Rethinking Spatial Socialisation as a Dynamic and Relational Process of Political Becoming

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ABSTRACT The article sets out to bring early political development back to the research agenda in childhood studies and the social scientific inquiry more generally. Proposing a geographical approach, it seeks to develop the concept of spatial socialisation as a dynamic and relational process through which political becoming takes place. Contrary to the conventional conceptions, children are understood as participants rather than recipients of socialisation – active agents in their everyday environments alongside with their adult authorities, institutions, the media and their lived communities as a whole. Moreover, drawing from phenomenological theorisations of subjectivity, politics and space, the employed approach problematises the worlds in which political socialisation takes place. The article argues that the dynamic processes of socialisation constitute the spatial realities where children and youth lead their lives 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 agencies. These understandings are of the 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 socialisation 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; Strandell, 2010; Van Krieken, 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 10 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 colonised people's lived worlds have been politicised, to bring visibility to their realities and views. What follows is that the orders, troubles and matters politicised from *adult* perspectives are emphasised, 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 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. 301) argued more than 60 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 socialisation 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 socialisation as a dynamic and relational process of political becoming.[2] As a concept, spatial socialisation 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 socialisation, involving both individual capacity to relate to the world and collective competence in 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. Therefore, I find both 'childhood' and 'nation' as plural and contextual concepts, which renders their relationship co-constitutive and fluid.

The article proceeds as follows: I will first briefly present a critique of the traditional political socialisation 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 socialisation, including the recognition of children as situated intersubjectively 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 Socialisation

In 1987, *International Political Science Review* released a special issue asserting the importance of political socialisation 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 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 socialisation is mentioned in political science textbooks as a generational transmission technique and as a social mechanism that explains voting behaviour, 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, 2014). 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 socialisation nor socialisation 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 politicised 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 multigenerational communities in various ways, being a full social agent from very early on (e.g. 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, pp. 221-222) in the special issue mentioned: '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 socialisation 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 realised the shortcomings of earlier theorising 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. R.W. Connell, 1972; see also Habashi & Worley, 2009). Fifteen years later her critique crystallised as: 'Political socialisation 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, pp. 218-219). From this internal critique, it is easy to understand the backlash of the 'new' childhood studies tradition in the 1980s. Largely in line with R.W. Connell (1972), yet discussing socialisation in general, Leena Alanen (1988, p. 54, 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, socialisation, hence, became the symbol of old-fashioned, adultist, behavioural, developmentalist and future-oriented childhood research. 'Child as becoming' was depicted as an antithesis to the emerging trend that placed the child at the centre of enquiry as a knowing, acting and skilful '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 socialisation that it still carries. It is, hence, not farfetched to say that the whole topic has undergone a 40-year disappearance.

Framing Socialisation as a Dynamic and Situated Process

The reimagination of children's political socialisation 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 sociocultural 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 socialisation. 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 socialisation 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 socialisation 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 socialisation, they also become 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 emphasises the fact that relatedness and uniqueness are co-constituted. As gendered, classed, raced, abled, sexed etc., 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 socialisation. 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-centred 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 socialisation 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 reinterpretation of political socialisation, 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 realised the commonplace venues of childhood as political arenas *par excellence*, involving children as children *both* in the actual 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 emphasised 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-centred interpretation of the youthful subject and the dynamic conception of socialisation. 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 neighbourhood, 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 organised according to physical metric distance but along 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 socialisation 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 socialisation 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 etc. 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 socialisation 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 fluttering 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 neighbourhoods, 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 neighbouring countries, and those placed in asylum in immigrant neighbourhoods in further locations such as 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 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 socialisation, 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 socialisation 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 Socialisation with Children

