

**RETHINKING YOUNG PEOPLE'S
LIVES THROUGH SPACE AND
PLACE**

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SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CHILDREN
AND YOUTH (SSCY/SSCH) VOLUME 26

RETHINKING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH SPACE AND PLACE

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2020

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78973-340-2 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78973-339-6 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78973-341-9 (Epub)

ISSN: 1537-4661 (Series)



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ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

List of Contributors vii

Author Biographies ix

Introduction: Rethinking Young People's Lives Through Space and Place
Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah 1

PART I NAVIGATING IMAGINED AND REAL SPATIAL BORDERS

Chapter 1. Public Spaces as Loci of Education and Identity Building. Paul Maerky and the Lives of Messengers and Apprentices in Geneva's Horological District, 1871–1876
Diana Volonakis 13

Chapter 2. Todo es Diferente en la Frontera: Mixed-status Familism in the Texas Border Strip
Carlos Aguilar 27

PART II BELONGING, MEANING-MAKING, AND REPRESENTATION

Chapter 3. Re-imagining Childhoods: Nepali Children's Homes
Jennifer Rothchild 47

Chapter 4. From Inequality to Social Exclusion: What Do Children Say about School?
Camila Caldeira Langfeldt and Angela Scalabrin Coutinho 61

Chapter 5. Youth and Their Multiple Relationships with the City: Experiences of Exclusion and Belonging in Montréal
Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, Juan Torres and Geneviève Grégoire-Labrecque 85

PART III
LEARNING IN AND THROUGH SPACE

Chapter 6. Re-examining and Re-assembling the Gendered Worlds of Preschool Girls	
<i>Yeojoo Yoon and Allison Sterling Henward</i>	<i>107</i>
Chapter 7. Weaving Place-based Education and Coast Salish Knowledge: Stories from Salt Spring Island	
<i>Jodi Streeelasky</i>	<i>121</i>
Chapter 8. Please Sit Down: Children's Creative Expression Within the Boundaries of a Structured Early Childhood Education Classroom	
<i>Katherine Martin</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>155</i>

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INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH SPACE AND PLACE

Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah

Traditionally, in sociological research, space is often simply viewed as context or backdrop for the object of analysis. Space for the most part is taken for granted. However, the relatively recent “spatial” turn in sociological research illustrates that space is not simply context for research but rather space is process, and in process (Gulson, 2011), it informs practice. Foundational works by scholars like Lefebvre (1991) cement the idea that space is socially produced and therefore should not be seen as “natural.” Space is not independent of human activity, rather its meanings is constructed through social relations of people both inside and outside of it.

Space is imbued with power relations that shape subjectivity, practice and sense of belonging (Sriskandarajah, 2019). Subjectivity is co-constitutive with spatiality (Gulson, 2011). It is in “place where negotiation is forced upon us” (Massey, 2005, p. 154). Spaces and places are where differences are lived out and contested. Place is where influences and belongings intersect (Clayton, 2004). Belonging comes into existence through material conditions as situated in space (Youkhana, 2015). Making of social distinction has a powerful spatial dimension (Watt, 2006). Geographical location, the intersection of space, time, people in a particular historical moment all play an important role in the development of cultural and social capital. How people experience space is marked by age, gender, race, sexuality, divergent abilities and citizenship status. These markers also inform space.

Although there is a burgeoning spatial turn in sociological research, little has focussed on children and youth. Farrugia (2018) argues that when studying children and youth, the emphasis has historically been on time over space. The rationale for this lies in the fact that most research on children and youth view the period of childhood and youthhood simply as a time of transition to adulthood. Children and young people's voices and experiences are relegated to the margins,

seen as temporary and therefore not worthy of study. This of course ignores and therefore children and youth are embedded in larger power dynamics that inform their lived realities and also the fact that they are beings with agency how they are able to negotiate these realities.

