

Chapter 6

Mapping children's presence in the neighbourhood

Sven De Visscher

University College Ghent, Belgium

Abstract

Within Gert Biesta's framework on civic learning, public spaces are considered as the main fields where processes of civic learning can take place. Learning is always "in place and time". Place matters, not only as a spatial background or set of conditions that can facilitate or hinder the learning process, but as a pedagogical process in itself. So in order to facilitate processes of civic learning, which are – as Biesta mentions – always out of order, we first need to understand the pedagogical meaning of the neighbourhood. Taking children's here-and-now citizenship seriously influences the role of educational research and of the educational researcher. In this contribution, I build up a methodological framework for mapping children's presence in the neighbourhood. Three questions about children's fellow citizenship underpin this framework. How are children able to be present in their neighbourhood? How are children allowed to be present in their neighbourhood? And how are children willing to be present in their neighbourhood? An analysis of three neighbourhoods in the city of Ghent (Belgium) with these questions shows that neighbourhoods differ by the opportunities and limitations they offer in relation to civic learning. Children contest and shift the spatial and social boundaries within their neighbourhood sporadically and gradually.

Keywords: civic learning; children; neighbourhood; citizenship; public space

Introduction

The framework of civic learning that has been introduced by Gert Biesta (2011), starts from the idea that democratic education should not be interpreted as the preparation of children and young people for their future participation in democratic life, but as the creation of experiences for learning from current citizenship, or the creation of possibilities to engage with the experiment of democracy. This kind of learning takes primarily place in public places. These public places are understood as places where the transformation of private wants into collective needs are made possible, or put differently, "locations where the experiment of democracy can be enacted and where something can be learned from this enactment".

In this contribution, I would like to link some of these ideas to the pedagogical discussion about children's presence in the neighbourhood. The relationship between children and the neighbourhood is not a very popular topic in pedagogical research. And wherever the neighbourhood is integrated within the pedagogical discussion, it often appears in the first place as a background against which formal, informal and nonformal learning processes, developmental processes and socialisation processes of young people take place. This approach is reflected in the international pedagogical literature in concepts like *educating cities* (Bernet, 1990), *pedagogy of the city* (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008), *community schooling* (Hiemstra, 1972) or *urban education* (Pink & Noblit, 2007). This background then needs to be planned and designed through social and spatial interventions in such a way that it meets the developmental needs of young people in the best possible way. Throughout the 20th century, the content of this prescriptive perspective evolved from a play area approach, to the *play inclusive* design of public space and the more recent child friendly and child oriented design of public space (De Visscher & Bouverne-De Bie, 2008).

In my research, however, I have started from the reality that children grow up into very different neighbourhoods, most of which don't meet the predefined child friendly criteria, which leaves the question open what the neighbourhood "as it is" means for the interrelationships between learning, citizenship, democracy and the public sphere. The neighbourhood places children spatially and

socially into society; it gives them a specific place in the world. Moreover, the neighbourhood is also made *by* its residents and users themselves, including children. The prescriptive approach largely fails to reveal the meaning children themselves give to their neighbourhood, which often goes beyond the play opportunities (see Cope, 2006). Also, it offers a narrow view on children's fellow citizenship. Different neighbourhoods create different perceptions of the social world – including children's own position in it – and different opportunities for children to act upon this world. In order to understand this pedagogical meaning of the neighbourhood, empirical research is needed that reflects the complexity of neighbourhoods and life situations of children. Starting from the neighbourhood-as-it-is, requires an understanding of the spatial, social and personal dimensions involved. This, in turn, implies that the neighbourhood should be studied simultaneously as a built environment, a collection of bricks and architectural concepts; a shared environment, a collection of people that inhabit, appropriate and give collectively meanings to the bricks and architecture plans; and as a lived environment, a collection of individual meanings, actions, and preferences within this environment.

In this contribution, I will first elaborate on the citizenship discussion, and link it to a pedagogical discussion about children's presence in the neighbourhood. What I will do is to move the perspective from the *educator* who is trying to create the best educational environments for children, to the *child* who grows up in, interacts with and acts upon very different environments. This, in turn, changes the way in which the child is given a place within pedagogical research: from a learning subject to a fellow citizen. Next, I will explain how I have translated these ideas into a methodological framework for my empirical research on children's presence in the neighbourhood.

The child as a fellow citizen

When it comes to children's citizenship, Lawy and Biesta (2006) make a useful distinction between citizenship as *status* into which children have to be introduced, and citizenship as a quality of everyday social *practices*, that children also take part of. “[Children's] citizenry is not a status or possession, nor is it the outcome of a developmental and/or educational trajectory that can be socially engineered. It is a practice, interwoven and transformed over time in all the distinctive and different dimensions of their lives” (Lawy & Biesta, 2006, p. 47).

