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## **From children in the city to the city made by children**

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*Publication date:*  
2018

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Mechlenborg, M., & Jepsen, M. B. (2018). *From children in the city to the city made by children*. Paper presented at ENHR 2018, Uppsala, Finland.

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# **FROM CHILDREN IN THE CITY TO THE CITY MADE BY CHILDREN: A REVIEW ON CHILDREN'S SPATIALITY IN THE AGE OF CIVIC SPATIAL ENGAGEMENT**

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## **Abstract**

*The paper is based in the rise of new participatory methods with concepts like “spatial citizenship” (Gryl, Jekel, & Donert, 2010; Jekel, Gryl, & Schulze, 2015; Patterson, 2007), “critical spatial learning” (Goodchild & Janelle, 2010; Gordon, Elwood, & Mitchell, 2016) and “the right to the city” (Elshater, 2018) as a specific dimension of citizenship education (Meyer-Bisch, 1995). With its origin in geoinformation these concepts has primary focused on geotechnical uses and geo-competences, while broader reflections of spatiality, place attachment, spatial production etc., has been largely ignored or understudied (Gordon et al., 2016). In a review on urban spatiality and youth, the paper shows how concepts of space/place, empirical focus and the role of the child/youngster have changed historically and led the way to the contemporary understanding of spatial citizenship education. On that, the paper gives suggestions to how research on spatial citizenship education should be broadened in order to fulfill the potentials for engaging young people.*

**Keywords:** Children and youth, citizenship education, children's geography, review

# FROM CHILDREN IN THE CITY TO THE CITY MADE BY CHILDREN: A REVIEW ON CHILDREN'S SPATIALITY IN THE AGE OF CIVIC SPATIAL ENGAGEMENT

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## Introduction

This paper reflects on how the relation between youth and urban spatiality has been interpreted since the establishment of the field in 1970's. The paper takes its academic starting point in new collaborative and participatory methods that wants to raise a critical spatial thinking in children and young people by engaging them in their local environments and neighborhoods. With concepts like 'spatial citizenship', 'spatial citizenship education' (Gryl et al., 2010; Jekel et al., 2015; Patterson, 2007), 'critical spatial learning' (Goodchild & Janelle, 2010; Gordon et al., 2016) and children's 'right to the city' (Elshater, 2018), the goal is not merely to build up spatial competences but to initiate civic spatial empowerment. On this background, the paper suggests to gather these different, yet similar concepts in geoeducation<sup>1</sup> into a common discipline of what we hereby will define as *spatial citizenship education*.<sup>2</sup> By doing so, we add a significant spatial dimension to the concept of the UN declaration of *citizenship education*, seeing civic empowerment through "absolute, cognitive and relational concepts of space" (Gryl et al., 2010, 2).

The paper shows how evolving concepts of space/place, empirical focus and the role of the child/youngster have led the way to the contemporary understanding of spatial citizenship education. A central finding is that the studies on youth & urban spatiality originates from a fundamental loss of social urban integration and a pursuit after what was lost in modernist urban planning and modern childhood pedagogies and understandings. The paper argues that this experience of loss must be acknowledged and united with likewise dominating concept like social construction of childhood,

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<sup>1</sup> With its origin in geoinformation, the primary focus has been to expand ways to gather, collect and analyze geoinformation via different kind of technology and spatial representations, modellings etc. Secondly, the purpose has been to reflect on geotechnical competences and uses in terms of engagement and spatial learning (Jekel et al., 2015, Gordon et al., 2016). Contemporary critical voices within the discipline, however, confirm that geotechnology may lead to competences within technology use, geocommunication and learning in general. However, the question of how it encourages an active spatial thinking fundamentally remains unanswered (Gordon et al., 2016 558-572; Gryl et al., 2010). Spatial citizenship education is a result of this discussion.

<sup>2</sup> In "GI & Spatial Citizenships" Gryl, Jekel & Dekel, 2010, introduces the concept of spatial citizenship and the additional concept of spatial citizenship education as a method for obtaining a spatial citizenship skill. This approach is later unfolded in Jekel, Gryl & Schulze's article "Education for Spatial Citizenship" (2015). In this paper the concept of spatial citizenship education is used more broadly to define different, related approaches to civic spatial engagement and learnings, including critical spatial thinking (Gordon et al., 2016 558-572), the right to the city (Elshater, 2018 432-455) etc.

children as social actors, fuzzy spaces and angels/devils, in order to develop a coherent discipline of *youth's spatial citizenship education*.

### **Three phases of youth & urban spatiality studies: Toward spatial civic engagement**

The paper presents a meta-review on youth & urban spatiality studies through three phases centered on concepts, empirical and theoretical approaches to space/place and the role of the children/young people (see template 1). The purpose is to give an overview of how different, historical discourses dominate the understanding of the child and the “problems” of the city, leading to a fundamental loss of an (ideal) integrated, chaotic city and an academic split in perception in how this loss should be healed.

A few comments to the three phases. Though the three phases to some extent is chronologically developed, it has – first of all - not been possible to define an exact year-to-year period or to formulate a definition that covers all academic reflections within the given period. Works that historically belong to one phase conceptually relate to the next, or to the former. Yet, we will argue, that the different phases are historically related in a specific temporal context with its own discourse(s) on the role of the child/youngster, the city and its academic position. Secondly, the three phases have focused on dominating approaches and concepts and put its validation in already canonized works, well-established journals and well-estimated reviews and projects; as well as their ranking in different library databases like Scopus and Libris. Thirdly, the last phase is not as defined in its scope as the two phases before it. This has to do with the obvious fact that the third phase is still evolving and the required needed academic distance is lacking. Yet, we argue that we are currently experiencing a new phase with new concepts and discourses. Fourth, we have tried to limit the meta-review to literature and projects related to what we define as youth & urban spatiality studies. As declared by UN Commission on Children's Right (1989) children is 0-18 years of age. However, UN statistic bases their surveys on a different definition in which youth are between 15-24 years old, children 0-14 years (UN Youth and the United Nations, 2017). In the paper, we focus on older children (from 8 years of age) and youth (15-25) defined as *youth*. At the same time, several scholars find inspiration in childhood studies, which per se have a wider age definition. Discourses in childhood are therefore defined as the role of the child/youngster. The physical settings differs in all three phases, but a significant amount of literature takes it offspring in an urban setting, or at least, they reflect on how their work of study relates to an Anglo-American urban setting. The modern Western city is, as we will show, a site of origin, when taking about youth and spatiality. As the template 1 illustrates (see next page), we want to give an introduction into a complex field of study by reducing and structuring its findings into dominating discourses, concepts and perceptions.

