Child rights governance: An introduction

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Abstract

In this special issue, we explore child rights governance as the intersection between the study of governance and the study of children, childhood, and children's rights. Our introduction puts forward a set of theoretical points of departure for the study of child rights governance, engaging with scholarship on human rights, international relations, history, and governance. It links the individual contributions to this special issue with four central dimensions of child rights governance, namely: temporality, spatiality, subjectivity, and normativity.

Keywords

In what is perhaps the most famous definition of 'global governance', James Rosenau describes it as 'systems of rules at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization' (Rosenau, 1995). Today the concept of governance has caught the interest of scholars in fields like political science, economics, business studies and

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international relations to analyse a wide range of phenomena such as school life, global policy-making, international institutions, public health, economic transactions, street gangs or traffic rules. Children and youth are in many contexts presented as governed by others – parents, teachers, social services, religious authorities or out of control. For childhood scholars, though, the opposite has been constitutive in the shaping of the field of childhood studies over the last decades. The agency of children and young people certainly also influences the systems of rules and governance that surround them. They are thus as much subject to these systems as they can be active and shapers of them, in many cases together with or in parallel to the adults surrounding them. Despite this acknowledgement of children as being both targets and shapers of governance, though, with some exceptions (Duhn, 2018; Nakata, 2015; Sandin, 1986; Sealander, 2003; Smith, 2014), the systematic study of governance of children and youth has received little attention within childhood studies as well as to the exploration of how child rights are given shape in national and transnational politics, law and society.

In this special issue of *Childhood*, we explore the intersection between the study of governance and the study of children and childhood in regards to the understanding of children's rights–*child rights governance*. With child rights governance we refer to how children's rights, and the principles and institutions associated with the idea of children's rights, have become part of the mechanisms, systems, actor constellations and instruments of governance across local, national, regional and global levels.

Three decades after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly in 1989 (hereinafter UNCRC), the human rights of children as articulated in the UNCRC have gained hegemonic status in policy-making and influenced a wide range of political and social practices as well as knowledge production on children and childhood. At the same time, children's rights have become an explicit instrument, not only to protect and emancipate children from oppression, but also to govern, regulate, and control children and childhoods.

The 30th anniversary of the UNCRC provides us with a timely context in which to situate this landmark treaty by looking at child rights using a governance lens. It gives us an opportunity to build on and advance some of the important scholarly deliberations on children's rights. Some of these contributions have been published in this journal at the 10 year anniversary of the adoption of the UNCRC 'A time for celebrations' (*Childhood*, 1999 Vol. 6(3)) and in the special issue 'Childhood rights in international development' (*Childhood*, 2006 Vol. 13 (3)). A dominant strand in contemporary research on children's rights has been focusing on the implementation and monitoring of universal standards for children's rights (Reynaerts et al., 2012; Vandenhole et al., 2015). We suggest a broadening of the study of children's rights that builds on critical and ongoing conversations on how to contextualize, historize and theorize the notion of children's rights (Ferguson, 2013; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Quennerstedt, 2013; Tobin, 2013). The lens of child rights governance serves that purpose.

In the context of its creation, the UNCRC opened up new avenues for thinking about the rights of children with regard to gender, ethnicity and culture, addressing inter alia issues like harmful traditional practices, freedom of religion or the right of children to privacy. In other respects, though, it also formalized, universalized and homogenized the understanding of childhood and rights of children, thereby disregarding how class,

ethnicity, gender or culture, then and now, shape local perceptions of for example corporal punishment, disability or the environment. From that observation, we argue that a study of children's rights must be placed in the specific historical, political and social context that shaped both the structure of the convention and its contents – the definitions of rights. Consequently, the historical context in which the UNCRC was created must be reflected in our empirical and theoretical analyses of the relevance of the UNCRC – some 30 years later, merging with and in interaction with a varied and new social and political landscape. Such contextualization and theorization of human rights for children not only foregrounds a critique of the situated character of rights and the compromises involved. It also provides an opportunity to analyse the consequences and dynamics of governance of children and childhoods not only within the framework of the UNCRC but also before, after and beyond its coming-into-being.

