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# NOT IN THE SAME WORLD: TOPOLOGICAL YOUTHS, TOPOGRAPHICAL POLICIES*

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**ABSTRACT.** Public attitudes continue to portray youths in Western societies as being passive and disengaged. Critical scholars are largely unanimous in that the misrecognition of and disrespect for young people's everyday experiences and activities form a major reason why they appear detached from politics and public life. Contributing to this debate, this paper traces the everyday experiences of some Finnish urban youths, and argues that their lived worlds differ notably from the worlds of the public administration that seeks to address youths as active citizens. Based on these findings, the paper proposes the pragmatically oriented concepts of "issue publics" and "topological connectives" for rethinking youth participation and democratic life more broadly. *Keywords*: *mundane politics, youth inclusion, hobbies and fandom, mediated world*.

In February 2014, the national broadcasting company in Finland announced, "Politics does not interest the youth." A few days later, the leading newspaper stated in the same spirit that, "Young people find politics okay---as long as they don't need to participate." This news was an interpretation of the yearly Youth Barometer, published conjointly by the Youth Research Network and the Ministry of Education and Culture Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, emphasizing, this time, influential participation (Myllyniemi 2014). Such negative attitudes regarding youthful political agency that O'Toole calls "crisis narratives" are not specific to Finland, but span around Europe, liberal democracies, and beyond, and have raised notable concerns (2016). Recent calls by the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (H2020), for instance, highlight declining youth participation as a major topical challenge (see also Eurobarometer 2013, 2015).

In response, critical scholars argue that the major reason for this seeming detachment from politics and public life stems from the misrecognition of, and disrespect for, young people's everyday belonging, engagements, agencies, and politics (Jans 2004; Tisdall 2008; Biesta and others 2009; Pells 2010; Taft and Gordon 2013; Nolas 2015). As Wood states:

> When participation becomes policy through citizenship curricula, it gains a level of normativity by placing an expectation on all students that they will participate as citizens as part of their curriculum requirements. Such requirements are frequently divorced from emotions, places of meaning and pre-established social relationships and thus employ abstract notions of belonging. (2013, 50)

Recent discussions in geography have joined in this debate. Among others, Thomas (2011); Bartos (2013); Marshall (2013); Azmi, Brun, and Lund (2016); Beazley and Miller (2016), Habashi (2016); Jeffrey and Staeheli (2016); Hörschelmann and Reich (2017); and Mills and Waite (2017) profess the active participation of young people in issues that they find important and interesting, and how they worry about people, places, and matters within their own range of caring. Drawing from various empirical contexts, these studies demonstrate that young people are seldom unresponsive to the inequalities and concerns they encounter in homes, schools, neighborhoods, hobbies, popular media, friendship groups, and other mundane environments.

Joining in these critical perspectives, this paper explores young people's spatial belonging and agency, with the aim of providing one elucidation as to why the attempts of state institutions and other public actors in youth inclusion often fail. It responds to Percy-Smith's (2016) call for a fundamental shift of emphasis in youth participation, framed in Habermasian terms as a move away from the adult-centered, political-administrative domain of systems, towards intergenerationally established lifeworlds, where people create practical forms of political engagement (2016). This leap of faith is essential to take if we want to appreciate all young people's active involvement in

the society. To contribute to the "deinstitutionalization" of youthful political agency, I will introduce an approach that appreciates lived realities as topologically practiced, in contrast to the societies organized topographically by public administration. Then I propose two research streams that may be helpful in identifying, hearing, and supporting the topologically dwelling youth on their own grounds.

The paper is based on research focusing on the everyday experiences and practices of Finnish youth. Altogether 129 girls and boys, aged eleven to sixteen, participated in the study and shared their lived worlds with the research team. The analysis revealed social networks and spatial belonging that exceed and cross territorially organized neighborhoods, districts, cities, countries, and supranational structures, as well as move between different temporalities, hence disclosing topological realities where young people lead their lives and identify relevant issues (Kallio and others 2015; Kallio 2016a, 2016b; Korkiamäki and Kallio 2017).

In this paper, I present an analysis focusing on two key themes that the study participants shared with me: hobbies and mediated lifeworlds. The analysis of equine lives and ice hockey worlds sheds light on the topological aspects of young people's everyday activities, whereas the media analysis explores their spatial conceptions. Based on these findings, concerning young people's mundane political realities and agencies, the paper proposes a pragmatically oriented conception of "issue publics" as a potential conceptual ground for youth inclusion. The idea builds on identifying and empowering young people as political subjects who dwell in topologically established, geosocial "connectives."

STUDYING POLITICAL REALITIES AS EXPERIENCED BY YOUTH

Young people are active players in constituting their worlds. They become involved with some people rather than others, spend time in certain locations while evading other places, and share

experiences, create understandings, develop skills, and take active roles in some communities, but resign from responsibility in other occasions. Yet, in establishing their lived realities, youths do not act freely. Institutional frameworks and the public administration strongly condition their agencies, including geopolitical and geoeconomic underpinnings.

I have explored this entwinement for about fifteen years, by analyzing national and municipal child and youth policies---based largely on transnational children's rights---in contrast to children's and young people's accounts of their lived realities. This paper presents results from three interlinked studies exploring the political realities of youth.[1] The sub-study with Finnish young people, which I focus on in the analysis, involved eleven to sixteen year-old participants, boys and girls equally, from middle-class neighborhoods in Tampere (n=76) and Helsinki (n=53). The fieldwork took place in 2011--2012 and I carried it out with Elina Stenvall.

