

Young people and local power geometries. The intertwining of social class, gender and ethnicity in public spaces

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Abstract

In the urban public spaces of Helsinki, Finland, the pluralistic cultural and social practices of young people and the authorities repeatedly take place. This chapter looks at a selected area of Helsinki, one where the population varies and where questions of social class, ethnicity and gender are not just intertwined but are made visible through a contested use of public spaces, in which different 'power geometries' (Massey 1994) are traced. As well as contextualizing these cases within the formal state, such as Government Acts on education, youth work, gender equality and the current political atmosphere, I assume that the building of respectable and active citizenship takes place in informal social relations. These processes of building 'urban citizenship' (Gordon 2007) are looked at through power geometries, and balances formed in different urban spaces such as schools, youth clubs, shopping centres and the streets. The belonging to, or marginalization from, urban space is strongly connected to social, ethnic and gendered orders. The everyday social orders of who is who, and who is respected and valued, are built in these different urban sites, orders that intertwine with gender, ethnicity and social class.

Introduction

Young people and their relation to and identification with public, semi-public and private places have been researched for a number of years in many parts of the world, including Finland. Youth groups or cultures are often identified by their place, and spaces are markers of identities, for example suburban youth (Lähteenmaa 1991), the boys of 'Koskela', a suburb of Helsinki (Louhivuori 1988), street corner society (Whyte 1943), club culture (Thornton 1995), girls' horse stable culture (Tolonen 1992) and girls' bedroom culture (McRobbie & Garber 1986).

In the light of youth research, the questions of social identity, belonging, marginalization, citizenship and urban education often have spatial dimensions. Here, young people's relationships to urban space and school space are inspected in view of gendered, classed and ethnic informal practices. And, vice versa, I claim that the social orders of everyday life are formed and reformed within practices of using the space. These informal spatial practices are also reflected in formal legal rights and the current political atmosphere.

In this chapter the pluralistic cultural and social practices of young people are traced within the context of urban spaces. Special attention is given to physical and social spaces, such as schools and shopping centres, to show how the social and spatial are intertwined. How the rights, abilities and will to use the space and act as 'active citizens' in it are central to young people's belonging, is also examined (see also Gordon 2007, p. 447). In addition, the changing power geometries of local places (Massey 1994) are traced.

Young people's resources and possibilities to use urban public space as active citizens vary. The chances of acquiring the potential respected membership of a community are strongly framed and intertwined with gender, class and ethnicity (Skeggs 2004). I will show how the use of public space has varying and contested meanings in the minds of a group of young people who have taken part in the present empirical study conducted in eastern Helsinki youth clubs, schools and urban spaces in 2008 and 2009.

According to Elisabet Öhrn and Gaby Weiner, urban education refers to interrelationships between poverty, immigration, and poor schooling often in inner city areas (Öhrn & Weiner 2007) where the quality of the neighbourhood is central. 'When accounting for patterns of pupil behavior and achievement in schools, the location of neighborhood remains connected to social and cultural behavior' (Öhrn & Weiner 2007, p. 400). In the Finnish context, and more specifically, that of the City of Helsinki, researching urban education is a rather different matter. Instead of being deprived, inner city schools in Helsinki are more like elite schools, often specialized in certain subjects like languages, math, music or sport. However, the questions of poverty and social inequality as well as class, cultural patterns, being an immigrant and educational equality are valid and applicable in suburban areas surrounding the city centre of Helsinki. In this chapter I present a suburban area in eastern Helsinki, not particularly poor or problematized, but which if compared with other areas of Helsinki does feature some social, cultural and economic differences, as shown by social indicators. It is a district of small semi-detached private homes, and rental housing owned by the City of Helsinki. According to the publication 'Helsinki by Districts 2011' (City of Helsinki Urban Facts), the proportion of people with university-level education in the area (in 2010) was approximately 30 per cent (the national average is 38 per cent). The unemployment rate was approximately 11 per cent, with the average being 8 per cent in Helsinki proper. Roughly 15 per cent of the inhabitants have a first language and nationality other than Finnish; in the area's western parts it is 6 per cent.

In eastern parts the proportion of 7-15-year-olds is approximately 10 per cent, and in some western parts 6 per cent. (See http://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/11_03_30_Tilasto_hki_alueittain_2011_Tikkanen.pdf, see also Helsingin tila ja kehitys 2013)

Here, I continue to trace what Tuula Gordon (2007, p. 447) stated, that cities can be studied ‘as political spaces where rights and duties of citizenship can be enacted.’ In urban spaces, moreover, pluralistic practices that intertwine with social class, ethnicity and gender, are traced. My starting point is similar to Gordon’s: that local areas contain formations of political spaces where processes related to belonging, inclusion and exclusion are played out and contested.’ Furthermore, I will reflect on certain *informal* cultural practices of young people in the context of a specific district in eastern Helsinki. Before doing so, however, I explain some *formal contexts* by giving examples of Finnish education and youth work legislation, and will also make reference to the current political discussion and atmosphere.

