Chapter 6
Towards a Nuanced Understanding of Children's Participation and Realizing Social Justice in the Urban Realm: A Case Study in the Classroom with Ethnic Minority Children

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Abstract This chapter presents a case study of research conducted with 39 children from an ethnic minority background in the city of Enschede, The Netherlands, where we focus on understanding participants' experiences and perceptions regarding their local neighbourhoods through an experimental digital methodology using Google Maps™. The findings showcase detailed geolocated observations that can be incorporated into the planning process and hold the possibility of better addressing minority children's needs in their living environments and realizing social justice. Through our discussion of the research process and outcomes, we reflect on facilitation processes and meaningful participation of children while navigating fieldwork material limitations. The chapter starts with a brief discussion on childhood agency and participation, followed by a brief contextual description of the city of Enschede where our study takes place. Next, we highlight the recruitment process followed by a discussion of the digital methodological approach we employed to engage the participants in mapping and producing a visual archive of their positive and negative experiences in their residential neighbourhoods. Finally, we reflect on our study alongside larger debates on children's agency and participation in urban planning processes.

Keywords Children's participation · Child-friendly · Social justice · Agency · Mapping · Children's perceptions

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6.1   Introduction

Sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory planning are one of the targets of The Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Goal 11.3, SDG) (United Nations, 2015). This is specifically important for realizing social justice and inclusion of marginalised populations, including children, women, and people from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. They remain disproportionately impacted by poor living conditions and decision-making processes with children remaining one of the groups requiring strong protection and achieving a minimum of participation (Jans, 2004). As such, interest in engaging these groups in public participatory activities has been growing in recent years. In the urban realm, the "just city" theory proposes to those who can intervene in socio-spatial inequalities, such as policymakers and planners, to move beyond economic aspects of equity and distribution and incorporate other dimensions such as participation and diversity (Fainstein, 2010).

For children specifically, the declaration of their rights in The Convention on The Right of the Child in 1989 (United Nations, 1989) propelled research-based and practice-based interest in centring children's voices on issues that matter to them. However, developing participatory mechanisms that draw from children's local knowledge while accounting for context-specific limitations remains a challenging process.

6.2   Childhood Agency

Contemporary notions of childhood are predicated on the Piagetian developmental model viewing children as pre-conditioned adults and segmenting their growth, needs, requirements, and associated capacities along with a linear progression into adulthood (Piaget, 1976). In this model, active participation and agency were located at the end of this progression (Jans, 2004). However, this view was challenged by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that asserted the child as a bearer of their own rights. Articles 12 and 13 specifically address their rights to freedom of expression in all matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989), opening up the possibilities for children's participation and recognition in a world dominated by adults.

With all nations signing the UNCRC convention (Except for the US and South Sudan), attempts to translate the rights articulated in the convention into different local agendas were made with various projects under municipal, NGO, and non-for-profit models and projects. For example, in the EU, government-initiated youth councils are the most prevalent structure for participation in at least 27 countries along with semi-governmental child-focused organisations that work with/for children to promote their rights (RAND Europe & Eurochild, 2021). Such institutional councils are also present in other regions; however, they remain representational in nature as they are structured through adults' conception of citizenship and participation and

hence are considered limited in promoting children's participation and social justice (Jans, 2004). Furthermore, the binary distinction between childhood and adulthood that is inherit in the modelling of these institutions ignores diversity of individuals and intergenerational relationships, and fails to interrogate participation as an evolving discourse (Tisdall, 2015). This results in these institutions holding a symbolic value that doesn't always translate into effective influence on decision making.

Instead, an argument is made for a participatory model based on a learning process where children's play is seen as a way of giving meaning to their environment. This is paralleled by Percy-Smith (2013), who argues for the need to focus on children's daily relationships, interaction, and engagement to witness their active and autonomous mediation of their environment. In fact, James (2004) rightly questions whether childhood experiences across different cultures and within the same culture across different classes, ethnicities and genders lead us to question the significant weight given to biological factors—including age. In this regard, environmental and social contexts can enhance an individual's agency through their acquisition of cultural and social capital that allows them to mediate and reproduce these same contexts (Oswell, 2013).

