EXPLORING SOME TOPICS FOR A POTENTIAL RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. Worldwide, Children's Geographies have developed continuously, increasing its research topics with the expantion of Cultural Geography. In Romania, the children have not so far been sufficiently explored geographically, despite the fact that the Romanian society passes through a difficult period of change which affects the whole population, children included. This paper aims to explore some topics for a potential research in Romania, in the new field of Children's Geographies (e.g. children in different environements, the relationships between children and the natural or anthropic environments and landscapes; different categories of spaces for children and childhood). The topics of the research have emerged from references to the international literature on Children's Geographies. Most of the issues debated in this paper are accompanied by some suggestions/ideas related to Children's Geography adapted to the country's background, but so far negleted by Romanian Geography.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is recognized worldwide that the child is always located somewhere (Rasmussen, 2004, Gagen, 2004, Clark, 2013), and, without adopting the deterministic approach, the importance of space, place (Tilley, 1994, Holloway, Valentine, 2000, Massey, 2004) and scale (Swyngedouw, 1997, Howitt, 2002, Thomson, 2005, Jonas, 2006, Ansell, 2009) is revealed by many studies focused on the educational, cultural, ethic and economic issues involved by looking for and rising a child in different parts of the world (e.g. England, 1996, Gittens, 2004, Abebe, 2007, Nilsen, 2008, Corsaro, 2011, Kovács, 2014, Souralová, 2014). Undoubtedly, this literature is the answer to James's (1990) question: "Is there a "place" for children in geography?". He suggested then that it was the time to consider how "the other third or quarter – the children – live" (p. 278), making a reference to Tivers's research question (1978) about "How the other half – the woman – lives?" (p. 302).

Now, with a delay of almost three decades, we ask the Romanian academic scholars the same question: "Is there a "place" for children in Romanian Geography?" We try to "build" an answer, based on the contemporary development of Romanian Geography. During the past decades, Romanian Human Geography has developmed in many directions, some of its sub-fields following the well known pathways (e.g. rural and urban geographies, population geography, economic geography) and others, taking new paths or identifying new research topics in traditional topics (e.g. social geography, cultural geography). However, Children's Geographies, as sub-field of Cultural Geography, represent a totally new research direction. Giving that the research potential subject is represented by the 3,047,938 children (meaning 14.06% out of the total resident population in 2017) registered in Romania, and the natural, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds vary a lot in this country (influencing chidlren's lives and places in many ways), undoubtedly, the answer to the above-mentioned question is «Yes, it is a "place" for children in Romanian cultural geography».

The aim of this paper is to explore some topics with a research potential in the field of Romanian children's geographies. Firstly, for investigating and adapting these issues to the Romanian background, the author presents the worldwide trends in this sub-field of Cultural Geography. Secondly, based on the international approaches, the author intends to offer several directions for
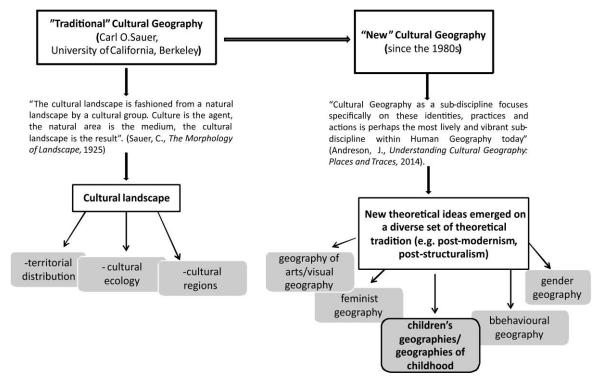
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future Romanian children's geographies. Thus, the last part of the paper cummulates some indicative approaches in terms of child's temporal and territorial limits, distinctive categories of children, categories of spaces for children and childhood, etc.

2. CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES – A SUB-FIELD OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

People and land the world over are characterised by inumerable cultural differences (Jordan-Bychkov *et al.*, 2006) and an entire sub-field of Human Geography. E.g. Cultural Geography is devoted to the study of these differences. It focusses on the way in which different peoples and processes come together in particular places, how they interact and how those places change meanings for people (Crang, 1998). Cultural Geography aims to explain cultural change in different geographical settings, from the political to the economic ones (e.g. production and consumption of landscapes), from sexuality, gender to race and nationality (Mitchel, 2000).

