Possibilities and Impossibilities for Everyday Life: Institutional Spaces in School-Age Educare

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Abstract: This project aimed to investigate through empirical analysis the possibilities and impossibilities for everyday life in the institutional spaces of school-age educare. The data consists of twelve weeks of fieldwork in twelve settings and group interviews with staff teams in each setting. Through empirical analysis of the variation in institutional spaces, the results highlight the importance of academically educated staff, stable staff teams, dedicated rooms, available material, and time to plan and prepare their work as the distinctive features that co-construct possibilities and impossibilities for children's everyday lives.

Keywords: school-age educare, fritidshem, everyday life, institutional space, multi-sited ethnography

Introduction

This project aimed to investigate possibilities and impossibilities for everyday life in institutional spaces in Swedish School-Age EduCare (SAEC). Institutional spaces are co-constructed by the socio-material aspects in an institution where human to human relations and materiality are co-working (Alvesson & Empson, 2007, Massey, 1994). SAEC settings are co-constructed by the people who work there, the children, rooms, material to engage the children, by time and by the relationships within the setting as well as the relationships to other institutions such as the school and the children's families. Depending on how these aspects are co-constructed, different institutional spaces for everyday life are offered. My interest is the empirical variation in institutional spaces (Alvesson & Empson, 2007) and how distinctive features co-construct possibilities and impossibilities in relation to children's agency and the identity of a SAEC setting.

In the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800), children's everyday lives in Swedish SAEC are articulated as meaningful leisure beside education and teaching. The interest in investigating institutional spaces in SAEC is grounded in several steps taken to strengthen policy for SAEC in the last 20 years. In line with educational reforms of children's learning and development, SAEC was integrated with compulsory school in 1996 and after that the national curriculum has been revised several times to encompass SAEC (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). These steps have all increased the intended learning outcomes

for SAEC with an emphasis on learning and teaching. At the same time, during these 20 years there have been numerous economic cuts made to structural conditions for SAEC. Different reports have presented statistics on growing child groups, dropping teacher/child ratios, fewer teachers with academic degrees, poorer conditions in rooms and of material (The Swedish School Inspectorate, 2018). This article contributes an empirical analysis of the way today's greatly changing SAEC are constructing children's everyday life.

Even though research in this field is increasing, there is still limited knowledge and empirical evidence of the everyday lives of children in SAEC today, where almost 500,000 children between the ages of 6-13 years are in attendance. Consequently, the intention is to investigate possibilities and impossibilities for everyday life in institutional spaces in Swedish SAEC through empirical analysis. The following research questions are posed:

- What distinctive features co-construct everyday lives in SAEC?
- How are children's agency and the SAEC identity constructed in SAEC?

Previous Research

Place and space regarding children in pedagogical settings has been investigated from different perspectives. Ellis (2004) and Green and Turner (2017) use the term place to describe when children add meaning to spaces. Moss and Petrie (2002) use instead space to highlight the complexity in child services and how these spaces are filled with social relations, perspectives, intentions, and power relations. In line with Moss and Petri, Clark (2010) argues that pedagogical institutions for children are rich in symbols, routines and rituals, where children are engaged in everyday tasks.

Smith and Barker (2000) report how children attach meaning to spaces and resist the adult domination by adding their own meaning to spaces and using them in un-intended ways, which impacts children's everyday life. Evaldsson and Corsaro (1998) highlighted children's collective processes in terms of relations in everyday life when they investigated children's play and disputes. In line with them, Hurst (2019) argues for giving space for waiting to promote children's relational work in SAEC.

