

# Spatial Citizenship for All? Impulses from an Intersectionality Approach

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## Abstract

The concept of Spatial Citizenship was established to provide a framework for the engagement of citizens in processes of reflexive geomeia presumption and emancipatory participation within different cooperative decision-making processes. Although initially aimed at a (post-)secondary target group, Spatial Citizenship has recently also been applied in the context of primary education to ask whether it can help provide spaces for the participation of children. Going beyond this point, this paper seeks to provide a first step in interrelating Spatial Citizenship with approaches from intersectionality and critical migration research in order to help further research along intersectionality axes such as age, ethnicity and class. The aim is to create a framework as a basis for epistemological insight into the interrelations between the appropriation of space in the context of everyday life and the aforementioned intersectionality axes

## Keywords:

spatial citizenship, children, mapping, participation, intersectionality, primary education

## 1 Introduction

*Lecturer: What do you think about implementing fishbowl conversations into primary school teaching?*

*Student 1: Well, I think it depends on how one uses the method. If there's a fixed group in the center and the other students simply examine their style of discussion and how they use their arguments it could work, but not if everyone is able to get into the discussion and add their ideas.*

*Lecturer: Why is that? What do the others think about this issue?*

*Student 2: I agree with student 1. I think pupils in primary school should first learn how to follow rules of conversation. That would be more important than letting everyone contribute their ideas to the discussion.*

*Student 1: Yes, they have to learn how to behave when they take part in discussions in society later on, when they are older.*

*Student 3: Additionally, I think that these kinds of discussions don't work in primary schools anyway. There are certain students who are not able and willing to take part and they will then disrupt the entire setting.*

Taken from a discussion in a seminar on elementary science and social studies, the example above illustrates student teachers' rather deficit-oriented attitudes towards children's participation and citizenship, which would give the children a limited prospect of gaining real-life participatory experience in class. And yet this experience would be valuable to pupils and practise their right to participation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990).

Recently, research has been conducted on the issue of how to apply Spatial Citizenship as an instrument for empowering vulnerable groups of society (Attender et al., 2015). Although Spatial Citizenship was initially developed for secondary education, current research also focuses on the concept's application in primary education (Gryl, 2015). This research looks at how to locate children within concepts of citizenship (e.g. with regards to their cognitive competence) (Piaget, 1990; Melton & Limber, 1992) and participation outside of the processes of legal citizenship (e.g. voting in representative democracies) (Bloemraad et al., 2008). Beyond the questions of how and why to engage children in processes of spatial and public participation, there are further categories, or intersectionality axes, such as gender, which influence these processes (Attender et al., 2015). This paper will look at the categories age, ethnicity and class (Lutz & Wenning, 2001), and interrelate research on intersectionality and power relations with Spatial Citizenship's issues of normative aspects of citizenship, as well as with the opportunities for children's participation and emancipation provided through Spatial Citizenship.

## 2 The Spatial Citizenship Approach

The concept of Spatial Citizenship fosters active engagement in spatial decision-making processes through reflexive consumption and production of geomedia (cf. Gryl & Jekel, 2012). Within an education for Spatial Citizenship (Jekel et al., 2015), e.g. in geography classes, pupils acquire the competences necessary to participate in these spatial processes using (digital) geomedia, i.e. geomedia technology and methodology competences, the reflexive use of geomedia, and competences related to geomedia communication (Schulze et al., 2015).

Spatial Citizenship is thus based on different theoretical approaches. One of the basic principles is the assumption that forms of (political) participation have changed crucially over recent years, resulting in young people becoming engaged in informal rather than formal processes of political and spatial participation (Bennett et al., 2009). In connection with the development of Web 2.0, young people are now faced with a variety of informal possibilities for political and/or spatial participation and self-expression (*ibid.*). The assumption of participation in the formation of spatial processes and the appropriation of space derives from Lefebvre's (1993) theory on the (re-)production of public space that is constructed and has meaning assigned to it by individuals as well as by institutional stakeholders, and thus is used as a manifestation of power and control relations. These spatial (re-)constructions are then (re-)produced and communicated by (digital) geomedia, which have become omnipresent carriers of geographic information (Fischer, 2014).