Recognising children as actual fellow citizens has been debated before, mainly within the sociology of childhood tradition. James and Prout (1997) argued extensively for a deeper sociological understanding of childhood and to invest in empirical data on the actual social position that children take in different societies, including their own view on their lifeworlds. The sociology of childhood was successful in making children's fellow citizenship visible within society, but in doing so, it was faced with other pitfalls, like the risk of (over)generalising children's different and unequal situations into a single sociological category, irrespective of other categories such as gender or socio-economic position. Reducing children into an age-based social category with a specific culture, meanings, symbols that distinguishes them from adults can end up in different kinds of social and spatial segregation (Zeijher et al., 2007). An example of such thinking is the reduction of children's social position into a citizenship status based on play (Jans, 2004). In this line of thinking, children are recognised as here-and-now fellow citizens, but in the same time, the value of their citizenship is predefined by adult expectations and imaginations about childhood, staying close to the romantic view on childhood that precisely is trying to be avoided. Citizenship is furthermore reduced to the experience of being part of a community and having a voice – in the case of Jans by defining children's play as an expression of citizenship. The political dimension of children's citizenship tends to vanish behind the pedagogical intention to promote children's participation in the community. Or to put in the words of Gert Biesta: children's fellow citizenship is easily translated into a *social* identity, having to do with one's place and role in the life of society, without opening a perspective on the possibility of other places and roles within society.

Citizenship as a *political* identity has to do with the relationships between individuals and between individuals and the state, with their rights and duties, and with their participation in collective deliberation and decision making. Applied to the pedagogical discussion on children's presence in the neighbourhood, this implies that public spaces are not a neutral, objective reality that stands outside the people (and as such it is not correct to speak about *the* relationship between the neighbourhood and (a generalized notion of) children), but public space is constantly (re)constructed through the everyday social actions of citizens, including children. In other words, urban public space is a social construction and different opinions about (the proper use of) this space are the product of the societal context in which they arise (Massey, 1995). As a consequence, the ways in which children are present in the neighbourhood is linked with the social, cultural and historical context of the city and the relationships between residents, and takes part of the different forms of actual participation that arise within public space.

Towards a methodological framework

The dominance of a play discourse, both in defining children's social position and their spatial position within the neighbourhood, tends not to move beyond age specific, prescriptive statements about children's fellow citizenship.

Studies that start from this approach, often result in prescriptive, idealistic models about the *good* child (as opposed to unwanted behaviour of the child) in the *good* neighbourhood (as opposed to pedagogically unfit environments for the ideal development of the child). The *good* child is taught to behave and interact 'properly' within a *good* pedagogically sound environment. What is 'good' or 'proper' depends on historically, socially and culturally based norms and rules. Blinkert (2004), for example, defines a child friendly neighbourhood based on criteria such as speed limit, street width, number of skate or football spots within a reach of 200 meters, etc. The good child in the good neighbourhood of Blinkert is measured by the amount of time spent in front of a TV. Blinkert's conclusion is that well equipped neighbourhoods result in fewer hours spent by children in front of the TV. What this type of research addresses to a lesser extent is the question who defines the characteristics of a good neighbourhood, whether these are good for all children, whether neighbourhoods that don't meet these criteria are pedagogically undesirable, and how children look at their neighbourhood (good or bad) themselves. A good neighbourhood, according to the predefined criteria for childfriendliness, is for instance not necessarily a neighbourhood that is accessible for all. In other words, this asks for an explicitation of the underlying pedagogy.

The above described prescriptive approach to the relationship between children and public space departs from an individual pedagogy that tends to generalise differences and inequalities between different groups of children and between different kinds of neighbourhoods. By "individual" pedagogy I refer to the developmental psychological tradition that focuses on the (physical, psychosocial, mental) development of the individual child. A universalistic model of the ideal child (and his or her socialisation) in the ideal neighbourhood is constructed, that enables to rank neighbourhoods according to their pedagogical value, and to educate children in order to behave properly in public space. As such, the neighbourhood, like other pedagogical environments, is considered as an element that structures children's "coming into the world".

Beside this prescriptive approach, it is also interesting to explore children's different social and spatial positions and the pedagogical assumptions, opportunities and characteristics of the neighbourhood "as it is", irrespective of its play facilities or child-friendliness. From a more social pedagogical perspective, the individual child is always considered as part of a larger community, and as a citizen of a broader society. More precisely, the focus is not on the future citizenship of children, but on their here-and-now position within society. The focus shifts from children's "coming into the

world” towards children’s “being in the world”, and from a prescriptive to a more descriptive approach. Social pedagogy puts the relationship between individual and society at the basis of educational interventions. This shifts the focus from the individual child and his behaviour towards the neighbourhood as a direct influence on the relationship between child and society, and a reproduction of the social position of children in society. The individual child becomes more visible as a fellow citizen, undergoing and co-constructing the same social circumstances as adults are.

From this perspective, children are not seen as individual learners, but as here-and-now fellow citizens. The question I want to explore here is what this approach to children and to education might imply for setting up research on and interventions in relation to children’s presence in the neighbourhood. Studying the neighbourhood from a social-pedagogical perspective then requires three types of questions about the neighbourhood as-it-is, in order to gain understanding of how this space intervenes into the relation between the individual child and society. These questions contrast with the normative question about how the child *should* be present in the neighbourhood. A first question is how children are *able* to be present in the neighbourhood. This question refers to the neighbourhood as a physically built and confined space. A second question is how children are *allowed* to be present in the neighbourhood. This refers to the neighbourhood as a shared space with socialised meanings, practices, traditions, possibilities and restrictions. The third question is how children are *willing* to be present in the neighbourhood. This refers to the individual, lived experiences of children within their everyday lifeworld, and their actual presence and agency within the neighbourhood.

