided that I needed to challenge this, I stood up straight, squared myself and head held high I tried to directly look at people in the face and catch their eye, I wanted and almost dared the general public to make eye contact. Apart from the earlier teenagers, not one single person would look at me. The annoyance turned to anger and rage. Inside I was screaming that I was here, standing on the pavement and actually existed. I wasn’t some sort of ghostly figure that didn’t exist. I felt so strongly that I was being
ignored but why? I couldn’t decide if those passing by were trying to protect the feelings of those on the breadline not wanting to make that moment feel potentially worse or were they protecting themselves, possibly feeling guilty for being fortunate enough to not be joining the line? Maybe it was a combination?” (Observation data, 2017)

While actively averting a gaze is not directly harmful it quickly becomes apparent that it’s a strong pattern concerning the breadline. It becomes harder to decipher just who the general public are trying to protect, is it themselves or those in the line? Do they want to spare the feelings of those queuing due to the known stigmatisation of food charity, or is it to attempt to pacify their own feelings of guilt?

The sense of guilt is a strong driver in some actions. For the passers-by it can be based on the sense that they feel some degree of guilt for managing or making a decent living;

“I also felt so incredibly guilty, for having the privilege to be able to do my own food shopping and choose what I eat; to be able to do so without anyone judging me.” (Observation data, 2017)

Food is an emotive issue, for many, childhood meant parents giving lectures about children starving in the third world in order to coax empty plates (Poppendick, 1998). Are they fighting the knowledge that one’s own situation can change all too easily and they may find themselves on the breadline one day? Makela who works as a social director at the Salvation Army breadline simply said of the breadline that “it could be me any day. We never know what might happen in our lives.” (Further data, 2017).

With regards to the aforementioned issues regarding privacy we can consider the effect of standing for charity in a public space has on a person:

“But I noticed at that point there was a third photographer and I felt something to a mild degree of rage, did the world want to turn up and
take a photo of the show? It was bad enough to stand and wait with everyone passing and ignoring us but did it have to be captured and frozen in history too? It felt like a huge personal intrusion.”

(Observation data, 2017)

This is exactly part of the issue Nystöm, (1999) was referring too. In effect, standing outside allows everyone to pass their own degree of judgement. The concept of public space means that it includes everyone and everything within it. Being outside there is simply no way to avoid the situation either for those in the line or that need to pass by, it creates a very public scene, from what should be a private affair.

The observation detailed “Those waiting in the line seemed to have a sort of unwritten code of behaviour between themselves.” There are several examples of this mentioned such as those talking with a friend doing so quietly, saving a place while someone stepped aside and the generally orderly behaviour. While there is no doubt the consideration of being wary not to draw further attention to oneself in the breadline there are further elements to be considered. It can be considered a social norm and even expectation for an individual to monitor their own behaviour, against others in the same situation. Walker (2014:36) takes this further “pride and shame exist at low levels are reinforced by low-level responses that result in people becoming mutually attuned to each other, reinforcing a sense of attachment built through mutual respect and understanding”. This point agrees with the end of the observation:

“By the time I got home, I felt both physically and emotionally exhausted. I did however walk away with the utmost respect and admiration for those in the breadline. I feel it takes a big leap to put yourself out there as for that time standing in the queue its paramount to being some sort of ghost human being. You see me, but you don’t.”

(Observation data, 2017)

It was extremely evident that joining the breadline is not an easy process, the stress of the everyday situation that leads up to the first time in the queue with subsequent visits,
but the actual physical and emotional turmoil bring a quiet mutual understanding and respect.

5.3. Poverty and time; factors of social exclusion

The wait in the queue is uncomfortable, almost ‘luckily’ this particular line generally took around 30 minutes waiting time, however as noted in the survey responses it can be longer and in other breadlines the wait can be hours long:

“We waiting more sometimes hour, sometimes one hour half.”

(Questionnaire data, 2017)

Atkinson (1998) looks at time to highlight some specific groups of people; they are those that are deemed to have sufficient time which includes retirees and those that are unemployed. Those that are just simply short of time and a third group that are above the poverty line but short in time. This third group may also include people who need to work more than one job in order to keep above that line. Activities take time but also can be a reflection on consumption and poverty and they also require money such as cooking dinner, a trip to the cinema or a holiday. Considering the time and poverty relationship, it would indicate that the breadline also excludes those not amongst the first group of being time rich because the process of joining the queue eats up greatly into a daily allocation. The breadline itself is open only during the morning and early afternoon during a weekday which would exclude a sector of the working poor unless they take time off work to queue.

If we look back to Castells (1996) concept of ‘structurally irrelevant people’, we could perhaps question why those in the line are also not only forced to wait in public, but why their time is also taken up in such a manner. It seems that poverty also has a ‘time trap’ attached to it, things need to take longer. In this case it is also time which increases factors such as exposure to the weather. Two survey respondents directly mentioned it
was unpleasant to stand outside in the winter, which was further enhanced in the observation:

“The cold and damp felt painfully uncomfortable as I shivered within my coat, I'd happily have enjoyed a hot drink at that point but I couldn’t risk losing my place in the queue and having to start all over again.”

(Observation data, 2017)

The time waiting is further exposure to social stigmatisation and overall a drawn out and draining process. It is an assumption that the people standing have nothing else or better to do as they need to make the time available. It inadvertently is part of the social power struggle, enforcing rule and regulations upon those that can be seen as having no right to complain. It’s a means to forcibly manage someone’s time, when generally it has become common place to complain of being time poor and lacking enough.

5.4. Social ‘bubbles’ of emotional coping strategies

On turning around I saw the mother waiting with the pram again, her friend had come out from the distribution point, she put her bag under the pram and both walked off together. I wondered about how they both felt, to me it felt like a hard step to join the breadline and I can’t imagine the conversation had with friends. I thought it must be a very supportive friendship; to have a friend join you in the line while you wait your turn.”

(Observation data, 2017)

Along the breadline it was clear that the majority of people visit on their own, however some were there in pairs and there were some small groups people that consisted of clear long term friendships. For those alone it could be considered that that was an active choice. The act of going to the breadline is considered a stigma due to lack of personal capabilities. While visiting alone may be stressful it could be considered a
worse feat to admit to friends or family that your own personal circumstances were not as you would like or not what is generally seen to be socially acceptable.

There were some pairs in the breadline; it seemed to be a predominance of female friendships and generally elderly in age. Those in pairs generally carried a conversation in lowered voices and at face value it would appear to be nothing more than the opportunity to use the time to socialise with one another:

“Those waiting in the line seemed to have a sort of unwritten code of behaviour between themselves. They were patient, those that talked with friends kept their voices down, while those along just stood seemingly hunched over to keep the cold out. “ (Observation data, 2017)

However, if this is reviewed further it can be interpreted as a way and means with which to cope under the stress of the situation. In terms of a coping strategy it is a way in which to deal with the emotive side of the situation and find ways in which to attempt to lessen the stress. Having someone there gives moral support in an emotive situation and you can concern yourself with the conversation rather than the situation that has been presented. In a way in provides a “social bubble”, the bubble creating this little sub-environment of safety, gentle protection and insulation.

It can be assumed that those standing in the breadline are doing so through a lack of options and to an extent it may be the last resort as the stigmatisation is so strong. The emotional coping strategies look to be a way in which to lessen the burden than has been inadvertently placed upon them. However, Roberts (as cited in Snel and Staring, 2001) argues that even in such situations there is still a choice:

“Attributing strategies to people, whether as individuals, as households, or as interest groups, signals that despite the importance of structural constraints choice is possible, and that the exercise of choice can result in alternative outcomes”.

Going to the breadline with a friend is most definitely an active choice or conscious decision which can help to deplete or deflect some of the stress levels from social stigma.

During time in the breadline there has been clear presence of small groups of friends that could be labelled as alcoholics:

There are quite a few alcoholics around today, I’ve not seen them here before as they had some distinguishing factors such as very rotten teeth. They are happy and jolly though, not creating a disturbance though clearly loud. I feel slightly amused that the woman in the group is drinking wine but she has a little glass for it too. I’m reminded of a previous visit to the area with a study group and collectively being confronted by a couple of alcoholics heavily under the influence.

(Observation data, 2017)

It is a common situation in Finnish cities to see some congregations of both men and women drinking and also sleeping with the empty containers beside them. While alcoholism is a dependency issue it also falls into a way of living or having a lifestyle that is socially defiant and a way of presenting themselves with a level of aggression that keeps them separated from other members of society. This is a group that are clearly socially and economically excluded from society, seen as outcasts to the general community, possibly feared and rejected. By forming friendships with those in a similar situation they have developed another form of coping; an excluded group has created their own dependency network.

The breadline is clearly a source of quiet conflict in this area, Are these silent struggles are possibly also the reason for some of the antisocial behaviour? The recognition of disdain was recognised in the survey responses when asked ‘what do you think passers-by think of the breadline?’:
“There might have been some little problems sometimes because the line has been so long, and it disturbs the other people walking here. The people that don’t know this place give bad looks….”

“Some hate that people that come for food. There are some angry faces”

“They feel ashamed to see this as Helsink’s street imagine.”

(Questionnaire data, 2017)

The breadline users are clearly aware of their own situation and that those experiencing it from outside the line see things differently. Determinist theory (Knox, 1999: 243) looks to explain poor behaviour as a result of such conflicts in urban environments; it is an adaptation to contradictory demands. In this case a busy street should be a place for travel, a passing though place, a shopping area, a social centre and these roles all have general behaviours with them; but yet here there is also the breadline placing its own very separate and different demands and expectations upon people’s social behaviours and actions. These cross purposes create confusion, stress and in turn can create more social disorder.

Leonard (in Lister, 2010: 138) describes how resistance can be divided into two areas of “micro-resistance of everyday life and “organised collective political resistance”. It is this micro-resistance that comes into play with regards to provisions of welfare state services. This resistance also spills out and is played between the providers of the breadline and those that use it in an anti-social manner. As a concept, it is particularly linked to those with low incomes; it is a means with which to stand up to measures of discipline and control.

If we consider this small group that are going against the grain with those unwritten rules or code of behaviour we can further see that they are potentially making a statement about their own situation, acting defiant as a way of accepting any form of fault:
“Some receivers conform religiously to such implicit social rules in order to gain some status. Others instead are aware of what is expected of them, but choose not to conform. As conforming would suggest that they are to blame for their situation, which they want to make clear they are not.” (Bol et al, 2014: 15)

There were also minor themes in creating protective bubbles, but they are means to set themselves apart, or to transfer blame. It was commented several times during the survey, that more welfare was needed. From those using the line “we need more benefits”. Furthermore one respondent answered my questions but then continued:

“Myself. Can I tell you something about my situation? I’m a single mother and errr, I’m errr an artist, a visual artist and I used to work. I used to work sometimes but now I can’t as I’m alone with the girl and then I got some illness. I got a depression, a real deep depression.

And that’s why I’m here now.”

The respondent choose to talk further because she wanted to make me aware that she was somehow ‘different’ from the other people in the queue. No doubt very aware of the general stigmatisation and wanting to set herself apart with valid reasons, a means of shaming as it still transfers the blame and stigmatisation to those others in the line who must be lazy, unemployed through choice etc. It is what Lister (2004) has referred to as ‘othering’, it creates those categories of ‘undeserving’ and ‘deserving’. Showing that though this is very much a coping strategy it also shows there is also stigmatisation from within the breadline itself.

The protective bubble analogy, can work as a duel process. It creates that protective environment inside but at the same time it also thin, fragile and vulnerable to being popped. We can perhaps also question why some choose to visit the breadline together when the social implications can be tough, but it is that last resort. Apart from the potential to build on that initial social capital and support which is essential; it can also be a means by which some try and set themselves apart from the stigmatisation.
5.5. The breadline as a cause of altered social behaviour

The way the breadline is stigmatised clearly affects people’s outwards behaviour, as seen previously there are clear physical markers related to body language. Social isolation is a common problem related to poverty. At the same time, it became apparent that it also causes adaptations in social behaviour.

Those that were queuing in couples already adopted hushed voices as part of the unwritten rules, but on the third visit:

“I noticed on looking down that the guy in front of me was wearing ‘vegetarian shoes’, something I’m personally aware of being popular footwear in the vegetarian and vegan community. Ordinarily I’d have struck up a conversation about the shoes under ‘normal’ circumstances, if we had been queuing to go into a bar for example, but something held me back and I decided to try and build up some courage to speak to him.“  

(Observation data, 2017)
However, further on during the visit nothing changed:

“As I get closer to the end of my wait I’ve still not built up the bravery to speak to the guy with the vegetarian shoes. I’ve realised I can’t. I don’t want to draw attention to myself, or be a nuisance. It also feels like I would be intruding on his private moment when possibly he just wants to escape as soon as possible. I don’t want to stop him joining the queue in future to be recognised as the ‘shoe man’. It feels rude to strike up a conversation over clothing when I know I’d happily give a compliment under different circumstances.’”

