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Rethinking spatial socialization as a dynamic and relational process of political becoming

Abstract

In this paper, I set out to bring early political development back to the research agenda in childhood studies as well as to the social scientific inquiry more generally. Proposing a geographical approach, I seek to develop the concept of spatial socialization as a dynamic and relational process through which *political becoming* takes place. Contrary to conventional conceptions, I present children as participants rather than as recipients of socialization--active agents in their everyday environments alongside their adult authorities, institutions, the media, and their communities as a whole. Moreover, drawing from phenomenological theorizations of subjectivity, politics and space, the employed approach problematizes the worlds in which political socialization takes place. I argue that the dynamic processes of socialization constitute the spatial realities where children and youth lead their as much as they constitute the youthful subjects they involve.

Introduction

Political agency is a highly respected human capacity, forming an essential element of democratic societies, and is one of the major driving forces in all of societal life. If people were not capable of acting politically, the horizon of change would grow dark. This prospect is of utmost importance in societies where living with plurality and difference is the continuing, yet fluctuating challenge (Barnett, 2012; Simonsen, 2013). Being such a matter of importance, one would think that social scientists have developed a good understanding of the mechanisms and processes related to political agency. In particular, theories related to the development of political agency seem essential in grasping how human beings become political subjects, to understand, first, the differing political agencies at play in past, present and future societies; second, the dynamics between differently located, situated and oriented political actors with intersecting ideological and ethical mindsets; third, the meaning and potential of upbringing, peer-group learning, the media, pedagogy, and education in the formation of new civics; and fourth, the globally intertwined lived realities that are constrained on the one hand by market forces and on the other by state

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agencies. These understandings are of utmost importance in tracing the relations between childhood and nation, the broad intent of this special issue.

Yet quite the contrary is the case. Children's political development has raised little interest within academia since the paradigmatic change that turned socialization into an old-fashioned 'adultist' concept with no place in the 'children here and now' perspective that has dominated the debate since the 1990s (Alanen, 1988; James & Prout, 1990; van Krieken, 2010; Strandell, 2010). The burgeoning childhood studies literature has taken broad interest in children's rights and participation, yet without connecting youthful agency with politics at large, outside of policymaking and the formal systems where children are noticed as the important 'novices' of the adult-led administrative-political life (e.g. Such & Walker, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Neither have political scientists become alert to children's agency, as children are usually seen to form the non-political part of the society (but see McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Sapiro, 2004; van Deth et al., 2011). Following a similar path, pedagogues have rarely discussed children explicitly as political actors, approaching them rather as the foci of education policies in nation-state-bound pedagogical systems or as social agents enmeshed in power relations (but see Phillips, 2010; Lester, 2013). As *political beings* active in their everyday lived worlds and as *political becomings* whose agency unfolds also in the future societies, children still appear as relatively alien to scholars.

This said, during the past ten years or so, some interest in children's political agency has arisen. In my primary scholarly environment – the nexus of human geography and childhood studies – there is a growing tendency to portray children and youth as political actors whose interests and ideas are embedded in and result from their everyday lives (e.g. O'Toole, 2003; Habashi, 2008; Thomas, 2009; Bosco, 2010; Skelton, 2010; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; Leonard, 2013). Associated discussion is evolving in international relations, anthropology, sociology and education as well (e.g. Brocklehurst, 2006; Lazar, 2010; Phillips, 2010; Lester, 2013). The political vocabulary, however, is still used sparingly, and it is not always clear what terms stand for. Most often, the idea of youthful political agency draws from feminist and post-colonial traditions where women's and colonized people's lived worlds have been politicized, to bring visibility to their realities and views. What follows is that the orders, troubles and matters politicized from *adult* perspectives are emphasized, as well as the importance of seeing children and young people as transformative political actors in the here and now – an idea that fits well in the prevailing childhood studies

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paradigm. What typically remains out of sight are questions concerning children's political formation and the practices by which they take part in and constitute politics on their own grounds, as part of their everyday lives that are not just agonistic in nature (Bartos, 2012; Biesta, 2012; Elwood & Mitchell, 2012).