A three-dimensional social cartography

In my empirical research, I have translated these three questions on children’s citizenship into a three-dimensional cartography, consisting of three interrelated maps of children’s position in the neighbourhood. The first map, the socio-spatial map, describes the social and spatial conditions of the selected neighbourhoods. Different social and spatial constructions of the neighbourhood create different opportunities and restrictions. The second map, the mental map, describes how residents have created shared meanings about the features of and changes in their neighbourhood. And the third map, the personal map, represents children’s actual presence in and movement through the neighbourhood.

Being able to be present: the neighbourhood as a physically built environment

The concept of neighbourhood is generally understood as primarily a physical environment. Kearns and Parkinson (2001), for instance, define the neighbourhood as the smallest spatial unit, the area that is situated within a 5 to 10 minutes walking distance from the home. Others confine the neighbourhood based on surface criteria (e.g. the area within a range of 500 meters from one’s house) or the number of families within a spatial unit. Furthermore, Kearns and Parkinson state that the neighbourhood should not be seen as a separate or isolated space. The meaning of the neighbourhood is inseparable from the spatial context of higher spatial scales within which it is embedded. Beside the neighbourhood, Kearns and Parkinson make a distinction in urban space between the home area (the smallest scale), the locality (the broader neighbourhood or city district where the neighbourhood is located), and the urban district or region. The meaning and characteristics of the neighbourhood depend on the status, reputation and social and cultural features of its larger surrounding, and on the social, cultural and economical opportunities that the city offers. City and neighbourhood are further influenced by national politics and global developments. The neighbourhood can serve different functions, such as “relaxation and recreation of self; making connections with others; fostering attachments and belonging; and demonstrating or reflecting one’s own values” (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001, p. 2103). A different way to define the neighbourhood as a physical space is by referring to the combination of recognisable physical elements (e.g. houses and buildings) and public provisions (e.g. school, church, shops) that

transform an abstract notion of neighbourhood into a recognisable spatial unit that reflects a certain spatial coherence.

The pedagogical meaning of the physically built environment – also in relation to the question of civic learning – refers to the approach of living together and the relation between private and public sphere that are embedded within the design of a neighbourhood. Space is a meaningful witness of social and societal changes in history and present. It creates the material basis for people's social (inter)actions within their community but in the same time results from these social (inter)actions. The spatial structure of the neighbourhood reflects particular political choices and perspectives. To build something in an existing spatial structure is influenced by a particular social, economical, technological and cultural context: new residential neighbourhoods won't be built when the population is decreasing, no new offices or factories when the economy is stagnating, and no rail stations when transportation is not organised on railways (Linters, 1990). Studying children's presence in the neighbourhood includes the question what meanings, values, and perspectives on citizenship and community are included in the design of the neighbourhood, and how the built neighbourhood creates or prevents opportunities for social and cultural development, and for the experiment of democracy. In other words, what conditions are created by the neighbourhood to bring citizenship into practice? And to what kind(s) of citizenship does the neighbourhood contribute?

Spatial interventions are always somehow inspired by an image of the *possible* world, of the world *as it could be* (Shaw, 2008). I'll give two examples from my research in Ghent to illustrate this idea. In this research I have studied the socio-spatial map from different neighbourhoods by performing a content analysis on different written sources, such as demographic data, architectural plans, historical data, etc. The first neighbourhood that I have studied, Sint-Pieters-Buiten – also referred to as the *millions quarter* of Ghent – , is an exclusive residential neighbourhood. The spatial structure and the social status of the area have been strongly influenced by the world exposition that took place in this area in 1913 and the unique collection of Interbellum architecture that has turned this area into a kind of open air museum. The spatial design of this neighbourhood reflects a bourgeois-liberal approach to neighbourhood planning. This implies a public space that is subordinate to the private sphere and that mostly serves functions of personal development and expression. The design of the neighbourhood intends to reflect quietness, order and aesthetics. The aesthetic layout of the neighbourhood's public space should create the appropriate *décor* for the architectural and historical value of the private houses. The idea of a *defensive* architecture is strikingly applicable to this context. The original building guidelines included the obligation to provide wrought iron fences to close off the private gardens from the public space. This doesn't only protect and cut off the privacy of the intimate, bourgeois family from public interference, it also evokes the impression of living with one's back turned to the rest of the city. The city is physically excluded by positioning this neighbourhood at the edge of the city. But also in a social and cultural sense, the plurality and intercultural encountering that belong to urban life, are excluded from this neighbourhood.

