

How can cultural and green assets support mental health and wellbeing in Black, ethnic minority, and refugee communities? A qualitative study of lived experience stories

Francesca Taylor

Francesca.Taylor@kingston.ac.uk

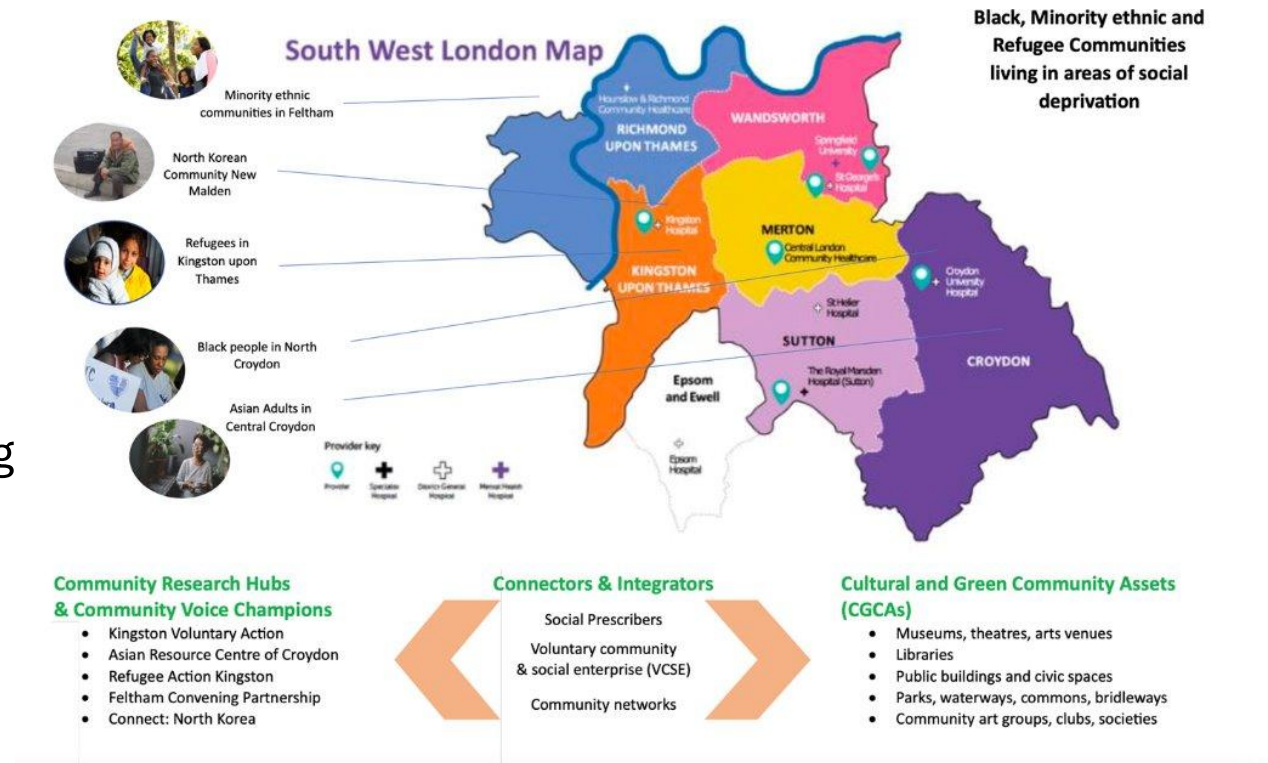
Co-authors: Meg Jensen Kingston University, Silke Zschomler University of the Arts London, Maria Chatzi University of the Arts London, Tushna Vandrevala Kingston University, for the Abundance Project Team

The British Psychological Society DHP Conference 2025



Background

- Black, ethnic minority and refugee communities live in unhealthy urban environments¹
- Greatest risk of poor mental health and wellbeing
- Least likely to engage with cultural and green community assets that support mental health^{3,4}
- Positive impacts interlinked with psychosocial, social and behavioural factors³



1. Lloyd GD, Catney G, Wright R, et al. An ethnic group specific deprivation index for measuring neighbourhood inequalities in England and Wales. *The Geographical Journal* 2024;190(3).
 2. Marmot M, Allen J, Boyce T, et al. *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On*. London: Institute of Health Equity, 2020.
 3. Fancourt D, Finn S. What is the evidence on the role of arts in improving health and wellbeing? A scoping review. *Health Evidence Network/WHO*, 2019.
 4. Collins RM, Spake R, Brown KA, et al. A systematic map of research exploring the effect of greenspace on mental health. *Landsc. Urban Plan.* 2020;201.

