

## Chapter 13: A Common Spatial Scene?

### Young People and Faith-Based Organisations at the Margins

#### 13.1 Introduction

This chapter shifts the focus to one of the overarching questions of the book on the role of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in dealing with the plight of young people at the margins in the selected South African and Nordic localities. The case studies show that FBOs have an important supportive function for many young people living on the margins of society, even though they may play only a limited role in fighting youth marginalisation in their respective local communities. Only few FBO activities were directed pointedly at changing the situation of marginalised young people. This does not mean that the FBOs did not help young people in need; yet how they did this differed considerably between the Nordic and South African contexts – and between metropolitan and rural or more remote areas. FBOs functioned as a spiritual and social resource, or sometimes even as the last safety net, hence meeting the most acute existential needs of young people. At the same time, however, they were not engaged in more systematic attempts to empower marginalised young people. These similarities, differences and tensions evinced in the results from the six case studies demanded deeper analysis and interpretation.

We started out our research in the different case study locations by analysing what the young people interviewed revealed about their life experiences and their hopes, the hardships and exclusions they faced, and the role of FBOs amid all of this. The analysis reaffirmed the importance of the local contexts in determining the resources and limitations in the lives of both the young people and FBOs. This in turn drew our attention specifically to the concept of space. Analysing the local contexts with spatial lenses turned out to be a fruitful approach to understanding what was going on – but also not going on – between young people and FBOs in the different localities.

Marginalisation and exclusion as concepts and descriptions of social reality can be understood as spatial imagery. One could, for example, say that exclusion takes place when persons or groups find themselves isolated because they cannot get access to what others naturally take for granted. Spatial theory has gained growing attention in the social sciences and humanities; it acknowledges that individuals and groups “are both produced by, and producers of, history and geography” (Warf & Arias: 2009, 4). By applying approaches from spatial theory, the analysis in this

chapter not only moves beyond a purely instrumental understanding of the role of FBOs; it also enables us to identify dimensions that may broaden and deepen our research focus in this book on the relationship and interaction between FBOs and marginalised young people.

This chapter develops a spatial perspective on the case studies in this book in several steps. We begin with an overview of selected theoretical and empirical research that has used space as an analytical tool to analyse and interpret the situation of marginalised young people. This is followed by a short spatial characterisation of the six case study locations and then by our analysis of the case studies. By adopting a spatial lens, we show how spaces impose limitations on the life of young people and what they do to move beyond the confinements. In the concluding reflection, we discuss the possibilities for young people to transcend their limitations and the role that FBOs can play in these processes.

### 13.2 Using Space and Place as Heuristic Lens

Against the backdrop of growing globalisation, since the late 1980s the social sciences and humanities have taken increasing account of the dimension of space. This “spatial turn” drew attention to (geographical) space as a cultural phenomenon. Warf and Arias put it as follows: “Geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen” (2009, 1; original italics). Scholars in the social sciences and humanities often approach the significance of space as stemming from social relationships, and from the actions and interests of individuals or groups (Fuller & Löw: 2017).

The situation of marginalised young people has already been analysed using spatial lenses in studies from different parts of the world. A South African example of this is Hanna Dawson’s (2014) study, where she focuses on youth protests in an informal settlement in the Johannesburg area. The motivation for the uproar was the dissatisfaction of the young people with their marginalisation in society, which materialised as unemployment and material inequality. Her analysis showed that the protests emerged in spaces of “deliberate” waiting and envy. An ethnographic study of the spatial experience of everyday life of NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people in Northern England in turn came to a very different result. It showed how NEET young people felt isolated in the “spheres of residence, education and work”, and how they handled their situation by escaping from the challenging encounters in these spaces, for example, by withdrawing into the shelter their families offered (Thompson et al.: 2014). A third example is Jeffrey and Young’s (2012) research on unemployed young men in Uttar Pradesh, India, which illustrates how seemingly meaningless situations of waiting resulted in new cultural and

political practices that sometimes even went beyond caste boundaries. These three studies illustrate how different spaces of exclusion can be experienced by young people, but also how they can generate very different types of agency.

The spatial approach is not new to the study of religion either. One of the basic features in the observation of religion is the distinction between “sacred” and “profane” spaces. Mircea Eliade, a scholar of the history of religion, has already in the 1950s claimed in this respect that sacred places are places that give religious communities “orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to ‘found the world’ and to live in a real sense” (1959, 29). The American scholar of religious studies, Thomas Bremer (2006), in turn integrates both discourses from cultural and from religious studies in what he calls a “heuristic distinction between space and place” (2006, 25). He understands space as “an undifferentiated expanse lacking a meaningful content”, while communities or individuals give value and meaning to places, that is, “particular locales”, which “punctuate” the meaningless homogeneity of space (2006, 5). Places are thereby seen as both social and relational, and “it is impossible to think of a particular place without inferring a social dimension” (2006, 26). Bremer’s distinction between space and place is a helpful analytical tool for analysing the situation of young people at the margins and FBOs from a spatial perspective.