(Observation data, 2017)

It became very apparent that the breadline has caused a change in social activity; it is as if the turtle retreated into its shell under duress. The immediate stress of joining the breadline for the first time has diminished but the effects are ongoing and evolving. The stigmatisation of the breadline is an affect that weighs heavily upon those in the line, from someone usually outgoing and talkative the personality has become more reserved. The physical nature of the breadline, the oppressive public situation has impressed itself to inadvertently create a social boundary. Lefebvre (1991) explains that those relationships created through boundaries are very important and in essence create the divisions of space. In this case, though the space itself would appear on the surface to be public and open and accessible to all it has in reality become a ‘junction point’.

“Junction points: these are often places of passage and encounter; often, too, access to them is forbidden except on certain occasions of ritual import.” (Lefebvre, 1991:193) He continues to explain that such places are also “in the nature of things, points of friction” (1991:193). The social behaviour has been affected by our expected social roles and how it’s expected to behave under the circumstances. Spicker (1984) made the argument that a person held in low regard by society can be expected to reflect that upon themselves with feelings of inferiority.
Socially the breadline would on the surface appear to be more accepted in that specific area, one of the survey questions asked; what do you think passers-by think of the breadline? One respondent, a man in his forties replied:

“I don’t know because it has been here so long, because of that I don’t think people even mind. There might have been some little problems sometimes because the line has been so long, and it disturbs the other people walking here. The people that don’t know this place give bad looks, but people have been here so long lining that those that know don’t mind it.” (Questionnaire data, 2017)

While in essence the respondent originally gave the opinion that the line was not a problem he then contradicted himself. This agrees with Lefebvre’s theory regarding junction points. The respondents reporting of ‘little problems’ and disturbing people walking past is exactly cases of friction, furthermore this was observed during the first observational visit:

“As I carried on walking I noticed a young Finnish man in his early 20’s berating an elderly man in the queue. He looked foreign, used a crutch and was not unlike the Romanian beggars that populate the city centre.”(Observation data, 2017)

It could be argued in this example that this public altercation would not have occurred if the breadline had not been occupying the public space, but fully follows the concept of minor disturbances at junction points.

5.6. Physical Coping Strategies ; Repacking food

One action encountered from the first observation was the way those standing in the queue had become prepared with shopping trollies and their own bags. However, it became evident that the food charity actually gave out the food in bags and those receiving it simply chose to repack as was evident outside;
“Some people were reorganising bags to make it easier to carry the food home or more commonly placing it into other bags, I did wonder why this was so. The breadline used ordinary supermarket bags so nothing conspicuous; did they want to disassociate themselves immediately with the choice of bag? Is the supermarket bag in that area a tell-tale sign of the breadline? “ (Observation data, 2017)

On the first day it was noted that the food was being given out in simple ‘S-Market’ carrier bags, a standard food shop, and there was even one across the road from the breadline. However, it became apparent this was a fairly standard practise and more than just convenience. This practise was also observed at a different food bank in Kallio, ran by the Salvation Army and operated a system that required no queuing:

“an elderly lady went inside the building and was out again in less than two minutes. I watched her pop the bag of food inside her own bag and carry on.” (Further data, 2017)

The process of repacking food in their own bags was and is a coping strategy. It was ownership. A means to claim normality just as any person buying food in the supermarket would have the choice over which way they took their shopping home.

While immediate thoughts may not be that a simple carrier bag has meaning it does become apparent that the imamate object has become a symbol of the breadline:

“At that point I noticed a woman coming past, she looked decidedly downcast. Head bent low, shoulders hunched over and looked as if she was struggling to carry the bag of her shopping. I decided it was actual shopping and not a bag from the food line as I tried to peer through and into the bag out of curiosity. I came to that conclusion because there was some baby food in there that it wasn’t from the distribution point but
really I couldn’t know. Maybe they do have baby food too? I had found myself looking at people’s food trying to judge their personal situation.”

The bag had become a status symbol of the breadline, on seeing the bag it led to a snap judgement of the person holding it, and in turn one judgement over their own personal situation. Repacking food was not just about ease, it was a normalizing strategy, a way to protect themselves from prying eyes that pass the breadline.

5.7. Perceptions of the area

To those who answered the survey:

“Survey question: do you think this is a good (nice) area to visit/socialise in?

One response: not socially, I don’t like this area.

Another response: kind of, it’s like the centre for these kind of people.”

From 10 responses, 4 were very definite that it was not a nice area to socialise in, two more declared it to be ‘ok’. Although it’s a small sample the results do not paint a glowing picture of the area. The comment regarding “these kind of people” is perhaps the most stigmatic comment regarding the nature and reputation of the area, someone within the line has labelled the people who use it and the area.

Opinions of Kallio, Helsinki are easy to find on the internet:

“We'll begin with Kallio district, where my apartment is. Pasila excluded, it's the dirtiest, poorest and quite possibly the ugliest of all Helsinki outside the suburbs. Here you will face students, old people, ordinary people, alcoholics, drug junkies, thai massage parlors, shops
owned by immigrants from India, Asia and other countries, punks, etc.”
(Forum post, 2005)

This area of Helsinki is quite unique, Kallio is known for being a ‘hipster’ area with trendy, cheap bars and clubs, a moderate degree of gentrification occurring but the other side of the coin is related to insufficiency and being rough around the edges. It has a long history of being a ‘working class area’, steeped in poverty (Evans and Cook, 2014).

The breadline is a dominant scene in this area of Helsinki, at a busy junction of a main road, near the metro station, shops, schools etc. The twice a week queue cannot be missed if you go past it by foot or on transport. Similarly if you are in the line, there is nowhere to hide. Such a dominant view can easily colour an opinion of the area, and in a negative form it can call the area in question. The stigma of the breadline can become the stigmatisation of the area, Musterd and Ostendorf (2000) highlight how that can be problematic with areas such as future employment opportunities.

There was drinking of alcohol on the street on every observational visit, one occasion it was brought to my attention by the intoxicated woman having a heated discussion with breadline staff (the so called gate keeper on the door) as she passed by the queue:

“After finishing one interview I was quickly drawn to the gatekeeper shouting. The commotion was centred around a woman in her 50’s clearly quite inebriated. She wasn’t in the breadline but simply passing by; and by all accounts for some reason wasn’t a fan of this particular breadline or welcome there either. After a few heated words the woman carried on her journey.” (Observation data, 2017)

On a separate visit:

“There are quite a few alcoholics around today; I’ve not seen them here before as they had some distinguishing factors such as very rotten teeth. They are happy and jolly though, not creating a disturbance though clearly loud. I feel slightly amused that the woman in the group is drinking wine but she has a little glass for it too. I’m reminded of a
previous visit to the area with a study group and collectively being confronted by a couple of alcoholics heavily under the influence. “
(Observation data, 2017)

This group while clearly drunk were not would be perhaps expected from a stereotypical street alcoholic. They were having fun and enjoying their day, completely harmless. However it instantly reminded me of a previous visit which had been unpleasant and it is that sense of association that needs to be considered with the breadline and the area it is in. Furthermore a news article commenting about how police were unsuccessfully trying to reduce drunken behaviour remarked;

“Police have especially had their eye on the corner of Helsinginkatu and Fleminginkatu. Inebriated individuals flock to the site, where fights break out throughout the day. The booze-soaked area is also a breeding ground for various types of illicit activity.” (Crackdown…, Yle, 2011).

Strongly worded media articles on public disorderly behaviour can only raise bad sentiments further.

This is exactly the corner of the breadline. The breadline a marker, or symbol of poverty and that cause of association can also cause feelings about the area. Do those that drink choose that corner because it already has a strong stigma of the breadline? Perhaps those standing in the breadline are using the alcohol and area to hang out as a way of blocking out that stigma and creating different memories? Between the alcohol problems and breadline it creates a dim reputation of the area; Hamnet, (2004) explains the ‘area effect’ where a larger proportion of disadvantaged create further problems and negative impacts, resulting in the area becoming lesser in terms of desirability.

One problem with the level of anti-social behaviour is that the general public use it as an example of the ‘underclass of society’. Brook et al (1999) point out some the characteristics of this group being “alienation, social exclusion, welfare dependency, socially isolated and uncivilised behaviour”. Essentially it is those seen not to be doing as the ‘average’ or socially dominant person does. This underclass can be seen as “representations of urban life and its problems” (Brook et al, 1999: 89).
In the survey one question posed was asking, what do passers-by think about the breadline? One very interesting response came “They feel ashamed to see this as Helsinki’s street imagine.” (woman in late 20’s). This was the one response that was unique and really resonated with respect to what attitudes of the area may be.

When an area is seen as being rough and poor, does it impact the way that it’s also treated? The square had rubbish dumped in it and hadn’t been cleaned up;

“In the little square immediately outside the distribution point I notice some broken furniture, mostly wood and shelf supports along with evidence of someone eating snacks. I wonder how long the rubbish has been there and what led to it.” (Observation data, 2017)

When the area is seen negatively does this impact people’s reactions and the way they take care of it? I had also noticed that there was a lack of somewhere to rest:

“There are no benches in the area, I thought back to rules and ways of encouraging social and open public spaces. Not. One. Bench. Nowhere for the tired elderly to rest after queuing, nowhere a mother could sit to calm a child. This felt like the absolute height of social division. It felt like those of us queuing had been given a metaphoric middle finger. We could stand in line, take passers-by ignoring our existence, photographers gawping at us and then we had to leave immediately at the end of the line because we had played our part. We were not welcome.” (Observation data, 2017)

From a previous visit last summer I remembered there was also a lack of benches at that time too, it wasn’t just that they had been removed for the winter. Potentially any benches had long since been removed as a method to curb the anti-social behaviour in that square. But what it did enforce was the feeling that the average person was not welcome there. This was not a space to be social, it was purely to be function and serviceable.
5.8. Reclaiming the urban: graffiti and rubbish

The breadline is on the corner of a little square in the centre which potentially could be a pleasant place in which to sit and pass the time socially. However, right to the side is an old kiosk standing, the paint showing the test of time and weather. However, it is covered in graffiti:

The Kallio graffiti kioski

If we were to ask people what they thought about it, no doubt there would be mixed opinions of it looking ugly because of the graffiti or perhaps some may find it cool if it has anything to do with specific tagging or gangs of friends.

While it may look out of place, it is a social action, a method of expression, an act of defiance and generally considered to be anti-social behaviour. A way for those committing the act to take ‘ownership’ of that area or a way to feel and make a
connection with it. The area specifically seems to directly belong to the breadline that but the graffiti stands out as a method of reclaiming that. It stands out as a symbolic gesture of defiance and an emblem of a power struggle. Lefebvre (1991:141) explains how such symbols in clear view represent an “emotional investment” at a particular place and are done so that everyone maybe witness to this.

Halsey and Young (2006) believe the act is a means to create a sense of association: “Specifically and critically, graffiti connects the writer to the city through the very act of writing.” The breadline itself is such a dominating part of the landscape and it clearly has some degree of social impact on the area too. When looking at the composition of the breadline itself, it is usually a mix of people from student age upwards (20 years plus) put more elderly. There were some children present with parents but teenagers were not in the line, or at least to any noticeable degree. There had only been one clear experience of teenagers in the line from the second visit:

“Some male teenagers were passing by, I presumed on their lunch break or similar from school. They were noisy and in a big group. I wasn’t looking forward to them passing but I was pleasantly surprised to see they really had no reaction in any way at all. They just carried on walking normally and were fine if I caught a fleeting eye contact. They just reacted as though they were simply passing anyone on the street, it really felt as if it was no big deal to them”
(Observation data, 2017)

This group had absolutely no reaction to the queue at all, and if anything, the short eye contact showed that it was a neutral experience to them. It could be that they had been become desensitised to the queue as it is a permanent fixture or perhaps that by the small act that take place in the area they had been able to make their own connections with the area in the time when there is no line.

The graffiti can also be a reflection on the actual planning and facilities of the area. Youth generally are lacking in finances but still want to socialise with their friends, often there is a lack of suitable places for them to go together, it maybe that the area
directing outside the breadline has become one of those places where they can be together without much questioning, the graffiti has potentially derived from boredom but also as means to mark their territory.

If we refer back to the photos of the graffiti, it can be seen that apart from dominating image, the text appears to make no sense. It’s rather freeform and appears to be squiggles and words, perhaps initials or nicknames of those committing the painting. Alonso (1998) comments that “These scribblings have been said to provide a unique insight into society, because messages written through graffiti are often made without the social constraints that might otherwise limit free expression of political or controversial thoughts.” It can be taken that the graffiti in this specific spot is an act of rebellion against the rigidity of the breadline and the unwritten rules that have been created in that square.

