

Joint physical custody, multi-locality, and lived space: how children from
divorced families negotiate their place through space

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ABSTRACT:

This chapter focuses on multilocal families and more specifically on the ways in which children of separated parents, living in equal shared physical custody arrangements, define and construct their 'home' in a context of circular mobility. It is based on two case studies drawn from ongoing fieldwork conducted in Belgium with children aged 10 to 16 in the context of the ERC Starting Grant project "MobileKids". Our main aim is to understand how family relations structure children's "life spaces" and "lived space" (di Meo, 2012). We explore in particular the meanings and feelings that family relations confer to the space of the 'house' in children's experiences, including both the physicality of the place of residence, and the relations and emotions that children attach to it (Forsberg, Autonen-Vaaranemi, Kauko, 2016: 435). We also highlight the various strategies that children develop to mediate/influence their family relations through "space", including strategies of spatial appropriation and territorialization. We conclude by summarizing our main findings and considering future developments.

KEYWORDS:

(Please supply up to 6 keywords for your Chapter)

1. Multilocality
2. Sense of place
3. Home
4. Lived space
5. Childhood
6. Participative methods

Main Body:

Introduction

"(...) And then one day, but I can't tell you at what age, I think she was around 5 or 6, when we started to switch every week because we realized that weekly shifts really do offer stability to the child, well, to my daughter obviously, and to all of us actually, something much easier to visualize from Monday to Monday than having to do different things. So that's one thing. And so we decided to make the transition from one house to the other through the school. Not that her father and I have a problem seeing each other, that's not the case at all, but it's easier for her. She goes to school in the morning and she returns at night to the other parent's. She carries her luggage with her. That's what she likes the least, even still, is to have additional things with her. She's entering her first year of secondary school so ... having a bag, is no fun " (Marie's mother)

This quote nicely describes how Marie, a 13 year old Belgian girl with divorced parents, shifts on a weekly basis between her mother's and father's houses and what this implies for her. Her situation exemplifies the emergence of new family configurations that challenge the standard model of the nuclear family in Europe such as single-parent families, Living Apart Together, or, in this case, post-divorce families. Interestingly, these contemporary configurations all imply a higher level of mobility of their members. As the marital family no longer represents the dominant model, we have moved away from the nuclear, stable, sedentary family, associated with a single place of residence, to wider and more mobile families associated with different places of residence (Widmer, Castren, Jallinoja, Ketokivi, 2008). In this context, a new definition of the family has emerged in social sciences which is based on a relational conception of space where family is perceived as a "particular social network, frequently multi-local, spanning across households and centering around reliable personal care relationships between two or several interrelated generations" (Schier, Hilti, Schad, Toppel, Dittrich-Wesbuer, Monz, 2015 : 442). Various disciplines, including sociology, geography and psychology today include research fields centered on family networks and on the practices of these multilocal families. These include – but are not limited to - studies of multigenerational and multilocal families (Widmer and Lüscher, 2011), transnational families and care relations across distance (Baldassar and Merla, 2014), and multilocal families in which one or several members work far away (Nowicka, 2007). Post-divorce (or post-separation) families also occupy an important place in this new scholarship (Schier et al., 2015), and it is in this sub-field that this chapter locates itself. The multilocal families that we present here, including Marie's, are indeed characterized by the "geographical separation of parents

and children over different periods of time and by their division into several households and places” (Schier et al., 2015 : 442), following marital or partnership breakdown.

We met Marie and her relatives during ongoing fieldwork among children with separated parents living in stepfamilies and shared physical custody arrangements, in the context of the ERC Starting Grant project “MobileKids: Children in multi-local, post-separation families”.¹ MobileKids seeks to understand how, and under what circumstances, children growing up in separated families and living in shared physical custody arrangements in Belgium, France and Italy appropriate this way of life and potentially develop new skills, practices, and ways of being that incorporate the ability to maintain social and family relations in a multi-local context through the appropriation of mobility and virtual connectedness. More specifically, the research² that informs this chapter aims to understand how Belgian³ children aged 10 to 16 define and construct their 'home' in this context of circular mobility.