Official Finland and equal rights

Finland is a country where equal rights have been valued and promoted, as reflected in a large body of legislation. For example, the Basic Education Act states that ‘The purpose of education referred to in this Act is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life.’ And: ‘Education shall promote civilization and equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives.’ (Basic Education Act 628/1998.)

In addition to promoting civilization and equality, Finland officially supports the pupil in becoming a *responsible member* of society, referring to the Protestant ethic of earning one's right to be a citizen through bearing responsibilities. In addition, the Youth Act, which concerns youth policy and applies to persons under 29 years of age, goes even further by aiming to promote *active citizenship* and empowerment, based on values such as equality, multiculturalism and internationalism.

‘1. The purpose of this Act is to support young people's growth and independence, to promote young people's active citizenship and empowerment and to improve young people's growth and living conditions.

2. The implementation of the purpose is based on communality, solidarity, equity and equality, multiculturalism and internationalism, healthy life styles, and respect of life and the environment.’

Youth Act (72/2006) (webpages of the Ministry of Education and Culture, unofficial translation)

However, at the political level these themes of citizenship and multiculturalism are contested. The themes of ethnicity, multiculturalism and racism arose in political consciousness with the success of the ‘ultra- nationalistic’ True Finns party in parliamentary elections in the spring of 2011, and again in 2015. In 2011 the True Finns won over 19 per cent of the popular vote and in 2015 formed part of the coalition government. In addition, journalists, politicians and researchers have been harassed for being too ‘immigrant friendly’, and on many public webpages the amount of hate speech has increased. Some MPs have also made openly racist comments. On the other hand, strong opposition, including a spontaneous movement called ‘We have a dream’, has arisen in social media and on the streets of many cities. Some of this socio-political context was already evident in the

school and street atmosphere while collecting the data for this research, and is important to understand it as a background to the present chapter.

Questions of gender equality have also been at stake in the agendas of Finnish state policy.

According to the Act on Equality 8.8.1986/609, passed in 1986, women and men are to be treated equally:

‘The objectives of this Act are to prevent discrimination based on gender, to promote equality between women and men, and thus to improve the status of women, particularly in working life.’

Therefore in the eyes of the law women are equal to men, and this is to be promoted by national and municipal organs, employers and educational institutions. The discrimination and harassment of women are also forbidden by law, and compensation is to be expected if it occurs. In addition, a quite liberal law on same-sex marriage was passed by the Finnish Parliament on 28.11.2014, again with lively political discussion both for and against it.

Legislation concerning education, youth work and gender equality reflect the values of the parliament and thus of the whole nation. That is, equal rights, active citizenship and nondiscrimination are mentioned in many laws, and are practiced by public administration and also many NGOs and development projects. It is, however, interesting how these (also contested) equal rights, memberships, citizenships and responsive memberships of society are played out in the everyday lives of young people in Helsinki, where the present research project’s data has mainly been collected. Later, I will turn to particular cases of experienced urban space, citizenship and equality, as well as rights and belonging.

The practices of spaces, and different shades of the power geometry

I claim that the political, social and physical spaces, as well as formal and informal ones, are closely related with each other. In my understanding, both place and space are deeply relational, and intertwine with the social and ‘mental’ (see Massey 1994). Doreen Massey sees the spatial as socially constituted and the social as spatially constituted. Both space and place are seen as ‘natural objectives’ but dependent on social relations. Places can be seen as networks of social relations, and Massey uses the term *power geometry* to emphasize how groups and individuals are differently positioned in these networks, and in relation to each other. She also claims that the identities of places are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by their counter-position to them (see Massey 1994, p. 121).

One’s relation to space is therefore also social – and one can have a feeling of belonging or of being dominated, or one of being marginalized in relation to a particular space. Katrine Fangen (2010) has distinguished several aspects of marginalization: educational and labour market exclusion, as well as e.g. spatial, relational and socio-political exclusion, in relation to family, friends, civic society and leisure activities. Elsewhere I have discussed educational transitions and exclusion, along with leisure activities and friendships (see Tolonen 2013). Here, I concentrate on the relationship between spatial and social aspects, and how these resonate within society as a question of belonging or as one of urban citizenship, meaning educational practices in different urban spaces (see Gordon 2007; Öhrn & Weiner 2007). Here the different institutions and spaces used by the young in the area form local political and social power geometries which are related to each other. Examples are presented later in the chapter.

My claim here is that local social gendered, classed and ethnic orders are performed in local schools, streets, youth clubs and shopping centres. Even though both gender and ethnicity studies have histories of their own, gender and ethnicity are defined here as symbolically, culturally and hierarchically marked. They are seen as everyday action that is repeatedly performed according to the local gendered, classed and ethnic orders of everyday life. (For more on gender and class see Anthias 2005; Butler 1999; Jokinen 2004; Skeggs 2004; Tolonen 2001; and on ethnicity, Essed 2002; Hall 1990; Rastas 2005 and 2009.) These orders are local, but formed historically through the relationships between domination, social division and social class (Skeggs 2004), as well as through current national political agendas.

