

Nina Jentl & Juha Kaskinen (editors)

TO BE YOUNG!

Youth and the Future

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FOREWORD

What does it mean to be young today and what will it mean in the coming years in this rapidly changing world? What could the future of youth be or look like?

The aim of the “To be Young” conference in July 2012 was to perceive and create futures through the eyes of today’s youth, adults and decision makers for the young people of the future. The course of a youth’s life, both today and toward the future, covers an entire spectrum of reality. Focusing on faith in young people, their ability and determination to build an inevitably different and in many ways and hopefully improved world for us all to live in was the focal point of this conference.

This book collects some of the presentations and papers presented in the conference. Articles selected in this book cover several approaches of youth research. Topics include politics, education, gender questions, futures methodologies and young immigrants just to mention a few. We thank the authors and referees for their work.

The conference was organized in association with the Finland Futures Academy and the Finnish Youth Research Network. The “To Be Young” conference marked Finland Futures Research Centre’s 14th Annual International Conference and its 20th Anniversary celebrating twenty years of academic research, education and development work.

In Turku December 20th, 2013

Nina Jentl and Juha Kaskinen

“NOW, YOU PUT IT TO SLEEP.” “I DO WHAT...?!” THE EMPOWERING EFFECT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN TEENAGERS’ EVERYDAY LIVES

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ABSTRACT – "Digital natives," "tech-savvy" and "net generation": these are popular expressions used both in academic and everyday discourse to signify the generation of young people born into a society with high internet penetration. This labelling derives from turbulent innovations of information communication technologies (ICT) which have shaped social processes in the last two decades. But what is behind this one-sided, technologically -determined image of youngsters? In this paper, I present the preliminary findings of my Ph.D. research project “The Role of ICT in the Communication Practices of the Social Group of Teenagers”. The objective of my research was to explore the role of ICT in the everyday life of a group of teenagers. I approached this topic from the perspective of social shaping and domestication of technology. I studied the members of two Czech peer groups born in 1992 and 1993. I wanted to get as complex an image of the research topic as possible so I explored it in various everyday life contexts: peer-to-peer, home and school. I also conducted the study over a longer period of two and a half years. I covered the topic primarily through qualitative techniques. Social media, applications and web sites, mobile phones and especially smartphones have been empowering teenagers: they have been weakening the structuring effects of daily living contexts such as school, peer group and home. However, ICT did not elicit new types in teenagers’ behaviour. Their core practices remained the same, as did the structures that influenced their behaviour.

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Introduction and Background

Over the last two decades, society witnessed turbulent innovations in the area of communication and information technology. The internet and mobile phones with their applications – have become everyday communication tools alongside traditional mass media and telecommunication devices.

There is no doubt, ICT have established themselves as an important and axiomatic element of young people’s everyday leisure lifestyles and school-based experience (Boyd 2008). As many studies (e.g. Liley 2006; Boyd 2008; Ito 2010) have shown, digital mobile and internet communication technologies have out-paced broadcasting media such as TV, radio and print in terms of their importance in the primary arenas of youth’s everyday life – school, home and peer group.

But how do Czech teenagers use ICT in their everyday lives? There is still little evidence in the Czech academic context. In this paper I will attempt to shed some light on this issue using the preliminary findings of my research which is based on the analysis of a partial data set. First, I will present my theoretical background; second I will guide you through the design of the methodology; and third I will show the results of my current research work.

"Digital natives," "tech-savvy," and "net generation" (Tapscott 1998) are among the various labels used not only in the Anglo-Saxon world to characterize the generation of young people born in a society with high internet penetration. This rhetoric is a consequence of innovations in the domain of communication tools which have contributed to the formation of social processes for last two decades. It derives from the principals of the "Knowledge Economy," an economic model in which production and service are based on intellectual capabilities rather than physical capital and natural resources (Powell & Snellman 2004) and in which young people are considered to be the key players due to their relatively high level of technological literacy (Facer et al 2001).

This labelling is typical of technological determinism discourse which postulates that new technologies are agents of change that cannot, themselves, be deliberately shaped or controlled. This perspective is shared also by the proponents of the knowledge society and the information society (Castells 2000). These conceptual frameworks define information as a type of modern currency, dividing societies into information-rich and information-poor ones. Young people are then seen as agents of this change – the “owners of the future”. This discursive approach has been criticised for developing and strengthening a generation gap (Facer et al 2001). It also represents youth as a monolithic mass of mere ICT consumers, which can be distinguished only by their technical and technological skills (Facer et al 2001).

These perceptions symbolically “ghettoize“ youth culture and are in conflict with conceptions of young people as active social agents who “negotiate, share, and create culture with adults and each other” (Corsaro 1997: 18). This more positive view of young people as active members of society is embedded in the social construction of technology (SCOT) concept (Bijker et al. 1987) where people, not machines define the role of ICT in a society (Baym 2010). In the new sociology of childhood, ICT represent tools that enable young people to express their voices, which might otherwise be neglected (Milner 2004). Thus, figuratively, ICT empower youth to liberate themselves from the dictatorship of passive consumer categorizing and to freely pursue their interests.

Discussions of the relationship between youth and ICT that are framed by fears of young people acquiring more power than adults who are losing control over them represent a discourse that is the opposite of SCOT. This moral panic encourages the formation of an image of youth as a threat to adults who do not attain the same degree of internet literacy. The perception of young people as potential victims of dangers such as stalking or cyber bullying is another example of a moral panic discourse (Baym 2010).