Research in Swedish SAEC indicates the shifting focus on education in policy and the poor conditions in practice. Andishmand (2017), in her ethnographical study of three different socioeconomic areas, reports inequality in SAEC and big differences in children's leisure, due to large groups of children and poor staff conditions. Haglund (2018) reports, using a narrative approach, how poor conditions for personnel and insufficient time for planning are limiting children's possibilities in their everyday lives. Elvstrand and Lago (2019) examined the recurrent activity of choosing what to do in the afternoons and indicate that choices are more limiting than free, based on what teachers value as important activities for children. Lago and Elvstrand (2019) report that children are neglected in SAEC free spaces, which makes SAEC a space for exclusion and even bullying, depending upon whether teachers participate in activities. Haglund (2016) discusses the fact that the tradition in SAEC work takes a peripheral position to children's play. He questions whether the teachers are resisting educational trends by highlighting children's social play and development of relations. Johnsson and Lillvist (2019) examined social learning in SAEC

through group interviews with staff. They report that dialogue and social learning is taken for granted and with limited time for the teachers to reflect on their work, social learning is limited by structural conditions.

Conceptualizing Institutional Spaces

This project is based upon theories which interrelate human agency with structural conditions. Qvortrup, Cosaro, and Honig (2005) emphasise the importance of the interrelatedness of structure and agency and state that studying social life in childhood should comprise them both. The concept 'institutional space' is used to highlight the fact that services, rooms, localities, and facilities are filled with social relations in which power relations are culturally embedded (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Agency is constructed in relation to structural conditions in institutional spaces meant for everyday life, and this relationship makes it possible to analyse the identity of a SAEC setting. Its identity is contained in the social relations in that specific setting and is constructed in relation to other surrounding institutions, schools and families, in stretched-out relations (Massey, 1994). Using the concept of institutional space makes it possible to analyse how rooms, time, relations, and material resources co-construct both possibilities and restraints in everyday lives.

Alvesson and Empson (2007) argue that institutional identity is represented by an institution's members as a social group in relation to the external environment. Certain distinctive features make one institutional space differ from another. My interest is the empirical variation in institutional spaces and how distinctive features co-construct the identity of a SAEC setting. Alvesson and Empson find it valuable to analyse the empirical variation in organizations because each space is a complex product of shifting social relations. The institutional spaces studied are consequently interesting because they offer different possibilities for agency in everyday lives.

Ethnographical Fieldwork

This article is part of a larger research project about children's leisure in SAEC, where I spent one week in twelve different SAEC settings each, employing a multi-sited and compressed ethnographical approach (Jefferey & Troman, 2004, Pierides, 2010). Ethnographical research is an accurate process that involves observing, analysing, and theorizing empirical situations. Jeffrey and Troman discuss time in the field and see shorter compressed fieldwork as an alternative. Pierides (2010) argues for the benefits of a multi-sited approach in educational ethnography by comparing different local sites. It allows connections and patterns of relations, differences, and boundaries, which support exploring the empirical variation.

The 12 studied settings represent a variation of smaller and larger cities, municipal and private schools, rural and urban areas, large schools and small schools. Fieldwork was completed during the spring semester of 2019. I spent one week in each setting. Every week in the field was structured in the same way with observations and interviews. I spent around 18 hours in each setting, at the end of the school day, 4-5 days a week, and one morning be-

fore school began, of each week. I followed the children, making observations the first days of the week. The latter part of the week I interviewed the staff in groups. To summarize, the data used in this article consist of fieldnotes taken down over a period of twelve weeks and group interviews with twelve staff teams, including 53 staff, only 23 of whom have degrees and are trained for work in SAEC. They were of mixed ages and genders. Ethical considerations reflect a responsive and attentive approach to fieldwork. No names of children, staff, schools, or cities are used. All have fictive names and everyone who participated did so voluntarily.

Analysis

Fieldnotes and interviews from the twelve settings were transcribed. During fieldwork and transcription, I made memos with sensitizing concepts, questions, and memos from reading literature. These memos have, in line with grounded theory, functioned as guidance when I was initially sorting my data and relating codes to each other (Charmaz, 2014). While reading through my data several times, searching for similarities and differences, I found that the sorting of empirical variation led me to discern three institutional spaces. These spaces are co-constructed by content, activities, material and personnel resources, time, rooms, and are inspired by Alvesson and Empson (2007) (Table 1). The SAEC's content and activities were listed, along with personnel resources (who works there) and material resources (what can children play/engage in). Rooms and time were investigated in the transcriptions, and relations between people, as well as the relations between people and material were searched for (Alvesson & Empson, 2007, Massey, 1994).