The ongoing secularisation and changes in the religious landscape have created a new interest in applying spatial categories to research on religion, e.g. the distinction between the public and the private sphere, and the role of religion in each (cf. Casanova: 1992; Molokotos-Liederman et al.: 2017; Manuel & Glatzer: 2019). Scholars in the sociology of religion, anthropology and political science have become preoccupied with locating the new complex position of religion in society and the concomitant recognition that religion and FBOs can be understood as part of both the private and the public spheres (Furseth: 2017; Haynes & Henning: 2012). Moreover, the place of young people is also emphasised along these lines of capturing the changing religious landscape. Nordic studies show that only a minority of young people relate explicitly to Christianity (Lövheim & Bromander: 2012) and that young people who engage actively in Christian churches are relegated to the fringes of Nordic youth society (Zackariasson: 2014). Other research projects highlight that the growing diversity creates new spaces of social engagement and agency where FBOs can collaborate with likeminded individuals from secular civil society (Clope & Beaumont: 2012; Clope et al.: 2017). Moreover, empirical studies indicate that FBOs can also become platforms for immigrants to learn about the public (welfare) systems in the new country, where the values of the majority society are explained and related to the values of minority communities (Holte: 2018b).

In theological and religious studies within the context of South Africa, space has become a core concept, albeit in a different way. Several recent contributions address the injustices of the apartheid period and how, 25 years after the transition to democracy, those injustices still manifest themselves throughout the country.

The segmentation of the country into privileged and deprived spaces emerges in different ways in these studies. Delport and Lephakga (2016), for instance, argue that if spaces are expressions of embodied meaning, and if these embodiments differ so greatly between different spaces, the demand for justice is the logical consequence of experiences of spatial alienation and dispossession. Other contributions pressing the churches to fight for justice also use spatial analysis or imagery. Ribbens and De Beer (2017) reflect on how churches could claim their right to rapidly changing urban environments through processes of place-making or spatial innovation. One can understand their article as a response to the challenge from Swart and De Beer (2014), who in an earlier contribution had concluded that South African public theology does not pay enough attention to urban environments and their recent distinctive developments.

Similar reflections on the overlaps between space and justice are developed in more explicit attempts to define spatial justice. Eliastam (2016) suggests that the social value of *ubuntu* should be included in all conceptualisations of spatial justice. By emphasising the interconnectedness of all human lives, the concept of *ubuntu* complements the understanding of spatial justice with a relational dimension enabling us to move beyond existing spatial configurations. For Meiring, in turn, spatial justice can be described as “embodied sensing of meaning” or as a “sensory experience of the physical environment” (2016, 4) that can be filled with meaning. This definition comes close to Bremer’s distinction between space and place highlighted above, according to which individuals and groups transform undifferentiated expanses of space into significant places by giving them value and meaning. Both Bremer’s distinction and Meiring’s definition provide important perspectives for the following analysis.

### 13.3 Six Spaces of Youth Marginalisation

This book focuses on six geographical localities. Before commencing with the spatial analysis, let us briefly revisit these different localities. Four case studies were conducted in South Africa: a central part of Pretoria (Chapter 6), a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Johannesburg called Riverlea (Chapter 8), the small town of Franschhoek in the Western Cape province (Chapter 9), and Emakhazeni in Mpumalanga, the most eastern province of South Africa (Chapter 10). The two Nordic areas were situated in Søndre Nordstrand, a suburban district in south-eastern Oslo, Norway (Chapter 7); and Lammi, located in the rural area of southern Finland (Chapter 11).

There are both similarities and differences between these six localities. The first obvious one lies in the general economic differences between South Africa and the Nordic countries. The economic circumstances differ enormously and this needs to

be taken into account in any kind of comparison. Adding to economic differences are the significant social, cultural and contextual differences between the localities from the southern and northern hemispheres. When analysing the role and the (spatial) position of FBOs in combating youth marginalisation in South Africa and the two Nordic countries, we should not ignore or trivialise the differences between these two contexts. Our analysis takes into consideration what Chapter 2 in this book reveals about the significant degree to which young people in South Africa are excluded from what the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines as basic rights for everybody, including access to education and waged work (United Nations: 1948/2019, Articles 23 and 26). However, even in the highly developed Nordic welfare states some young people experience exclusion and marginalisation. Belonging to the small minority of those excluded from education and working life has strong effects of marginalisation – even though the Nordic welfare states actively seek to realise the basic human rights of NEET young people (Sletten et al.: 2015).

A second important factor to consider when comparing the case studies is the size and degree of urbanisation of the respective locality. Three of the localities are part of big cities: Pretoria, Johannesburg and Oslo. Franschhoek, on the other hand, is a small town in the midst of the wine district of the Western Cape that is a popular international tourist destination. Two localities are quite small countryside spaces, namely, Emakhazeni and Lammi. While Lammi has been incorporated in the bigger city of Hämeenlinna, which is well connected to the capital Helsinki, Emakhazeni is situated far more remotely and cut off from larger settlements. The size of a locality implies certain contextual factors related to population, which has a significant impact on the living conditions in the respective geographical space. A higher degree of urbanisation usually implies a higher degree of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and at the same time geographically better access to various public or private services. Rural communities, in contrast, are often characterised by longer travel times to potential employers and public service institutions, and by tighter and more manageable social networks.