This editorial is divided into three main parts. In the first part, we situate the contribution and focus of this special issue on child rights governance within contemporary societal and scholarly conversations about children's rights. In the second part, we put forward a set of theoretical points of departure for the study of child rights governance. The conceptual framework on child rights governance that we propose engages with scholarship on childhood studies, human rights, international relations, history and governance. In the third section, by drawing on the articles assembled in this special issue, we identify four central dimensions of child rights governance, namely, temporality, spatiality, subjectivity and normativity. Finally, we reflect on some of the potential implications that the contributions, conversations and findings of this issue can have for future discussions in the field.

Child rights governance – broadening the scholarly horizon

Undoubtedly, the UNCRC has become a central normative reference in international and national debates, a 'gold standard' and benchmark that can be measured, evaluated and compared on how to strengthen the rights of children and their status in politics, law and society. As a sign of our time, the political attention on implementation of these standards is not surprising, nor is the interest from the research community to evaluate the success or failures to live up to such standards. The drafters of the UNCRC created a set of standards that now is deeply embedded in the governance of international relations which can be exemplified by the creation of Independent Human Rights Institutions, also exclusively for children, as prerequisites for EU accession and expansion by Central and Eastern European countries or the impact of Child Rights Programming/Human-Rights Based Approaches in development programmes in the Global South (Thomas et al., 2011; von Bahr 2019). Following the increasing popularity of 'good governance' as a component of international development cooperation, 'Child Rights Governance' has also evolved into a distinct policy and programming area with non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children listing 'Child Rights Governance' as one of their areas of prioritized activities. In that sense, child rights governance not only serves to monitor and evaluate how governments deliver child rights and invest in children (Save the Children, 2019) – but the acknowledgement and implementation of child rights also represents a component of a broader set of

values and 'benchmarks' against which modern, civilized statehood is measured (Sköld and Cromdal, 2019).

Through mainstreaming processes, implementations strategies and the creation of institutions associated with the rights of children, children are made subjects of governance, which in turn define ideas and conditions over what is considered being appropriate childhoods. The range of actors and institutions governing and controlling children is wide, including not only state authorities and judicial systems, but also non-state actors such as NGOs, religious associations, universities and scientific communities, business corporations, trade unions, social movements and many more. In this regard, the benefit of the notion of governance lies in its inclusivity towards any type of public or private actor who shapes or executes rules pertaining to a specific social field.

The increasing recognition of children's rights following the adoption the UNCRC has been accompanied by a significant growth of scholarly work and knowledge production in disciplines such as (international) law and politics, anthropology, education, pedagogy, (political) economy, sociology and the establishment of the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. This special issue is, in fact, a reflection of a consolidating interdisciplinary conversation about child rights. Following authors such as Quennerstedt (2013), Reynaerts et al. (2012) and Vandenhole et al. (2015), the contributions assembled in this special issue exemplify a turn towards more critical explorations of children's rights, using governance as a concept to contextualize and theorize about child rights or study them from a comparative perspective.

An important contribution in earlier research is the emphasis on how child rights translate from international conventions to different contexts and in what ways child rights are given meaning in the lived experiences of children (Reynolds et al., 2006). With an anthropological approach the guest editors of a special issue of this journal aimed to 'tease out the complex ways in which rights-based policies mesh with the practice of doing development and in the process can become entangled, welded together or clash with children's ideas of right and wrongs' (291). They argued that children's rights were not merely the products of deliberations and international agreements; they were ideas that already exist before they are translated into legal principles. In this way, the dominant top-down approach to children's rights through implementation of universal values was questioned from 'below'. Such a bottom-up perspective implies paying attention to the meaning making of children's rights in the everyday lives of children to capture the tensions at work between global and local formulations of children's rights (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Liebel, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2006).

Recently, attempts have been made to formulate an agenda for critical child rights studies (Quennerstedt, 2013; Reynaerts et al., 2012; Vandenhole et al., 2015). This line of research has started to question the moral imperative, put forth in mainstream research to regard children's rights as an emancipatory force and that more of children's rights is logically better for children.