The three institutional spaces of SAEC contain aspects generated by the empirical analysis. The spaces are called Abandoned Space, Activity Space and Community Space (Table 1). The aspects are listed in the right-hand column in the table horizontally. The vertical spaces are linked to the aspects. It is important to notice that the spaces are fluent and not consistent and can change over time when the aspects are shifting (Figure 1).

Two of the analysed SAEC settings were more challenging to place in one of these three spaces, Dolphin and Tiger. Dolphin tends to be both like Activity Space and Community Space in terms of Dolphin having no dedicated rooms and not much SAEC work, but when talking to children and staff I could hear a spirit of community. In Tiger, there were several teachers who had education degrees, everyone was engaged to their work, but with very poor conditions for doing a good job. Tiger had low priority in school and poor conditions regarding time to plan and develop their work, and there were no stretched-out relations like the others in Community Space. Actually, there is sometimes a thin line between the institutional spaces indicating that they are fluent and not consistent.

Table 1. Framework for Institutional Spaces and Aspects

	Abandoned Space	Activity Space	Community Space
Content	Self-selected, not common	Curriculum content	Self-selected, common, and long-term
Activities	Self-selected, not planned	Teacher-led and teacher-planned, children can influence	A mix of teacher-led and child-initiated activities
Personnel resources	No academic degree, except for a few. Most staff members work as assistants in schools and after that in SAEC.	A mix of teachers with and without degrees, several assistants.	Mostly teachers with academic degrees
Material resources	Shabby and worn-out material in cupboards. Not easy to see or use, not labelled. Children use copy paper and pens, to colour pictures. Some building and creative material. Creative material is not for self-use.	Material for teacher-led activities. Constructive and creative material has to be retrieved and removed for school day. Child-initiated creative work is not possible because they should not make a mess.	A lot of material to stimulate and improve children's interest and initiatives. Variation for progression and different levels of difficulty. Different techniques for creative painting as example.
Time to prepare and plan	Insufficient time for planning, both individual and common. No time between school-day and working in SAEC. Sometimes the staff comes to SAEC after it has started.	Variation in time for the staff depending on if they teach during school-day or are assistants. Those who are trained often have individual and common time for planning. Assistants are not part of planning.	Time for planning, individual and common. Always time between duties during school-day and when SAEC starts.
Rooms	If SAEC has their own rooms, they are often spartan, worn, or not inviting.	No dedicated place for SAEC, have access to a lot of rooms in the school. No room is suitable for large groups of children. The rooms are furnished for school teaching and chairs are on desks.	Own rooms for SAEC work where children's buildings and creations can be left over time. Rooms with sink for painting, kitchen for baking and experimenting.
Relations	Staff can be exchanged whenever and replaced without regard to relations or continuity. Children can choose who they want to play with.	The personnel with educational degrees interact with each other and with children. The untrained personnel do not interact the same way with children. Staff divides children into groups.	Staff teams with continuity and care. Interplay and relations are a content. Children can choose who to play with but are challenged and inspired to play with new friends and try new experiences.
Teacher's role	Passive and protective.	Instructive and challenging teacher-led activities.	Active, supporting, challenging and interactive.
What children are offered	Free choice of activity and friends. Poor material and untrained personnel.	Free choice of content in teacher-led activities and rooms. Limited choice in who to play with, varied support and material.	A mix of self-initiated activities and teacher-initiated activities. Children con choose who to play with and can influence. Community is offered.
Stretched-out relations	None, subordinated to both school and parents.	A struggle over rooms with schoolteachers, nothing is required of parents.	Collaboration with both school and families based on good relations and cooperation.
Identity	Weak	Invisible and activity based	Strong and relation based

Figure 1. Settings and Spaces[1]

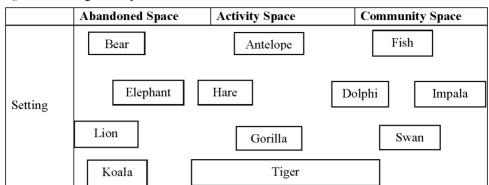|	Abandoned Space	Activity Space	Community Space
Setting	Bear	Antelope	Fish
	Elephant · Hare		Dolphi · Impala
	Lion	Gorilla	Swan
	Koala	Tiger	

