

POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS OF A TRUST APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S LIVES, PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

A collaborative book

For a period of two years, an international group of researchers have worked on a collaborative book on trust dynamics in children's lives, participation and citizenship. The part of departure was two observations:

- 1) Increasing sociological recognition of trust as essential to agency and citizenship in globalized societies characterized by complexity and risk.
- 2) Trust and mistrust very often is recognized in sociological childhood research as significant – but under-theorized and very seldom systematically explored – factors in the shaping of children's participation, citizenship and well being.

The concept of basic trust is valuable for analysing children's lives and capacity for participation and citizenship; however there is a need to move beyond the prevailing individualistic and familial approaches in order to replace this view of children as passive objects of adult agency with an understanding of the child as an agent.

Direction for future research: Empirical studies on the development of basic trust as a spatially contextualised phenomenon. This includes investigating how politics, organizational and institutional structures, power relations and discourses shape children's development of basic trust and feelings of security.

The generational order, both in itself and in its intersections with other power relations, constructs children, and especially certain groups of children, as untrustworthy. As a result of these constructions, children are met with distrust and control, and as 'not yet citizens', rather than with trust and recognition. This has negative consequences for children's wellbeing, participation and citizenship identity

Directions for future research: Exploration of how notions of 'who can be regarded as trustworthy' are constructed through the governance of certain groups – what Rose has termed governing through "the community" as a new territory for the administration of the individual and collective existence' (Rose, 1996: 331).

Organizational structures and welfare paradigms matter: Spaces for trust building and, by extension, spaces of lived citizenship (that is citizenship as practiced, learned and experienced), are constructed in the intersection of global flows of information and communication, for example professional knowledge, governance strategies, ideas and information; and locally contextualised policies and practices.

Directions for future research: Exploration of how the spaces for trust building and of lived citizenship are shaped by this intersection of global flows and local policies and practices.

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A three-pronged overall conclusion

- 1) Trust dynamics are spatially contextualised.
- 2) The concept of trust is potentially extremely valuable in analysing and theorising about children's participation, citizenship and life quality. However, it also has a number of limitations and requires further theoretical development.
- 3) Both the potential of the trust concept, as well as its limitations and the need for further theoretical development, are a result of the many theoretical definitions of trust that exist and of the spatial contextualization of trust dynamics.

A processual trust approach is valuable for analysing facilitation of children's agency, participation and citizenship, however needs to move beyond a trust – mistrust dichotomy

Directions for future research: Development of definitions of trust in terms of a continuum (e.g. as 'relationship specific trust' bound to a specific issue and a relationship between two specific persons), and theorize the role of agent's dispositions for trust, including how such dispositions is related to power, but also to theorise about how children's actions may not always be intelligible in terms of such a continuum

Power and domination constitute 'the dark side' of system trust, since trusting a system implies accepting the power relations inherent in the system. Adults' trust in expert knowledge about children's development frames their attitudes in paternalist and patronising ways. This 'dark side' of system trust remains a lacuna in trust research in childhood studies and beyond.

Direction for future research: If we accept that power and domination constitute 'the dark side' of system trust, and at the same time that system trust supports personal trust and vice versa (a point made by Luhmann and in many chapters in the book), a tricky issue arises about the relationship between personal trust on the one hand, and empowerment and domination on the other. Further research is needed to elucidate this issue.

The book is published ultimo 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan
Extract from reader's report: "All the chapters engage with contemporary analysis of the sociology of childhood and connect with Luhmannian definitions of trust as well as more recognisable perspectives on trust. The complexity of the concept becomes apparent as trust dynamics are examined in depth. Readers are challenged to consider adult and child power relations, think about trust as relational and examine the importance of trust in promoting agency, participation and empowerment practice. (..) Overall this is an inspiring book examining the theoretical implications of trust dynamics in order to theorise and develop a greater understanding of the gaps between the rhetoric and the reality of participatory practice in work with children and young people.