Geographies of Children's Well-Being: in, of, and *for* Place

10

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In this chapter, it is argued that children's well-being is shaped by where they live. It does not suggest that where they live *determines* their well-being; rather, it argues that where children live is one of several factors that *contribute* to their well-being. It does not even suggest that where they live is more or less important than these other factors; for example, it is not the purpose of this chapter to suggest that neighborhood is more or less important than family life in shaping children's well-being. Such an ambition may appear lowly to a social science welded to binarisms (what matters most – structure or agency?) or reductionism (what factor accounts for most of children's well-being?), but these knowledge goals are for others to pursue. The hiatus of this chapter is to propose a conceptual framework that accounts for the way in which where children live interfaces with other factors to shape children's well-being. The journey toward this point will necessitate an articulation of why geography matters in any appraisal of children's well-being.

In *Localities: a holistic frame of reference for appraising social justice in children's lives* (McKendrick 2009), I argued that where children live is an integral and central part of the experience of childhood. This earlier paper focused on neighborhoods, the dominant locality, and realm of everyday experience for children. It contended that childhood studies must take place seriously if we are to understand the totality of children's lives. It drew a distinction between neighborhood problems and problem neighborhoods and reflected on the significance of "control and presence," and "opportunity and constraint" in shaping children's neighborhood lives. This, together with a critical reflection on localities as a political project in the shape of attempts to promote child-friendly neighborhoods, inadvertently provided much relevant insight for understanding the geography of children's well-being.

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This chapter does not merely replicate the contentions made in *Localities* and other papers that have sought to demonstrate the importance of place in children's lives (Burton 2011; Cunningham and Jones 1994; Gill 2008; Hart 1979; Hiscock and Mitchell 2011; Moore 1986; and Ward 1978, 1990). Rather, it complements this work by directly considering the ways in which neighborhood effects child well-being and it provides tools to guide further work in this area. This is not to suggest that geographical studies of children's well-being are absent from the literature. On the contrary, in recent years, several high profile studies have sought to compare levels of child well-being across world regions, nations, regions, and districts. The knowledge gained – and the knowledge that is marginalized – by pursuing macro-geographies of child well-being is considered early in this chapter. Following from this, the challenges that are involved in measuring geographies of children's well-being are considered. Having appraised the findings of studies that purport to examine the geographies of children's well-being, and elucidated the methodological challenges that must be negotiated to measure it, this chapter turns to summarize the broader knowledge base on what constitutes a "good place" for children. This leads to the development of a range of descriptive and conceptual tools to better understand the geography of child well-being and, finally, the proposal of the argument that it is in everyone's interests to enhance children's well-being in place. By way of introduction, this chapter begins by drawing observation that, in recent years, there appears to have been a spatial shift in civic society's approach to promoting and supporting child welfare.

10.1 Children's Welfare: A Spatial Shift?

Academic disciplines are, quite rightly, very particular about their core concepts and geographers are no exception to this rule. Here is not the place for a lesson in the philosophy of geographical thought, but it is important to clarify that this chapter contends that wider civic society has been increasingly concerned to identify the spatial patterning of child welfare (a spatial shift), rather than being concerned to elucidate the character of child welfare in particular localities (a concern with place). As will be shown, this predilection for spatial patterning has far-reaching implications for the understanding children's well-being and the efficacy of policy interventions which aim to enhance it.

The primary institution for supporting children's welfare is the family, and in particular, the immediate family unit of parent/s and siblings. This should not to be denied or ignored by any attempt to elucidate geographies of welfare. Equally, it would be a naïve analysis or policy strategy that did not accord a complementary or supplementary role to "environment" in shaping well-being.

There are several grounds for paying attention to the geographies of child well-being. First and foremost, in our interdependent worlds, the sensibility of drawing

on professional expertise is widely accepted (neighborhood as resource). Child welfare is promoted by the ready access to schools, health, and social services and those professionals and volunteers with an aptitude to enable children to enjoy, experience, and/or realize their potential in an array of sporting and leisure-time pursuits. Second, the role of neighborhood support in enhancing child well-being also pertains to the potential of the neighborhood environment to facilitate leisure and child development (neighborhood opportunities). For example, the ready availability of age-appropriate places to take children may assist estranged parents in making the most of what limited time they have available with their children who do not live with them. Neighborhood opportunities are often understood in terms of dedicated playspace and, to a lesser extent, the way in which the environment facilitates children's independent mobility. However, a wider array of opportunities should be expected from neighborhoods, for example, adaptability of the built environment, places to facilitate sedentary leisure and reflection, access to friends, a manipulable natural environment, etc. Third, independent family units often must draw upon the support of a wider network of friends or extended family. Once again, well-functioning neighborhoods can facilitate this. Grandparents, for example, often fulfill an important role in caring for their grandchildren, enabling parents to participate more fully in the labor market. A well-designed neighborhood that facilitates children's independent mobility could both lessen one of the pressures that shared care places on family life (transporting children), and promote health-enhancing behavior among children. Where the housing system does not facilitate living near to family (or friends), then a child-friendly transport system would be even more of a key ingredient of a well-making environment for children and their families. Fourth, more intensive and direct support is often required where the family unit, for whatever reason, is unable to ensure children's welfare. For example, the often chaotic lives of drug-abusing parents necessitate the interventions of social services to support both the child and the wider family of which they are part. The "hidden hand" of support services is an integral part of the geographies of well-being, which must be as concerned with what people do, as with what the built and natural environment offer. Finally, it must also be acknowledged that, at any one time, many children are "looked after" or are in "alternative care." Eurochild (2010) has estimated that as many as one million children in the European Union are currently living in institutional settings. Although a minority group, it would be unacceptable to reduce the quest to improve children's well-being to those living only in private households. The quality and availability of institutional settings should be considered in any comprehensive account of children's well-being across space.