Each of the studied localities has its own special characteristics, as described in the previous case study chapters. Consisting of several residential areas adjacent to its hectic and often congested central business district, Pretoria Central also changes its scenery at night. While many people leave its central business area for home, others return to or remain on the streets. This includes a substantial group of homeless people but also sex workers, people looking for entertainment, drug sellers, police and others. Riverlea in turn is a tough neighbourhood on the outskirts of Johannesburg still by and large dominated by a “coloured” population. This city district still struggles with identity issues and racial divisions emanating from the apartheid era. As in other urban neighbourhoods, drug use and drug dealing have become a growing social problem, and some parts of Riverlea have

to some extent been taken over by criminal gangs. The Oslo city district, Søndre Nordstrand, is characterised by a diverse multicultural population with 50 per cent inhabitants who have an immigrant background. Public statistics show more social exclusion than in other more homogeneous city districts. Franschoek is a town segregated along race-class lines with geographical divisions persisting from apartheid times. It projects an attractive and cosy face to tourists and visitors, but is also home to spaces of poverty that tourists never see. Emakhazeni on the Highveld of Mpumalanga is a remote rural municipality, where social differences stand out between poor townships where black people live and more well-off towns with many white inhabitants. Of necessity people in Emakhazeni are more dependent on each other than those in urbanised areas are, since health and social services for the citizens are available only in towns more than 50 kilometres away. Lammi in Finland is the second case study from a rural area. It is a rural incorporation of the city of Hämeenlinna with strong traditions and a very homogenous population that was recently challenged by the arrival of a larger group of asylum seekers from African and Middle East countries.

Our analysis of these six localities from a spatial perspective focuses on three overarching questions: (1) How do young people at the margins and FBOs characterise the limitations of the spaces they live in? (2) How do they describe possibilities to move within and beyond those spaces? (3) Why do they remain in spaces that effectively constrain them?

### 13.4 Understanding Marginalisation through Spatial Lenses

The distinction between spatial expanses with and without any meaning to individuals and groups is a relevant starting point for analysing what young people and FBO representatives have to say about the spaces they live in (cf. Bremer: 2006). Their narratives could also be interpreted with the help of Meiring's notion of spatial justice as "embodied sensing" (2016, 3) that gives meaning to those who live in those spaces (2016, 4).

The following two sections focus on what young people at the margins and FBOs told us about their experiences of being "stuck" in spaces without hope, meaningful activities or any possibilities to realise dreams, and about places providing hope of moving beyond these confines. Experiencing both confinement and hope also concerns the notion of spatial justice or the lack thereof. In our analysis, we will use the concepts of space and place introduced earlier from discourses in the study of religion in general and sociology of religion in particular. Here, space and place are related to the lack or the presence of meaning and hope. Based on this distinction, we will present how the young people talked about spaces where they did not find any meaning or hope, and about places that gave them hope and provided

possibilities. Even though meaning and hope are not self-explanatory from, for example, a social science perspective, they are helpful to illustrate ambiguities and coherence in the youths' and adults' perspectives of young people's lives and the role that FBOs play in their lives. Ultimately, the spatial analysis is meant to provide a better understanding of the involvement of FBOs in the everyday lives of marginalised young people and their role in strengthening cohesion in both the South African and the Nordic contexts.

#### 13.4.1 Spatial Expanses without Hope and Possibilities

The physical location and structure of the case study areas contributed to different problems for young people. As mentioned in Sections 13.2 and 13.3, the South African context largely still reflects the structures established during the apartheid years. Young marginalised people often live far away from the business centres and even from FBOs. The problems created by such distances are exacerbated by not having access to affordable transport. In these cases, the young people described the locations where they lived as spaces of material separation and segregation where they were literally stuck. In Emakhazeni, for example, it was a challenge to access health services, since they were located far from where people were living. In Franschhoek it was difficult for young people to attend church services and to participate in church activities, since churches were located in the centre of the town, at some distance from where most youths interviewed were living.

Furthermore, even after 25 years of democracy there was little to no integration between people across racial and class lines in the South African case studies. Such separation signifies more than physical, spatial separation and is also a reflection of the deep inequalities and social separation that still prevail between many communities. As Neil from Franschhoek put it: "Some of the young people there said: 'Well, we have never ever been to Franschhoek' and they are literally 10 kilometres outside of town ... and then you have people sitting in this town which are some of the richest people in the world probably."

The descriptions by young people of the local communities revealed many elements of segregation in the South African context. Yet elements of segregation were not limited to the South African case studies. In the Finnish case study of Lammi, the young people experienced the village community as small and closed off, and there was a tendency among the residents to want to know everything about everybody and to draw lines of separation between those who have always lived in Lammi and those who were newcomers, such as asylum seekers. Similarly, in the Norwegian case study of Søndre Nordstrand, young people experienced that having grown up in this city district separated them from young people from other city districts, who had many prejudices about what Søndre Nordstrand was like. However, the differences between the Nordic and the South African locations

showed themselves in the degree of insuperableness that the spatial limitations posed for the young people.