The general aim of my research is to learn about young people's ways of experiencing and understanding the world as political, by unearthing their experiential knowledge that builds from different kinds of pieces of information, conceptions, and understandings (compare Habermas 2006, 420). Hence, the fieldwork sought to leave the unearthing of that knowledge fully open, and for the young participants to define, where their lives unfold and how their worlds are political. Respectively, the analysis traces political realities as experienced and conceived by youth contra-systemic politics/polities/policies. This methodological orientation draws from relational theories of space and from a broad understanding of politics. With Jouni Häkli, I have formulated a theoretical approach that considers the political as related to matters with contextual importance and particular significance to those involved, following phenomenological traditions of political theory (for example Häkli and Kallio 2014a; Kallio and Häkli 2017; compare Marres 2007; Featherstone 2008; Isin 2012; Shklovski and Valtysson 2012; Barnett and Bridge 2013). One of our intentions in this research is empirically to develop means for studying topological realities. To explore spatiality as

socially defined, we have designed methods of "topological mapping," which lead to the following fieldwork with the youth (see also Kallio 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b):

The participants were first provided with mapping platforms (Neighborhood, City, Region, Finland, Europe, and the World) on which they were asked to mark down matters, places, people, and events important to them, and to sketch overall where they lead their lives. The markings could be distinguished as pleasant (green), unpleasant (red), or otherwise meaningful (yellow). The maps were not for analytical purposes, but served as personalized interview frames in the dialogical production of "topological biographies" (example in Fig. 1).



FIG. 1—Neighborhood and Europe mapping platforms with Annie's markings.
Her devotion to horses is analyzed in the first empirical section.

The second phase of fieldwork included individual interviews, where we engaged with the markings of each participant, discussing them in-depth and linking them as connections emerged. At this point, the scalar structure of the mapping platforms was completely deconstructed as various spatial dimensions entered the discussion (for a detailed analysis, see Kallio and others 2015). Following child-centered methodologies, the participants could tell about their experienced realities in ways most convenient to them. The interviews thus proceeded thematically with some participants, while others described their worlds through the people involved in them, revealed place by place where significant things happen or reside, or began from everyday experiences and practices to convey what it is like in "my world."

After the interview phase, the participants had the opportunity to provide written materials, drawings, or other artwork about particularly important matters in their lives, to complete the biographies. At first, we encouraged them to tell more about the themes that we had identified as significant during/after the interviews. Yet we soon realized that this did not lead to the best outcome; the youth knew much better themselves what aspects in their lives were especially important. Hence we let them choose freely what to write or draw about, which proved rather fruitful as the analysis will demonstrate (example in Fig. 2).
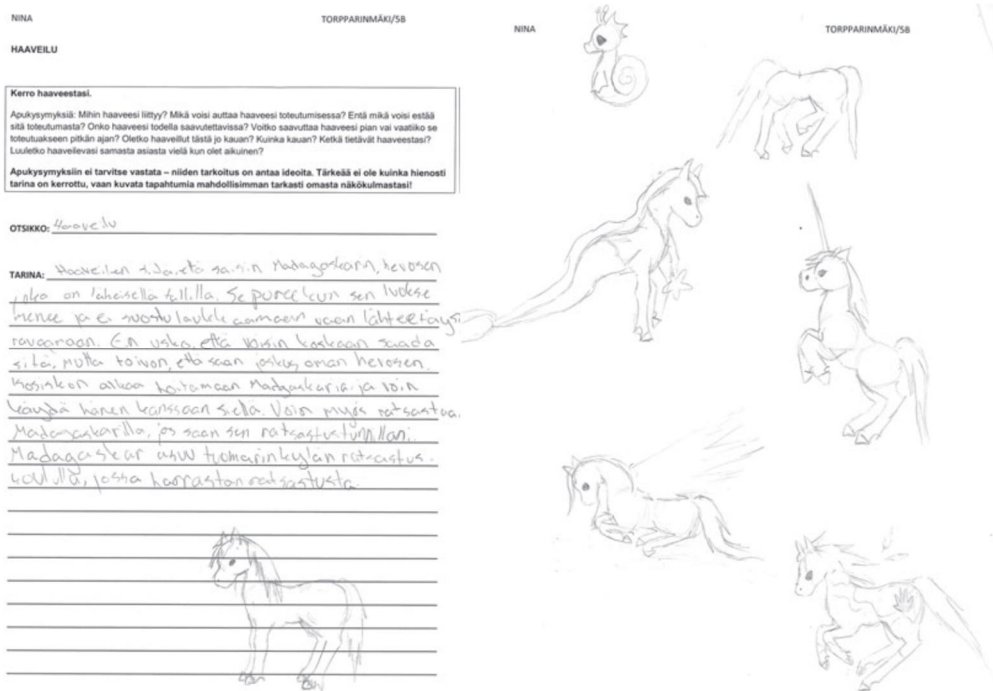
F<small>IG</small>. 2—Drawings and a portrayed dream by Olivia, who wished for a pony that she could own and take care of with her friend Paulina. Their devotion to horses is analyzed in the first empirical section.

The methods of topological mapping allow the portrayal of relational worlds where experience-based political aspects can be traced. They are centered on children, following the ethical stance that I have adopted in my longstanding research with children and young people. In all phases, the participants' rights to determine what aspects of their lives may be included in the study were emphasized. In the analysis, I have acknowledged the situatedness of knowledge, as well as the positionality of the researchers and the participants, in a critical geographical spirit---for example, England in 1994. I consider the dialogical biographies produced in the study as partial truths about the participants' experiential worlds.

T<small>OPOLOGICAL</small>-T<small>OPOGRAPHICAL</small> A<small>PPROACH</small>

The manifold places, communities, matters, and people meaningful to youths differ from those presumed in administrative strategies, not tout court, but notably enough to create a "fog" between lived realities and projected actualities. My previous analysis, with Jouni Häkli, Pia Bäcklund, and

Riikka Korkiamäki, showed that the spatial ties with which young people find themselves belonging are variable and unpredictable, whereas governmental strategies predominantly assume their lived worlds to be locally bound and institutionally established (Kallio and others 2015; Korkiamäki and Kallio 2017). The findings concerning families and friendships are illuminative in this regard. In the Finnish urban context, youths may move about on their own from an early age and they are well connected through virtual technologies. Thus, their familial and peer lives differ markedly from the ways in which the public administration identifies their presence, mainly through the home address and the location of the school.

For researching these distinct realities, I have sought analytical tools from spatial theories that emphasize relationality. An approach that appreciates territoriality as the basis of administrative organization and relationality as the practice of everyday life has proved to be useful in this regard. In this framework, state-based policymaking and municipal administration follow topographical logic, whereas young people's engagements, belonging, agencies, and politics form topologically.[2] Topography here refers to Euclidean spatial relations defined by proximity, distance, location, and boundedness---and topology designates spatial relationality, shifting ties of belonging, and discontinuity, as defined by social relations (Murdoch 1997; Häkli 2008; Martin and Secor 2014; Joronen 2016). In the first sense, the world appears as a continuous space of locations and regions; in the second sense, it is rather a disorganized and volatile constellation, established, ruptured, and molded through the connections that people generate with each other and with things, thoughts, artifacts, animals, plants, institutions, places, and so on (Häkli and Kallio 2014b; Kallio and others 2015; Kallio 2016a, 2016b; Kallio and Häkli 2017).