MobileKids gives a central place to children’s lived experiences of this multilocal way of living between two fixed households (Gullov, Palludan, Winther, 2015). Children are considered here as social actors who are “actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live” (James and Prout, 1997 : 4). We consider that the child has “room to maneuver which he puts to profit, and transforms to his advantage the situations where he (sic) is involved, constructs himself by adhering to the ways of acting and thinking that are proposed to him, but also by selecting them, reacting to them and modifying them” (Danic, Delalande, Rayou, 2006 : 28, our translation). This also applies to children’s relationship with space. *Children’s geography*, a research field that emerged during the 1990s inspired by the UN Convention on the

¹ See www.mobilekids.eu. This project has received funding from the *European Research Council (ERC)* under the *European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program* under grant agreement No 676868. This chapter reflects only the authors’ view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

² This doctoral research is conducted by Bérengère Nobels under the supervision of Laura Merla.

³ Belgium represents a particularly interesting case, as equal shared custody has become since 2006 the first type of arrangement that should be considered when parents divorce or separate (law of 18/07/2006). In 2016 nearly one in two marriages ended in a divorce (Statbel, 2017) and a recent study shows that in Wallonia and Brussels nearly 1 divorced family in 3 puts in place a joint physical custody arrangement (Ligue des familles, 2016).

Rights of the Child (1989), indeed highlights “the multiple ways in which space structures the daily lives of children and youths and on the contrary, in which children interpret and construct their own territory” (Lehman-Frisch and Vivet, 2011 : 6, our translation).

Based on the preliminary analysis of two family cases (presented in the methodological section), we explore in this chapter how family relations structure children’s “life spaces” and “lived space” (di Meo, 2012). We focus in particular on the meanings and feelings that family relations confer to the ‘house’ space through the experiences of two girls, Marie and Coralie, including both the physicality of the place of residence, and the relations and emotions these two children attach to it (Forsberg et al., 2016: 435). We also highlight some of the strategies they develop to mediate/influence their family relations through “space”, including processes of spatial appropriation and territorialization.

The chapter is organized as follows. We start with a theoretical section defining key concepts for the analysis of the multilocal context in which Marie and Coralie grow up and the role space plays in the way they structure their multilocal life and define ‘home’. We then introduce our methodology and move on to present our main results, structured along five dimensions: strategies of territoriality; defining a symbolic place through materiality; conferring space a particular sense; expressing emotions; and facilitating the transition. We conclude by summarizing our main findings and considering future developments.

Space, mobility and multilocality

Multilocality, defined by Rolshoven and Winkler (cited by Nadler, 2009) as active everyday life in multiple places, and, in particular, the distinction between multi-local residentiality and multi-local living, are central concepts in our project. *Multi-local residentiality* is defined as a situation where an individual or a group of individuals (children in our case) stay in more than one usual dwelling over a period of one year (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2013: 67). *Multi-local living* designates “the appropriation of the multi-residential situation as a way of life, not experienced as transitional, temporary, abnormal, but as a way to inhabit space, a discontinuous lived space, “contaminated” by rhizomic practices, appropriated through the transposition and activation of resources and the durability of a set of embedded daily-life instruments” (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2013 : 159). This notion stresses processes of

appropriation, territorial familiarity, practices and continuities within the spaces of residential multi-locality. Based on this, we explore the hypothesis that children in post-divorce families appropriate and create continuities between their different places of dwelling as well as the transitional spaces through which they travel, and which then become apprehended as a whole. We consider dwelling and mobility together, as these are closely blended in the lived experiences of children with two “homes”. They live in a “polytopical dwelling” (Stock, 2006) that implies a circular mobility characterized by a cyclical return to various places including “moorings and immobilities and the recurrent movement of persons, objects and ideas between these places” (Schier et al., 2015 : 440). In fact, the articulation of multi-local residentiality with multi-local living is inspired by the distinction made by social geographers between ‘life spaces’, defined here as the concrete material experience of space and the representations children attach to them, and ‘lived space’, or the intimate network of children’s real and imagined places and territories (di Meo, 2012). Territoriality thus refers to their global sense of being ‘in’ space, with its various social components of territory, place, network and scale.