A second neighbourhood that I have studied, Steenakker, is a social housing neighbourhood that is located next to Sint-Pieters-Buiten. Steenakker is a typical example of the Garden City movement (Ward, 1992), in the way that it has been applied in Belgium through the 1920s. Garden suburbs were supposed to be small, village-like communes at the edge of the city where working class families could own a house, far removed from the unhealthy workers' barracks and polluting factories in the inner cities. They were meant to protect the higher working class against the negative socialising influences and perils of the city, in a time when the socialist movement had a growing influence. A difference with the Sint-Pieters-Buiten neighbourhood is that the design of public space doesn't only aim to protect the private sphere of the home, but also tries to stimulate public interactions and the social cohesion necessary for the working class families in order to

support each other in difficult times. The spatial design reflects a rather communitarian approach to neighbourhood planning.

These two examples from Ghent show that a socio-spatial map can open up a lot of information on how a particular neighbourhood, by its design, creates different social and spatial opportunities. However, isolating this perspective from other, social and individual perspectives, poses a risk of spatial determinism: the positivist idea that the behaviour and dispositions of individuals and groups can be controlled and predicted by managing certain spatial conditions. People, individually and collectively, give meaning to the objects, structures and other people within their lifeworld. Silk et al. (2004), for instance, state that any definition of the neighbourhood based on physical criteria is insufficient to capture residents' subjective experience of their neighbourhood and its boundaries. This subjective experience can entail the immediate housing block where one lives, as well as the environment where family or friends live, at a larger distance from the home. Different individuals and groups develop different physical definitions of the same neighbourhood. Or more precisely, the definition of the neighbourhood is not only personally subjective, but also socially and historically constructed. As such, a second and third layer are required that complement and deepen the information from the socio-spatial map, based on collective meaning constructions and personal experiences from the users of a certain neighbourhood.

Being allowed to be present: the neighbourhood as a socially shared environment

Within sociological theories, the neighbourhood is defined as a local community, focusing on the collective meanings, practices and actions that people develop within a particular environment, and on the social and cultural opportunities that this environment has to offer. Attention is given to the social interactions that take place in the neighbourhood and the balance between the private, public and parochial spheres of interactions with the neighbourhood (Lofland, 1998). The 'private' sphere refers to the intimate relations between primary groups such as the family and close friends. The 'parochial' sphere refers to group interactions based on a certain level of commonality between neighbours, co-workers, members of a certain organisation, practitioners of a similar hobby, etc. And the 'public' sphere refers to the world of strangers, people who we don't know and with whom we have little in common. All three spheres coexist within the neighbourhood, and occur within public, semi-public as well as private places.

The socially shared neighbourhood refers to the ways in which residents (including children) give and have given meaning to their physically built environment and the spatial and social changes in it. Mapping the shared environment requires attention for the different citizenship practices that people develop within their neighbourhood. These different practices reflect divergent positions in the balance between the private and the public sphere. The *habitus* concept (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) offers a useful framework to capture these social and cultural practices within a neighbourhood. The habitus can be defined as a set of unconscious schemes that structure our situation-specific ways of thinking, perceiving and acting. Applied to the neighbourhood this means that we 'read' and 'write' the city as we have learned to think, speak and behave in (class and cultural) specific ways (Blondeel, 2005). The habitus structures people's everyday social actions, but in the same time it is socially (re)constructed through these social actions. Again, I will illustrate these ideas with reference to the research in Ghent. In that research, the shared neighbourhood has been studied with the use of oral histories. I have interviewed adult residents who grew up in one of the selected neighbourhoods and who were also living there at the moment of the research. I asked questions about the past and present of their neighbourhood, their childhood memories about being allowed, able and willing to be present in the neighbourhood, and the collective past and present meanings and practices about living together in their neighbourhood.

Residents from the Sint-Pieters-Buiten neighbourhood indicated a specific relationship and involvement with their neighbourhood that can be summarised with the expression that “*everyone tends to go his or her own way*”. People know a lot about each other and about the local community without being around each other’s houses all the time. Residents recognise themselves as a community – not necessarily as a consequence of intense mutual contacts – but because they recognise themselves as a group of like-minded. Several references were made to this idea throughout the oral histories, such as the statement that the neighbourhood mostly “attracts people who have reached something in their lives” or “who share a certain cultural capital”. Community life consists of autonomous individuals (or families) who share a local public space with other autonomous individuals (or families) and who are connected to each other as consumers of collective provisions within and outside the neighbourhood. As such, residents from Sint-Pieters-Buiten don’t conceptualise their neighbourhood primarily as context for social interactions, but rather in *practical* (i.e. related to the local provisions that they use) and *symbolic* (i.e. related to social positioning) terms (see Blokland, 2003). Citizenship and involvement with the community becomes especially visible whenever the shared values are threatened from outside: e.g. when litter and garbage disturb the neatness of the parks, or when the local government plans to install parking meters that might disturb the aesthetic quality of the public domain, or when a possible night shop might attract too many outside people into the neighbourhood. The answer to these threats is found in direct negotiations with the government and politicians about the legal rights of the residents.