Abandoned Space

The content in *Abandoned Space* is not easily observed and in dialogue with staff and children there is no common content found. The children choose their own content as well as activities. Most of the time, the activities are self-organized play and the selection of staff-led activities is limited. In these Abandoned Spaces, personnel resources are poor in many ways, the staff do not have teaching degrees, except for a few, and they are not guided by a leader (headmaster or academically educated teacher). In Abandoned Space material resources vary a lot, sometimes these SAEC settings have some suitable rooms, equipment and material. Sometimes they are located in the same classrooms as during the school day, sometimes abandoned in a leftover storage place. Play and creative material was hidden in closets or was not in good shape. It was not easy for the children to see or use the material, it was not introduced by staff and not labelled. Usually the children were drawing with pens on copy paper and colouring in ready-made pictures, or they were playing with construction material and spent a lot of time outdoors in the schoolyard.

The staff have insufficient time for planning and preparing activities. Some of the staff were in school all day and arrived just in time for SAEC to start, or sometimes even after it had started. Nor could they influence their work during the school day. Lars tells us about the poor conditions in Lion, where it is difficult to create meaningful leisure time for the children:

> Lars—Of course, you can let them go out so they can run off their energy a bit but to really understand meaningful leisure time in depth […] But we could have planned for an excursion today, prepare a snack to bring, but you can't do that when you start half past one and you are supposed to leave at a quarter to two. You need time to check who is present, you need to go to the canteen to prepare, you could have aimed to be the best in all levels. […] instead of being in class from eight o'clock to half past one, but you are sort of exhausted when the work starts with what you actually are here for, but you can't do it, it is very wrong. (Interview with staff team at Lion, Lars, Youth Recreation Leader)

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1   All of the studied settings have fictive names. In a Swedish context, SAEC-settings usually have the names of animals, flowers, or other nature-inspired nomenclature. The interviewed teachers are connected to each setting by the first letter of their name. For example, Lars in the first example works in the SAEC-setting Lion.

Lars spends all his time in school protecting pupils who cannot manage school or aiding the schoolteachers. When SAEC starts, he is not prepared and has no time and no energy to do meaningful things with/for the children.

In Abandoned Space the expectations for both staff and children are unclear, which seems to impact their relations. Below is an observation from Elephant just when SAEC starts that afternoon:

> 13.30 The school-day ends. One of the preschool classes arrives a little bit earlier and they are welcomed in the room for SAEC by a youth recreation leader. They gather on the round carpet. Of the seventeen children present five of them are sitting still, the other ones are running around, pushing one another, kicking, standing on their head in the sofa, at the same time as the other preschool class is about to end for the day. The sound level is high, and the children are running back and forth between the doors, the youth recreation leader and a substitute try to get the children's attention to lead the circle time. The substitute tries to stop the children from running in and out between the rooms but instead gets into conflict with the children. (Observation at Elephant)

In Elephant there is no continuity in the work team, people constantly change. The staff has difficulties in gathering the children even in smaller groups, to get their attention, and the expectations for the children are not clear. The unclear expectations for the children make them doubtful and worried, which sometimes leads to violations and acting out when the staff is not present.

The conditions in Abandoned Space as a whole involve opportunities for children to choose what to play with and with whom, but there are few opportunities for children to participate in teacher-led activities or use material resources. Further, the analysis shows that in Abandoned Space, with the untrained personnel and poor material conditions, children's interest and their own activities are not seen. Even if the children can be seen as agents in choosing what to do every afternoon, the staff do not interact with the children. The staff show low interest in what the children are doing, and they are uncertain about how to approach children's own activities and interests. This often leads to children being 'tidied up' and adults often interrupt the children in what they are doing.

