# 'First Step: Dress Cool ...' Young people's representations of locality

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**Abstract:**

*In an increasingly globalised world, the importance of locality in the understanding that young people have of themselves and their place in the world would appear to be anachronistic. However, those working with them often find that ideas of neighbourhood remain important in young people's narratives of their identities. This essay reviews two sides of the academic argument about the importance of place, 'neighbourhood studies' and 'post-structuralism', before analysing the role locality has in young people's representations of themselves in a youth centre in Berlin. The author suggests that these young people appropriate global cultural trends for use in constructing images of locality. These images, untethered from spatial constraints, enable the young people to use representations of locality to situate themselves in the maelstrom of global cultural and social narratives. The article poses a number of questions for those working with young people to help understand the importance of locality to them.*

**Key words:** young people's identity, locality, neighbourhood studies, post-structuralism.

WHEN MOST young people have access to social networking sites, international media, and global trends, the importance of neighbourhood identities seems anachronistic. Surely in an age when young people can select from an ever increasing range of social and cultural resources to construct images of themselves, the streets around where they live would lose significance? My experience of working with young people, however, appears to contradict this. Locality as a source of individual and group identity seems as relevant as ever. Whether expressed in territorial 'post-code' gangs, or simply used by young people as one of several explanations for their lifestyle choices, locality has been a constant topic for the young people with whom I have worked. With reference to some of the academic arguments about the importance of place, this article will analyse the role of neighbourhood identities for a group of young people with whom I worked in Berlin in 2004.

Young people who hang out on street corners, drink in local parks or talk loudly on buses are often seen as problems that undermine local expressions of community and neighbourhood pride, as they intimidate 'legitimate' adult members of the community (see Brent, 1997:79). The youthful appropriation of space has been widely written about, as academics have explored the need for

young people to create places of their own (e.g., Loader, 1996 or Hall et al, 1999). This 're-mapping' of urban space is central to understanding the ways in which young people relate to the places they live in, and goes some way to informing youth work approaches (see Crawshaw, 2001). Here I look beyond these sporadic, 'effervescent' events (Maffesoli, 1996), to study how young people relate to, construct, and understand those localities whose communities they are accused of affecting so negatively. The key questions explored in this article are: What importance does locality have for young people in an increasingly globalised world? How are young people's lifestyles affected by their locality? To what extent are young people able to appropriate ideas of locality as they do street corners?

Although post-modern theorists point to the dissolution of structuralist criteria, the drawing of lines along class and ethnic boundaries, along with their spatial geographies, appears to be as present as ever to many of those working with young people in the UK. Is this a sign of the 'post-modern paradox', whereby 'when people find themselves unable to control the world, they simply shrink the world to the size of their community' (Castells in Gilroy, 1987:232), or is locality, along with class and race identifications, just another tin to be picked from the shelves of the 'supermarket of style' (Polhemus 1998)?

## Neighbourhood vs. Post-structuralism

The study of people's relationship with their locality is nothing new – the studies of the Chicago School from the inter-war years onwards looked at how economic structures were reflected in class and ethnic divides, with Robert Park's 'zones of succession' (1967), which portrays a geography controlled by structure, still often applied to modern cities. Venkatesh, writing about early 20th century studies of the city, comments how

> The city was described as a mosaic of 'little worlds', each a distinct settlement but all interrelated into the larger metropolis. In this view, each of the settlements was understood to be a physically, socially, and culturally coherent entity, what would later be called a simpler term, a "community". A community had territorial integrity, that is, it had identifiable borders and was separated from its neighbours by natural or manmade boundaries. A community had a cultural unity: people shared outlooks, customs, languages, and perhaps some physical features (2002:6).

This 'integrity' was also seen in youth cultures. Whilst these early approaches to urban youth cultures do not underestimate the role of young people's agency in constructing their identifications, this agency is the product of structural impositions – it is not a dialectic between structure and agency, but rather structural determinism. As debate about the importance of place has grown, it

has been possible to roughly divide it into two camps – 'neighbourhood studies' and the 'post-structuralists'.