In Steenakker, citizenship practices build on the identification with one or more social groups within the neighbourhood. These groups are based on a set of shared meanings, values, norms and ways of making use of public space and produce different processes of social inclusion and exclusion. In Steenakker, people from very different social and cultural backgrounds share the same neighbourhood. Nevertheless, this multicultural situation doesn’t necessarily create a multicultural community with intercultural interactions. A common theme throughout the oral histories in Steenakker is that since the early history of the neighbourhood, there have always been different social and cultural groups that have had a strong impact on the local social life and relationships. The dividing lines between these groups, however, have altered throughout history. During the 1950s the difference between “us” and “them” was mostly based on the influence of the ideological pillars. The most dominant dividing line existed between Catholics and socialists: contacts or any kind of relations between these groups were not done. This division could also be recognised in the use of public space: certain areas within the neighbourhood clearly belonged to either the Catholics or the socialists, and each other’s borders were mostly respected. From the 1970s onwards, the dividing line gradually shifted to the difference between the “original” residents from the older parts of Steenakker that were built during the 1920s-1930s and the newcomers who occupied the more recently built parts of the neighbourhood or from the new neighbouring neighbourhood Nieuw Gent who were seen as lower class. In the 1990s yet another dividing line developed, based on ethnicity. Large groups of second and third generation Turkish immigrants arrived within the neighbourhood and bought some of the houses of the deceased original residents. Each one of these dividing lines created new group identities and subgroups within the same neighbourhood. Presently, all these different dividing lines still play a role in the social relations within the neighbourhood, be it to a different extent.

Similar to the previous statement that isolating the physical dimension of the neighbourhood can end up in spatial determinism, there is also a risk of social determinism when community issues are cut off from the related physical and political dimensions. The very concept of community is indeed problematic. It covers very different, often conflicting meanings (Lynn, 2006; Shaw, 2008). For example, the communitarian tradition (Etzioni, 1998) approaches community as a shared identity, accompanied by a number of shared values, norms and meanings or a common story. Soenen (2006) calls this *thick communities*, based on sustainable, strong relationships that individuals experience as

meaningful, that are relatively constant within their lifeworld and that create the basis for a sense of social identity. A different approach rather focuses on *imagined communities*. "Imagined" is not synonymous to imaginary, but refers to the statement that the imagination of a community within the experiences of people is not always linked to real, assignable social interactions between individuals. Imagined communities refer to the mental presumptions of thinking and feeling to belong to a particular community (Blokland, 2003). They are not (necessarily) based on intense social relations but rather on the recognition of shared features, meanings, values and norms, and on the social positioning against others with other features, meaning, values and norms. In other words, community is defined as the affective sense of belonging to a certain 'us'-group (and therefore to distinguish oneself from 'the others'), based on imagined commonalities. The problem with both of the abovementioned approaches to the community issue is that they ignore the awareness that social identities are constantly changing and developing. Identity is an active and critical process that develops in relation to other people and in different temporal and spatial settings. Identities are never fixed. Therefore, a third approach to community departs from a relational framework. This approach implies that community is not seen as a collective identity or a shared set of norms and values that produce processes of social inclusion and exclusion, but as something that is realised between people, through human(e), interpersonal relationships, and through which people develop a specific awareness about what it means or *can* mean to live together in a shared space. In this line of thinking, community and social interactions are strongly connected to ambivalence. Community based on ambivalence arises from the actual social interactions (whatever these may look like or develop) among people.

Therefore, a third layer in the cartography of the neighbourhood is needed, in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the neighbourhood as a co-educator. A layer that connects the abstract and decontextualised notion of community to the everyday practices and relations from people within their neighbourhood.

Willing to be present: the neighbourhood as a 'lived' reality

The 'lived' neighbourhood refers to the differential ways in which children really move through, make use of and identify with (specific places in) their neighbourhood (as opposed to how they abstractly talk or feel about it). From a social-pedagogical point of view I am interested in the meanings that children attach to the social and cultural opportunities of their neighbourhood, and in the actual position that they take within public space. In doing so, I approach children as fully competent social and cultural agents, *by definition*. In his theory of structuration, Giddens (1997) links the everyday, contextual actions of agents to the meaning of those actions for the production and reproduction of societal structures. According to Giddens, all social actions are *structured*, this means that people's social actions are based on the existing social structures within society, which are linked to one's social position. Thereby, agents simultaneously reproduce these structures through their everyday social actions. This implies that children's presence and interactions in the neighbourhood are 'structured' by the social position that they have and by the local community that they are part of, and that they are capable of (re)producing (and hence also of changing) these social structures by their everyday actions within the neighbourhood. Again I will illustrate this with some findings from the Ghent study.

In order to gain a perspective on the variety of personal maps of young residents, a group of 39 children were asked to keep pictures about their neighbourhood for a period of 1 week. I clearly instructed the children not to take pictures of 'typical', 'beautiful' or 'well-known' places, but to focus on those places where they were actually present or that they actually passed by during that week. Afterwards, an interview took place with each child about his/her pictures. During these 'photo-elicited' interviews (see Prosser & Schwartz, 1998) children were asked to choose three pictures about which they would talk and the researcher additionally chose two other pictures. I

asked questions about what was on the picture, when it was taken, who was around when the picture was taken, what the person was doing in that place when taking the picture and why he/she had decided to take that picture. I did not restrict the interviews to the content of the five selected pictures, but I tried to assess the neighbourhood's opportunities and restrictions from children's point of view in a comprehensive way, by also asking more general questions about the neighbourhood.

