

Reflections

The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland – commentary to Huttunen and Albrecht

ARITA HOLMBERG



Holmberg, A. (2021) The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland – commentary to Huttunen and Albrecht. *Fennia* 199(1) 144–146. <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.108085>

This is a commentary to the article “The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland” by Janette Huttunen and Eerika Albrecht. In the piece I reflect on the analysis and results of this interesting research, focusing in particular on adult’s depoliticization of children’s protest and the potential collective social and political impact of the Fridays for Future movement for youth.

Keywords: children, climate protest, adult, Fridays for Future

Arita Holmberg (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0389-6095>), Swedish Defence University, Department for Security, Strategy and Leadership, Box 27805, 115 93 Stockholm, Sweden. E-mail: arita.holmberg@fhs.se

The article “The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland” by Huttunen and Albrecht (2021) constitutes an important and timely contribution to the growing amount of literature that address the global youth social movement concerned with the climate crisis. Their analysis of the framing of children’s and youth protests through the lens of environmental citizenship raises a number of points that should be further addressed in future research. The depoliticization by adults of children’s political engagement, revealed by the analysis provided by Huttunen and Albrecht, is one important matter for understanding the development of environmental citizenship. Connected to this issue is the broader question of resistance towards environmental awareness and the sustainability efforts that is spurred by the climate crisis entering the political agenda. Much more critical research needs to be directed at scrutinizing this resistance. Important efforts have already been made by Hultman and others (see for instance Hultman 2017), but Huttunen and Albrecht (2021) research brings an additional dimension to previous work.

In connection to the first point mentioned above – on the depoliticization of children’s protest, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that it has been an active strategy of many western countries to educate children on sustainability (Corner *et al.* 2015; Barthe *et al.* 2018; Olsson 2018). This has been conducted in much the same fashion as development aid for decades, targeting children and the young generation with certain information and ideals in order to achieve long term change and make children educate their families. The result is very much what we have been observing with the

youth protests in recent years – educated children advocating for social and political change (Holmberg & Alvinus 2020). It is a prolongation of the strategy to award children knowledge in this area. However, the implications for the social and political dynamic in families, societies and political arenas are under researched. This is where Huttunen and Albrecht results become so very interesting, and allow us to scrutinize the marginalized role that children and youth are awarded in relation to the most important issue of our time. As the authors note, “...young people are not only passively learning to become environmental citizens; they are also shaping environmental citizenship through their own activity.” (Huttunen & Albrecht 2021, 55).

Given the inherent paradox between the strategy to educate children, and the social notion of childhood (limiting their agency) that characterizes western democracies (Garlen 2019), it is not surprising that we note a reluctance towards accepting children’s protest and political engagement. However, what is problematic is that also the supportive adult voices may contribute to depoliticizing children’s activism. This testifies to the enormous difficulties associated with the questioning of the social order and with trying to think differently about the politics needed in the Anthropocene (Dryzek & Pickering 2019). Given the challenges of accepting and allowing children to speak (and to listen when they speak), the extent of the difficulties associated with incorporating the perspectives of nature and non-human animals becomes apparent (Carter & Charles 2018; Fox & Alldred 2020). This is a major future challenge in face of the climate crisis, environmental citizenship and life in the Anthropocene.

The article also inspires thought on the collective, social and emotional dimension of environmental citizenship. Huttunen and Albrecht (2021, 56) write “Despite the FFF movement being a youth-centred movement – by the young, for the young – an adult voice is dominant in the discussions surrounding the movement. For the young participants in the FFF movement, this experience has shaped their identity, their emergence as active citizens and their perceptions of active citizenship.” Previous research has addressed the social and emotional impact of children’s awareness of the climate crisis (Green 2017; compare also Norgaard & Reed 2017). The impact of the Fridays for Future movement may well add a collective dimension to this experience. In this context, it becomes relevant to talk about children as a climate precariat, suffering from shared vulnerabilities in relation to their security, perceptions of temporality and identity (Holmberg & Alvinus 2021). It is likely that we have only caught a first glimpse of the collective social and political force of children’s and youth engagement in relation to the climate crisis.

References

- Barthe, S., Belton, S., Raymond, C. M. & Giusti, M. (2018) Fostering children’s connection to nature through authentic situations: the case of saving salamanders at school. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00928>
- Carter, B. & Charles, N. (2018) The animal challenge to sociology. *European Journal of Social Theory* 21(1) 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431016681305>
- Corner, A., Roberts, O., Chiari, S., Völler, S., Mayrhuber, E. S., Mandl, S. & Monson, K. (2015) How do young people engage with climate change? The role of knowledge, values, message framing, and trusted communicators. *WIREs Climate Change* 6(5) 523–534. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.353>
- Dryzek, J. S. & Pickering, J. (2019) *The Politics of the Anthropocene*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198809616.001.0001>
- Fox, N. J. & Alldred, P. (2020) Sustainability, feminist posthumanism and the unusual capacities of (post) humans. *Environmental Sociology* 6(2) 121–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2019.1704480>
- Garlen, J. (2019) Interrogating innocence: “childhood” as exclusionary social practice. *Childhood* 26(1) 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568218811484>
- Green, M. (2017) ‘If there’s no sustainability our future will get wrecked’: exploring children’s perspectives of sustainability. *Childhood* 24(2) 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216649672>
- Holmberg, A. & Alvinus, A. (2020) Children’s protest in relation to the climate emergency: a qualitative study on a new form of resistance promoting political and social change. *Childhood* 27(1) 78–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219879970>
- Holmberg, A. & Alvinus, A. (2021) Children as a new climate precariat: a conceptual proposition. *Current Sociology* [online Jan 4 2021] <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120975461>

- Hultman, M. (2017) Natures of masculinities: conceptualising industrial, ecomodern and ecological masculinities. In Buckingham, S. & le Mason, V. (eds.) *Understanding Climate Change Through Gender Relations*, 107–123. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315661605-6>
- Huttunen, J. & Albrecht, E. (2021) The framing of environmental citizenship and youth participation in the Fridays for Future Movement in Finland. *Fennia* 199(1) 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.102480>
- Norgaard, K. M. & Reed, R. (2017) Emotional impacts of environmental decline: what can native cosmologies teach sociology about emotions and environmental justice? *Theory and Society* 46(6) 463–495. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9302-6>
- Olsson, D. (2018) *Student sustainability consciousness: investigating effects of education for sustainable development in Sweden and beyond*. Dissertation, Department for Environment and Life Sciences, Karlstad University, Sweden. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1257928/FULLTEXT02.pdf>