The graffiti on this kiosk has been allowed to remain, there has no attempt to clean it off or show any sign of being owned by an individual or business. But on the third visit further observations were made with regards to a building across the road and the general upkeep of the immediate square:

“In the little square immediately outside the distribution point I notice some broken furniture, mostly wood and shelf supports along with evidence of someone eating snacks. I wonder how long the rubbish has been there and what led to it. I notice that on the same side of the street, across the road, a man is trying to scrub some graffiti off the wall with varying levels of success.” (Observation data, 2017)

That specific corner has even had its poor condition mentioned in the media with conjunction to the anti-social behaviour:

“Community beautification efforts have also had little lasting effect. For example, a refurbished old-fashioned kiosk in the neighbourhood has repeatedly been vandalised.” (Crackdown…, Yle: 2011).

The two actions and keeping of these two corners are in sharp contrast to each other. One corner kept clean and graffiti removed, while the other is clearly littered and
painted. In a sense it’s almost like the road was the geographic division on the street which represented regard and respect for the area. The feelings of the people are immediately represented in how the area is respected and cared for, a division of space, social classes and acceptance of responsibility. The two corners have been manipulated and sorted by class strata (Lefebvre, 1991).

5.9. Owning the breadline

On breaking down the data as a whole the largest surprise was the way the actual breadline itself played such a dominant role in the community. While the positive aspect of food aid cannot be denied, there were also perceived negative effects which are specified further.

5.9.1. Staff behaviour

Staff or presumably volunteer behaviour was generally found to be very mixed, it could vary between extremely helpful or rude and even aggressive and through observations it very much depended on who the person was, so those who were known received a much friendlier welcome:

“The woman was very good with the people that came with wheelchairs as food bags were passed back and forth over the step in. However, there were also many elderly using walking aids and she seemed very selective about who she was willing to help lift the walking frame up or down the step for. It was also noticed she was selectively friendly with some people; it was of course easy to assume that doing that sort of job you would recognise longer term users of the breadline. However, there was still very much the element of ‘belonging’ and ‘unwritten rules’ that I had previously encountered. Watching the families with prams and pushchairs row them up at the side of the building just as they started to reach the head of the queue, those rules and sense of ‘belonging’ became
very apparent as I heard the ‘gatekeeper’ shout loudly and rudely “prams there!” to a woman nearby that hadn’t left hers in a timely fashion. From my own position I felt mortified for the mother to be shouted at in such a manner. I wondered why the ‘gatekeeper’ had felt the need to shout when it would have been more sensitive to simply speak to her. The same ‘gatekeeper’ was clearly not happy by my presence and constantly threw looks of distain my way throughout my time there.

Occasionally one staff member would pop out to smoke by the door, and chat with someone that she clearly knew and had been in the breadline. After finishing one interview I was quickly drawn to the gatekeeper shouting. The commotion was centred around a woman in her 50’s clearly quite inebriated. She wasn’t in the breadline but simply passing by; and by all accounts for some reason wasn’t a fan of this particular breadline or welcome there either. After a few heated words the woman carried on her journey. “(Observation data, 2017).

This acceptance of people and behaviour towards those using the breadline was also reiterated by one of those respondents who answered the questionnaire, a male refugee from Iraq, he was asked if he thought the area was nice and replied “the worker and organisation is not good, this place (pointing to building) not good.” He later explained he was a Muslim which meant he was limited as to what meat products he could eat, so sometimes wouldn’t take something unsuitable:

“When you go inside they not respect you. Take this, no take this, don’t take this! Go enough. If not enough. If they like you they give enough, if they don’t like you no enough they tell you go. “

(Questionnaire data, 2017)

The above observations and opinion clearly imply that those that work in the breadline see that is their position or role in which to create order, and impose their own definition of conformity upon those standing and using the breadline. Those using the breadline have already developed their own logic of unwritten rules and sense of how they
‘should’ behave in a public queue, but further to this those using the breadline are feeling that they are not being respected on a basic level.

The notion of charity implies fairness and aid to those that need it, and yet this is clearly a way for the breadline to show their dominance over those that need the help. Not only is this situation a two-way power battle of the public space and social class, the breadline itself has entered play, and portrays itself as the most dominate factor. It plays out that those who conform to the rules, means and accept what they are given are treated well enough but the concept of respect is not there for those that are seen to make a fuss or don’t conform as expected. Walker (2014: 54) sums it up by pointing out that “charity thereby demeans the recipient while serving to enhance the status of the giver”.

As mentioned in the observation above, on the day I attempted to carry out the questionnaires I was viewed warily, not by those in the line but by the woman ‘gate-keeper’ outside the door to the distribution point.

As evident from the above photo, the chosen point in which to attempt to interview people was in the public square. It was a good distance from the distribution point and in front of a non-associated second hand shop. However I was later approached:
“As I had my head bent low to look in my bag a man around aged 60, short and stocky startled me by a very aggressive “Kuka sinä olet?”, which means “who are you”. He was, as can commonly be described as ‘right in my face’. I explained I didn’t speak Finnish very well and that I was a student. I then asked who he was, I was unsure if he was someone from the queue or breadline staff as he was wearing normal clothes and staff have fluorescent vests on. He remained very threatening in his body language and in my ‘personal space’. He claimed to be the director.”

(Observation data, 2017).

The exchange was short but aggressive on his part and I was left feeling exposed and extremely unwelcome although I had technically been correct seeking pre-permission from the breadline operators and then carrying out the research sensitively. I personally was now on the receiving end of the same lack of respect that the asylum seeker had reported being subjected too.

After seeking some help to try and contact the person I had had an email exchange with, a woman came outside to speak to me:

“I pointed out that I was a woman standing on my own, on a pavement, not causing trouble. That he had come up right to my face and that I felt he had actually been aggressive in his manner. She replied “no this is not possible, my father is a good Christian man” and indicating to the line with her hand she added “he does this, he feeds people”. The man himself was stood nearby and chimed in that I had been aggressive because I had dared to ask who he was, he then walked away. I calmly pointed out that I had really felt intimidated and that there was nothing wrong for someone to feel a certain way in a situation when she repeated again that he couldn’t behave like that as a good Christian man.

I then simply pointed out that I was only stood on the pavement, I had no intention to interfere with their work and that I only talked to people
happy to do so. I was then sharply told I couldn’t go inside (I had not even been near the door the time I was there or had any interaction with the staff before this event) and that I should finish my research and leave.

I choose to leave a few minutes after as I felt very uncomfortable and unwelcome. It felt like the food charity had taken ‘ownership’ over this corner of the road and that ‘outsiders’ were not welcome. “

(Observation data, 2017).

The general aggressive behaviour lends itself to the view that the breadline and that area of the town is seen as their ‘turf’. Rude or hostile behaviour is a symbolic indicator of someone that feels threatened and wants to try to protect something; it also comes across with a degree of self-importance because it was clearly unacceptable to be asked in return who the director was. If somehow you are seen by those providing the aid as different, challenging or ungrateful, the basic respect is non-existent; further emplacing perceived social positions. Massey (2011) talks about internal geographies of a place and how identity is imperative to political organising, in this case it the breadline and its organisers look to be strong players in the political ownership of the area.

The general attitude and talk of feeding everyone with good Christian intentions smacks of a sense of superiority. Those directly involved have perhaps developed a sense of ‘halo complex’, as the breadline is for a good cause there can be nothing harmful from it. The breadline clearly is providing significantly needed aid, however at the same time is opening up the same very people using it to stigma and public judgement. Walker (2014) comments upon the fact that the undesired aspects of shaming, both personal and social are generally viewed with disdain. Sharing that created pain is generally not appreciated “especially those who are shaming them since this is likely to trigger further shaming.” (Walker, 2014:47). The continuation points out that those who feel they are doing their social duty may develop “moral rectitude”.
5.9.2. The spatial dominance of the breadline

Knox (1999: 222) defines spatial dominance:

“as the way in which the organisation and production of spaces and places can be controlled by powerful individuals or groups; through private property laws, zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, gates (and implied gates)”.

It is this dominance which is clearly seen through a multitude of physical factors. The creation of the breadline has been a conceived space, they shape and form how the area is used and in doing so “tend to get leverage on the power to shape the material ‘urban reality’ to which the rest of us then have to adjust.” (Healey, 2007: 204). The breadline becomes much more than a life line necessity twice a week, it becomes a factor and huge influence in spatial dominance, which therefore results in social dominance too. There are a clear three distinct methods in which authority is gained.

The first is by the use of a system by which a row of traffic cones connected with rope are laid out in order to make sure the line goes a particular way.

The breadline queuing marker from two different positions, 2017
It could potentially be argued that such a marking system would allow the general public to access the local residences and services nearby, however the guideline stopped in front of the pharmacy (the steps to which are just evident on the left side of the photo). It does deter people from lining up diagonally across the square, however, this would not interrupt the business. The use of the current system actually ensures that the line hits the pavement at the first and most public view point of the junction; a calculated manoeuvre to inform everyone that this part of the area belongs to the breadline. Furthermore it smacks of making a strong public and political protest about the lack of governmental aid and the general situation regarding welfare and benefits in Finland.

The breadline makes two further spatial claims with the way it operates, which are both evident in this photo:

The breadline making a spatial claim, January 2017

Firstly a truck is present to the right of the busy tram stop, it is parked on the pavement and means that the footpath is inaccessible to pedestrians. The truck was bringing food
to the distribution point and was parked up while the staff unloaded, talked and smoked around it. While it cannot be denied that bringing food to the centre is imperative, it blocks the entire busy corner. The clientele of the breadline have already been observed as wheelchair users, families with prams and toddlers, elderly with walking aids, they are greatly inconvenienced and placed in the path of danger by being forced to walk on the road and tram tracks.

In the photograph it can be seen how the food distribution point has a double door (the gate keeper is wearing a florescent jacket), it makes sense that one door is the entrance and the other side exit. The line comes from the right hand side, immediately in front and then enters on the left-hand side, those leaving then exit on the right hand door. The bulk of people leave to go to the tram shop or wish to join the main road, however, they need to then cut across the waiting line in order to get to the pavement:

“The majority of people left the building and wanted to go to the street, so it meant that having to pass through the line. It seemed clumsy and inconvenient. The woman standing by the door acted as a ‘gate keeper’. She controlled the flow of people into the building and often held some back trying to keep a gap open before ushering more people forward. “
(Observation data, 2017)

The common sense approach would be to change the entrance/exit side over. However, when breaking the process down it comes across as a form of manipulation, a means with which to exercise power and control over a lower social class. Urban governance is a means by which a party (in this case the NGO) set rules or standards which affect a large party of people, however as a weakness is that “it often fails to focus on the issues, of power conflict and interests.” (Davies and Imboscio, 2012:137). In this case the breadline would be in a beneficial position to act as a facilitator between the public and government, even to an extent the media. A strong organisation would give political weight and could help build community ties to help create a solid social foundation. Instead we find the opposite where the lack of consideration and very public power struggle mean those in the lower classes are used as pawns.
When conducting the interview, the respondents were asked if they would prefer a different method of getting food aid. From ten responses, two replied that this current method was “ok” but then followed it up to say that something else would be better. Eight replies were a defiant “yes”. Replies were further iterated with comments about it being unpleasant to wait in the cold, that sometimes it was too long to wait in the queue and that it was embarrassing to be outside. Clearly the outside option is causing negative feelings to those in the line, though to what extent is personal. The way they are required to queue up and conform to a strong system can only add to these feelings of negativity. Through some broken English the refugee’s final comment had been “one place when you come, he write your name. He tell you when to come, you don’t need to stay in the line. It’s better.” Those using the line clearly would prefer not to be standing in public.

5.10. Is there a different way to provide food aid?

When the survey was carried out, all respondents answered that they would like to see a different way of getting food aid. When the British system of food banks was explained, they were asked for an opinion and all commented that it sounded like a much better option, quite simply; “it sounds very nice in England”. There were also some comments collected from two UK food banks that were independent organisations with which to help draw some comparisons to long breadlines.

Through the survey, it was also discovered that there was a place in Helsinki where you could make an appointment and go collect food without having to wait in a line. Apart from making an appointment, the concept sounded very much like the UK system of food banks with no queueing. On investigating, it was discovered that it was run by the Salvation Army and was also in the same area of Helsinki, Kallio. The information on their website gave contact information, to call or email, to organise a time to make a collection. The person dealing with emails was very helpful, answered some questions and extended an invitation to take a visit, which was gratefully received.
The whole experience was very different. On arriving, I would never have guessed that a breadline operated out of the building:

“I had to walk for a few minutes and easily found the Salvation Army around a corner as per the instructions I’d been given. I did look up to check the street sign and number though as I was still unsure I had the right place because the street was dead, not a person in sight outside the building. It was only 9.30am, too early so I decided to wait on the opposite corner and observe a while. I checked the information from their website on my phone as I was sure the breadline was open, it was, opening hours were Monday-Wednesday 9-15, Thursday 9-13 and Friday 9-15. I felt really shocked and emotional to see that there really was no concept of a queue here, it was extremely discreet.”

(Further data, 2017).