The Abandoned Space is a vulnerable space regarding SAEC work. Below, Bengt, a student teacher, is telling us about the vulnerability in Bear and how the head teacher does not understand the SAEC work and cannot create conditions for it:

> Bengt—No it is very vulnerable. I think there is lots of space in a very limited frame […] but it is the school first and you can see that all the time. Then I think there is a school mentality about SAEC with a focus on this specific activity to be done, it becomes more of a lesson mentality which is unfamiliar for how I understand SAEC work, but I have to accept that. (Staff team interview, Bengt student teacher at Bear)

Bengt is talking about the vulnerable situation when the head teacher does not have enough knowledge of SAEC to create proper conditions. It tends to be teaching in line with school subjects, single activities that are planned instead of longer projects focusing on the whole situation. He also says that the school is always prioritized before SAEC, resulting in no time for planning. This lack of out-stretched relations to school combined with poor contact with parents is constructing a weak identity for the SAEC.

Abandoned Space is often invisible in the school; there is no space, no signs and no atmosphere indicating this is where children's everyday lives are. SAEC can be moved

around from room to room and the staff can be substituted from one day to the next if the head teacher needs them somewhere else. If there are planned activities these can easily be left out because there was not enough, or the right, staff in place.

It is my argument that the geography of the social relations in these Abandoned Spaces limits the children's agency. There is no space promoting influence and participation and no common things to be negotiated. This together constructs the weak identity of *Abandoned Space* where children's everyday lives are characterized as children who are left to themselves in the belief that children's leisure must not be controlled. The social space and the relations construct a space for holding children between school and home.

Activity Space

The content in *Activity Space* can be observed in relation to curriculum content such as painting, music, digital tools, play, physical activity, and outdoor experiences. In a dedicated timeslot during the afternoon the staff offer the children the opportunity to take part in staff-led activities of this type. In dialogue with children and staff I learned that sometimes the children can influence what activities they will do beforehand. Personnel resources are not poor but vary in these spaces. There is often staff present and prepared for planned activities, but their profession varies a lot, and this is observed in how they arrange the activities and how they interact with children. The use of personnel resources is often planned so the staff with the least training works in the early mornings and late afternoons, ensuring that the trained staff are present during the school day and for the teacher-led activities in the specific timeslot in the afternoon. In general, the staff has time for planning and preparing their work, but this varies and depends on whether they teach a subject or content during the school day or are assistants in class. Those with academic degrees usually have both individual and common time for planning, but the assistants usually do not have that time.

Contents and activities are organized in relation to what material resources are available. There is material for construction and creativity, but it always has to be retrieved and removed because the rooms are primarily intended for use during the school day. SAEC has access to a lot of rooms in the school, but no room is dedicated for use by SAEC. In Hare there is a wall in the hall, the place indicating this is for SAEC:

> In the hall is a pinboard and a small shelf for SAEC. There is some information for parents, a plan for the weekly activities, and pictures showing the planned activities. Today there will be play and crafts. There is also some documentation of their work and activities with pictures. (Observation at Hare)

This pinboard and shelf are the only things indicating this is more than a school for two first grade classes. The Hare's SAEC setting is in the same rooms as during the school-day for these children. Noteworthy for Activity Space is that the rooms are not suitable for the number of children and not for SAEC work. The rooms are not furnished for play but for school teaching and the chairs are often on desks for the (school)day and the children are hushed. This means that there cannot be any messy self-selected creative work, and no creations or buildings can be left for another day. Activities and content are organized in re-

lation to these circumstances. In Antilope we talk about the fact that there is no room for SAEC, and that the children have no place to store the things they make:

> Anders—Those who are up in X [name of group and class], there it is lessons when we have SAEC, so they can't go in there and store their things, or they can, but they don't want to.
>
> (…)
>
> Alfred—Because we have all the time, during all these years we have been forced to adjust what we do to what we can do. We know we can't do a big project that we need to store somewhere, so no then we do a small project that we can finish tomorrow instead. (Staff team interview at Antilope with Anders, teacher in SAEC and Alfred, youth recreation leader)

In this example, the staff in Antilope talk about the poor conditions when there is not a dedicated space for SAEC. They adjust to these conditions, meaning that no creative work can go on over time. The children have no place to store their things they are working on and have not finished. Instead, activities are on a daily or weekly basis doing things children do not need to store.