In recognizing that children's practice of their agency is not only negotiated, but also mediated by gender, age, bodily forms, and collectively reproduced practices (Christensen & O'Brien, 2003), we reach a relational understanding between agency (of children) and structure (of childhood) that is influenced by 'Bourdieu's (1990) structuration theory where children mediate their social and environmental contexts, and are simultaneously mediated not only by the contexts but by others inhabiting it (Bourdieu, 1990). Moreover, although this represents a notion of 'mediated 'agency', Oswell (2013) critiques what he calls a 'categorical reduction of childhood' because this notion doesn't focus on the assemblage of processes that brings it into being. In his view, it is important to also 'understand the extension of agency along different temporalities and spatiality's' (Oswell, 2013, p. 16) and not always position it at the scale of the individual child or the collectivity of childhood.

This required researchers and practitioners to challenge adultism notions of agency, participation, and active citizenship that is conditioned by institutional processes, and encouraged exploring children's own perspectives to acknowledge their experiences and expand our understanding of how children practice their determination and agency at the local scale of the everyday (James et al., 1998).

6.3 Childhood Right of Spatial Justice and Participation in the Urban Realm

Numerous studies have pointed to urban settings contributing to the physical, social, and psychological development of children (Lynch, 1977; Simpson, 1997; Valentine, 1997). Unfortunately, with social and economic inequalities prevalent in cities today, an increasing number of urban dwellers face challenges in accessing urban amenities

and rights to their cities with children bearing the most weight of these inequalities (Bartlett, 1999). As such there has been an increased recognition of the need to strengthen people's capacities and promoting local voices (Craig, 2007). Nevertheless, child participation in municipal governance did not always take priority despite evidence of the feasibility of incorporating their issues and voices in local governance (Bartlett, 1999). Failure to address children's insights and experiences can result in living environments where children feel alienated and excluded (Gleeson & Sipe, 2006). This is evident in the limited independent mobility, the reduction of walkability (De Vries et al., 2010, Wridt, 2010), and the exclusion of children from public spaces (Laughlin & Johnson, 2011).

In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed The New Urban Agenda (NUA) as a resource for all actors and residents of urban areas in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11—Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (United Nations, 2017). The notion of social justice is embedded in the NUA as it also advocates to "ensure that all citizens have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination" (United Nations, 2017).

The NUA in its 148 article, includes explicitly children and youth as one of the groups that should participate in urban development decision-making. The signature countries commit to:

> promote the strengthening of the capacity of national, subnational and local governments, including local government associations, as appropriate, to work with women and girls, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, and those in vulnerable situations, as well as with civil society, academia and research institutions in shaping organisational and institutional governance processes, enabling them to participate effectively in decision-making about urban and territorial development. (United Nations, 2017)

Furthermore, the NUA article 42 also supports governments

> "in fulfilling their key role in strengthening the interface among all relevant stakeholders, offering opportunities for dialogue, including through age- and gender-responsive approaches, and with particular attention to potential contributions from all segments of society, including men and women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants". (United Nations, 2017) Before the NUA, UNICEF has advocated children's participation in planning processes. Participation is one of the key elements required to build child friendly cities—"promoting children's active involvement in issues that affect them; listening to their views and taking them into consideration in decision-making processes". (UNICEF, 2004, p. 4)

In its framework for action UNICEF (2004, p. 1) indicates several rights that cities have to guaranty to every child (young citizen) in order to be considered "child friendly" including rights to spatial justice and participation. Martinez et al. (2017) have classified those rights in three main groups:

Rights to spatial justice

a City guarantees the right of every young citizen to

- "Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability" [and age].

Participatory—Procedural rights/the right to participate

a Child-Friendly City guarantees the right of every young citizen to

- "Influence decisions about their city".
- "Express their opinion on the city they want".
- "Participate in family, community and social life".
- "Participate in cultural and social events".

Quality-of-life rights/the right of well-being

a Child-Friendly City guarantees the right of every young citizen to

- "Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation".
- "Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse".
- "Walk safely in the streets on their own".
- "Meet friends and play".
- "Have green spaces for plants and animals".
- "Live in an unpolluted environment".

Over the past three decades, there has been not only a growing body of research examining children's environments and geographies (Chawla, 2016; Lynch, 1977; Ward, 1978) but also an increasing number of participatory research activities exploring local living environments with children as active agents in the process (Cope & Elwood, 2009; Driskell, 2017; Kyttä, 2004; Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Valentine, 1997). These studies generated much-needed discussion on carrying out research with children, the range of methods available and frequently utilised in working with them, the significance of the perceptions they hold of their environment, the ethical guidelines on working with them, the positionality of the researcher in relation to the researched, and the overall implication of the research process on the production of knowledge.