Our research considers space as relational and embedded in actions, in line with Massey who defines space as the result of social processes, practices and interactions between individuals and things (Massey, 2005). We highlight that space plays the role of an intermediary between the material and the social (Remy, 2015) in the sense that children in motion exchange through it goods, ideas and symbols with their relatives (Weichhart, 2015). In addition, life spaces are not only territories but also networks of places that can be shared by different persons (Lévy in Bonnet and Desjeux, 2000). We will see that these places can have various functions that can be similar or different for the people who share them (for instance, leisure, versus play, versus work) (Schmitz, 2012). In each dwelling, a specific familial way of living , which combines mobile and stable daily practices, is created. Children don’t only switch from one house to the other. They also travel between rules, roots and ways of doing that vary from one house to the other (Winther, 2015). By doing so, they develop various strategies and competences to adapt to these various ways of “doing family” (Morgan, 2011) in each house and to the different roles assigned to them, based on their position in the family (son/daughter, sibling, half-sibling, stepson/daughter etc.). These daily places create the “lived space” (di Meo, 2012) of children, in the sense that they are “practiced, represented, thought, diverted, avoided, and so on” (Danic, David, Depeau, 2010 : 9, our translation). These strategies concretely attest to the way children make use of and appropriate those places, individually or collectively, giving them a sense, a particular symbolic meaning. Therefore, interpreting children’s practices of multi-local living cannot be

dissociated from the understanding of the meaning children attach to them (Félonneau, 1997 : 52), and convert “the space into a place with special behavioral and emotional characteristics for individuals” (Hashemnezhad, Heidari, Hoseini, Parisa, 2013 : 5). In this chapter, the “sense” that children confer to places is central, and involves the “physical place of residence, its social relationships, and the emotions attached to it” (Forsberg et al., 2016 : 435).

Method

The research that informs this paper involves in-depth fieldwork with 30 children, aged between 10 and 16 and with at least one parent who has re-partnered. At this stage, data has been collected with 10 families, mainly recruited through advertisements in the media; contacts with social workers, schools, lawyers and youth professionals; and snow-balling techniques. For this chapter, we decided to focus on case studies with two rather similar families, Marie’s and Coralie’s. We felt that this narrow focus was necessary to explore and try to disentangle complex processes and present them in a clear way, within the limits of this chapter. These cases engage in particular detail with the key themes around space and place that we wished to explore in this chapter.

In both cases, the parents have a middle-class background and both have re-partnered: Marie’s mother Sarah lives with Tom (Marie’s step-father), and their son Vincent (Marie’s half-brother, aged 6), while Tom’s daughter Anna (aged 23) does not live with them anymore. And Marie’s father Octave lives in an apartment with Leslie, Marie’s stepmother. Coralie’s parents Nina and Mathieu don’t cohabit with their new partners Tristan and Nicole, but the girl often stays at Tristan’s house (with his 4 children aged 8 to 15) and less frequently visits Nicole, who lives with her children aged 19 and 22. The two girls are of similar age (respectively 13 and 12) and have been living in equal shared custody arrangements since their parents broke up. Both have experienced long-distance shared custody arrangements (Coralie’s parents live at 20 km from each other) although Marie’s situation changed recently (her parents now live in the same city). The rhythms of their circulation between their parents’ houses are however different. Marie moves from one house to the other each Monday after school, but Coralie moves more frequently between homes. She stays with her mother on Mondays and Tuesdays, then goes to her father’s on Wednesdays and stays there on Thursdays as well. She then alternates weekends between her two homes, either staying at her father’s until Monday or going back to her mother’s on Friday after school and sleeping there until the next Wednesday.

Data collection with our participating families involves four stages. We start with individual interviews with the biological parents to understand family contexts and cultures (cultural dimensions,

educational values, relationships with relatives, etc.). We then conduct three semi-structured interviews with each child over a 6 to 8-weeks period, each based on a specific participative method: 1) Socio-spatial network game (Schier, 2017), a board game where children represent their various dwellings and how they travel between them (meeting n°1); 2) Emotion maps (Gabb and Singh, 2015), a technique where children draw a map of their various dwellings viewed from the top, identify “their” rooms and spaces with stickers, associate them with emotions, and do the same for the places “of” their other relatives (meeting n°2); and 3) a commented walk/drive that reproduces how children travel between houses (Thibaud, 2002) (meeting n°3). These methods cover a large range of topics including: children’s family networks and their spatial configuration; practices of dwelling and mobility; mental representations of space and home and the practices that support these representations; what they do and with whom; how they switch from one house to the other; and how they maintain contact and links with family members.