The idea of neighbourhood mirroring socio-economic structure is central to understanding the role of neighbourhood studies in the second half of the 20th century and beyond. Whilst the 'zones of succession' have become ever more complicated as the fashions of urban dwelling have fluctuated, the concept of identifying areas with class or ethnic groups has remained intact both in popular representations and anthropological studies of urban space. Significantly, this approach has been most prolifically used in association with poor areas. If neighbourhood equates to structure, and structure produces agency, then what better way to understand the actions of the working classes than to study working class areas? Whilst the effects of global flows of capital and power become ever more evident in Britain's disadvantaged communities, this concentration on local cultural spheres has remained popular, whether with right wing commentators such as Charles Murray (1990) or their detractors. Indeed, the '"lower" tier of city residents […] is defined mostly by being cut off from that world-wide network of communication […] "doomed to stay local" […], it is inside the city they inhabit that the battle for survival and a decent place in the world is launched, waged, won and lost' (Bauman, 2003:17).

One of the effects of the collapse of the Fordist model of production and the rise of globalised economies has been the prevalence of the 'post-modern paradox'. Richard Sennett writes that 'as the shifting institutions of the economy diminish the experience of belonging somewhere special … people's commitments increase to geographic places like nations, cities and localities' (in Bauman, 2002:110). With class identifications diminishing, but structural inequalities remaining, the neighbourhood has become a key factor in people's understanding of their place in the world. This has been particularly pertinent for young people, who (due to the collapse of the youth job market with industrial restructuring) often lack the means to pursue leisure activities away from their locality (see Loader, 1996). This is associated with the appropriation of public spaces by young people, but has also caused young people to create place-based narratives of community. Locality here becomes synonymous with identity. The 'willingness' for young people 'to be something determined' (Maffesoli, 1996:65) is realised through the construction of local identities, that adapt to local social relations. As Back comments, 'the nation is thus shrunk to the size of the neighbourhood, resulting in the emergence of a kind of "neighbourhood nationalism"' (1996:53). This use of neighbourhood nationalism may be seen as the expression of the need to belong to a locality, but the narratives of what the locality represents are constructed; the narratives mirror the social make-up of a neighbourhood and are still closely related to their socio-economic structure. The neighbourhood thus becomes as much a social as a spatial entity. Locality is used to represent community.

At the centre of this locality-based community is a need for what Maffesoli calls 'proxemics' (1996)

– the need to be together in close contact with other people. The effects this has on young people's – especially those without the means to leave their locality when they please – understanding of their place in the world should not be underestimated.

The increasingly complex and at times contradictory flow of information in the modern age has led to some academics, influenced by post-modernist thinkers such as Michel Maffesoli, to conclude that the importance of bounded identities has waned so as to become insignificant. In a new age of fluid, spontaneous 'identifications' , therefore, the spatially bounded nature of locality can no longer be seen as crucial in youthful constructions of 'neo-tribes' – fleeting movements, that defy efforts to be pinned down, whose very nature is 'characterized by the pluralism of possibilities, the effervescence of situations, the multiplicity of experiences and values' (Maffesoli, 1996:65). Far from being reactions to structural inequalities, these groupings are 'not bothered by finality, utility, practicality, or what we may call "realities".' (ibid,:81) In a more critical tone, Furlong and Cartmel conclude that 'the lived and mediated experiences of young people in the fields of leisure and consumption is an important mechanism via which the epistemological fallacy of late modernity [the declining importance of class] is maintained and reproduced' (1997:23). In light of this new understanding of youth movements, Steven Miles has concluded that 'the territorial youth groups with which sociology has traditionally been fascinated are actually less significant than they were in the past (assuming they were indeed ever "significant")' (2000:67). This understanding of the construction of identity as being increasingly less influenced by modernist concepts of class and space is central to post-structuralist arguments.