These observations suggest that the world beyond the family makes many contributions to support and enhance children's welfare. Furthermore, a number of loosely related contemporary trends have coalesced to heighten the specific importance of geographies of well-being. These refer not to the geography of the underlying forces that shape well-being; rather, these refer to the heightened visibility of the outcome of these forces in the form of standardized comparison

of outcomes across administrative entities. In short, the geographical indicator has risen to prominence in recent years. Although the genesis of this trend lies beyond children's welfare, in this, it has found fertile ground. First, the emergence of evidence-based, or evidence-informed, policy has added weight to the value of pre- and post-intervention data. Evidencing impact is now an integral part of the policy process. Second, a related point is a wider concern for public accountability. For example, stakeholders – local and sector-specific interest groups – seek investment that furthers their interests and those dispensing public (and private) funds are often tasked with accounting for decisions to fund X instead of Y, and to demonstrate the impact of the funds they dispense. The need for such accountability is heightened when, as is often the case, funds available are insufficient to meet demand. Here, the challenge for both public and private bodies is to dispense funds to the most deserving of all of the deserving cases that seek them. Using data to demonstrate need – for example, highlighting areas with the highest level of deprivation, or identifying populations with the highest incidence of poor health – is commonplace. Third, there is a wider culture of evidence-led debate that extends beyond the narrow objective of securing project funding or justifying departmental spending. This is perhaps most strongly evident in the European Union with the Social Open Method of Coordination which does not set targets, but tasks member states to report performance and shares this "openly" among member states (Fraser and Marlier 2012). The desire not to be the poorest performer among peers is thought to be as effective a driver for improving standards as any obligation. It is also very much part of the core work of a wide range of interest groups, evidenced in their production of briefing papers and information sheets (e.g., Eurochild 2012). Finally, all of this is made possible by, and is a further catalyst for further production of, the growing availability of timely, geo-coded data.

One further contextual trend should be noted. In the broad field of children's welfare, much effort has been invested in measuring child poverty. For example, in the European Union, this led to the development of the Laeken suite of indicators to provide a comprehensive measurement of poverty (European Union 2009). Within nation states, there have also been moves to develop standard poverty indicators (e.g., Department of Work and Pensions 2003; UK Parliament 2012). Although these have the potential to conceive of poverty beyond material well-being, there has tended to be a greater focus on the single indicator of whether children live in a household that has less than 60 % of median household income (equivalized for household composition). This has been a comfortable indicator for those governments that have championed a work-first approach to tackling child poverty, that is, where the main anti-child poverty strategy is to increase parental employment. However, this reductionism in poverty measurement (and strategy) has increasingly concerned those responsible for promoting children's welfare in the round (Sinclair and McKendrick 2009).

Against the overly narrow focus on household income in studies of child poverty – and in the context of a growing concern with the spatial patterning of children's welfare outcomes – there has emerged an alternative approach as many now seek to chart the macro-geographies of children's well-being.

10.2 Macro-geographies of Child Well-Being

Comparative indices of child well-being are seductive knowledge. Readers are inevitably drawn to the top end and the bottom end of a league table. Favorable results are warmly received and evidenced to validate work programs and policy strategies. Adverse results occasionally lead to the methodology being questioned, but almost always lead to searching questions being asked to account for what appears to be "poor performance."

There is no shortage of macro-scale comparative studies of children's welfare. Although largely eschewing the league table format and fronting its reports with descriptive and analytical commentary on particular themes, UNICEF (2012) publishes *The State of the World's Children* every year. The report ends with a compendium of key statistics on different aspects of child welfare, the range of which has increased through time, continuing to increase in recent years with the addition of statistical tables on "adolescence" and "disparities among richest and poorest households" in 2011, and "disparities across urban and rural areas" in 2012. Where available, statistics are presented for nation states and summary statistics are generated for world regions. A broad range of statistics are presented, some tightly focused on children (e.g., participation in secondary, primary, and preprimary schools), others describing conditions that impact both on children's well-being and that of other groups (e.g., a range of indicators on women's health). These statistical tables are introduced as "Economic and social statistics on the countries and territories of the world, *with particular reference to children's well-being*" (UNICEF 2012, p. 81, *emphasis added*). The only indicator that is presented in league table format for nation states is the Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR), which is described as a "critical indicator of child well-being" (UNICEF 2012, p. 87) (For information, Somalia achieved the ignominy of rank 1 with a U5MR of 180 (per 1,000 children). Iceland, Lichenstein and San Marino shared rank 193 with a U5MR of 2 (per 1,000 children).), on the grounds that it measures the end result of the development process, it is the result of a wide variety of inputs, and its measurement qualities mean that results are representative of the nation as a whole (it is described as improbable that the U5MR of a wealthy minority will skew the nation's result and disguise the wider reality of the majority). Indeed, UNICEF presents this as a "principal indicator" of child well-being which it uses as an "agreed method of measuring the level of child well-being and its rate of change" (UNICEF 2012, p. 125). Although *The State of the World's Children* is primarily discursive and analytical, the allure of ranking places by well-being is too hard to resist.