According to Freeman (2006) many planners acknowledge the underrepresentation of children involvement in their cities and the urgent need to create an urban setting that contributes to their physical, social, and psychological development. However, these planners also feel that they lack the skills needed to develop practices that effectively take children's insights into account (Freeman, 2006). Therefore, it is important to recognize that attempting to understand children's perceptions and trying to get insights into their experiences, involves a great deal of research. This is particularly true because of the subjectivity of the elicited insights and the vulnerability of this population group.

Having said that, multiple barriers exist to children's effective engagement and participation. Among them is the view held of children as incompetent vulnerable subjects, the misconstrued notion that they lack the knowledge, experience, and needed skill to participate and form their own opinions, and the subsequent reluctance of children to participate (Lekies et al., 2009). Moreover, systematic obstacles due to their lack of political power (e.g., inability to vote) and their exclusion from the use of public spaces (Simpson, 1997) contribute to further marginalizing their voices. Even when participation is part of a community-organized activity (e.g. sports activities and/or small projects), barriers may be present in different forms including the socioeconomic backgrounds of the children, the lack of time to participate, the lack of access to the community organization, and stigma of physical or mental disabilities (Law et al., 2007; Lekies et al., 2009). Consequently, children are rarely given space for active contribution and their participation remains at the margins of an adult-centric expert society. Reflecting on their participation in municipal and governance processes in Canada, young people identified lack of funding and resources; non-continuity of participation; limited linkage to power, and lack of sustainability of process and training as main barriers to effective participation (Lui, 2004).

Meaningful participation, therefore, remains a challenge involving multi-level degrees of empowerment with most research and practice-based initiatives falling under consultation according to Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, 1992). This conceptual framework for children's participation was further elaborated on by Jennings et al. (2006) to develop a practical framework for critical youth empowerment. In their research with community youth organizations, they interviewed both adults and youth to develop six main dimensions including: A welcoming and safe environment; meaningful participation and engagement; equitable power-sharing between youth and adults; engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes; participation in socio-political processes to effect change; and integrated individual- and community-level empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41).

However, in the instances where children were given a voice, scholars have reported multiple benefits, not only to the participating children, but also to the organizing adults, and the community as a whole. These benefits include activating children's citizenship and sense of responsibility, promoting an early awareness of the environment, learning and developing a set of new skills (e.g., peer collaboration, using new tools), and finally a potential to extend the collaboration network(s) between schools, local organization and municipalities to promote more participatory activities (Frank, 2006; Wilson et al., 2007; Zeldin, 2004).

To this effect, the literature reports on different methods used to engage children in their communities. For example, Wilson et al. (2007) empowered children in an after school program through the use of photovoice to raise issues that are important in their environment and used the photos as the basis of critical dialogue and collective action plans. While Wridt (2010) utilized participatory mapping to engage children in evaluating their local neighborhoods. More recently, many researchers attempted to utilize technology in an effort to streamline the participation process. For example, Santo et al. (2010) trained children to use technology in order to collect data, analyze

information, and create maps with computers to register their experiences of their neighborhoods, while Berglund and Nordin (2007) developed a method for children to map and record their opinions in a child-friendly computerized geographic information systems (GIS) to facilitate the process of bringing their insights to the official planning process. In the next section we continue this line of investigation as we introduce a case study of working with children using computer-aided methods to engage them in recording their experiences of their local neighborhoods.

6.4 Case Study

The case study described in this chapter was conducted in Enschede, The Netherlands, in January of 2013 prior to the mass migrant movement to Europe in 2015.

Our study was sparked by an interest to explore children's perceptions and experiences of their local environmental context. By environmental context we refer to any space lived by children outside of their home. It may include not only the spatially-contiguous neighbourhood but also the school -including the space of the journey-to-school and other recreation sites where children visit and hang out (Martinez et al., 2017).

We designed the case study with a participatory methodological approach accounting for participants actively contributing cumulatively to build a spatial knowledge repository of their experiences in their neighbourhoods. The following section details our recruitment and methodological approach.