The work in Activity Space impacts the relations in a hierarchical way where the adult has the power and agency. In these spaces circle-time is primarily used for information and secondarily for dialogue. Most of the time, circle-time takes place in a classroom or during snack-time when the children sit down, and a member of staff stands up and informs the children about the activities in the afternoon and also checks who is present. There is no dialogue or opportunity for the children to offer in-put, but they are allowed to ask questions in this situation. In SAEC Gorilla, Gerd speaks about their activities during a week:

> Gerd—Every section [has circle-time] on their own and they differ in length, some days they are about thirty minutes, sometimes a short one for ten minutes, so we won't be in the canteen all at the same time, so it varies. And I don't know, I guess our circle-times look the same, you check who is present, inform them about the activities for the day, sing some songs and so on, maybe the children have something to tell. Yes, a classic circle-time and then a snack, afterwards we always go outside.

Gerd explains what the children are offered during a week. The circle-time is a space to check who is present and maybe do something together if they cannot go directly to have a snack. Then Gerd continues:

> Gerd—[…] A child came to me and said a couple of days ago 'Gerd, I like Wednesdays the most because then at first we are outside and we can play what we want to and then inside and play what we want to, that is my best day'. The day we structured the least. (Staff team interview at Gorilla, Gerd teacher in SAEC)

Here Gerd tells us about one child having told her that he/she likes it the best when there is nothing planned, and the children can choose what to do by themselves. Maybe the child is questioning the staff-led and organised activities because they are not based upon the children's perspective.

Taken together the social relations in Activity Space can be understood in several ways. One explanation is that the revised curriculum with an increased emphasis on teaching has generated staff-led activities to make sure the children are offered opportunities to develop certain abilities in line with the curriculum. Another explanation is connected to

the large groups of children, where in order to structure the afternoon the staff who is present has to arrange one activity each to separate the children in smaller manageable groups.

The varying staff group impacts the relations between staff and children. Children are encountered differently depending on who they interact with. This is observed in how the adults approach the children and interact with them. Some staff are interested in children's perspectives and guide them, others are not able to take their perspectives. This leads to a very uncertain space for the children, where they sometimes are actors and can influence and sometimes not at all. Further, the analysis shows the Activity Space as curriculum based SAEC, where the children choose from activities that are offered. Children can be active in choosing and be actors in their everyday life. But there are actually not really opportunities or space for dialogue. In the teacher-led activities the children are offered possibilities to be challenged to do new things and encounter new material.

There is a strained dialogue with parents and with the school. SAEC is many times invisible in school, being everywhere and nowhere. A struggle is going on over the rooms, where SAEC work is not welcome, because it is too loud and too messy. Nor is it a space for children when they are SAEC-children; the chairs are already on desks and they are being hushed. The only legitimate SAEC activities are the planned staff-led activities. This makes Activity Space visible in relation to what mostly looks like school. The geography of the social relations in Activity Space promotes children's agency in choosing staff-led, curriculum-based activities. In Activity Space children's everyday lives are characterized by the children as consumers of staff-led and staff-initiated curriculum activities.

Community Space

The content in Community space is linked to the common life and democratic issues where different activities are used to practice this content. As an example, circle-time in these spaces is used as a meeting space where teachers and children in dialogue can discuss their common situation and their everyday lives here and now:

> 13.30. the children arrive in the SAEC room for third graders and sit down on the round carpet. Ilse leads the circle-time and checks who is present. There are 19 children present. The children take part in the conversation. Last week's responsible children are evaluated together, new ones are chosen, new tasks are decided, things you can do to make someone happy with words and actions. On the wall behind is a wishing tree, every child has written an activity on a leaf that has been put on the tree. Every Monday they take a leaf off the tree which decides what is happening on Wednesday, every child is supposed to take part in that activity. Drawing with charcoal became the activity of the week. After that three girls do a skit with hobby horses about horses, homework, and friendship. (Observation at Impala)

When the children arrive at SAEC, they know what is expected of them. There is continuing interplay and dialogue between Ilse and the children. The children are invited to participate and have influence. Ilse works alone in Impala. She is a teacher in SAEC for the children in third grade, she has worked with this group since first grade. The content in circle-time is the common activity for the group and it is about responsibility and taking care of each other. In Community Space, circle-time is a well-known space where everybody sits

down together in a circle and sees each other, and the teachers participate according to the same rules. This is also a space for prevention work, where areas of the community are discussed, they talk about rules and possibilities, where the children are engaged and participate as actors equal to the teachers.

