Chapter 1

Space, Place and Educational Settings: An Introduction

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Schools are one of the few institutions through which all individuals in most countries around the globe are legally obliged to pass. Within societies and during the course of an individual's life, access to and participation in education are critical for humans to develop and societies to flourish. It is a key institution, alongside the family, in the socialization of individuals, and is crucial to creating social order in almost all societies.

One can therefore say that educational institutions, such as schools and universities, but also non-formal and informal education settings, which include private tutoring and what Mark Bray (2009) calls shadow schooling, shape the trajectories and experiences of everyday lives. As a set of formal institutions—from pre-school to higher education—educational actors are engaged in social and cultural production through their policies, programmes, and practices, which pave the ground for realizing futures.

As stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, education is considered a universal human right. In many developed economies, young people spend a substantial part of their lifetime as children and adolescents attending educational institutions, though not all are in high quality schools. By way of contrast, there are still some 263 million young people out of school worldwide, so the globe is a long way from meeting its lofty goals.

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Yet education is also a positional good (Brown, 2000), and as societies have embraced ideologies to link education more closely to global competitiveness, important differences have emerged between families and communities regarding what education will entitle them to relative to others with less education. For some, education provides them with qualifications, empowerment, social integration, and orientation with the aim to open up perspectives for the professional career and well beyond. However, it has become a matter of major concern to both governments and to the multilateral agencies, like the OECD and UNESCO, that educational opportunities are not evenly distributed within societies. The pandemic, which has affected all nations around the globe, has laid these inequalities bare. All in all, existing social inequalities are reflecting in and potentially reinforced by different opportunities to participate in education and the varying degrees of educational success.

The conductors of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and of numerous other studies show that students' competences and qualifications differ considerably. Although these differences are partly linked to their individual abilities and prerequisites, they also depend on the educational institutions' financial and personnel resources, such as the qualifications of the teaching staff, the annual education budget, and local labor markets. However, differences in the students' educational achievements cannot be explained solely by their learning abilities and the institutions' equipment, because extra-individual factors from families and other non-school environments also play important roles. There is overwhelming evidence that students from more affluent families and with parents holding higher educational degrees tend to have clear advantages over those from educationally deprived and less affluent families (Coleman et al., 1966; van Zanten, 2005).

It could be argued that various actors and stakeholders in educational policy and educational planning should share the responsibility of setting up and reshaping the conditions of education as a matter of social justice. Yet private actors increasingly see education as a source of profit, particularly when they are able to secure a toe-hold in the education market. Education is also a site of contestation, as social classes strategize getting ahead in the race to access better jobs and more secure futures. In this ongoing process, actors articulate competing ideas, viewpoints, and ideologies in debates over which goals should be prioritized, which measures should be taken, and what the veracity of evidence is. It is highly contested which interventions are needed and to what extent financial resources can be allocated for education. As one can observe in many places, this leads to numerous conflicts and related negotiation processes involving not only politicians but also civil society actors, parents, and students, as well as various other stakeholders and decision makers. The great efforts various actors have undertaken to actively engage in such negotiation processes underline education's particular social and political importance as an arena to make key decisions and set the course for present and future developments.

With this book, we argue that researchers of education may frame their efforts too closely if it they remain within the realm of a classroom or educational institution. In many cases, it is important not to neglect the broader context of educational

settings, taking into account the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions as well as the notions of space and place (Massey, 2005). Accordingly, we understand educational settings as the broader framing of education, which includes the out-of-school environment, neighborhoods, and institutional arrangements, as well as the agendas of the multilateral and corporate world. Education literally takes place in the neighborhood and educational landscapes are embedded in local communities, although they are exposed to and are part and parcel of educational policies and the ongoing dynamics of transformation at regional, national and international scales. Such profound changes in the education sector have occurred as a result of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and related programs and initiatives over the past few decades (Tolofari, 2005).

As part of the *Knowledge and Space* series, this book's authors follow a comprehensive approach bringing together a set of contributions reflecting various disciplines with their methodologies and theoretical backgrounds. The main idea is to create an open arena for exchange and cooperation, drawing upon and going beyond the ongoing research activities in geographies of education (Butler & Hamnett, 2007; Hanson Thiem, 2009; Holloway & Jöns, 2012). Complementing other volumes in the *Knowledge and Space* series, such as *Geographies of Schooling* (Jahnke, Kramer, & Meusbürger, 2019), we explore the nexus between education, space, and place. The majority of the chapters assembled in this volume are based on papers presented on the occasion of the Knowledge and Space Symposium on *The Role of Socio-Environmental Settings for Learning and Educational Attainment* that was held in Heidelberg in September 2017. In addition, we decided to include a few more selected contributions to enlarge the scope of the research fields that are represented in this volume.

Taking up the example of Heidelberg in southwestern Germany, Gerhard, Hoelscher, and Marquardt (2021) adopt a sociospatial perspective to better understand the interplay between the knowledge society, educational attainment, and the unequal city. The authors point out that social and educational inequalities are produced and reproduced by educational institutions in a university town that is referred to as a "knowledge pearl" because it is highly competitive in the knowledge economy. They use the case of Heidelberg to underline that making knowledge and education a local priority does not necessarily prevent some students from being left behind.