The longer opening hours clearly help take the strain away from creating the queue seen in the Kallio breadline as it was only open 2 days a week, for 5 hours at a time. The first UK food bank replied that “we open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm” (Further data, 2017) and further made comment that they never have any form of queue outside the building. The second UK food bank operates slightly differently as it is aimed towards homeless people so it opens specific evening hours but they also walk around the town centre to give food out to those that need it. Likewise, they also don’t have any queue at their facilities.

At the Salvation Army not only was there no evidence of the breadline, the area itself was completely different. Peaceful and clean, no graffiti or discarded rubbish. Everything looked well cared for and as though the people respected the area.
The view across the road from the Salvation Army Breadline

“It was so quiet in this area I could hear the birds sing, it didn’t feel like I was in a busy city area next to a breadline after my previous immersive observations. The area was beautiful, clean and well cared for. There was a church opposite with two little play areas, two mothers chatted while their children played. To the left there was an emergency services station but it was currently peaceful.” (Further data, 2017)

As for the breadline itself, clearly the appointment method worked smoothly:

“An elderly lady went inside the building and was out again in less than two minutes. I watched her pop the bag of food inside her own bag and carry on. A slow trickle of people came, they all went inside and out so quickly. It was a very emotive experience; it felt like this method of food aid really was no big deal. It’s so easy and non-invasive. It was a quick effortless process for those going inside and it had no impact on the area
around it, no queues to negotiate, no business doors to awkwardly stand in front of.” (Further data, 2017)

The Salvation Army Breadline building during open hours (27 March 2017)

The staff and volunteers of this breadline want to try to keep the process of collecting food as quick, easy and simple as possible. Marja-Liisa Makela explained why it was important to them;

“We don’t want that people have to queue to get food. That’s why they have to make appointment by phone or email. They’ll get their own time and they get food without queuing. Queuing is difficult for the elderly and families with children. And we want to respect their dignity that they don’t have to queue.”

While the social department of this religious group clearly operate towards creating an easy process, they have seemingly also removed that stigma that is created by standing outside in public even though it still remains hard for people to accept they need help. From the above observation, we can see that some of the same coping mechanisms still have filtered through to this breadline in the way that people still choose to repack the
food into their own bag. It shows that while this ‘no queue’ option takes away the public struggle, it still has the general expected stigmatisations related to food charity and poverty.

Makela was asked if she thought it was embarrassing for people to come and ask for help, she replied “Yes I think that some of our clients have big step come to get food aid. Especially for the first time.” Clearly admitting to needing help is hard, but not standing in public view takes a lot of the whole process. The first UK food bank commented that:

“There is a stigma about accessing a foodbank and I think if it were more available to the community without them having to ‘ask’ for a food parcel, a lot more people would use the facility. I think that a lot of families struggle on the bread line and do not receive any support but are too proud to ask.”

The large Kallio breadline asks no questions, it gives food to all those that choose to stand in their queue. It can be questioned if the queue is so long because it’s only open a short time in comparison to the others, but then it is easy enough to take food if you are willing to stand in the line and be seen in public doing so. In comparison the UK food banks and Salvation Army are still busy, even with having to take that step to admitting officially that they need help. It’s a battle of which stigmatisation is worse, owning up once that you need help to someone or standing in public for open judgement?

That lack of public viewing also means that those living and working nearby have different opinions and experiences. The question was posed to the Salvation Army to ask do you think people that live near your breadline have any special feelings about it? In reply;

“I haven’t got any feedback from neighbours. I think that neighbours see that our clients are mostly "normal" people and they are harmless. But situation could be different if we have very long queue for example
in Myllypuro where people come to queue very early 05 o’clock or
maybe earlier.”

It has been clearly recognised that the concept of a large breadline does create uneasy
feelings and possibly resentment. It would be a natural step for any locals to make a
complaint to the breadline about unruly client behaviour or problems with access but it
is telling that there have been no complaints and the perception is that locals recognise
the clients as being just in a situation where they need help – ‘normal people’.

The First UK food bank also strongly built on this viewpoint when asked if the local
residents had any strong feelings about the foodbank;

“No, some of the local residents use or have used our foodbank. We had
a surplus of fresh food donated before Christmas so we put it outside
with a note to help yourself and it all disappeared so I suspect if we did
that on a regular basis, more people would use it.”

Not only is there a solid lack of complaints or ill feeling, the food bank here also does
some small acts which go to creating a positive community feeling. They also
commented that “We have a lot of donations from the community, from local schools
and churches and local families and groups who want to give to help those less
advantaged.” When the local community is working together to help the charity
provide food it implies that there is certainly a lack of ill feeling but one more of
compassion and understanding.

The Salvation Army clearly believe that standing outside is not a viable option due to
the emotional and physical implications. The UK food banks were asked for their
opinions on the Finnish breadlines:

“Dreadful that in this day and age people should be reduced to that just
to get some sustenance. I think it is humiliating and does nothing for a
person’s self-esteem.” (Further data, 2017)
6. Conclusion

In short, it can be said that the use of public space for the provision of the breadline or welfare charity, is having a confirmed and multiple negative effects. The public nature is reinforcing stigmatisation of those needing the food aid, not only are they seen to be a ‘type’ but it is effecting the users emotions which range from delicate and sensitive to a defiant indifference. The area is home to a quiet power struggle between the general public, those that use the breadline and those that provide it. The breadline has become a point of friction.

Those standing in the breadline are dealing with the immediate effects of poverty. They also go through many and varying levels of feelings both self-imposed and those which are generally accepted to come from public agendas. The sense of stigmatisation is felt on varying levels with many trying to find ways to lessen the emotional burden; leaning on friendships, disguising their identity or finding ways to separate themselves from the others in the queue even at the expensive of further stigmatising users.

The public nature of the breadline is most certainly problematic; those that use it are reacting in different and various ways as a means of coping. It is clearly causing some users to feel further embarrassment on top of poverty issues and a very strong sense of shame for needing to partake in food aid. The dynamics of shame and degradation are used as tools to keep order and firmly further enforce the social classes. The stigmatisation of the breadline ensures those that use it are forced to acknowledge their place in society. There are public opinions and judgements passed down and it directly affects how people are treated.

In an effort to ease the public process, some breadline customers claim they are not feeling any stigmatisation in the situation, an almost meek existence to make the process quick and easy; while others try to put their feelings aside for the sake of their family situation. A further group are directly using antisocial behaviour as a way to make a direct stand, a show of resistance against enforced authority. These feelings and actions come as a very direct consequence to the situation.
Poverty itself causes isolation as the lack of funds means many missed opportunities, further enhanced by their stark lack of consumerism and lack of ability to join in with social events. Not only does a personal financial situation become a factor of seclusion, the public nature of the breadline encourages it further. The risk of social isolation is worse when also dealing with the breadline, not only does it imply an absolute level of poverty, it means having to also deal with imposed wills of those around them in public and the real risk of being identified against their will. That risk of being identified was a real factor for some users of the breadline and something that they worried about which indicates the social stigma of the breadline is felt very strongly for some individuals.

A social power struggle is very clearly being played out in the area; the spatial hierarchy is strongly defined and active. The general public, those in the line (segmented in behaviour and feelings but united in cause) and the breadline providers are playing at roles to be the dominant party. Those in the line have become the bottom of the chain by the will of public stigmatisation and more heavily the imposed will, rules and regulations of those that run the food distribution. In this particular breadline it is perhaps the prime revelation to find that the greatest ‘owner’ of that power came from the actual breadline distributors themselves by imposing their will and rules upon not only those requiring their help but also upon the area and the general public itself. The heavy handed set of rules, use of public space, and restricting the use of public space ensure their presence is dominant in the area and it further segregates those that choose not to conform.

The upkeep of the area around the breadline appears to suffer as it is unkempt. Those that frequent it choose to deface property and dump rubbish which is indicative of a lack of pride and a clear sense of indifference. It comes as a result of retaliation and desire for the local people to reclaim some of their own area and ownership.

There is a small provision of non-public food charity within the same area of Helsinki run by the Salvation Army. Not only is the area kept well, there are no obvious or reported public power struggles between any actors of those that provide the breadline, those that use it, or live and work nearby. In this case, the charity actually wants and acts to build a sense of community and social support. It is not simply a one stop shop to
tackle hunger; but it is a way and means of helping the person in poverty as a whole. It is about tackling hunger, providing social support and even unity. While it does not tackle the issues resulting in poverty, it would appear to be a less stigmatic approach though it would need further research in order to fully ascertain this. This private approach is not only is easing the personal situation of those needing the charity, it is encouraging community understanding and support. Rather than isolating sectors of society, it is building and working to unite it and create social support networks. This works very much in line with the UK system of food banks, and findings are consistent that community support is a strong positive factor.

The need for food aid cannot be argued or denied, to a degree the stigmatisation of food aid can never be removed due to human nature and expectations; but there is clearly a different solution in place which looks to be a less problematic approach. It is one which attempts to serve the needs of society as a whole and works as a community unit rather than being a driving force for segregation and stigmatisation.
7. Scope for further research

This research has barely scratched the surface of the complicated spatial and social struggles of one particular breadline within Helsinki. There are many areas that can be developed further in this case considering the one specific example but also on a wider scale, therefore some brief suggestions have been made below.

Potential further research on this one public breadline, as larger scale research on the same topic may draw some statistically relevant data. Deeper research can consider variations and patterns over a time frame. This would require enlisting the help of some long term users; there is the potential problem of long term social exclusion. Dealt with sensitivity can also play a large part in the actual research itself.

One potential area is to research the breadline from within the organisation itself to access the situation, however ethically this has some delicate aspects and may cause some areas of safety concern for the researcher. If the breadline itself would be willing, a long term research project to change their methods of providing aid could be assessed to see how it impacts upon the people and the local area.

Larger scale research could look at a similar style study across multiple breadlines to access whether similar problems of stigmatisation and social problems are a city issue, a nationwide concurrence or if this outcome is purely down to this one location. Would Helsinki, the thriving capital have higher levels of stigmatisation over a smaller Finnish town battling with higher levels of unemployment? Do the larger breadlines with higher levels of media interest suffer with more social and spatial issues?

On an international scale, full research and comparisons could be drawn up with British breadlines. While at current it can be concluded from literature that the British breadlines encourage community, there may be some low level or different ways in which social struggles and power play is presenting itself. Do long term provisions of food banks eventually produce the same set of issues?
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I had previously checked the weather prediction the evening before and felt a light relief that it was due to be around +5oc, dry and partly cloudy. I had no idea of how long I would realistically need to queue and the thought of standing in line for a long time had filled me with dread.

I felt horribly nervous that morning. I was nervous about how I would be accepted into the line, would I stick out in some way? Would those passing by stare at me? Would anyone try to pick an argument? I knew for ethical reasons I needed to leave the line near the front and I was worried in case that would cause some reaction from those waiting around me. I felt as if that would almost belittle the time queuing of those that needed to be there.

Stepping off the metro I felt nauseous and really considered just turning around. I knew I needed to keep going, in a sense I was there because I had to put myself in the queue as I needed the aid. On walking closer I saw the fuzzy mass of a crowd and started to wonder if that really was already the start of the line? Could it possible that it was really so far from the distribution point? People were walking towards me with shopping bags and I was wondering if they had been in the breadline. I saw people joining it constantly; they had clearly come prepared with bags or shopping trollies. There could be no doubt, this was the line.

I had planned to just join the breadline when I met it but I kept walking. I couldn’t face it, I was too nervous about what anyone may think of me. In a split second I decided to walk past the queue and size up the situation. The queue was huge; it spanned a good distance to the next road. I noticed in the line there were a few groups of friends, a few couples, lots of elderly and some younger members plus mothers with pushchairs. The queue was orderly though with everyone staying over to the right hand side of the pavement (building side) almost trying to keep out the way.
As I reached the little square the distribution point is based I noticed some people hanging around. A mother with a baby in a pram, some people stopping for a smoke, some with dogs chatting and a guy standing at the side, acting a little shiftily. Some people were reorganising bags to make it easier to carry the food home or more commonly placing it into other bags, I did wonder why this was so. The breadline used ordinary supermarket bags so nothing conspicuous; did they want to disassociate themselves immediately with the choice of bag? Is the supermarket bag in that area a tell-tale sign of the breadline?

I walked a little further around the corner before I dared turn around, I didn’t want to look obvious in what I was doing. On turning around I saw the mother waiting with the pram again, her friend had come out from the distribution point, she put her bag under the pram and both walked off together. I wondered about how they both felt, to me it felt like a hard step to join the breadline and I can’t imagine the conversation had with friends. I thought it must be a very supportive friendship; to have a friend join you in the line while you wait your turn.

I continued to walk past the line, those in the queue were facing me. I couldn’t quite bring myself to look at anyone directly in the face. I was embarrassed for myself, I was embarrassed for them. How could it be that they had to stand so publicly to be scrutinised? Have we really lost all sense of human decency that we can’t allow this to be more private moment? I also felt so incredibly guilty, for having the privilege to be able to do my own food shopping and choose what I eat; to be able to do so without anyone judging me.

