

The Everyday Environment: A Place to Feel Connected to, a Place that has Meaning

Die alltägliche Umwelt: Ein Ort zum Wohlfühlen, ein Ort der Bedeutung

El entorno cotidiano: Un lugar con el que sentirse conectado, un lugar con significado

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Zusammenfassung Dieser Beitrag widmet sich den Beziehungen von Grundschulkindern zu ihrer alltäglichen Umwelt und den Bedeutungen, die sie ihr zuschreiben. Die Untersuchung der kindlichen Beziehungen zu Orten sowie ihrer Raumwahrnehmung erfolgt mittels des Mosaikansatzes. Partizipative Forschungsaktivitäten wie Kartenerstellung, Spaziergänge in der Nachbarschaft und Interviews mit Kindern, ermöglichten die Erhebung der Verbindungen, des Wissens, der Bedeutungen und der Meinungen die Kinder über ihre Umwelt besitzen und mit dieser verbinden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass dieser Ansatz einen strukturierten Einblick in die Einbindung der Kinder in ihre alltägliche Umgebung und das *insideness* ihrer Raumempfindung gibt. Vor diesem Hintergrund reflektiert der Beitrag über den möglichen Einsatz der hier vorgestellten Ergebnisse im Geographieunterricht der Primarstufe.

Schlüsselwörter place attachment, Raumwahrnehmung, insideness, lernen außerhalb des Klassenzimmers, Grundschule

Abstract This paper reports on the findings of a research project investigating the connection of primary school students with their everyday environment and the meaning they derive from it. Children's place attachment and sense of place are investigated using a mosaic approach. Through participatory research activities, such as map making, neighbourhood walks, and interviews, children described their connections, knowledge, meanings, and opinions about the environment. Results show that this approach provides structured insight into how well children are connected with their everyday environment and have developed insideness in their sense of place. How this insight can be used in primary Geography education is discussed.

Keywords place attachment, sense of place, insideness, outdoor learning, primary Geography

Resumen En este artículo se exponen los resultados de un proyecto de investigación sobre la conexión de los alumnos de educación primaria con su entorno cotidiano y el significado que obtienen de él. Se investiga el apego de los niños al lugar y su sentido del mismo mediante un enfoque de mosaico. Mediante actividades de investigación participativa, como la elaboración de mapas, paseos por el barrio y entrevistas, los niños describieron sus conexiones, conocimientos, significados y opiniones sobre el entorno. Los resultados demuestran que este enfoque proporciona una visión estructurada sobre el grado de conexión de los niños con su entorno cotidiano y el desarrollo de su sentido de pertenencia al lugar. Se discute cómo se puede utilizar esta perspectiva en la enseñanza de la geografía en primaria.

Palabras clave apego al lugar, pertenencia al lugar, interioridad, aprendizaje fuera del aula, Geografía en Educación Primaria

1. Introduction

Primary education has the task of ensuring that all students can develop broadly. This means that all students can develop optimally in the cognitive, social-emotional, cultural, and physical areas and are well prepared for their further school career (ONDERWIJSRAAD 2011). The environment in which they grow up and the way in which they feel connected to their neighborhood play an important role in this development of children (OWENS 2004, 2016). Schools also play a role in this. They prepare children for the future, a future that looks increasingly troubled given the environmental crisis (TANNER 2019; OWENS ET AL. 2020; DEVINE-WRIGHT & QUINN 2021).

Every day children spend time in their environment, they go to school, play with friends, visit the sports club, the library, and so forth. Based on these daily interactions, they not only develop knowledge about the environment (what is where?) but also feelings, affective relationships and opinions. In other words, they become connected to their environment. Feeling connected to the environment and knowing what is going on there is important for young people in the formation of their identity and self-confidence and their ways of thinking about the world (WILSON

1997; OWENS 2004; TANI & SURMA-AHO 2012; BARNES & SCOFFHAM 2013). But neighborhoods differ in the way they accommodate children's lives, especially when it comes to possibilities for outdoor play (KARSTEN 2005) and there is a growing trend that the freedom children have to move outside is restricted due to, for example, pollution, safety, lack of play and green areas, and parental concerns (KARSTEN 2005; DOLAN 2016).