### 3 Spatial Citizenship from an intersectional perspective – age, ethnicity and class

The justification for extending the concept of Spatial Citizenship from an intersectional perspective instead of focusing on individual factors of exclusion lies within the concept of intersectionality as such: different axes of intersectionality influence each other, leading to individual experience of exclusion or discrimination (Walgenbach, 2014). Only focusing on students' migration history, for instance, might prevent other views being seen – for example the role of age or class in why they refrain from participation. Additionally, intersectionality allows for an analysis of power relations on different levels; the micro scale examines how intersectionality axes influence “subject formation, i.e. the formation of identity and the process of subjectivation” (Walgenbach, 2007, p. 57, trans. by the author). Perspectives from critical migration research provide an understanding of young people as individual subjects, who are not heteronomous but emancipated and able to take part in the “production of meaning and social reality” (Scharathow, 2013), i.e. able to engage in the emancipated (re-)production and appropriation of space in the sense of Spatial Citizenship (Gryl & Jekel, 2012). This acknowledgement of individuality also allows for reflexive research which is aware of acknowledging difference while at the same time avoiding the use of labels that try to create homogenous groups (Scharathow, 2013).

#### Intersectionality and (children's) participation

The intersectionality approach is rooted in the feminist movement of women of colour in the United States in the 1970s, although the term itself was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the complex power relations in the interrelationships between different axes of discrimination. These power relations do not work as simple add-ons but further influence the process of discrimination, resulting in individual and unique forms of power imbalance (Winker & Degele, 2010). Lutz & Wenning (2001), among others, introduced a system of dualisms related to a variety of categories of intersectionality. Although their binary, contrasting, categories may be criticized for oversimplification and lacking additional dimensions, e.g. the existence of trans\* identities in the category of gender, they provide a useful catalogue of intersectionality axes, of which age, ethnicity and class are of great interest when dealing with the participation of children in spatial or general planning processes. Age refers to the differentiation between children and adults; ethnicity includes affiliation to an ethnic minority or migration history (ibid.). Class can refer, for example, to an understanding such as Dahrendorf's (1959), for whom classes were based on the possession or lack of power. Reasons for linking the Spatial Citizenship approach with intersectionality research lie within the observed lack of children participating in planning processes and politics in general (Elwood & Mitchell, 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2010; Ohl, 2009), although age is not the only factor influencing children's absence from participatory action and political involvement. Recently, the 17th Shell Jugendstudie (“Youth Study”) (Shell, 2015) noted a general rise in young people's interest in politics, issues of public and political relevance, and different forms of participation, except among children and young people from marginalized backgrounds. Thus, the aim of linking an education for Spatial Citizenship with an intersectionality approach is not to develop criteria for public

participation processes to be as inclusive as possible, but rather to provide a bottom-up approach for creating awareness among children about forms of individual spatial exclusion, in order to oppose these processes of exclusion and (re-)appropriate spaces. In order to create such awareness, a deeper understanding of the influence of intersectionality axes, such as age, class or ethnicity, on children's citizenship and (spatial) participation is necessary.