As I carried on walking I noticed a young Finnish man in his early 20’s berating an elderly man in the queue. He looked foreign, used a crutch and was not unlike the Romanian beggars that populate the city centre. I was torn, no one else was intervening and I didn’t want to draw attention to myself. I guess no one else wanted to draw attention to themselves either. I felt that the elderly man was being bullied simply because he looked foreign.
Towards the end of the line I saw two old ladies with shopping trollies reaching the queue about the same time as me but I took my place just in front of them. I glanced down the line with relief to see the young Finnish man had now left and the elderly man was left to his place in peace. I glanced at the time to mentally note it was now 10:15am.

Standing and observing every one’s actions in the line I noticed it was fairly common to be playing with phones so I felt at that point it would be fine for me to make some quick notes that I could update. It was a relief that I wouldn’t have to remember everything on returning home.

In the queue I noticed the line snaked in front of several businesses and some residential doorways too. I wondered if the breadline stopped some people using the restaurant on the aid days as it could be difficult or even embarrassing to ask people to excuse you through. Someone passed through to a shop and was very polite and almost apologetic at wanting to go through. At 10.20am the phone of the one of the old ladies behind me rang. She was very blunt at telling the person calling she was in the bread line with a friend and then proceeded to mention another line in Myllypuro (also Helsinki). I did wonder if the situation was so bad for some people that they needed to visit both lines in order to get enough to live on.

Those waiting in the line seemed to have a sort of unwritten code of behaviour between themselves. They were patient, those that talked with friends kept their voices down, while those along just stood seemingly hunched over to keep the cold out. I noticed how one person who had received his food bag then came to pop into Alko afterwards and another man then left the queue to go in and re-joined in the same spot. Alko had a security guard inside glaring at those that dared to go inside. I couldn’t at all blame those popping to the shop for something stiff, I could almost go myself. I was freezing cold and felt mortified, embarrassed and on show. I felt like I’d been put on public display and marched through the streets for some sort of bad behaviour punishment.
One woman in the queue kept her place with her trolley while she went to gaze in the window of some little design boutique which had a pretty window display of handmade jewellery. It was an odd collision, the mish-mash of two extremes held from each other by nothing but a pane of glass. I thought it was an odd place to have such a little shop. While Kallio does have the reputation for being a hipster area I felt this particular block was far from that reputation.

The line continued to progress at a good speed, brisk enough to feel I wasn’t to be stood there all day but slow enough to be left with my thoughts and reminders that I really felt a bit too cold. I noticed as I got closer that there was a simple guideline for the queue set up with traffic cones and string. Mostly I noticed how it meant that the front of the pharmacy was a little more accessible than the other businesses along that path. It was near the more open square in front of the line that I could see that there were still some people hanging around the little square chatting. They seemed very comfortable hanging out and I did wonder if they use the breadline themselves or it was just somewhere they gathered socially, their little hang-out spot. I also noticed a man aged around 30 was walking his dog. The dog stopped to be petted by people in the line and the man very comfortably chatted with the people stroking the dog. It was the only social interaction I’d seen from someone outside of the line, not that those individuals queuing acknowledged each other either. No passers-by made eye contact with me while I was in the line, at some point I stood tall, lifted my head high and determinedly tried to look people in the eye, I got nothing. There is a busy tram route here and I noticed how those sitting on the tram stole little glances at the line but were very careful to do it fleetingly. Maybe by standing in the queue I’d developed some subhuman power that caused anyone to instantly combust if they looked at me?

As I got fairly close to the start of the line I pretended to take a call and hurriedly left my position in the line to walk further up the street. I wondered what those standing behind me thought of leaving so close to the front. I walked a little further, crossed to the other side and took a position opposite the front of the line so I could make some further observations. While I was queuing I had seen two people taking photos of the breadline, I wasn’t thrilled. I didn’t want to end up in the media for all to see. I hoped
the photos were for study at best. The man originally stood awkwardly was now trying to interview people too, one man stopped to talk to him. But I noticed at that point there was a third photographer and I felt something to a mild degree of rage, did the world want to turn up and take a photo of the show? It was bad enough to stand and wait with everyone passing and ignoring us but did it have to be captured and frozen in history too? It felt like a huge personal intrusion.

As I continued to make some simple observations, most related to how peaceful it was and how this really was such as varied and mixed group I noticed a police van circle twice within a ten minute time span. I did wonder if it was co-incidence or something common place. The line was so incredibly peaceful I felt that the only disturbance would only ever come from ‘outsiders’.

It was that point of standing and feeling miserably cold that I started to think I could use a seat. There are no benches in the area, I thought back to rules and ways of encouraging social and open public spaces. Not. One. Bench. Nowhere for the tired elderly to rest after queuing, nowhere a mother could sit to calm a child. This felt like the absolute height of social division. It felt like those of us queuing had been given a metaphoric middle finger. We could stand in line, take passers-by ignoring our existence, photographers gawping at us and then we had to leave immediately at the end of the line because we had played our part. We were not welcome. Well today folks the show was over, but it wasn’t. The breadline would continue to stand for another three and a half hours. I couldn’t help but hope that today was one of those days when they didn’t run out of food bags.

By the time I got home, I felt both physically and emotionally exhausted. I did however walk away with the utmost respect and admiration for those in the breadline. I feel it takes a big leap to put yourself out there as for that time standing in the queue its paramount to being some sort of ghost human being. You see me, but you don’t.

Friday 17th February 2017
My second visit to the breadline was the same week but a little later in the day. This was Friday and therefore I knew it was the chance to join this queue for many as it would
not open again until the next Wednesday. I thought how it was potentially a long time to make whatever they would receive in the food bag, last.

I was incredibly thankful not to feel as nervous for this visit, mostly because I knew the ropes. I knew how and where to queue. I knew how I was expected to behave, I knew for the large part how the passers-by would react to me.

The weather was not the nicest, +4oC, grey, light rain and a horrid cold wind that blew through your clothes; I was already regretting not wearing more. It was easier to absorb more of the area this time now I didn’t feel I needed to focus all my energy on working through the first time nerves. Standard supermarkets and bars near the metro exit, however it was not long before I noticed a pawn brokers, the window was full of some expensive antique Iittala glassware and pretty gold jewellery. I had two immediate thoughts regarding who could afford to buy such things in the area and wondering how many of those in the breadline may have sold some treasured possessions in order to free up some cash.

The queue was considerably shorter today. I wondered if it was the time or the weather that had affected it. I took my place in the line straight away today and as previously it had continued to grow steadily behind me. I noticed I really didn’t feel so embarrassed for myself to join the line but this time my thoughts had really concentrated more towards the passers-by. As the line slowly shuffled forward I was quickly and rudely thrown out of my thoughts by a door banging closed as I realised a woman had come out of a residential doorway. I stepped to the side to allow her through and she didn’t acknowledge me in anyway. I think of all the times I’ve held a door open for someone or done that funny side-step dance when two people try to pass but end up stepping in the same directions and there is a little giggle and you continue on your way. The woman was around 60, she didn’t say thank you, give half a smile or little look to acknowledge me letting her through. I pondered over her apparent lack of basic manners but then realised she actually only saw me and the breadline as a massive inconvenience. We were blocking her doorway, we were eating up her personal space and access. We were unwanted.
Some male teenagers were passing by, I presumed on their lunch break or similar from school. They were noisy and in a big group. I wasn’t looking forward to them passing but I was pleasantly surprised to see they really had no reaction in any way at all. They just carried on walking normally and were fine if I caught a fleeting eye contact. They just reacted as though they were simply passing anyone on the street, it really felt as if it was no big deal to them. After they passed I noticed what I presumed to be a father and son across the road, the boy was probably around 5 years of age. They stood back and observed the line for a while, the dad did something with his phone and the little boy pointed a few times while they held a conversation. I imagined that the dad was trying to explain the breadline to the little boy before they carried on with walking down the road.

At that point I noticed a woman coming past, she looked decidedly downcast. Head bent low, shoulders hunched over and looked as if she was struggling to carry the bag of her shopping. I decided it was actual shopping and not a bag from the food line as I tried to peer through and into the bag out of curiosity. I came to that conclusion because there was some baby food in there that it wasn’t from the distribution point but really I couldn’t know. Maybe they do have baby food too? I had found myself looking at people’s food trying to judge their personal situation. How was that really ok? A little toddler traipsed just behind the mother but both looked completely fed up and the woman not once raised her face high enough to look higher than the pavement.

As I moved forward the passers by continued to walk I started to get annoyed that no one was willing to look at me. I decided that I needed to challenge this, I stood up straight, squared myself and head held high I tried to directly look at people in the face and catch their eye, I wanted and almost dared the general public to make eye contact. Apart from the earlier teenagers, not one single person would look at me. The annoyance turned to anger and rage. Inside I was screaming that I was here, standing on the pavement and actually existed. I wasn’t some sort of ghostly figure that didn’t exist. I felt so strongly that I was being ignored but why? I couldn’t decide if those passing by were trying to protect the feelings of those on the breadline not wanting to make that
moment feel potentially worse or were they protecting themselves, possibly feeling guilty for being fortunate enough to not be joining the line? Maybe it was a combination? I also became aware that standing alone on the breadline really allowed me to be alone with my own thoughts a little too much.

The cold and damp felt painfully uncomfortable as I shivered within my coat, I’d happily have enjoyed a hot drink at that point but I couldn’t risk losing my place in the queue and having to start all over again. I noticed that there was no one hanging around the little square in front of the distribution point today. Was it due to the cold? As I pondered over potential reasons a little daycare group came passing by with happy chatting children. The children just carried on talking to their friends as the staff developed a sudden fussiness with concerning themselves that the children kept walking and to the side. The staff behaviour looked artificial to me, as though being so consumed with the children it gave them an excuse not to acknowledge the breadline queue in any form. The children were almost a handy diversion for them.

A speedy 12 minutes after joining the line today it was time for me to act out an excuse and leave the line again. As I was waiting to cross the road I was joined by a woman who had been repacking her food into a backpack. Only now she was hungrily eating an apple, I had very guilty thoughts because I was wondering about her personal situation which was none of my business. I wouldn’t question anyone’s situation for eating an apple coming out of a shop.

I took the same action as the previous visit and took a position opposite the breadline to take some further observations. I was walked past a window and peered in to see several tables, at first I thought it was a café. It was a momentary relief as I thought I could pop in and get warm, but I quickly noticed it was empty followed by an astronomical price tag attached to the table. It was a furniture shop. I returned my thoughts back to the line and watched two elderly men come out from the distribution point together, they opened the bags, one helped the other pack it into a shopping trolley and they took a further minute to swop a couple of food items. It was nice moment to observe, the unspoken friendship and the tiny gesture that meant they likely got to have some degree
of preference over what they were to eat. I further note that the father and child I had
seen watch from the other side of the street had just come out of the building with a bag
of food. I presumed that just as I had done previously it was their first time and they had
taken a little time to weigh up the line and how it was expected to join and behave.

At 11.26am, just 19 minutes of being outside waiting I felt the level of cold was quite
unbearable and decided I would make a move to leave. I crossed the road with the
intention of walking past the line to see if I could make eye contact. I walked down the
line and was shocked to notice that I fully recognised one person in the line from being
there two days ago. The man had had some very clear distinguishing features and I
could make no mistake. I noticed I also fully recognised a further two people but
quickly found myself questioning others.

Just outside Alko I noticed one man in the queue open a bottle of strong alcohol and
take a drink from the bottle. Someone else a few people back took a look at him and
took the chance to pop into the shop himself. I thought about reading previous stigma
research and how those using food charities were so often labelled negatively and that a
passer-by seeing this public drinking may be inclined to lean to that stigmatization.
From my own position and knowing how cold the wait was my own thoughts had been
to sympathise.

Walking back to the metro I noticed how besides the restaurant a few doors from the
breadline distribution point there was no cafes. I wondered if this was because the area
was ‘poor’ and those using the breadline were not expected to have finances to visit a
coffee shop. Would it be bad business to have a café opposite or near the line? Maybe
people wouldn’t want to sit inside with the line snaking in clear view? I also felt it was a
way to which further implicate that not only was the breadline not welcome, those of us
which stood there were not welcome to stay either.

Overall I felt it had been much easier to join the breadline this time. I knew the ropes, I
knew what to expect and hadn’t been as nervous. I was surprised by how my own
emotions and feelings are so quickly changing in a short space of time.
As an afterthought on travelling home, I came to wonder about the process of recognizing someone in the line. Would it influence my own actions in anyway if I was in the position to be offering a job for example and I interviewed someone knowingly from the breadline? What would I think to maybe go to a bar on a Saturday night and spot someone worse for wear? It became apparent that by exposing the people to standing in the breadline it created a position where it was almost impossible not to wonder about someone, what their situation is, why where they in the line and how. Knowing that it had created a situation where it becomes too easy to pass judgement on a person without knowing anything concrete apart from the fact they need food.