This research focuses on the connection of students with their everyday environment and the meaning that they derive from it. Understanding how students are connected to their environment enables teachers to connect their teaching and learning to the daily environment and develop students' sense of place. DOLAN (2016) suggests that by establishing a better connection between your students and their own environment as a teacher, you stimulate students to better know and understand their environment and the people who live, work, and recreate there. As a result, they could feel more part of the community, understand that their actions can have (positive or negative) consequences and thus adopt a positive attitude towards citizenship and sustainability in their own environment.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Relationship between People and Places

In the 1970s, under the influence of humanist geographers, such as Yi-Fu TUAN (1977), people's subjective experience of places received more attention with the keyword *experience* as a counterpart to the *spatial science/analysis* where people were seen as objects in space and not as persons who maintain a relationship with places.

To be able to interpret the relationship between people and places, various place-related concepts are used, such as community attachment, sense of community, place attachment, place identity, place dependence, and sense of place (HIDALGO & HERNÁNDEZ 2001;

HERNÁNDEZ ET AL. 2007; LEWICKA 2011; SCANNELL & GIFFORD 2010; JACK 2010; ANTON & LAWRENCE 2014; TANNER 2019; DEVINE-WRIGHT & QUINN 2021).

In this research, we distinguish between the connections with places (place attachment) and the meaning given to places (sense of place).

2.2 Place Attachment

Place attachment is one of the key concepts in Environmental Psychology (TANNER 2019) and has been described as the affective bond between people and their environment (HIDALGO & HERNÁNDEZ 2001; VAN DER GRAAF & DUYVENDAK 2009; SCANNELL & GIFFORD 2010). Being connected with places plays an impor-

tant role in people's feelings of security and well-being (JACK 2010; TANNER 2019)

Various components or dimensions can be distinguished in connection with a place, as shown by multiple studies (CUBA & HUMMON 1993; HIDALGO & HERNÁNDEZ 2001; SCANNELL & GIFFORD 2010) that VAN DER GRAAF and DUYVENDAK (2009) summarize in the following way.

In the first place, the question is how someone is connected to the environment: the physical aspects but also the social aspects within this physical space. HIDALGO and HERNÁNDEZ (2001) distinguish between rootedness or physical attachment and bonding or social attachment. Physical attachment is about bonding with, for example, playgrounds, buildings, and parks in the neighborhood and social attachment about the relationship that someone has built up with others. The distinction is not absolute and physical places often form the context in which emotional bonds arise (CUBA & HUMMON 1993; VAN DER GRAAF & DUYVENDAK 2009).

In addition, there are the motives for bonding, the motives related to the social and economic function of the neighborhood: family or friends in the neighborhood, connection with the community and work or property in the neighborhood (VAN DER GRAAF & DUYVENDAK 2009). Working or living in a certain place thus creates a certain bond. This is expressed, for example, in the desire of people to stay close to a place with which they feel connected or in the search for places that resemble places that people already know (see also: HIDALGO & HERNÁNDEZ 2001). Children often value places for what they can do there, or in terms of the concept of affordance (GIBSON 1979), the characteristics of the environment that a child sees as an opportunity, and that matches with his or her physical abilities, social needs, and personal intentions (KYTTÄ ET AL. 2018).

Finally, a distinction can be made between different scales or levels of identification: the house, the neighborhood, or the region as a place with which someone feels connected (CUBA & HUMMON 1993; VAN DER GRAAF & DUYVENDAK 2009).

Based on the above, in this study, we distinguish two dimensions of connectedness:

(1) *Where* do children feel connected?

This relates to the environment *in itself*.

This connectedness can take place at different (spatial) levels of scale. The house or (part of) the neighborhood.

(2) *How* and why do children feel connected? This relates to the physical and social characteristics of a particular place or environment. In other words, the connection of children with places and the relationships children maintain with those places and others.

2.3 Sense of Place

The connectedness with places ensures that students can give meaning to their environment. They develop perceptions, feelings and opinions about places with which the abstract space turns into a meaningful place. The meaning associated with places is also called sense of place. According to TUAN (1980), it is a self-conscious, reflective awareness that allows one to appreciate and *create a place*.

He strikingly writes that “[t]he given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought” (TUAN 1977, p. 9). In other words, something that you know is always a composition of experiences, feelings, and thoughts. SCOFFHAM (2017) adds that the meaning we ascribe to places makes them more memorable to us; thus we are more likely to care for them. For the emotional bond with a place that we build up in this way, RELPH (1976) used the concept of *insideness*, or the degree to which a person belongs to and associates himself with a place.

LIM and BARTON (2010) build on Relph's philosophy and in their study use *insideness* as a conceptual tool to understand children's sense of place in an educational context. Based on their research, they distinguish three characteristics of *insideness*:

- (1) Knowledge about the environment, which involves understanding of both the physical and social environment and being able to look critically at the environment;
- (2) Environmental competence, which means the ability to move with agility in the environment and know how to participate (playing outside, making friends);
- (3) Diverse and strong affective relationships with a place: meanings, feelings of pride, ownership and mutual relationships.

