This is an engaging collection of ethnographic studies into children’s conception of place as a social and physical location. The cross-cultural focus is wide, drawing on research from Europe, Africa, Asia, North America and Oceania. The book is a positive addition to comparative study in the field and demonstrates a growing interest in research into the anthropology of childhood. The essays examine children’s complex understanding of place and enrich our appreciation of the ways that they see and interact within the social world. The book’s focus on the everyday lives of children creates a rich body of work that looks at the ‘micro geographies’ of specific cultural contexts and explores the ways that they provide an insight into the lives of specific children. The comparative approach challenges Western notions of childhood by investigating the informal learning that takes place in areas of children’s experience that are not usually examined. Central to this book is an interpretation of contemporary childhood and youth culture that demonstrates how children cope with and subvert the imposition by adults of artificial boundaries to their space and situated identities.

The book is divided into three thematic sections. The first section looks at how children use frequented space to create opportunities for empowerment or to control events in environments such as day nurseries, conflicted territories in Belfast and aboriginal schools in Australia. The second section examines intergenerational relationships in diverse settings such as sports centres, multicultural neighbourhoods and refugee camps. The third section explores questions regarding the foundation of individual children’s sense of belonging. This is illustrated in the conflict that arises between a sense of belonging to a local community and parental expectations of schooling in Meinert’s study of rural Uganda, Kjorholt’s Norwegian study on the role of children’s social participation and the creation of a children’s culture and Olwig’s examination of immigrant experience of connection to a global community to remake their identity.

The diverse nature of the examples of childhood agency and shared identities covered by the research demonstrates the value of in-depth case studies to bring a fresh approach to questions of childhood and children’s place in society. Each essay has merit in the way that it explores the complex dynamics of children’s construction of place. The variety of perspectives on childhood spaces means that the book can be used as a general reader for undergraduate childhood-studies students who are engaged in cross-cultural perspectives courses. Equally, individual chapters provide case-study examples to stimulate discussion among educationists, children’s rights workers and policy makers to debate the participation and empowerment of children. For example, Anderson’s research into an open-access sport programme in Norway demonstrated how children’s use of facilities failed to conform to adult notions of organised sport. This led to the cancellation of a promising programme for engagement with disaffected children and raises questions about social participation and policies of youth social-inclusion programmes. Meinert’s research into the conflict that the imposition of rural education had on local communities in Uganda, Lorimer’s study of aboriginal children’s disaffection with schooling that disregarded the children’s sense of cultural attachment to place and Nieuwenhuys’ study of children’s work in South India highlight how complex is the interaction between children’s access to education and cultural space. The emphasis on
'tutelage’ and informal ways of learning that children acquire through their relationship to place underpin many of the studies in the book. This point is emphasised in Vered Amit’s concluding chapter, which addresses how some approaches to the sociology of childhood often have more to say about adults than the children who are the object of the research.

Because this book is based on anthropological research, the richness of the ideas and the questions raised about current approaches towards the study of children and childhood could be lost to a wider audience who are not familiar with the way that micro studies of place and identity offer insights into policy matters. Overall, this book makes a welcome contribution to the interdisciplinary study of childhood.

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