The present political–philosophically oriented scholarship largely supports the idea of studying how things are or can be political in different contexts and situations, rather than nailing politics to certain fixed ideas (e.g. Dean, 2000; Rancière, 2001; Nancy & Adamek, 2002; Isin, 2012; Dikeç, 2013). This approach contains the idea that political agency in itself is not a matter of choice; it is in their ways of being political that people differ from each other. This thought has deeper roots than it may first seem. Hannah Arendt (1953, p. 31) argued more than sixty years ago that 'the political' is not a law-like order nor a system but a human condition that is reborn and reshaped by new subjects: "With each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world, a new world has potentially come into being." Adopting a relational standpoint, Arendt presented the subject as the locus of politics where the potential of change resides. This should not be read as an individualistic notion on the practice of politics, but rather as a philosophical idea concerning the nature of politics (Arendt, 1958, pp. 8–9) [1]. It suggests that children form one of the decisive keys to understanding the shifting spatialities of our political worlds and the contemporary change that unfolds in various scalar dimensions (cf. Ansell, 2009; Mitchell & Elwood, 2012; Kallio & Häkli, 2013). By appreciating children as *constituting subjects* and *actors constitutive of their lived worlds*, we may identify new forms, directions, dynamics and relations with political relevance.

There is, therefore, clearly space for bringing political development and youthful socialization back to the agenda in social scientific inquiry and childhood studies. With an attempt to enliven the interdisciplinary discussion, I introduce a geographical approach, presenting spatial socialization as a dynamic and relational process of political becoming [2]. As a concept, spatial socialization has traditionally been employed in discussing how societies continue to exist as spatially grounded configurations through mundane and institutional practices. Rethinking the players of these practices, I propose children's agency as a crucial component in spatial socialization, involving both individual capacity to relate to the world and collective competence to intersubjective engagement. Moreover, I accentuate that societies and communities are (re)produced in these dynamic processes and, thus, not fixed or pre-existing to the subject.

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Therefore, I find both 'childhood' and 'nation' as plural and contextual concepts, which renders their relationship co-constitutive and fluid.

The paper proceeds as follows: I will first briefly present a critique of the traditional political socialization research and bring out some early insights for alternative understandings. After this, I will portray a relational reading of space and politics that may be employed as a starting point in building an interpretive frame to youthful socialization, including the recognition of children as situated inter-subjectively developing subjects and contextual actors. Finally, I will reflect upon the methodological potential of this approach with reference to my ongoing study.

The prolonged disappearance of political socialization

In 1987, *International Political Science Review* released a special issue asserting the importance of political socialization as a social scientific topic. The authors, delivering their perspectives from around the world, shared a concern for this important phenomenon as being discarded from the research agenda. The situation resulted from the omissions of children's subjectivity and agency in the 1950–1970s research. Twenty-seven years later, it is not difficult to join in their concern, as the situation remains more or less the same. Political socialization is mentioned in political science textbooks as a generational transmission technique and as a social mechanism that explains voting behavior, for instance, and some original work can be found on these themes (e.g. McDevitt & Chaffee 2002; Sapiro 2004; van Deth *et al.* 2011; Neundorf & Niemi 2013). Otherwise little research has been done. Consequently, the concept has not followed recent theoretical developments but has rested as a remnant of earlier attempts. Neither politics as an aspect of socialization, nor socialization as a political process has been rigorously deciphered with reference to the current understandings of 'the political' and 'the child', both of which have changed notably since the 1970s.

In the past couple of decades, the political–philosophical debate has taken a relational direction that contests fixed conceptions of the political (e.g. Rancière, 2001; Nancy & Adamek, 2002; Isin, 2012). Various spheres of life previously considered as non-political have been politicized from feminist, post-colonial, and other critical perspectives (e.g. Staeheli *et al.*, 2004; Browne *et al.*, 2009; Barker, 2010). Simultaneously, the 'new' childhood studies tradition has directed attention to the child as an active and capable agent who takes part in her peer and multi-generational communities in various ways, being a full social agent from very early on (e.g.