FBOs in both South Africa and the two Nordic countries often maintained the existing separation lines, since many of them tended to focus on the needs of their own members instead of working cooperatively across divisions. This parochial attitude resulted in a lack of opportunities for employment and for meeting other young people to socialise with in the separated and marginalised spaces. The desire to get access to employment and finding places for socialising with other young people were two of the most pertinent needs articulated by young people from both South Africa and the Nordic countries. The lack of employment among young people also implied that they were missing out on important social skills and experiences, including being responsible for specific tasks, feeling part of something bigger, and being rewarded for their contributions. Without employment, most young people did not feel part of a community and of sensible working places that would enable them to meet their basic needs or give meaning to their lives.

Most towns in South Africa, like Riverlea and Franschoek, are faced with severe economic and social challenges, such as generational poverty and unemployment. It therefore comes as no surprise that young people experienced these spaces as existentially confining and as unjust because of the lack of opportunities to build a better future for themselves. The negative economic and social conditions also affected how people and the generations related to each other and how the youth perceived themselves in these constricted spaces. In Riverlea young people experienced that they were being stigmatised as lazy. In Emakhazeni, Riverlea and Franschoek adults attributed the youths' problems to their irresponsibility, such as risky sexual behaviour, drug abuse and wasting money on drinking. Slater from Emakhazeni summarised the attitude of parents towards the youth as follows: "Parents reject the children because they do not take life seriously." Views like this had a devastating impact on the relationship between youths and adults and inhibited the agency of young people who felt that they were not being treated with respect. These conflicts with parents and other adult relatives had particularly grave effects, since the family has also been highlighted as a crucial but challenged place in the lives of many young people. In the South African case studies single parenthood was quite common. Mothers were often the only parent present in the house, bearing the main responsibility of caring for the family. The young people talked about how destructive and demotivating the disrespect of family members and other significant people such as teachers was for them. They felt that they did not have a voice, were not included in discussions and decisions about their own lives, and were thereby rendered invisible. Common economic and social challenges and experiences of exclusion did thus not necessarily lead to solidarity and mutual support, but also contributed to tensions and even isolation and separation between people sharing the same already limited geographical space.



The strong opinions on the behaviour of some young people even affected the relationships among young people themselves. Out of fear of becoming part of destructive behaviour and activities, some young people had decided not to have friends. On the one hand, this could be viewed as a brave and even admirable decision, but on the other hand, it led them to even greater isolation from necessary relationships in the communities where they lived. The vicious circle of negative behaviour patterns resulted not only in more constrictions in the lives of young people, but was also caused by spatial conditions. The Riverlea and the Oslo case studies revealed overcrowded living spaces mentioned as a problem that in turn bred other social ills such as conflicts, mugging, burglaries and exploitation. Some areas in the localities studied could in fact be described as toxic and not conducive to young people developing a meaningful view of life. In overcrowded locations, the lack of places to socialise and meet other young people was identified as a major problem.

Previous research on marginalised young people found protest (Dawson: 2014), withdrawal (Thompson et al.: 2014), and new cultural and political practices (Jeffrey & Young: 2012) to be youths' responses to the situation of being stuck in spaces without meaning for them. However, in our own case studies withdrawal and passivity seemed to be the main responses of young people to meaningless and hopeless situations and limiting spatial surroundings. Some young people, in particular in the South African case studies, even guarded against having any hope for a better future because of their lack of opportunities to have a better life. Their present experiences of being stuck in spaces without possibilities and from which they could not escape made them pessimistic about having any chances in life. In such a state of demoralised passivity, these young people were not open or ready to recognise possible opportunities, thereby finding themselves stuck in the margins geographically and metaphorically. Similarly, the young people described the FBOs as passive and not able to address the geographical spaces of hopelessness faced by the young people. Even though FBOs taught values that young people experienced as helpful, as for example in Riverlea, they neither made a difference to the economic and developmental challenges faced by marginalised youths, nor created new places of hope. Young people perceived FBOs as, on the one hand, places where positive moral and social values could be cultivated but, on the other hand, they also saw FBOs as part of a space without hope. While some young people felt that they were unable to meet the (ethical) standards expected by the FBOs, the FBOs were unable to help the young people to escape the constricted spaces of which they were part.

In the Nordic case studies, the youths highlighted the segregation between young people with Nordic roots and those with immigrant backgrounds. Some felt that they were categorised as outsiders, because they were not like the young people with Nordic roots. On the opposite end, a smaller group of the young people with

Nordic roots experienced their peers with immigrant background as a threat to their safety. As one of the Norwegian young women explained: “There are some refugees in particular who are very aggressive, for example, at the centre, and they look down on girls.” The composition of many youth groups in the FBOs reflected a similar segregation, since the FBOs predominately recruited young members from their own (minority) communities. They thus contributed to duplicating the spaces of segregation instead of becoming a bridge between different communities. As the interviews in Lammi showed, the young asylum seekers who had been placed in Lammi by the authorities had almost no interaction with the local young people, and no platforms for encounters between the groups were available. In some of the South African case studies similar tensions were experienced with respect to immigrant youths, primarily because immigrants increased the competition for the already limited job opportunities, as in Pretoria Central. The lack of integration of immigrants into the different levels of society was emphasised by the youths with immigrant backgrounds, while some of the young people with Nordic or South African roots described immigrants as intruders into what they experienced as already limited spaces.