**Friday 10th March 2017**

I got off the metro today and joined the queue on the escalator behind an elderly woman with a shopping trolley, I immediately started to wonder if she was going to join the breadline too, it was though the shopping trolley had reached the status symbol for the area. I slowly followed her down the road and just passed her as she stopped to adjust something, but sure enough she joined the line right behind me.

It was around 10.45am when I joined the queue. The weather was pleasant, it wasn’t sleet ing or windy. It was a few plus degrees and the sun was starting to warm up which felt nice. I noticed on looking down that the guy in front of me was wearing ‘vegetarian shoes’, something I’m personally aware of being popular footwear in the vegetarian and vegan community. Ordinarily I’d have struck up a conversation about the shoes under “normal” circumstances, if we had been queuing to go into a bar for example, but something held me back and I decided to try and build up some courage to speak to him.
After taking note of the above shoes I noticed how everyone else around me had taken an odd liking to their own shoes too. There seemed to be the more stereotypical reactions today, those in the queue had adopted the more head bowed position and passers-by were also looking elsewhere in their moving.

The actual line itself feels to be much closer to the wall today, almost like an apology for taking up pavement space and trying to keep out of the way of those passing. There is still snow around and I developed a sudden worry about snow falling off the roof onto the queue remembering how there is once in a while a news story about someone dying from falling snow. As I looked to check the buildings opposite I felt a sense of relief to see they were clear from any snow.

Behind me I hear a lot of Russian being spoken in female voices, a quick glance reveals they are elderly women. I wonder if they have ever faced any sort of aggression for their nationality as I had witnessed on my first visit.

There was a man aged around 65 in the line a few people behind me. He wondered over to stand by the kerb on several occasions. I couldn’t decide if was uncomfortable standing in the line or trying to address how the queue was moving. As I realise I’m
feeling cold again I notice a young man walking past and smoking a cigarette giving out some sly looks of contempt along the line. It doesn’t feel good and I realise that today I’m feeling very passive to be waiting for my turn.

Left to my thoughts I’ve started to look at peoples clothing. Do these people in the line actually look poor or are they dressed well, do they look like they belong in the breadline? I feel disappointed that I’ve let a recent newspaper article lead me to judge those surrounding me. They quietly accepted me on the first visit when I felt nothing but personal embarrassment and now I was wondering about their situations. I feel ashamed that I’ve tried to judge someone and I’ve clearly been led to do so.

As I get closer to the end of my wait I’ve still not built up the bravery to speak to the guy with the vegetarian shoes. I’ve realised I can’t. I don’t want to draw attention to myself, or be a nuisance. It also feels like I would be intruding on his private moment when possibly he just wants to escape as soon as possible. I don’t want to stop him joining the queue in future to be recognised as the ‘shoe man’. It feels rude to strike up a conversation over clothing when I know I’d happily give a compliment under different circumstances.

In the little square immediately outside the distribution point I notice some broken furniture, mostly wood and shelf supports along with evidence of someone eating snacks. I wonder how long the rubbish has been there and what led to it. I notice that on the same side of the street, across the road, a man is trying to scrub some graffiti off the wall with varying levels of success.

There are quite a few alcoholics around today, I’ve not seen them here before as they had some distinguishing factors such as very rotten teeth. They are happy and jolly though, not creating a disturbance though clearly loud. I feel slightly amused that the woman in the group is drinking wine but she has a little glass for it too. I’m reminded of a previous visit to the area with a study group and collectively being confronted by a couple of alcoholics heavily under the influence.

Nearing the front of the line I once again make my excuse and leave, though it’s still very hard to do so as it feels disrespectful to those still waiting in line. I note it has taken
around 20 minutes to queue today which doesn’t feel so bad in turn of actual time but I feel I’ve been ‘on display’ long enough.

I walk further up the road, cross over and go to stand and observe the process for a little while. There are a lot more prams in the line today and further up another pram with the adult and some young children in tow which must be quite a stressful wait for that person. There has also been a remarkable lack of photographers today, not spotted one at all.

At the doors to the building of the food distribution I notice that they have a system in place for wheelchair users and I’ve counted five in a short time. They are bought food out to them and the volunteers seem quite helpful and help them pack things up in a suitable manner. Looking at the waiting line I quickly realised I’ve judged someone again. A middle aged man wearing what I would presume to be expensive trainers and holding a quirky bag is nearing the front of the line. He had passed me a while ago and I had felt he has judged us in the line. I had felt small, embarrassed and insignificant. He looked well-kept and kitted out; and yet he had taken his place too. Most likely he was doing nothing than sizing up the unwritten rules as I had done so on my first visit. Perhaps what I had mistaken for his judgement had been nothing more than him battling his own feelings and emotions to join that line.

Around 11.15 an ambulance with blue lights pulls up.
The staff quickly help move the line to make room for it to pull up and the paramedics hop out and help a middle aged gentleman into the ambulance. I can’t help but wonder if this is a regular occurrence for the breadline. Waiting when sick, elderly, or a baby must be taxing on a body. Factoring in the cold or maybe if someone hasn’t eaten well for a while it must be an incredible hardship.

I slowly walk further down the road, passing the queue on the opposite side of the road. New people join it constantly, so it never shrinks. I feel sad and melancholy as I realise that while today’s visit has certainly not been the hardest my emotions have quickly changed to be more passive. I’m withholding myself from starting a simple conversation, a basic social connection with other people. I don’t want to interrupt their time and I don’t want to face any further dejection. I don’t want to make a nuisance of myself or draw attention to any of ‘us’ in the line.

**Wednesday 15th March – Interviews and Observations**

Today was a nice sunny day and dry. I was prepared to do my interviews and was nervous that it may be hard to get people to agree to talk to me, at worst I thought they
could only say no. I was happy I’d bought some small bars of chocolate to give as a
token thank you to those that stopped to help.

As I walked on the opposite side of the road I noticed that the line was the shortest I’d
ever seen it and I was worried I may struggle to get any responses at all. I crossed the
road and on the corner went to take my questions out of my bag, however I noticed a
man in a wheelchair struggling to cross the road. He has been to the breadline and was
barely a sixth of the way across the road when the light was already red. He was
physically struggling and now holding up the traffic. At first I hesitated then went to
offer him help which he accepted. I took him across two roads to the tram. Going back
to the corner, I wondered why no one from either staff, coming out of the breadline or
even just passing by had stopped to help him.

The original research plan has been to first just try to make contact with someone that
looked friendly or open and then try every fifth person from there. The first person was
a young woman whom I’d assumed was with her mother, they were interested to hear
about British foodbanks but did not want to answer the questions. Next was an older
man who just blanked me. I approached a couple with a pram, the woman was happy to
answer the questions and was quite pleased with the chocolate bar. The next person
said no.

I stood to the side and decided to revaluate. As I was doing so, I noticed that the mother
and daughter I had first approached had come out of the building, put their food into one
bag and had re-joined the line.

My planned method of surveying wasn’t workable with a short line as the woman that
answered had moved quite far in that time and perhaps it wasn’t ideal to walk and talk.
After just observing the unusually speedier queue I decided that the little square was a
better position. It wasn’t the busiest exit but people could stop to talk and were shielded
from the main road by the queue itself. I decided it was just simply easier to ask anyone
that came near enough as some people clearly choose an exit path. I couldn’t blame
them as it was probably a common place for researches judging from what I’d seen of
photographer activity.
The responses very slowly tricked in with only 10 in 3 hours. I had started to keep count of those that just said ‘no’ or ignored me but it was abandoned due to growing at a steady speed. Thankfully those that were willing to talk were quite chatty and I got 2 slightly longer interviews on the street as a single mother and a refugee offered extra information about their own situation and feelings without being asked. A high point was being approached by a man who came to ask what I was doing, he was from Estonia and with a Finnish friend, both men were in their late 50’s to early 60’s. While they didn’t answer the survey they were generally very chatty and it was nice to have a little conversation. The Finnish man was a retired bus driver and they generally walked a lot and went to several breadlines. They were interested to hear about the British system and thought that it most certainly was a better option for the cold winter months. In the summer they didn’t mind being outside because they liked to talk to people.

It was disappointing that I wasn’t gaining more responses, but I knew that would be a struggle due to the sensitive nature of the subject. However the time allowed me to make some very interesting observations.
First the doorway to the food distribution building was on the corner of the building and it was placed on a cross roads. It was a double doorway, the entrance on the left as you faced it and exit on the right.

The majority of people left the building and wanted to go to the street, so it meant that having to pass through the line. It seemed clumsy and inconvenient. The woman standing by the door acted as a ‘gate keeper’. She controlled the flow of people into the building and often held some back trying to keep a gap open before ushering more people forward.

The woman was very good with the people that came with wheelchairs as food bags were passed back and forth over the step in. However, there were also many elderly using walking aids and she seemed very selective about who she was willing to help lift the walking frame up or down the step for. It was also noticed she was selectively friendly with some people; it was of course easy to assume that doing that sort of job you would recognise longer term users of the breadline. However, there was still very much the element of ‘belonging’ and ‘unwritten rules’ that I had previously
encountered. Watching the families with prams and pushchairs row them up at the side of the building just as they started to reach the head of the queue, those rules and sense of ‘belonging’ became very apparent as I heard the ‘gatekeeper’ shout loudly and rudely “prams there!” to a woman nearby that hadn’t left hers in a timely fashion. From my own position I felt mortified for the mother to be shouted at in such a manner. I wondered why the ‘gatekeeper’ had felt the need to shout when it would have been more sensitive to simply speak to her. The same ‘gatekeeper’ was clearly not happy by my presence and constantly threw looks of distain my way through out my time there.

Occasionally one staff member would pop out to smoke by the door , and chat with someone that she clearly knew and had been in the breadline. After finishing one interview I was quickly drawn to the gatekeeper shouting. The commotion was centred around a woman in her 50’s clearly quite inebriated. She wasn’t in the breadline but simply passing by; and by all accounts for some reason wasn’t a fan of this particular breadline or welcome there either. After a few heated words the woman carried on her journey.

Over time the queue length fluctuated and was clearly a mixed crown. There were a lot of elderly people, young couples, families, and mothers with young children. Some mothers were clearly stressed with trying to pacify children bored of the wait and throwing tantrums. One particular mother had to deal with a child aged around three years old screaming and throwing himself on the floor as she had no choice but to take him out of the pushchair and abandon it to the side. I thought it would have been nice to offer that mother the same service of just bringing her a bag of food out under the circumstances. I felt no one in the line would have minded and it would have eased the situation considerably.

Some families who went in together would then gather everything into a couple of bags then go separate ways to continue their day as one person took the food home. Repacking and sorting food outside was again a common theme for the day. From my position I was able to see that today’s selection seemed consist mainly of French bread, small pots of yogurts, some packet sauces and small amounts of fruits and vegetables. A
gaunt looking elderly man had half eaten a banana by the time he made it out of the
door and someone else was already opening a chocolate milk drink.

Though I had not made a note of the time I would estimate it was around 12.15pm, a
van pulled up in the square as I stepped back. At first I assumed a delivery but thought it
was odd as I had previously seen that happen around the other side of the building. Two
men got out of the van and it became clear it was a security van though not labelled in
any recognisable way. They took a black box from the side door and disappeared inside
the building of the breadline, shortly reappearing, loading and driving away. This struck
me as an odd and unexpected event. I would never expect them to receive such large
cash donations or need to handle such large amounts of money in cash.

Shortly after this I was on the receiving end of some intimidating behaviour and the
queue was vastly shortened so I decided it was a good point to leave the area. The
shortened queue also meant that the gatekeeper saw it as a suitable time to remove the
cones and string that had made people queue up in a particular manner.

Apart from the positive experience of people that had talked to me, I walked away with
a very negative experience and felt determined not to return. I sensed that those people
lining up were in clear need of support, but were being used to make a very public point
about the welfare system. The treatment of people outside was clearly unequal unless
you were ‘known’ and from one account this was also the case inside the building.

**Wednesday 15th March**

**Interview Day – Altercation with breadline manager**

The conversation below took place in Finnish:

A little before 1pm I noticed my phone battery was starting to run low so decided to
take out the spare battery and plug my phone in. As I had my head bent low to look in
my bag a man around aged 60, short and stocky startled me by a very aggressive “Kuka
sinä olet?”, which means “who are you”. He was, as can commonly be described as
‘right in my face’. I explained I didn’t speak Finnish very well and that I was a student.
I then asked who he was, I was unsure if he was someone from the queue or breadline staff as he was wearing normal clothes and staff have fluorescent vests on. He remained very threatening in his body language and in my ‘personal space’. He claimed to be the director.