Background

- Cultural and green community assets need to be negotiated
- Identify and understand barriers as well as enablers to access and engagement¹
- Limited evidence on experiences of marginalised and underserved communities²
- Little research at community level, together with communities, to understand their experiences and needs²



1. Mak HW, Hu Y, Bu F, Bone JK, Fancourt D. Art for health's sake or health for art's sake: Disentangling the bidirectional relationship between arts engagement and mental health. *PNAS Nexus* 2024;3:465.

2. Jimenez MP, De Ville NV, Elliott EG, et al. Associations between nature exposure and health: A review of the evidence. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2021;18:4790

Background

- Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded 'Abundance Project'
- Developing and evaluating community-led ways to encourage engagement with cultural and green assets
- 'Abundance mindset': recognising skills, abilities and resources in marginalised and underserved communities
- Solutions catalysing local action on mental health and wellbeing



The research questions



- How are cultural and green community assets (CGCAs) described, related to, and engaged with and why?
- What are the perceived benefits and challenges associated with CGCA engagement?
- What are participants' values, attitudes, and interest and how do these intersect or not with their CGCA engagement?
- What are the opportunities and enablers to encouraging engagement with CGCAs?

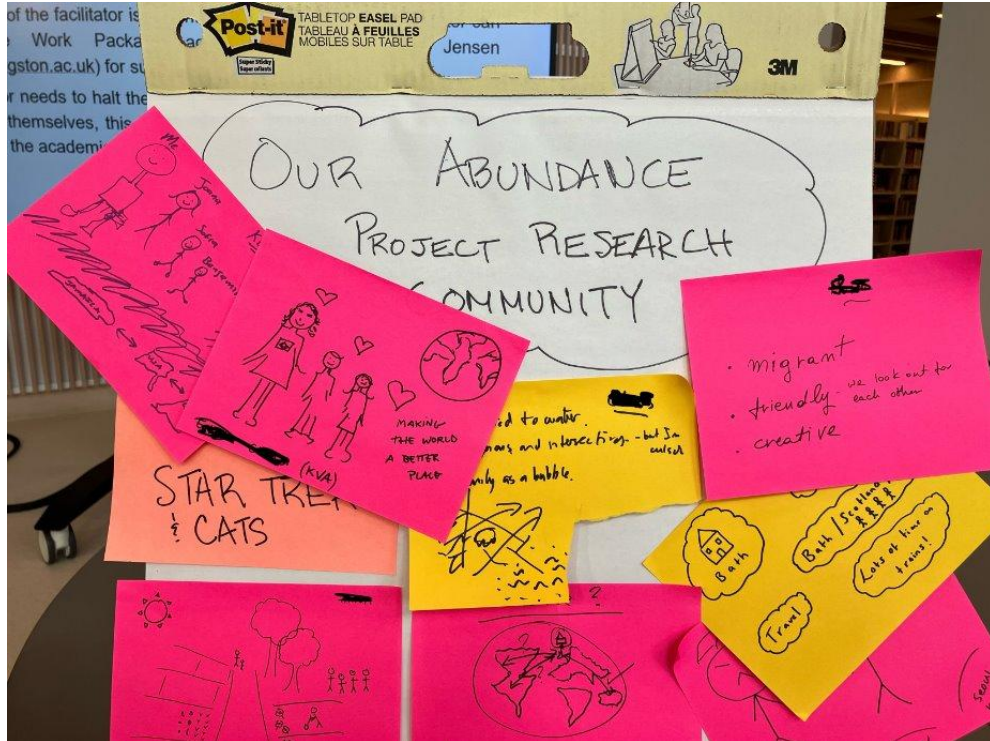
Methods

- Multi-site qualitative study using lived experience storytelling
- Place-based in SW London boroughs
- **Phase one:** 5 ethnic minority and refugee community organisations recruited 27 volunteer community voice champions (CVCs)
- Cycle of 12 collaborative, community experience-focused workshops

Who are Community Voice Champions?