The aspects and examples presented above show that the spaces where the young people lived and the confinements that such spaces imposed on their lives were experienced as a problem. The way in which many of the young people characterised the contexts they lived in echoes Bremer’s characterisation of spaces without meaning alluded to. They described these constraints in diverse ways, for example, as isolating, disrupting, limiting and boring. As such, their accounts mirror different aspects of spatial injustice and represent depictions of an embodied sense of meaninglessness. In many narratives, neither the adults in general nor the families nor the FBOs appeared as places or agents of meaning. Rather, they seemed more to reinforce the limitations rather than helping the young people to overcome them. From the perspective of the young people, the FBOs were part of the problem and confined to limited spaces themselves.

#### 13.4.2 Places of Hope and Meaning

Importantly, however, the narratives of the young people focused not only on how they found themselves stuck in restrained spaces; they also told us about how they moved beyond their confinements and what they did to find meaning and a place for themselves in the midst of hopelessness. For example, certain young people depicted the case study locations as places of hope for a better future. Pretoria Central as a synonym for economic vitality was repeatedly mentioned in this respect, since it had become a symbol of better future prospects for many South African young people in contrast to underdeveloped and remote locations offering them little opportunity. Typical reasons for moving to Pretoria Central were to find a job or

education or both. In contrast, Søndre Nordstrand was also perceived as a place of hope, albeit in a very different respect. For the parents of the young people interviewed, this city district represented hope for creating a place for themselves and an affordable and safe life not too far away from Oslo centre. Many families with a migrant background had moved there in the hope of establishing a good family home in Norway.

However, both locations had also become spaces of disappointed hope. A prominent view that emerged from the case study research was that such relocation led to disappointment, hopelessness and in some instances experiences of even greater vulnerability, hardship and social isolation/exclusion, more so because the young people involved had become trapped or stuck in their adopted spaces, seemingly unable to leave those spaces again. Solly and Joyce are examples of this in Pretoria Central; they were a young couple who, despite great efforts, basically found it impossible to return to their hometown in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Like the experiences of many other young people reflected in the case studies, they literally remained stuck in their present spaces;<sup>1</sup> the only possibility remaining for them was to move between locations within those spaces. In comparison, from the case study findings in Søndre Nordstrand it also emerged that this location had turned into a space that people in Oslo generally associate with social problems and crime instead of being a safe place for families and young people. Some of the young people therefore expressed an explicit desire to move to other parts of the city when they got older. In these narratives, the search for meaningful places led to new experiences of exclusion that made the abandoned locations sometimes appear as places of hope.

Nevertheless, many young people evinced a strong sense of belonging to the locality in which they were living, despite the limitations and hopelessness. Young people in Riverlea and in Søndre Nordstrand were eager to defend their city district against the negative image it had acquired among the public. Being brought up in these two locations and belonging to their social networks became part of their identity. In Riverlea the sense of belonging even impeded the police from taking control of drug-related crimes, since the drug dealers were always warned when the police approached the city district. The feeling of belonging to a specific locality was also so strong in Emakhazeni that some of the young people could not even think of a future beyond this space – even though they were bored and frustrated by it. Young people in Lammi experienced the relationship to their village in a similarly ambiguous way. On the one hand, the village was a place they belonged to, often for several generations; on the other hand, they felt socially restricted by

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1 Cf. the discussion in Section 12.4 of Chapter 12, where the example of Solly and Joyce is similarly upheld to present an argument about spatial confinement.

belonging to such a tight community, unable to avoid the gossip. In addition, the close community of Lammi did not manage to include newcomers very well. This ambiguity illustrates that many young people tried to create places of hope in the midst of exclusion and in the light of their search for meaning.

Across all case studies the interviews with young people illustrated that there were certain places of meaning and social value within the spaces of hopelessness. FBOs were mentioned as having the potential to be such places, for instance, when they provided the premises and the activities that created meaning for visitors and participants. Jeremy from Riverlea stressed the significance that FBOs had for him: “I want to come again back [to church], you see ma’am. Put myself in line...” Young people both in South Africa and in the Nordic countries described what FBOs offered as alternative places, or places of safety. One example was the FBOs in Pretoria Central that offered food, shelter and showers for homeless people. For some of the young people interviewed, this meant nothing less than those FBOs serving as havens for young people to find temporary relief from their lives of hardship and abandonment – which often played out in a life on the streets. Moreover, young people also appreciated FBOs because they provided safe alternatives to crime, drug abuse, bad friends and risky sexual behaviour. Similarly, in Riverlea, young people depicted the churches as literally “trouble-free zones” that shielded them from the dangers of substance abuse and other ills in their neighbourhood. And in Emakhazeni young people, as well as church leaders, upheld churches both as moral role models and by implication places where young people could experience a sense of purpose and direction away from the hopelessness and destructive existence that defined life in the community. One young focus group participant in Emakhazeni summarised this as follows: “I feel safe in church. I feel more calm in church than outside.” These examples demonstrate the potential of FBOs to create meaningful places and glimpses of hope for young people feeling stuck in spaces they cannot escape.