The activities offered to the children are varied, they are created in common and support a shared life, but the children's individual expressions are possible and arranged for. Personnel resources are a distinctive feature here, meaning the staff is academically trained for work in SAEC. The staff is a team with common time for planning, reflection and evaluation. I learned from the dialogues that the staff in some ways can control their time during the school-day and they always have changeover time between duties during the school-day and when SAEC starts. Sven works in Swan and he explains:

> Sven—On Tuesdays I am responsible for one of the fourth-grade classes, so I have planning time for that on Mondays for 40 or 50 minutes. Tuesdays I am responsible for one of the fourth grades before lunch, Wednesdays and Thursdays I do some handcrafts with the fifth graders and fourth graders and Fridays I work on developing the SAEC during the morning and I also have recess duty Monday to Thursday at lunch break. So, it is very, I experience my days are optimized, so I can do my best at SAEC, and the lunch breaks. (Staff team interview at Swan, Sven teacher in SAEC)

Sven tells us about his working days and how he has the opportunity to influence his work during the school day and how that creates good conditions for his work in the afternoons and that he can concentrate on that work. He has changeover time before SAEC starts and can have a calm start in the afternoon together with the children.

Material resources are also a distinctive feature in Community Space, meaning there are dedicated rooms and materials supporting SAEC work. The rooms are their own and consist of several rooms with for example a room with a sink for painting and a kitchen for baking and experimenting. Constructions and creations can be left for another day and projects can be worked with over time for longer periods. There is lots of material for the children to play with and be engaged in, to be creative and to inspire others. Material is available for children to use:

> Ilse—It is about really listening, what are they asking for and then we need material and facilities to make it work and to quickly be able to say 'Yes, then we'll get this for you'. To have resources and possibilities to that are plentiful, because that is our function as teachers, not the doing but the teaching and the questions 'How can you do this?' (Staff team interview at Impala, Ilse teacher in SAEC)

Ilse tells me about how they create conditions for children to develop abilities such as problem solving, exploring, and creativity, which Ilse says, are in line with the curriculum. She emphasises that she bases what she does on the children's interests, bringing out plenty of material in functional rooms and teaching the children by asking them questions.

Viewed together, the conditions in Community Space can be understood as the team know each other well, are stable, have time together and can focus on SAEC. The space can also be understood as rooms and materials supporting children's leisure, with a dedicated space for children to work, create and where things can be worked with over time, which creates space for project work without a specific goal, but using an important process. In

Community Space camaraderie among the staff, between the children and between children and staff creates wellbeing and support for the children. The staff have an academic education and know the purpose of their work; they can use their personnel resources as well as the material resources in intended ways and with the interest of the children.

In Community Space children can be the ones who lead the group, power is distributed among the relations, thus making the children actors. The staff have modelled and if the children have ideas for activities, they can choose to have an activity with their friends, where the staff participate and support if needed. In Fish, Fredrik tells us about how they work with longer projects:

> Fredrik—but what I think of is a project like this Talent. It is a social project actually; it is not just this. Then there is cooperation from them, they have to cooperate on different programs and so on. But it is the same with recreational sport, it is just the same, we are practicing how we behave toward each other, but it is recreational sport. (Staff team interview Fish, Fredrik teacher in SAEC)

Fredrik talks about how all their activities are parts of a long-term social project on how they together should behave toward each other. The circle-time is used to discuss common issues and to strengthen some of the children in relation to others by highlighting some ideas. Children's everyday lives are seen as important and as valuable.