- ✓ *'Voice' of their communities through their own lived experience, and collecting stories, opinions, feedback from their communities*
- ✓ *Volunteers to participate throughout the project*
- ✓ *Payment for time given and travel costs*
- ✓ *Induction, including mental health awareness, and ongoing training throughout study*

Methods



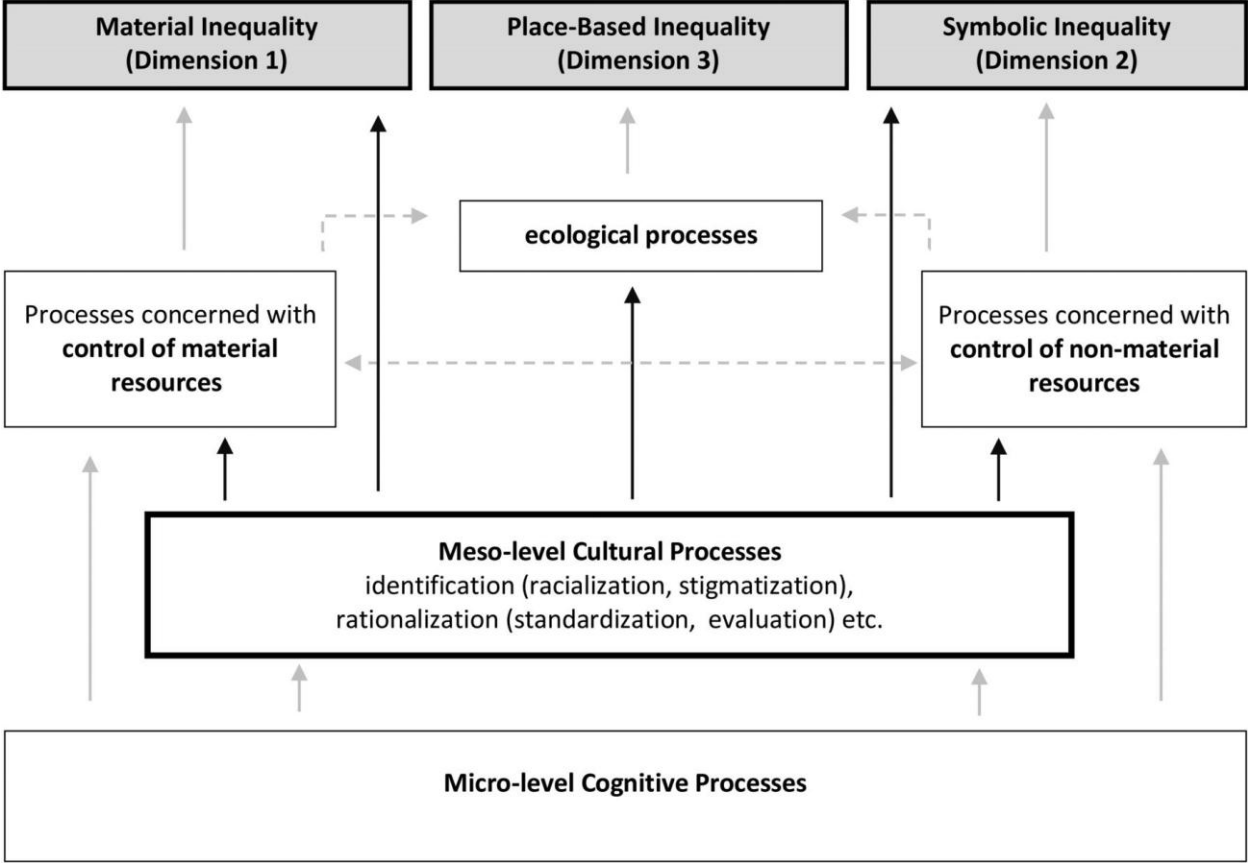
- **Phase two:** 141 individual lived experience stories collected from community members
- Notes, drawings and/or images made of stories
- Phases 1& 2 data coded and thematically analysed using inductive and deductive coding
- Collaborative and reflexive process^{1,2}
- Emergent themes sense-checked with CVCs
- Framed by theory of cultural processes and causal pathways to social inequalities³