Topographically informed processes of politicization establish territorially, leaning on and leading to regional justifications of political relevance and respectively organized political activities. This state-based, systemic idea of politics lingers behind most public debate,

conventional political research, and public administration---including importantly issues of citizen participation. For example, in one of our fieldwork sites, the zoning plan had been revised some years ago and the actual transformations were happening at the time when we worked there. The citizen participation part in the process had followed a customary formula, heavily emphasizing residency (Pløger 2001; Lawless and Pearson 2012). The people living close by the transforming area during the planning phase were considered "those on whose living, working or other conditions the plan may have a substantial impact" (Land Use and Building Act, chapter 8, section 62), and primarily they were offered opportunities to state their opinions about the plan. The facts that the green area (a part of a national park) and the extended private area (a golf course) are extensively used by others than those who live nearby did not weigh much in the process. The political aspects of the transformation were thus territorially defined, with citizens seen as residents.

Conversely, in topological spatiality political relevance is based on social relations that define spatial connections. This makes politics more fluctuating and personal and its contexts of mobilization often unforeseeable. The political worlds that people discover and distinguish throughout their life course, and where they may act on their own grounds, build on experienced spatial belonging that constitutes through personal engagements (Wood 2017). These "geosocial" engagements follow diverse logics and are constantly reorganizing, spatially and temporally (on geosociality, see Mitchell and Kallio 2017). Unlike in the topographical system world, where given people may define and agree upon politics in a governed process, in topological lifeworlds "the political" is inseparable from the realities that people identify with (compare Habermas 2006; Leino and Laine 2012; Barnett and Bridge 2013). Returning to the previous example, what people do or do not find "concerning them" in the transformation of a green area is irreducible to where they currently live. When politics is understood as matters with contextual importance and particular significance to those involved, feelings of belonging and socially established meanings lead to

involvement (Marres 2007; Wood 2013; Habashi 2016; O'Toole 2016; Wood 2017). In this approach, citizens are understood as political subjects.

## A LIFEWORLD WHERE I BELONG

Common topics discussed in the study were hobbies. Organized leisure activities hold a strong position in the Finnish child and youth policy agenda, and they are financially supported by the state. The national Child and Youth Policy Programme states that, "opportunities to participate in hobbies must not depend on the parents' economic situation. All children and young people must have equal opportunities to enjoy experiences offered by culture and physical activities" (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 4). Municipalities, sports teams, and other hobby organizers, as well as families endorse this agenda. Like most public-administrative initiatives, it is topographically grounded (accentuating achievability), yet the plurality of hobbies somewhat erodes this attempt (appreciation of personal choice). Hence, hobby policies do not completely contradict with young people's topological lifeworlds.

I was not surprised to learn that nearly all of the participants took part in organized leisure activities that provided them with important dwelling environments and social communities. An ordinary day often divided in three between home, school, and hobbies. Moreover, to some youth leisure activities were almost passions, involving fandom, devotion, sharing and plenty of work. Such intense life was built around different sports and artistic activities, for instance. Two "hobbyworlds"---centering on horses and ice hockey---are next introduced as examples of topological dwelling and contexts of political subject formation. Whether these geosocial lives provide opportunities to political agency or invite youths to citizen participation that I examined later are questions that I will return to in the last part of the paper.

Trotters, mounts, ponies, and "Icelanders." Pets and favorites. Dream horses. Frightening horses. Hobbyhorses. My horse, friend's horse, mom's horse, our pet horse, mom's friend's horse, friend's mom's horse, friend's friend's pony… These expressions are from the biographies of twelve girls whose lifeworlds included horses. Four of them could not imagine their lives without them. To a couple of girls, riding was a hobby among other hobbies. Some mentioned that they just liked to go see horses at the nearby stables. Those who did not have a personal interest in them were involved through their friends, siblings, or parents with whom they visited the stables and whose "horse stories" they regularly shared.

By the help of the four girls who were passionate about horses I became familiar with the everyday practices of 'home stables,' intense camping and training times, country side where horses run free in paddocks, playfulness of hobbyhorsing, people of kith and kin with whom equine lives are shared in offline and online communities, and aspirations towards the future with horses. Pihla's[3] story that lingers between memory, presence and desire is illuminative of how this life engenders topological ties and feeds into political subject formation. When writing, she positioned herself as a time traveler into a particular event and place.

> My family was on their way to Gran's place. They had with them my trotter Romantic Rose, and Tenkanen. They come to the summer pasture to enjoy the grass and to run freely in their paddocks. Our dogs are barking in the trunk, they have recognized my Gran's house by now. They like being there and always run to my Gran's dog whose name is Vilma. The flowers are blooming in yellow and red. I wished to be included in the moment. I thought that I would also like to go along to Gran's place. (Pihla, written story)

The topological lifeworlds that open up from descriptions like this one are deeply personal, yet, at the same time, essentially shared (compare Bartos 2013; Marshall 2013). They include specific places, like the Gran's place in the Finnish countryside, but as Pihla's expression "in the moment" hints, these do not indicate merely physical locations. The elements she mentions---family, horses, pastures, dogs, flowers---all play an important role in her emotional belonging (Wood 2013). Along with spatial elements, her portrayal discloses the concurrent presence of different temporalities characteristic to topological ties. The story involves her in the present (teller/observer), in the past (feeling, acting, and knowing with her family and animal friends) and in the future (wishing to dwell in and maintain this world with those involved).