In a similar vein, the OECD (2009) falls short in its attempt to avoid the distraction of a league table format. In *Doing Better for Children*, their analysis of comparative child well-being across 30 OECD countries, there is a conscious attempt to avoid an overarching index (a summary league table ranking) on the grounds that it would "distract the focus toward discussion of the aggregation method, and away from more important practical issues of improving child well-being" (OECD 2009, p. 22). In avoiding a single summary ranking, the OECD opted to classify countries according to whether, relative to the OECD average, they

performed significantly better, significantly worse, or about the average for each of six domains of child well-being (material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, risk behaviors, housing and environment, and quality of school life). However, the analysis also ranks each nation from best performing (rank 1) to worst performing (rank 30) for each domain. Readers' attention is as much drawn to the big numbers (relative positioning) in the summary table as the coloring (classification of performance, relative to average). For example, the reader is naturally inclined to castigate the United States for a ranking of 23 for material well-being and 25 for educational well-being; but this should be tempered by the additional knowledge that is provided that the US performance is in the "about the average" band on both domains. The OECD should be praised for providing a classification to temper the focus on rankings, but the inherent danger of these rankings is all too apparent.

In contrast, UNICEF/Innocenti (2007) and the UK Government (Bradshaw *et al.* 2009 for England) are among those who have embraced the league table approach, manipulating multidimensional indicator sets to generate league tables of child well-being. Many others have been generated in recent years (e.g., Michaelson et al. 2009; UNICEF 2010) and others are pending (TARKI Social Research Institute 2010 for the European Union).

Table 10.1 summarizes the comparative macro-geographies of child well-being in "rich" countries that was produced by the Innocenti Research Centre in 2007 (UNICEF 2007). Although inevitably drawn to the extremities of the overview table (the top and bottom end of the table of countries, ordered by average ranking), the wealth of domain data offers a degree of depth to the analysis. For example, although child well-being in the UK is consistently worse than that in comparable nations, it should be noted that its performance on "health and safety" is less poor. Similarly, although reporting generally high levels of child well-being, it is striking that children in Sweden rank less favorably in terms of "family and peer relationships." Indeed, the quality of "family and peer relationships" seems to be an issue that should be of wider concern across Scandinavia. The value of not reducing well-being to a single summary measure is readily apparent (Fig. 10.1).

Bradshaw et al.'s (2009) work in England offers a cautionary note against a different type of overgeneralization. Although macro-geographical patterns in child well-being can be discerned from their analysis – there are more local areas with low child well-being in London and more areas with high child well-being in the wider South East of England – there are complexities that must also be acknowledged. In every region, there is a mix of local areas with the lowest and highest levels of child well-being (although the mix is different in each region). Similarly, although there is a hint of a national "regional geography" of child well-being (with the likelihood of identifying areas with low child well-being falling from north to south), London is an outlier that ruptures the neat pattern.

Clearly, in addition to providing seductive knowledge, these macro-geographies of child well-being have the potential to provide useful knowledge.

Table 10.1 Child well-being in 21 "rich" countries, 2007

	Average ranking	Material well-being	Health and safety	Educational well-being	Family and peer relationships	Behaviors and risks	Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Switzerland	8.3	5	9	14	4	12	6
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Ireland	10.2	19	19	7	7	4	5
Belgium	10.7	7	16	1	5	19	16
Germany	11.2	13	11	10	13	11	9
Canada	11.8	6	13	2	18	17	15
Greece	11.8	15	18	16	11	8	3
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

Source: UNICEF (2007)

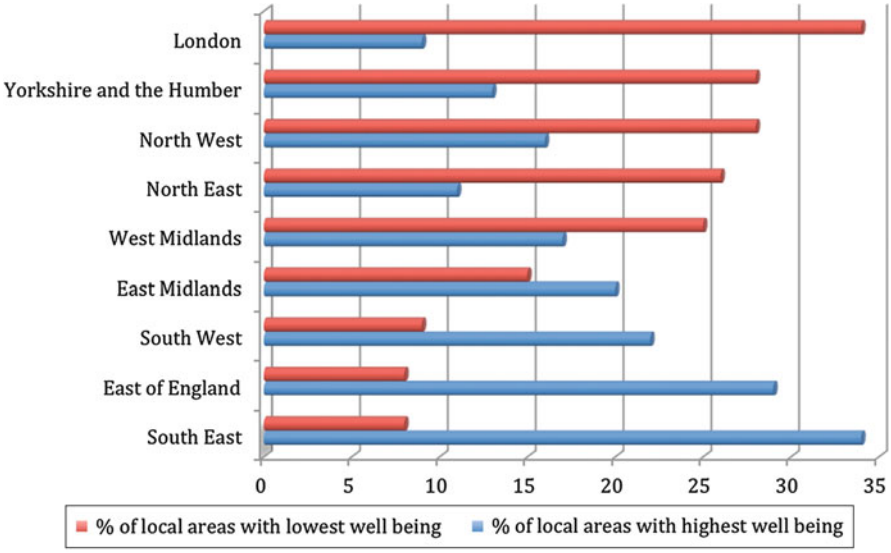

Fig. 10.1 Comparative child well-being in English regions, 2009 (Source: Bradshaw et al. (2009). Note: These data are regional counts of the number of local areas (Local Super Output Areas) within that region that are among the best 20 % in England (*blue bar*) and the worst 20 % in England (*red bar*) in the Local Index of Child Well-Being. There are 32,482 LSOAs in England, with an average of 1,500 residents in each)

Although it would be an error to equate useful with utilitarian knowledge, one of the common features of these contemporary macro-geographies of child well-being is that they are oriented toward policy. Indeed, the policy orientation of these indices is much heralded. One of the reasons underlying the selection of each indicator for the OECD is that they were "relatively amenable to policy choices" (2009, p. 21). Similarly, in reviewing the development of indicators to measure child well-being in the EU, Eurochild (2009, p. 5, *emphasis added*) contends that, ". . . indicators should also be employed to help shape policies and services which require that they are devised and used in ways that would extend their impact *beyond simply building knowledge*. Indicators of child well-being should be used in a way that contributes to improving the lives of children throughout the EU." Understanding child well-being is not a primary knowledge goal; it is implicit, inadvertent, or assumed that child well-being will be better understood through charting the policy-oriented macro-geographies of child well-being. The primary objective is to identify good and bad outcomes for children (both in aggregate, and by domain), in order to encourage poorly performing administrations to enact improvement.