The importance of having *insideness* LIM and BARTON (2010, p. 336) describe as follows:

“Having environmental competence seems to be critical for children to become skillful, ca-

pable explorers and participants in their place. As children become more knowledgeable of their neighborhood geographically, socially, and culturally in details, the concreteness and particularity in their understanding help them to become more strategic, competent and participatory place explorers in their neighborhood”.

In this study, we use the three characteristics of *insideness* mentioned above to indicate the sense of place of children, characteristics that, of course, cannot be seen separately from each other and that interlock like cogwheels.

3. Research Methods

An important starting point in this research was that students should be active participants, who are listened to and the value is seen in bringing their own knowledge and competencies to the research. For that reason, the research is based on the so-called mosaic approach (CLARK 2005; CLARK & MOSS 2005). Different methods of data collection were embedded in a project in which the school environment was central, with a focus on the students' own experiences and valuations of the environment. The different methods together thus form pieces of the mosaic and provide insight into the ways in which students are connected to their school environment and give meaning to it.

The following research methods were used:

(1) Drawing a map of a certain place in the neighborhood.

(2) Completing a questionnaire asking about a number of experiences with the everyday environment and in which pupils entered a number of general characteristics.

(3) Photos of nice and less pleasant places in the neighborhood taken during a neighborhood walk with captions or ideas for a redesign for a particular place.

(4) Interviews with students on the basis of the maps drawn by them using an interview guide (cf. BLANKMAN 2020, 2021).

The data were collected at two primary schools in the fall of 2019 and the fall of 2020. Fig. 1 provides a description of the schools and the students as well as the phases of the data collection. The study was conducted with students aged 9-12 years. The research was conducted anonymously. The parents of the par-

	School Sun	School Moon
Characterization of the school	Located in a (working-class) neighborhood with a lot of diversity and relatively many low income and single-parent families.	Located in a homogeneous middle-class neighborhood.
Characterization of the students	Many children with a migration background; most children continue to lower secondary education. Duration of residence in the neighborhood varies.	Hardly any children with a migration background; approx. 60% continues to higher levels of secondary education. Children generally grew up in the neighborhood.
Data collection fall 2019	Questionnaire (n = 85) Map of a place in the neighborhood (n = 55) Neighborhood walk (in small groups) Interview (n = 7)	Questionnaire (n = 69) Map of a place in the neighborhood (n = 65) Neighborhood walk (in small groups) Interview (n = 7)
Data collection fall 2020	<i>Due to the measures surrounding COVID-19, it was not possible to carry out a second series of mapmaking and interviews. In 2020, the primary schools in the Netherlands were temporarily closed. In addition, adults had limited access to primary schools when the schools re-opened. At school Sun, the focus was also placed on the subjects Mathematics and Language.</i>	Map of a place in the neighborhood including photos of places that were rated positive or negative (n = 22) Interview (n = 10)

Fig. 1. Participating schools and data collection (school names are fictional for privacy reasons (Source: author)

participating students gave requested permission to participate.

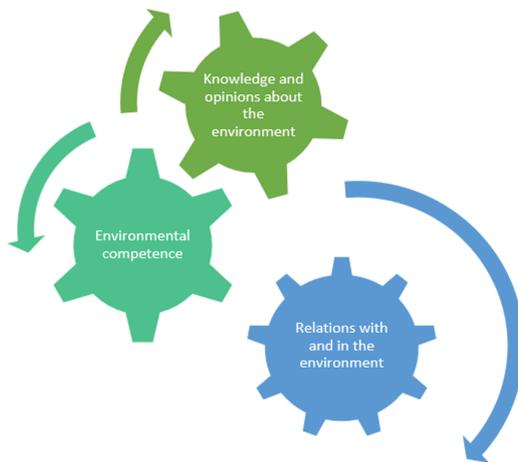
The schools are located in a neighborhood in or near the city of Haarlem in the western part of the Netherlands. With the exception of a number of busy roads, both neighborhoods are relatively quiet areas with plenty of space and play facilities for the children.

3.1 Map of the Neighborhood

First of all, maps can give us insight into the geographic knowledge and map skills of students. Maps, on the other hand, can also provide us with valuable information about children's connection to places (OWENS ET AL. 2018; VUJAKOVIC ET AL. 2018; LEHMAN-FRISCH ET AL. 2012; VUJAKOVIC 2016). In seeking to convey personal meanings and knowledge of

their local area from memory, students are the experts (OWENS ET AL. 2020).