Following a broader trend in the study of international standards (Acharya, 2004; Berger, 2017; Merry, 2006), scholarship on the human rights of children has thus been turning away too from a rather technical interest in implementation, diffusion and 'compliance' with international agreements towards the dynamic and often turbulent ways in which these agreements are translated, contested and enacted across the most

diverse contexts and at different points in time (Poretti et al., 2013; Thoko, 2010). This contemporary focus on the politics of international law (Koskenniemi, 2009) and on how norms become meaningful and are being translated into context-specific rules, discursive and social practices has also brought with it a renewed interest in the agents involved in the realization and localization of human rights standards (Koskenniemi, 2005, 2009). It is also in this sense that governance promises to be a useful and productive lens for the analysis of child rights both in codified international principles and as a broader normative point of reference. While international and domestic law on child protection and child rights formulate appropriate, legitimate and desirable behaviour towards children and their social environment, governance denotes the concrete structures, processes, rules and practices that enact these human rights principles.

Child rights governance – a conceptual framework

This special issue suggests that governance is a useful theoretical and conceptual starting point for thinking about child rights as it addresses the interplay between principle and practice. In this section, we put forward a set of theoretical points of departure for the study of child rights governance. The conceptual framework on child rights governance that we propose engages with scholarship on human rights, international relations, history, governance and childhood studies. Drawing on traditional and critical approaches to governance, the section serves to elaborate our understandings of the interrelated but yet distinct concepts of government, governance and governmentality and finally synthesize some of the benefits we see of using governance as an analytical lens to study child rights.

To begin with, in our account of child rights, we embrace the understanding of children as bearers of (human) rights. We do not treat child rights as a fixed idea with clear-cut contours to be traced from the past into present – but rather as an idea that is changing in meaning and expression, and that is 'fused' with different ways of conceptualizing children and childhood. Theories on the changing nature of children and childhood with time and place have for long been fundamental to the field of childhood studies and have been applied to a great variety of empirical research questions (Cunningham, 1991, 1995; Heywood, 1988, 2001; James and Prout, 1997; Lee, 2001; Sandin, 1986, 2012; Wells, 2015). Along a similar line, and with reference to some strands of human rights scholarship, the rights of children as we refer to them are not something that *exist* a priori or independent of contexts and can be identified simply by the use of ordinary moral or legal reasoning (Cruft et al., 2015). Rather, they are *made sense of, given meaning and are used* in political, social and legal processes in order to solve specific problems (Beitz, 2011; Benhabib, 2004, 2011; Holzscheiter, 2010; Josefsson, 2016; Koskenniemi, 2005; Moyn, 2013). Children's rights are expressed in language and concepts that are rooted, not only in different traditions of culture, law and institutions, but also, in very concrete ways of daily interactions in all sites and spheres where children and youth are present and struggle to claim rights (Balagopalan, 2014; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Josefsson, 2017b; Liebel, 2012). And as the contributions of this special issue demonstrate, although we sometimes find a strong consensus on the rights of the child, these

same rights are in other times and places found to be essentially contested concepts fraught with tensions, contradictions, and conflicting aspirations.

Governance and the dispersion of authority?

In political science, the notion of governance embraces a perspective on politics in which political and social authority is dispersed among different types of actors and political decisions emerge from the interaction between states, international agencies, civil society organizations and social networks (Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998). Governance, thus, deflects scholarly attention from the analysis of state power, central governments and domestic bureaucracies towards the ability of state authorities to interact with and steer a constantly widening array of non-state actors in the exercise of political authority and the crafting and implementation of policies. This applies as much to domestic governance as it applies to the notion of global governance which is built on the presumption that in contemporary forms of governance, states have lost some of their earlier dominance of the governance system, as well as their ability to evoke compliance and to govern effectively due to societal transformation and the growing relevance and potential of control mechanisms sustained by transnational and subnational systems of rule (Rosenau, 1995). Governance thus helps us analyse and understand how spheres of social activity are linked where a central activity of governance becomes the management of networks (Rhodes, 1996) through the participation of diverse actors (Walters, 2004: 30) and how they have come to cooperate through more horizontal network-like structures with flat hierarchies.