The examples presented in the next sections are drawn from empirical data consisting of 39 interviews with young people aged 13-17 years, of whom 23 were boys and 16 were girls. In all, 33 interviews were conducted in the Helsinki area. Other interviews were carried out in the small north-eastern Finnish city of Kajaani, known for its paper industry but also high rate of youth employment. Here, however, it is the Helsinki data that is referred to, and more specifically, data collected in eastern Helsinki to describe the power geometries (Massey 1994) of a particular suburban area from various points of views.

In addition to the interviews of students and some parents, the data include ethnographic observations, photos, pictures drawn by students, as well as discussions with teachers, youth workers and police. The data were collected mainly in youth clubs and a school in Helsinki in 2008-2009 as part of the research project 'Young people's leisure time' funded by the Youth Research Network, and the University of Helsinki's 'Material formation of the family' project. The names of all the informants in this study have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

School space and youth clubs: divisions and encounters

My analysis is inspired by Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000, p. 53), who distinguish three layers of the school: the official, informal and physical. The official school is stipulated in the documents of the school and the state. The informal school means socio-cultural practices and interaction other than instruction between students and between students and staff. When focusing on the physical school, the above researchers examined the possibilities and limitations offered by school buildings and spaces (see also Souto 2011; Tolonen 2001).

The school is an important site of becoming a formal and active citizen (see Gordon 2007). It is a space for education and career, and also social control and policy. At the formal level of the school, one can gain respect through the positive assessment of school work. Here, it is the informal and physical school that will be primarily referred to when analysing the everyday social orders created by young people. The informal school is a level dominated by peers, and where another kind of value of the self is formed (Souto 2011; Tolonen 2001). In accordance with Carol Gaskell (2008), I see that the school acts as a space where respect and reputations can be fought over and negotiated. Further, the school is an ideal space for negotiating social status, reputation and 'social and active citizenship' since there the dynamics of negotiations can be witnessed and redistributed by school peers and also brought to the street (see also Manninen et al. 2011; Nayak & Kehily 2008; Tolonen 1998 and 2001).

At this informal level, different styles and social positions can be distinguished. One of the styles relates to official school, that is, of being a successful student (with good grades and motivation)

(see also Willis 1977). One of the social positions relates to informal youth cultural styles (sports, computers, popular culture), and in addition, another relates to ethnicity. Young people read these styles and social positions in sensitive and innovative ways, and situate themselves socially in relation to both formal school (grades) and informal school (youth cultural styles, ethnicity) (see Souto 2011; Tolonen 2001).

As one interviewee, Tia, a 15-year-old girl from a Finnish working-class background said about her classmates, and herself:

Researcher: What sort of youth cultural styles can you point out in your school?

Tia: There are different styles of rockers, the ordinary ones, then the heavy ones, then Lizzies, and then there are all sorts of different groups of people (...) To be honest, no one in our class really likes people from abroad/immigrants. Except I don't discriminate against them.

Despite her classmates' attitudes, Tia distanced herself from this power geometry and prejudiced thoughts and actions – not out loud, but by avoiding these boys at school. Another student of the same school situated himself in the social setting through youth cultural styles and school success, but also in relation to his immigrant background:

Arif: There are heavy rockers, there are those who don't study, and who do; there are ordinary Finns, and then foreigners (=immigrants), and I am mostly with the immigrants. Then there are the racists ones, and those who do sports, the ones who play with computers and talk about them (...) I am among the foreigners, and those who study.

I visited this school for some months, interviewing the young people about their leisure time, and writing down my observations. I mainly saw peaceful events but at times I also witnessed racist bullying among the boys. Some of these young people appeared to be skinheads: along with their racist opinions, they wore pilot jackets, jeans and army boots. They used mental tactics to control their classmates and their public opinions, and some attempted to control the school space in physical ways, such as standing like a guard in front of the class, and staring at certain students. I never saw them touching anyone, apparently because I was present, and they also had an active and firm classroom teacher who did not tolerate such behaviour. But it did affect the social atmosphere. Occasionally other boys in their class took part of the teasing, like the ‘hockey player’ in the next example.

Research Diary 4th of May 2009: I went to school this morning before 11 and hung around in the corridor where ninth graders congregate(...) Some students I knew were present, and one ninth grade boy (a hockey player) teased a Somali boy. The Somali boy walked upstairs and this bigger boy tried to prevent him, clearly wanted to give a performance about teasing this smaller and darker boy. He mentioned something about the boy’s big brother. A teacher came and stopped this unfair wrestling. The bigger boy had a hesitant smile on his face, but I did not see the smaller one smiling. This was not a game between friends.