#### **PHASE 1: The establishment of the field (1970s-med 1980s)**

It was a widespread perception in the 1970s, that planners (and adults in general) lacked insights into children's life-worlds. The first phase therefore represents the establishment of youth & urban spatiality studies and is directly linked to Colin Ward's influential book *The Child in the City* (1978). Based on a critic of modernist urban planning Ward formulates a profound vision for the (Western) city:

“I don't want a Childhood City. I want a city where children live in the same world as I do” (Ward, 1978, 204).

Other major contributions are Kevin Lynch's *Growing up in Cities* (1977) founded by UNESCO, Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1969), Roger Hart's *Children's Experience of Place* (1979) and *The Development of Spatial Cognition* (1973) - the latter in collaboration with Gary T. Moore. Furthermore, Hart initiated and was an editor of *Journal Children's Environments Quarterly* (later *Children's Environment*) in 1984. The works in the late 1970s led the UN to adopt Lynch's and other scholars' reflections on Child-Friendly-Cities by launching the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. This event marks the end of the first phase of youth & urban spatiality studies.

Template 1: An overview of all three phases in youth & urban space study from the establishment of the field in 1970 til the age of civic spatial action today.

PHASES	ACADEMIC POSITION	SIGNIFICANT QUOTES	ROLE OF THE CHILD/ THE YOUNGSTER	ROLE OF THE SPACE/ THE CITY	IDEALS & DISCOURSES	KEY FINDINGS
1.  ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIELD. 1970s-1980s (1989: UN Right of the Child Convention).	Ther lack of social life of children in the modern Western cities because planners (and adults) lack insight into children's life-worlds. Urban planning and design studies dominates this phase.	"I don't want a Childhood City. I want a city where children live in the same world as I do" (Ward, 1978).	The child is innocent, yet incompetent, and needs guidance and facilitation from adults/authorities. There is a strive towards understanding the child as a person with its own needs rather than adults to be.	The city is a symbol of a modernist planning gone wrong, its dangerous and excludes children and young people.	The problem of the city is a planners problem and should be solved with a new planning paradigm that includes children's needs and uses : The intergrated (human) city.	1. Due to the dangerous city children are being kept more at home by their parents (study on Children Independed Mopility, Hillman). 2. Children like unprogrammed spaces to play in (Ward, Hart).
2  CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE FIELD. 1990s - mid-2000s	New social study on childhoods, the concept of place attachment and environmental psychology dominate this phase, where fundamental concepts and insights within the study of Youth & urban spatiality are formed.	"The quality of their [children's] lives is determined by local resources, dangers and deprivations. Therefore it is necessary to combine quantitative data on urban quality with processes that enable young people themselves to specify what works and doesn't work for them in the places where they live" (Chawla & Malone, 2003 118-141)	Childhood is being perceived as historical and cultural conditioned, with focus on the specific, local context. Children are social actors, 'beings' rather than 'becomings'.	The city becomes a symbol for community involving different places, routes and spaces (liminal spaces) that enable children and young people to develop their social and individual identity in different geographical settings around the world.	Focusing on the site specific context, age group, gender, sexuality and ethnicity new concepts are developed, and in this aftermath academic reflections are emerging. How do we engage children the right way, and how do we make children's insights accessible and useful for the development of their urban setting?	1. Children are both 'angels' and 'devils' depending on the space and perspective. 2. Children measure quality of wellbeing in their neighborhood differently than adults. 3. Children use different spaces when constituting their identity and role in the community. 4. A further decline in children's independent mobility (CIM).
3.  POLITICIZATION AND MERGING WITH NEW DISCIPLINES. Mid-2000s-	Children and the city (re)emerge as central themes in public debate, politics and academia, with a political ambition to secure children's right to the (modern Western neo-liberal) city.	"How, we asked, can Child-Friendly City policies and practices support physical and social transformations, not only towards a goal of more walking and cycling by children, but towards the institutionalization of children's right to the city?" (Whitzman et al.,2010; 475).	Childhood studies moves toward a more relational insight. The child is a social actor, but victim to a protective perspective and a neo-liberal culture/city in which children are denied rights of participation.	Based on Lefebvre, Harvey, Massey etc. the city is a site for production and reproduction of inequality, segregation, poverty and social-economic health related problems. This approach is closely linked to the spatial turn in human science.	With concepts like 'environmental competence' and 'resilience', the ideal is to move from a need-orientated to a right-orientated transformation of the city, in which children's participation and needs are in focus.	1. Children in modern Western cultures lose opportunity to gain mastery over their physical and social environments, they lack environmental competences. 2. Participational methods shifts from the principal of planning to the principal og governance (Unicef, UN etc.). 3. Spatiality is a site for production and reproduction of powerful social-economic structures.