The dispersion of authority and the intimate intertwinement between an array of actors in the governance of child rights is something we can see, not only in recent times, but also by looking back to the history of the 20th century. NGOs and 'child experts' were indeed involved in shaping child rights agendas in both contestation of, and in cooperation with, governments. Non-state actors were also vital in the developing of child rights norms, institutions and mechanism at a domestic and international level (Holzscheiter, 2010; Lindenmeyer, 1997; Lindkvist, 2018; Marshall, 2012; Moody, 2017; Nehlin, 2009; Nieuwenhuys, 2001; Sandin, 2012). As this special issue demonstrates, the dispersion of authority and power in child rights governance between governmental and non-governmental actors is hardly static. It varies not only with time and the different legacies of political and institutional regimes, but also with specific areas of politics and the levels on which governance takes place. For example, in the area of migration decision-making authority is associated mostly with the sovereign power of governments (Bhabha, 2014, 2019), in contrast to the area of poverty reduction or child protection, where NGOs tend to play a more central role (Aufseeser, 2014).

Governance as governmentality

As Walters (2004) points out, recent discussions about governance as a self-regulatory exercise of networks also tend to neglect tensions and conflicts by overemphasizing consensual facets of governance in modern societies. Essentially, Walters makes us aware of the absence of reflections of power in core theories on governance – where the

interplay between state and non-state actors and the delicate line of division between public and private interests is presented as a technical matter of finding win-win-solutions for policy problems and of 'managing' stakeholder interaction. In his words, most scholarship on governance 'displaces talk of politics as struggle or conflict'. (Walters, 2004: 36). Following Walter's critique, our approach to child rights governance also pays attention to the 'politics' and governmentality of governance and governing – that is, the many ways in which a discourse on governance shapes contemporary policies, techniques and instruments associated with child rights governance (Larner and Walters, 2004). Such a perspective on child rights governance, we hold, permits to disclose the inherent normativity that lies behind the notion of governance and to address the power effects of mainstreaming (Koskenniemi, 2009) and using specific interpretations of child rights as a way to measure, regulate and assess social progress and the 'State of the World's Children' (UNICEF, 2019). Emphasis on the best interests of the child and, generally, on the child perspective signify a development and transformation of children's rights during the 20th century, from an emphasis on children's rights as separate child right, to children as bearers of the same right as adults (Sandin, 2012). This corresponds to a transformation of the notions of childhood from being different to an emphasis of likeness. As children in this way also are regarded as citizens, with a voice to be respected, they also become the object of governance and control, as is the case for other citizens in areas such as migration (Anderson, 2012; Josefsson, 2017a,) poverty (Aufseeser, 2014), family politics (Lindgren, 2001) or in schooling (Balagopalan, 2014). Certain regimes of rights make possible some subjectivities and normativities while making impossible others (Balagopalan, 2019; Josefsson, 2017b). At the same time, the acknowledgement of children and other societal actors as having legitimate claims to social, economic and political agency points to child rights politics as a site of struggle, not so much between public authorities and private actors and organizations but rather among different private actors/organizations (Hertel, 2006; Holzscheiter, 2016; Liebel, 2012).

In order to capture the power dynamics inherent to the concept of governance, we draw on the understanding of governmentality as proposed by Foucault (1991) and adopted in critical discussions on governance by authors such as Sending and Neumann (2006). Seeing child rights governance through the concept of governmentality allows addressing the 'reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge and of regimes of representation and modes of intervention' (Lemke, 2007: 44) that have an impact on the subjectivities, agency and everyday life of children and young people. At the same time, the transformation of the state – from being the core of governing to being only one element in a wider architecture of governance involving many actors and agencies – must be seen as affecting the structure of child right governance. One such example is the outsourcing of welfare functions of child rights work to NGOs. Historically, we can note how different actors and institutions of Western/Northern welfare states have negotiated their relative authority and responsibilities in social policy, resulting in different ways of organizing governance between state, market and civil society (Kettunen and Petersen, 2011; Lindenmeyer and Sandin, 2007; Trägårdh, 2007).

It is also in this perspective central to point to how the organization, contestation and mobilizing by young people shapes policies of child rights and open up new terrain for alternative subjectivities and forms of agency. Throughout history, children and young

people have interacted with core governance institutions such as political authorities and philanthropies. In that sense, they have also in a way shaped obligations and conceptions of rights. To name a few, this can be found in the struggles of street children (Balagopalan, 2014; Sandin, 2009), in child labour regulation (Holzscheiter, 2016; Liebel, 2012), through young environmental activists in non-governmental sector (Kaijser and Larsson Heidenblad, 2018) and in the mobilization of young migrants for a right to stay (Josefsson 2017b).