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James & Prout, 1990; Gallacher, 2005; Pike 2008; Strandell, 2010). Together these developments have built firm grounds for seizing the insightful suggestions made by Raewyn Connell (1987, p. 221–222) in the mentioned special issue: "We should, then, see children as growing up in a field of social relations which is inherently political . . . in which the person appears not as the object of socialization but as a participant in power relations, negotiations, ideology-formation, and so on."

Connell's assessment is markedly apt as she is one of the scholars who realized the shortcomings of earlier theorizing when many still agreed with them. Her central arguments can be found in her early 1970s writings where she argued against the quantitative methodologies that were practically the only acceptable ones at the time (e.g. Connell, 1972, see also Habashi & Worley, 2009). Fifteen years later her critique crystallized as: "Political socialization research has given little attention to what its measures actually measure . . . the foreclosure of issues by the quantitative research methods' own logic was so strong that it was difficult for challenges to the theoretical model to emerge from the fieldwork. The research thus worked itself into a closed circle" (Connell, 1987, p. 2018–219). From this internal critique, it is easy to understand the backlash of the 'new' childhood studies tradition in the 1980s. Largely in line with Connell (1972), yet discussing socialization in general, Leena Alanen (1988, p. 52, emphases in original) framed the problem as the

triangularity of childhood . . . [being] made up of assumptions concerning the nature of an essentially non-social *childhood*, the *family* as an appropriate context for this kind of childhood, and *socialization* (the more academic term for what childhood processes are about). This configuration presents the (Western) child not as (yet) part of her society, but condemned into a curiously non-social existence.

Resulting from the cavalier attitude toward children as social beings, socialization, hence, became the symbol of old-fashioned, adultist, behavioral, developmentalist, and future-oriented childhood research. 'Child as becoming' was depicted as an antithesis to the emerging trend that placed the child at the center of enquiry as a knowing, acting and skillful 'being' (Uprichard, 2008; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Concurrently, the connection between children and politics grew thinner since the relational understandings of politics were yet to arrive in childhood studies. Until quite recently, politics has been altogether associated with the adult-led world and thus linked with (semi-)formal participation only (Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2010; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a). Together these discursive developments laid a heavy burden on political socialization that it still

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carries. It is, hence, not farfetched to say that the whole topic has undergone a forty-year disappearance.

Framing socialization as a dynamic and situated process

The re-imagination of children's political socialization requires an update of three key concepts: child-subject, politics and spatial context (Kallio & Häkli 2011b, 2013). Beginning with the first one, in the study of 'political becoming', there is no need for a detailed line between childhood, youth, and other phases of life. If accepted that all human beings enter the world with no previous contact with socially meaningful life and, from then on, continue to build the relationship between oneself and the world, the generational definition of 'youthful subject' stands specific enough. This premise allows the idea of 'the child' to travel from one socio-cultural and geo-economic context to another, without laying a Western or other bias, yet capturing the common denominators of youthful subjects (cf. Harris-Short, 2001).

Youthful subjects have many things in common with their elders. As social beings, children are not less human than older people. In agreement with post-structurally inspired theories of intersubjectivity, many studies have shown that even very young children participate actively in the social life of their communities and involve adults and children alike in their activities (e.g. Gallacher, 2005; Gallagher, 2008; Pike, 2008) [3]. Thus, youthful subjects are active participants also in the processes of socialization. But there are certain specificities as well, especially when it comes to political development. Children find out about the world very intensely and their orientations are less directed and ready-made than they will be later in life. This means that socialization is more effectual and open ended during the early years.

The quickly increasing comprehension invests in youthful subjects in the form of situated knowledge that encompasses what the world is like and who one is in it, in relation to others. These knowledges are produced intersubjectively but are acquired subjectively, involving the child and the whole of her lived world as agential. As such, they are prone to reshape but slow to transmute, forming a rather coherent basis to *political subjectivity* (for a detailed account, see Häkli & Kallio 2014). One of the key features in youthful socialization can thus be captured in terms of 'situatedness' that brings together social, political and spatial dimensions [4]. The concept refers to the concurrent relationality and particularity of human existence, denoting that when children become more similar through the processes of socialization, they also become

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more unique. In Hannah Arendt's (1958, p.8) words: "We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who lived, lives, or will live."

