

Chapter 1

Introduction: New Urbanisms, New Citizens

Over the past few decades, urban living has dramatically transformed the lives of children and young people. Rapid urbanisation, formidable physical re-composition of cities, and huge proliferation of the world's population (heading towards 70% urbanisation by 2050) are refashioning the interactions amongst demographics, environmental, social, cultural, economic and politics in towns and cities across the world (UN-Habitat, 2016). In many urban contexts the lives, mobilities and everyday experiences of children and young people are substantially impacted upon by large scale urban extensions, including new innovative forms of urban sustainable development that seek actively to engage urban dwellers with the repercussions of climate change. Simultaneously, an ongoing international 'new wave' of multidisciplinary childhood studies claims to radically and affirmatively transform thinking about the spaces and politics of childhood and youth. This book aims to bring these two research and policy-making around urban sustainable development and childhood into productive conversation. It will do so by drawing upon rich empirical data from a large-scale, four year interdisciplinary study of four newly-built sustainable urban environments in South-East England, and upon cutting-edge research from other geographical contexts. The book marks a step-change in scholarship on the everyday lives of children and young people growing up in new sustainable urban environments, based on theoretically-informed empirical exploration.

The argument we develop is twofold. First, we demonstrate through interpretative analysis how 'new wave' materialist, nonrepresentational and post-humanist theorisations afford fuller, carefully detailed, practicable, new understandings of children and young people's mobilities, materialities, socialities, play and civic participation. In particular, our analysis will provoke, extend and recast significantly, some key normative scholarly, political and

popular assumptions about children and young people's play, (lack of) mobility, and (lack of) community engagement and participation . Second, we argue that the full appreciation of the *vitalities* of children and young people's everyday lives require 'new wave' thinking to be critically re-evaluated and grounded anew within a politicised sensibility attuned to community affects, diversity of identities, inclusions and exclusions.

Structure and contributions of this book

Our research was animated by diverse recent lines of new materialist, nonrepresentational and post-humanist theorisations within a multi- disciplinary childhood studies, which we discuss in Chapter 1. We have found that this scholarship (which some term a 'new wave' (Ryan, 2014), and which terminology we use for ease of reference) offers inspirational, exciting prompts to engage, in new and sustained ways, with children and young people's complex mobilities, socialities, embodiments, emotions/affects, and more-than-human relationalities. Indeed, these ideas helped us to acknowledge, articulate and engage more fully with children and young people's everyday lives in ways, which were both intellectually revelatory (affording interconnected languages of affect-embodiment-materialities-biopolitics) and practically useful (for example, allowing us to share research findings in diverse engagements with urban planners and policy-makers). Simultaneously, in this first chapter we advocate new critical reflection upon some key tenets of so-called 'new wave' thinking. We substantiate this throughout the book drawing on examples from our ethnographic encounters with children and young people. A particular aim of the book is to capture both theoretical and policy/planning implications of researching children and young people's lives and experiences in diverse urban spaces. In this we echo, Christensen and James (2017), who argues that such endeavour raises powerful, yet complex new epistemological questions. In chapter 1, we articulate five framing questions of 'new wave' scholarship. We argue that children and young people's everyday lives and experiences

demand more cautious, critical engagements with the ‘new wave’ theorisation. In effect, then, the substantive chapters (chapter 3 through to chapter 7) develop, and build towards, a critical re-engagement with the ‘new wave’ theoretical framework to establish a firmer ground in the lived, experiential, *vital* empirical details and politics of children and young people’s everyday experiences and entanglements with the material built and natural environments of urban spaces.

As a second point of departure, in Chapter 2, we introduce and contextualise the concept, principles and international planning/policy context of ‘sustainable’ urbanism. We outline how this globalised turn has constituted a significant array of new urban spaces and – we argue, consequently – new experiences of urban childhood and youth. The scale, significance and motive force of sustainable urbanism is remarkable. Over three decades, one can trace the growth of particular modes of ‘sustainable’ urbanism through numerous international policy discourses, construction projects and design and planning interventions, which are impacting the lives of millions of children and young people. In reality sustainable design and planning interventions - deriving from particular Euro-American antecedents and exemplars – have been adopted in diverse, global sites of urban development and expansion.