To sum up, we suggest that the concepts of governance and governmentality help us analyse and understand child rights inasmuch as they draw our attention to the management of networks of public and private actors targeting children's well-being and rights, to struggles over authority between public and private actors as well as to the productive effects of governance on the agency and subjectivity of children and those surrounding them. Such a perspective on child rights governance permits also to disclose inherent normativities that lie behind different forms of governance that make use of specific interpretations of child rights as a way to regulate children and childhood and the ways in which these are contested by young people's resistance and political action. By using child rights governance as an analytical lens we hope to offer a productive response to the quest in the field for more of contextualization and theorization of children's rights beyond a dominating focus on the 'implementation gap' (Quennerstedt, 2013; Vandenhole, 2015).

Child rights governance and its four dimensions – temporality, spatiality, subjectivity and normativity

In this issue of *Childhood*, we assemble contributions that study a great variety of forms, processes and instruments of child rights governance across time and space. The contributions highlight different subjectivities and multiple, often antagonistic normative frameworks associated with child rights governance. Being aware of the modern connotation of governance and its explicit origins in the global North, in drawing together the various articles for this special issue, we have been careful to also incorporate analysis of child rights governance in regions of the world where the UNCRC is a contested legal framework, or adopted in ways that stretch the meanings of children's right. Consequently, we have specifically invited contributions that are interested in how dominant ideas and legal and political frameworks associated with children's rights forge the identity of children as subjects and objects of governance. We have thus been keen to include contributions that address how an understanding of children as rights-holders becomes institutionalized as an instrument of childhood governance, also in societies and political systems of the global South. At the same time, the special issue strives to move beyond a global north/south binary by acknowledging the multiple contexts and ways in which childhood governance takes place (Twum-Danso et al., 2018).

Following the above reasoning, we have structured our discussion of individual contributions to this special issue through four dimensions of child rights governance: temporality, spatiality, subjectivity and normativity. As the contributions demonstrates, child rights governance can be understood across time (temporality) and space (spatiality) as well as in relation to ideas on and practices of agency (subjectivity) and the ways in which it gives expression to different meanings and normative legacies (normativity).

Each of the articles in this special issue addresses at least one, but often several of these dimensions of Child Rights Governance.

Temporality

Any discussion of child rights governance, we suggest, must build on the realization that the contemporary notion of child rights is closely related to other conceptualizations of children's needs and protection and to how these have transformed historically in interplay with different social, cultural and political contexts and institutional regimes. The historical expression of rights therefore delineates which expressions and rights are possible to claim in a specific time and which rights are not.

In her article 'Early Child Labour Legislation beyond the North-South Divide: The United States and Brazil in Comparative Perspective', Nina Schneider has the ambition to bring the global South into the discussion of the historical development of child protection and governance at the turn of the 19th century into the 20th century. In Schneider's article, the development of child labour legislation in the United States is used as a background to problematize the interaction between state and central government in a federalist state. This background opens up for some interesting comparisons with the development in Brazil where the child labour debate and school legislation were reforms initiated on federal level. In Brazil, the central government passed a bundle of child rights laws that covered many different aspects of children's lives and where the child labour laws were coordinated with the school legislation. However, the legislation could pass the parliament, as Schneider indicates, because the industrialists who used child labour counted on that the new laws would not be implemented. It was also a time in history when child rights reforms fitted the agenda of social groups that advanced the liberal agenda of the new republic and could be cast in a discourse about child rights for protection. Schneider's analysis of how the political design of the federal governance and other aspects of the political agenda opened an opportunity of child rights reform also indicates the importance of the place of negotiations about child rights. In Brazil, such negotiations took place largely in the parliament and the central government while in the United States, the courts and the common law system played a much more important role.