1. Braun V & Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.* 2006;3(2):77-101.

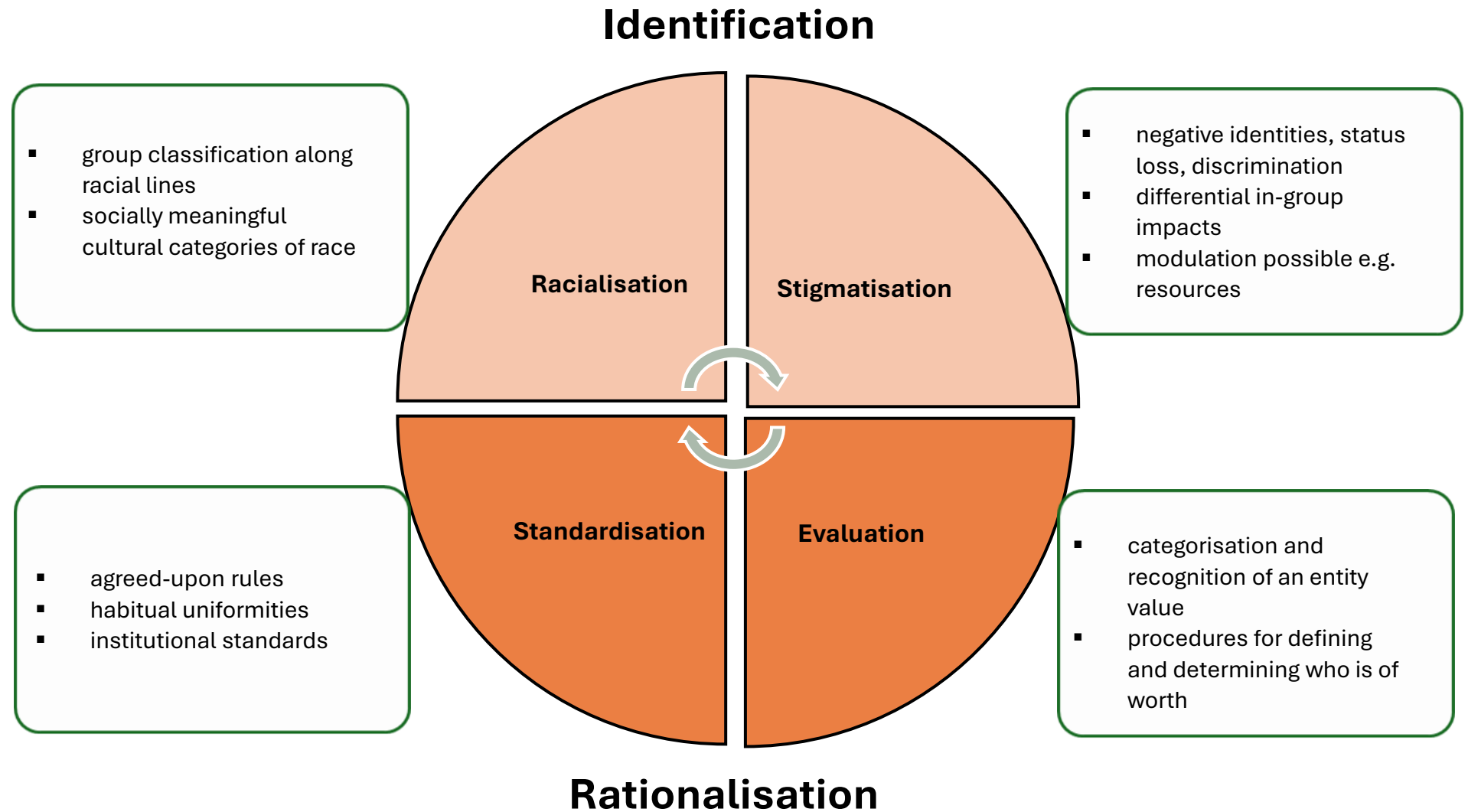
2. Braun V & Clarke V. Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *Int. J. Transgend. Health* 2023;24(1):1-6.