We asked the students to draw a map of a certain place in their neighborhood that is important to them, analogous to the Meaningful Maps project (OWENS ET AL. 2018). It was not important whether the students drew a map that was as correct as possible, but that the map reflected what they know and feel about the place. This was also emphasized in the instruction. The map could become a *formal* or *conventional* real map, but also a *pictorial map* (a map in which children draw pictorial elevation views of features) or an elevation view. The option students select partly depends on their map skills. In addition, students were asked to include as much information as possible on the map in the form of, for example, a legend or key and short annotations (in the



Characteristics of insiderness	Possible questions
Knowledge and opinions about the environment	What do I see on the map? Who else lives there/do you see or speak/do you know? What are you doing there? What else do you know about ... Should the neighborhood stay this way/what should be changed?
Environmental competence	What other places in the area do you visit? How do you get there? What activities do you do there? With whom? How do you meet? Are you allowed to go everywhere in the neighborhood?
Relationships with and in the environment	Are you proud of the neighborhood/this place? Who are important to you? Do you know the people in that place? Do they know you? Do you feel safe there?

Fig. 2. Interview guidelines (Source: author)

form of stories/sentences with explanations). The maps were analyzed on the basis of dimensions of place attachment: to which places do pupils feel connected and how and why do they feel connected to these places.

3.2 Questionnaire

In addition, the students were also asked to provide a rating for their neighborhood in the form of a number from 1 to 10 as an indication for the quality of living and playing in the neighborhood, how safe they feel, and what freedom of movement they have (including whether they are allowed to play outside and go to school on their own). In addition, a number of biographical characteristics were collected.

3.3 Neighborhood Walk and Photos

In small groups, the students made a neighborhood walk via a route planned in advance by the students of each group (cf. CELE 2006). The walk took place under the supervision of a parent or teacher. During the walk they took photos of places that are meaningful to them

4. Findings

In this section, we introduce the results of the research evaluating data collected by means of the questionnaire, the maps drawn, the interviews, the neighborhood walk, and the photos that were taken.

4.1 What Did the Students Draw

The analysis of all the drawings (formal map, elevation view, and pictorial maps) shows that about half of the students drew a formal map (Fig. 5), about 20 percent of the students drew an elevation view or a pictorial map, with the remaining 12 percent drawing a combination

or places that they think should be improved. Back at school, the results were processed in different ways: students redesigned a particular place, wrote captions for the photos or wrote a letter to the municipality requesting that certain places in the neighborhood would be improved. These activities gave us insight into students' sense of place.

3.4 Interviews

To gain yet more insight into their sense of place, we conducted an interview with 21 students based on the maps they created, using interview guidelines (Fig. 2) derived from the three characteristics of *insideness* (LIM & BARTON 2010). By talking to the students, we obtained more in-depth information on their opinions, perceptions, and feelings in addition to, of course, also getting more insight into their knowledge of the neighborhood. This part can also be seen as a phase of reflection (CELE 2006; PIKE 2011).

of a formal map and a pictorial map (Fig. 6). Students from School Sun more often drew an elevation view or pictorial map (Fig. 3).

4.2 Connection with the Environment

Concerning where the students felt connected, the results show that they primarily remained connected to their home environment (Fig. 4). About 40 percent of the students drew their own house or street. In addition, they also drew images of places where they play (Fig. 6). Occasionally, students also drew a place that was further away. For example, the horse rid-

Type of map	School Sun		School Moon		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Formal map	26	47	50	57	76	53
Elevation view or pictorial map	17	31	13	15	30	21
Combination	12	22	24	28	36	26
Total	55	100	87	100	142	100

Fig. 3. Types of maps (Source: author)

ing school, the football or rugby club, or the community garden—places with special affordances for the children. Students from School Sun more often drew a specific place in their neighborhood (a park, square, or play-

ground). These are all places where children can do something, or, in other words, places that fit the personal characteristics and needs of the students. In contrast, students from School Moon more often drew a larger part of

Place drawn	School Sun		School Moon		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Own house or garden	10	18	2	2	12	9
Own street	12	22	31	36	43	30
Place in the neighborhood	29	53	4	5	33	23
Larger part of the neighborhood	4	7	41	47	45	32
Route	-	-	9	10	9	6
Total	55	100	87	100	142	100

Fig. 4. Places students feel connected to (Source: author)