Despite claims that youth are mobile and globally oriented in times of late modernity, youth continue to show strong local connections (Harris & Wyn, 2009, p. 327; Nayak, 2003; Nayak & Kehily, 2013). The perception of youth as highly mobile is qualified by other realities of contemporary times. Despite scholarship that proclaim the increasing homogenisation of society due to globalisation and the irrelevance of locality, researchers such as Hoey (2010) and Van Der Bly (2007) argue that the local continues to play an important role in the construction of identities. Van Der Bly (2007) argues that local communities create their own heterogeneous cultures, understandings and identities within homogenising economic and cultural world processes. Everyday lives of youth are still place-bound (Nayak, 2003; Verhoeven, Davids, & Schulpen, 2007).

Children and youth more than adults are limited to their local environments and spend most of their time in their neighbourhoods. Because young people are more rooted in their communities due to their limited access to resources and mobility, they are often at the forefront of negotiating everyday difference in local spaces. Researchers have found young people are often more influenced by where they live than other groups (Kintrea, Bannister, & Pickering, 2010).

It is in specific spaces young people are “actors and acted upon” (Raffo, 2011, p. 9). Geographies of space become fields of social practice where youth negotiate their status, recognition and their futures (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010). Place re-creates and reinforces structures of privilege and oppression (Sutton & Kemp, 2011). Recent works on youth and space illustrate spaces are important markers of difference (Gosine & Islam, 2014). Spaces are places where social and spatial inclusions and exclusions are articulated and negotiated (Zaami, 2015). Belonging and sense of self-worth are often produced through and tied to space (Cairns, 2013). As Foley and Leverett (2011) aptly summarise,

Spaces and places are therefore constituted, physically, socially, historically and discursively for and by children and young people. They contribute to the stratification of a society and, thereby, to the governance of social groups and the reproduction of social values. Yet they can also represent and become the sites of agency, refuge, subversion and/or counter-culture. Attending to meanings, tensions and potentials within spaces is, we believe, a prerequisite of change. (p. 1)

This book aims to illustrate the importance of centring spatiality when understanding the lives of children and youth. Exploring the interconnections between children and youth and how they are situated in their environment allows for understanding how spaces inform their lives and how they make meaning in relation to the spaces and places they occupy. An understanding of how children and youth are situated in their environments and how this informs both them and their environments have practical implications. We see this in the chapters that constitute this volume.

This book exists at the intersection of the new sociology of childhoods and new materialism. The new sociology of childhood departs from conventional understandings of children and young people on two important fronts, “the

child as social actor and the generational order” (Bühler-Niederberger, 2010, p. 159). Conventional understandings of children view them as in a constant state of becoming, a period of transition to adulthood. However, the child as a social actor approach foregrounds the need for understanding the lived realities of children and young people (Bühler-Niederberger, 2010). The new sociology of childhood emphasises the importance of centring children and young people’s voices in addressing problems and inequality (Marshall, 2016). The approach diverges from the socialisation perspective that is prevalent in the study of children and young people. The new sociology of childhood moves away from “focusing on the individual child” (Matthews, 2007, p. 326) and recognises children and youth are constituted through their embedded positions within wider structures that they actively negotiate. The approach views children as agents who are capable of negotiating their own realities. Also, recognising that young people have valuable contributions to make in the socio-spatial understandings of social realities.

In conjunction with the new sociology of childhood, this book draws on the new materialism approach. The new materialism approach centres the material aspects in understanding the social (Wyn, Cuervo, & Cook, 2020). The approach examines both the human and non-human aspects of place and how it informs children and young people’s experiences (Wyn et al., 2020). According to Wyn et al. (2020, p. 15),

[t]he ontology of new materialism is relational. It looks not at how things are constructed but at what they do. This means looking at associations, capacities and the capacities to affect or be affected, and it means that “belonging” is an “affect” that is derived from assemblages of human and non-human entities.

New materialism disrupts the subject–object binary whereby only subjects are seen as having the capacity to shape experiences. In the new materialism approach objects, factors like the local environment, neighbourhood and school also have the ability to inform experiences (Wyn et al., 2020).