### *The role of children/youth in the first phase*

Childhood became a theme of increasing academic interest throughout the 1970s, especially with the forming of new social life forms in the aftermath of the social revolution of 1968s. Up until then, childhood was perceived as a natural and universal stage in life from which every child would eventually turn into an adult, according to the notion of mere growth. According to this understanding, the child was characterized by innocence and incompetence, but also immature and less civilized than adults (James & Jenks, 1996, 318; Valentine, 1996, 587). Lloyd DeMause took the stand to retrieve the understanding of childhood in his book *The History of Childhood* (1974)<sup>3</sup>, to great inspiration for the thinkers of the first phase of youth & urban spatiality studies. DeMause revealed childhood as a culturally and historical concept while outlining the history of childrearing from Antiquity to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of six historical modes of parent-child relations (DeMause, 1992, 56). At his time, DeMause discerned a forthcoming transition in modern Western civilization from *the socializing mode* towards *the helping mode* of childrearing. From socializing children into the world of adults, children were seen as holding their own competences and agencies. Hence, the role of the adult was to facilitate the child's realization of these competences, rather than to educate the child according to adult perceptions of the world (DeMause, 1992, 57f). The helping mode involved the important notion that the child knows better than the parents, what it needs, and therefore the helping mode implies no attempt to discipline or form habits. By introducing childhood as a cultural and historical concept, DeMause called for critical reflection on the culture of childrearing. Additional to the relation of parents and their children, the notion also provoked a scrutinizing of institution's -like the city - and their (lack of) ability to frame happy childhoods.

The notion of the city as a facilitator of children's own competence and self-need is fundamental to several significant thinkers in the first phase of youth & urban spatiality studies. Hence, Ward asks "...whether the city, as a human institution, adopts the helping mode towards its young citizens", or whether it has deprived it's children the opportunity of a happy childhood, as "concealed technology, family mobility, loss of the country, loss of neighborhood tradition, and eating up of the play space have taken away the real environment" (Ward, 1978, vii).<sup>4</sup> By asking this rhetorical question, Ward sums up children's privileges on the one side, and the modernistic city's failure in trying to meet these privileges, on the other.

### *The role of the space/city in the first phase*

The question of space in this first phase of youth & urban spatiality study is 100 percent equivalent to the question of the city: First, because the city plays a vital role in critique of modernistic planning, initiated by the Chicago School and Jane Jacobs book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1992). Second, because the city in the 1970s became a site of danger and risks caused by traffic, crime and riots. Thirdly, planners perceived the city as a kind of institution to which childrearing is an important question (Ward, Jacobs). All three perspectives are key drivers in the development of a Child-Friendly-City discourse (Elshater, 2018).

The critique of modern Western cities are multiple but revolves around the ideals of separating functions by dividing the city into smaller units designed to meet specific activities; streets for automobiles, parks for pedestrians, business districts for commercials, playground for children etc. Based on a rational system of order, the functionalistic planned city, as the critique goes, is unfit to deal with the natural chaos of social life and interaction. Jane Jacobs, Colin Ward and Richard Sennett explicitly relate their concerns for children growing up in a functionalistic planned city (Jacobs, 1992; Sennett, 2008; Ward, 1978).<sup>5</sup> In fact, Jacobs dedicates a whole chapter in her book to the question of children in the city (1961). She advocates for the integration of children into city life, arguing that sidewalks holds both protectionist and educational potentials. Here, children are under casual surveillance from adults, which not only serves as protection, but also teaches them the important lesson of responsibility (Jacobs, 1992, 75ff). Ward also reacts on the functional separation of city life, arguing that in modernistic cities children and adults inhabits parallel worlds. As he points out in *The Child in The City* (1978):

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<sup>3</sup> Which is partly reproduced in *The Sociology of Childhood* (Jenks, 1992) by the title *The Evolution of Childhood*

<sup>4</sup> The latter quotation refers to Paul Goodman's book *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (1960).

<sup>5</sup> Jacobs describes how modernist architects and planners thought children would be happy, if they got them "off the streets into parks and playgrounds with equipment on which to exercise, space in which to run, grass to lift their souls! Clean and happy places, filled with the laughter of children responding to a wholesome environment. So much for the fantasy." (Jacobs, 1961, 74).

“Rather than throw in a few playthings, shouldn’t we help them [the children] climb out of the sandbox and into the city?” (Ward, 1978, 211).

Otherwise, children are deprived the opportunity to enter the world of adult freedom and responsibility. This deprivation, he argues, accelerates within the urban context, as children becomes consumers attached with commercial needs (Ward, 1978, 203):

“In the cities in the West, we get in some ways the worst of both worlds. We no longer cow our children into submission, in fact we indulge them as consumers, with the powerful aid of the advertising industry, but we fail to induct them into a world of adult decision-making...” (Ward, 1978, 203).

The critique of the modernist city also focused on the failure of it. With the growing of modern Western cities and the explosion of automobiles, the modernist planning paradigm did not succeed in organizing the chaos of the living city. Hence, the perception of the city as a dangerous site dominated the first phase of youth & urban spatiality study (Cahill, 1990, 393; Valentine, 1996, 585). Traffic accidents, stranger-danger, violence, abductions and murders were significant risks associated with public space, and led to a public concern with children’s safety. A comprehensive study on British schoolchildren’s travel patterns and levels of personal autonomy was conducted in 1971. The study revealed a tremendous rise in the age of when being granted permission to access public spaces unaccompanied by adults (Hillman, Adams, & Whitelegg, 1990). Thus, the age of free, independent mobility rose by 2,5 years from the early 1970s to 1990, showing that children slowly disappeared from public spaces both during day and night (Hillman & Adams, 1992; Valentine, 1996, 585). This led to the establishment of CIM – Children’s Independent Mobility study, which came to play a vital role in the establishment of children’s right to the city (see phase 2 and 3).

Simultaneously studies of children’s use of urban spaces and local neighborhoods concluded, that children themselves, when granted permission, found great value in disorderly and un-programmed spaces. One of these, made by the Opies in 1969, states, that...