The two case studies that inform this chapter are based on a) the triangulation of these three methods through a thematic analysis of children’s discourses, and b) the confrontation of this analysis with the parents interviews in order to get more elements of family context. Children’s productions (SSNG and emotion maps) are indeed apprehended mainly as a “speech support” and are thus not analyzed separately from children’s accounts.

FIG 1 HERE

FIG 2 HERE

We truly feel that these three methods “empower” children (Johnson, Pfister, Vindrola-Padros, 2012 ; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, Craig, 1996). By including them in the research process they method allow children to play an active role in the interviews as they invite them to build their own representation of their various dwellings and how they circulate between them (SSNG), to guide us in their journey between homes (commented walk) or draw their own vision of their house(s), erase, add or remove a sticker (emotion map), therefore participating in the elaboration of the data. In this way, this set of activities also allows the children to take increased control over the research process because they are the ones guiding the conversation around what they choose to set on the game, the map or talk about as we travel together. Furthermore, using “games” and traveling together decrease the pressure and create a more familiar atmosphere (Punch, 2002 : 337 ; Davis, 1998 : 328). Finally, because children can be quickly distracted, performing such activities helps to sustain their attention and interest throughout the interviews (Punch, 2002 : 337). In addition to these positive aspects, our methods also have some limitations. Emotions maps in particular require certain skills from the children and can

sometimes lead to frustration or loss of patience when they end up erasing and re-drawing their houses to be as accurate as possible. We therefore often reminded them, throughout the interview, that we only needed an overview of their homes and did not expect them to produce beautiful drawings. Children also sometimes don't understand why we want to meet them three times and may feel that the activities are somewhat redundant. But each encounter allows us to develop a particular aspect of their multilocal lives, and also offers multiple opportunities for children to find their preferred mode of expression.

Results: Negotiating ones place in the family through space

As mentioned above, we consider space here as relational in the sense that "it acquires meaning in relation to other spaces, but also through the social ties and social relations that take place in a specific location or target space as an explicit stake (...). Jean Remy defines space as a resource that allows individual and collective actors to assert themselves, to communicate with one another, but also to distance themselves from the socially imposed order "(Lenel, 2018: 11, our translation). Marie and Coralie's cyclical mobility from one dwelling to another, from one family culture to another, means they must regularly leave one family setting and adapt themselves to the other one. How do these girls mobilize space as a resource to establish connections within the various family spaces and with the members they leave/reunite with? How does this process manifest itself through spatial materiality? How do Marie and Coralie convert various "life spaces" into a single "lived space" (di Meo, 2012)? How do family relationships confer special meaning and emotions to spaces (Forsberg et al., 2016)? And what kind of strategies do they develop to influence their family relationships through space? These are the key questions we address in this section.

Strategies of territoriality

"uh the living room ... I put him (her half-brother, Vincent) just in the middle because he takes it all the time ... every time, we find Playmobils, Legos, Transformers and so on in the chairs, on the ground, on the small heater so we walk on it, it hurts our feet, we cannot sleep on the couch so uh here ... it's his territory almost ..." (Marie, 13)

Marie placed on the emotion map of her mother's house a blue sticker showing Vincent in the middle of the living room. She explained that when she returns to her mom's she longs to land on the sofa she particularly likes and considers as her own, but she can't do this because it is invaded by her half-

brother's toys. "(...) *and when I ask him to remove them, he puts more so uh ...*" said Marie . This rather "trivial" situation illustrates that children develop strategies to maintain their presence in the house and to be recognized within sibling relations and families "in claiming material space and leaving territorial marks" (Palludan and Winther, 2016 :12). Marie also leaves "*small brides*" on the bar, as she considers that this furniture also belongs to her. Leaving her spatial imprint, she re-asserts her physical place when she is back home.