A great deal of existing research has studied the underlying policy discourses and planning visions of ‘sustainable’ urbanism, but much less consideration has been given to the *actually-existing* urban spaces, communities and experiences constituted via policies and visions of ‘sustainable’ urbanism. So, in the latter half of Chapter 2, and through the remainder of this book, we identify some characteristic features of ‘*sustainable*’ *urbanism in practice*. In particular, we highlight three key sets of features: i) build-in *sustainable urban architectures and radical technologies*, ii) *urban mobility and networks of connectivity* (for example, smooth and effective reduction of carbon dioxide emission through the creation of

walkability, cycling and public transport), and iii) community *participation, liveability, inclusiveness and conviviality*), which have been planned-in to ‘sustainable’ urban developments over the last decades. Over the course of this book we explore how actually-existing material, spatial and social features of ‘sustainable’ urban developments are impacting significantly upon children and young people’s everyday lives, in case studies of new-build housing in south-east England and beyond.

In Chapter 3 we draw attention to the often-taken-for-granted, sometimes playful, sometimes frustrating interactions with build-in *sustainable urban architectures and radical technologies*. We show that as ‘smart’ and ‘green’ new technological innovations are integrated into homes and communities in diverse contexts - from sites in England to new urban developments in India - there is a need for greater understanding of how people interact with these new features, their embodied experiences and impact on how young people and their families may begin imagine sustainable living in the future. We focus on lived experiences of sustainable urban architectures, including sustainable urban drainage channels, and the eco-technologies woven into the fabric of homes and streetscapes. Drawing on a materialist perspective – paying attention to the emotional, embodied and intra-active everyday lives of sustainable urbanism - we show how young people were inextricably connected to their local built environments, connected through observing, being with, wondering about, being critical of, touching eco-architectural forms and working out everyday routines and practices, involving interaction with new household technologies.

In chapter 4, we explore attempts to enhance sustainable *mobility and networks of connectivity* in urban contexts. In particular we show how the mobilities of young people are intense, despite social and material boundaries that have previously been interpreted as

harbingers of a *decline* in children's independent mobility. In contrast to the focus of earlier scholarship, we demonstrate how children and young people engage in 'walking' as an important, yet mundane everyday activity. The chapter then goes on to discuss the experiences and interactions of children and young people with the design and material features of streets and roads and other street users. The chapter shows how self-contained road networks and certain design features importantly afford their everyday mobility. We focus on shared surface streets that have been designed to equalise the status of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists in their use of the street and has been promoted as a step towards the democratization of city space. However, as we will show, in its present articulation, the shared surface street does not straightforwardly foster benign and egalitarian relationships between children-as-pedestrians and adult motorists. In the chapter we argue that traffic movement involves complex interactions amongst intersecting humans, social, discursive and diverse materialities, and we specify how linguistic, affective and material orderings are important to children (and others) in their navigation of shared surface streets.

In chapter 5, we consider notions of 'viable', 'meaningful', 'cohesive' or 'functioning' community which have come to be central to sustainable urbanism. We note that urban development supporting social sustainability features are characterised by policy and planning interventions designed to attract and accommodate a diversity of residents through providing 'mixed' housing stocks and convivial public spaces. However, children and young people have a particularly ambivalent presence within the sustainable urban policy and planning discourses: being at once superficially visible (in, for example, architects' drawings, visions documents, planning briefs and housing developers' brochures), yet still profoundly marginalised via the design and regulation of public and 'community' spaces. The chapter evidences how children and young people have profound and important (but often overlooked) roles in both the initial and ongoing constitution of community in newly-built

urban spaces: through everyday gestures of generosity and welcome, but also through everyday acts of boundary-maintenance ‘them and us’ and social-spatial exclusion. We particularly note how quickly intergenerational and intersectional discourses and exclusions based on age, social class and housing type emerged in our four case study communities. As in other chapters, the discussion is underpinned by the celebration of children and young people’s rich, detailed, lively, playful everyday knowledge (achieved through out-door mobilities in particular) and narratives of community, but rue the limited extent to which planners and policy-makers actually engage with this knowledge. The discussion of social exclusions, in the latter half of the chapter express our deep concerns, which we later frame as critical questions for ‘new wave’ theories in childhood studies.

Chapter 6 explores young people’s experiences of *participation* in practice, in communities designed to ostensibly foster liveability, inclusiveness and conviviality. Through analysing young people’s movements, interactions and voices in diverse community spaces, from self-purposed community centres to public spaces, we show multiple barriers to young people’s everyday participation in their communities. We highlight spaces and moments of structural exclusion – the exclusion of young people’s bodies and voices – excluding them from dialogues, negotiations and discourses. However, developing our arguments in Chapter 5, and through our attention to vital urbanisms, we highlight spaces, moments and encounters between young people, adults and infrastructures that shape community interactions – young people’s affectual experiences woven into the vitality of community making.