The study that I draw from is based at the University of Tampere, Centre of Excellence in Research on the Relational and Territorial Politics of Bordering, Identities and Transnationalisation (RELATE), Space and Political Agency Research Group (SPARG). The empirical fieldwork was carried out in 2012 in Tampere and in Helsinki, where we worked with 129 11- to 16-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 (for 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 socialisation 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 socialisation, 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 empty mapping platforms provided (world, continent, nation state, region, city and neighbourhood), using colour codes to signal pleasant (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 issues discussed. 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 article, 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 Figure 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 materialising 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 socialisation are relational, shifting and subjectively conceived.*
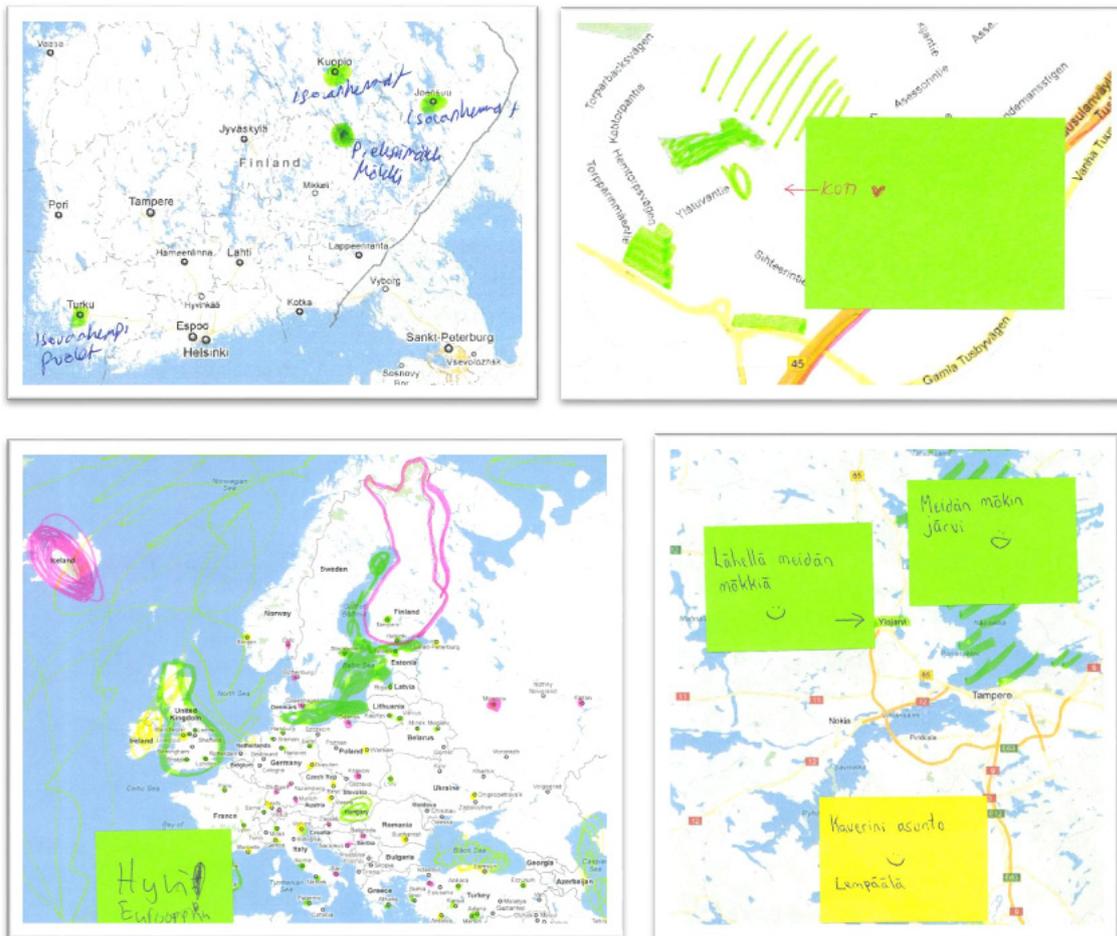

Figure 1. Variably located homes. Represented are places where familial life takes place. Top left: Grandparents' homes and the summer house. Top right: Family house. Bottom left: Cities, countries and regions in Europe. Bottom right: Summer house, friends' place and 'our lake'.

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 fieldwork, 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 the Second World War. 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 etc. (see Figure 2 for examples).

Figure 2. The other 'Red Russias'. Top left: 'I have been to Russia but did not like it much.' Top centre: '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'.