I could see these ‘Finnish boys’ (in skinhead outfits) upstairs, and downstairs there were more immigrant children and their friends. This social line was not always kept, and different groups of young people seemed to gather in different places. --

I learned that the spaces and social orders of everyday life seemed to go together in this school. While carrying out the interviews I also learned that the students with racist attitudes did not like certain places in the suburb. Further, there seemed to be a strong social and physical division of

space in the school – a certain power geometry or ‘balance’ was evident at the time. The informal school was divided physically and socially into ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ (cf. Souto 2011). Kerstin von Brömssen and Signild Risenfors (2014) have written about spatial distinction as expressed at the ‘immigrant corner’ of one Swedish school. As in this Swedish research, the students with an immigrant background in my study used their corner downstairs as a strong place for identity work. It was socially loud, with the students concentrating on having fun there during the school day, similar to the findings of von Brömssen and Risenfors (2014). Further, the students in this space presented themselves as proud multicultural persons, and had an ironic relationship to such words as ‘refugee’ and ‘immigrant’ (see also Haikkola 2011; Tolonen 2010). There seemed to be more boys at the corner than girls, but ‘everyone’ was welcomed if they were friends of the people there. I did not observe as strong a social hierarchy among the immigrant background students in this school as did von Brömssen and Risenfors (2014), where even the seating order was set. To the contrary, this school had a changing ‘everyday social order’, based, however, on ethnicity and gender.

In brief, the everyday social order was continuously made and remade within the power geometry of the school space and social space. However, it was not neutral, free, similar or equal for everyone. One’s position in this order was tied to divisions established by gender, ethnicity and class. The school was in a mixed suburb in terms of social class and ethnicity, and also the number of boys and girls was similar. Working-class boys in particular seemed to be more street-wise and not so interested in education and official school than, for example, middle-class girls and a number of ethnic minority youth. Some of the school’s social and spatial power geometries were constructed through cultural style, ethnicity and gender: the young people actively read each other’s styles and ways of publicly acting in the school and on the street (see also Gaskell 2008),

drew up the social categories, and decided who belonged to which group and in which position. Even the youth-culture options were not open for all (see Tolonen 2013).

As well as the school, I visited several youth clubs in the area, and observed different communal histories and power geometries in them. Unlike the school, entering the youth clubs was clearly voluntary: young people could choose where and with whom to spend their leisure time.

Researcher: I have been to the school and have a feeling that there is segregation between immigrant young people and others. What do you think about this? And there are also some conflicts at school.

Youth worker: Well, one can see in our youth club that the immigrant youth are one big group, like based on boys from African countries and then some others like Russians or boys from Kosovo will join them. But here they get along. On the other hand, some more quiet Finns are not familiar with their noisy ways and don't hang around with them.

Researcher: Any differences between the youth clubs nearby?

Youth worker: Well this used to be a strongly Finnish club. Then we had one youth worker who started to ask young people with different backgrounds to join in, and it was deeply contested if the immigrant young people could join. There were fights over it outside. But honestly, I think we need to have multicultural clubs. The immigrants have come and have stayed.

At this time the situation at the local youth club was peaceful, but it had not always been. Also, other youth clubs in the Helsinki suburbs have been in a state of change, being contested due to the everyday local gendered and ethnic orders (see also Honkasalo 2011; Perho 2010). Local groups

may dominate some clubs, and this may be the case especially in suburban settings. Usually the youth clubs situated near the city centre attract young people from the suburbs who wish to take part in some special activity (computer club, theatre, music) (Cf. Kivijärvi 2015, 2010 and 2013), some of them dominated by girls. The local youth clubs have frequently been used by those who have been keen to stay and spend time in their own neighborhoods, having an attitude of neighbourhood nationalism. Working-class and immigrant boys often dominated the local youth clubs, but at times working-class and a group of girls with various immigrant backgrounds also found their way there (see also Kivijärvi 2015; Tolonen 2010 and 2013).

Such articulations of the power geometry (Massey 1994) of the school and youth centres were not born in a vacuum. As mentioned earlier, from the perspective of social class, this neighbourhood's educational average was slightly lower than in other parts of Helsinki. However, there were families with academic, as well as working-class and immigrant backgrounds. The educational background and work status of the families actually varied very much. Thus, at school one could find young people with various backgrounds, but those I met at the youth club were mainly boys from a working-class background.

In the schools and youth centres I visited in eastern Helsinki, 20 to 40 per cent of the young people could be identified as having an immigrant background, and at least 12 of my 33 interviewees in Helsinki had immigrant backgrounds as well, with either one or both parents having moved from another country to Finland. In this particular suburban area the question of dealing with multiculturalism and being an immigrant was important, and was often dealt with by young people in different, often gender-specific ways. Not just segregation, but also togetherness was evident. The young people said they formed spontaneous football teams of 'foreigners' or 'refugees' against

‘Finns’, even though they may have had an immigrant background but were not necessarily refugees – these terms were used as (ironic) identifications and ways of showing belongingness while playing with and against each other, and can be interpreted as *neighborhood nationalism* (Back, 1996; Gordon 2007; Kivijärvi 2015), meaning here a feeling of togetherness among the working-class and ethnic minorities. Girls, too, told of participating in the games, even though these urban articulations of neighbourhood nationalism through football were dominated by boys.