Chapter 7 offers a final step towards a full appreciation of the *vitalities* of children and young people’s lives in sustainable urban communities. It focuses upon an activity that is deemed to be a central, assumed element of children and young people’s lives, especially in the Minority Global North: play. However, rather than seek to romanticise play, or see play as some kind

of ‘natural’ solution to the creation of more vital, urban places, we carefully construct an argument for examining what we term *the space between childhood and play*. Reflecting upon a number of examples from our research, and from elsewhere in the world, we argue that a focus on the space between childhood and play opens up a number of opportunities for an interdisciplinary childhood studies in sustainable urban contexts (as per Chapter 1). Specifically, we consider how playing comes to be conjoined with a range of key concerns for sustainable urbanism: everyday social relations; public space; nonhuman agency; social difference; and, the politics of vitality.

The Conclusion chapter develops our closing contribution that marks a critical return to the five questions, we introduced in chapter 1. First, however we summarise key findings from preceding chapters in a way that is designed to offer both conceptual and practical (especially, policy-orientated) insights. We critique recurring marginalisation of children and young people’s experiences and knowledges in sustainable urban planning and policy practices. Against this grain, we offer a series of practical, evidence-based prompts, which we hope will inspire future engagement with children and young people in affirmative participatory processes to develop the vitalities of diverse sustainable urban spaces. Second, and rather more expansively, we re-engage with the five framing theoretical questions. We argue that sustained research encounters with children and young people prompt critical reflection upon ‘new wave’ materialist, nonrepresentational and posthumanist theorisations in multi- and interdisciplinary childhood studies. In the conclusion, we essentially stage a conversation between the framing precepts of ‘new wave’ scholarship and the vitalities, details and politics witnessed in our research. We suggest that this kind of conversation is not only extremely productive and generative of important new, critical and politicised insights - it is also essential to retain the vitality of academic ‘new wave’ debate.

Research Context

The key empirical material discussed in this book derives from a major, four-year, interdisciplinary research project on which the authors collaborated. The *New Urbanisms, New Citizens (NUNC)* was funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (2009-2013). In this research we explored children and young people's experiences of newly-built 'sustainable' housing developments in south-east England, which exemplified the internationalised emergence of 'sustainable' urbanisms as key, characteristic, increasingly-commonplace spaces of childhood and youth. The project was an avowedly interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together anthropologists, geographers and sociologists with shared, although disciplinary disparate, interests in childhood and youth. The overarching aim of the project was to investigate relationships between sustainable community regeneration, children's experiences and mobilities in new urban environments, and their participation and citizenship in planning and design. The project addressed a series of objectives which set out to i) develop our theoretical understandings of children's lived experiences in new, sustainable urban environments; ii) investigate children's mobility patterns through their everyday uses of public and private community spaces; iii) explore children's experiences of belonging to their community and the implications for their participation and citizenship; and iv) inform the planning and design of sustainable communities *for all*, with an explicit focus on young people's everyday experiences of life in new urban environments.

The policy impetus for the project was the then New Labour government's major programme of investment in house-building in the UK, framed by the *Sustainable Communities* agenda. 'Growth Areas' in the south-east of England (see Chapter 2) were earmarked for the planning and delivery of hundreds of thousands of new homes (over three decades). However, following a major round of investment in ostensibly 'sustainable' urban development, this agenda was overtaken by economic and political events: specifically, the global economic

downturn, during which the building of new housing slowed dramatically down; and a change to a Conservative Government in 2010, leading to transformations in the political backdrop surrounding the planning of new-build settlements (a period of decline followed by renewed commitment to large-scale housebuilding in early 2017). Nonetheless, these Growth Areas were the focus for substantial initial urban development, and continue to be regarded as exemplars of large-scale delivery of sustainable urbanism. The project was focused on one of the designated Growth Areas. The Milton Keynes-South Midlands (MKSM) Growth Area encompassed an area of 4,850km² located between London and Birmingham, England. When the Growth Area was first designated, the plan was to build around 250,000 new homes. However, in practice, around 10,000 homes were built annually between the roll-out of the *Sustainable Communities* agenda in 2003 and the housing market downturn of 2009. Although the Growth Area is now officially de-designated, the region is still a focus for large-scale housing development. Significantly, planning proposals and permissions in the region continue, to a large extent, to retain design features and principles characteristic of the *Sustainable Communities Plan*.