Therefore it would be a total misinterpretation to include negative attitudes toward Russia *as a state* in understanding the political realities of these children. Owing to my unreflected presumptions that were ever more accentuated during the fieldwork, I nearly missed some of these references. This makes explicit that any generalisation concerning children's political realities is likely to fail because *all spatial relations are based on situated knowledge that is subjectively established.*

Third, clear evidence emerged about spatial socialisation as a process that relates as well as differentiates people. A good example is the participants' expressed relationships with Finland (see Figure 3 for examples).
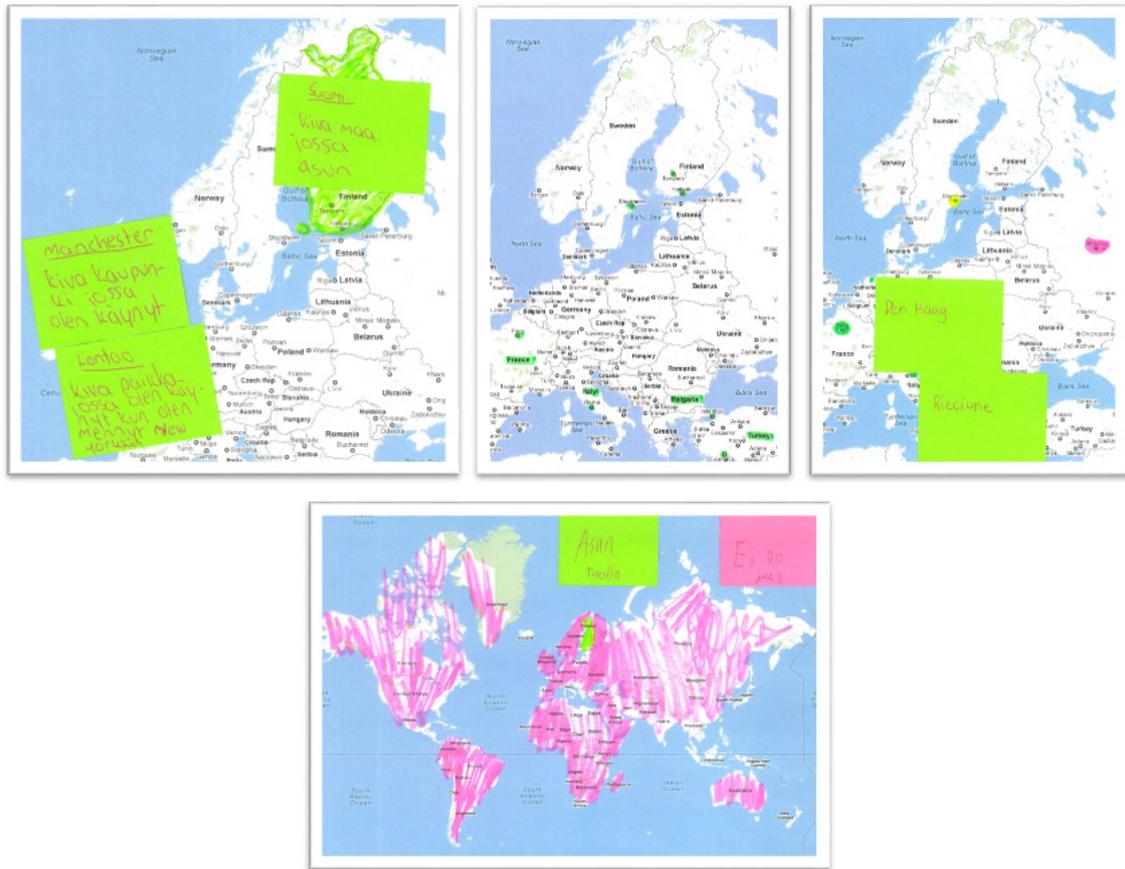

Figure 3. Spatial attachments with Finland. Top left: Finland, Manchester and London parallel as nice places. Top centre: Finland not marked, instead a collection of European cities and countries. Top right: Finland not marked, instead five cities with different colour codes. Bottom: Finland marked green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

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 colour, 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 emphasised the importance of Finland as a place of belonging. The latter were notions concerning a naturalised 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 powerful and ever-present *processes of spatial socialisation do not lead to sameness but create relative differences by which people variably situate themselves in their lived worlds*.

Being nothing more than brief eclipses, it is hoped that these empirical findings succeed in illuminating how a dynamic and relational, geographically grounded approach to socialisation

differs from a static and categorical political socialisation 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 50 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 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 article, my aim is to draw the interdisciplinary scholarship back to the study of socialisation where methodological development, theorisation 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 multidirectional (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, socialisation 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 socialisation research, notably enough, it is hoped, 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 mobilised 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, socialisation comes to denote a dynamic and situated process in which the world and 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.

Acknowledgements

Notes

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

[2] In this article, 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 owing 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 for his or 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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