This is not to suggest that these multidimensional indices are groundless or do not focus on matters which contribute to children's well-being. On the contrary, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides the foundation for much of

this work. Stated bluntly by Bradshaw et al. (2007, p. 134), "The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a normative framework for the understanding of children's well-being," going on to explain how its four general principles provide a framework for the articulation of an analysis that is concerned with both well-being and well-becoming, that is, nondiscriminatory, in the best interests of the child, concern with survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. Even where the impact of the UNCRC is not articulated as precisely, there is often acknowledgement that it offers loose guidance. As the Innocenti work (2007, p. 3), observes, "Although heavily dependent on the available data, this assessment is also guided by a concept of child well-being that is in turn guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

With a preference for policy-oriented indicators, a common grounding in the UNCRC and the consensus-building orientation of an international research community (Ben-Arieh and Frones 2007), it should come as no surprise that there is much commonality in both the individual indicators and the overarching domains that comprise the multidimensional measures of children's well-being in place.

Table 10.2 summarizes the domains that are used in four measures of child well-being (columns) and the types of indicators that are used to measure performance across these domains (rows). It is immediately apparent that there is much common thinking; material well-being, health, education, and risk feature in all indices, and "housing and environment" features in all but one. Furthermore, most of the indicators use data on children's experiences to evidence well-being (e.g., average literacy achievement of 15-year-olds is used as one of the indicators for educational well-being in the OECD index). Estimates of children's material well-being tend to be based on indicators at the level of the household with children (e.g., the proportion of children aged 0–15 in households claiming a range of welfare benefits is used in Bradshaw et al.'s index for local areas in the UK). Other types of indicator feature less often in these indices, which have been designed to capture the macro-geography of children's well-being. For example, there are few cases of indicators that speak of the resources and opportunities that are available to children in the locality.

10.3 Capturing All of the Geographies of Child Well-Being?

10.3.1 Challenge of Measurement

Setting aside, for now, more fundamental objections, the first challenge in capturing macro-geographies of well-being through multidimensional indicator sets is to devise robust methods. The full weight of the international research community has addressed the task of optimizing measurement. The general demands of utilizing effective indicators (those that are available, comparable, and timely) and appropriate data aggregation methods have been met. This is not to suggest that consensus has been achieved. Table 10.2 has already demonstrated subtle differences across projects. The publication of two papers, each of which utilized

Table 10.2 Domains, types and number of indicators used in four multidimensional indices of child well-being

LOCAL INDEX OF CHILD WELL BEING (UK)	Material well being	Health	Education	At risk	Housing	Environment	Crime	Quality of School Life	Family & Peer relationships	Subjective well being
Resources for children					2	1				
Resources for households with children	5	1		*	1					
Resources for localities					1					
Opportunities in localities						4				
Child experiences		2	6	*		1				
Neighbourhood experiences							4			

COMPARATIVE CHILD WELL BEING IN OECD COUNTRIES	Material well being	Health & Safety	Educational Well Being	Risk Behaviours	Housing & Environment	Crime	Quality of School Life	Family & Peer relationships	Subjective well being
Resources for children	1								
Resources for households with children	2				1				
Resources for localities									
Opportunities in localities					1				
Child experiences		8	3	3			2		
Neighbourhood experiences									

CHILD POVERTY ANDCHILD WELL BEING IN THE EU	Income	Material deprivation	Labour market attachment	Health	Education	Exposure to risk and risk behaviour	Housing	Local Environment	Crime	Quality of School Life	Social participation & family relationships	Subjective well being
Resources for children		*										
Resources for households with children	4	*	2				2				1	
Resources for localities			1									
Opportunities in localities												
Child experiences				12	4	4						
Neighbourhood experiences								2				

CHILD WELL BEING IN RICH COUNTRIES (ECONOMICALLY ADVANCED NATIONS)	Material well being	Health & Safety	Educational Well Being	Behaviour & Risks	Housing	Environment	Crime	Quality of School Life	Family & Peer relationships	Subjective well being
Resources for children			2							
Resources for households with children	2								2	
Resources for localities										
Opportunities in localities										
Child experiences	3	3	4	12					3	4
Neighbourhood experiences										

alternative algorithms to rework the UNICEF Innocenti data on child well-being in "rich nations" (UNICEF 2007), also evidences that differences of opinion persist (Dijkstra 2009; Heshmati et al. 2007). Differences of emphasis aside, the research community has risen to the general challenges of measurement.

Similarly, child-specific measurement challenges have also been faced. Although weaknesses are acknowledged – data are not equally available for all groups of children, for example, less data are available for younger children (particularly data on educational outcomes); data are not often disaggregated by migrant and dis/ability status; and well-being data are often not available for those living in institutions – other issues have been addressed. There is a clear understanding of the importance of including data that addresses children's lives as lived (well-being) and the foundations that are lain in childhood for a positive future (well becoming). More broadly speaking, this may be conceived as the need to embrace both a developmental and a child rights' perspective. Also, it requires a focus on social ills, in addition to more positive qualities of children's lives. Some comparative work already incorporates children's own perceptions of their well-being (UNICEF 2007), while other studies have taken subjective well-being as their primary focus (Bradshaw et al. 2011), although data are more readily available on children's outcomes and parental opinion/household situation and these data tend to feature more prominently than children's perspectives at the current time.