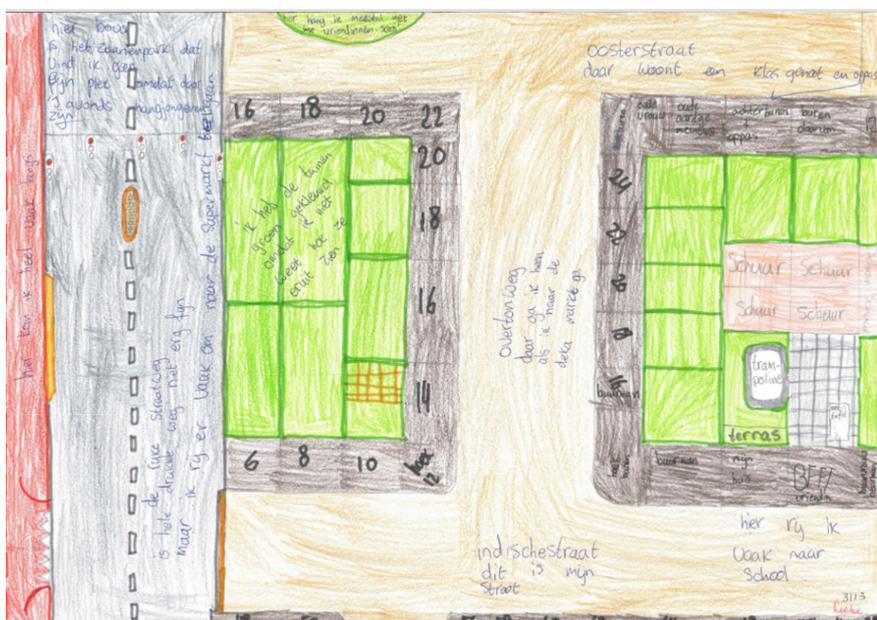


Fig. 5. Example of a map (School Moon, age 10) showing a part of the neighborhood rich in information reflecting aspects of physical and social connection, explaining her activities in different places, and entailing rich details on her home (Source: author)

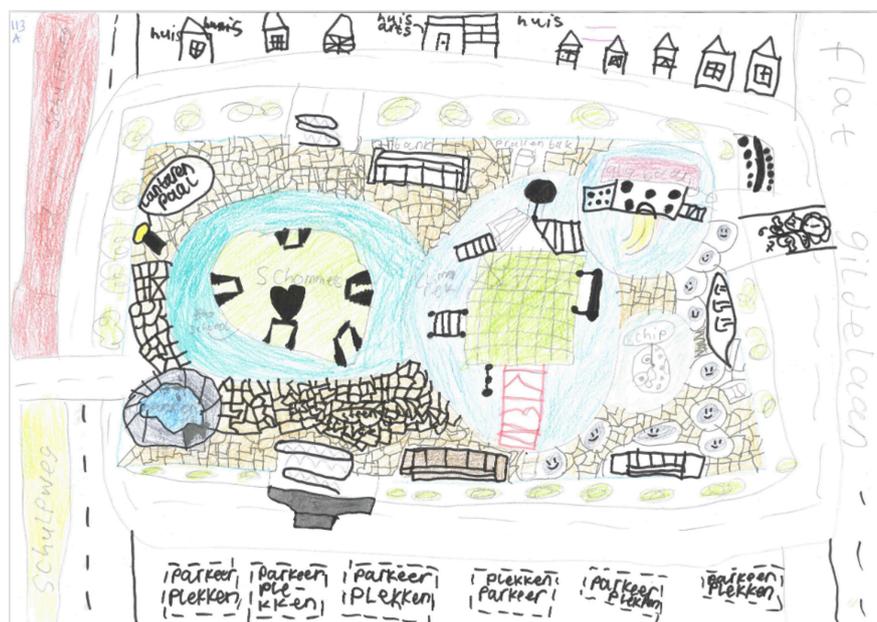


Fig. 6. Example of a combination of a pictorial map and a formal map showing a playground in the neighborhood (School Sun, age 10) showing aspects of physical connectedness and explaining the importance of social connectedness (Source: author)

the neighborhood (several streets), whereby their own house often was also part of the drawing (Fig. 5). The findings are consistent with the results of the Meaningful Maps project in the United Kingdom (OWENS ET AL. 2018), where children also focused on their immediate home environment from an ego-centric perspective. Also, the photos taken during the neighborhood walk often include their own house, which is characterized as a nice place.