The international scholars in this edited collection aim to examine how children and youth create, negotiate, change spaces and places and assert their rights to space. A socio-spatial approach allows us to examine how space interrelates with the social construction of children and youth. The chapters in this book examine space used by children and youth in many different contexts, including neighbourhoods, community centres, schools, public streets, the natural environment, orphanages, early education classrooms, homes and borders. The same space is understood in many different ways (Leveritt, 2011, p. 9), depending on how children and youth are positioned. The first two chapters examine how children navigate real and imaginary borders and these borders inform the livelihoods of those who live in these spaces.

Volonakis in her chapter draws on a historical approach to examine how young apprentices in nineteenth century Geneva navigated public space in constituting meaning. Until the late nineteenth century, the Genevan watchmaking community were bounded within the working-class community of Saint-Gervais in the centre of the city. Volonakis draws on the memoirs of Paul Maerkys who recounts his early years apprenticing in Saint-Gervais, Geneva’s horological district.

Volonakis argues that the Saint-Gervais apprenticeship system was constituted through public spaces that acted as the workshop where youth learned the craft of watchmaking. Spaces like streets, public fountains and eateries took on educational functions. In nineteenth century Saint-Gervais, children would leave school at 12 years old and begin their apprenticeship. The apprenticeship programme required youth to use public spaces as a part of their knowledge transmission, highlighting the spatiality of knowledge transmission. In this understanding, space is not only an object but subjective, infused with meaning.

Through Maerky's writing, Volonakis shows how young people were victims of practical jokes by adult community members who were preparing them for their craft. The jokes were a way to cope with the tedious daily work. In addition to this, the practical jokes were a way to educate the young people about the realities of their industry. Humour allowed for disciplining youth into the norms of their community. Volonakis takes it one step further and argues that humour was used to demarcate not only cultural boundaries but also physical boundaries. Practical jokes included sending children on errands that had no end. For example, to pick up things that did not exist. This was a way to teach children to become more discerning. Practical jokes were inscribed into place.

Youth would often also use public spaces as a way to circumvent surveillance by adults. Youth created their own spaces outside the purview of their apprenticeships, like the public fountains where they would gather to get water for their workshops or pathways to night school. In these spaces youth would enact their own pranks on others. Even in this historical work, there is evidence of youth forming groups based on their neighbourhood boundaries when engaging with youth.

In chapter 2, Aguilar examines how physical borders circumscribe young people's pathways to adulthood. In 2012, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme was implemented to give undocumented migrants who were brought to America as children short-term status. Although the programme was not a pathway to citizenship, it conferred protection to youth and enabled them the opportunities to attend school and work. Aguilar argues that although DACA afforded some youth with these protections, they had different implications for those who live in the area along the Texas–Mexico border. The Texas–Mexico border is patrolled by American immigration border control and has 18 interior checkpoints that prevent mobility of undocumented immigrants. Aguilar looks at the intersection of space and immigration status and familism. Aguilar sharing the experiences of seven DACA recipients living (or have lived) on the Texas Border Strip argues that the lived realities shaped by this particular space informed by migration policies, discourses on illegal migration and national security shapes the “coming of age processes” that accompany youthhood.

Living on the Texas Border Strip effect how young people make important life decisions like attending college or taking on work opportunities outside the Texas Border Strip and in turn what this would mean for their families. As Aguilar illustrates, although there have been discussions on the spatial mobility that DACA has afforded its recipients, the literature has not looked at the lives of young people who reside near interior immigration checkpoints in the United States.

Although research often discusses the benefits of DACA to its recipients, it does not situate the benefits within family dynamics where there are mixed-status. These spaces bound young people both legally and also due to their familial connections and obligations. Parents are fearful that they will not be able to see their children if they move beyond the borders or fearful when they return to visit them on the Strip. The circumventing of mobility often means young people continue to delay adulthood as they choose not to move outside to pursue employment or school opportunities. Living in these spaces with families of mixed legal statuses inform young people's opportunities regardless of the fact they have status. There is constant worry for their family who continue to live undocumented.