What tends to be accepted as a given is the underlying geography. The methodological concerns that might tax the geographer tend to be explicitly considered to a lesser degree by those responsible for producing multidimensional indicator sets for child well-being. The dangers of ecological fallacy (the attribution to individuals of behaviors and experiences based on where they live – Robinson 1950) and the modifiable area unit problem (the arbitrary specification of geographical units for data reporting which may obfuscate, rather than illuminate – Openshaw 1984) are not primary methodological concerns. In part, this is understandable, given that this work tends to have a policy or advocacy orientation and there is a necessity to work with, rather than question, the administrative units to which data refer. However, they remain challenges for interpretation, if not weaknesses in calculation.

10.3.2 Questioning Purpose

As previously stated, the indices are framed as part of the policy process. The desirability of this is clear. However, the way in which this is pursued is not without problems. Stating a preference to include domains that are amendable to policy choices (and that each indicator enables performance to be assessed for these domains) inadvertently suggests that other aspects of well-being (those that are less amenable to policy choices) have been excluded. Independently of this, the indices express a preference for outcome measures (impact on children), as opposed to inputs (policy work that aims to improve outcomes). This has been achieved, as

the preponderance of outcome indicators in indices of child well-being evidences (Table 10.2). These measurement preferences – for policy-relevant and outcome-based indicators – are understandable and consistent with the desire to use this knowledge to effect improvements in children's well-being. However, there is an inherent inconsistency in this approach as a means to improve children's overall (global) well-being.

The tacit acknowledgement that the multidimensional indicator sets that are focused on outcomes and oriented toward policy are unable or unwilling to consider all of those factors that contribute to children's well-being implies that their summary measure being should not be considered as an overall measure of child well-being. Rather, it would be more accurate to describe it as an overall measure of policy-focused child well-being. This would not necessarily undermine the inherent value of the aggregation.

However, the complexity of the social world is such that it is difficult to attribute outcomes to a single cause. Expressed differently, and for example, the policy interventions that seek to reduce the number of children living in households with an income level well below the median are not the only factors that contribute to this goal being realized. Indeed, it is theoretically possible for an effective policy intervention to do no more the shore up and compensate for wider pressures that work against this goal being achieved. One concrete example would be the effectiveness of anti-child poverty strategies in tempering the increasing levels of child poverty in an economic downturn. Describing as "failure" any outcome that does not lead to improved performance may not only be misleading; it may be counter-productive, leading to the rejection of effective policy. The efficacy of a policy cannot be determined with reference only to crude data on outcomes.

These observations are not made to support an argument in favor of moving away from either an outcomes focus, or a policy orientation, in the macro-geographies of child well-being. Rather, they are drawn in order that we are more modest in our knowledge claims, more proportionate in our assessment of the extent to which children's well-being can be improved through policy, and open to possibilities for exploring other ways of understanding children's well-being and its geographies.

10.3.3 Beyond Geography as Spatial Patterning

The problems associated with developing the macro-geography of children's well-being are not inconsiderable, but are surmountable. Much research endeavor is already being invested in methodological design and improvement. However, it should also be acknowledged that spatial patterning is not the only contribution that geography can make toward understanding children's well-being. Geographers are not only concerned to document and map variations across space.

Another useful geography of children's well-being is to appraise places as landscapes and to "read" those landscapes in terms of the subconscious way in which they enhance or constrain well-being. Here, the focus may be as much on the

representation of a place as a child-friendly environment, as on the actuality of whether that place enhances the quality of children's lives. The extent to which there is an absence of signs forbidding ball games in spaces that might otherwise facilitate play, considering the quantity and quality of playgrounds when they are interpreted as symbols of children's right to play and right to use of the neighborhood; the extent to which child-centered modes of transport, such as walking, cycling, or skateboarding, are marginalized or prioritized in transport design; the extent to which the built environment is designed in a way that facilitates all children's active participation (e.g., sensitivity to the capacities of small children); the way in which children's perspectives are routinely sought in neighborhood decision making – each of these is more than a practical example of how neighborhoods can be made more amenable to children. They are also indicative of children's neighborhood status (the collective desire to promote child well-being) and can be "read" as such as a socio-spatial landscape.

Other geographies might be less concerned with form or outcomes, and may be more concerned with the underlying socio-spatial processes that constitute and reconstitute place. Holloway and Valentine's (2000) contention that place is porous – in which contexts (institutions, neighborhoods, etc.) draw upon external influences and blend them with existing local cultures to create new realities – is one such acknowledgement that places are dynamic and are a blending of the idiographic and the nomothetic. There is also a rich tradition of work that seeks to describe what places should offer children (as a means to enhance their well-being).

10.4 Qualities of a "Good Place" for Children

On one level, the macro-geography of children's well-being defines a "good place" for children. Good places are those in which children are not hampered by low household income and poor housing; are ones in which they are able to achieve positive outcomes in health and education; and are ones in which they can avert risk, "negative" behaviors, and poor relationships. Given the outcomes focus and policy orientation of this work, there is a tendency to define "good places" not according to the public services (and household resources) that are available (inputs), but rather in terms of those with more children achieving successful outcomes. Our understanding of residential social geography (the ordering of space by cultural orientation, life stage, and socioeconomic status, e.g., Knox and Pinch 2009) leads us to question whether, so defined, "good places for children" are merely aggregations of children with already positive outcomes or, more fundamentally, are places which are positively enriching children's lives.