In time, Cultural Geography studies have emerged as an alternative to environmental determinism (Ratzel, 1882, 1891, Semple, 1911, Huntington, 1911, 1913), a concept which held a central if not dominant position within Geography only during the early part of the twentieth century, though some of its traces date back to Greek and Arabic civilizations. As an alternative to the idea that the natural environment, at scales ranging from the individual to societies, shapes the human development across various domains (Johnston, 2017), Cultural Geography focuses on cultural landscapes (Sauer, 1925). The traditional Cultural Geography (Fig. 1) was not called "traditional" until 'it' became the focus or subject of scholarly critique (Schein, 2004). Since the 1980s, Cultural Geographers started engaging with many significant ways in which they recast Cultural Geography, through feminist, behavioral and gender geographies (New Cultural geography). Through this new broad range of pathways, Culture finished being conceived simply as a way of shaping the natural landscape, but it has evolved, making differences in everybody's life and everyday places (e.g. ethnicity, disability, cultural and religious practices).

Fig. 1 – Cultural Geography – the dynamic of concepts and scientific interests.

Despite the fact that the child is organized as both a spatial and temporal variable, it has not been a major focus of research in Geography (Holloway, 1998), but gradually, the interest for child's geographies started increasing, two sub-fields of Cultural Geography being developed: Children's Geographies and Geographies of Childhood (Fig. 2). The worldwide geographical literature focussed on children, childhood and their territorial approach shows the blurred distinction between Children's Geographies and the Geographies of Childhood, despite the fact that the two sub-fields of Cultural Geography remain affiliated by research subject: children and their childhood.

The Geographies of Childhood focuses on the multiple ways in which society thinks about the idea of childhood and how this society acts on children's lives and influences them in diverse places and times. Childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon (James and Prout, 1997, James *et al.*, 1998, Holloway and Valentine, 2000). In a traditional way, childhood is approached by emphasizing the various stages of children development (Oakley, 1994), and in the way of the new social investigation, it is studied from two perspectives: (1) as social construction which varies with place and time (Prout and James, 1990), and (2) in which the child is studied as active social actor, as beings with its own rights rather than as pre-adult becoming (Uprichard, 2008, Morrow, 2011) and having a social agency.

As a sub-field of Cultural Geography, Children's Geographies deal with the study of places and spaces of children's lives, with children's experiences of playing, living and learning (Holloway and Valentine, 2000), participating in different "micro-" and "macro-"political engagements (Skelton, 2013, Kallio and Häkli, 2013), involving themselves in community development and environmental care (Hart, 1997).
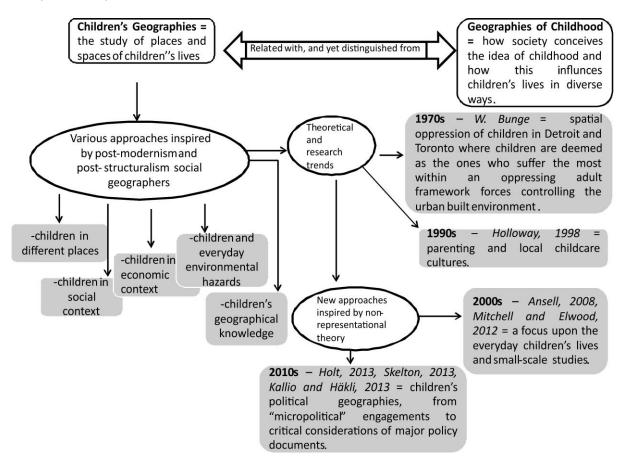

Fig. 2 – Children's Geographies – different research topics approached in the international literature.

Children's Geographies represent a research field which involves the study on and with children, they having unique characteristics and representing a distinct and significant demographic category (James, 1990). In the early 1970s, Bungé (1973) identified the need to include children in geographical studies. In his researches, Bungé considered children as one of the largest minority, he focusing his scientific interest on the environmental forces which influenced children's lives. The need for Cultural Geography to engage more with Children's Geographies was highlighted especially in the early 1990s (James, 1990, Ward, 1990, Winchester, 1991, Philo, 1992) and since then, Children's Geographies are "broadly sympathetic to cultural geographic themes" (Gagen, 2004, p. 406). Discussing the paper published by Ward (1990), Philo (1992) argued on the theoretical affinities with Cultural Geography and identified also some themes that resonate with Cultural Geography (e.g. the ways in which space and place are entangled in the lives of all manner of 'other' human groupings, children included).

3. EXPLORING POTENTIAL TOPICS EMBEDDED
BY ROMANIAN CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES

Children's Geographies, as sub-field of Cultural Geography, represent a totally new research direction in Romania. The discussion about topics for potential research embedded by Children's Geographies is structured following the main research trends emerged from the worldwide literature on Children's Geographies.