The following three chapters examine how space informs young people's sense of belonging and constitutes their meaning-making and representation of spaces. In chapter 3, Rothchild applies C. Wright Mills' sociological imaginations to examine how children's sense of belonging in orphanages in Nepal is informed by space. Rothchild argues that life stories are tied to spaces. Leaving or entering certain spaces is predicated by larger social structures like gender, family, economy, income and broader geopolitics. In her study, Rothchild examines the home spaces of five Nepali children. Her research centres the space of the home. Often socio-spatial research tends to examine the outdoor environment or public spaces omitting the spatial realities of the home space. Rothchild examines how intimate home spaces, school spaces and work places inform children's experiences and contribute to pathways to orphanages. The new space of the orphanage allows the participants to subvert dominant gender scripts prevalent in spaces they inhabited before entering the orphanage. For example, within the confines of the orphanage space, boys take on domestic duties like washing and cooking. Both boys and girls welcome this reality, seeing it as an opportunity to assert their agency and subvert dominant scripts that often did not serve them well outside these spaces.

In chapter 4, Langfeldt and Coutinho's study examines two public schools (Centre and Border schools) in two neighbourhoods in the City of Curitiba, Parana in southern Brazil. The neighbourhoods differ along lines of income, violence, cultural capital and green space. Based on Stuart Hall's work on representation, the authors examine how social conditions and spatiality constitute particular meaning-making among the children. The chapter examines how social inequalities inform how children view their schools, the intersection between territory, poverty and social exclusion. Childhood is informed by territoriality, particularly in contexts of high-class stratification. Although the children live in the same city, sharing similarly spaces, their experiences are differentiated by the neighbourhoods they live in which are shaped by economic, social and political structures. The children give meaning to these experiences through where they are situated within the social structure.

The Centre school is predominately white. The neighbourhood is well served by the state, in terms of electricity, garbage removal, access to water and sewer systems, and it has low reported crime rates. It has large green spaces and many leisure spaces and access to medical facilities. The Border neighbourhood is situated on the outskirts of the city. The area is home to Indigenous communities, and more diversity, although still predominately white. The area has high levels of

reported violence. The areas have little leisure and public spaces and limited access to medical facilities. There is a lack of adequate sewage system. For children in the Border school, school represents future possibilities. School is the means through which to survive. School also acts as a place of leisure in a physical environment in which these spaces are lacking. For some in the Border school, school is an escape, provides a sense of safety that their surrounding areas do not provide. For the children in the Centre school, school is not the central point of their lives. For them, it is more about the opportunity to be with their friends than a look for the future, because they have more access to cultural capital outside these spaces. Physical spaces shape children's activities and meanings they attribute to their spaces. Spaces provide or hinder opportunities. Children's wider connection to the nation-state or wider community is informed by their relationship to their local spaces.

In chapter 5, Blanchet-Cohen, Torres and Grégoire examine how youth navigate urban centres, focusing on the experiences of youth in Montreal, Canada. They find youth have an ambiguous relationship to the city, feeling a sense of exclusion, while simultaneously searching for belonging. Belonging for these youth is constituted through both the physical and social environments. Belonging is not only determined by social connectedness but also bounded by their evaluation of things like the conditions of their streets and access to transit and to services that are located within their neighbourhoods. However, these assessments are determined not only by their spatial locatedness in the city but also by social markers that differentiate their experiences along factors of age, gender, income, neighbourhoods, race, ethnicity and family histories. These factors determine how localised youth's experiences allow for physical mobility beyond their local neighbourhoods and city.

Racialised youth see the physical locations they inhabit as neglected and underserved in regard to access to services, leisure spaces, and youth-friendly spaces. They also recognize that the city does not invest in the physical upkeep, provision of safety, or access to transit in areas where they live. Race informs how physical spaces are maintained. The stratification is more easily noticeable in a city where poverty lives in close spatial proximity to wealth. Racism is not only spatial but also socially experienced, perpetuated by not only adults but also other youth. These realities inform young people's understandings of their future possibilities.