“The peaks of a child’s experience are ... occasions when he [sic] escapes into places that are disused and overgrown and silent” (Opie & Opie, 1969, 15) in (Cloe & Jones, 2005, 312) .

Also Lynch (1977) found, that children around the world took advantage of wastelands and un-programmed areas within their reach, when interacting with their local environment. These areas were of great value in terms of play, Lynch argued, although their feelings for these places often contained both fear and joy (Lynch, 1977, 13+27). In continuation of his studies, Lynch advocated for additional research on the topic of children and youth in cities, in order to gain further insights into how children used and related to their physical surroundings (Lynch, 1977, 79).

### *Towards a new planning paradigm in the first phase*

In the first phase of youth & urban spatiality studies the problem of integrating children (back) in cities and thereby reconstruct was modernist thinking had destroyed, is described as a planning-problem. The critique points at urban planners and architects, reminding them of the task of making space for children in cities. While addressing the problems of unsafe cityscapes as related to the modernist’s ideals for the functionalist city, Jacobs simultaneously pled for a new paradigm (Jacobs, 1992, 78f). Throughout her argumentation, she notes, that designing for children is also designing for adults (Jacobs, 1992, 85). An assumption shared by Ward, as he argues that “environmental policies which would improve the lives of children in our cities would benefit adults too” (Ward, 1978, 203). Ward gives an example related to the role of traffic: “Every step a city takes to reduce the dominance of motor traffic makes the city more accessible to the child. It also makes life more tolerable for every other citizen” (Ward, 1978, 204f). Additional Ward recommends that the city planner aims at facilitating the lives of different people, rather than controlling it:

“ ... it is not policies that are needed, but merely a willingness to elicit and facilitate people’s own policies” (Ward, 1978, 203).

This can be understood in terms of a shift in the city-child relation, parallel to the terms Lloyd DeMause used to label different modes of child-rearing: Instead of planning the city according to the socialization mode, in which the city is

responsible for training its children in specific ways, city-planners should rather move on to, what DeMause defined as, the helping mode (DeMause, 1992).<sup>6</sup>

In term of the discourses that underlie the first phase of children in the city study, two things are central. First, the modern Western city is not for children. Working to (re)integrate children is simultaneously to humanize a dehumanized, rational planned urban environment. Second, when children are described as experts on their own needs, this understate the necessity for more studies on how children and young people understand, use and interact with their urban environment. The focus on children in the city culminated in 1989, when the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the Convention, children are stated to have fundamental rights as fellow human beings. Furthermore, they have specific needs for protection and provision and the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Chawla, 2002, 11; Elshater, 2018, 433). As Jacobs, Lynch, Hart, the Opie's etc. argued in their studies, the Convention overall pleaded for inclusion and acceptance of children and for giving them a voice in defining and responding to the issues that concerned them (Bartlett, 2002). As such, this event naturally marks the end of the first phase in modern youth & urban spatiality study.

## PHASE 2: Conceptualization of the field (1990s-mid 2000s)

Despite continuing critical commentaries by scholars on the absence of children in geographical research (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998), theoretical perspectives and concepts on the matter are evolving throughout the 1990s. Alongside various attempts to gain insights into the life-worlds of children, there is a general strive towards a more differentiated and interdisciplinary approach to the theme. Empirically a repetition of Lynch's seminal study *Growing Up in Cities* (see first phase) by Louise Chawla is central to the second phase. Also, the so-called CIM-study from 1971 was replicated by Mayer Hillman, John Adams and John Whitelegg in 1990. Other contributions are Gill Valentine & Sarah Holloway's *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning* (2004), *Children in the City: Home, Neighborhood and Community* (2003a) edited by Pia Christensen & Margaret O'Brien and *Place Attachment* (1992) edited by Irwin Altman & Setha M. Low. In 2003 the international peer-reviewed journal *Children's Geographies* (2003) starts issuing international research on the field of research.<sup>7</sup> With the conceptualization of the study, a growing interest in methodology and theory eventually led to an academic split. At the same time, national and international debates on children and young people's well-being in the city had quietened.

### *The role of the child/ youth in the second phase*

Up through the 1980s and 1990s the topic of childhood became the focal point of research from a wide range of intellectual disciplines contributing to the field of spatial studies. Four perspectives are relevant to reflect upon in order to understand how the discourse on children in the city changed in the second phase.

First, the notion of childhood as historically and culturally conditioned is fundamental to this second phase, as "biological facts of infancy are but the raw material upon which cultures work to fashion a particular version of 'being a child'" (James & Jenks, 1996, 317). These changes inspired the establishing of *The New Social Studies of Childhood*. An increasing dissatisfaction within traditional social sciences, especially the notion of 'growth' was criticized, as it defined childhood as a universal, biological phenomenon, implying the idea of the "natural child" as merely an immature adult (see phase 1). This, scholars claimed, was not the case: "Any transition from one status to another is never simply a matter of inevitable growth; it involved rites of passage and initiation, all of which are disruptive and painful" (Jenks, 1992, 12). Hence, both the process of growing up, and the specific form of childhood became understood as dependent on context – as a social construct, rather than a natural phenomenon (Prout, 2004, 1). Jenks' *The Sociology of Childhood* (1982), and James and Prout's *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (1990) were two of the most influential outliners of the second phase understanding of childhood, and are frequently mentioned in contemporary studies within youth & urban spatiality studies.