## Children's citizenship

There are several reasons why children are not entitled to the entire range of citizens' rights, such as their age-related cognitive or biological development (Piaget, 1990), or an attributed lack of ability to articulate their needs in a way that is regarded as 'appropriate' in formal and official settings (Elwood & Mitchell, 2013). Therefore, children are often regarded as apolitical and they are mostly "positioned outside of the public sphere" (*ibid.*, p. 1). Furthermore, their (lack of) rights and responsibilities is also bound to their respective nationalities (Smith & Bierke, 2009): citizenship is "usually defined as a form of membership in a political and geographic community" (Bloemraad et al., 2008, p. 154) that is related to different dimensions such as "legal status, rights, political and other forms of participation in society, and a sense of belonging" (*ibid.*), where all the dimensions can be interrelated, e.g. when a country's residents' legal status affects their right to vote. Even where former immigrants have undergone the process of naturalization, indicators for integration such as "economic advancement, educational attainment or cultural acceptance" can become evidence of second-class citizenship, despite one's official legal status (Bloemraad et al., 2008, p. 162). Although children in Germany have citizenship rights, such as participation in decision-making processes, which influence their life-worlds, for instance under the child and youth services law (Ohl, 2009) or the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990), in most cases children are not able to claim their due since there is no official institution where to press charges, and these rights remain mere guidelines that do not help to empower children and young people in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that children and young people seek to express their views and experiences "on issues that are related to their immediate environment and everyday life" (Tuukkanen, 2012, p. 144) and on global topics such as climate change or poverty (*ibid.*). Such engagement in informal political discourse through the construction of one's self and one's private as well as one's public sphere is especially important for those who do not have the status of legal citizens, who come from marginalized communities, and whose experienced life-worlds often differ remarkably from outside media representations (Lösch, 2013, Ramasubramanian, 2010). Appreciating children's everyday practices as a manifestation and expression of their politics (cf. Elwood & Mitchell, 2012) and thus acknowledging them as political stakeholders, e.g. through the inclusion of map-based narratives into planning processes, can, however, be one way to provide a meaningful context for children's political and spatial participation.

## Children and (spatial) participation

Participation is often restricted to the private spheres of children's life-worlds (Habermas, 1987), such as home or school, which are used as substitute settings for realistic and meaningful participatory contexts (Smith & Bierke, 2009). Even public participation projects often lack access to real opportunities for participation or influence on "real politics" (ibid., p. 21). These cases of "alibi participation" (Ohl, 2009, p. 88) focus on organizing political acceptance for certain projects instead of providing authentic and effective possibilities for children's or adults' participation. Other issues in participatory planning processes relate to the problem of perspective: professional planners are often convinced that they know what is best for a certain environment. Thus "mainstream stories of 'dysfunctional environments'" (Ramasubramanian, 2010, p. 8) oppose feelings of a strong "social cohesion" and places that matter in narrations by local children (ibid, p. 8).

And yet, the possibility for spatial and public participation in the construction of space has been greatly enhanced by the rise of VGI (Volunteered Geographic Information) in the wake of neogeography (Elwood & Mitchell, 2013), and along with it emancipatory approaches that provide "new spaces of civic engagement" (ibid. p. 276). Using VGI, Spatial Citizenship can offer marginalized groups increased access to, and more credibility in, traditional processes of spatial negotiation through competences in geomedial presumption, reflection and communication (Schulze et al., 2015). These spatial communications visualize subjective perceptions through children's maps, and question power (im-)balances and interpretational sovereignty in planning processes (Ramasubramanian, 2010), as they are articulations of identity that are capable of promoting "social and political awareness" (Elwood & Mitchell, 2012, p. 4). The Web 2.0 context, in which these spatial representations are shared and negotiated through various platforms, has already changed the scope of children's participation, making way for new forms of "global citizenship" (Tuukkanen, 2012, p. 144).

## 4 Conclusion

Several studies provide detailed insight into how to organize participation projects in order to attract marginalized groups in general, and specifically young people from families with a history of migration (Ramasubramanian, 2010; Ohl, 2009; Elwood & Mitchell, 2013). However, one of the questions that remains to be answered is what kind of support primary-school children can gain from the concept of Spatial Citizenship in taking their first steps in spatial and public discourse within the (re-)construction of their individual life-worlds. This paper has outlined possible starting points to answer this question in relation to intersectional research taking into account factors such as age, 'race' and class that does not work on a deficit model but, rather, brings to light opportunities for emancipatory public participation through individual, spatial life-world narrations. As a follow-up to this initial outline, further theoretical research is needed on the interdependence of exclusion based on intersectionality axes and the appropriation of space. Empirical in-school research will also help to provide necessary answers as to whether an education for Spatial Citizenship can be an effective tool to support primary school students in their emancipated (re-)appropriation of spaces.

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