Anna Juliane Heinrich and Angela Million (2021) address the question of how initiatives in urban development and urban planning can contribute to reducing educational inequalities. They draw upon Campus Rütli in Berlin and the Morgenland Neighborhood Education Center in Bremen-Gröpelingen to sketch out the implementation of educational landscapes with the support of funding programs and initiatives. With these two examples from Germany, they show how socially deprived neighborhoods can benefit from implementing and rearranging local educational landscapes.

In their chapter, Douglas Lee Lauen and Kyle Abbott (2021) examine how variation in charter school effects test-score achievement in the United States. Charter schools challenge the notion that a centralized government can and should determine the practices and curriculum in common schools that all students should attend. Therefore, they provide an interesting case study in how institutional

settings vary across countries (and states within countries) that determine which types of schools are permitted to exist. In addition, this chapter's authors highlight the variable effects across studies, some with very few schools of the same type in one region, some with many schools of different types from many regions.

In another chapter based in the U.S., Brian L. Levy (2021) explores the question of the effects of neighborhood setting on educational attainment. Drawing on sociological and life course theory, he theorizes about the heterogeneous effects of neighborhood socioeconomic status on student educational attainment. Specifically, he posits that neighborhoods can contribute to cumulative advantage, cumulative disadvantage, advantage leveling, and compensatory effects. This chapter serves as a reminder that settings can have complex and varied effects on youth.

Matías Nestore (2021) examines the complex relationship between pedagogical practices and marginalized youth in the Quartieri Spagnoli (QS) in Naples. As an urban space, the QS is a paradoxical mix of wealth and poverty, advantage and disadvantage, a formal economy and an informal one, which emerge out of the ways in which global neoliberal politics shape places and their politics. Nestore (2021) draws on an ethnography of marginalized youth in the QS, and argues that teachers' pedagogies to a large extent contribute to these excluded youths' marginalization. He concludes by suggesting that educators and policymakers need to take into account the production of place-based identities as a matter of social justice.

Tim Freytag and Samuel Mössner (2021) use their contribution to explore the fragmented geographies of education in Freiburg, Germany. The authors trace back the implementation of an educational landscape and network in Freiburg that includes monitoring and counseling services and was funded within the framework of a national program. Although the organizational structures implemented are designed to support the work of the educators and to enhance the students' educational participation and success, it proves difficult to establish a support system that efficiently responds to the needs of students from less privileged family backgrounds and that allows the reduction of persisting educational inequalities.

David Giband (2021) sets a focus on schooling for the deprived gypsy population in the inner-city neighborhood of Saint-Jacques in Perpignan, France. Adopting a territorial approach, he analyzes the complex relationship between school education and the sociocultural environment of a marginalized group. Moreover, the author takes a critical stance towards a local experiment that was part of an educational reform, whose actors aimed at setting up inclusive cultural schools to transform individual and collective attitudes towards schooling among the gypsy families in Saint-Jacques.

Julia Nast (2021) addresses the question of how neighborhoods shape the organizational practices of teachers and other educational professionals. Combining a Bourdieusian perspective and new institutional theory, she draws upon interviews and observations from two schools in Berlin to explain how local settings become important as social, symbolic, and administrative units. Consequently, institutional changes can take various forms and play out differently in different neighborhoods. In other words, neighborhoods as such contribute to the production and persistence of educational inequalities.

As Susan L. Robertson (2021) shows, however, despite places mattering, actors in contemporary modes of governing education tend to set aside, and ignore, the

importance of place-based social inequalities. In short, she argues, central governments and international agencies, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, tend to flatten socioeconomic differences in places, imposing instead a new kind of difference in schools, one based on vertically organized ordinal rankings. This approach to governing sets up a competition with winners and losers in a social mobility race that has its own pathologies.

Complementing each other, the authors of this volume's chapters illustrate and analyze the complex interrelations between space, place, and educational settings. Several contributors underline that educational inequalities can be aggravated by structural barriers shaping the students' out-of-school environment. On the one hand, other authors focus on the scope for action that students, parents, teachers, and stakeholders can utilize to improve and enhance educational participation. Public and private programs, networks, and initiatives at various geographical scales widely support such activities.

We present this volume as an invitation to explore and critically reflect the interplay between space, place, and educational settings that is marked by complexities, ambivalences and controversies. Scholars, students, and practitioners alike can use this book as a resource. Nevertheless, the volume does not provide easy answers or solutions. The chapters' authors point at particular cases and examples to be studied from specific methodological and theoretical perspectives. Owing to this approach, a few disciplines and important fields of research, such as non-formal and informal learning, remain underrepresented. Moreover, the contributions' geographical scope is limited due to their authors' focus on the global north. Consequently, we suggest taking this volume as a starting ground to be deepened, extended, and transferred in the course of ongoing empirical work and theoretical thought and debates.

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