Within MKSM, four case communities were chosen for the research representing diverse forms and principles of new, sustainable urban development. In the book we have decided that all community and personal names are pseudonyms. We have made this choice to protect the identities, mobilities, lives and spaces of the children, young people and their families taking part in our research. The first community, Hettonbury, was chosen for its status as exemplar for sustainable urban development in England. The new suburb represents a ‘sustainable urban extension’ built along a number of key principles for sustainable urbanism (see Chapter 2). The outline planning consent was approved in 1997 for 1,020 new homes to be built on a site proximate to a large town in the South Midlands. Notably, Hettonbury was planned and built using the process of *Inquiry by Design* – a complex, lengthy form of

negotiation involving local authority planners, architects, private developers, local community members and various local voluntary organisations. The outcome of this process was a design code, which resonates reasonably strongly with the design parameters of the *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM, 2003). Hettonbury (see Figure 1 for photographs of each of the four developments) contains sustainable features such as: Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) incorporating residential drainage, porous paving, swales and retention ponds; photovoltaic (PV) and solar hot water units installed on the majority of houses; houses built to higher standards of environmental design (e.g. better insulation), with some exemplar ‘Code Level 6’ Homes (see Chapter 3); the urban architectures meant to foster social sustainability elements such as ‘liveability’ and ‘conviviality’ (see chapter 5) – courtyards, urban squares and public spaces, linked by ‘shared surfaces’ to afford pedestrians the right of way over cars (see chapter 4). At the time of writing in 2017, the Hettonbury development was still not fully completed.

Figure 1. Case study developments – Top left: Nannton; Top right: Tillinglow; Bottom left: Romsworth; Bottom right: Hettonbury)

The construction of the second case community, Romsworth began at around the same time in 2003, but built on distinctly different principles to Hettonbury. Although and despite having a similar number of homes, Romsworth is created as a new self-sufficient settlement, built on former agricultural land approximately eight kilometres from the nearest town. It is an example of a standalone sustainable community, although it has never been badged as an ‘Eco-town’. It is not possible to understand Romsworth community without knowledge of its early planning history. The land on which Romsworth is now situated was sold by the landowner on the explicit premise that a *community* would be built there. Subsequent transfers of ownership occurred probably because developers were (somewhat unusually in

the UK context) tied into actually building a 'community' and not 'just another' new housing development. Eventually, the notion of community has become manifest in many important ways: through the comparatively early construction of local community facilities, including shops, café, community centre, a primary school, a doctor's surgery and a dentist (compare Romsworth, for instance, with Hettonbury, which still only has one small shop, a school and a community centre (see chapters 5 and 6); through the design of houses, built largely in the style and masonry typical of the housing in surrounding villages; through advertising hoardings compelling home buyers to 'come and build a community'; through early and ongoing practices of community-making amongst residents, including efforts to welcome new neighbours and a vast array of community events. Although construction work was taking place during the entire period of the NUNC research by the time of writing, Romsworth stood completed as community.

The third case study community, Nannton typifies the majority of new-build housing development, which took place in MKSM in the wake of the *Sustainable Communities Plan*. The development occupies a large tract of land covering around 2 km² on the edge of an existing town. Since 2000, more than 2,000 new homes, and associated roads and infrastructure, have been built by private large scale housing developers and contractors. The development contains a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes. However, typically for large developments and given the economies of scale involved, the development comprised many houses built to the same template . Unlike Hettonbury – but like many housing developments built in south-east England, post the *Sustainable Communities Plan*, Nannton does not feature any visible or exceptional forms of sustainable architecture. Unlike Romsworth – but, again, typically for many *Sustainable Communities* developments Nannton is not particularly marketed or configured as a 'community'. Indeed, promotion of the development has overwhelmingly focused on location and convenience for local, regional and national

transport links. The development includes a school, shopping precinct and outdoor play and green spaces. Additional community resources were originally planned. However, at time of writing, development of Nannton had stalled, such that the provision of community resources and spaces remains relatively modest, given the density, size and diversity of the population.

Finally, the fourth case study community, Tillinglow, exemplifies a mode of housing development that has been commonplace, post the *Sustainable Communities Agenda* and in many other geographical contexts. Small pockets of housing have been constructed on derelict, ‘brownfield’ (previously occupied by industrial premises or other usage) or ‘infill’ (occupying often-awkwardly shaped plots in between existing urban development) land. At Tillinglow, around 100 high-density dwellings were constructed on a brownfield site on the edge of an existing housing estate. The Tillinglow development was delivered by a provider of affordable and ‘shared-ownership’ housing, and – like many new-build housing developments of this scale and model of delivery – has been beset with challenges, litigation and negative publicity relating to the reportedly poor quality of materials, rapid erection and scant finish. The development includes elements of sustainable architecture such as Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) channels, photovoltaic (PV) panels and solar hot water units. However, the development did not include construction of new services and community amenities, and the site has relatively poor connectivity to adjacent housing estates.