He demanded to know what and why I was studying. I struggled to collect my Finnish language together due to feeling startled, intimated and threatened by his manner. I simply explained I was looking at the breadline as we don’t have them in England but we have food banks which felt like it wasn’t what he wanted to hear. He asked to see my questions and put his hand out as if to take the clipboard from under my arm. I gently turned and explained that they were only written in English. To which he accusingly asked if people in the queue would be able to understand English.

I then said and repeated that I had checked from with the breadline foundation that they were fine with my research outside. While finding the email on my phone I pointed out I was stood outside on the pavement away from the actual line. I was not being rude or loud, and if I tried to stop someone and they didn’t want to answer I left it. I then repeated again I had email and when I told him the name of the person who answered my email he simply walked away and went inside.

The exchange left me feeling like I’d been threatened and was not welcome although I knew I was behaving according to suitable guidelines but also with sensitivity to the situation. I was on the pavement, away from the actual breadline and the door and only approaching people that had been inside and were leaving the area.

I was concerned for my own personal safety during the exchange and afterwards. I decided to call a Finnish speaker for help to contact the person I’d had an email exchange with; I thought it would help secure my own situation. My return phone call bought very surprising news. The confrontation had been with owner himself, the man who runs the breadline. At the start of the conversation he immediately said “oh this is about the English speaker”. In the exchange when he heard I had felt threatened he simply hung up the phone call.
Still standing outside undecided if I should leave or not, I saw him peer around the door at me. He then came back with a woman who came to speak to me in English. During the conversation I learnt that she was his daughter and was the person that had replied to my email.

She was angry that the phone call had said the manager’s behaviour had been aggressive towards me. I pointed out that I was a woman standing on my own, on a pavement, not causing trouble. That he had come up right to my face and that I felt he had actually been aggressive in his manner. She replied “no this is not possible, my father is a good Christian man” and indicating to the line with her hand she added “he does this, he feeds people”. The man himself was stood nearby and chimed in that I had been aggressive because I had dared to ask who he was, he then walked away. I calmly pointed out that I had really felt intimidated and that there was nothing wrong for someone to feel a certain way in a situation when she repeated again that he couldn’t behave like that as a good Christian man.

I then simply pointed out that I was only stood on the pavement, I had no intention to interfere with their work and that I only talked to people happy to do so. I was then sharply told I couldn’t go inside (I had not even been near the door the time I was there or had any interaction with the staff before this event) and that I should finish my research and leave.

I choose to leave a few minutes after as I felt very uncomfortable and unwelcome. It felt like the food charity had taken ‘ownership’ over this corner of the road and that ‘outsiders’ were not welcome.
**Questionnaire Data:**

1) Do you visit this area for other reasons outside of the breadline?
   1) only for the breadline (woman with pram)
   2) only for the breadline (man)
   3) yes, I live 1km away (man aged around 40, walked with a crutch)
   4) only for the breadline (man aged 60)
   5) only for the breadline (man aged 60)
   6) no, only the breadline (woman aged around 40)
   7) only for food (man around late 20’s)
   8) used to live nearby but now here for other reasons. (woman in late 20’s)
   9) only for the food now (man in late 20’s)
   10) only to take food (asylum seeker from Iraq, around 30)

2) Do you think this is a good (nice) area to visit/socialise in?
   1) yeah
   2) not really
   3) yeah, yeah
   4) its ok not much here
   5) no, I have no friends here, I only come for the food.
   6) no not really
   7) not socially, I don’t like this area
   8) kind of, its like the centre for these kind of people
   9) it’s ok
   10) nice area, but the worker and organisation is not good, this place (pointing to building) not good.

3) What do you think passers-by think of the breadline?
   1) I don’t know
   2) don’t know
3) I don’t know because it has been here so long, because of that I don’t think people even mind. There might have been some little problems sometimes because the line has been so long, and it disturbs the other people walking here. The people that don’t know this place give bad looks, but people have been here so long lining that those that know don’t mind it.

4) I don’t think they mind, the government doesn’t give us enough money to live from

5) I’m not sure. I think some don’t mind and others do

6) I think it’s uncomfortable

7) some think its good, some hate that people that come for food. There are some angry faces.

8) They feel ashamed to see this as Helsink’s street imagine.

9) I don’t think they care

10) These people that walk by? Some people good, but more people not good. They drinking and smoking, but mostly I stay to survive.

4) How do you feel when people pass by you in the line?

1) I don’t feel anything I just come for the food

2) I don’t think about it

3) I don’t mind it

4) I don’t want to be here, but I need the food

5) I don’t think about it

6) Its shame, I feel ashamed. I have friends who don’t know I use the breadline, so I avoid it by wearing sunglasses and a big hood. It’s not nice.

7) I don’t mind

8) I don’t care anymore, it’s so bad for us. My feelings have changed, I now see it as free food and we take what we can get.

9) It’s like “yippee” free food, I don’t think about it.

10) they look at me like I’m homeless.

5) Do you worry about being recognised in the queue?

1) no
2) no, I don’t live nearby 
3) no, no 
4) no, I like to talk to people while I’m here 
5) no, I’m not from here 
6) yes, especially some friends. It’s hard. 
7) no 
8) sometimes 
9) no 
10) I don’t like this! I don’t like this!

6) Would you prefer a different system for getting food aid? 

1) This is ok when you need help, sometimes it’s too long to wait but it’s ok. Something else would be better 
2) This is ok, but something else would be nice. 
3) It sounds very nice in England. This is nice in the summer when you can come with a friend and talk. But when the weather is really bad it would be nicer inside. 
4) Yes, it would be great not to stand outside in winter. We need more benefits 
5) yes, 
6) yes 
7) yes, there is one place you can go every 2 months and you get two bags of food. This can be ok, the wait is only about 30 minutes. 
8) It would be better, it’s kind of embarrassing to be in public. 
9) yes 
10) any organisation here, but stay out (outside). In Espoo one place you can take coffee.
7) What do you think to the British system?

1) It sounds much better

2) sounds nice

3) It sounds very nice in England.

4) Sounds much better

5) It sounds good to be inside and get good food.

6) Its better.

7) The British system sounds nice

8) It sounds a lot better.

9) sounds good

10) its good

Comments from survey participant 6:

Single Women in her 40’s

Myself. Can I tell you something about my situation? I’m a single mother and errr, I’m errr an artist, a visual artist and I used to work. I used to work sometimes but now I can’t as I’m alone with the girl and then I got some illness. I got a depression, a real deep depression.

And that’s why I’m here now.

It’s so wrong that people have to stand here.

I’m highly educated; I went to applied sciences of art. The artist it’s not easy to get work. I really hope these things will change.
Comments from Survey participant ten:

Asylum Seeker

When I stop here, I feel the same the homeless. I life good life in my country, but what I do because of who I am?

I have good life, I have good work, I have good student (back home), what we do? I come because of terror.

But here in Helsinki good, I lived in the north before I came Helsinki. nothing. No help with food.

It’s good when they do this but the system not good. And the weather not good sometime. We waiting more sometimes hour, sometimes one hour half.

When you go inside they not respect you. ”take this, no take this, don’t take this!” Go enough. If not enough. If they like you they give enough, if they don’t like you no enough they tell you go.

When you come first, you take good, if you last you take nothing (talking about when you join the queue)

I am Muslim, I can’t eat anything. Sometimes I wait one hour or one hour and half and I take just yoghurt or milk. I can’t take milk. You can take something but some is very bad or expired.

I have family, I must come here, I need food but money from government is not enough. Finland very expensive I wait 1 year and half for permit. If you want me, accept me or tell me go. It’s very bad, it’s very bad. I’m not young to start here and start again. I don’t know what I do. It’s very hard.

In Espoo, they want only Kela card, only ID from government. I’m asylum seeker, if I get permit I get a house I get a job. I won’t need to come for food. They won’t help me.
One place when you come, he write your name. He tell you when to come, you don’t need to stay in the line. It’s better.

**Further Data**

**Interaction and Observations with the Salvation Army (Kallio, Helsinki)**

From undertaking the surveys, it had been mentioned that there was somewhere in Helsinki you could make an appointment and go collect food aid without having to join a queue. I managed to find the information easily, and was very surprised to find it was also in Kallio and not too far from the lengthy breadline. I contacted them through email to ask if they would mind answering a few questions about how they operate and why. The reply came quickly, they were very willing to help and offered that I could also go and visit them to see what they do. The following responses were written by Marja-Liisa Mäkelä, the director or leader of the social services section of the Salvation Army in Helsinki.

“1) Why does the Salvation Army ask people to make appointments to collect food?

We don’t want that people have to queue to get food. That’s why they have to make appointment by phone or email. They’ll get their own time and they get food without queuing. Queuing is difficult for the elderly and families with children. And we want to respect their dignity that they don’t have to queue.

2) Do you think people feel embarrassed to come to you for help?

Yes I think that some of our clients have big step come to get food aid. Especially for the first time.

3) Do you think the area around your breadline has any sort of reputation (good/bad/normal area)

We are situated in Kallio which is popular among students and other young urban. But our area has been labourer area and here has been poor people and still here is poor
4) Do you think people that live near your breadline have any special feelings about it? I haven’t got any feedback from neighbours. I think that neighbours see that our clients are mostly "normal" people and they are harmless. But situation could be different if we have very long queue for example in Myllypuro where people come to queue very early 05 o’clock or maybe earlier.

And our short breadline is behind the corner not in front of the doors that people go to their homes.

Of course media use photos, it’s not good for those who stand at the queue. Media is good, but it also should tell that people need also something more than food. They might need social work and guidance. I mean that food doesn’t eliminate the need of social work and problem of high cost rent and problem of employment.”

It was arranged I would go meet Marja-Liisa on Monday 20th March, 2017 at 10am. I took the bus there that morning; it was a clear sunny day though slightly nippy. I was not at all nervous to be going and felt very relaxed after being so warmly welcomed and helped over email already, it felt like a good sign. I had to walk for a few minutes and easily found the Salvation Army around a corner as per the instructions I’d been given. I did look up to check the street sign and number though as I was still unsure I had the right place because the street was dead, not a person in sight outside the building. It was only 9.30am, too early so I decided to wait on the opposite corner and observe a while. I checked the information from their website on my phone as I was sure the breadline was open, it was, opening hours were Monday-Wednesday 9-15, Thursday 9-13 and Friday 9-15. I felt really shocked and emotional to see that there really was no concept of a queue here, it was extremely discreet.

It was so quiet in this area I could hear the birds sing, it didn’t feel like I was in a busy city area next to a breadline after my previous immersive observations. The area was beautiful, clean and well cared for. There was a church opposite with two little play
areas, two mothers chatted while their children played. To the left there was an emergency services station but it was currently peaceful.

A staff member popped out for a few minutes and took the chance to chat to someone that was passing by. An elderly lady went inside the building and was out again in less than two minutes. I watched her pop the bag of food inside her own bag and carry on. A slow trickle of people came, they all went inside and out so quickly. It was a very emotive experience; it felt like this method of food aid really was no big deal. It’s so easy and non-invasive. It was a quick effortless process for those going inside and it had no impact on the area around it, no queues to negotiate, no business doors to awkwardly stand in front of. There was very little passing traffic and no busses or tram route going past. As I decided to go inside, I noticed a homecare group of young children had come to play across the road too.

I opened the door to the breadline room though it felt wrong to refer to it in such a way as there is no line. I’m immediately hit by the sweet sugary smell of cinnamon and cardamom from baked goods, and it smelt delicious and homely. A tall guy in his 50’s looks at me and smiles and asks how he can help me, what a warm, comforting welcome. I explain in Finnish that I have a time with someone and he takes me outside explaining the office is at the end of the building and he knocks on the door as it’s kept locked. He chats away explaining that Marja-Liisa has had a busy morning and just to keep knocking until she hears.

I decide to wait a few minutes because I’m still a little early, but the man came back with a woman who has a key just as Marja-Liisa comes to the door. Im quickly nicknamed the ‘British girl’ and the man makes attempts to talk to talk to me in English which I think is a very sweet effort. I’m offered tea which I gladly accept as its cold, and I’m taken to their ‘café’. It’s lovely and homely, with little tablecloths. There is tea, coffee and biscuits, and I’m told that all their clients (this is how they refer to people that need their help) are very welcome to come and sit and take a drink and whatever sweet treat there is for free. There is always a volunteer in the room who has time to sit and chat with anyone that comes in.
Marja-Liisa takes me back to the office so we can chat. It’s busy and there are people constantly popping in to make appointments. I feel a little guilty for taking her time away from those that need it so decide not to take too long.

It’s a nice discussion and I feel that all the people that work and volunteer at this breadline have a great deal of empathy and utmost respect for anyone that contacts them and walks through the door. I find out the majority of people are volunteers and give a large part of their own time up to help others.

The breadline here is open every weekday and people are welcome to visit it every day too, if they have need. It is essential to make the appointment and for the first time they do ask for some proof that you are really financially struggling. The aim is that the aid is there for those that are really poor and to ensure this they ask for some paperwork that proves their situation. It was added that most of their clients are living on the extra ‘income support’, a benefit directed to those with insufficient incomes.