Secondly, in the 1990s the concept of place attachment emerges as an area of research. From being a concept primarily of interest to scholars within the field of phenomenology, various disciplines are paying attention to the question of place attachment highlighting the multiple facets of the concept (Altman & Low, 1992, 1f). The 12th volume of the serial of *Human Behavior and Environment* issued a theme of place attachment, presenting the work of scholars from a

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<sup>6</sup> This texts *The evolution of childhood* by Lloyd DeMause is an excerpt from his original release *The History of Childhood* (1974)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=cchg20>



wide range of disciplines including anthropology, human geography, architecture, family and consumer studies, folklore, psychology, social ecology and urban planning. These various disciplines contributed to the studies of place attachment in relation to multiple themes such as childhood place attachment (Chawla, 1992) and attachment to the home, the plaza, the community etc. (Altman & Low, 1992, 1f). The point is that the local environment - the physical context - plays an important role in children's sense of belonging and creation of a social and individual identity.

Thirdly, the killing of the 2 year-old James Bulger by the hands of two 10-year-olds in a British city also contributed to a rethinking of the definition of children. At the time of the Bulger-killing media described it as "the end of childhood" and "the killing of the age of innocence", advocating for tougher sanctions against juveniles and shattering the dominant contemporary idea of children as possessing a special nature (pure, innocent and vulnerable) (Cahill, 1990; Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998; Valentine, 1996, 588). In *Angels and Devils: Moral Landscapes of Childhood* (1996) Gill Valentine argues, that the tragic event contributed to an ambivalent perception of children "as simultaneously 'angels' and 'devils' – [which] exposes the complex multiple and contested nature of childhood" (Valentine, 1996, 596). This paradox, is being (re)produced and articulated through space, as adults asserts their sovereignty over children controlling their use of playing by adult policies (Matthews et al., 1998, 1725; Valentine, 1996, 582). Valentine proves this point by quoting parents articulating fears of demonized children, anxiety about their own children's safety and worries about whether adults is capable of maintaining control of public space (which in itself demonstrates the assumption that streets and public spaces belong to adults)(Valentine, 1996, 590 + 596). Matthews, Limb and Taylor reacts on the Crime and Disorder Act declared in 1998 in UK. Fueled by the discourses about moral decline, the act presented parental orders enabling local authorities in the country to place curfews on children's unaccompanied use of local places (*Crime and disorder act 1998*). Such curfews, Matthews et al. argued, would cause nothing but social malice, disconnecting youth from the world of adults leaving them feeling alienated and powerless (Matthews et al., 1998, 1715).<sup>8</sup>

A fourth finding, which also contributed to a new understanding of children's role in urban spaces, is articulated by Louise Chawla after the repetition of the *Growing Up in Cities*-project (see phase 1) in 1992. The multi-study showed, that the sense of being taken seriously and feeling part of a community rank as a key dimensions influencing children's wellbeing in the settings they inhabit (Chawla, 2002; Chawla & Malone, 2003, 119). Another significant conclusion is that young people measure the quality of their neighborhoods substantially different from economic and social indicators, popular among adults measuring wellbeing. Thus, measures of life expectancy, education and average income does not correlate with the children's assessment of their neighborhoods (Chawla & Malone, 2003). This adds up to the idea of children's perception as radically different from those of adults, leading Christensen & O'Brian to conclude that children "have merged as a key source for understanding the dynamics of their everyday lives." (P. Christensen & O'Brien, 2003b, 2).

Altogether, these new perceptions of childhood advocated for a more interdisciplinary approach to the exploration of children's life worlds. As James, Jenks and Prout state in their book, *Theorizing Childhood* (1998): "...we must envision the child within a broad cultural context" (James et al., 1998, 196). Instead of seeing the child as incompetent, vulnerable and dependent 'adults to be', children was granted the status of beings (James & Jenks, 1996, 317; James et al., 1998; Strandell, 1998, 395), recognized as *social actors* with needs and preferences deserving the same attention as adults (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, 764). From studying children as such, childhood studies integrated aspects of class, gender, age and sexuality, recognizing that children as a social category is just as complex, composed and differentiated as the social group of adults. This interdisciplinary approach also triggered a growing interest in the spatial dimension of childhood within sociology and children's role as social actors within geography (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Matthews et al., 1998).

### *The role of the city in the second phase*

As the importance of cultural and social differences in the role of children became evident, the urban space also called for greater investigation. This resulted in a differentiated view, fragmenting the city into spatial concepts and themes with its own insights and meaning related not only to geography, but to age group, gender, culture, ethnicity etc., drawing attention to the link between the dwelling, the local homebound environment, neighborhoods and public spaces as different zones in children's life worlds (P. Christensen & O'Brien, 2003a; Matthews, 1992).

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<sup>8</sup> This article by Matthews et al. refers to an empiric study: "Children 5-16: Growing into the 21st century" launched in Jan 1997. The programme was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, comprising 22 projects, with Alan Prout as grant holder.

As in the 1970s, the concept of community was important. In the UNESCO studies both Lynch (1977) and Chawla (2002) found that public and semi-public places that foster social inclusion ranked high on the lists of children and young people when prioritizing nice environment for growing up (Chawla, 2002, 15). Furthermore, the twin-study showed that children valued communities defined by clear boundaries. According to Chawla & Malone, community spaces appealed to children, as it afforded them the opportunity to engage and take part in activities in the same setting as adults (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 120). During the second phase, the notion of community strengthened and became the concept that par excellence characterizing the city. The indicators of a neighborhood was characterized by “measures of social capital from children’s perspectives”, not qualities of the urban environment or planning (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 125). The point is, that high quality public realms allowed children and young people to interact and develop social networks, norms and interpersonal trust conceptualized as “aspects of social capital”, meaning that the urban setting is (only) relevant as a catalyst for children’s social agency. As such, the physical settings and planning ideology that were central to the investigation in the first phase were put aside in favor of a spatial anchored community.<sup>9</sup>

Picking up on older findings (such as Lynch’s, Ward’s and the Opie’s), scholars start conceptualizing children’s attachment to wastelands and unprogrammed spaces as a proof of a natural, psychological need for children to explore and manipulate their settings without being taught or facilitated by adult(’s supervision) (Cloe & Jones, 2005; Matthews et al., 1998, 1717). Especially the creative expression was important as it relates to a sense of freedom and the satisfaction in being allowed the opportunity to manipulate the environment according to the needs of the play (Chawla, 1992, 76).