A practical example may help in grasping the idea. Children going to the same kindergarten all find themselves as gendered beings with reference to the prevailing norms. Yet each child relates to these norms in specific ways. Gender is, therefore, not a categorical determinant that turns children the *same*, but a part of each child's particular self-conception that makes them gender-wise *related*. To turn it the other way round, different norms engender different kinds of gender relation but no norm produces equally gendered subjects. Adding intersectional layers to this picture only emphasizes the fact that relatedness and uniqueness are co-constituted. As gendered, classed, raced, abled, sexed, et cetera, human beings adopt subject positions with regard to many meaning-making systems, embodying the social reality that connects the lived worlds of "those who are absolutely different with a view to their *relative* equality and in contradiction to their *relative* difference" (Arendt, 2005, p. 96, emphasis in original).

This leads to the second clarification, concerning the political aspects of youthful socialization. Politics is a grounding philosophical concept that has been given different meanings at different times, beginning from Aristotle and continuing to the social scientists of today who are still nothing but unanimous about its core values and contents. In search for a child-centered approach, I have turned to phenomenologically oriented theories, drawing mainly from Hannah Arendt whose thoughts resonate with those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Nancy (see Puumala & Pehkonen, 2010; Isin, 2012; Dikeç, 2013; Simonsen, 2013). What connects them is the appreciation of politics from the perspective of those engaged in it – the things they are engaged in denoting the social events and dynamics central to people's "living together in the world of plurality and difference" (Barnett 2012, p. 679). This comes close to what Connell (1987, p. 219) referred to as "the phenomenology of political consciousness in children", an obvious focus of the political socialization research that was fully missed in the 1960s literature that combined "a functionalist conception of politics and abstracted research methods focused on dimensions of attitude".

In her re-interpretation of political socialization, Connell (1987) pointed to the interplay between consciousness and practice that brings the phenomenal political world into existence in lived communities. As one of the early feminist theorists, she realized the commonplace venues of childhood as political arenas *par excellence*, involving children as children *both* in the actual

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practices pertinent in their lived worlds (beings) *and* in the developmental processes where their agency evolves (becomings). Moreover, she stressed the intertwinement of mundane 'politics' and more formal 'Politics', which is strongly emphasized by the present political geographical literature as well (Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2010):

There is a politics of the family, as there is a political order to every school, a politics of mass media, etc. All of the institutions identified by the political socialization theory as 'agencies' of socialization to the political system themselves *contain* a form of politics. Where political socialization theory treated children's participation in these institutions as a kind of preparation for (later) politics, we should rather see the child as necessarily already participating in a politics in each case. It is important that this politics, though differently configured, is not separate from the politics of the state which the political socialization literature prioritized (Connell, 1987, p. 221, emphasis in original).

These ideas fit well in the child-centered interpretation of the youthful subject and the dynamic conception of socialization. What is still needed for a renewed methodological approach is the relational conception of space that helps to outline the contexts of children's political becoming: *where* the child becomes political and in *which world* s/he starts to form the realm of politics.

The lay conception of spatial belonging follows the idea of expanding circles: As the person matures, her/his habitat expands territorially from the home to the neighborhood, the local area, the city, the state, the sub-continent, the continent, and finally the globe. This regional expansion, apparent in many administrative and policy strategies for instance, is based partly on experienced environments (where one lives) and partly on conceived localities (what one learns) (e.g. Such & Walker, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Yet research on spatial belonging has argued for decades that people's lived worlds do not build and unfold merely territorially (Agnew, 1994; Häkli, 2008). In addition to regional realities, spatial relations and bonds are created in affectionate networks that can spread all around the globe (e.g. familial relations); in fluid communities that are constantly changing shape, location and constitution, yet retaining their unity in practices (e.g. football fandom); with regard to circulating trends and goods (e.g. popular cultural products); and in other relational spaces that are not organized according to physical metric distance but along

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with some other spatial dimensions. This applies to children and youth as well (Binnie *et al.*, 2007; Marshall, 2013; Skelton & Gough, 2013; Kallio *et al.* 2015).