The places that came out of these personal maps were, in a next step, the basis for a task-based focus group discussion in each neighbourhood. This focus group discussion was conceived as a child-guided walk through each neighbourhood, in which the participating children were asked to walk to the nodes, explore each other's views on the same places, and add extra information. The aim was to find out more about the characteristics of the different nodes. As a final step, the information was presented in an exposition during a local community event staged in each neighbourhood, acting as a vehicle to present the results to the participants and the local community and to verify the information within a larger context.

In Sint-Pieters-Buiten children's presence in the neighbourhood appeared to be rather limited. There are a number of explanations for that observation. One of them is that children have a busy leisure agenda that results from the institutionalised individualisation of their everyday use of time and space (see Kampmann, 2004). Their leisure agenda is institutionalised, because children find social and cultural opportunities mainly within formally organised (pedagogical) settings. It is individualised because the everyday use of time and space depends on the development of a personal life trajectory with personal preferences and interests. The personal maps of children living in Sint-Pieters-Buiten consisted mostly of institutional places like the school, scouts centre and church, and the routes between their homes and these places. Besides these institutional settings, children often referred to places outside their neighbourhood: private sport clubs and friends' homes, mostly situated in the richer towns outside Ghent. That leaves little time to do things within the neighbourhood's public space. Connected to this, children indicated that they feel little attracted by public space as an everyday socialising context "*because nothing really happens there*". As a consequence of the institutionalised individualisation of children's use of time and space, there remains little opportunity for informal encounters or unexpected situations within public space. Children from Sint-Pieters-Buiten are therefore easily capable of remaining within a group of like-minded peers with a similar social and cultural background, without being confronted with the broader plurality of the urban context in which they live. For some children, the exclusion of public space from their everyday lifeworld results in the perception of public space as an unfamiliar, unreliable or unsafe environment. Resulting from this situation, children identify only to a limited extent with public space within their neighbourhood.

In Steenakker, public space seems to take a more important position as an everyday socialising context for children. There is a very vivid public space within the neighbourhood, with a visible presence of children as well as adults. The social and cultural opportunities within public space depend partly upon the social group to which one belongs. Children of Turkish origin, for example, described their neighbourhood almost exclusively in terms of where different members of their family and Turkish friends lived, worked or gathered. And the formal and informal play spaces in the northern part of the neighbourhood were, to give another example, unfamiliar and even uncomfortable territory to the children living in the southern part of the neighbourhood. Still, these different groups do not live completely segregated. The different group-related patterns meet each other in certain places, which are mostly functionally unspecific or multifunctional places like a central square or road in the neighbourhood. The social interactions that arise within the neighbourhood are not only based on encounters with family, friends or familiar like-minded others, but also on the awareness of and confrontation with 'Other' people on certain places within the

neighbourhood. In some cases, these confrontations are passive and don't result in social interactions: children perceive and experience the unfamiliar other and become aware of the diversity of habits, values and meaning within the same neighbourhood. In other cases, the confrontations lead to more active interactions like conflicts or new social relationships.

Just as the other two maps should not be analysed unidimensionally, there is a risk in isolating the personal maps from the physical and social perspectives, namely a risk of individualisation and decontextualisation of children's perspectives on their social and physical environment, as is the case in some types of participatory or hyper-interpretative childhood research. Studying the neighbourhood as co-educator requires a truly three-dimensional lens that contextualises and enriches the information that results from each one of the individual perspectives involved.

Boundaries matter

The suggested three-dimensional cartography requires that the study of the neighbourhood of children as a pedagogical field, includes the combination of the three questions mentioned earlier: how are they able, allowed and willing to be present in the neighbourhood, in which the neighbourhood is understood as not just a collection of bricks, mortar and individuals, but as a social and political space. As such, this combination of perspectives, turns the attention to the boundaries within and around the neighbourhood, as well as the ways in which children simultaneously reproduce these boundaries through their everyday actions, and question/shift some of these boundaries.

Boundaries are an important concept because they shape and are shaped by social identities. Boundaries are the carriers of processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Through processes of appropriation and identification, boundaries can become carriers of social divisions and inequalities. the way in which the neighbourhood and its boundaries are socially constructed by and for children. Social class, for example, in itself does not affect the way children experience their neighbourhood. It is rather the way in which the neighbourhood is constructed differently vis-à-vis children from different social classes which affects the children's patterns of use of their neighbourhood. To put it shortly, boundaries matter: the construction of these boundaries is meaningful because they influence people's sense of social identity and they organize social space through geographies of power (Malone, 2002).

Agency implies that children co-influence the reality they are part of. It refers to the ways in which children deal with the rules and norms prevailing in their community in a specific historical and social setting, and thus also the ways in which they influence this community (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). Agency refers to the process through which children develop an identity, not against but as part of a social reality. The agency concept is therefore related to the dynamics between the social world and the individual participant.