Such historical legacies are also important in the global south, or the 'majority world', where colonial historical patterns and institutions influence the manner in which right claims can be realized. Sarada Balagopalan argues in 'Why Historicize Rights-Subjectivities? Children's Rights, Compulsory Schooling and the Deregulation of Child Labor in India' that this is less a direct consequence of a Western hegemony of today than a result of how the discourses of children's rights are used and defined in the relationship between marginal communities and the state. Relationships that are characterized by India's development-focused policy-making on child labour and schooling and on what Balagopalan refers to as structural exclusions that underwrite abstract assurances of equality founded in post-colonial legacies. The social segregation and the pre-existing and prevailing religious, class, race and cast segregated environments set the parameters for the how rights of children are understood and come in use, rather than the universal language of rights. The ability of local communities to assert such rights

are limited and the loss of state initiative and reduction of social welfare measures instead underwrite the use of children's rights discourses by the government as a means to place the responsibility in the individuals, through self-regulation and self-improvement. In this process, child wage labour is defined as a private family matter that can be accommodated to the limited school requirements for the populations on the margin of society. The lack or realization of rights is consequently not only a result of lacking political will and resources to implement child rights claims but a result of the inherent consequence of a neoliberal exercise of state governance in which the child rights are privatized. In consequence, it is implied, an effective child rights governance must be based on a government that promote substantial economic improvements for families and that communities mobilize politically and include child rights as a part of a collective claim making.

Spatiality

Both Schneider's and Balagopalan's analyses illustrate not only the importance of the historical legacies to the conditions under which rights can be claimed and exercised, but also the importance of the spatial location of the institutions (be it parliaments, agencies, courts, communities or families) at different levels of society (be it local, regional, national or global level) that are given the role to uphold children's rights. By analysing where Child Rights Governance takes place in society, at an individual, family, group, local, regional, national or global level, we can enhance our understanding of how different societal and institutional structures have implications for how rights are defined and how children are governed. Such processes are also tainted or influenced by the role of international and local organizations and global discourses on children's rights. The interplay between a 'Western' discourse of children's rights in a post-colonial setting is discussed in Franziska Fay's 'Decolonizing the Child Protection Apparatus: Re-Arranging Hierarchies of Knowledge in Zanzibar'.

Franziska Fay's article demonstrates how child rights governance in Zanzibar can be understood as a confrontation between Western coded 'universal' values on child protection and local practices, customs and traditions. Her article explores the normative issues revolving around the application of child rights to the specific issue of corporal punishment in a postcolonial setting. In her study, Fay exposes the reluctance and negative attitude to a proposed ban on corporal punishment as it is articulated by local officials who see child rights as an expression of colonial rule in society and politics. In this way, she demonstrates how the unwillingness of local actors to frame corporal punishment as a violation of children's rights is not so much an endorsement of corporal punishment itself as it is a rejection of norms of Northern origin. In her article, Franziska Fay also raises the pertinent question as to whether it is possible to identify several 'universal CRC-based concepts of protection' that can be accommodated with local culture and religious traditions to promote child safety and protection. Her core conclusion is that such conflicts need to be recognized and negotiated with local leaders rather than imposed in order to de-colonize child rights discourses and child protection policies endorsed by external actors such as UNICEF or Save the Children; decolonization, thus, can only successfully be achieved from within.

    The analyses by Balagopalan and Fay address central problems with respect to both the temporal and spatial dimensions of the relationship between the international community, governments and local cultural and religious traditions that are expressed in child rights governance. They substantiate the question about the extent to which the CRC can be understood as an expression of a provincial set of values concerning the rights of the child, as a Western or Northern rather than universal – insular concepts that inevitably will come in conflict with other particularistic sets of values and that run the risk of reproducing colonialist patterns of dominance. Such arguments are valuable and remind us of the spatial legacy of the UNCRC and the ways in which the particular power constellation and geographical distribution of Member States inside international organizations such as the UN at the time of the CRC drafting (1979-1989) has strongly influenced a catalogue of child rights that continues to dominate international policy-making and transnational advocacy in 2019. Beyond these obvious tensions arising from the spatial origins of forceful international norms on the rights of the child, though, the articles by Balagopalan and Fay also expose processes whereby such international standards on child rights and seemingly universal notions of child rights governance are translated into or 'grafted' onto local contexts, thereby being appropriated by actors in this local context and becoming meaningful in specific social and cultural settings. They are thus also forward-looking inasmuch as they expose the possibilities for the realization of global norms in local contexts – and they testify to the malleability of international norms that is necessary for their social acceptance over time and across spaces.