Concerning *how and why students are connected*, the maps often focus on the physical environment: houses, streets, squares, parks (cf. Fig. 5, Fig. 6, Fig. 7). These physical places often form the context in which emotional bonds arise (Fig. 6). Places students drew have meaning to them because it is the home of family or friends or because it is a place where they can play, exercise, or meet. On their maps, they write things like: "Because Amelie lives in this neighborhood", "A classmate/

neighbors/babysitter lives here" and "My school, I think is a very nice school with nice teachers". This social connection is also strongly reflected in the interviews. For example, one of the pupils says: "I think it's a nice neighborhood, I have a lot of friends who live close to me, I can always play with them" and "Every year there is a street party, with BBQ and inflatables. I like it because it's cosy".

The children's perspective is self-centered. For example, they write: "This is my house, a friend lives here, my grandmother lives here". In addition, we hardly see any elements, such as churches and companies on the maps; they are there, but they probably have no meaning (yet) for the students. On the maps made by students of the School Sun, only one student represented a big steel factory, even though it is right next to their neighborhood. There is a gas station close to School Moon. Yet, none of the students put it on their map.

	School Sun		School Moon		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Physical elements	47	85	83	95	130	92
Physical and natural elements	8	15	4	5	12	8
Total	55	100	87	100	142	100
Elements of social connection	23	42	53	61	76	54
No elements of social connection	32	58	34	39	66	46
Total	55	100	87	100	142	100

Fig. 7. Physical and social connectedness (Source: author)

4.3 Sense of place

The opinion of the students about their neighborhood is generally positive (Fig. 8): they enjoy living and playing there and most of them feel safe, regardless of the socio-economic characteristics of the neighborhood in which the schools are located. This is remarkable, since recent Dutch research (JENNISSEN ET AL. 2018) shows that residents of neighborhoods with a great diversity feel less safe and less at home and that the social cohesion is more lim-

ited than in more homogeneous neighborhoods. We do see small indications for this (Fig. 8) in the fact that especially girls from School Sun located in a neighborhood with more diversity and low income, value their own environment less positively as a place to play, and also feel relatively less safe in the neighborhood. In the more homogeneous middle-class neighborhood in which School Moon is located, hardly any children feel unsafe (Fig. 8).

	Living in the neighborhood (number 1 t/m 10)		Playing in the neighborhood (number 1 t/m 10)		I don't feel safe in the neighborhood (in %)	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
School Sun	7.1	8.1	6.5	7.5	9.1	2.4
School Moon	8.4	8.3	7.4	7.5	0	2.8

Fig. 8. Appreciation of the neighborhood (Source: author)

This particularly positive image also emerges in the interviews with the students on the basis of the maps they have drawn.

4.4 School Place Perspectives

Most of the students from *School Moon*, located in a fairly homogeneous middle class neighborhood, were born in that neighborhood or have lived there for most of their lives. They know their surroundings well and say that you can play outside on the squares and playgrounds, that there is not much traffic. In general, they mention elements that have meaning for them. In addition to the squares and playgrounds, they mention things like the magazine shop, the ice cream shop, and the bakery that sells delicious poppy seed balls, but also the proximity to shops or a road on which they often cycle. They really know the nature of their neighborhood so well that they are unable to get lost: "When we cycle in the neighborhood we try to get lost and then we keep turning left or right without knowing where we are going and we try to get lost. But we never really succeed because we keep coming back to a point that we know. We know the neighborhood very well". What they say about the neighborhood also shows a degree of pride.

The interviewed students can move around the neighborhood in an agile way, they have a lot of freedom of movement (because it is safe, because their parents give them that freedom). They walk or cycle to friends, meet at the end of the school day or coordinate through WhatsApp to play outside or play football together. Students report the following about this: "I hang out here (on the square) with my friends. Chatting and all that. And usually one has a phone and then sends a WhatsApp to other children to come there too and then we end up with a very large group".

The neighborhood is a place where the students feel at home, a place where they also feel safe, and where they know the people: "I think it's a nice neighborhood, because there are many friends living there, the school is nice and there are many places where you can play and enjoy yourself." And: "I know half of the people that live on my street. We are all friends. My mother also has a WhatsApp group with other people in the street and if we need something that we don't have ourselves, we can borrow it".

A popular spot in the area often mentioned by students is a large park where you can skate, play, and walk the dog. But the students also criticize this place, they think there is too much graffiti and rubbish on the ground and sometimes a fire is made by the young people who hang out there. For that reason, the students prefer not to come to the park at night. Three students jointly wrote a letter to the mayor with a request to change a few things in the park and they will soon have a conversation with him and the alderman.