Physical and mental mobility take a myriad of forms in youthful realities, engaging children with a mixture of social processes. By going to places, meeting different kinds of people, learning about diverse things, and relating with assorted activities and movements that go on in their lived worlds, children link together places near and far, mesh differently grounded cultural realities and split customary connections, pick up unpredictable frames of interpretation and leave behind other registers, and so on and so forth. The contexts of youthful socialization are, hence, at once shared in their lived communities and also vary from individual to individual, including common and separate elements even within the same family, school class and peer group.

Phenomenologically understood, the context of youthful socialization is the world as it appears to the child. This appearance is affected by various sources and experiences, converted into encounters with other people's conceptions, and modified as the comprehension evolves about the relations between places, people, moralities, feelings, knowledge, material objects, et cetera. The situated knowledge that thus invests in the subject is simultaneously common and individual, or relative and unique.

A practical example may be in place here as well. Spatial socialization has been studied mostly in the nation-state context, as a dynamic force that creates new community members and at the same time reproduces the nation (e.g. Paasi, 1999, Benwell, 2014). It rules forcefully in institutional spaces but gets enacted also in banal everyday encounters, such as when one looks at a flickering flag or holds coins with certain designs (Billig 1995). These fleeting everyday events reproduce national identities and uphold the nation via its members. Yet the so-founding situated knowledges are subjectively created and may vary considerably. For instance, current Syrian children are surely more than alert to national symbols but may associate them with very different ideals and meanings, depending on how they are positioned in the conflict and how the world, therefore, appears to them. What 'being Syrian' comes to mean to the children living in government-protected neighborhoods, those spending their early years in the midst of the conflict in underground communities, the ones exiled in detention camps in Syria and in the neighboring countries, and those placed in asylum in immigrant neighborhoods in further locations like Sweden, varies a great deal. What is important to notice, however, is that these children are not becoming political in *separate* but in *related* realities because Syria forms a shared world of

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plurality and difference to them, be it however involuntarily shared or physically absent/present in their everyday environments (cf. Marshall (2013) on Palestine). Via the dynamic processes of spatial socialization, all these children place themselves and their significant others in particular ways in the imagined community of conflict-ridden Syria, thus becoming unique but related Syrians.

Put together, these conceptual interpretations provide an enlivened conception of youthful political socialization as a dynamic process in which the world and the political child are intersubjectively formed, involving and producing related yet unique situated subjects. To flesh out how this approach can be methodologically employed, I present some preliminary findings from my current research.

Tracing spatio-political socialization with children

The study that I draw from is based at the University of Tampere, Center of Excellence in Research on the Relational and Territorial Politics of Bordering, Identities and Transnationalization (RELATE), Space and Political Agency Research Group (SPARG). The empirical field work was carried out in 2012 in Tampere and in Helsinki where we worked with 129 eleven- to sixteen-year-old young people. The aim of the study is to make visible the worlds where the targeted children and youth lead their lives, how they see themselves as agents in their worlds, and what things matter the most to them in these worlds (early results, see Bäcklund *et al.* 2014; Kallio 2014; Kallio *et al.* 2015). The approach is hence more or less opposite to that which was employed by the 1960s socialization scholars. Whereas they pre-defined both the spatial and the political context, we kept the two as porous as possible; while they saw children as targets and products of socialization, our interest falls upon children's (inter)subjective engagements in these processes. Nonetheless, this orientation did not come without difficulties.