In Community Space the staff is comfortable with working with different things side by side, supporting different groups of children. Topics that need to be discussed in the whole group are discussed during circle-time; otherwise the teachers walk around, talking to children in smaller groups. The social relations of Community Space are stretched outside SAEC with relations to school and to parents and families. The relation to schools and to families is based on cooperation, which strengthens their identity when meeting with others. There is a dialogue with parents about the children's hours in SAEC. Moreover, the content is different from school, which also strengthens their identity. There is also a strong value-based approach in the Community Space which offers children more agency, children are listened to and they are creators of their everyday lives with support from the staff. In Community Space children's everyday lives are characterized by the children as active participants in the creation of content, activities and routines.

Findings

In investigating possibilities and impossibilities for everyday life in institutional spaces, the empirical analyses highlight substantial differences in how the three spaces are constructed. Staff with degrees in education, stable staff teams, dedicated rooms, available material and (changeover)-time are the distinctive features that co-construct social relations in the different spaces for everyday lives. The three different social spaces propose different affordances of meaningful leisure time, pedagogical activities, possibilities and impossibilities for children's agency. In terms of agency it is presented how power relations between staff and children construct limitations in agency. The identity of SAEC as weak, or invisible and activity based, or as strong and relation-based constructs different subjects as well as affordances.

In *Abandoned Space* children can choose an activity as well as friends, but the relations in the space as well as relations to others, do not construct a space for participation or community, nor are they offered new experiences. Activity Space, I argue, is a result of strengthened policy where activities are planned for and offered to children in the afternoon, but only in dedicated timeslots. The main difference from Abandoned Space is a more academically educated staff, even if it varies, and for children to be part of new experiences depending on how they choose. The *Community Space*, I argue, is a space for children to act and participate and where their leisure and everyday lives are valuable, which differs from both the other two spaces. The social relations in Community Space construct a space for sharing and offer possibilities to experience new material, activities and friends, to be inspired and learn from each other. The work is grounded on relations not only among children and staff but to parents and other persons meeting the child, like schoolteachers. When the social relations in space and time are stretched-out the community space is constructed (Massey, 1994). In summarizing differences and similarities, it is obvious that different possibilities for agency, activities, and wellbeing in everyday life are constructed. As highlighted by Hurst (2019) and Evaldsson and Corsaro (1998), it is important to create space for children's relations and what children themselves seem to think is important in their everyday life. But it is also important to ensure closeness to the teachers, to support the work with relations (Elvstrand & Lago, 2019). Balancing planned activities with children's own work with their relations requires a responsive and attentive teacher.

Community Space contains a context for children to be involved in societal arrangement, democratic processes, to grow as persons and prepare for life outside institutions. The other two spaces do not seem to offer the same. The stretched-out relations to school and families construct these possibilities. What makes the spaces differ from each other is what can be offered to the children in terms of available rooms and material as well as their teachers' possibilities to plan, prepare and reflect upon their work. These findings correspond to Andishmand's (2017) study of inequality in Swedish SAEC. In addition, Haglund (2018) as well as Johnsson and Lillvist (2019), report the way structural demands on SAEC affect daily practice.

Conclusions

To conclude, a stable staff team, dedicated rooms, several available materials, teachers with degrees in education and time for teachers to plan and prepare seem to be the distinctive features in constructing social relations with the possibilities for agency in everyday life. The compressed and multi-sited ethnographical method provided the opportunity to empirically analyse how certain aspects co-construct variation in institutional spaces. The study has some limitations in that the twelve studied SAEC do not represent a national cluster. However, ethnographical research with closeness to the field has the aim of producing rich empirical analyses and in the SAEC settings that were studied there is variety in terms of the size of the schools and municipalities, which were in both rural and urban areas. The extensive documentation from the twelve SAEC settings contributes to the building of empirical evidence about children's possibilities and impossibilities in Swedish SAEC. In ad-

dition, this study contributes knowledge about how social relations construct possibilities for children's agency in everyday life, which has implications for policy makers. It is evident, considering the distinctive features I found, that social relations and structural aspects together co-construct the SAEC.

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