6.4.1 Enschede: Contextualizing the Study Area

Enschede is in the Province of Overijssel in the eastern part of the Netherlands, close to the German border. It is a medium-sized city with close to 160,000 inhabitants (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). From the nineteenth century onwards, the city developed into a national centre of the booming textile industry. High demand for low-skilled workers translated into shortages in the local labor market. In turn, companies resorted to recruiting employees from abroad, initially from Southern Europe but later mainly from Turkey and Maroc (Pater et al., 1989). In the late 1960s, the textile industry collapsed because of international competition, leaving the city to be one of the poorest municipalities in the Netherlands. Since then, efforts have been made to revitalize the city's economy and transform it into a modern city with a focus on knowledge-intensive industries and institutions of higher education (Enschede-Stad, 2014). Many of the non-western migrant workers, however, remained and reunited with their families and together made up about 18% of the city population in 2020 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In general, population groups with a migration history still have a less favorable position on the labor market and have a lower socioeconomic status (Jongen et al., 2020).

6.4.2 Participant Recruitment

Since the study was participatory in nature, invitations were sent to local schools in the city that offered independent curriculums. This was specifically done to facilitate possible collaborations with teachers and introduce the research as part of their planned geography lessons. The case study presented in this section was conducted with Al-Ummah School in Enschede. The school ran a ministry-approved Dutch curriculum with extra lessons and activities that are embedded in Muslim-based practices and their student body was primarily composed of children who come from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Email communication was established with the school's principal that included informational documents detailing the purpose of the research and a proposed plan of study. An initial meeting took place on school grounds where the researchers and principal discussed details of the proposed research and anticipated timeframe, along with the possible positioning of the study as part of specific geography lessons for grade 7 and 8 students. Further discussions were then held with the home teachers of these classes to discuss possible methodologies of introducing the research to their classes.

Ethical principles in working with children were considered in access and research procedures. After securing formal access to the school, we asked the teachers to get informed consent of the legal guardians of students in their classes and ensured verbal informed assent from the participants themselves on the days we were present in the school. We followed a convenience sampling approach and engaged a total of 39 children (21 girls and 18 boys) ranging in age between 10 and 11 years old. All participants came from ethnic minority backgrounds, including Bosnia, Morocco, and Turkey, with most of them being born and raised in Enschede. Most of the participants spoke languages other than Dutch, including English, Arabic, and Turkish, which facilitated one-on-one communication with the main researcher who also spoke English and Arabic.

6.4.3 Methodological Approach

Our work with Al-Ummah school was the second case study we were conducting as part of a larger research that looked at the qualities of the living environment from children's perspectives. It followed an initial case study that involved an international school in the city of Enschede where we worked with the geography teacher to design a research that involved their students in exploring the city centre area and report on their perceptions and experiences using multiple methods including: participatory mapping, photovoice, walkalongs, and interviews (Alarasi et al., 2016).

Initially, the fieldwork here aimed to conduct a parallel study methodologically while focusing on the residential neighbourhoods of the participating children. However, following an initial meeting with the school's principal, the study

approach was adapted to better suit the students' needs and to also account for the main researcher's limited capacity in the Dutch language. During subsequent meetings with the principal and the teachers for grades 7 and 8 we learned more about the school's available resources (both logistical and technical) and we further modified the design of our methodology based on the suggestions of the teachers. As a result, the case study mainly employed two methodologies including mapping and photovoice as ways of: (a) engaging students with their local neighbourhoods and (b) building their soft and technical skills in map-reading and communicating their experiences.

Considering the students' first language and the teaching medium in the school, all research materials needed to be communicated in Dutch. Both teachers of grades 7 and 8 collaborated with the main researcher to translate an introductory presentation that detailed the research aim and a step-by-step process in a child-friendly language. The main researcher introduced the study to both classes in English aided by the translated slides and instant verbal translation from the teachers. Additionally, consent and assent forms in the Dutch language were shared with both children and their legal guardians that highlighted that their participation in the study was optional and gave them the right to withdraw at any given time without consequences to their schoolwork.

The teachers of both grades surveyed students to assess whether they had access to digital cameras and/or phones with cameras. With limited research resources and with many students reporting not owning a camera at home, we redesigned our research process to include a workshop on using Google MapsTM. We did this for two reasons. First, to accommodate teachers' request of engaging their students in technical skill learning. Second, to utilise the 'street view' option of Google MapsTM as a digital method of capturing photos of their local neighbourhood for participants who did not own a camera.