Other statements also show that students are able to take a critical look at their neighborhood. For example, a student reports that there are far too many parked cars in the area and that they sometimes drive too fast. In addition, they think that the rubbish and dog poo on the street should be cleaned up and that people should actually use the appropriate waste bins.

For the students of the *School Sun* located in a neighborhood with more diversity and low income, the neighborhood carries different meaning to them. This is especially true for students who have been living there for some time. Most students are allowed to go anywhere, although the railway line that runs through the neighborhood with a busy road next to it seems to be an informal border line. Students comment on this: "I am allowed to go anywhere in the neighborhood, but not across the railway. That is a bit too far", or "I only cross the railway when I go to football practice".

A number of places are popular among the students, the interviews showed. For example, several students refer to the schoolyard as a place "Where there are always children". One of the students also drew the schoolyard and said: "I often go there after school. There I play with friends. Sometimes we meet there and sometimes I just go there to play football." The boy who drew the map represented in [Fig. 6](#) writes:

"This is the blue square. This is called so because it has a lot of blue. It is a playground with swings, a climbing frame, slides, a ship that can turn and benches and a waste bin. I feel safe and it is fun because every day there are many children especially in the evening. Then we play hide and seek among the trees and bushes. The place is important to me because I play there every day and there are always children and I know everyone there".

Clearly this is a place with a lot of affordances. Another place in the neighborhood where all the interviewed students visit, is a park. Here they come to play; at the same time, it is a place that is looked at critically. After the neighborhood walk, a group of students sent a letter to the municipality asking whether this park, but also other playgrounds in the area, could be renovated. One of the interviewed students also says: "I wanted to draw a red climbing frame. It was here, but has been removed because it was too old. I don't think it's too old. And now I am outside less. Because if there is no one outside to play, I could still do that on the red climbing frame. Actually, I would like the red climbing frame back". In addition, he also speaks enthusiastically about the many places in the neighborhood where he goes, as well as about places further away. He has a lot of knowledge about the neighborhood.

Two of the interviewed students who have been living in the neighborhood for a relatively short time have less experience with the neighborhood. One of the girls was born in Latvia and has lived in the neighborhood for two years. She says that she usually comes to

the square near her house, but that she is also often at home with her mother. Another girl living in the neighborhood for half a year regularly goes to her old hometown to dance there and she cannot tell much about her new neighborhood yet. A third girl knows the neighborhood a bit better. She came to live in the area from Syria four years ago. She has drawn her street, a street where she basically knows every resident by face, but not yet by name. She is clearly proud that the houses have solar panels.

The fact that students have strong feelings and opinions is also evident from the redesigns that students made as a result of their neighborhood walk. For example, there were designs for a new playground, two unsafe traffic intersections, one of which is equipped with traffic lights and pedestrian crossings, and the other has a bicycle bridge.

The interviews with the students from School Sun show that the longer they live in the neighborhood, the more they seem to identify with their neighborhood, they participate more and in a larger number of places and feel more at home there.

5. Discussion

In this research, we investigated, using different research methods, how students from two primary schools are connected to their everyday environment and what meanings this environment has for them. The children who took part in this study live in places (no matter how different the two neighborhoods are) where there are sufficient opportunities to play outside, to go to school on their own and to actively explore the neighborhood.

They can and are allowed to play outside independently and their freedom of movement is not restricted by parental supervision and restrictions as a result of, for example, heavy traffic, as is the case for many children in an urban context (KARSTEN 2005; DOLAN 2016). The students are positively connected to their environment, although there seem to be small indications that especially girls from School Sun, located in a neighborhood with more diversity and low income, value their own environment less positively as a place to play, and also feel relatively less safe in the neighborhood (cf. JENNISSON ET AL. 2018). The length of residence in the neigh-

borhood can also play a role the way children feel connected to a place (LEWICKA 2010).

In our research, we adopted the construct *insiderness* as operationalized by LIM and BARTON (2010) in three characteristics: environmental understanding, environmental competence, and various affective relationships with a place. The clear links between these three characteristics became evident in our study as well. Children from School Moon have a lot of knowledge about their environment. This also makes it easy for them to feel competent in the environment, move freely through the environment, meet up with friends and maintain relationships with these friends, but also with adults in the neighborhood and the environment through their parents. Their affective bond (place attachment) with the environment is strong. With children from School Sun we see this especially if they (and their parents) have lived for a longer period of time in the neighborhood.