Children develop strategies for negotiating spaces, which can go as far as strategies of "territoriality" (Félonneau, 1997: 46) that are grounded in their desire to have an exclusive use and exert a symbolic control on certain spaces or certain objects. A territory is an "appropriated space" in the sense that it is "specific to a person or a group of people but also specific to a certain use" (Schmitz, 2012 : 5, our translation). The juxtaposition of several territories in the same space is possible as long as "people do not consume the same attributes of the territory and that their activities don't prevent the other group from enjoying this space as well " (Schmitz, 2012 : 5, our translation). In the present case, Marie and Vincent want to use the same attributes of a specific space but for different functions (to play - to land). Their uses are not compatible and thus lead to conflicts and negotiation processes to reinforce the delimitations of their own territory.

"when she arrives at home, it's actually best not to ask too many questions... she just wants to land and be with us and that's it,... and if possible to immediately turn on the TV but that ... that's not possible anymore... So then we start to have small conversations, small things like that ... she just wants to land and ... she does acclimatize super-fast actually ... she's instantly home again and ... it's rather us, all of a sudden she comes back and ... well, there's one more person ... it's calm, we have a week without her, and then all of a sudden, she arrives ... it's not that it's bad but ... you have to get used to always having someone else who is there ... I love it but ... there's always this short laps of time to get set up ... Mondays, Tuesdays, these are not the best days ... for Marie's return, they're not the best days ... we must usually wait until Wednesdays for her to feel like she's always been at home... so there is always a little time ... (...) because I think she also needs to have time to land so ..." (Sarah, Marie's mother).

As Sarah explains each family member needs to adapt and get used to having one more person in the house, every time Marie comes home. Each member must redefine his/her place in the material space of the house, physically and symbolically accepting to "make room on the sofa" for Marie.

By delimiting her own territory (her sofa, her bedroom, etc.), Marie appropriates some space making it her own, arranging and restructuring it "in personal shells which manifest his [her] privileged relation with the places in which he [she] is even temporarily" (Félonneau, 1997: 49, our translation). She described her appropriation's ritual when she sits on the sofa and how it produces enjoyable sensations: she takes three pillows that she arranges in a very particular way behind her head and a blanket that covers her from head to toes. While marking the sofa with her personal imprint, she gives it a set of symbolic meanings that she described as "*her small cocoon*" reflecting a warmer "lived space" where she wishes to be alone, and where she feels comfortable. "The appropriation passes by the possibility that a space, objectively or temporarily outside itself, can become a space of interiority, that is to say, without danger for the self" (Félonneau, 1997: 49, our translation). In the social psychology of the environment, this concept is often associated with the notion of home. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981: 123), home appears as "a world in which a person can create a material environment that embodies what he or she considers significant. In this sense the home becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant who dwells within". This world "provides a space for action and interaction in which one can develop, maintain and change one's identity. (...) The home is a shelter for those persons and objects that define the self; thus it becomes, for most people, an indispensable symbolic environment" (1981:144).

Defining a symbolic place through materiality

"(...) and suddenly, there was a room downstairs actually ... that's where I slept before I got my own room with my own stuff, my clothes ... before, I used to put all my clothes in Amelie's room, she had given me two drawers ... and so now, I have my own wardrobe and my bed, my bed ... I moved again, I gave her back her drawers and I put my stuff downstairs ... simpler ... and they have boxes actually where they store all the drawings and stuff, things and me, I have my own cardboard box ... " (Coralie, 12)

Coralie has had her own room at her dad's and mom's since the beginning of the shared physical custody. She spoke very little about these two houses. She spoke more about Tristan's house, her stepfather, where she stays most of the time during the days she lives with her mother. There, she has become the accepted sibling of 4 children, as she gradually acquired more symbolic space in this recomposed family, through material footprints across the house's space that are equal to those of her "siblings":

"But it's true that they have colors for their stuff ... otherwise, we wouldn't figure anything out..." that was my towel!", " But no, it was my washcloth! "So it was a bit ... so, Tristan decided" you choose a color ", everyone has a color, they have blue, purple and orange ... and I chose yellow to also have my color ..." (Coralie, 12)

Like the others, she has her own cardboard box to store her belongings, she chose her own color to signify the things that belong to her, until she finally got her own room with her bed, her wardrobe and her "stuff". By increasingly giving her a physical place through the materiality of the home's space, her stepfamily testified to her the importance of the place she also symbolically takes into the family.