Physically speaking, all three neighbourhoods in my research offered quite some open spaces for children to play outside. Yet, in each case, children are confronted with specific boundaries and restrictions in their presence in public space. These boundaries are connected to the spatial, social and political features of the relation between child and public space. In each case the balance between being able, allowed and willing to be present in public space is different. Of course all three dimensions are present in each of the neighbourhoods, but different focuses can be observed.

In Sint-Pieters-Buiten this balance is mostly influenced by the question how children are still willing to be present in public space. The physical design of the public space creates a lot of opportunities for children to play and meet each other: for example, there is lot of open space and there are safe sidewalks. However, children are scarcely present in public space. This observation relates to the

observation that children's everyday use of time and space is heavily determined by a busy, institutionalised leisure agenda. A situation that Kampmann (2004) refers to as "institutionalised individualisation". As a consequence, there is little room left for informal encounters in public space. In Steenakker, boundaries are mostly related to the question how children are actually *able* to be present in public space, taking into account the presence and spatial claims of other groups in public space, and the influence of their own social group on their use of time and space. And in Nieuw Gent, boundaries to children's presence in public space is mostly related to the question how they are allowed to be present in public space. This is connected to the warnings and rules that parents give in relation to places or strangers that should be avoided. Children seem to have little difficulty in accepting these rules. They are aware of the fact that they share the neighbourhood with individuals and groups who they have little in common with. However, the children from Nieuw Gent who participated in the research didn't really seem to link the perceived diversity in their neighbourhood with feelings of unsafety, as some of the adult residents did. As such, their personalised social networks within public space overcame some of the social and cultural dividing lines that adults experienced.

So at first sight, children seem to accept most of the boundaries imposed on their presence in the neighbourhood and to elaborate strategies to maximise their social and cultural opportunities within these boundaries. But a closer look shows how children perceive boundaries as a window on new opportunities. The ruling boundaries are not contested by disobedience against parents or other educators. But through their everyday presence in and use of the neighbourhood, sporadic situations occur in which some boundaries shift little by little.

Discussion: Civic learning and the educational researcher

Can educational research be seen as a democratic practice in itself? Democratic research practice starts by defining a research topic and research questions that recognise children's citizenship. In other words, the question what topics are being studied is equally interesting with regard to the development of a democratic research practice as the methods involved. As I have discussed earlier, pedagogical research into the relation between children and their neighbourhood often ends up in endless lists of criteria for a *good* or child-friendly space within the city. These so-called 'universal' child friendly criteria tell us more about the disciplinary and discursive concerns of adults (see Nespors, 1998), rather than meeting the diverse specific situations in which children grow up. Most of the time, these design principles are based on theoretical and often taken-for-granted assumptions about children's development and the expected use of public space by children. In many cases, the democratic nature of research is looked for on the level of the research methods. In this line of reasoning, research designs that enable active participation of children in different stages of the research are supposed to generate a more democratic research practice than research designs that approach children only as passive sources of information.

In this contribution I have focused on the methodological implications of a social-pedagogical approach to the discussion on children's presence in the neighbourhood. The view on children as actual, here-and-now, citizens is reflected in three guiding questions about children's presence in public space: how are they able, allowed and willing to be present in (the neighbourhood's) public space. I have argued that these questions differ fundamentally from the question how they should be present in the neighbourhood. The latter type of question departs from a rather prescriptive model of the neighbourhood that is mostly oriented at organising children's *coming into the world* in the best possible way. The former type of questions changes the scope to children's different ways of *being in the world*. Another methodological consequence from these theoretical options is that the child (and his or her behaviour, dispositions, etc) is not the object of research, but becomes a research subject. The research object is the neighbourhood's public space and the opportunities and restrictions that it holds for children to realise their citizenship. Educational research is an

intervention into the life situation of children and therefore the role of the educational researcher is not a neutral one. Taking the perspective on children on how they are able, allowed and willing to be present in their neighbourhood, raises critical questions about the democratic quality of public space within the city. As I have argued earlier, the experience from the research in Ghent show that children influence the boundaries *of* and *within* their neighbourhood steadily and sporadically through their everyday presence and social actions within this space. However, it should also be clear that the three different neighbourhoods create different conditions, possibilities and restraints for children to act upon their environment.

In that sense, my methodological framework has been limited in that it doesn't reveal the concrete learning processes or the specific democratic moments that took place in each of these neighbourhood.

The research results should however challenge us to rethink the pedagogical meaning of the neighbourhood in relation to processes of civic learning. Children are socialised into very different societal orders, with different conceptions of citizenship and community, including their own position within it. The neighbourhood is a setting where diverse citizenship practices and community practices are continuously constructed and reconstructed through the everyday social actions of its residents. As such, the research in Ghent shows for example how in a neighbourhood like Sint-Pieters-Buiten children are socialised into a bourgeois-liberal or utilitarian notion of citizenship, emphasizing individual rights and freedoms and collective civic norms and virtues. In a Steenakker, children seem to be socialised in a rather communitarian or social notion of citizenship, focused on group membership, solidarity and collective practice. These differences need to be situated within the combination of architectural and social elements and children's agency. The very observation of the different (unequal) conditions into which children live in itself already carries a political meaning, but also in terms of the civic learning opportunities *in the subjectification mode*, differences e.g. into what counts for a democratic moment and under which conditions such democratic experiments can develop can be expected.