Subjectivity

All articles assembled in this special issue discuss children as objects or subjects of governance and the various ways in which the rights, interests and legal and political personality of the child are defined and delimited. Child rights governance, thus, has direct implications for children's subjectivities. Various contributions to this special issue highlight and problematize how child rights governance is imbued with powerful discourses on children's inherent vulnerability. This theme is particularly strong in Jacob Lind's article on 'Governing Vulnerable Migrant Childhoods Through Children's Rights' but also resonates with Judith Lind's 'The rights of intended children: The best interests of the child argument in assisted reproduction policy'. Jacob Lind's analysis on child rights governance focuses on how governance is constitutive of children's subjectivity, asking what rights subjects are made possible and impossible under particular discourses, institutional structures and contexts. The author focuses on how the unaccompanied young persons are described in government reports and governmental policy documents on migrant children. The premises are given in the general Swedish political context according to which all decisions must be based on the best interests of the child. His argument, based on theoretical discussion, document analysis and participant observation, is that child rights are indeed mobilized in this process for young persons that in many cases are or could be described as competent agents and, implicitly, could be seen as an asset to their new country of residence. However, that is not the link Lind advances in his article. He argues on the contrary that there is a strong link between arguments for deportability and the presentation of children's subjectivity as vulnerable and in need of support. It is

in this light important to reflect over governance that is based on child vulnerability and protection and child agency and competence.

In a similar vein but exploring a very different topic, Judith Lind discusses how the interpretation of the best interests of the child-principle in the context of Swedish policy-making on assisted reproductive technologies (ART) defines the legal subjectivity of 'intended children', that is, children not yet born but already potential rights-holders. Her article explores governance through the discursive mobilization of children's rights and the best interest principle, showing that while governmental policies have sought to balance the rights and best interests of intended children with those of involuntarily childless persons, non-governmental child rights organizations have through their involvement in the legislative process been largely privileging the best interests of the child in their positions on ART. The principle of the best interests of the child, she demonstrates, can take on starkly different meanings and be the foundation of arguments for contradictory policy outcomes. At the same time, her discussion illustrates the span of civil society and government agencies involved in the negotiation about the meaning of the principle of best interests but also that the commitment to protection of children's rights shaped a rhetorical path dependence that had to be complied with or taken into account. The principle of the best interest is a central argumentative resource that has to be mobilized but it is not always successful when confronted with principles associated with adult rights.

Normativity

As demonstrated by the different articles in this special issue, Child Rights Governance is laden with moral, political and legal principles, values and norms that sometimes converge and sometimes collide between different actors and different local, regional, national and global contexts on what specific schedule of rights ought to be protected and can be acclaimed. To analyse child rights governance does therefore also imply a dimension of power (and potential abuse of power) and what ought to be guiding the work for and prioritization of the rights of children and on what grounds.

In her article 'Governing Adolescent Mobility: The Elusive Role of Children's Rights Principles in Contemporary Migration Practice', Jacqueline Bhabha shows how the effects of child rights governance on the subjectivities of adolescents 'on the move' are intimately connected to how their rights are normatively (un)addressed in contemporary international and regional frameworks of governance. She presents migration policies as being marked by contradictory systems of governance, namely the governance of migration and governance of child rights. She also points to how age ironically is ignored, as a factor, that leads to policies ill designed to address the role of migrant adolescents. The governance of adolescent migration, thus, has direct effects on the subjectivities of young people on the move. Furthermore, the article demonstrates how the lacuna of child rights governance for the group of adolescent migrants challenges the notion that diffusion of governance authority is the precipitating cause of protection failures, as it may be in other child rights areas. Rather, Bhabha argues, and thus addressing the very normative dimension of child rights governance, it is the centralized concentration of governance authority that limits access to effective adolescent rights because of the dominance of the

migration framework and the migration control agenda to the detriment of a more effective child rights impact.

In her article, 'EU external strategies on the rights of the child -targeting what, whom and how?' von Bahr addresses on the one hand new dimensions to the spatiality of child rights governance through its focus on EU as a significant regional actor of children's rights. But on the other hand, and in a somewhat unexpected way, she addresses the normativity of child rights governance by studying the foreign policy and strategies of the European Union and what specific rights are prioritized within a given (and relative extensive) set of rights. Her quantitative study notes that despite the fact that the EU's diplomatic pressure and economic aid has increased over time, the EU has still not taken an independent policy position on child rights, but is rather supporting UN policy initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The results demonstrate how EU external support puts an emphasis on child protection via the sponsoring of large international child rights NGOs, while less support has been given to projects around the empowerment of children and domestic NGOs in some regions. That actualizes the question of what rights and what means to promote rights that are given priorities by EU as an actor and what actors and what regions that are receiving the support.