The shopping centre as contested urban space: A wild youth club or relaxing leisure site?

The local shopping centre was rather well equipped, with many culture and sports services and local shops along with a large food store. Local services, as well as a metro station and bus stops were situated near the centre, meaning that it was a central and focal connecting point for almost all the inhabitants of the area, not just young people. Further, a kind ‘field struggle’ over this urban space seemed to be going on between the different actors.

The local shopping centre presented a very different place from the perspective of adults. Once at a meeting in one of the local schools, teachers, youth workers, police and some parents debated the leisure practices of young people in the area. I talked with two local police officers, and they apparently saw the shopping centre as a potential crime scene: they told me that many different kind of drugs were on their way in, and alcohol use was decreasing. Young people would sell anything they could get hold of, even medicine from their parents; at times they sold harder drugs. The police felt they were unable to control this unless someone committed a crime, then they could do a drug test. Sometimes they also got calls from the shopping centre concerning shoplifting or

some nuisance, mainly bad behaviour. Especially during the winter, young people spent a good deal of time in the shopping centre. The police officers estimated approximately 30 ‘regulars’ daily, school hours included. According to them, the youths ran around, behaved badly, walked into people and pushed. They also congregated in the nearby park, which according to the adults caused problems. The police were frustrated by their behaviour. The police also told me that other young people avoided the shopping centre, as they were afraid of the youth gangs there. In addition, one youth worker commented on the private security guards who kept order there in addition to the police: they were young themselves, and the young people knew how to provoke them.

The local authorities seemed to have a joint mission – to solve the youth problem in public urban space and correct the power geometry dominated by some young people. Evidently the young people in question acted as active citizens in public space, but did this in a wrong and not very responsible way, resulting in being perceived by other citizens as a threat. This united the different authorities (see Pyyry 2015; Tani 2011). The youth workers also had co-operated with the police and social workers, which they felt was positive and useful, with new young people finding their way to the youth clubs which offered support and supervision. They claimed that young people caused trouble at the shopping centre, and called it ‘a wild youth club’.

What about the young people themselves? How did the local youth see the very same place? What would different young people say about this place, and what kind of social practices and power geometries were to be found there as a public space?

I interviewed Oskari, a 15-year-old boy from a working-class background, who had quite poor school motivation and success, and he expressed a high level of interest in hanging around at the shopping centre with friends:

Oskari: Well we hang around here and there, sit down and do something.

Researcher: With whom?

Oskari: Depends who turns up there. (...) Well we see each other there (in a certain place) and meet, so we don't have to call each other. You just go there. We then go somewhere else, or just stay there. (...) There is this place close to stairs, behind them. That is where we sit.

Researcher: You sit and talk then (...) Have you ever been in trouble? Like with the guards? I interviewed some youth workers, and they say some of you do get into trouble.

Oskari: Yeah. With the guards. Sometimes the guards come over and then some of us start to argue with them, if we are bored. It is fun to irritate them, we get something to do, and some fun also (...) With all the authorities, it's fun to be mouthy with the police.

Researcher: Well how often do you hang around there?

Oskari: Almost every day.

The shopping centre seemed to offer him a pleasurable place with a large community of his own, where everyone can be friends, and one can spend time without the demands of school success or goal-oriented hobbies. For him, it was simply a pleasure to be in a city space as a 'flexible citizen' (cf. Gordon 2007; Ong 1999; Pyyry 2015), to emphasize social togetherness. Oskari did not see

himself and his friends as active in petty crime, as a nuisance to others (asserted by the police) or as wild youth (asserted by the youth worker). However, he did agree that they provoked the guards or other authorities – if they were bored (cf. Hebdige 1985; MacDonald & Shildrick 2007; Whyte 1943).

Oskari was an example of working-class boy who spent his time mostly in local urban space with other working-class and immigrant friends, but he also moved around the city. Similarly, some of the girls in the study spent their time in other Helsinki shopping centres, not here in the local one. Nelli, in the next example, was a working-class girl who did not particularly like school and was intent on vocational training. She, too, avoided the local shopping centre. In her leisure time she more often sought relaxation with friends than action. She said she liked to play outdoor games and spent much of her free time at the local youth club. She did not like the young people at the local shopping centre: she felt their way of behaving in this public space was not her style, since they acted tough and immature, and not responsibly.

Researcher: So you don't spend time in the shopping centre?

Nelli: No, I really don't (...) Those who hang around there, they pretend to be drunk or something, they like to present themselves as tough (...) I don't like to spend my time with them. They are so childish.

Nelli's friend Milla was also from a working-class background, and liked to spend her time at the youth club in a more private girls' group with immigrant background girls, rather than with many people in a public space. Being in this group made her feel welcome instead of like an outsider.