FBO representatives in all the case studies expressed the desire to turn their sites into supportive social places for young people in need. This could, as in Søndre Nordstrand, take on the form of providing activities and meeting places for youths, including those who were not interested in football or other sports. However, the Oslo case study also illustrated that FBOs failed to fill the gap despite good intentions, since the young people interviewed so clearly emphasised that there was a lack of places for social encounter. Being a safe place could even mean being a space of separation, confined from multicultural encounters, as some young people with fearful attitudes towards immigrants explained in Oslo.

In certain instances, FBOs therefore did soften the segregation of individual young people and contributed towards creating places of community and inclusion for otherwise totally excluded youths. This is shown in some of the South African case studies. Homeless young people from Pretoria Central, for example, described

how they participated in church services and church arrangements after the services, which made them feel that they belonged to a community there. Upon being asked why she attended a specific church that was quite far from her home, Phalisa in Pretoria responded, “Because I love it there. When I got there, I got a sense of belonging.”

Both in the Nordic and in the South African case studies the young people mentioned the potential social and spiritual resources of the FBOs. For young people in rural Lammi, it was self-evident that the Lutheran majority church contributed to social cohesion in the village. In several case studies young people who engaged with FBOs described them as places of community, where they could develop their faith. They mentioned, for instance, the activities that FBOs offer, as in Riverlea, where young people went to the church to worship, to participate in prayer groups, but also to dance. Young people in Oslo characterised the services of the churches as relieving stress from personal demands and responsibilities. FBOs were also characterised as places where relationships could grow, as an extension of the family, and as a complement to the support structure that the family offered. While some young people highlighted that FBOs cared and listened like supportive family members, others perceived the activities of the FBOs as useful, but superficial, as in Franschhoek.

Some informants in the case studies also highlighted that FBOs were places where valuable teaching about religion and communication about moral and social values were taking place. This included teaching young people respect for each other and strengthening them in their understanding of human dignity. A young focus group participant in Emakhazeni underlined this: “According to my opinion, in church they teach you how to treat others with manners or with respect. You must have respect for others so that you can get the respect back.” Thus, FBOs were perceived as having the potential to achieve behavioural change and at the same time to strengthen the religious identity of the young people. In particular in the Norwegian case study young people underlined that FBOs were places where they could receive religious teachings and explore what religion can mean for their everyday life. This was important to them in otherwise secular environments with few possibilities to express their faith. For those young people who were active, FBOs sometimes became platforms where they could contribute and receive positive recognition from adults. Consequently, the adult informants of many FBOs were eager to describe “their” young people as resourceful youth leaders, for example, in the case of Søndre Nordstrand.

While the examples above illustrate that FBOs had the potential to create places of meaning and to provide young people with resources, it is important to stress that the young people emphasised much more often the importance of their families in helping them to solve their problems. Family was the most important support structure mentioned by marginalised young people in all locations; FBOs could

only supplement what families offered to young people. Families also provided role models and gave the young people inspiration for how to live their lives. The young people in the two rural case studies, for instance, pointed out that one of the advantages of living in a rural area was easy access to the extended family. But even in the more urban case studies in South Africa, quite a number of young people seemed to have found comfort and safety in the support structures of their immediate families, examples being Franschhoek and Riverlea. In the case of Lammi and Franschhoek, these were households seemingly dominated by females – mothers but also grandmothers – while in the case of Riverlea, members of the larger extended family also came into play. As such, these families reflected various household arrangements, such as single motherhood and mother–father relationships that have ended. As the authors of the Franschhoek case study qualified, regardless of the family and household arrangements, they “nevertheless played a significant role in young people’s lives.” On the flipside, even though the family could be seen as a place of meaning, it also restricted young people by compelling them to remain in spaces that constricted and isolated them, instead of allowing them to move on.

The examples given above illustrate how young people strive for meaning in spaces of hopelessness. Both family and FBOs were mentioned repeatedly as places of safety, support, community and ethical guidance. They helped young people to carry on in contexts of confinement. At the same time, families and FBOs also contributed to the disruption of young people by offering places of refuge with hope but without actively addressing the limitations of local communities to create more permanent inclusive places of justice. While neither families nor FBOs were able to restore spatial justice, they nevertheless provided fragments of “embodied meaning” (Meiring), hence motivating young people to search for greater meaning in their lives besides the immediate comfort that they provided for those young people.

### 13.5 Spaces of Confinement Restraining Agency

The feeling of being stuck in a space leading to marginalisation appeared to be a defining feature of young people’s lives in all the case studies in this book. From this vantage point, the discussion in this section now continues to identify different ways in which the notion or image of “stuckness” – of being forced to remain in particular spaces – manifested as a condition across the various case studies.