The foremost practical problem arising from this methodological approach is the premise that nothing can be assumed and, therefore, we had more difficulty determining what could be asked. To overcome this, we requested that our participants choose what they wanted to share with us about their lived worlds. The data collection included a mapping and a story-telling exercise accompanied by relaxed interviews. First, the children marked down places that were familiar, important and interesting to them, on the provided empty mapping platforms (world, continent, nation state, region, city, and neighborhood), using color codes to signal pleasant

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(green), unpleasant (red) and emotionally neutral (yellow) matters. By these markings, they came to define the spatial and political contexts of their lived worlds as they appeared to them, thus following the phenomenological logic. The subsequent interviews were based on these personified maps. Each child-created map provided the structure for her/his interview, leading to variably oriented discussions on the themes, people, matters and places related to their markings. It was also possible to create new markings during the interview, to connect places together or introduce other sites associated with the discussed issues. Later on, the participants had the chance to continue and complete these narratives in the form of written stories, cartoons and/or drawings. In terms of this paper, three findings made so far appear particularly interesting.

First, we have found that the lived worlds of youthful subjects do not align with certain age-specific scalar dimensions or spatial extensions. This became visible through our participants' choices on the mapping platforms which they selected variably, regardless of age, to portray their lived worlds. It proved unfeasible to guess which scalar dimensions would be employed by whom or what kinds of spatial relations the markings stood for. For example, the portrayals of 'home' varied greatly (see Fig.1 for examples). On one extreme, all platforms could be used to signal that familial life was distributed to various places spanning the world (e.g. family houses, cottages, holiday resorts, popular media production sites, relatives' places, religious monuments, homeland, war-allies, etc.). In contrast, the family house could serve as the ex-officio locale of home, a nest where different elements of the lived world came together (e.g. family, school, friends, relatives, hobbies, the media, dreams, memories, etc.). Then again the physical home sometimes functioned as a place of residence with little meaning and activities embedded, or as a point of access to a non-familial community materializing in virtual space. Taken together, these findings suggested that for these children 'home' had no general scope or mode but could stretch between variable spatial extensions, be located more or less firmly in place, and be connected with multiple lived communities. This conclusion seems to apply to other spatial attachments as well (e.g. peer communities, cultural associations, geopolitical positioning). Theoretically, what these findings point to is that *contexts of political socialization are relational, shifting and subjectively conceived*.

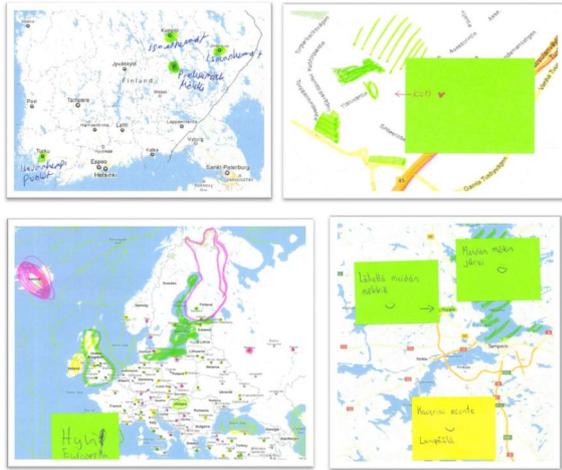


Figure 1. Variably located homes. Represented are places where familial life takes place. Top left: Grandparents homes and the summer house. Top right: Family house. Bottom left: Cities, countries and regions in Europe. Bottom right: Summer house, friends place and "our lake".

Second, we found compelling proof that politics embedded in spatial relations are always situated. This discovery was a bit surprising as the idea prevails in our ontological premise and we were thus not tracing it specifically. Yet the danger of making false assumptions about the nature of politics proved even greater than we expected. Regardless of the contrary intentions, during the field work, I started to implicitly associate certain politics with certain markings, the most striking example being 'Red Russia'. The participating children live in Finland, which has a violent history with Russia. Many families as well as the school institution and the media still strongly reconstruct national relations through this lens, even if it contradicts the official stand. This became evident as 37 of our participants marked Russia or Moscow red and as no other region received such consistent negative attention. Most of these markings were explained with reference to World War II. Yet in the interviews it appeared that some red labels had nothing to do with war, geopolitics or the Russian state, but referred to personal encounters with people, weather conditions, unfortunate events, environmental questions, et cetera (see Fig.2 for examples). Therefore it would be a total misinterpretation to include negative attitudes toward Russia as a *state* in understanding the political realities of these children. Due to my unreflected presumptions that were ever more accentuated during the field work, I nearly missed some of these references. This makes explicit that any generalization concerning children's political realities is likely to fail because *all spatial relations are based on situated knowledge that is subjectively established*.