The CIM study also evolved during the second phase. Referring to the empirical work of Hillman et al. scholars (1990), Gill Valentine and Hugh Matthews argue, that parental fears and the paradox of children as ‘angels’ or ‘devils’ restrict the independent mobility of children and youth. This, they conclude, has serious negative consequences for the children’s development of social identities and competencies (Matthews, 1998; Matthews, 2000; Matthews, 2003; Valentine, 1996; Valentine, 1997). Furthermore, it limits the opportunities of engaging children in environmental decision-making, as the Right of The Child prescribes. Matthews draws attention to the street (as a metaphor of all outdoor public spaces) as a liminal space. Here adolescents get the crucial opportunity to work with their self-awareness and own “fuzzy” personality. The potential lies in the tensions and discontinuity of the streets, which allows the articulation of new and “hybrid” identities (Matthews, 2000; Matthews, 2003, 103) Matthew states:

“The streets emerges as one such fuzzy zone, a place that offers children the space and opportunity to pull away from the constraints of childhood, but in which their presence is seen as uncomfortable and discrepant by many adults” (Matthews, 2003, 114).

To Matthew the street is not only fuzzy in term of it physical characteristic, but as “a site of passage” or “rite du passage”, meaning a symbolic space of “transition” in which young people are giving room for experimenting with a new identity and personal positioning (2003, 101). Thus, space and time coincides (e.g. rite du passage). This states the importance of fuzzy spaces as a necessary element in the psychological development from child to adult, from childhood home to the life spaces of grown-ups. Other concepts like *onstage and backstage* (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 126)<sup>10</sup>, secondary territories<sup>11</sup> and second spaces (Werner & Altman, 1998, 132) help describe how children and young people’s identity and social network were tied spatial different from adults. This put attention to the psychological, educating aspects of urban settings in the second phase.

Despite the interest in different geographical, cultural and social contexts, the empirical research in the second phase though still advocated for the ideal of the child-friendly city formulated by Ward, Lynch and others in the first phase. An advocacy that found its most significant argument in Chawla’s review on the UNESCO twin study from the 1970s and the 1990s. Here, Chawla identified a number of similarities in children’s preferences to their urban environment, which seemed constant despite the rapid changes within the 25 years in the world in general and the life of urban children in particular on the one hand, and major differences between the cities on the other. She found, that the sense of being taken seriously and feeling as a part of a community ranked as key dimensions influencing children’s

<sup>9</sup> Although Jung (2015) argues, that the field of community research has been ignoring the role of communities in the lives of children – especially when it comes to how children conceptualize and give meaning to the social as well as physical elements of communities (Jung, 2015 722-740, 724).

<sup>10</sup> The concept of onstage and backstage derives from Erving Goffman’s definition of the dwelling having an official, frontstage with the purpose of being on public display and a more private, backstage, where activities and everyday life can take place without the moral gaze from society (Goffman, 1956). The concept of back- and frontstage serve as an explanation to the need of children to withdraw from the gaze of adults and to give insight into way some places are more fascinating than others (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 126).

<sup>11</sup> Secondary territories are defined as the continuum of spaces ranged between the private spaces (such as the home or primary territories) and public spaces (defines as third territories). Werner and Altman (1998) emphasize the importance of secondary territories, in order for children to develop meaningful identities as individuals and beneficial relations to the surrounding society (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 126; Werner & Altman, 1998, 132).

wellbeing in the settings they inhabit. Hence, she sums up the results from the GUIC-projects in four indicators of great importance when measuring children's wellbeing in their spatial environments:

- The identity of the community (stigmatized or hopeful/positive)
- Safety (fear or security)
- Social integration (opposed to social isolation and alienation)
- If it is a place of engagement (opposed to boredom)

Elaborating on these four indicators, we get a deeper insight into what according to Chawla and other researchers with small or insignificant variation could be characterized as "human constants in the way children use their world" (Chawla & Malone, 2003, 120).

### *Towards a new methodical split in the second phase*

The request for a Child-Friendly-City initiated by Lynch, Ward and the thinkers of the first phase is in the second space not primarily addressed as a planning problem, but as a broader academic challenge. Whereas earlier research in a request for a universal tool for a planning scheme focused on gaining insights into children's for needs for risk reduction and security, the idea of children as social actors implied a need for more differentiated knowledge of children's well-being in the city. Granted as active citizens holding insights and ideas of great value to urban planners, due to their status as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' changed focus of how to solve the problem with today's urban cities (see above, and (Chawla, 2002; Holloway & Valentine, 2000, 764)).

The 'othering' of the child stressed the point, that adults might not be able to understand the needs of children, even after consulting them. The question of methods is therefore taken up an increasing bigger role in the second phase compared to the first phase, both in terms of which methods to engage, and why, but also in terms of validating the outcome and making it accessible and useful for planners, urban designers and decision makers in city development. Christensen and O'Brian notes, that how to define children's wellbeing has led to a methodological split the study on children and urban spatiality. They plea for new mixed methods to integrate "intensive research, such as qualitative and ethnographic investigations, with knowledge produced in extensive research, such as surveys and longitude studies" (2003a, 2f).

Simultaneously, scholars advocate for a critical self-reflection in the ways researchers engage children in projects, and call the need for a larger sensibility (P. Christensen & O'Brien, 2003a) and a more well-establish children-orientated communication with young people (Baraldi, 2003; Clark & Moss, 2011). As Roberts concludes in a quote that several scholars cite:

"It is clear that *listening* to children, *hearing* children and *acting* upon what children say are three very different activities, although they are frequently elided as if they were not (Roberts, 2008).