Milla: I mainly have friends who are from another country (than Finland), then I don't feel like an outsider since I am a foreigner (born in Eastern Europe). I have some Finnish friends but only a few. My friends are mostly foreigners.

She expressed feelings of 'neighbourhood nationalism' (Back 1996; Gordon 2007), meaning that she belonged to this neighborhood, but, mainly to her multicultural group (Honkasalo 2011, Kivijärvi 2015), which she found supportive. These girls distanced themselves from the bigger youth crowd at the shopping centre whose behaviour they disliked. However, some, like Lea, would also spend time there just to sit in a cafe.

Lea: Oh yes, there is (trouble) nowadays. In the newspaper there was a story that there has been trouble with young people, but they are some strangers, I don't know them at all. Sometimes my friends are there also.

Jani was a 15-year-old lower-middle-class boy; his parents had a secondary education and worked in the service sector. Concerning his leisure practices, he claimed he had some hobbies elsewhere, including making films and music himself. Jani liked his class as well as going to school, and did not like hanging around at any of the shopping centres, even though he shopped there at times.

Researcher: How often do you go to the (local) shopping centre? And what do you do there, what is nice about it?

Jani: I think some of the shops there are nice. If I go there I do some shopping (...) a few times a week.

Researcher: You don't hang around in there?

Jani: No I don't.

Researcher: Why? Some young people do.

Jani: Well I think it is quite stupid, that they spend their time there in the shopping centre. They always, like, throw stuff around, or something like that.

Jani was clearly distancing himself from the young people in the shopping centre. He thought it was stupid, and not a very sensible or respectable way to spend one's leisure time (Skeggs 2004).

Using a shopping centre as a place to hang around in was contested in many ways – while some did so daily, others, young people as well as authorities, had strong opinions that loitering in the street or in a shopping centre was a sign of 'doing nothing' or a way of getting in trouble with the law (see also MacDonald & Shildrick 2007; Massey 1998; Robinson 2009; Tani 2011). The opinions of the police, youth workers and various young people were all different articulations of the power geometry (Massey 1994) within this particular shopping centre, and exemplify 'a field struggle' over the proper use of a public urban space along with the articulation of the right kind of active citizenship.

A continuum of power geometries between the school and the street was also evident. As in many other studies, here it was more likely that working-class boys with a negative attitude to official school were the ones who felt more at home in the public, less-controlled space of the shopping centre. This hanging around in city space gave them the possibility to feel that they belonged to their neighbourhood (see McDonald and Shildrick 2007; Shildrick 2006) and to express 'neighbourhood nationalism' (Back 1996; Gordon 2007; Kivijärvi 2015), at times together with some of the working-class girls and immigrant boys and girls. Middle-class boys and girls tended to have some kind of hobby (sports or cultural), and many, along with immigrant girls, saw it as not particularly respectable or sensible to hang around in this shopping centre (see discussion on respectability in Skeggs 2004; also see Hollingworth and Williams 2009; Isotalo 2015; Peltola

2015). An everyday social order, as well as a contested power geometry (Massey 1994) seemed to be evident in relation to these places among the local youth. This order had its classed, gendered and ethnic measures.

Urban spaces, and ethnic and gendered risks

All the young people participating in this study used the city space in multiple ways. At times, they stayed more at the local shopping centre during their leisure time, at other times they would prefer to ride the metro and buses, staying in different stations. Other shopping centres were also popular, as well as some petrol stations with coffee bars, hamburger restaurants, sports fields and open parks. Many of the interviewees of all ages (12 to 17) moved freely in the city space, both girls and boys. They travelled daily from local premises and streets to sport clubs, to reach their hobbies, or to the city centre. For some, this moving about was an important basis of their identity; for others, staying in the local surroundings was important in terms of neighbourhood nationalism (Back 1996; Gordon 2007; Kivijärvi 2015).

Moving about and facing risks were experienced in many ways, and these risks also had gendered and ethnic power geometry (Massey 1994) measures. Most of the girls in the study claimed they were not afraid to move around in Helsinki by themselves or with their friends, although they preferred the latter. However the girls claimed they became very angry at times. Some had experienced sexual harassment, either verbal or physical, often in connection with public transportation. They felt that their right to be mobile urban citizens was violated when their free movement around city was interrupted by strangers.

Researcher: Have you ever been afraid in the metro station here?

Tia: Well every week, I said to my boyfriend, I don't want to go alone anymore – always some men, and sometimes women, come and talk to me at the metro. Sometimes they are just lonely, that's ok. But there are these guys who come – and I always try to go where other women are sitting – since these men come and sit too close to me and start talking to me. I don't like it. Sometimes they are drunk. At times some of them speak English, and I can't speak English that well.

However, as well as irritating or anger-provoking experiences in the city space, sometimes the girls were actually frightened, as in the following case of Riina, a 17-year-old working-class girl.