New modes of communication, in particular the internet, have enabled young people to opt out of local discourses completely, and enter instead into global flows of fashion and communication. Albrow states that 'the whole concept of culture has been disembedded from its territorial base and re-embedded in a mass communications media frame' (in Miles, 2000:63). These young people are, therefore, 'unconcerned with the affairs of "their" city – just one locality among many, all of them small and insignificant from the vantage point of the cyberspace, their genuine, even if virtual, home' (Bauman, 2003:16). Modern communications mean that the need for 'proxemics' can be solved without the need for physical closeness, as 'one's "village" could span the globe' (Wellman and Gulia in Hodkinson, 2002:28).

Does this therefore mean that the role of locality in young people's lives is no longer relevant? Certainly for many young people the imagery of their neighbourhood is less important to their self-identification than the music they listen to or the clothes they wear. Maffesoli writes that 'In contrast to the 1970s […] it is less a question of belonging to a gang, a family or a community than of switching from one group to another' (1996:76). This does not mean, however, that the idea of the neighbourhood gangs is therefore an anachronism. Rather, 'as old meanings are trashed, new, unexpected ones are created in a process of semiological terrorism' (Polhemus, 1998:132). Paul

Hoggett comments that '"Place" now becomes reconceptualised as an identity one chooses as much as one which is accepted fact' (1998:8).

What we are left with, then, is what appears to be a discrepancy between the ability of modern technology to make national and social boundaries insignificant, and the need for young people to continue to negotiate their everyday, localised lives. As Crawshaw points out, 'it is important to recognise that although young people live within an increasingly timeless and globalised world, local places and spaces remain a crucial medium and mediator of lived risk experiences' (2001:64). Lefebvre writes, 'no space disappears in the course of growth and development: the world-wide does not abolish the local' (1991:86). While the global and the local may seem to contradict each other, they are not incompatible.

The meeting of global and local forces has therefore become more evident (although it was present throughout the modern era). This has led to images of the local becoming less bounded, and whilst some young people have chosen to deconstruct traditional ideas of neighbourhood alliances, others have looked elsewhere for their identifications – the use of new technology making these more accessible. The breakdown of bounded identities has caused the creation of multiple, fleeting identifications, as young people have the ability to move from one cultural movement to another. In creating new movements out of the cultural tools available, young people use the media, international styles and local references to come up with mixes of the global and the local, the much vaunted 'glocal'. This fusion enables them to forge understanding about the significance of the global in their locality, and the role of their locally situated selves in a globalised world.

The following discusses how this played out in the experiences of locality of young people in the Berlin neighbourhood of Kreuzberg. The discussion is based upon experiences and observations from a six month period working as a youth worker in 2004. It is not intended to provide a definitive answer to the question of young people's relationship with their locality. Rather it will argue that the questions asked about the importance of locality are applicable for anyone working with young people, regardless of the answers they produce.

## Kreuzberg

Kreuzberg is a large administrative area located to the south of central Berlin. Under the old post-coding system, Kreuzberg was split into two areas, SO61 in the west, and SO36 in the east. It is the latter that has become synonymous with the various images that Kreuzberg has accumulated, and it is this area on which this article will focus. Before Reunification, Kreuzberg, in West Berlin, was surrounded on three sides by the Berlin Wall. This lent it a peripheral status, and the cheap or empty housing and marginal position meant that from the Sixties onwards the area become

populated with Turkish *Gastarbeitern* and members of 'alternative' scenes, in particular punks and anarchists. It soon built up a reputation for being both the centre of radical left-wing movements, and a focus point for Turkish youth street gangs.

With the fall of the Wall and the reinstatement of Berlin as the capital of a reunited Germany, Kreuzberg moved from the margins of West German society to become an inner-city district in the new Germany. Despite the ensuing gentrification, Kreuzberg remains the area in Berlin with the highest Turkish population, in a city that claims to have the biggest concentration of Turks in Europe after Istanbul. My experience whilst working full-time for six months at the Naunynritze Cultural and Youth Centre, located in a network of around a dozen blocks, commonly referred to as the Turkish Quarter, forms the basis for this article.