A workshop took place during class time in the school's computer lab where the main researcher (supported by the home teachers) ran a demonstration for both groups (7 & 8) on the use of Google MapsTM. This included directions on how to search for a specific location via the search command, directions on turning on satellite layer to ease map readability and navigating a map through panning and zooming. Students were paired on one computer, and they were given time to play around with the maps while also allowing room for peer support and discussion. We then asked them to locate their school by entering the address in the Google MapsTM search bar, and as a group tried to navigate the map by identifying familiar landmarks to the participants. We then repeated the process by asking participants to enter their home addresses in the search bar and navigate through familiar landmarks around their own neighbourhoods. The main researcher along with both teachers had one-on-one casual conversations with participants about their respective neighbourhoods and asked them to show us on their maps what areas they liked/disliked and to support their dropped pins by street map views when available.

In the course of one week, children who had access to a digital camera photographed places that they liked and places they disliked in their neighbourhoods and attached them with a dropped pin on Google MapsTM to help identify the

a.) participant's example using a personal camera with a dropped pin on Google Maps™

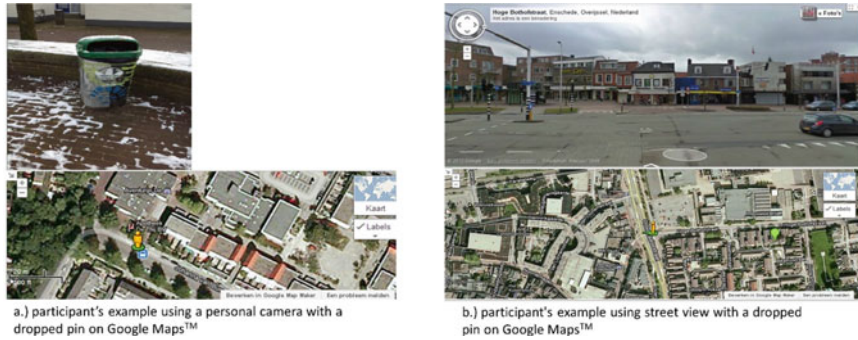b.) participant's example using street view with a dropped pin on Google Maps™

Fig. 6.1 Examples of mapped photos (*Source* Compiled and edited by first author based on Google Maps, Street Views and Photos retrieved by participants)

locations (see Fig. 6.1a for example). Children who did not own a camera utilised the street view option of Google Maps™ to show their liked and disliked places (see Fig. 6.1b for example). All participants were asked to include a short description of their photos explaining why a specific place was (dis-)liked.

A total of 190 pictures from 12 different neighbourhoods (9 of which were in Enschede) were reported back. The home teachers facilitated a translation of all descriptions to English. The translated text along with the associated photos were entered into Atlas.ti™ a qualitative analysis software that facilitates coding of qualitative data. Structural coding was initially done to retrieve excerpts of both positive and negative experiences. Next, a round of open coding was done to get a general understanding of the perceptions and experiences. This was followed by a thematic analysis to identify patterns of reoccurring themes. Finally the emergent reoccurring themes were organised and sub-categorised into social and physical qualities using the Chawla (2016) model of the living environment.

6.4.4 Findings

This section shortly highlights the case study's findings. As discussed earlier, participants reported 190 information-rich points in 12 different neighbourhoods. Table 6.1 provides a breakdown of the multiple emergent themes reported in their photo-mapping exercise. As illustrated, the themes cover positive and negative qualities that are part of the social and physical environment of the participating children.

The highest-ranking reported quality was 'variety of activity setting' with participants including pictures of places that facilitate meeting with peers and free play. Most pictures were of child-dedicated facilities that were specifically designed for play. 30 pictures came back of playgrounds, 8 of football fields, 7 for especially dedicated activity centres where children go for organised afterschool activities (e.g. karate lessons or swimming lessons) (see Fig. 6.2a). Only 5 pictures came back of