The majority of clients are happy to visit as they need, once a day. However, there are the occasional problems as on the odd occasion they have had someone try to visit more than once a day which they don’t allow. Marja-Liisa explains that she worries that in this case the bread and vegetables are likely to be sold and the money used for other purposes.

The Salvation Army has provided social support for 125 years and last autumn they had a party to celebrate. They asked anyone to share memories they may have, there were very few of those but they received an overwhelming amount of positive support and feedback.

Marja-Liisa explains that it is very important to all of the staff and volunteers to also provided social support to all of their clients. They want to see, hear and talk to everyone that comes through that door. They make time for everyone as it’s pointed out that it’s important to also give time and emotional support besides the food. At Christmas they saw 50 people per day in their office, which was hard work with only three people taking those meetings. It can be a very stressful time of year for people and
they wanted to make sure that the emotional support was there for everyone as well as ensuring every client got a little gift card to a shop and extra food supplies.

This office has a real sense of community action and togetherness. They run activities and different groups to help bring people together. Some pop-up events included making Easter cards and a hugely popular Arabic food day. Marja-Liisa then mentions that they also have a Muslim woman on their volunteer team who gives up a lot of time to help. They had one refugee from Irak visiting their breadline and he got a place on the integrational Finnish course ran by the government. When he needed a work experience placement he asked to help at the Salvation Army for the two weeks.

I tell her about my observational experiences and how I felt, how it was difficult and each visit changed my reactions. She told about how some of their clients would go stand in another line at 5am in the morning and wait for 5 hours before getting any food, she wants people to come to them to feel worthwhile and respected, for she points out “it could be me any day. We never know what might happen in our lives.”

I thank her for her time and let her know it’s been a really positive experience for me and that everyone made the experience so welcoming from the moment I stepped in door. As I leave the office there are already several people waiting to talk, but I’m still thanked for coming and offered the chance to go to their café and take another drink if I would like.

It really does not feel right to call this place a ‘breadline’, it’s a community. It’s a peaceful place of support and safety; it takes care of the whole person not just putting food on the table. It’s about the person.
Are you an organiser, volunteer or receiving help at the food bank?

I am the Service Delivery Manager of the Banbury Young Homelessness Charity where we work with vulnerable young people and their families aged between 13 and 25. One of the services we offer is a Foodbank.

Is the food bank in a busy area (town centre or high street for example)

We are located in one of the most deprived areas of Oxfordshire, situated in a Community Building on a housing estate which is a 10 minute walk from the town centre.

How often during the week is the food bank open?

We open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm

Do people ever need to queue at the food bank, if so could you give a rough time estimation for the worst case scenario?

No, we don’t have volumes of people, there is not queueing.

How do the general public react to the location of the food bank?

I would say that we are well supported and there are no issues around location. If we were more central I suspect we would get more foot fall.

Do you think local residents have strong feelings towards the food bank? What do you think they are?
No, as some of the local residents use or have used our foodbank. We had a surplus of fresh food donated before Christmas so we put it outside with a note to help yourself and it all disappeared so I suspect if we did that on a regular basis, more people would use it.

Have there ever been any social problems because of the food bank? (for example arguments, discussions, vandalism or violence)

No

Do people using the food bank acknowledge each other in anyway?

It doesn’t apply to us as we don’t have a steady stream of people; it is in our building with other services on offer.

Do you think the food bank provides a social network or support for those using it?

Again, that doesn’t apply to us.

Does anything especially stand out to you? Or anything you feel strongly about? Or anything you want to mention in general?

There is a stigma about accessing a foodbank and I think if it were more available to the community without them having to ‘ask’ for a food parcel, a lot more people would use the facility. I think that a lot of families struggle on the bread line and do not receive any support but are too proud to ask.

We have a lot of donations from the community, from local schools and churches and local families and groups who want to give to help those less advantaged.

What do you think to the concept of the Finnish breadline?

Dreadful that in this day and age people should be reduced to that just to get some sustenance. I think it is humiliating and does nothing for a person’s self-esteem.
Are you an organiser, volunteer or receiving help at the food bank?

Volunteer at an initiative to provide hot food/cold food to take away and clothes/toiletry donations. It’s only a small group of people that help run/organise this alongside other initiatives in the city centre to try and ensure that there is coverage of some kind in respect of food/clothing/shelter throughout the week.

I help here: https://www.facebook.com/SoulKitchenChester/ (Saturdays)

There is also ShareShop – open daily https://www.facebook.com/ShareShopChester/ which does a fantastic job – you can go in and make a donation to pay for a hot drink/meal and donate clothes – a really easy way to help and it’s making a massive difference.

City Mission (Monday & Thursdays)  
Chester Aid to the Homeless (Wednesdays)

Is the food bank in a busy area (town centre or high street for example)

it is in Chester City Centre, just on the outskirts of the main streets (held in an underpass)

How often during the week is the food bank open?

Saturday 5-7pm

Do people ever need to queue at the food bank, if so could you give a rough time estimation for the worst case scenario?

No queues –we usually have between 20-30 people attending over the course of the 2 hours, and also we’ll go on a walk around the city centre to hand food out to people as well.

How do the general public react to the location of the food bank?

It’s tucked away out of the centre and so many are possibly unaware.

Do you think local residents have strong feelings towards the food bank? What do you think they are?
General reaction to the work that the Chester charities do to help the homeless is generally positive, however I do still think there’s a certain amount of NIMBYism going on – there was a furore at Christmas time when the ShareShop was closed due to an apparent fight/altercation outside, but it did seem to be conveniently timed for the Christmas period (the shop is located in the same area that the German Christmas Markets are held) and possibly not wanting tourists to see the “unsavoury” side to the city.


Have there ever been any social problems because of the food bank? (for example arguments, discussions, vandalism or violence)

Apart from the issue described above which I’d question the truth of given the convenient temporary closing Oct-Jan across the Christmas Market period, no, nothing at all. Generally people are very grateful for the help they can get. It is clear often that some of these people have additional addiction issues, but I’ve never witnessed anything other than people politely coming along for some food/advice.

Do people using the food bank acknowledge each other in anyway?

Everyone seems to know each other.

Do you think the food bank provides a social network or support for those using it?

There’s definitely familiar faces every week (which is sad really as living on the streets long term especially in cold temperatures is no life) and there’s always a nice friendly atmosphere, people having a laugh and a joke, enjoying some food/hot drinks.

Does anything especially stand out to you? Or anything you feel strongly about? Or anything you want to mention in general?

I think my general issue with the place where I live is the absolute lack of support provided by the local council, it’s very much an “out of sight, out of mind” type issue. There are only 10 emergency beds in Chester City Centre for the homeless and these are
(understandably) taken quickly on a daily basis. People are quick to judge those that don’t try to queue up to get a bed, but the reality is that it is a room with 10 mattresses in, (mixed M&F) and no lockers to keep belongings, so many feel more secure sleeping on the streets than at this location. I’d say there are AT LEAST 40-50 homeless people in Chester.

The initiative I help out at ISN’T registered as a charity, solely so that we can operate the way that we do. If anyone was to try and move us on/tell us we can not do what we are doing, the official line is that we are meeting up for a picnic in a public area – which is perfectly legal. If we registered as a charity I think the police would try and move us on each week.

There’s been a spate of also handing out ASBOs to the homeless to stop them entering the city centre, I can’t help feel this is more about not wanting dirty horrible homeless people sullying the look of the historic roman town rather than any massive wrongdoings.

I think that people should realise that no one chooses to live this way, we are all very lucky to have warm homes, food on the table, an income – it only takes a couple of bad things to happen to you (lose a job/relationship breakdown) and you could EASILY be in the same position, and that’s what makes me personally feel so strongly about this. I think there’s too many people who think people that are homeless and struggling with addiction are beneath them/some kind of lesser human that doesn’t deserve sympathy which couldn’t be further from the truth, they’ve just had a bad hand dealt and once you hit the bottom, there’s not really anyone helping you back up these days.

This is a recent nice story anyway:


Please tell me about the breadline. I am frightened of being forced to return to Finland with my 3 year old Brit/Finn daughter. Thats not a life I want. I’d have zero chance of employment in Finland, in UK I was lecturing in physics but I’m not qualified for anything in Finland. I can’t do cleaning work as I’m severely asthmatic with triggers of
dust and chemical cleaners and fragrances. I can’t learn Finnish and I’ve been trying for 6 years.

Email Received March 2017

Do people end up at the breadline because life is that tough in Finland when unemployed, foreign and alone or is it only people who already have serious mental health, gambling or addiction issues? What proportion of the breadline users are of foreign origin? Are people there because of Kela and social benefit payment errors? I’d have no family and no support, no financial buffer, if Kela let us down, even just for a week, we’d starve and freeze.

Nobody speaks English where our house is, nobody, well ok I found 2 police officers but they live way way away and just work there sometimes. If it can’t be done in Finnish, it cant be done full stop. I’ve tried, its hopeless, trying to get child vaccination information from a 'nurse' who doesn’t speak English and shows you with a ticks against a list what she will give to your child and and underlines the date shes going to do it, and you realise that she’s ticked the name of the vaccination you know for a fact is not safe to be given after a certain age according not only to manufacturer but also according to Finlands vaccination program. I don’t believe you can afford to blindly trust, (as Finns are used to doing) I feel as a parent that its me who is ultimately responsible.

We only ever lived in Finland for 9 months. On arrival there from the UK I was deceived into signing a form that I was told was a tax form. In reality it was signing away my sole custody into joint custody with her Finnish father, I didn’t even know it was a maastraati office, they said nothing, I didn’t understand Finnish but perhaps they didn’t understand the lies he was telling to me in English. We are staying in Belgium on her fathers Finnish Military secondment, when it ends, or when they throw him out because of my police complaints about his abuse, I believe (and am told) that a Finnish custody court would order my daughters return to Finland (She was born in UK and has lived the last year in Belgium, only the 9 months before Belgium was in Finland)
It seems that if you cant provide a decent life for a half Finnish child in Finland, 
(because of lack of recognised qualifications, complete isolation, no money to run a car, 
rural location, no language skills, no family support etc) the authorities don’t much care, 
they wont instead allow you to leave Finland and move the child back to their home 
country where you can make a decent life for them. The ‘right to a Finnish life’ is 
ignorantly considered foremost in ‘the childs best interests’ and used as a blanket reason 
to grant no international custody relocations. Reportedly the courts wont accept or 
acknowledge that the only reason you can’t function and care for your child properly is 
that your in Finland and severely disadvantaged by this. They will not allow you to 
move your child to a country where you CAN make a decent life, they will just instead 
remove your child to the Finnish parent or into state care.

Please share with me anything you know about the people who use the breadline as I 
really fear that Finland is a very desperate place to be when you are alone, 
unemployable and completely isolated. What do those people do when they are 100km 
away from a city breadline as I would be? I’m sure that depth of struggling puts even 
the strongest people in a position eventually resulting in depression, mental illness and 
for some even addiction. Remove a child from their mothers custody, because they 
couldnt get them an ambulance when they couldn’t spell the address out in Finnish 
sounding letters, they didnt understand the nursery schools instructions, were too old or 
incapable to learn Finnish, they couldnt sort out the kela problem or deal with social 
welfare without the language, they couldnt get their electric fixed as the electricians 
only spoke Finnish, their chid was coming home crying everyday about school and 
teachers labelling them mamu, and the child had to wear shoes too small because Kela 
messed up their payments. I cant find any reason why this WONT be happening to me. 
All this results in isolation, depression, and children being removed into care. What 
child would choose to live with the non Finnish parent, who could not afford to run a 
car, could not afford birthday presents and nice food, the foreign parent that society 
would soon teach them to be ashamed of, what child wouldn’t rather live with the fully 
integrated Finnish parent, and pretend to all around them to be fully Finnish? What 
child would not instead chose the well connected parent, with rich relatives who have
big cars, speedboats, summer cottages, parties and luxury lifestyles.

If social services took my child into care in a country where I had no chance of being fairly heard and putting things right, I’d certainly freak out enough to labelled mentally ill. I know I couldn’t stand outside a foster home knowing my non Finnish speaking child was crying for me inside it and not try to break the doors down to get to her. It just looks like the downhill slide from wealthy diplomat family (as we are in Belgium) to being street hobo could be a very very fast one. I know I’d go crazy, I’m going crazy now worrying about being sent back there. Going there as as single person, ‘allergic’ to city life with absolutely no hope of building any kind of life. I can’t contemplate it. And no, Finland wont do anything about the abuse, hundreds of photos I’ve shared with the Finnish government and military responsible for sending us here, they ignore me. There comes a level in International diplomacy and politics and military where what ‘should’ occur simply doesn’t. Systems and laws bend for those with reaches to right level of power and influence.

These above would be my concerns, feeling embarrassed at being seen begging in public would be small fry compared to the utter destruction that had got me there in the first place.

Regards
Ms F