On first appearances, Kreuzberg may seem the perfect example of the move from the modern era of bounded space and identities (the Berlin Wall being the archetype of this), to a post – or late-modern entity, criss-crossed by the flows of global influences. The replacement, in the nineties, of the old post-codes with new, smaller and less symbolised areas (Naunynritze is now in 10997, a code it is hard to appropriate), may have been the death-toll of the old east Kreuzberg identifications. However, on arrival in the area, it immediately becomes apparent to any visitor that the significance of the old imagery of Kreuzberg SO36 is still central to contemporary understandings of the area. I will argue that the construction of identifications based on discourses of locality by the young people could be seen as similar to the assembling of 'imagined communities' described by Benedict Anderson (1991). It is at the interface between the historical, cultural and ethnic discourses of the young people that their identifications with their locality are formed.

Karn writes that 'narratives include significant characters, dramatic episodes, a moral to the tale and, most importantly, use causal logics and shared cultural assumptions about the world to create meaningful accounts' (2007:42). By exploring the representation of these elements, it is therefore possible to come to a better understanding of the significance of narratives of belonging to a locality. For the young people with whom I worked in Kreuzberg, the combination of stories of past events in the area – replete with folk heroes and villains – and representations of present conditions to validate the continuing applicability of these narratives were used to construct 'meaningful accounts' of their own circumstances.

The value of historical images of Kreuzberg for young people was made clear by their continued use of the old post-code (SO36) to symbolise 'their' area. This ranged from the use of hand signals to represent the number, to the naming of music groups and other cultural entities after the code. This phenomenon was not restricted to the Turkish youth of the area. Local establishments include SO36 in their name, and t-shirts with the code emblazoned on them remain popular. The images of Kreuzberg from the eighties are thus both adopted and reinscribed by the young people and other

groups in Kreuzberg. The continued use of these symbols does not however imply that the images they represent necessarily coincide. As Abu-Lughod points out, there is 'no single "authorial" image of the neighbourhood' (1994:195). Thus the symbolism that the young people invested in the old post-code may be different to that of the bar or the tourist.

The continued use of the old code, rather than the newer ones that spatially mapped the 'Turkish Quarter' more accurately, tells us a lot about the nature of locality-based narratives of belonging. The continued use of SO36 by the young people in Kreuzberg, many of whom are too young to remember when the old post-code was in use, can be viewed as recognition of the social symbolism of this spatially liberated sign. De Certeau describes how place names 'become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning' (1984:105). The code therefore has a dual function – both the continuation of its appropriation by previous generations and the capability of the young people to re-map the spatially invested narratives of locality along the social boundaries of their 'community' – an example of 'semiological terrorism' (Polhemus, 1998:132) . In this paradoxical situation, then, the spatial entity of Kreuzberg, along with its structural and architectural specificities, at once locates the young people, but at the same time is socially and culturally re-mapped, located, by those young people. As David Harvey writes,

> *Social space, when it is contested within the orbit of a given social formation, can begin to take on new definitions and meanings. This occurs because the social constitution of spatio-temporality cannot be divorced from value creation or, for that matter, from discourses, power relations, memory, institutions, and the tangible forms of material practices through which human societies perpetuate themselves* (1996:231).

The fact that this space is 'contested' is essential to our understanding of how the symbolism of the old post-code can change, both over time and from one group to another.

For those working with young people, it is therefore necessary to attempt to comprehend their conceptualisation of their locality, and to try to understand how these 'social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another' (Lefebvre, 1991:86). Youth workers' images of the area may be very different to that of local young people.

One of the key investments that the young people made of local space was one of ethnicity. Kreuzberg was represented by many of the young people as a Turkish area – despite the fact that the Turks were a minority group in the district. In this respect, I was told by one young person that 'Germans do not come to Kreuzberg, because if they do they get beaten up'. Whilst this statement seems to border on the ridiculous if one takes Kreuzberg to mean the spatially bounded space, an

understanding of Kreuzberg as a 'lived' place for this young man helps us to realise the significance of this opinion. The social networks of the young people I worked with were almost exclusively Turkish, and thus ethnicity became conflated with locality. As Solomos and Back explain, 'race is a privileged metaphor through which the confused text of the city is rendered comprehensible' (1995:41). The lived experiences of the young people validated this metaphor.