The child, as scientific concern for researchers activating in Children's Geographies, but also as person, presents some *temporal limits*. In publications focused on this topic, two types of temporal limits are identified: biological (defined by chronological age) and historical (the child has been perceived firstly, as a passive research "object" and, after that, as an active research "subject" (James, 1998 quoted by Holloway and Valentine, 2000). In the international literature, the authors who debated on childhood and child (e.g. Ariès 1962, Jenks, 1996 quoted by Holloway and Valentine, 2000) wondered when the notions of childhood and child were "invented". Ariès (1960, 1982), studying medieval arts, concluded that in the Middle Ages children were regarded as little adults, an interpretation criticized by Gittens (2004) and Corsaro (2011), and only during the Enlightenment did the concepts of childhood and child started to be more frequent. The changes in the perceptions of child and childhood were more numerous starting from the 1970s and the 1980s (James, 2009), with the launching of the International Year of the Child in 1979, since "the new notion about children and childhood focused on the collective actions of children with adults and with each other" (Norozi and Moen, 2016, p. 77). The temporal limits of childhood vary from time to time in the very same society or in different societies (Norozi and Moen, 2016). Thus, the Romanian researchers in the field of Children's Geographies could approach the issue of temporal limits at different periods and spaces: e.g. in distinct rural or urban settlements/households/homes/families, during certain historical periods such as the inter-war period, or before and after 1989. The school/high school enrollment, the first unaccompanied journey (what/where was that journey?), the first own decisions concerning her/his own everyday or general existence are only few hallmarks which could delimit the childhood from adolescence. For example, it would be challenging to study the interactions between the Romanian children with private and public local places, they depending not only on culture, time, but also on circumstances (Norozi and Moen, 2016).

Jenks (1996) operates with two distinctive *categories of children*: Dionysian ("the little devil", p. 62) and Apollonian ("the little angel", p. 64). These were differentiated by "the same spatial ideology" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000) according to which children's place is at home, while other places (e.g. public places such as the street) exposed them to risk. The Romanian categories of "Dionysian" and "Apollonian" children are approached such as they result from ones of the greatest works of Romanian literature. E.g. Nică boy, the hero from *Childhood Memories* (*Amintiri din*

copilărie) by Ion Creangă, may be labeled as a Dionysian child, who lived, played and studied in a 19th century Romanian village; the same type of child is Panait Istrati's boy-character, who spent his childhood in a Romanian sub-urban space at the end of the 19th-century (Brăila); the girls-characters from the novel *At the Medeleni* (*La Medeleni)* by Ionel Teodoreanu represent both types of children (according to her father, Olguţa is an "angelic devil" and Monica is the embodiment of the Apollonian child), they studied in an urban school, played and spent their childhood in both urban and rural environments, also interacting with outlying geographical spaces (e.g. France); during the '30s of the 20th century, the interactions between child and rural labour, school and the other family members were mirrored in the Moromete family, in which Niculae is the main character; at the same period, the child Mircea Eliade lived, spent his childhood in an intellectual family and studied in a prestigious Capital City high school. This short analysis may be continued by some detailed studies of children and childhood described by other Romanian literature authors (e.g., I.L. Caragiale, Lucian Blaga, Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea, Titiana Nica Ţene). These two categories of children could constitute an interesting topic for a potential research, especially related to the issue of "social agency".

Worldwide, a very actual and great potential for research in Children's Geographies is the ***issue of "agency"***. We would mention that, for an individual, having an "agency" means having the capacity to act independently and to make his own free choices; reversely, "structure" in social science, represents those factors (e.g. social classes, ethnicity) which limit, or have a determinant influence on the agency. The geographical research with children and youth as having "social agency", is considered a progress for international Children's Geographies and the Geography of Childhood. Authors, such as Oswald (2013), studied the important changes registered in recent decades in children's everyday lives, as a consequence of new internet, mobile technologies and other forms of globalization, all these in the perspective of children's agency. Other authors (e.g. Carr, 2011), Schänzel and Smith (2014), Schänzel and Carr (2015) and Seymour (2015) looked into the issue of agency in movement, travel and leisure activities beyond one's home. May the issue of child's "agency" constitute a topic for geographical research in Romania? A possible answer may result from the great diversity of geographical and socio-economic backgrounds in which children's every-day life is unfolding. For example, the issue of agency is important and interesting to be studied in the case of children living in many Romanian rural areas, where boys and girls have important roles in household and family activities and productivity: the involvement is their own choice in some cases, but in many others it is the "structure" – the family, the economic and social factors – that enforces this reality, impacting children's agency in terms of school and play choices.