3. Lamont M, Beljean S, Clair M. What is missing? Cultural processes and causal pathways to inequality. *Socioecon. Review* 2014;12(3):573-608.

Cultural processes and causal pathways to social inequalities



Meso-level cultural processes



Findings: Themes

Struggles of being a migrant and impact on mental health

Mistrust of institutions

Restricted community knowledge and support around mental health

Cultural difficulties in accessing nature and culture

Community connections, belonging and resilience

Findings: Struggles of being a migrant and impact on mental health

- Loss of place and identity
- Raw deal of immediate neighbourhood
- Different types of stigmatisation in different forms
- Challenges of trying to fit in
- Isolation

As refugees have to grapple with loss of identity, loss of place so there is a huge importance for creating a feeling of belonging and home here. [CVC 16]

It's about when you live in society when you've got so many judgements and things and some fears to express yourself thoughts. [CVC 27]

Findings: Mistrust of institutions

I came face-to-face with the social services for the first time in my life and there's a misunderstanding, both my community and the social services...because there was something happening in not my family, but my relatives. So, I had to face and, you know, talk to them. Yeah. And it matches to my community because there's always this misunderstanding about, there's a lot of blaming between both sides. [CVC 21]

- Experiences of institutional discrimination
- Aware rules governing institutional interactions different from those within community
- Lack of understanding of processes
- Low expectations of fairness and appropriate support

Findings: Restricted community knowledge and support around mental health

- Struggle to understand language
- Cultural differences in conceptualisations and explanations
- Poor community awareness and understanding of symptoms
- Distanced from professional support
- Some seek emotional support from own community, religious and spiritual leaders
- Others suffer in silence given associated stigmatisation

I struggled to write down something because what's mental health? To me, what some people share about mental health is quite different from what I've grown to know what mental health represents.[CVC 18]

It's about mind it's about mental health emotion problem, but they can't, they can't realize they have issues. For them it's normal live with fears, struggling, tense. You know you don't have a choice. [CVC 27]

Findings: Cultural difficulties in accessing nature and culture

I think why those of ethnic minority communities they go with numbers is because of that discrimination. Because if you're by yourself you could be an easy target. [CVC 18]

People are taking sun bath, like taking a suncream...mostly they are doing like that. But that time I saw [name] family, they had a lunch in park. And it looks like they were eating there....So, I after that, I told to my sister, one day we also going like, it's like a picnic. [CVC 24]

- Nature and culture recognised as a sanctuary for mental health
- But, safety and security concerns
- Restricted by transport, time and cost constraints
- Uncertainty what to expect and behavioural requirements
- Sense of being welcomed and therefore belonging integral
- Utilise and appreciate a community mediated form of access