Narratives of race and ethnicity, however, also need to be contextualised as we recognise their role as social constructs. Whilst in Kreuzberg there are a number of members' clubs for Turkish immigrants from different regions of the country, for the younger generation the ethnic boundaries of their parents seem to have become more porous. One example of this is the apparent resolution amongst this second generation of some of the conflicts surrounding the national status of Turkey. The Alevi Muslims and Kurds, for example, were both included in this racial discourse without being distinguished – unlike in mainstream discourses of 'Turkishness'. This is not to say that all conflict was 'magically' resolved (see Cohen, 1980). Indeed, this could be seen as similar to Thornton's description of rave culture (1996), with class and ethnic divides being momentarily set aside over the youth centre's pool table. However, whilst these discourses fitted with the locality-based narratives of Kreuzberg as a marginalised, alternative sphere, in other narratives, for example those around belonging in the home-space or nation state, these momentary alliances would often revert back to their previous form. One example of how this affected young people was the turmoil one young man experienced. Of Turkish descent, his girlfriend was Kurdish. Whilst this was acceptable in the locality-based discourses of the young people (she fitted into that image of Kreuzberg and local representations of 'Turkishness'), his worries about how this may have been viewed by his family and how it fitted with his Turkish nationalism (in both cases she was constructed as the 'outsider') led to constant internal conflict. As in so many cases, narratives of community can here be identified as both inclusive excluded and exclusive (see Brent, 2009:166).

If we are to understand Kreuzberg as a social and cultural sphere as well as a spatial one, then we must ask ourselves what happens to those people outside the area who share the same culture, and those inside who do not. In this sense narratives of locality can be seen to mirror those of nationality. Whilst ostentatiously billed as spatial constructs, one's presence in a nation does not secure the acceptance of narratives of one's 'belonging' there. Likewise, those 'outside' can claim membership. Whilst making a film at the youth centre, one of the young people took the opportunity to enthusiastically proclaim his 'insider' status:

> Osman: Yo, yo, Kreuzberg 36, yeh, my name is Osman, yeh, I come from Kreuzberg, yeh, 36.
> Voice in off: Hey, you come from Tempelhof [another residential area in south Berlin]
> Osman (looking embarrassed): Ok, I come from Tempelhof.

Although immediately corrected on the spatial discrepancy of his statement, Osman obviously believed himself (and was widely perceived to be) part of the cultural Kreuzberg community, even

if he was not actually from there. In the same film, I asked a young person what it meant to come from Kreuzberg. He proceeded to list the attributes necessary to fit in:

> Mahdi: First step, dress cool; second step, come to Naunynritze; third step, don't wear any sad stuff.

Off camera, he continued to list a number of other factors – mostly based around misogynistic relationships with girls and knowledge of hip-hop styles. The assumption here was that if you shared the same moral basis discussed above and correctly negotiated the clothing and music styles adopted by this Kreuzberg community, you could become a member of this locality-based narrative, regardless of where you lived.

The same, however, could not be said of young people who lived in Kreuzberg, but did not possess the 'cultural capital' (see Thornton, 1996) necessary to 'belong' to these images of Kreuzberg. Regardless of the physical presence of other images of Kreuzberg within the centre (for example, rock gigs performed by local German young people), the viability of the exclusive narratives of the regulars' images of 'their' Kreuzberg beyond the confines of the community itself meant that the cultural spaces created by these narratives went largely unchallenged – most other young Kreuzbergers sadly avoided the centre and contact with the young people there. The exclusion of some young residents of Kreuzberg from the locality-based narratives of the young people I worked with at Naunynritze was therefore both active (the policing of cultural boundaries through fashion symbols, for example), and passive, with the co-option of the narratives of cultural boundaries by those 'outside' of the group. It is important to stress that this does not mean that those excluded from these narratives felt they did not 'belong' in Kreuzberg. Indeed, it is conceivable that their own discursive constructions of the area excluded the young people I worked with from alternative narratives of belonging.