Table 6.1 Emergent qualities of participants' photos

Experiences	Themes	Sub-themes	Number of pictures
Positive qualities	Variety of activity settings and peer gathering places	Playgrounds; community centres; parks; restaurants; movie theatre	65
	Familiarity	Home; playgrounds	12
	Natural Elements	Fountains; trees; ponds; parks	10
	Shopping services	Supermarkets; shopping centres;	5
	Aesthetically pleasing	Graffiti; art installations	5
	Safety	–	2
Negative qualities	Physical danger	Cars; roads; pollution; plants and animals	33
	Sensuous qualities	Dirty; old; loud; stinky; dark	25
	Boredom	Old playgrounds; sterile spaces	20
	Fear of harassment and crime	Bullying; senior homes; youth	12

Source Made by the authors

places that facilitate unstructured free play including parks and small green areas in their neighbourhoods. Fourteen mapped points came back of small shops, supermarkets, and restaurants as places the children liked frequenting to buy food (see Fig. 6.2b).

The reporting of other positive qualities included: the presence of natural elements; the presence of beautiful features in the neighbourhoods, and safety were gendered. Mapped points here were exclusive to female participants as they mapped points of small lakes, trees, green areas, benches, decorated and colourful installations associating them with serenity, calmness and good air to breath (see Fig. 6.2c). Participants' homes as well as streets in front of their homes were also mapped (again showing up in gendered ways) as female participants mentioned their homes as a 'favourite place'. This confirms previous findings that associate a sense of familiarity and safety the children felt with their immediate surroundings (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2009).

Negative features mapped included old buildings, abandoned green areas, public phone booths, and trash cans, and these were associated with words like ugly, old, and dirty (see Fig. 6.3a). These negative sensory experiences also extended to other mapped points as 8 pictures were of different places where a participant experienced loud noises and/or bad smells including pictures of construction sites, litter, major roads with heavy traffic, and green areas where they reported people not picking up after their pets. Moreover, 20 mapped locations were associated with boredom including pictures of play fixtures in playgrounds, empty green areas, bus stops, and

a.) 'I like it because I can play there with friends'
(female participant)

b.) 'Here is the shopping center. I like it because it
is fun and you can get things with your friends'
(male participant)

c.) 'I love this piano. It is beautiful and
fun and you can play with it'
(female participant)

Fig. 6.2 Examples of mapped positive qualitiess (*Source* Compiled and edited by first author based
on Google Maps, Street Views and Photos retrieved by participant)

local streets in their neighbourhoods. In all these locations, participants cited sterile
features that did not respond to their needs. For example, adult-centric places like
the bank showed up in this category, as well as different bus stops where participants
experienced long wait times. Also, the playgrounds that were mapped and associated
with boredom, did not respond to our participants' age-group needs and only catered
for younger children.

Themes of both physical and social danger were also reoccurring as partici-
pants reported on their concern for safety. Heavy traffic topped the pictures repre-
senting physical danger as 16 locations were mapped of major roads with experiences
communicating difficulty crossing, accidents taking place, and collision injuries (see
Fig. 6.3c). Fear for safety was also reported along with pictures of dark streets under
crossing bridges and streets covered and shaded by large trees (see Fig. 6.3b). Detailed
experiences also showed up here with some mapped points included narratives of
fear of falling in small pits, fear of being stung by specific plants (e.g., cactuses), and
fear of dogs.

Under social danger, participants reported fear of harassment and crime in areas
of their neighbourhoods where they experienced bullying, along with areas where
older youth (referenced in the participants' narratives as 'gangs') hang out and drink,
as well as old nursing homes where they came across unfriendly seniors.

a.) 'I hate it because the telephone is old and almost nobody uses it'
(female participant)

b.) 'I sometimes find this a dark and scary place because there is no light'
(male participant)

c.) 'I don't like it because here it is dangerous and there are a lot of cars'
(male participant)

Fig. 6.3 Examples of mapped negative qualities (*Source* Compiled and edited by first author based on Google Maps, Street Views and Photos retrieved by participants)

6.5 Discussion

The case study discussed here was completed following recommendations of city planners in Enschede to work with children in their residential neighbourhoods to gain contextual knowledge of the local living environment (Alarasi et al., 2016). The findings reported on in the previous section illustrate children's unique ability to record detailed observations about their environment that are valuable to planners. They clearly indicate children's capacity to participate in planning activities and provide observations that are valid in informing local planning policies that aim to better address children's need in their communities. The findings also highlight the importance of grounded knowledge produced by the children themselves when reporting their unique experiences and observations as a mode of claiming their space in the city. According to Carroll et al. (2019), this can open possibilities to urban spatial justice, especially when the observations challenge the adult hegemony of the city.