In contrast, there tends to be a focus on provision rather than outcome when "good places" are described in terms of the opportunities that they should afford children. This is not to suggest that children's use of the neighborhood is overlooked (e.g., Hillman et al.'s seminal work on children's mobility, published in 1990), or that knowledge of children's use of the neighborhood is not used to inform provision

(e.g., Cunningham and Jones' (1994) model of the child-friendly neighborhood utilized evidence on the more limited home range of girls, compared to boys, to reach a minimum recommendation of distances from home to playspace). However, the primary focus of those concerned to describe neighborhood opportunities is what is provided, rather than what use is made of these provisions. Whole area blueprints and principles have been developed for child-friendly cities and neighborhoods (Cunningham and Jones 1994; Elsinger 2012), while commentators and campaigning organizations have developed thematic blueprints to specify minimum standards that would be acceptable in terms of mobility corridors (Kytta, 2004), playspace (Play Scotland 2012), and greenspace (Ironside Farrar 2005, Chap. 6).

For others, a "good place" should be defined less in terms of the resources that are available to children, or the opportunities that are provided. Here, the main concern is that these are places that facilitate children's meaningful participation (Gill 2008; Gleeson and Spike 2006; Hart 1997; Horelli 1998; Percy-Jones and Malone 2001). Working from within a child rights perspective and grounded in the UNCRC, primacy is given to children's role in neighborhood life (UNICEF 1996); well-being cannot be gained if children have no role in shaping their lives. This thinking also underlies approaches to use subjective measures to measure children's well-being in place (e.g., Crivello et al. 2009), or indeed, in studies that invite children to articulate what constitutes a child-friendly neighborhood (Nordstrom 2010).

Resources, opportunities, and participation are already acknowledged as key ingredients of "good places" for children. Implicitly, there is an expectation that these will be afforded to all children, that is, that "good places" are inclusive, with appropriate offerings available regardless of age, gender, cultural background, dis/ability, socioeconomic status, and the like.

10.5 Evaluating Places and Conceptualizing the Geography of Child Well-Being

10.5.1 Impact of Places on Children's Well-Being

This chapter opened with the contention that children's well-being is shaped by where they live. Even if children have largely withdrawn from public space – perhaps in response to parental fears for their safety (Valentine and McKendrick 1997), or as a result of their own preference to pursue home-based leisure (Tandon et al. 2012) – the wider world impacts upon their quality of life, by virtue of not providing what it should. There are limitations in the extent to which the impact of neighborhoods on children can be generalized. It is entirely conceivable that while a place may enrich the well-being of one sibling, it may impair that of another, for example, the provision of a skate park to encourage children not to use the roads in a neighborhood with heavy vehicular traffic flow, may enhance the well-being of a sibling who skates, while doing nothing to address the problems faced by a sibling who cycles.

Whether the focus is on a specific child, or a generalization on the overall impact of a place on a group of children (or all children), Fig. 10.2 offers a simple tool to

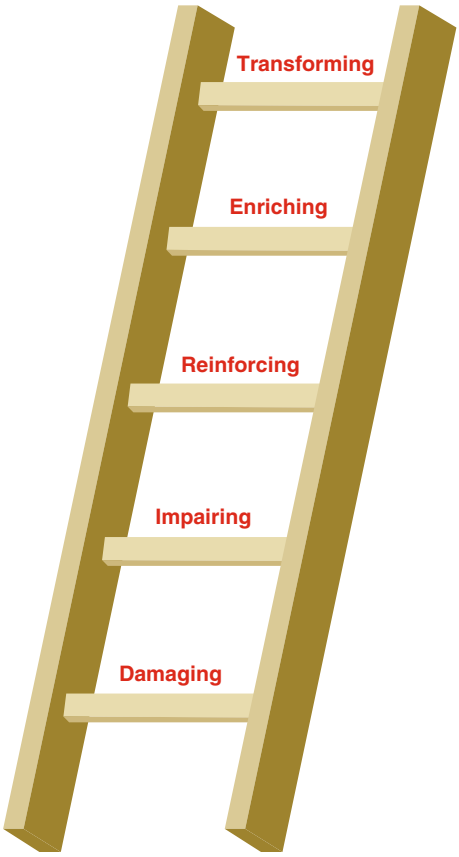

Fig. 10.2 The impact of places on the well-being of children (Source = author)

describe the impact of a place on children's well-being. Akin to Hart's (1997) ladder of children's participation, it acknowledges a spectrum of impact, in this instance from damaging through to transforming. It should be emphasized that this is a tool for describing the overall impact of places on children's well-being (and not a tool to describe overall levels of children's well-being). The distinction is important, as it focuses attention on what places can do (or actually do) to enhance children's well-being. Unlike the macro-geographies of children's well-being (which define "good places" as those in which children achieve good outcomes), it forces direct evaluation of contribution of place. It is possible that the contribution of places to children's well-being in localities in which children attain good outcomes may do no more than reinforce advantageous situations that emanate from the home environment (rung 3), while other localities in which children attain, *relatively*, less favorable outcomes are compensating for disadvantageous home environments by enriching (rung 4) or transforming (rung 5) children's lives.

10.5.2 A Taxonomy of Neighborhood Quality and Child Well-Being

Figure 10.2 sought to clarify the nature of the impact of places on children's well-being: good (rungs 4 and 5), bad (rungs 1 and 2), or indifferent (rung 3). A complementary approach to describing the geography of child well-being is to describe places in terms of what they offer to children (Fig. 10.3). Although applicable to different place-types (streets, cities, nations, etc.), it is most straightforward to appreciate at the scale of the neighborhood.

Earlier discussion of what places should offer children, based on the existing literature, suggested that places should comprise four offerings to enhance children's well-being, that is, they should be (1) *inclusive*, presenting all children with equivalent experiences; (2) *participative*, affording children an active role in shaping their environment and choosing how that environment is utilized; (3) environments of *opportunity*, providing children with the spaces and facilities that enable them to enhance their well-being; and (4) be *resourced* with the key services that are essential to support their quality of life as lived, and to lay the foundations for well-becoming in the years ahead.