The authors argue that these differences need to be accounted for by urban planners and policy-makers when determining children and young people's access to city resources. This includes both social resources and in the form of the built environment, including things like well-maintained roads and outdoor spaces. The authors advocate for emphasising the connectivity of young people's experiences between scales and the relationship between these scales, connecting local neighbourhood experiences to the wider urban setting. These multiple scales are not only in the physical sense but also the connection between mental health, education, mobility and belonging. Policies, services and programmes need to reflect these connections. Blanchet-Cohen, Torres and Grégoire argue that the pursuit of "child-friendly cities" is only possible through engagement with youth themselves. Policy directives must come from youth.

Young people often marginalised from mainstream spaces constitute alternative localised spaces where they build their own sense of community among other youth, including places like local community centres. These measures allow them to negotiate their sense of exclusion and create their own avenues of belonging. It is through youth's experiences of inclusion and exclusion as formulated through their connections with people and institutions they experience place. Youth subvert feelings of exclusion from some physical spaces by appropriating local spaces and creating meanings of belonging. Places like parking lots, community streets, streets, alleys, or even a common rock are reconfigured to places of meaning.

The last three chapters look at the centrality of physical spaces for learning and identity. In chapter 6, Yoon and Henward draw on a posthumanist approach to examine how space and materials inform gender in these spaces and the implications of this on equity in early childhood learning. Yoon and Henward draw on new material feminism to examine how children are constituted through their local environments. Yoon and Henward examine how certain spaces within the preschool classroom setting become read as gendered spaces by children who navigate these spaces in their meaning-making. Spaces are also places of subversion. Yoon and Henward argue that there is a propensity for those who work in equity to focus on curriculum and materials such as toys without analysing the physical environment. For example, the carpet becomes a place where children and the teacher are able to challenge hegemonic gender discourses. However, preschool classrooms are not bounded, they are shaped by outside spaces and materials brought in. Spaces inform the type of play that is possible. The new material approach disrupts traditional materialist approaches that view material as determining gender, rather the new materialist approach recognises that children engage in dialogical relationships with spaces.

In chapter 7, Streelasky examines the importance of place-based learning that centres spatiality within the context of Truth and Reconciliation. Through a case study, she examines how a teacher in the Salt Spring Islands, British Columbia, Canada, incorporates local Coast Salish Indigenous perspectives about space into teaching and learning. Streelasky argues that these opportunities allow children to access Indigenous knowledges that are traditionally relegated to the margins of Canadian society. She foregrounds children's agency by centring their voices in evaluations of these approaches. This also illustrates the importance of recognising that reconciliation is not only an adult process.

The incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge is made possible through the guidance of an Indigenous educator. The Indigenous educator encourages the centring of Traditional Knowledge about the vegetation of the island and the animals that inhabit the lands. Through the adoption of Indigenous Knowledge, the children learn about vegetation that is used for food, healing properties of plants and Indigenous legends. Streelasky draws on a critical pedagogy that centres place. By foregrounding place and the knowledge about place, students are able to garner an intercultural understanding about their local place. Indigenous Knowledge centres space and spiritual connections to the land. Place-based learning believes locality provides context for knowledge. It extends knowledge bearers beyond the teacher to include local community members. Within Indigenous

worldviews, places of learning extend beyond classrooms, and learning is rooted in connection to the land and the community. This needs to be emphasised if we want to decolonise education and move past narrow Eurocentric views of what constitutes learning spaces.

In chapter 8, Martin also examines the space of an early childhood education classroom and their localised culture. Martin recognises that external economic realities inform internal spatial realities of early childhood education classrooms. In her work, Martin approaches the classroom as a Third space in which children in an underfunded classroom are able to subvert their realities to create creative experiences despite lack of funding for the arts. The rug and activity table are spaces in the classroom where children negotiate the highly structured space of their classroom. These select areas of the classroom are creative spaces where the children interact with their friends away from their teacher's gaze. These spaces allow children to play and create as they desire away from the watchful eyes of their teachers. These are their creative spaces despite lack of art materials in the classroom. Martin's study emphasises the need to organise space to be child-centred and conducive to creativity. She advocates for a bottom-up approach when creating classrooms whereby children's inputs and creativity are centred.

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