In addition to our explicit focus on the NUNC data, throughout the book we have drawn on a range of international examples of children living and growing up in spaces of sustainable urbanism. A notable example, which we refer to in several chapters, is the *New Urbanisms in India: Urban living, sustainability and everyday life* project, funded by the ESRC (ES/K00932X/2), which investigated the everyday lives of young people and their families in

a site of urban transformation in India. This project was led by one of the authors of this book - for more information on the methodology and findings, please see the final report (Hadfield-Hill and Zara, 2017).

Research Methodology

The NUNC project team adopted a mixed-method approach to researching the lives of children (aged 9-16) in the four communities (Christensen et al., 2011) This large, interdisciplinary project was underpinned by ethnography, specifically, by up to six months participant observation in each of the four communities. Observations took place in a range of settings: in streets, squares, woodland and fields, and in public buildings and venues such as in schools; community centres, at organised clubs, community festivals and activities, such as Scouts; and in children's family homes. This part of the research was combined with up to four interviews with each of the 175 children who took part in the research across the four communities. The interviews covered the following broad topics: 'my week' – getting to know participants and their everyday lives; mobilities (journeys, transport and play) within and beyond the communities; sustainability; community participation and citizenship. All of the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed. Young participants (50 in total, either individually or in small groups) took the researchers on 'guided walks' around their communities. They led the researchers to important places (as they defined them): the walks and the informal conversations en route were recorded through a variety of media, including a GPS-enabled camera and a digital audio recorder.

In tandem with the observations and interviews, the research team integrated the use of GPS technologies into our research with young people. Young people were given a GPS device for a one week period to track their mobilities, at the end of the week the device was returned, the data downloaded and a follow-up interview arranged. Google Earth images, visualising

the tracking data formed a key component of the mobility interviews, engaging young people in the analysis of their own data and mobilities. Finally, in each of the communities the researchers co-organised a local workshop together with a small group of the children and young people who took part in the research. These events were designed to be participatory, and, in each community, attended by between 30-50 people, including child and adult residents, local community representatives, and a range of professional stakeholders (for instance the Police, youth workers, teachers, local authority planners and councillors). The workshops included a range of activities: from presentations by the young people themselves about issues that concerned them, to creative tasks (guided walk, treasure hunt, and Community Futures tree) designed to foster discussion about key themes from the research (Figure 2). The workshops offered an opportunity for data production for the research, and for participants as well as a safe dialogical space in which participants could undertake further, exploration of controversial issues, conflicts experiences, hopes and happenings involving the children and young people as residents in the community.

Figure 2: Romsworth community workshop, Future Tree activity

The research team followed, and in some cases developed important ethical guidance for research with children and the young people. The research underwent full institutional approval at the PI's University, and all of the researchers had the necessary checks for working with children in the UK. All research was consensual: the team obtained written, parental or guardian permission for each child, as well as written consent from children themselves. Given the lack of formal guidance in the UK context on the use of GPS research tools with young people, the team formulated a new and robust ethical protocol for GPS research with children. In addition, the research followed normal ethical principles surrounding anonymity, confidentiality, withdrawal and data management.

The different datasets from the project were analysed via NVivo. In writing this book, data from the NUNC project have been analysed alongside material from a range of other projects and sources. Thus, whilst the NUNC research forms a substantial resource for the thematic chapters, the book draws upon findings from a range of academic studies in contexts outside the UK (although it must be re-stated that specific studies of children in ‘sustainable’ urban communities, beyond the NUNC project, remain rare). Specifically, it draws where appropriate upon the authors’ own research in other geographical contexts.

Concluding Statement

In essence this book is a call for research, policy and practice, which is better attuned to the often-overlooked ways in which children and young people constitute *their own* inhabitations and understandings of ‘sustainable’ urban spaces, *their own* everyday geographies of mobilities and encounters, and *their own* modes of everyday participation and citizenship. We note that so far children and young people’s lived embodied experiences, understandings and insights have been overwhelmingly absent from extant scholarly and policy discourse and debate around sustainable urbanism. Given this absence, our final argument is, at least in part, a methodological one. We argue for the necessity of carry out in-depth, detailed and systematic mixed-methods research with children and young people in order to gain important and critical new insights about the lived – including deeply-sensed and embodied – everyday impacts of sustainable urbanism. The key material and writing of the book essentially represents the efforts of interdisciplinary collaborative research including well-developed, ethically-led participatory practice with children and young people living in diverse, emergent contexts of sustainable urbanism. Herewith, we hope that this book will form a platform for future equally productive multi- and or interdisciplinary ventures in the field.