There are 16 possible combinations of the presence or absence of these essential ingredients of a well-functioning place (Fig. 10.3), ranging from four-star neighborhoods (possessing every quality) to no-star neighborhoods (lacking in all qualities). The value of such an approach is that it does not accept strengths in one area as compensating for weaknesses in another. It makes clear that neighborhoods of child well-being are those that take all qualities into consideration. The objectives of this chapter do not permit lengthy discussion of the mechanisms through which a neighborhood could be considered to be inclusive, or participative, etc., and clearly this is an issue that warrants more detailed consideration. However, the taxonomy establishes a standard to which all neighborhoods should strive.

10.5.3 Accounting for the Geography of Child Well-Being

Tools to more precisely describe the way in which, and extent to which, places can effect child well-being force a more precise understanding of the issue. However, there are inherent dangers in sharpening focus. While there is merit in specialization, there is a risk in elevating the importance of the matter at hand to a level that it does not warrant. In the context of this chapter, accounting for neighborhood in children's well-being can only be achieved if cognizance is taken of the wider realm of influence of which it is part.

Figure 10.4 situates the contribution of neighborhood to children's well-being. As asserted throughout this chapter, neighborhood is one of the key realms that contributes to children's well-being. The understanding, developed in this chapter, of the neighborhood as an environment of opportunity and resource, which should enable participation for all children, is clearly articulated in the illustration.

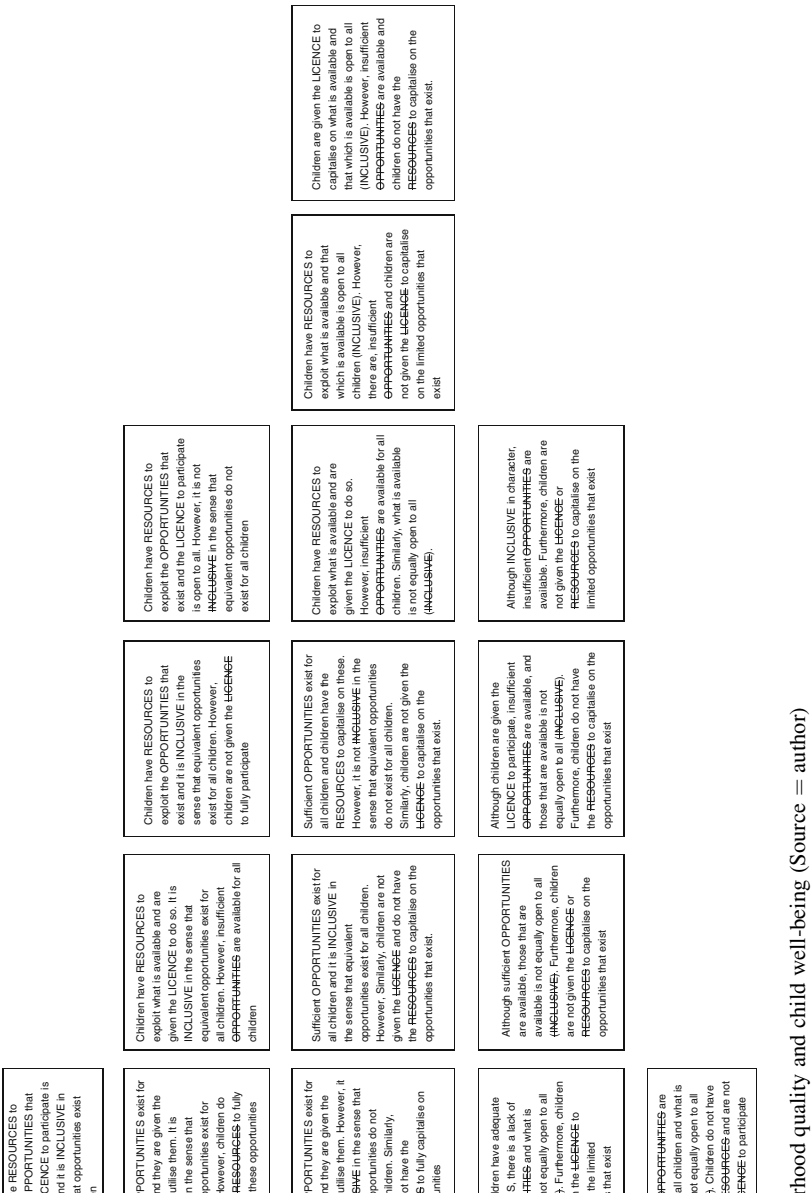

Fig. 10.3 Neighborhood quality and child well-being (Source = author)