I consider Pihla's story a thickening in her biography. As mentioned, the youth-produced writings and drawings concern matters that the participants wanted to highlight as particularly important in their lived worlds. Following the broad reading of the political that I lean on---matters with contextual importance and particular significance to those involved---these portrayals can be seen as manifestations of experienced politics. As such, they offer exclamation marks to the biographies. By conveying her daydream, Pihla wanted to draw the attention to these particular aspects in her world, instead of what happens in the city or at school with other youths for instance (see also Fig. 2). Thus, I take it that she finds herself existing strongly in this context, as a political subject connected with other people, animals, plants, the place and its histories, artefacts and conventions, and other significant elements. Together they have established lasting and mutual caring relations that, according to many feminist scholars, are an important source of political subjectivity and agency (Thomas 2011; Bartos 2013; Habashi 2016; Hörschelmann and Reich 2017; Kallio and Bartos 2017). Pihla has also generated knowledge, awareness. and attitudes in this topological context where she acquires capacities to act for and against matters important to her. In short, the story portrays a key political reality in her life.

Other rich entry points to the equine world come from Olivia, Annie, and Paulina. They spent much of their free time at the stables and in riding camps, which provided them with plenty of knowledge about how horses are treated and taken care of, practices related to riding and driving, and stable rules and conventions. They had gone to different stables and camps over the years, learning from many people and places about the equine world and sharing their own understandings with them. The girls had completed this practical knowledge with information concerning the characteristics of different kinds of horses, their geographical origins, breeding, and categorization, from various online and offline sources. The spatialities of their equine worlds were, hence, far from territorially bounded regions. As proficient horse-girls, they acquired capacities by which to access a variety of contexts related to horses and horse caring. They could even be characterized as global horse-girls, if global is not understood as a large-scale entity "out there," but as a topological constellation consisting of people, horses, stables, events, celebrities, rules, knowledge, and so on, from all around the equine world (on global topologies, see Häkli and Kallio 2014b).

Adding one more perspective, Annie conveyed playful elements from her equine life. She had made herself a hobbyhorse that she rode with her little sister and her best friend, who had equivalent companions. These wooden creatures with fabric heads carried them to trail riding and lengthy adventures in the woods, which she enjoyed tremendously. At the stables, she was sometimes a bit scared of the big and unpredictable animals. This insecurity had put her off from becoming a personal caretaker to one of the horses, even if she had gone through the training and passed the tests. With her hobbyhorse, she was confident and could fully enjoy her devotion, engaging concurrently with her best friend in this world in which she, otherwise, had no part.

Playfulness reveals yet another dimension of the equine world. It allows shifting positions between carefreeness and responsibility, providing for security and empowerment (on the geosocial constitution of securities, see Hörschelmann and Reich 2017; on playfulness, see Wee and

Anthamatten 2014). As Selma Vilhunen describes a key finding of her recent documentary film *Hobbyhorse Revolution*, "teenagers with growing pains […] discover their own voice and talent through riding and making hobbyhorses" (Tuffifilms 2017; also Fig. 3). Like in traditional equine communities, sharing and acting together are important elements of hobbyhorsing, or "kepparointi," as the activity is called in Finnish. The quickly growing group of hobbyists, in Finland and beyond, share experiences and ideas in virtual and local communities, practice together, convene in clubs, and organize training camps and competitions (SKY 2017). The producer of Vilhunen's film emphasizes the empowering and all-encompassing elements of these activities, "this is a very positive activity for young people's development as it instills a sense of worth and belonging. Anybody can join---whatever age, colour, sex" (Nordisc Film & Television Fond 2017).



Fig. 3—Hobbyhorse Revolution (Tuffifilms 2017).

Equine lifeworlds have characteristics common to many topologies. The involved people share knowledge and experiences, by meeting face-to-face as they work and ride together at the local stables and in national and international camps, and through online and offline social networking. These activities often involve strong emotional tones, foster feelings of belonging, and empower those involved as part of smaller and larger communities. Following a relational logic, the thus

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emerging lived worlds tie hobbyists into fluctuating intensities that grow stronger and weaker in places, depending on the geosocial activities they practice. That is, how people connect with each other over variable distances (territorial, generational, cultural, geopolitical, classed, racial, etc.) and how deeply enmeshed they become in the equine world, as political subjects. Topological realities also enmesh many histories, present situations and future aspirations, offering people subject positions that reach beyond their apparent everydayness. Socially defined topological lifeworlds hence have no general scope: each horse person has her or his own "spatio-temporal reading" about where and how equine life unfolds, and what matters are important in it. This experiential understanding provides for political subject formation and creates starting points to political agency, which I will return to in the last part of the article.

## BOYS IMMERSED IN THE ICE HOCKEY WORLD

This section adds to the topological dimensions explored above by looking into the world of a sport and hobby that holds a strong position in Finland. Both as a mediated sport and as a hobby, ice hockey may first appear as territorially organized and unfolding. Whether it be youngsters or grownups, the game is practiced by local teams playing in national leagues and in national teams that challenge each other in transnational tournaments. The sport also resonates strongly with geopolitical topographies, with distinguished Eastern and Western play styles and European and North American traditions, and it involves strong nationalist desires. However, the topological dimensions of ice hockey can be captured through geosociality, which draws the focus to the everyday social relations and activities that make the sport and the hobby meaningful to those involved, without losing from sight the geopolitical and geoeconomic forces that condition geosocial living (Mitchell and Kallio 2017).

Even if Finnish women are internationally among the leading teams, the majority of ice hockey players are boys and men. I was, therefore, not surprised that this theme appeared as significant to

our male participants in particular. The ice hockey enthusiasts shared their knowledge and opinions readily with us, and professed their commitment. When they had the chance to tell more about the matters particularly important to them, some of the boys drew symbols of their favorite teams in a careful manner (Fig. 4). Like the story written by Pihla, and the drawings and wishes expressed by Olivia, these artwork draw attention to the political realities where they were involved as active agents.



Fig. 4—Portrayals of ice hockey fandom.

To some of the boys, the world of ice hockey was present in nearly all everyday environments. They watched the games on television and other media; followed the news through various channels; including social media sites; played digital ice hockey games with their friends (online/offline); discussed the matter with their families, at school, and during their free time; and

played daily on ice in different groupings. Through their accounts, I have been able to trace

different dimensions of ice hockey topologies. In the analysis, I have borrowed conceptual tools

from the actor-network-theory inspired research that distinguishes between regional, networked,

and fluid spatialities (Murdoch 1997; Häkli 2008).