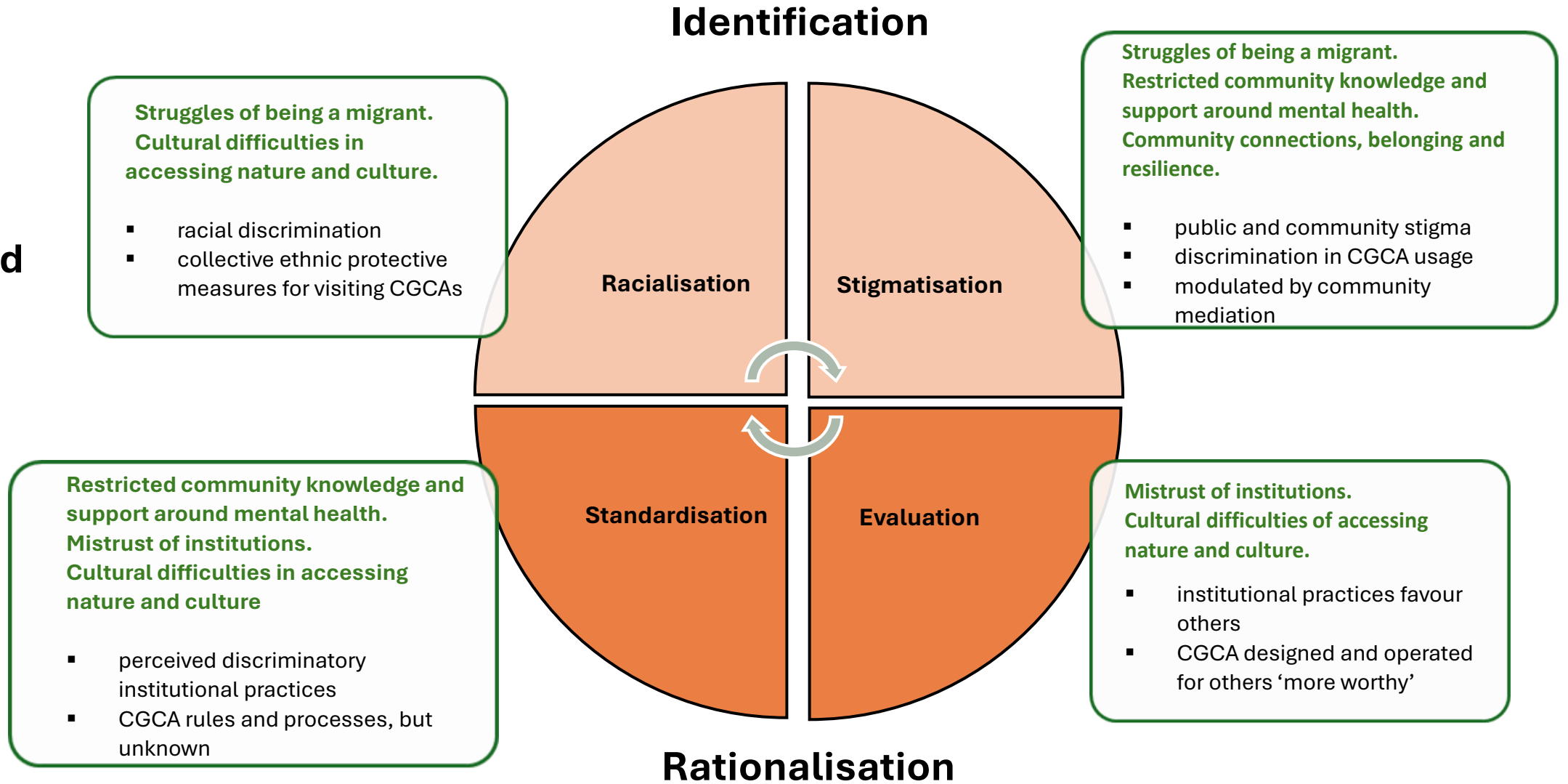
Findings: Community connections, belonging and resilience

- Place-based community resilience
- Collective identity, cohesion, social connections and knowledge sharing
- Close to cultural roots and traditions
- Sharing cultural food, traditions and language
- Church/mosque seen as places of support
- Community leaders/organisations create welcoming spaces and support adaptations to CGCA places

After my knee operation, life felt lonely and difficult. Everyday tasks were hard, and I missed feeling connected. Then I heard about Roots and Shoots a community gardening group...from the moment I arrived, everyone was warm and welcoming ... many of the people there spoke my language, understood my background. [CVC 5 from community member]

We actually do a picnic in the park, where all faiths come together, and we have the hub community where we actually have food, and everyone sort of mingles and talks. [CVC 6]

Themes and interlinked cultural processes



ual:



Thank you to all our CVCs and community organisations

Web site: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/chelsea-college-of-arts/research-at-chelsea/research-projects/the-abundance-project>