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Figure 2. The other "Red Russias".

Top left: "I have been to Russia but did not like it much." Top center: "Moscow a polluted city" (and "Finland as the best country"). Top right: "I would not like to visit Russia because it is not very safe." Bottom: "The Baltic Sea condition saddens me". / "Russian attitude towards the Baltic Sea".

Third, clear evidence about spatial socialization as a process that relates as well as differentiates people emerged. A good example is the participants' expressed relationships with Finland (see Fig.3 for examples). Out of the 122 participants who took an active part in the mapping exercise, 83 marked Finland explicitly on their maps (73 green, 2 yellow, 6 green/yellow, 2 red). In the interviews, explanations of these markings were typically quickly given. Regardless of the color, the reasonings split into two categories: passionate (the best country in the world, my home ♥, oppressive, dull, etc.) and laconic (I live there, homeland, just a place, etc.). The previous often involved multiple markings in many scalar dimensions, including writing and symbols that emphasized the importance of Finland as a place of belonging. The latter were notions concerning a naturalized context of living, given only once and comparable to many other markings in their maps. The 39 participants who did not mark Finland as a nation-state on their maps used, instead, cities, regions, and particular locales as reference points of belonging, within and beyond the Finnish borders. They took notice of some other nation-states, but there was no consistency in this. These portrayals indicate less state-bound spatial relations from the others. Put together, this analysis reveals that some children's sense of belonging is strongly dominated by the national frame of reference whereas others take it for granted, and some do not find it worth mentioning at all when talking about themselves. What this suggests, in general, is that even the most

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powerful and ever-present *processes of spatial socialization do not lead to sameness but create relative differences by which people variably situate themselves in their lived worlds.*

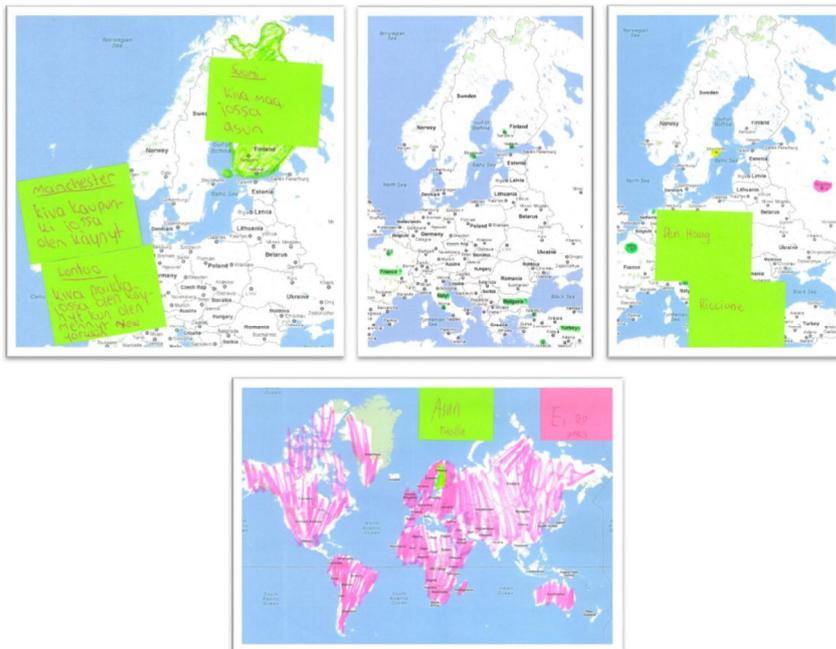


Figure 3. Spatial attachments with Finland. Top left: Finland, Manchester and London paralleled as nice places. Top center: Finland not marked, instead a collection of European cities and countries. Top right: Finland not marked, instead five cities with different color codes. Bottom: Finland marked green as "I live here", rest of the world red as "not yes".