Children have clear preferences, goals, and intentions to go to certain places related to the affordances of a place, such as what they can

do there and who they can meet there. However, this also applies to what they can no longer do there, as the example of the red climbing frame shows: now that the frame is gone, the student from School Sun has no reason left to go outside. Their attachment to places is also reflected in their critical attitude towards aspects of that environment. Although places have clear affordances (you can play nicely and meet friends), there are also points for improvement (there is a lot of junk or an unsafe situation). Children value these places what also reflects the relationship with the given places.

The focus of this research was on *insideness* to indicate the development of sense of place of children (source). The development of their sense of place takes place in a kind of dialogic involvement with place attachment and affordances of places. Children go to and explore certain places because these places have characteristics that correspond to the physical abilities, social needs, and personal intentions of the children (KYTTÄ ET AL. 2018).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

What this research evidently shows is that children all have clear knowledge, experiences, and opinions about their everyday environment. It is important to connect our education with this knowledge and the experiences of students and to see this everyday knowledge as valuable (MARTIN 2008; CATLING & MARTIN 2011; CATLING & WILLY 2018), and not only to connect our teaching with this knowledge, experiences and opinions but also to give children a voice (CATLING 2014).

Insight into the degree of *insideness* of students is important in order to connect with this knowledge, these experiences and opinions as a teacher. As this research shows, the degree of *insideness* differs among students.

The use of maps drawn by the students as a tool together with the developed interview guidelines (Fig. 2) can provide teachers with insight into the connection between children and places regarding their knowledge, experiences, and opinions. This knowledge enables them to better adjust and connect their teaching.

In addition, more attention should be paid to education about and in the school environment. As

This allows them to form an affective bond (SCANNELL & GIFFORD 2010; TANNER 2019) with those places. At the same time, this place attachment is a reflection of the affordances of a place. The same is the case for the degree of *insideness*. The full range of this knowledge, competences, and relationships that characterize *insideness* also enables children to build an affective bond with a place, which again reflects the degree of *insideness*.

This *insideness* helps them, as LIM and BARTON (2010) state, to become more strategic, competent, confident, and participatory place explorers in their neighborhood. A strong sense of place attachment in turn can be associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, stronger social bonding, and trust in others (LEWICKA 2011; TANNER 2019).

Primary education, on the one hand, can reflect the views on *insideness* and place attachment we described and, on the other hand, has an important role in the (further) development of this *insideness* and attachment to places, which will be discussed in the next section.

this study shows, an extensive knowledge of the environment helps students to feel safer and more competent in their environment. Leading to more enjoyment of it. Education about and in one's own environment can help to increase this knowledge and the attachment to places and thus contribute to the well-being of children (LEWICKA 2011; TANNER 2019). However, the reality at many primary schools in the Netherlands and elsewhere is that little attention is paid to outdoor learning and place-based education, although this is formulated in the attainment targets for primary education. Organizational, safety, and time constraints are often mentioned for this (DOLAN 2016; CATLING & WILLY 2018).

Learning more in and about the environment and experiencing that environment as a meaningful place establishes a connection with it, which according to HIGGINS (2009) is a starting point for building relationships with places and people, thus creating an understanding of the consequences of one's actions and an ethic of citizenship and care (DOLAN 2020).

If, as stated above, we start from children's own Geographies, this also means that we

should consider them as co-learners (CATLING 2014). By allowing students to ask their own questions to investigate their environment together with them and to appreciate their experiences with and in the environment, students gain more ownership of their learning.

It is the teacher's task to connect to the everyday knowledge of the students—the so called *school* knowledge, that is, the knowledge that students cannot easily acquire outside of school (YOUNG & LAMBERT 2014). This powerful knowledge helps students to explain things, to provide insight into developments and gives them the opportunity to think about alternatives (BÉNEKER & GAANS 2018). In other words, it thereby increases the capabilities of the students so that they can look beyond their everyday experiences and thus contribute to the *substantive freedoms* available to young people. For example, freedom to think, make good choices, and decisions about how to live (SOLEM ET AL. 2013). Education can thus contribute to the development of children into adults who can and want to be in the world with knowledge, skills, responsibility, and in connection with others (ENTHOVEN 2020), or, in other

words, can develop into responsible and critical (world) citizens needed to face the environmental, social, and economic challenges of the twenty-first century (TANNER, 2019), an important task of Geography education.

This study can be characterized as an exploratory endeavor with a limited context. Further research in a more diverse context, taking into account the migration background, length of stay and age of the participating students as well as the geographical characteristics of the neighborhood, can give us further and more refined insight into the place attachment and sense of place of children.

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