Although elaborated upon in different ways in the respective case study chapters, one theme that surfaces prominently is how being stuck in a certain space was depicted as a condition strongly reinforced by a kind of passivity among young people. This was a point of self-criticism often delivered by the young people themselves. According to the response of one young interviewee in Riverlea, this

was even seen as a collective trademark of the whole community and by implication its youths, who were depicted as “lazy people” passively waiting for things to be done for them. This point of view also reverberated in critical statements from the other South African case studies, such as the one by a young focus group participant in Emakhazeni, that the situation of the youths resulted from their own passivity, lack of agency and idleness. Additionally, young interviewees in Franschhoek expressed the view that young people’s failure at school could be attributed to their laziness to do their schoolwork. Yet there are also deeper explanations for young people’s passivity as expressed in the South African case study results – explanations beyond the description of merely being lazy and lacking a sense of agency. In this respect, it seems worthwhile to relate our own explanation to Dawson’s (2014, 871) description of young South Africans’ frustrated aspirations because of poor living conditions, limited education, poor skills, and lack of agency and control over their futures.

A common description that emerges from all the South African case study chapters is that large numbers of young people appear to have become so overwhelmed by their life situations, permanent exclusion from opportunities and resources, and their own persistent failures to improve their life situations that they had effectively succumbed to attitudes of passivity and hopelessness. For some, this translated into a life of mere coping with daily existence, of waiting for something to happen against all the odds; for others, it was a matter of mere survival and basically giving up on life. This reminds us of the words of David, the 23-year-old male from the Pretoria Central case study: “I don’t have any hope ... It is just I am giving up.”

A comparison between the South African and Nordic case chapters in this book thus hardly seems possible when one takes into account the severity and extent of young South Africans’ sense of exclusion from opportunities as the cause of their passivity, lack of agency and resultant sense of “stuckness” in spaces without meaning and hope for the future. This limitation is not only well explained by the different degrees to which socio-economic deprivation defines the respective South African and Nordic contexts, but also by the differences in young people’s reactions to the different respective life situations in the Nordic countries and South Africa. Nonetheless, these differences do not detract from the fact that the two Nordic case studies do offer some evidence of young people who also suffered from experiences of social exclusion or lack of full integration as well as a concomitant inclination towards inactivity and passivity. This, one could conclude, is pointedly expressed in the description of young people’s experience of boredom in Søndre Nordstrand, for whom football – similar to the youths in the far more deprived South African location of Emakhazeni – appeared to be the only pastime to keep themselves busy with.

We have already touched on the fact that there is an indissoluble connection in the various locations between the passive attitudes of young people captured in the case studies and their exclusion from socio-economic opportunities and resources. Yet it

also remains very difficult in this respect to draw any straightforward comparisons between the degrees of deprivation experienced by young people in the four South African locations and their counterparts in the two Nordic locations. Whereas young people in the latter two locations experienced exclusion from employment and educational opportunities in contexts characterised at most by conditions of relative deprivation, the degree of deprivation and the extent to which resources were lacking to counter such deprivation in the former locations appear to be far more extreme. In all the South African case studies the different locations are depicted as spaces lacking in possibilities for young people to develop themselves and live meaningful lives through participation in educational and employment opportunities. While there were some opportunities for schooling and employment that could at best be described as of a precarious nature, the ultimate destiny of young people in these spaces seems to be one of joining South Africa's huge cohort of NEET young people (Chapter 2). The direct consequence of their NEET conditions is that they found themselves stuck in spaces of deep isolation that they found impossible to escape from.

One could conclude that lack of agency and passivity reflects only one side of the coin in the case studies. In addition, what emerges as perhaps one of the strongest common features in all the case studies is what can be labelled “negative” or “destructive” agency on the part of young people. The case studies describe situations where young people not merely remain inactive, but where their condition of “stuckness” in their respective spaces was further exacerbated by their turning to perilous and self-destructive activities. In the six case studies the problem of drugs and drug abuse are without exception mentioned as a defining element of the everyday lives of young people. This could be understood as a search for diversion, belonging and meaning. Yet, at the same time, in all the South African case studies the reference to perilous and self-destructive activity is given additional content through allusion to the way in which alcohol and drug abuse, dropping out of school and risky sexual behaviour constituted endemic features of the young people's lives. Taken together, these features complete a disturbing picture of self-destructive activity that has a severely detrimental effect on young people's prospects of transcending their spaces of marginalisation.