Furthermore, the analysis shouldn't end at this point, but should be a starting point for pedagogical interventions that are inspired by *the world as it could be* (Shaw, 2008). This implies a certain normative positioning towards the possible society and the possibility of social change. At this point I clearly follow Biesta's ideas on civic learning (Biesta, 2011) in that the answer to the educational question about the neighbourhood is not to be found in turning all neighbourhoods towards a specific ideal model, a kind of new democratically inspired child-friendly framework, that aims to socialise children into (more) democratic ways of being present in the neighbourhood and of interacting with others. In other words, the normativity that I want to suggest is not a matter of imposing our own view on citizenship and democracy to others. In my opinion, the normative challenge is to understand first of all the neighbourhood as it is, and the citizenship practices as they are performed within that particular neighbourhood, in order to generate situations where democratic moments may occur that question the social order of that particular neighbourhood.

References

- Bernet, J. T. (Ed.). (1990). *The educating city. I congrés internacional de ciutats educadores*. Barcelona.
- Biesta, G. (2011). *Learning democracy in school and society. Education, lifelong learning and the politics of citizenship*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Blinkert, B. (2004). Quality of the city for children: Chaos and order. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 14(2), 99 - 112.
- Blokland, T. (2003). *Urban bonds*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Blondeel, P. (2005). *Reading and (re)writing the city: the use of the habitus concept in urban research and development*. Paper voorgesteld op International Conference 'Doing, thinking, feeling home: the mental geography of residential environments', Delft.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cope, M. (2006). Lots of Opportunity Project (LOOP): Empowering children's vision for neighbourhood spaces [Electronic Version]. Retrieved 01.12.2006 from <http://www.geog.buffalo.edu/research/geokids>.
- De Visscher, S., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2008). Recognising urban public space as a co-educator: children's socialization in Ghent. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3), 604-616.
- Etzioni, A. (Ed.). (1998). *The essentialist communitarian reader*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Giddens, A. (1997). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hiemstra, R. (1972). *The educative community. Linking the community, education and family*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Professional Educators Publications.
- Holloway, S.L., & Valentine, G. (2000). Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood. *Sociology*, 34(4), 763-783.
- James, A., & Prout, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood*. London: Falmer Press.
- Jans, M. (2004). Children as citizens. Towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood*, 11(1), 27-44.
- Kampmann, J. (2004). Societalization of childhood: New opportunities? New demands? In H. Brembeck, B. Johansson & J. Kampmann (Eds.), *Beyond the competent child* (pp. 127-152). Roskilde: Roskilde University Press.
- Kearns, A., & Parkinson, M. (2001). The significance of neighbourhood. *Urban Studies*, 38(12), 2103-2110.
- Lawy, R., & Biesta, G. (2006). Citizenship-as-practice: The educational implication of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 34-50.
- Linters, A. (1990). Bouwen in de industriële tijd: Een evenwicht tussen noden en mogelijkheden. In *De beschikbare ruimte: reflecties over bouwen* (pp. 74-93). Tielt: Lannoo.
- Lofland, L.H. (1998). *The public realm. Exploring the city's quintessential social territory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Lynn, M. (2006). Discourses of community: Challenges for social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 15, 110-120.
- Malone, K. (2002). Street life: Youth, culture and competing uses of public space. *Environment and Urbanization*, 14(2), 157-168.
- Massey, D. (1995). The conceptualization of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world?: Places, cultures and globalization* (pp. 215-239). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nespor, J. (1998). The meaning of research: Kids as subjects and kids as inquirers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(3), 369-388.
- Pink, W. T., & Noblit, G. W. (Eds.). (2007). *International handbook of urban education*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Schugurensky, D., & Myers, J. P. (2008). Informal civic learning through engagement in local democracy: The case of the seniors' task force of healthy city Toronto. In K. Church (Ed.), *Learning through community: Exploring participatory practices*. Toronto: Springer Science + Business Media.
- Shaw, M. (2008). Community development and the politics of community. *Community Development Journal*, 43(1), 24-36.
- Silk, J. S., Sessa, F. M., Morris, A. S., Steinberg, L., & Avenevoli, S. (2004). Neighborhood cohesion as a buffer against hostile maternal parenting. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(1), 135-146.
- Soenen, R. (2006). *Het kleine ontmoeten: over het sociale karakter van de stad*. Antwerpen: Garant.

Ward, S. V. (Ed.). (1992). *The garden city: Past, present and future*. London: Routledge.

Zeiger, H., Devine, D., Kjørholt, A.T., & Strandell, H. (Eds.). (2007). *Flexible childhood? Exploring children's welfare in time and space*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.