Considering the ethnic minority background of the children, it is crucial to reflect on the rights that cities must guaranty to every child, to realize spatial and social justice, and be considered "child friendly". In particular "be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability" UNICEF (2004, p. 1). Reflecting on the different themes emerging from the mapped photos, we can identify observations corresponding to children's rights in cities as set by UNICEF and classified by Martinez et al. (2017). For example, in mapping different activity settings including community centres, parks, and libraries,

participants touched on their procedural rights to participate in community and social life as well as their rights of well-being to meeting friends and having green spaces. Moreover, in mapping locations and qualities that negatively affected them (e.g. streets with cars; dark streets; and bullying) participants indirectly commented on their rights to walk safely in the streets, to live in an unpolluted environment and to be protected from abuse.

We can also make an argument for the effectiveness of the employed mapping methodologies in engaging children in communicating and registering their experiences and in promoting their civic education in a classroom setting (Rubel et al., 2017). We approached this study attempting to create a participatory exercise that accounts for the agency of children. Throughout our research design process that was navigated while accounting for fieldwork material limitations including language barriers, time restrictions, and access to technological devices, we recognized participatory activities as a complex multi-layered structure. In doing so, we intend on emphasizing the limited notion of the 'agentic child' and stressing the need to examining agencies extending beyond the capacity of the child.

In this regard, Prout (2004), insists on finding ways to conceive of childhood that transcend biological determinism, and embrace hybridity and multiplicities. One way of establishing this is through Actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 1996). Using the metaphor of networks, this theory suggests that we can conceive of childhood as 'a collection of different heterogeneous orderings' (Oswell, 2013, p. 70). Agency in this sense becomes infrastructured and distributed across a complex network of agents where children become hybrids of 'child-computer-camera-thing' with networks providing more openness to new actors resulting in continuous and endless proliferations, iterations, and combinations (Prout, 2004).

Reflecting on our fieldwork, we contend that advocating for children's participation without making appropriate provisions is potentially tokenistic and unethical. Here, Veale (2006) stresses the ethical obligation on the researcher's part to be aware of the historical and socio-political experiences that are part of the personal and collective identities of ethnic minority children and acknowledge these dynamics in a way that allows for a responsive research process.

We therefore argue for the need to also start reflexively situating ourselves as a node in a complex system that enables children in becoming active in reproducing their own structures and their associated spaces. We need to examine our position as researchers who are removed from childhood spaces yet interested in exploring them. We need to reflect on our 'node(s)' and/or our reflexive actions and the potential they hold in extending or hindering our subjects' agencies.

Tools that enable the production of embedded visualisations (i.e., the map; the camera; the computer) become an extension of agency since the child is viewed as a hybrid actor of 'man–machine' (Büscher & Urry, 2009; Prout, 2004). In this sense, agency is not thought of as discursive, but rather as material, heterogeneous and distributed across social, technological, and natural resources and media (Oswell, 2013, p. 61). Agency in this sense can be supplemented and extended beyond human capacities, opening up endless possibilities for (re-)negotiation and (re-)production of socio-spatial experiences, processes, and structures (Prout, 2004).

6.6 Conclusion

Through a detailed account of our methodological approach, the chapter offers a discussion of children's participation in planning processes and presents a critique to limited notions of children's agency.

We argue that by discussing the messiness of working with children, we can decentre children's agency from the individual child to a relational embedded infrastructure that extends beyond the human capacity of the child. This conception of agency helps us in expanding our understanding of participation as we continue working towards realizing social justice and finding mechanisms that ensure 'inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels' (Goal 16.7, SDG) (United Nations, 2015).

To conclude, it is important to note that these various models and theorisations demonstrate how agency can be partial, conditioned, and situated beyond the individual child. Furthermore, even though the literature suggests that we need to tune into the scale of everyday life and attend to children's competencies rather than their limitations, we need to be attentive in not getting focused solely on the microgeographies of childhood. To this effect, Actor-network theory (Latour, 1996) and the idea of networks may provide an opening to help us move to a multi-scalar analysis that will enable us to examine webs of connection between local experiences, global processes, and reproductions of childhood (Christensen & O'Brien, 2003).

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