To those involved in the sport as practitioners, ice hockey involves routinized practices. The

boys belonging to the teams organize their family, friends, and school lives around the daily and

weekly training schedules. Let me present one example, from an eleven-year-old boy Elias, who has

been playing actively in a team from the age of seven:

> *Interviewer:* Here is a marking, close to your house and school….
> *Elias:* A place where you can play ice hockey.
> *Interviewer:* With whom do you usually leave from school?
> *Elias:* A couple of teammates.
> *Interviewer:* Do they live close by?
> *Elias:* Yes, less than 500 meters from our house.
> *Interviewer:* So quite close. How often do you have training?
> *Elias:* Four to five times a week.
> *Interviewer:* Right, quite often. Does that include the games or…?
> *Elias:* They are on Sundays.
> *Interviewer:* Are they here close by or do you travel to other cities.
> *Elias:* Other cities, like Turku and Hämeenlinna.
> *Interviewer:* And here is another marking, the ice hockey arena and the Tappara home arena.
> Do you have your own training there?
> *Elias:* Yes.
> *Interviewer:* And you are a fan of Tappara? Do you go watch the games often?
> *Elias:* Yes, on Saturdays.

There are hardly any moments in an ordinary week when Elias would not be involved with ice

hockey. In addition to practicing with his team nearly every weeknight, traveling to games on

Sundays, and watching the national league on Saturdays (either in person or on television), he plays

with his mates at the local ice rink as well as during the breaks at school, and enjoys related digital

games alike. Whilst parents may be the most important collaborators in providing practical,

financial, and emotional support for such intense hobbies, often the participating local network is

much broader. It may involve tens of people from different areas of life: teachers who allow

exceptions in schoolwork, grandparents who participate in chauffeuring and volunteering, friends who find time to shared activities between practices and games, schools that organize opportunities for playing on ice during the breaks, neighbors who take care of the house when the family is away, coaches who devote their free time for the teams, and so on. As the boys share their dedication to ice hockey with these and other people, the hobby builds gradually into an inherent element of their local communal lives.

Also in the lives of committed fans---who may of course also be players themselves---ice hockey is continuously present and mingles with various everyday matters and groupings. Instead of practice routines, mediated leagues and tournaments direct fandom activities. These include watching the games through different devices and in situ, following the leagues, debating and speculating about the teams and the players with friends and via social media, and supporting their favorite teams and betting for them in the pools. The generated relationships may therefore organize in the form of circles of friends and family, but they often involve also transnational networks of fans, who convene in the games and communicate through social media.

As a mass-cultural phenomenon, ice hockey unfolds quite differently. It is a combination of performative art, nationalist battle and global popular culture---bread and circuses to the masses. These may appear almost anywhere, but their intensities are fluctuating. During the big tournaments, television rates skyrocket and social media sites fill with passionate comments and speculative opinions. To provide one recent example, the final game of the World Junior Ice Hockey Championships 2016, held in Helsinki, drew nearly 2.5 million viewers on the national television, in addition to which the game could be followed live at the Hartwall Arena (fully booked, over 13,000 seats), and via the radio and virtual broadcasting. In a country of 5.5 million inhabitants, this counts as a notable audience.

In the mass-cultural spatiality of ice hockey, even complete strangers may build momentary affective relations as they adopt the position of a fan. Yet, the next minute, other matters of concern take over and push the game to the background in most people's lives, withering these faint geosocial associations. Outside the high season, some people may even set out to protest against the substantial media attention and public funding that the sport receives in Finland. What these dimensions profess is that, as a mass-cultural sport, ice hockey is characterized by fluidity. It comes and goes, grows denser and again thinner, moves from place to place, pops up and vanishes, and draws together masses that may disperse as quickly as the last goal scored.

Put together, these three dimensions reveal a multifaceted social space consisting of local/regional framings, networked connections, and fluid agglomerations---a topological constellation involving continuity and cuts, but no lasting shape (Secor, 2013, 431). The boys in our study, who were involved in it as practitioners, fans, and parts of the mass-cultural crowd, had become experts in this sphere of life. Many of them had little interest in matters that did not connect productively with their ice hockey worlds. Their competence involved plenty of knowledge production and skills, but also "geosocial sensitivity" that is needed as ice hockey binds together intimate relations and geopolitical divisions, familial practices and nationalist attitudes, peer solidarities and fierce competition, and caring practices and violent behavior. These are all elements that, in the establishment of political subjectivities, build capacities to, first, understanding what goes on around us and, second, acting for and against matters that seem important to us. The potential of such strongly motivated mundane agencies---based on ice hockey or equine lives or any other passionate hobby---has not been realized in municipal youth participation programs that seek to involve young people primarily in ways that connect easily with formal planning and decision-making structures.

This section focuses on young people's highly mediated worlds. As opposed to the previous analysis that shed light on their intense everyday geosocialities, in focus here are spatial perceptions and their connections with mundane communalities. Regarding youth participation, understanding these spatial relations is valuable from two perspectives. First, the socially established, media-influenced remoteness and nearness of places, countries, regions, and cities creates topological frameworks for young people's developing political subjectivities. Second, the dis/connections between mediated worldviews and personal lives reveal agencies that young people appreciate and wish to practice or, alternatively, disapprove of and try to eschew, as political subjects.

Nearly all of the participants had a personal cell phone and a computer that they could use freely, both with Internet access. They watched plenty of nationally and internationally produced television programs and movies, played online and offline digital games, were active on social media with Facebook and Instagram accounts, listened to music from Spotify, watched and posted videos on YouTube, contacted their friends and family through social media applications such as WhatsApp, and the like. They also followed the news together with their parents from newspapers and on television, and received information about topical events and issues through their various online networks and sites. Hence, their lives and agencies are greatly mediated.

At large, the transnational and national media that these youth use and are exposed to reproduce certain geopolitical divisions. This could be spotted from their conceptions of the relative distances between southern Finnish cities and the major Russian and U.S. cities. They continuously presented perspectives where St. Petersburg and Moscow are remote cities somewhere in the Soviet Union/Russia, where wars rage, dictatorship prevails, and the neighboring countries are in danger of occupation. In comparison, New York and Los Angeles appeared as easily accessible nearby metropoles that they could enter like a duck takes to water. Even those who mentioned the

prevailing societal problems in the United States, which had made them critical about the *state*, placed these urbanities at a little distance from themselves.[4] Similarly, the fact that one can get to St. Petersburg from Helsinki central station in less than 3.5 hours and to Moscow overnight in a sleeping car was not present in their descriptions. This rather expected result contributes to understanding the political geographies that young people encounter as they try to make sense of the world where they live and their own positions in it.