In this chapter, we dissociated for analytical purposes the definition of the physical place from the symbolic place of the child in the family, but as we can see here these two aspects are strongly interrelated. In the families we interviewed, the parents explained that they were proud to have accommodated their house to offer their daughter a room even if she was there only half of the time. They interpreted this accommodation as a symbol of the place they make for her in their house, as a proof that they don't put her in a "corner". Despite the fact that the child is absent at regular intervals, she remains symbolically present by the marks she leaves in each house during her absence. Marie's "small brides" or Coralie's yellow stuff actually remind their symbolic presence to the rest of the family.

The other parent is also symbolically present through materiality: *" (...) before, I had the clothes from mom's home in dad's home and I brought these back to my mom's home... but now, I don't bring everything back anymore..."* (Marie, 13). The separation between here and there is clear because Marie has her own things in each home, even if it became less clear with time. Despite this separation of stuff wished by the parents, we can see that objects referring to the other parent often stay with

the child during the days when she is in the other house. By stuff or objects we mean for example, clothes revealing a totally different style or exhaling the smell of a different fabric softener. It is in this way that the other parent stays symbolically present in the house. Through materiality, children create breaks and connections, wished or not, between their different “life spaces” (di Meo, 2012).

Conferring space a particular sense

"Well I don't know ...first I like the colors 'cause it's a bit orange and comforting like that ... it's small ... and, it's not that I prefer small but I'd rather it be a little too small the house than too big like that, so we are closer together ... and well I like it..." (Marie, 13)

In the quote above, Marie gave a specific sense to her mother's home based in part on the physical aspects of this place (color, layout, etc.), one of the three dimensions of the sense of place. This cognitive dimension refers to the spatial perception of formal aspects of places or, put in other words, how children “know the environmental elements and use them to navigate their way” (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013 :6). Marie told us she prefers to play or watch TV in her mother's living room, where there is more “*animation*” than in her dad's house where she feels a bit lonely because her dad is “*often in a bad mood*” and Leslie “*works all the time*”.

This testimony further speaks to the second dimension: the behavioral dimension which includes the functional dimensions of the environment (that is, the activities and the relationships that take place therein). Marie also expressed that she feels well in a room depending of whom is there or of whom it refers to. This brings to the forefront the emotional dimension that relates to the meaning of, satisfaction with, and attachment to place (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013 : 6). Relationships with the people in presence and the positive or negative emotions that are felt influence the child's perception and attachment to a specific space, leading her to prefer to remain there, making her feeling more comfortable and safe or on the contrary, encouraging her to avoid a specific room. By interpreting the physical setting, children convert a space into a place (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001 : 233) transforming it in “a center of meaning or field of care that emphasizes human emotions and relationships” (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001 : 233). Those three dimensions highlight the importance of analyzing children's practices in relation with the meaning they give to their practices.

Expressing emotions

"(...) when I was younger, my specialty was to slam the doors and, when I walked in the stairs, I would stomp hard like that, I would put all of my weight so that they would hear I was angry ...

Researcher: And you can't do this anymore then?

Marie: no but uh ... I complain more... I'm "roooh" {sound of annoyance} and all ... and in fact, we cannot slam our doors anymore because now there are magnets so it does "pffffff" {sound of silent closure} like this and then after it makes "chtung", and it closes ... so if I want to slam the door I must close it myself because I can't just let it go... "(Marie, 13)

Marie does not only assign emotions to a space, she uses space as a resource to express her emotions without words. In the past, she used to express her anger by slamming doors. This is no longer possible, she has been deprived from this medium of expression of her anger, and has therefore turned to a vocal medium – grumbling loudly to make sure people notice how she feels. She also uses the furniture to display negative emotions, sitting in an armchair she dislikes instead of her favorite sofa when she doesn't *"have the same visions of everything"* (Marie, 13). This behavior change highlights that a particular household simultaneously contains various symbolic environments, various "homes" inhabited by different family members and that a specific room or object can carry different meanings or symbols. However, this is a dynamic process, as "the character of these homes might change over time as the goal and patterns of attention of its members change" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 138).