Alongside the recognition of the ability of locality-based narratives to both include and exclude, it is useful also to briefly note that they can be oppressive for those 'inside' them. One ex-gang member who had left the area told me he had done so in order to escape the 'claustrophobic' nature of living in Kreuzberg. As an integral part of the historical construction of the identification of Kreuzberg, the only way to liberate himself from what he saw as the restrictive cultural assumptions within the area was to leave entirely. One can only hypothesise that some with less confidence or economic security are subsumed into narratives of belonging against their will (for an example of this, see Brent, 2001:11).

The conflating of images of Kreuzberg with brands and hip-hop was a key factor in the young people's understanding of the area. This may seem to be contradictory – the use of international styles to represent the local. It is here that the concept of the 'glocal' can help us to understand

this phenomenon. By adopting international styles the young people were able to utilise them to understand their own local experiences. Although Kreuzberg, with its bustling legal economy, ethnic and social mix and good transport links may seem far removed from the idea of the ghetto espoused in many of the tracks the young people listened to, the young people found affinity with the lyrics about social and economic exclusion and cultural adaptation to this. Yet again, we see here how the social representation is extrapolated from its spatial context. The cultural manifestations of 'ghetto culture' as represented in hip-hop lyrics were divorced from the spatially bounded nature of the ghetto by the young people, and transposed onto their own lived experiences. The ghetto thus becomes a series of cultural attributes and actions (such as gun-ownership), which can be adapted to local specificities. Therefore young people did not simply adopt American hip-hop styles; these styles were adapted, re-read, to represent the *local* circumstances.

Willis writes that:

> *People bring living identities to commerce and the consumption of cultural commodities as well as being formed there. They bring experiences, feelings, social position, and social memberships to the encounter with commerce. Hence they bring a necessary creative symbolic pressure, not only to make sense of cultural commodities, but partly through them also to make sense of contradiction and structure as they experience them in school, college, production, neighbourhood, and as members of certain genders, races, classes and ages* (in Miles, 2000:118).

It is important to understand the complexity of this process. It is not simply a one-way exchange, whereby the young people adopt hip-hop imagery. This imagery itself can have multiple meanings, and has to be understood *through* the 'living identities' of the young people. I would argue that the cultural meanings of globalised commerce are not simply appropriated, with completely new meanings created, but that they are formed in a dialectical relationship. Young people construct an understanding of their lives by using hip-hop imagery, but at the same time this imagery is understood through the filter of their lived experiences.

By linking images of Kreuzberg with hip-hop, I believe that the young people are symbolising a new understanding of the nature of locality. Untethered from its purely structuralist, spatially-bounded roots, locality as a cultural sphere is able to represent both the lived experiences of the young people and their understanding of their place in a globalised world. For the young people with whom I worked, the choice of identities – either Turkish or German – offered them by mainstream society was too restrictive. These national identities remain imbued with sentiments of modernist, essentialist 'nation-building'. By constructing their own 'imagined community', that reflected the hybrid, globalised nature of their identifications, the young people were able to 'magically' solve this dilemma. Far from 'shrinking the world', the young people were in fact

using these locality-based identities to reconfigure spatio-cultural relations to situate their localised life experiences globally.

In this section I have demonstrated a variety of ways in which ideas surrounding locality affected the young people with whom I worked at Naunynritze. Such a short piece has not been able to do justice to some of the complexities involved in this relationship. Each young person brought with them their personal experiences and the experiences of those close to them to create individual, unique concepts of the role of Kreuzberg in their understanding of themselves. Nor should the trends I have identified here be seen as either directly transferable to other groups of young people or as being a definitive description of these young people's experiences of locality. As Karn tells us, 'claims about the nature of a place [do not] necessarily reflect a timeless, essentialist sense of identity. Identities of place are subject to change and contest' (2007:58). Nevertheless, it is possible to add the concepts I have developed here to those proposed above by the 'neighbourhood studies' and 'post-subculturalists'. These concepts can be represented as follows:

1.  Locality is a socio-cultural construction based on social narratives and signifiers. The spatial boundaries of neighbourhoods are only one element in its significance. They can be superseded by historical, cultural and social narratives that reconstruct the notion of the locality as a cultural, rather than spatial, entity.