Despite a growing academic interest in the methodological aspects of youth & urban spatiality– also within the UN system<sup>12</sup> - public debates on the matter slowly silenced as new social groups (elderly, refugees) emerged and the decline of rural areas overtook planners and politicians attention (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006).

## **PHASE 3: The politicization and merging with new disciplines**

The current phase marks a revitalization of the debate on children and adolescent in the city. By two perspectives in particular: A political motivated research on the empowerment of children and youth in the quest for a sustainable transition of the global city. This approach is closely linked to the universal declaration of children's right convention, to the CIM studies and Child-Friendly-Cities Initiatives. Secondly, a critical investigation in the social-economic

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<sup>12</sup> During the 1990s UN initiatives were launched with the purpose of developing new methods to involving young citizens in city planning, like the Habitat Agenda (1996, Elshater, 2018). Hart, who played a significant part in first phase, also works with UNICEF to develop suitable participatory processes for urban planning. Cities' for Children: Children's Rights, Poverty and Urban Management (UNICEF 1999) is a significant front runner to what happens in the beginning of the 21st century study on youth & urban spatiality.

construction of cities as sites for inequality, segregation, poverty and social-economic health related problems. With the merging of new disciplines like consume- and culture study, critical urbanism, rural- and suburban studies, global studies etc., new perspectives to children's wellbeing and agencies are at the same time being added. This has led to a fundamental split in how to solve the problem of children's well-being in the city.

### *The role of the child / youth in the current phase*

After years with other social groups on public display, children and young people are now regaining their position in public debate, academia and planning similar to the attention in the 1970s. Gleeson & Sipe even state that public actors and researchers are "[re]instating kids in the city" marking a "resurgence of concern for children in professional, political and popular quarters" (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006, 1).

The request for an interdisciplinary approach in the first phase are now resulting in new scientific recognition of the multiple factors and interdependencies between different aspects of children's role in the city. However, a growing concern of children's well-being point to a revitalization of the consequences of modernization in modern Western countries. Reports and books like *Children of the Lucky Country?* (Stanley, Prior, & Richardson, 2005), *Home-alone America* (Eberstadt, 2004), on raising rates of depression, anxiety and misconduct among teenagers and children in middleclass families in developed countries around the world echoes in several recent youth & urban spatiality studies.

Karen Malone, an influent voice in current CIM study, argues, that the problem of today is not bad planning, but "the protectionist paradigm of parenting" (Malone, 2007; Malone, 2011). Malone draws her conclusion from suburban studies showing that children's experience with the city takes place in the backseat of a car driving to and back from school or sports activities (Malone, 2007, 525). From a safe distance of danger, the young generation is being "bubble-wrapped" (Malone, 2007, 513). Other scholars describe a growing "idolizing of children" by parents who will do anything in their power to pursue an impossible "ideal" childhood for their children ((Donahoo, 2007) cited in (Freeman & Tranter, 2011, 7)). The outcome is, as Tim Gill, another scholar, defines it, *risk averse behavior*. By this, he means behavior that is counter-intuitive as it prevent children from learning to cope with risk and danger, instead of preventing them from such (Gill, 2007). Consequently, children of today loses "the freedom to create, explore and gain mastery over their physical and social environments" Malone concludes, at the same time "they also lose opportunities that are significant in developing healthy lifestyles, social networks and environmental competence" (Malone, 2011, 161f).

As different scholars has stated, this perspective is rooted in a modern Anglo-American culture rather than a reflection of an actual global situation. However, the "bubble-wrapping" of children serves in the third phase as an important argument for children's rights as it put attention to children's lacking agency, health issue (inactivity, obesity etc.) and as shown an *environmental incompetence* (Hörschelmann & van Blerk, 2012; Malone, 2011). On this background research draws attention to the child to which access to urban spaces, free mobility and possibilities for playing and socializing are elements in the overall well-being. The purpose with the children's right convention is therefor to solve objectives identified with the definition of well-being through a more holistic and sustainable approach in which *environmental competence* and *resilience* are important concepts (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007; Whitzman, Worthington, & Mizrachi, 2010).

Several scholars have criticized the universal definition of children's urban well-being stated in the convention for being essential and static (Elshater, 2018; Farrugia, Wood, Bäckström, & Bengtsson, 2017; Hörschelmann & van Blerk, 2012; Jung, 2015). The New Social Studies of Childhood's (second phase) advocacy for the social construction of childhood serves as argument for a more anti-essential understanding of children's spatiality. In critical reflections studies investigate how age is invented and represented in practices and spatial representations, involving intergenerational exchanges between children, parents and grandparents (Hörschelmann & van Blerk, 2012), housing politics and material built environment (Freeman & Tranter, 2011), consume and cultural mediation on lifestyle values (Farrugia & Wood, 2017) etc. This shows, how a relational understanding of age relates to "cultural rites, perceptions and imaginations, institutional structures, family or household constitutions, scientific knowledge and material living conditions" (Hörschelmann & van Blerk, 2012, 3). In these studies focus are not on a lack of incompetence or reduced access to public spaces, but on how children and youth in different contexts, culture and age group act in - and do - spatiality.

## *The role of the space/ the city in the current phase*

The convention of Children's Right and the precipitous decline in the ability of children to move freely in their neighborhoods and urban environment without supervision, the so-called decline in CIM (Children's Independent Mobility) has led to a renewed political interest in the city. Simultaneously, a sense of urgency to investigate the social-political consequences of the neo-liberal development of cities in modern Western culture, pointing to social and residential segregation, inequality and urban poverty is a key driver in several recent studies (Farrugia & Wood, 2017; Gleeson & Sipe, 2006, 1-9; Gryl et al., 2010). Especially with the increased population intensities in many cities around the world. This has led to new theoretical perspectives of the production and reproduction of space - with great influences from the spatial turn in human science etc. - now challenging more conventional concepts of space and place (Soja, Massey, Warf, Fabian, Gumbrecht, etc.). Quoting Christensen and James (2000), researchers in the third phase look at the city as at site where children "have been denied those rights of participation and their voices have remained unheard" (MacNaughton et al., 2007, 458).