Facilitating the transition

When Coralie was invited to indicate "her" places in the house, she put a sticker on the corridor and explained: *"The corridor because I walk all the time in it ... yes like to go everywhere, I have to take the corridor then ... and as there is often the linen there, I do "chouk, my stuff ... [imitating the sounds she makes when she takes her clothes from the laundry basket]"*. Before having her own room, Coralie was constantly moving from room to room, without having a place where she could settle. Considering the corridor as a space of her own reflects well her feeling of constant movement, cyclic mobility between and within different life spaces. This constant movement also impacted, and was further encouraged by, her sibling's relations, as she found herself moving (and being torn) between her quasi-sisters bedrooms who regularly fought to attract her in their respective room to play together.

She was thus constantly “in-between” both physically and relationally. During the interview, she defined herself as the central link in the chain that connects the whole, the different life spaces and the different families among which she travels.

Coralie’s testimony also reveals that children who inter-connect various life spaces also need to suspend this connection during phases of transition between houses in order to adapt to the household where they arrive. “Neutral” places play an important role in this regard, as they allow children to distance themselves from the family culture they leave behind (different ways of doing, values, activities, standards, material decorations of houses, atmospheres) and helps them prepare their adaptation to the family environment of their other parent's home. This neutral place serves as a springboard between two quite different life frames. Coralie explained it very well when she said: “*well, sometimes it's a little annoying to cut the moment with mom to go to dad ... sometimes it's just a little annoying but since I have started horseback riding ... because before, mom would pick me up at school, I would go to her house, we would make little things together then suddenly there was the train and I had to leave and as I started a moment with mom, to cut it like that, it was not nice ... like now I started horse riding, after that, it does not really make a difference ... because I go horse riding so ... I was already not with mom ...*” (Coralie, 12).

Conclusion

Marie and Coralie’s testimonies allowed us to show the important and multi-faceted role that space plays in the multilocal lives of children living in shared physical custody, mediating the interaction between the social and the material, and helping them deal with two (or sometimes four) different family settings. Space appears as a resource that children mobilize in their family relationships to confer a specific sense to the material places they inhabit.

Understanding the type of relationships that exist between the social and the material, between people and things is therefore crucial, as “objects affect what a person can do, either by expanding or restricting the scope of that person's actions and thoughts. And because what a person does is largely what he or she is, objects have a determining effect on the development of the self (...)” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 53). People interpret the objects that surround them,

give them a particular meaning, and assign them various levels of importance. As we have seen in this chapter, a sofa can be seen as “just a chair” to sit on, whereas for Marie, the sofa signifies “complex emotional and cognitive ties to other people and ideas” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: xi). Children create a significant relationship with both their human and non-human environment (Searles, 1986).

Through materiality, spaces influence family relationships based on how family members use them during their interactions. We saw that children can mobilize spaces to negotiate and mark their physical place in the environment of the houses by leaving spatial footprints symbolizing their presence in the family. At the same time, other kin members also use the materiality of space to show to the child the place they give her in the family. Coralie who was at first treated as a guest in her stepfather’s house, progressively moved to a status that positioned her more equally with regards to her stepsiblings. This recognition started with the invitation to choose her towels’ color and use a cardboard box to store her belongings, thereby integrating a system put in place for Tristan’ children, until the space of the house was re-organized so she could have her own room.

Children use spatial marks to delimit the territories they consider as their “own”, where they can temporarily exercise symbolic control and that they appropriate by conferring them a set of symbolic meanings (Félonneau, 1997). They attach themselves to spaces that become places they invest, and to which they assign a specific sense which varies according to cognitive, relational and emotional dimensions. For Serfaty-Garzon (2003), children who identify to “ their “ spaces can consider them as a part of themselves. Children also mobilize spaces as a resource to express themselves and display their emotions and state of mind to the rest of the family, or as transfer airlocks to facilitate their transition from one house to the other. “Neutral” time-spaces facilitate the disconnection from the house of departure infused by a particular family culture, and the reconnexion with the place and family setting of destination.

As the various themes of the results section show, by delimiting their territories, by leaving material marks recalling symbolically their place into the family, by giving a sense to some rooms, corridors, pieces of furniture by appropriating them or avoiding others; by mobilizing spaces as a way to express themselves or preparing themselves to switch between houses, Marie and Coralie transform their various ‘life spaces’ into a single “lived space”. Their various “life spaces” are embedded in intimate networks that form a coherent whole combining spatial representations and frames (di Meo, 2012). Coralie expressed really well this idea of multi-local living when she defined herself as the central link

in the chain that connects the whole. She connects her different life spaces and the representations attached to them, and which are influenced by the various family contexts among which she travels, to create her “lived space”.