2.  These signifiers are themselves based on local experiences. As in the case of ethnicity in Kreuzberg, these signifiers are constructed within the context of the locality. Kreuzberg can thus be viewed as a Turkish area by the young people, but what it means to be Turkish in Kreuzberg may be different from what it means to be Turkish in other contexts.

3.  Identifications with locality can contradict other identifications. Young people's identities are multiple – those based on locality form only one part of their wider self-representation. This can lead to internal conflict as the cultural and social significance of their locality-based identifications clash with other conceptions of the self. These other identifications do not, however, necessarily cancel out the importance of locality.

4.  Representations of locality can be inclusive, exclusive and controlling. Narratives of belonging to a locality can be used to include those who live outside of the area but are deemed as culturally 'assimilated'. They can also be used to exclude those from the area who express themselves differently, or oppress those who wish to do so but fear being marginalised by their peers.

5.  Images of locality adopt and adapt global styles and identities. Whilst Massey concludes that 'this challenges the idea that "local cultures" are understood as locally produced

systems of social interaction and symbolic meaning' (1998:123), I would argue that it is precisely these global styles that enable young people to produce and understand these 'interactions' and 'meanings'. By appropriating the notion of the spatially bounded locality and situating it as a globalised cultural sphere, young people create a space that represents their globalised selves in opposition to structured and controlling narratives of the nation state.

The question that must arise from this approach is what role structural inequalities have to play in relation to this. In the description above, the young people appear to be largely in control of their relationship with Kreuzberg. Nevertheless, these young people are some of the most economically, socially and educationally excluded young people in Berlin, indeed in Kreuzberg. Maffesoli writes that 'an integral part of the collective imagination, the neighbourhood is nevertheless only constituted by the intersection of ordinary situation, moments, spaces and individuals' (1996:22). The young people's construction of their locality-based identity is heavily influenced by 'the grinding, relentless nature of oppression' (Pile and Thrift, 1995:371), the structural inequality they experience on a daily basis. By seeming to reverse the power to exclude and include, the power to assign meaning and symbolically locate power, they are seeking ways to situate themselves against their own exclusion. For those working with young people around issues of locality, it is essential not to forget that narratives of belonging do not translate into structural ownership.

## Conclusion

Young people's experiences of locality are as complex and varied as young people themselves. Any attempt to disprove one 'conclusive' theory by introducing another can only lead to a confusion that does nothing to help those working alongside young people to negotiate their lived experiences. What I therefore propose is a series of questions (in themselves not definitive) for those working with young people to pose themselves.

*Does the young person express an identification with their neighbourhood?*

*If not, is this because they are excluded from narratives of locality-based belonging, feel that these lack relevance to their lives, or see them to be unimportant or non-existent?*

*If they do express this identification, where do they get their images of their neighbourhood from? Are they positive or negative?*

*What social and cultural attributes do they associate with their neighbourhood? Do they feel that they possess them?*

*Do they use these attributes to exclude those who do not have them, or to control those who may wish to express themselves in a different way?*

*Does their notion of locality mean that they feel excluded from other neighbourhoods? Could it prevent them from confidently moving to another locality?*

*How does their locality-based identification relate to any other identifications they may have? If they clash, how do they resolve this?*

*How does their understanding of their locality help them to situate themselves in a globalised world?*

It may not be possible to answer all of these questions. However, if we are to try to understand the way young people situate themselves in the world (whether socially, culturally, vocationally…) what better place to start looking than where most young people spend the majority of their time – in their neighbourhood? By approaching this subject matter with an open mind it is possible to advance one's understanding of the complexities that surround it. I suggest that this approach enables a more reflective style of youth work when dealing with issues of locality-based identifications. Whilst the conclusions may not be definitive, the process, I believe, is invaluable.

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