Another perhaps more surprising finding is that many of the participants did not shun the mixing of reality and fiction to portray the worlds in which they live, including fifteen to sixteen year olds. For example, sixteen of them talked about "Madagascar" in the interviews and it appeared on the maps of others as well. In many cases, it is the only location in Africa with positive connotations. None of the youth had been to the island and only one of them mentioned knowing anything about it besides what the *DreamWorks Animation* films have conveyed. They still introduced Madagascar without a doubt; they liked its solidary and joyful atmosphere and would like to go there.

Similarly, somewhere around Ohio, three girls made a marking "Glee," according to a television series they followed. As its devoted fans, they wished to visit America. The girls did not bring it up that this constructed fictional reality would not be waiting for them there, any more than the humanized jungle animals would be present in Madagascar. They, rather, talk about the world of *Glee* that they shared intensely with their friends, here and now. When we asked why the series is so terrific, one of the girls, Vivian, explained its particularly friendly atmosphere: "It's about a choir spirit. It's got a lot of singing and being together, that's why I think it's nice to watch. Not terrible killing things and such, but kind of friend spirited."

The movies *Madagascar* and the television series *Glee* are examples of media productions that have succeeded in becoming widely known and loved among children and youth.[5] They offer sociable worlds, where living feels good, regardless of the dangers, misfortunes, inequalities, and

challenging situations one may encounter. Caring and solidarity are central themes in both, attached to the amiable relations of friendship and family, which again highlights the notable meaning of these features in political subject formation (compare with the equine section above). Another aspect emphasized in these productions is a shared desire for living with difference and as different, as opposed to racist and xenophobic attitudes of other youths (*Glee*) or to the violent and hierarchical order manifested by the king and his followers (*Madagascar*).

Moreover, the transnational fandom platforms around these media products provide access to broader audiences with whom fandom can be shared and connections with similar minded people created (Nikunen, 2014). Glee Wiki (by Wikia Inc.), Glee Facebook Group (by Fox), GleeOnFox YouTube Channel, and The Official Instagram for GLEE provide such opportunities, among others. Like hobbies, these mediated realities are elements of topological constellations where young people may dwell and share their free time with others, in ways that feel good and right to them, connecting their local social networks with transnational "fandom connectives."

In contrast with the positive markings that led us to discussing globally mediated realities as entwined with friend and family lives, the topological mapping exercise produced plenty of negative markings with media links. Wars in the Middle East and the neighboring regions of Russia, poverty and sickness in Africa, and Russia as a bad state were common topics, tracing largely back to the news media. Also regarding these markings on overtly politicized issues, straightforward attitudes appeared; the participants did not like them and would not like to go there. Yet, notably, they did not say much about these topics and were particularly reluctant to talk about their feelings and attitudes concerning unpleasant locations in connection with their everyday lives. This does not stem from that they would not watch the news together with their parents or that the topics did not come up in school. Quite the contrary, hardly anyone followed the news independently and the school curriculum covers these matters and regions. Rather, it seems that

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most of them did not want to connect the negative mediated realities (where politics happens beyond their reach) with their personal lives (where they can influence the matters important to them).

These distinctions between pleasant and disagreeable distant locations, based largely on the media, are telling about young people's active agencies in the constitution of their worlds. They demonstrate how political socialization is not a top-down internalization process, but a dynamic, contextual process involving its subjects as active agents (Habashi 2008; Kallio 2014a, 2016b). Young people eagerly include the mediated realities that they agree with in their experiential worlds; respectively, they avoid becoming closely engaged with the topics that seem frightening or suspicious to them. These options are not always available, of course, as unpleasant issues may enter young people's lives just like those of adults. Yet, as Hörschelmann and Reich's (2017) study with underprivileged East German youths proposes, even in challenging circumstances young people seek to keep controversial matters at a distance from themselves, to ensure the geosocial securities that provide them agreeable subject positions.

At once, it is important to notice that the worldviews and agencies of young people do not form freely. A discussion between sixteen-year-old Riina and her father makes visible how even the politically aware and interested youth may find it awkward to engage with politicized matters in peaceful and wealthy democracies that, seemingly, offer good opportunities to active agency. (For a diametrically opposed situation in conflict societies, see Habashi 2016.)

> *Interviewer:* How do your parents react if you give a strong comment about something?
> *Riina:* Well, last week we talked about the world's water situation – when there is so much famine and other things in Africa. I said that we should help, to which my dad argued that not necessarily because then there would be so many people. And [he added] they may not know how to use them [the money] as the government is a bit screwed. It was a sort of sensible comment, but, well, I don't know if it's right just to sit here and watch the news. I don't know if there's something that could be done.

Riina is among the few participants who professed their concerns about worldly problems.[6] She was ready to meet the questions of climate-related poverty and suffering in her own life, which she had encountered through news. Yet she quickly became aware of the trickiness of these concerns when discussing them with her father, whose understanding of their complexity took a different direction. As she learned that her caring agency could lead to greater suffering and other unintended consequences, Riina felt bemused (compare Bartos 2013). To the interviewers, she conveyed a longing for alternative options for social responsibility, which she had not come across with thus far. This was common among the youth who had identified inequalities or concerns beyond their personal reach: doing anything about them, as an ordinary school kid, did not seem feasible.

As a general outcome, I have found that different contents---television series, animations, fiction movies, reality shows, telethons, magazines, and news---influence young people's worldviews in inconsistent ways. The mishmash of mediated imaginaries contributes strongly to their "imagined globes" where neighborhoods, cities, countries, and regions organize into constellations that differ notably from those presented on topographical maps, fixed in time and space (compare Billig 1995). Young people's lived global worlds consist of many kinds of spatial ties, ranging from popular media products of the Western entertainment industry to the grim news pieces presented in transnationally distributed news documents, and much falls in between and beyond these (compare global horse-girls in a previous section). While geopolitically and geoeconomically conditioned and institutionally framed, these spatial ties are actively created by the youth, together with their significant others who share but also contest their understandings and agencies. In these geosocially forming political realities young people come to realize which matters, in particular, concern them.