Von Bahr's as well as several other articles of this special issue indicate that when children's rights become a part of the system of governance in either national politics, NGOs, IGOs or transnational organizations, the whole array of child rights are mobilized in the construction of child rights governance. The participatory rights seem to be the most difficult to deal with and operationalize. In the case of India, Balagopalan suggests that the way child rights have been applied to the situation of marginal groups of the population has emphasized self-reliance. Balagopalan interprets this as a strategy of the central government to deflect from its responsibilities to undertake necessary legislative steps and practical measures towards greater social justice (in her case free schooling). It is against this background that we can also look at the CRC as a document that already during its construction asserted some set of rights, values, and norms about children as subjects of rights while it had difficulties accommodating others.

Conclusion

In this editorial introduction, we have provided a broad framework for the study and analysis of child rights governance within which to place the empirical and theoretical contributions assembled in this special issue. We argue that the notion of governance is of tremendous value in exploring and observing the tangible consequences of international human rights for children, most notably the international standards laid down in the UNCRC, but also standards on child rights beyond the CRC (such as the ILO Conventions on Child Labour), those that preceded the CRC (earlier Declarations on the Rights of the Child) or established regionally (such as the 1990 African Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the Child). By looking at child rights governance, we are thus drawing attention not only to how child rights are imagined in different philosophies, discourses, or worldviews, or whether they are properly implemented, but also to the concrete ways in which the idea that children are endowed with rights has been claimed for different purposes by state authorities, social movements, development agencies,

non-governmental organizations and many other political and societal actors, by adults as well as children and youth. While the contributions of this issue highlight the ways in which many of these actors have used child rights in order to empower children and strengthen their position, our special issue also addresses how rights are tainted with notions of obligations, compulsion, penalty and correction. Considering child rights as a reference object of governance therefore focuses on how the idea that children are vested with human rights is given substance, how these rights are being used (or not), and how they become productive in various legal and political institutions and sharpen broader societal norms, rules and practices.

We also argue that by making use of the concept of governance we are able to draw attention to what we refer to as the dimensions of temporality, spatiality, subjectivity and normativity of the practices and processes of child rights governance. The contributions assembled in this issue demonstrate how child rights have become an integral part in the governance and regulation of children, families and societies around the world, also prior to, beyond, and independently of international legal instruments. Notions of child rights governance must thus not only be understood across time (temporality) and space (spatiality) but also in relation to ideas on and practices of agency (subjectivity) of those endowed with rights. Consequently, to analyse child rights from the perspective of governance also means to study how policies and practices frame subjectivities and agency of the child and the balance of the needs and interests of children against those of their family's, parents' or other stakeholders' rights. Finally, the ways in which the rights of the child are governed in specific times and places also give expression to different meanings and normative legacies (normativity) surrounding notions of childhood and child development and to larger ideas on how to protect fundamental values of society, in short and long terms.

In the work with this special issue, our exploration of child rights governance has benefitted a lot by the many engaging conversations we had with the contributors to this volume as well as with other scholars who have participated in our discussion. It is through these ongoing conversations that the contours of child rights governance have begun to take shape. The exploration has showed to us the wide array of ways in which child rights governance are manifested and can be studied, and for sure made evident some of the challenges involved in exploring new terrains and even more so disclosed the many areas in which we still lack empirical insights and where we need more theoretical inquiries. We are particularly thinking about cross-country comparisons; multi-level governance and child rights at local, regional and global levels; transformation of systems of rights governance, child rights governance and inter-generational dynamics; child rights governance in relation to other systems of governance and larger societal transformations; translations of rights discourses/regimes; child rights governance and the dispersion of authority and responsibility between and beyond state and non-state actors; child rights governance and the power of political representation of young people; children and youth movements and their relationship with child rights discourse. By tying this collection of contributions together we hope this special issue will not only provide a platform for further studies on child rights governance but moreover we hope it will inject and provoke some new thinking on the study of children, childhood and children's rights.

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