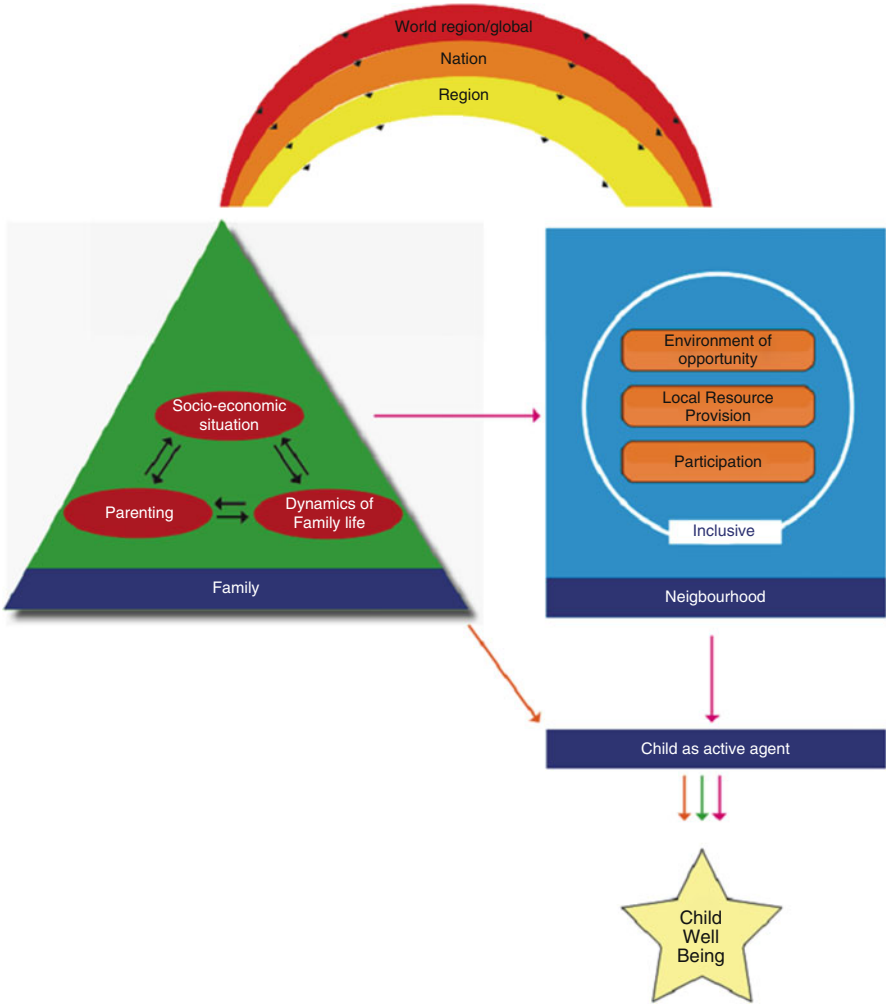

Fig. 10.4 Factors contributing to child well-being: a conceptual framework to situate place in context (No notes / Source = author)

However, acknowledging the importance of neighborhood should not be overstated, or made at the expense of other factors. Family life (whether as a provider of resources, as a meaningful interaction with significant adults, or as a social entity of which the child is part) also has a key role to play in facilitating well-being for children. Family is considered to have a direct influence on children's well-being (the orange diagonal line of influence that extends down to "child as active agent"). It also mediates the way in which children are able to fully capitalize on what the neighborhood has to offer (horizontal pink line of influence), for example, through

the extent to which, and ways in which, parents allow their children to access neighborhood space.

Two other points should be noted. Beyond the neighborhood, forces of influence at regional, national, and global (or world regional) scale bear down upon children's well-being. Akin to Bronfenbrenner (1973), these forces may seem distant to the everyday realities of children's lives, but they are pertinent to it nevertheless. These forces are sometimes far from abstract for everyday realities, as can be shown through the examples of the UNCRC in shaping how children are regarded by professionals (global), local service implications that may follow from the development of a well-being policy focus in Europe (world region), setting of national targets which shape the everyday work of children in schools (nation), and decisions on the allocation of municipal resources across local areas (region).

Finally, the schemata acknowledges that children have an active role in shaping their own well-being. The realms of wider influence beyond the neighborhood, the way in which the family provides the foundations of well-being and the possibilities that are presented by the neighborhood are received and mediated by children. Although this is not presented as a neo-liberal individualistic model that attributes well-being to the individual (which tends to lead to a blaming of those who fail to achieve), any progressive understanding of the geography of children's well-being must be open to possibility of children having an active role in negotiating or rationalizing provisions in order to determine their own well-being. On the other hand, evidence of some children achieving an adequate well-being despite an under-resourced neighborhood or an unsupportive family environment should not be used as an argument to dismiss the need to address deficiencies in these realms.

10.6 Conclusion: Better for Children, Better for All

This chapter concludes by returning to the title which suggested that children's well-being might be understood to be in, of and for place. Macro-geographical studies are accumulating a knowledge base of the spatial patterning of children's well-being. Here, the focus is on place as a receptor, an administrative convenience for the collation of evidence – it is the geography of well-being *in* place. The value of this knowledge is acknowledged, particularly as a means to appraise and influence policy and as a means to operationalize the laudable principles of the UNCRC. However, it is a limited geography of children's well-being, which is exposed to problems of ecological fallacy and the modifiable areal unit problem.

Geographers might be more motivated to develop a geography of children's well-being *of* place, that is, one that focuses on the ways and extent to which where children live actively impairs or enhances their well-being. Macro-geographical studies provide a useful steer, but the analysis requires a drilling down to understand whether positive outcomes are the causal consequence of how neighborhoods work. To achieve the goal, somewhat paradoxically, requires an appreciation of the limits to which neighborhoods influence children's well-being.

However, it is also contended that the project of improving children's well-being is to the collective benefit of the neighborhood and its users. Some may be uncomfortable with using children to achieve broader goals – such as the utilization of powerful images of starving children in order to elicit charitable donations to tackle impoverishment in fragile environments. It would also be an overstatement to suggest that everyone benefits from improving the way in which places enhance children's well-being. However, there can be no doubt that reshaping our neighborhoods to better serve the interests of children would inadvertently address many of the neighborhood problems perceived and experienced by the wider populous, for example, de-motivation to use public space, the adverse health consequences of a sedentary lifestyle, the incivilities that arise from antisocial users and uses dominating public space, and the like are all challenged by a child-friendly neighborhood. In the final analysis, the geography of children's well-being is much more than that – it is a project *for* place.

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