Riina: I am into Thai boxing (...) I wanted to start doing a self-defence hobby. My mum asked me why not something like dancing, but I said I would soon be 18 and starting to going out. Who would defend me then, dancing wouldn't help me. (...) Once I came home late from my boyfriend's, and near our house there are these bushes, I was just crossing the road and two boys came after me. There was a crowd of boys coming from the football field and two started to follow me. They ran after me and grabbed me, and I was quite scared. I got away, but later I felt kind of traumatized, I mean I don't necessary want to walk alone in the dark, I am scared.

The power geometry and gendered order was changing in everyday life – but even though women have full rights as urban citizens to move about, this was at times jeopardized by threatening situations. Hille Koskela has written about gendered spaces and the gender-related production of urban space and fear. She claims that gender is one of the most crucial factors regarding fear of violence and geographic mobility in urban areas (Koskela 1999, p. 111). In addition, Koskela claims that women who have been exposed to violence in the street are more afraid afterwards (Koskela 1999, p. 116).

Experiencing the urban space as safe is therefore strongly gendered, and the girls in the present study felt they were open to certain risks, ranging from unpleasant or annoying, to truly frightening (see also Aaltonen 2006). As well, it was evident that the existing power geometry between genders was at times potentially threatening to girls.

However, moving about in public urban space was not without risks for boys either, with both Finnish or immigrant backgrounds and looks. Next, I show some examples of risks experienced by immigrant boys, since they often circulated through urban space. For some of them, mobility seemed to be a crucial basis of their identity, in addition to having a space of their own, the ‘immigrant corner’ at school (see also von Brömssen & Risenfors 2014).

Many immigrant boys told me in the interviews that they had several hundred friends, whom they met both virtually and face-to-face while on the move. Katrine Fangen (2010) has named these large networks ‘communities of difference’ (see also Vestel 2004), in which young people with immigrant backgrounds can support each other with respect to racist and prejudiced attitudes and experiences in school and outside of it. The ritual of moving about and occasionally meeting in a sense reinforced these large networks, as well as the power geometry (Massey 1994) and balance of ethnic relations in public spaces. It reinforced their right to walk or otherwise move in the city space, like the young women above, as active urban citizens. But also like the young women, the young men, too, could be exposed to risks and there were occasions in which the power geometry was challenged.

A 16-year-old boy with a Mediterranean background, Ollie, said he moved quite a bit both socially and spatially. He belonged to a socially and ethnically mixed eastern Helsinki group at the local youth club as well as many other groups and networks involved in his favorite sports. He also knew people who had contested official city space in search of excitement: these young people painted graffiti in places controlled by guards. As well as excitement and having fun, marking the place with illegal graffiti had its risks.

Ollie: I always liked the graffiti paintings (...) Well I have lots of friends who do them as well (...) Once I saw my friend (...) all beaten up by the guards, they had caught him in the woods.

Young men who painted graffiti took risks, and if caught, had to deal with the consequences. Here, adult members of society, the guards, tried to prevent an illegal marking of space from taking place, but by questionable means.

The power of the group and of networks, as well as the power geometries between groups of young men, is shown to be at stake in the next example. Mahad, a 16-year-old boy, told me that the use of the N-word is very humiliating for him, and often prompts him to fight. I continued the discussion he had brought up:

Researcher: Well who uses the N-word anyway?

Mahad: Those skinheads do. At school. In seventh grade. Not anymore. And if they don't shut up you ask more people (...) that has happened. A gang fight. In the centre, at the shore. I was there also. We walked by, they just challenged us. The heavy metal guys. All the immigrants together fought against the skins and heavy rockers.

(...) But I don't think they say this (N-word) now, since there are so many of us, a big bunch of people.

Researcher: So there is a sense of safeness when there is such a big group. But would you dare go there (a certain square) in the evening by yourself?

Mahad: Oh yes (...) But once someone beat me up there. A big man, a kind of skinhead, someone 50 years old or so. He just came from a bar, near this food shop.

Researcher: Terrible. I am truly sorry. Does it affect where you go now, and what you do?

Mahad: No, no. I was a coward then, I didn't dare to do anything. But since I got beaten up I've become a tough guy (...) I won't let anyone touch me, to beat me up.

The contested moments of power geometries presented here are the fights between immigrant background boys and skinheads and heavy rockers, as well as a violent adult man in the nearby square. Similarly to Gaskell's (2008) study, the power geometry of the streets and the school was interconnected in the above example. For some boys, learning only the school subjects as well as rules and duties as citizens was not enough (see Gordon 2007): becoming streetwise and learning how to negotiate in terms of respect and the use of violence were also relevant (Gaskell 2008, Manninen et al. 2011), and a way to survive.