Being nothing more than brief eclipses, these empirical findings hopefully succeed in illuminating how a dynamic and relational, geographically grounded approach to socialization differs from a static and categorical political socialization framework. It enables a newly fashioned analysis of political presence and development where the child is identified as a central figure, situated in a particular spatial constellation as a competent, yet conditioned agent. An empirical exploration of, for instance, the ways in which the world appears and 'talks' to variably situated children in their everyday encounters with different kinds of people and places, and how they start to position themselves and others in these lived worlds, leads to quite different interpretations from those made some fifty years ago. As Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell (2012, p. 4) convey, such "emphasis on political formation allows us to read children's narrative, visual, and textual representations of their everyday lives and experiences as more than just evidence of their status

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as deeply knowledgeable social actors, but as actively negotiated sites of their politics." These politics might resonate with matters identified as political within the adult-led societies, but not necessarily. Rather than studying politics *in* childhood, this methodological approach provides means for studying politics *with* children, finding out about how things appear as political to them and how they seek to engage with these political realities together with other people on their own grounds.

Conclusions

In this paper, my aim is to draw the interdisciplinary scholarship back to the study of socialization where methodological development, theorization and empirical inquiry are greatly needed. With specific interest in the political aspects of these processes I argue that to keep the horizon of change glimmering, we need in-depth understanding of its foremost conditions – the beginnings of politics, as Arendt appreciatively calls children. For an up-to-date conception, I suggest that *politics* is understood contextually, as a fundamental aspect of social life that is fluctuating and spatio-temporally specific, concerning various matters and taking manifold forms in different communities where its meanings are constantly (re)produced. Second, I propose to apprehend *political development* as a multi-directional (inter)subjective process in which the world comes to exist to the individual in particular ways and the individual becomes situated in this world, likewise, particularly yet conditionally. Third, I put forward *children* to be valued as variably situated and skilled youthful subjects who own the capacity to relate and act with other people in their everyday communities and lived environments. Thus defined, socialization encompasses social, political and spatio-temporal aspects of human existence.

The methodological framework proposed on these grounds differs notably from that which was employed in the 1960s socialization research, hopefully notably enough to remove the persistent stigma. It includes three elements: (1) a twofold conception of youthful agency that identifies children as social beings, along with older generations, and as intensely developing newcomers in their lived worlds; (2) a contextual conception of politics as an experiential aspect of social life, identified and mobilized by human subjects who (re)produce the political realities that they share; (3) a relational conception of space where the world exists to people in the form of lived communities, which may take different forms and unfold in various spatial dimensions. In this view, socialization comes to denote a dynamic and situated process in which the world and

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the subject are intersubjectively formed, involving and producing related yet unique people. The framework is designed for an empirical analysis concerning the basics of how human beings become political in their lived worlds and how the world as political, thereby, maintains itself and at the same time changes. It, therefore, also provides means for contextually rethinking the relations between childhood and nation, beginning from the practice of youthful everyday living.

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Endnotes

[1] In fact, to Arendt (1959), political practice is always collective and should rather exclude than include children.

[2] In this paper, I will not engage with developmental studies debates or the related pedagogical/psycho-theoretical research, which omission should be understood as a disciplinary limitation rather than a scientific statement. There are plenty of interesting, intersecting discussions but I am not qualified to include them all in this essay due to my restricted competence. Yet I am more than open to cross-disciplinary dialogue.

[3] Consensus on the intersubjective constitution of the subject is not simple and straightforward. The most important divider between scholars concerns the subject's autonomy, which has vital meanings to her agency. For discussion, see Colapietro (2006), Markell (2007), and McNay (2008).

[4] In geography, the concept has been developed most strongly by feminist scholars. For an overview and critique, see Nelson (1999).

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