TOPOLOGICAL CONNECTIVES AS GROUNDS FOR ISSUE PUBLICS

Studying topological lifeworlds in contrast with topographically grounded system worlds has led me to identify a problematic gap between the matters of importance as experienced by young

people, and the forms of participation and engagement that policymaking and administrative systems are proposing to them. Perhaps the trickiest dilemma involving youths as topological dwellers is the identification of the communities where they belong and have competence, based on which they could be heard and supported as active citizens. In the contemporary transnationalising world, young people's lived realities are multidimensional and variable, and the actual *places* for locating their lived communities may be hard to find. The previous analytical sections have sought to highlight this by, first, showing how hobbies may be present in young people's lives in various ways and, second, discussing the complexities embedded in the constitution of spatial conceptions.

One potential way to escape from this "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994) would be taking the issues that youth find important as a starting point in tracing their topological lives, where political subjectivities are established, and where agencies may develop and unfold. This approach has been employed in recent research that seeks to distinguish new political activities from the more traditional forms of self-organizing action (see Habermas 2006; Marres 2007; Featherstone 2008; Baym and boyd 2012; Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Brough and Shresthova 2012; Isin 2012; Kim 2012; Shklovski and Valtysson 2012; Barnett and Bridge 2013). For considering the usefulness of these ideas in youth inclusion, this section introduces two conceptual openings.

First, the concept of "issue publics" has been developed in politically oriented new media studies. Kim introduces issue publics as "pluralistic groups of people who consider particular issues personally important, based on self-interest, collective identity and values" (2012,148). Traditionally, they have taken the form of societies and clubs. In the social media era, new forms of communality are emerging and the significance of physical encounter is diminishing. Issue publics may involve people regardless of their whereabouts and create what Fielding describes as "multiple interpersonal spaces" (2009, 506). Anyone with access to virtual forums concerned with certain issues, and with sufficient communication skills that enable participation in their discussions, may

become a partaker in the given public. Joining in does not require membership or longstanding commitment and people's associations may be for a shorter or longer period of time, including more and less active involvement.

In comparison to traditional forms of political organization and participation, issue publics allow more heterogeneity. Their basic activities involve sharing feelings, experiences, thoughts, knowledge and materials, generating informed attitudes and forming justified opinions, and taking active stances for or against the matters that seem particularly important in the specific context (Baym and boyd 2012; Brough and Shresthova 2012; Shklovski and Valtysson 2012). Growing understanding and awareness about shared interests lies at the heart of issues publics, which feeds into people's political subjectivities that may mobilize as agencies, now or later, in this or that context, with the same or other people.

Spatially, issue publics follow topological logics as they establish and transform through face-to-face, networked and indirect social relations. As Martin and Secor argue, topological logics do not juxtapose or privilege certain kinds of spatial forms; instead the key question is how space becomes organized in the practice of everyday life (2014, 430; also Rosen 2006). Besides physical locations, issue-based activities may build bridges over social distances. For example, a shared interest in horses or ice hockey can bring together family members, friends, other hobbyists, bloggers and their followers, fans who share their views online and offline, and other people of different age, ethnicity, gender, class, race, nationality, and language. The range of potentially politicizing matters in such intergenerational, transcultural associations is broad. Thus, seemingly nonpolitical, issue-based activities---such as hobbyhorsing---may form into important contexts of mundane politicization and political subject formation.

The second, interlinking stream of research that may be fruitful for rethinking youth inclusion has emerged at the interface between political science and communication studies, introducing the

idea of :connectives." Following Bennett and Segerberg, I see that the greatest political potential of issue-based activities lies in engendering "connective action based on personalized content sharing" (2012, 739). Leino and Laine's conception of issue politics captures aptly how politics appear in connectives: "Political is a type of situation where the focus should be on the matters of concern, instead of the procedural matters that directs attention to politicized issues" (2012, 92).Hence, following a pragmatist spirit, "people's involvement in politics is mediated by problems that affect them" (Marres 2007, 759; also Barnett and Bridge 2013).

Regarding youth participation, this means considering as political the matters of concern identified by young people in the topological connectives where they dwell. To go back to some of the examples brought up in the analysis: to Pihla the Finnish countryside exists as a beautiful space where people from various generational positions can dwell with their animal friends, maintaining shared values; to Annie, the woods where she runs with her hobbyhorse and friends form a vital urban green, and she feels angry about the golf course extension that is currently ruining her passage there (see red tag on the local map in Fig. 1); to Elias, the ice rinks at school and in his neighborhood, as well as the large-scale ice hockey arena, are of particular interest; and to Riina, the world's water situation seems alarming, yet out of her reach. From the perspective of active citizenship, these kinds of mundanely politicized matters may act as interfaces between public administration and young people, providing grounds for continuing or establishing issue-based active citizenship.

Distinctions between traditional and new forms of political activity have been made in social movement studies also more broadly (Iveson 2007; Miller and Nicholls 2013). The concept of issue publics is not typically used in this literature, but Habermas, for instance, mentions it when talking about mediated political communication. The major difference between these approaches and the one I am suggesting is that, in social movements or "issue voting" (2006, 420), people act for a

cause and/or participate in practices that they knowingly consider as political (Culcasi 2016). The explicit political aspects of their activities are often broadly identified (for example by the media, public administration, and other active citizens). Yet, as Habermas acknowledges, this is not the political reality where most people form political orientations: "The average citizen […] can definitely form reasonable attitudes toward public affairs, even unconsciously […] by aggregating their often tacit and since forgotten reactions to casually received bits and pieces of information, which they had initially integrated into and evaluated against the background of evolving conceptual schemes." Drawing from Delli Carpini he concludes: "People can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about their political choices without possessing a large body of knowledge about politics" (2004, 412).

To me, issue publics, as based on topological connectives, seem like potential contexts of youth inclusion. If encouraged by public administrative means, they could offer young people what Cornwall and Coelho (2007) call "new democratic arenas" and potential contexts for practicing "lived citizenship," to use Lister's 2007 term (see also Nyhagen 2015; Wood 2017). By tracing the issues that appear as particularly important to young people, participatory efforts could aim at supporting youthful agencies in the matters that concern them experientially and thus succeed to "blur the mundane-political distinction" (Shklovski and Valtysson 2012, 431), thus building connections between the topological worlds of youth and the topographical worlds of public administration.