Due to technology, media and global distribution of images and cultural manifestations, the understanding of the city as a local based community (second phase) is now being fragmented and reconsidered in new constellations. Some scholars have put attention to the cultural space of children (Freeman & Tranter, 2011). Others point to the local contexts as a key site for performing globalization, capitalism and culture (Farrugia & Wood, 2017; Freeman & Tranter, 2011; Jung, 2015). In the special issue on *Youth & Spatiality* (2017), Farrugia, pleas for "a shift from youth as an experience of progress through time, to youth as a heterogeneous process that unfolds relationally as part of material and symbolic production of time" (Farrugia & Wood, 2017, 209). Here, as in other papers, Lefebvre, Harvey, Massey and spatial performativity theories, are theoretical backdrops in order to look "critical to the social landscape of young life" (Farrugia & Wood, 2017, 211). Jung argues, that by focusing on spatiality, we will be able to investigate how community is constituted, rather than defining what it is (Jung, 2015, 724).

Based on these arguments, that the city in the recent phase is a metaphor for the (modern Western) society. A revitalization of Ward's urban vision (phase one), but understood less as in terms of a physical site of interaction and more as a performative frame for building up environmental competences, fighting inactivity and health issues, and empowering children to become active citizens (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006; Whitzman et al., 2010). In Elshater words, this is a "shift from a need-orientated to right-orientated approach to the understanding of Child-Friendly-City" (Elshater, 2018, 437). Or, as Whitzman et al. states it in the introduction to the *Journey and the Destination Matter: Child-Friendly Cities and Children's Right to the City*; the current political interest in children's right to the city is movement from "the principle of planning to the principle of government" (Whitzman et al., 2010, 482).

As a result, several non-profit organizations has worked to develop new participatory designs and systems of engagement. One of these is the UNICEF-led initiative called The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) supporting municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. Drawing on the studies of Hart for UNICEF (second phase) a number of practical planning and governance issues are raised. The underlying question in these studies is: How can children and young people participate meaningful in policy making in their cities and outdoor environments? (Elshater, 2018; Jung, 2015; MacNaughton et al., 2007; Whitzman et al., 2010). This involves questions of engagement, knowledge development, sharing and influence, in short, methods of participatory design and processes (Brown & Kristiansen, 2009).

## *Concluding: Towards a new paradigm of spatial citizen education?*

Departing from the understanding of children as social actors (P. Christensen & O'Brien, 2003a; P. M. Christensen & James, 2000; Holloway & Valentine, 2000, 764), children are now being reinforced as victims on the verge of losing their rights. Not due to the modernist ideal of the functionalistic city, but to a worrying Western parental culture, the consequences of neo-liberalist development and a political system unable to meet young citizen's perspectives and needs. This has led to a revitalization of children's role in modern Western cities, and a shift from urban planning and design to local governance and policymaking.

When the city becomes a site for developing environmental competences or spatial resilience (Malone, 2011) the question is not how to balance security versus accessibility to public spaces, but how children can partake and influence the development and transformation of their own environments. In this context, we are in the age of civic spatial engagement. This makes *youth's spatial citizenship education* extremely important. With concepts like critical spatial thinking and spatial education, it combine the quest for citizen education and an education enabling children to

participate in decisions concerning them (Meyer-Bisch, 1995) with “absolute, cognitive and relational concepts of space” (Gryl et al., 2010, 2).

However, youth’s spatial citizenships education also pinpoints a need for including the development of youth & urban spatiality studies, and its changing concepts of the child/the youngster in relation to the problem of the city. Especially the wish to reintegrate children into the city as a site for different discourses and understandings. A key question is: How do we combine a continuing development of Children’s right to the city as an essential universal declaration on one hand, and on the other hand, canonized studies on children’s spatiality, in which scholars repeatedly identify children’s need to escape programmed, designed and public spaces that means, *not* be integrated, included and part of the city?

Since Ward and Jacobs advocated for an integrated city (first phase), scholars, politicians and planners have worked to reconstruct or relocate qualities that disappeared up through the 20th century planning. Modernization has led to a mass improvement in children’s wealth, health and social mobility, however, the picture of a perfect pre-modern city (society), where poor and rich, children and adults, business and pleasure lives together in the same urban environment still haunts youth & urban spatiality studies.

Compared to the situation in the 1970s, insight into children’s life-worlds and spatiality have increased dramatically among planners, politicians and adults in general. A fact that is largely due to the development of the field and concepts like fuzzy spaces, (Matthews, 2003), onstage/backstage (Chawla & Malone, 2003) and second territories as examples of why children and young people should be granted as “beings” rather than “becomings” (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). Yet, the picture of the ideal city as a site for social cohesion and harmony echoes in the discourses of why children should be more visible, more socially included and formally heard in the governance of city development. As showed in this paper, this picture is an academic construction linked directly to the critic of modernist planning, later neo-liberalism and a parental fear, rather than a fact per se.

Youth’s spatial citizenship education is scientific anchored in geo-education and –information, and therefor in the development of participatory processes and designs. As a discipline, it could serve as a platform to overlap insights on children’s way of producing and reproducing their spatiality with the universal claim of children’s right to the city.

Acknowledge: This paper is financed by *Community Drive: Teaching children and young people to transform cities through community and data-driven methods* (2018-2020), an interdisciplinary research project at Aalborg University, Denmark.

Template 1: An overview of all three phases in youth & urban space study from the establishment of the field in 1970 til the age of civic spatial action today.

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