Anoop Nayak writes about racist name-calling in the classroom. He claims that even though young, black people can also call white students names such as white duck or ice cream, these names do not refer to slavery, imperialism, apartheid and discrimination (see Nayak 2003, p. 149-151), and thus do not trigger feelings of humiliation and a devaluing of oneself as a citizen. Calling immigrants and other students with darker skin derogatory names is also common in Finnish

schools, streets and other public spaces (cf. Hautaniemi 2004; Souto 2011), not to mention physical encounters or even assaults: all leave an unpleasant feeling of not belonging due to the colour of one's skin. In order to move about in public spaces freely as an urban citizen, it was safer to have the support of large networks (Fangen 2010) – this was clearly experienced by boys from immigrant backgrounds.

Even though a majority of the young people felt it was safe for them to move about in public city space, some had experienced risky and unpleasant situations, leaving deep marks on them, and these experiences were intertwined with gender and ethnicity. Both girls and boys had encountered frightening situations. The above-mentioned boy felt he had become 'tough' after being attacked. The girl in the example no longer wanted to move around alone. Experiencing these risks confirmed that actually open free urban space was not the same for all: one needed to learn that there are risks, and that the risks and ways of dealing with them were not only gendered and ethnic but also classed, as the lives of middle-class youth appeared to be more centred on their hobbies than working-class youth, which affected their use of public city space.

Conclusion: Urban space as open city space – can anyone go anywhere and feel they belong?

Defining the use of urban space, as well as the relationships between youth groups and between youth and adults, is hardly ever seen as neutral. I agree with Öhrn and Weiner (2007) that school and neighbourhood are interconnected: as well as social and cultural behaviour, school achievement can also be influenced by a school's surrounding neighbourhood.

In this chapter I have given several illustrations of the use of different spaces and power geometries within one urban neighbourhood in eastern Helsinki. School was found to be a space with many layers, and the young people presented different positions in relation to school success, local youth styles and gender, as well as ethnicity, all of which were displayed by strong spatial practices and mainly dominated by boys (see also von Brömssen & Risenfors 2014). The spatial divisions of school by ethnicity were not so strongly evident within the local youth clubs that the young people visited voluntarily in their leisure time. However, in the past, rivalry based on the use and ‘ownership’ of one particular club had arisen between boys from different ethnic groups (see also Kivijärvi 2013). On the other hand, the dominance of boys over girls in the public space of the school and youth clubs was not explicitly questioned, and contested moments in the gender relations were not widely reported in the data even though girls criticized the boys’ speech and actions, and mimicked them in an ironic way. Furthermore, girls spent less time in the shopping centre than did boys. In addition, girls’ behaviour in this public space was not seen as problematic as that of some mainly working-class boys, who found their social lives to be richer and more relaxed outside the school and youth clubs run by adults. The shopping centre was more a basis of their identity than school (see also MacDonald & Shildrick 2007; Massey 1998; Willis 1977).

In the streets and on public transportation both boys and girls felt vulnerable at times. Despite feeling safe in urban spaces in Helsinki, some conflicts and actual attacks were also reported by the girls and boys. When experiencing an actual attack by a stranger, both girls and boys reacted strongly. It seemed to challenge their right to belong in the public space and to act as active urban citizens. Being subjected to an attack did not only change their feelings about the urban space in negative ways, but also their behaviour towards others. Boys formed large networks to avoid (racist) attacks and remain safe (Fangen 2010); girls did not report having large safety networks but rather smaller and trustworthy girls’ groups.

Varying and changing gendered, ethnic and classed orders as well as different power geometries among different social groups therefore occurred in the urban space examined. Other's views concerning the urban space were particularly negative if youth practices in the public sphere attracted (unwanted) attention or were worrisome (see also Tani 2011), or if the youths' actions were not interpreted as respectable, that they had not learned to act as proper urban citizens (see also Gordon 2007). Every city, region and nation is alarmed if their young people appear on the streets too often, are too loud or behave in an anti-social manner (Cf. Hjelm et al. 2014). The practices of the young people here varied from hanging out and meeting friends to possible petty crime. Not just streets and shopping centres, but also youth clubs and the school space were presented here as contested, and in addition, as self-made and remade within local power geometries (Massey 1994) by different youth groups in relation to others, including the authorities.

In urban spaces, informal relations meet formal demands, regulations, laws and the political atmosphere in sensitive social ways. The building of respectable and active citizenship takes place in informal social relations, and these processes are contested through power geometries and balances formed in different urban spaces such as schools, youth clubs, shopping centres and the street. The everyday social orders of who is who, and who is respected and valued, are constructed in these different urban sites.

This valuing and revaluing of young people takes place in urban spaces: young people learn where and how they are welcomed and what is possible for them, as well as what is expected of them in order to act as members of a local and national society. Young people also learn that they cannot claim a natural-born right to citizenship, as in the eyes of law (see Gordon 2007); rather, in order to

achieve full, appropriate, active and responsible citizenship (Acts of education and youth work) they need to learn their classed, gendered and ethnic intersectional places in the everyday social orders fashioned through local power geometries. The urban spaces will teach you where and how to belong.

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