Importantly, however, in at least three of the South African case studies it is easily discernible how it has become unavoidable to also refer to the structural legacy of apartheid as a major prevailing cause for the spatial and social isolation the young people of those communities experience.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the case study discussions

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2 In the Pretoria case study context, this structure is more nuanced but nevertheless also present. The central areas are mainly inhabited by black people, as many white people had the opportunity to leave for more wealthy suburban neighbourhoods.



make clear how the neighbourhood of Riverlea, the townships of Emakhazeni, and the pertinent residential areas of Franschoek represent remnants of apartheid spatial and social planning. In sharp contrast to the places of privilege and abundance bordering them, these were locations that not only remained deprived of meaningful socio-economic development, but where entire communities remained trapped in cycles of generational poverty. In a very direct way, these were conditions that had an inescapable bearing on the lives of the young people and their prospects of transcending their spaces of constriction

### 13.6 Concluding Reflection: Meaning Within and Beyond Confined Spaces

The analysis in this chapter necessarily leads us to concern ourselves in conclusion with the question of the extent to which young people in our case studies were in fact able and likely to transcend the confines of their constricted spaces. Our immediate response to this question is that, based on our spatial analysis up to this point, it seems well justified to conclude that the possibilities of young people transcending those spaces appeared to have been severely limited in all the locations. As observed in the previous section, the various case study descriptions reflect young people who found themselves overwhelmingly stuck in confined spaces with little prospect of overcoming their predicament.

A closer reading of the different case studies nevertheless suggests that it may also be possible to identify a few exceptions to the overarching condition of “stuckness” in space experienced by young people. And here we find scope to at least advance the idea of young people’s potential for transcending these spaces temporarily and in a limited way. For instance, one might recall the rather negative image of young fathers in the Franschoek case study who transcended the space of their families and disappeared into the unknown to escape their duties of care. But beyond this negative image, one could also allude to the more positive images projected in a number of case studies of young people finding it possible to transcend the spaces of their immediate locations, at least temporarily, to worship (Lammi, Pretoria Central and Riverlea), meet friends (Riverlea) and attend school elsewhere (Riverlea and Søndre Nordstrand).

This said, however, the predominant image that remains in the case study descriptions is one of young people whose mobility had been confined to the spaces of their immediate locations. In this respect, it is from within these local spaces that young people’s mobility was manifested through their lives on the streets of Pretoria Central, their movements between sections of the neighbourhood of Riverlea, their freedom to participate in recreational activities and visit sport facilities, shopping

centres and fast food stalls in Søndre Nordstrand, and their relocation between places of residence in Lammi.

Returning finally to this book's core concern with the interaction between young people and FBOs, it is indeed no exaggeration to state that the accounts of many young people's frequent visiting of churches and in some cases mosques represent one of the strongest indicators of their mobility within the various locations and of their endeavours to find places of meaning. Through such mobility, FBOs seemed able, at least to some extent, to function as alternative places for young people within the confines of their exclusionary and hopeless environments. This seems to be the case reflected both in the South African and Nordic case studies, albeit qualified by the fact that the potential of FBOs to provide alternatives was more clearly emphasised in the accounts of South African youths in contexts of more extensive marginalisation and far less advanced secularisation.

The spatial lens that we have adopted in this chapter enables us to appreciate FBOs as institutional structures that presented young people in the different case study locations with at least a temporary possibility to experience places of comfort and hope. Importantly, however, this always entailed a transcending of space into place within the confines of the larger environments of marginalisation. The young people were hence compelled to return to those larger spaces of constriction, since the positive role of FBOs in their lives were never culminating in emancipatory action that could offer them more stable places of hope and meaning and lead to their inclusion in larger mainstream society. From this vantage point, what therefore effectively emanates from the various case study descriptions is a two-pronged image of the role of FBOs as change-makers for young people at the margins. On the one hand, it is an image of the greater majority of young people seemingly distancing themselves from any realistic expectation of FBOs becoming a vehicle to a larger world of social inclusion. On the other hand, it is also an image of at least some young people, noticeably in the South African context, who seemed to have kept faith particularly in the Christian churches as a potential, albeit still unfulfilled, gateway to a larger world of educational, employment and other opportunities.

In conclusion, the spatial analysis of the role of FBOs inspired by Eliade's and Bremer's distinction between large spaces without meaning and places with meaning and Meiring's concept of spatial justice as "embodied sensing of meaning" (2016, 4) pointed out what FBOs could contribute for young people in marginalised environments. Within the framework of the larger spaces of constriction, our analysis reveals that FBOs have the potential to provide clearly defined albeit temporary places of meaning accessible to both individuals and groups of young people. Yet these places of hope that FBOs offer often appear to be isolated from the wider society and in relation to other organisations and even to other FBOs. This lack of societal integration of FBOs is noticeable in the South African and Norwegian case studies – albeit less so in the Finnish rural community of Lammi, where the

church had taken on more of an integrative role despite its failure to include the newly arrived asylum seekers into the local community. Consequently, FBOs do not seem to have the possibility or capacity to function as socially integrating and empowering agents in the way they wish to act. FBOs could thereby be described as significant temporary places of meaning in an otherwise overwhelming space without meaningful possibilities and hope – but less so as facilitators of and inspiration for transcending the limitations of marginalisation and establishing more comprehensive places of meaning. The summary results of the six case studies show that FBOs are indisputably important to social cohesion among young people at the local level in South Africa and in the Nordic countries. By providing limited and temporary places of hope they make a noticeable contribution to individuals' lives and wellbeing, even if they cannot be considered to be efficient driving forces for change in young people's lives.