Arguing about the children and youth with or without agency, the Romanian geographers would find a fruitful research topic in ***debating on the scale*** of studies of children and childhood and also on the importance and relevance of choosing a micro- or a macro-scale of analysis. In all the domains of activity, the scale of analysis supposes a geographical approach for "ordering the world" (Herod and Wright, 2002, p. 5 quoted by Ansell, 2009), despite the fact that the concept of scale in Human Geography has been profoundly transformed over the last decades and yet there is no consensus today on what is meant by the term, or how it should be operationalized (Marston *et al.*, 2005). Worldwide, many studies on empirical and theoretical research on the scale were published (e.g. Bird, 1956, Holly, 1978, Howitt, 1993 and 2002, Herod and Wright, 2002, Marston *et al.*, 2005, Ansell, 2009) leading to some ideas which may be useful for some potential Romanian studies on Children's Geographies and the Geography of Childhood: the metaphor of Russian Matryoshka dolls (Herod and Wright, 2002, who explain that the dolls and scales fit together in one and only one way; a geographic study on child or childhood is understood very differently when examined at rural or urban community, regional, national or global scales (Jennings *et al.*, 2006); approaches to scale in terms of three facets: size, level and relation (Howitt, 2002). Nowadays, thinking about scale in terms of hierarchical arrangement, or

as being dominated by "dualistic association of local and global" (Ansell, 2009, p. 10) suffers a change: scale is viewed as bounding the space, Marston *et al.* (2005) proposing to eliminate the scale as a concept in Human Geography. Studying the relevance of a territorial level or another, highlighting the types and the intensity of relations established between children and between children and their living, studying and playing places may be some fruitful and sorted research topic in Romanian children's geographies.

The issue related to *categories of spaces for children and childhood* (the so-called "every-day spaces" by Holloway and Valentine (2000) or the "particular spaces" by Gagen (2004), identified and approach in the international geographical literature, are: the home, the school, the playground, the city and the countryside, street. The deep-going study of each of them could constitute a research topic for Romanian human geographers and even for those interested in Physical Geography, the multidisciplinary research being more appropriate (e.g. the diverse effects of landslides, summer or winter extreme climatic phenomena, floods, etc. on the every-day spaces of children), e.g. the educational system is central to the geographies of children and young people and to the organization of much family life, also playing a central role in shaping social identities (Collins and Coleman, 2008). The schools and kindergartens, as main institutions of education, are the places where Romanian children spend a considerable time in their day-to-day lives (e.g. 4–10 hours/day). Their geographical location could constitute a topic for a potential research: children's safety inside the schools and kindergartens located in some vulnerable areas (e.g. bio-physical and socio-economic vulnerability resulted from natural and human events), the opportunity for pupils to interact with local natural and cultural/historical situations (e.g. types of outdoor activities aiming to increase children's geographical knowledge are offered by schools and kindergartens located in different relief steps), the material and technical endowment depends largely upon the schools' and kindergartens' geographical location (generally, isolated rural and urban educational units are disadvantaged in terms of endowment and the educational process is suffering). The territorial differences between the places where children play (in terms of typology, security, equipments, etc.) may constitute another topic for potential research in the field of children's geographies in Romanian.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Children's Geographies could constitute a very fruitful filled of research for Romanian geographers through numerous and diverse topics, such as: the very complex issues related to children and the diverse contexts in which they live, learn, play, travel, etc.; cultural and economic ways/models of parenting in different territorial backgrounds; children's consumption (of food, information, cultural products, etc.) in different types of communities; natural hazards in relation with chidlren's geographical knowledge and their relationships/interactions with natural or anthropic environments and landscapes; children in different environments (e.g. cities and villages, home, schools, playgrounds), differences between children and their distinct features (e.g. children living in rural and urban settlements, those living in houses with courtyard, or in blocks of flats), etc.

The topics related to Children's Geographies which could be valorized by the Romanian researchers through a detailed research in studies, papers and books. Some of the topics present a high potential for theoretical approaches, such as the territorial scale in studies of children and childhood, while others would be valorized by applicative studies (e.g. different categories of spaces for children and childhood). The natural, socio-economic, cultural, historical changes could represent powerful driving-forces in shaping children's lives, but also opportunities for developing multidisciplinary research, which seem to be more appropriate for study and offer some useful and adapted solutions to detected issues.

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