This includes---essentially---learning from young people about "the political" and its spatialities, not as political articulations, but as contextually forming meaningful experiences and practices. For example, in my studies the importance of care and solidarity have occurred as crosscutting themes, in contrast to violence and unfairness (see also Kallio 2014b, 2016b; Korkiamäki and Kallio 2017). Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality or other characteristic, these elements in particular

seem to be appreciated by children and young people. This is evident, for example, as youth align with fictional realities where caring relations are strong and solidarity serves as a moral principle, and distance themselves from actual contexts where people cannot rely on them but may rather be subjected to, or even involved in, violence and unfair treatment. Similar attitudes can be found from hobbies where both girls and boys form lasting ties with their coevals and various adults, with whom they practice respectful and reciprocal ways of living together.

## TOWARDS INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN TOPOLOGICAL-TOPOGRAPHICAL WORLDS

In search for alternative youth participation models the current scholarship begins from the view that young people often have resources for involvement and are engaged in many (potential) venues of participation, and should be empowered on these grounds. While largely sharing this premise, the challenge I see is to locate the communities where they find themselves belonging and competent. My findings from research with youths suggest that young people's geosocial lives are multidimensional and fluctuating. They contest territorial scalarities in unfolding between people from various neighborhoods, cities, and countries, and reorganizing constantly across time and space. As a response to the challenges that these geographical diversities pose, this paper has suggested issue publics as potential venues for supporting young people as active citizens, which requires identifying them as partakers in topological connectives. How issue-based participation is organized in practice---for example, how much it relies on young people's existing practices or involves cogeneration of new ones---is an empirical question to be resolved contextually.

The suggestion is based, on the one hand, on a media analysis, where I have explored how the "casually received bits and pieces of information" (Habermas 2006, 420) contribute to young people's understandings about the worlds in which they live and, concurrently, challenge them to consider who they are in these worlds, how they want to live in them, and which matters are more important than others in their lived realities. I have purposefully selected examples that manifest

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what is usually considered as nonpolitical (fictive entertainment media emphasizing personal relationships) and as political (news media regarding geopolitical issues) in young people's lives. Instead of proof of individualistic lifestyles and detachment from politics, from a geosocial perspective the enmeshments of these globalities can be seen as portrayals of what young people consider important in their political realities. Secondly, the empirical analysis has introduced two specific examples of connective topologies, where young people are involved as active agents and where their issue-based agencies could be acknowledged and supported. Many issues encountered in these lifeworlds, where politicized and apoliticized matters intermingle, provide good starting points for growing awareness and taking active positions in a democratic society.

Hence, the attitudes and active agencies described by the participants of my research provide opportunities to public administration to hear and empower young people in matters that concern them. I argue that most youth in Finland, and in other liberal democracies, could easily be engaged with various kinds of activities as part of their mundane connectives, where they acquire positions and capacities to act and do not need to find new roles and agencies. This is why I find issue publics to be a fruitful concept in reconsidering youth inclusion and democratic life in a broad sense. It, first, shatters "the community" from a place-based fixed group into indistinct socio-spatial connectives that can unfold in many forms and sites, depending on the participants' social ties. This describes well the lives that many people lead in the current transnationalising worlds. Second, the social engagements that people create in these connectives are influential to their political subject formation, regardless of if they provide arenas for political activities or not. Issue publics are hence, always, potential sources of political attitudes and forums of mundane politicization.

To conclude, if participation is considered a democratic objective in itself, inclusive youth policies should begin from recognizing the fundamental difference between the worlds where young people live and administrative systems operate. This requires acknowledging topological lifeworlds

as the basis of youthful belonging and the communities that young people affiliate with as sources and contexts of their political subjectivities and agencies. Unlike administrative regions, these are not bound to particular locations and have no general scope. Further, inclusive policies ought to concentrate primarily on supporting youths in their lived realities and on providing them with opportunities to act with regard to their own interests, instead of endorsing active citizenship in contexts and matters that appear unfamiliar and distant, and thus unattractive, to them. These measures would foster young people's experiential political subjectivities and, thus, provide for their political agencies now and in the future.

Such a policy line is inevitably risky as it encompasses that young people may act in ways that are most inviting and rewarding to them and take active stances in matters that public administrative systems do not consider relevant (Azmi and others 2016; Hörschelmann 2016). Their self-generated attitudes and orientations may not serve the interests of the state and its institutions (Richardson and others 2014). They may also contradict with the "best of the child," as defined by the adults responsible for them, thus opposing children's rights to protection and provision with their rights to participation (Beazley and Miller 2016; Kallio 2016c). Yet these risks are not strange to democratic life. Opening the doors to democratic politics, in any context and with any people, involves that contradictory and unpredictable situations may occur (for example Jeffrey and Staeheli 2016). This is, indeed, what the "expansive participatory conception of radical democracy as a process of debate, discussion, and persuasion" relies on (Barnett and Bridge 2013, 1024).

NOTES

1. The empirical research was carried out in the research projects *Children as Political Selves: Recognizing Politics, Contextualizing Policies* (SA126700) and *Preventing Children's Marginalization through Place-Based Participation* (SA134949, with Jouni Häkli, Pia Bäcklund and Elina Stenvall). The analysis is part of my current study *Political Presence as a Right of the Child* (SA258341).

2. Like Martin and Secor (2014) and Joronen (2016), I understand topographical spatiality as one fixed spatial formation among others. Yet in this paper, I distinguish it from other topological formations for analytical purposes, to contrast the dominant spatial imaginational of participatory activities with the spatialities directing young people's agencies.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. This finding opens up another topological aspect, where, following a Lacanian approach, "the city and the subject are distributed and splayed out, a Möbius surface that encircles its own limit" (Secor 2013, 440). As a particular approach with deep philosophical roots, engaging with it is beyond the scope of this article.

5. Madagascar is strongly present also in my research materials from Northern England.

6. Other topics that the youth brought up in this way were, for example, wars in the Middle East, corruption in Russia, poverty in Africa and pollution in natural environments like the Baltic Sea and Finnish lakes.

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