There are of course many gaps and questions left unanswered in this chapter. Important aspects include the type of relationships that the different family members have with each other, how these relationships change, and how this connects with space. How do children’s places and territories in the physical space of the house influence their family relationships? Conversely, how does this physical place change as relationships evolve? We also need more details on how children adapt to their different family settings, and how these processes of adaption manifest themselves through space. What do children accept and reject, what do they circumvent inside each one of these life spaces? What dimensions and signs do they use to mark and qualify their lived space ? Finally, we know from the literature that representations and relationships to space vary and evolve differently according to the age, gender and socio-economic level of individuals (e.a. Authier and Lehman-Frisch, 2012 ; Authier, Bathellier, Lehman-Frisch, 2016 ; di Meo, 2012 ; de Singly, 2002). Bringing in a gendered perspective and paying more attention to the socio-economic conditions under which those arrangements take place will be of central importance during the next stage of this project.

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FIG 1: Socio-Spatial Network Game representing the various life spaces of Coralie

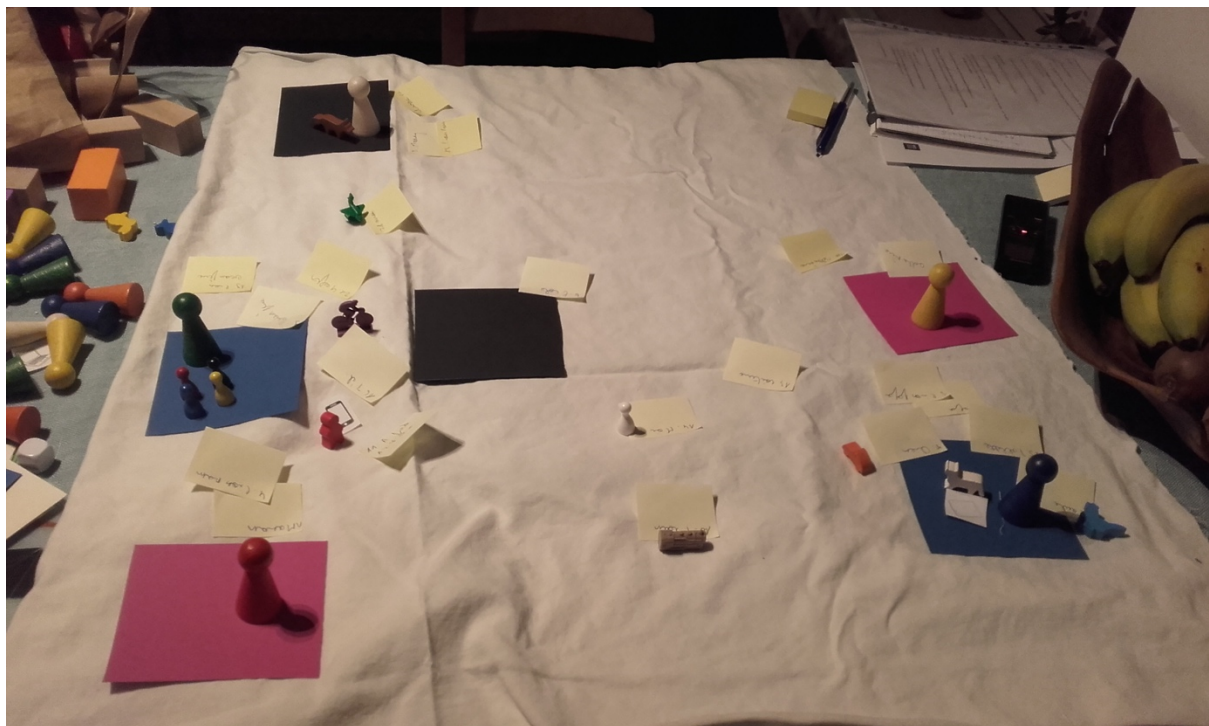


FIG 2: Emotion Map representing Marie's mother's house