It is tempting to use two other perspectives that do not conceive of the relationship between technology and society in such stark terms. These are social shaping and domestication of technology, which are located intellectually between technological determinism and social construction of technology (Baym 2010) and correspond to syntopian perspectives that perceive technology (particularly the internet) as tools that allow “individuals and groups to find common interest, engage in various types of exchange and create bonds of concern, support and affection that can unite them – got both good and ill” (Katz & Rice 2002, 165). Social shaping of technology theorists view the relationship between technology and society as two-sided: “the consequences of technologies arise from a mix of ‘affordances’ – the social capabilities technological qualities enable – and the unexpected and emergent ways that people make use of those affordanc-

es“ (Baym 2010, 44). Power is not appropriated by individuals or technologies but belongs to some extent to all participants in the human/technology relationship.

Moreover, according to some authors (Bingham 1996), it is impossible to divide the world into the sphere of things (technologies), on the one hand, and the social sphere on the other. On the contrary, “the society is produced in and through patterned networks of heterogeneous materials in which the properties of humans and nonhumans are not self-evident but rather emerge in practice“ (Valentine & Holloway 2002, 306). From this perspective known as Actor Network Theory (Callon 1986), ICT represent “things“ that gain their form as various social practices depending on the contexts in which they have been realized. Thus, ICT can serve different roles and function as diverse tools for individual youths and groups of young people.

The concept of domestication of technology extends the approach of social shaping of technology. It also perceives both technology and society as forces that influence the consequences of ICT. In comparison with social shaping of technology, this framework focuses more on the process by which formerly unknown and uncertain media become tools of everyday life. (Baym 2010) It stresses the importance of a “personal meeting” between individuals and technologies. In other words, users become familiar with the technologies in person having already acquired a certain amount of knowledge about them that is mediated by opinion leaders or media and advertising. They seek and find the meaning, significance and role of technology in their everyday lives (Haddon 2006). In fact, the domestication of technology framework describes the process of trivialization of technology usage.

Technological determinism and social construction of technology are typical frameworks of lay and media discourses in the Czech Republic that consider the intersection of ICT and teenagers. Jiří Trávníček (2011) showed the ways in which adults approach this topic with a struggle rhetoric: they perceive the internet as a negative symbol of a generation barrier and something that “belongs to those young people” (ibid 2011, 146). Quantitative data describing the behaviour of young adults proved quite the opposite: the internet is not a central aspect of teenagers’ and young adults’ life. It is not “a determinant of their behaviour. It is a source of information, contacts, entertainment, sharing” (ibid 2011, 161).

Although the number of qualitative studies covering the problematic of ICT and teenagers’ everyday life is quite extensive abroad, there have only been a few studies of this genre in the Czech Republic. Moreover, these studies focus only on a particular aspect of the topic. For example, Jiří Fiala studied the ways in which illegally distributed video content is used (2012). That is why I wanted to explore this issue in a more complex manner in my PhD project. I decided to qualitatively explore what Trávníček (2011) uncovered in his quantitative study. I wanted to get a broad and vivid image of a topic that is often perceived negatively and is simplified by media and adults. I wanted to find out what comes from the intersection between teenagers and ICT without the preconceptions and over-simplification so typical of deterministic discourses. I also wanted to look at the ways ICT have become embedded in young peoples’ everyday lives. Thus I decided that the ideal approach to this topic was through social shaping and domestication of technology perspectives.

Material and Methods

What does it mean for contemporary youth to live their everyday lives in a society of which ICT are an immanent part? This is a question that youth researchers often pose today. Even though research regarding the intersection of ICT and the everyday lives of young people is quite developed, “a conceptual and methodological framework that integrates the everyday experiences of youth with the multiple space-place connections facilitated by new media and network ICT systems” (Malla, Singh & Giardina 2010, 256) still waits to be defined.

The objective of my Ph.D. research project was to map the role of ICT in the everyday lives of teenagers. The research focused on the technologies teenagers spontaneously indicated were a part of their everyday lives: mobile phones (with or without touch screens) that were, in certain cases, connected to the internet; notebooks, netbooks or PCs with internet access; and chosen applications, web sites and social media.

The research sample was represented by two naturally-formed peer groups of four students born in 1992 and 1993. They were recruited through the snowball technique. I wanted to find groups with different everyday structures to be able to capture the potential dynamics of ICT usage depending on daily activities. The groups differed from each other primarily by locality and a cohesive element – an activity or environment shared by the group members. One group shared theatre club as a leisure activity. This group was formed by Klára and Eva, two girls quite busy with school and hobbies, and Jiří and Láďa, two boys from Prague and its outskirts. The other group was comprised of students from the secondary school in Liberec (three girls – Monika, Petra, Míša and one boy – Matěj), a town of approximately one-hundred-thousand inhabitants located northern Bohemia. Saving Matěj, a football club attendee, these research participants did not have any hobbies.

Having studied the current literature while considering social shaping and domestication of technology to be the ideal starting position, I tried to devise a methodological approach that would allow me to get as broad and vivid an image of the research problem as possible under given financial and time constraints. I studied the media behaviour of teenagers in various contexts: not only the chosen groups but also the peer-to-peer group in general. Family and school contexts formed the research arena. So-called traditional media such as television were also focal points of my interest. I chose various qualitative research techniques to obtain heterogeneous data that was ideally informed by living praxis.

In the majority of cases I could not observe mediated communication live in a natural environment: one-on-one communication data are nearly inaccessible to the researcher. That is why I engaged the research participants in the data collection process and thus used several aspects of participatory research. The teenagers' level of participation corresponded to the "collaborative" position on Roger Hart's ladder of participation (Hart 1997). The data of consistent media behaviour – not accessible in real time (e. g. sending text messages by mobile phone or group chat on Facebook) – were gathered thanks to the media and photo diaries that the participants were asked to prepare. Besides this, I organized focus groups (twice with each group – at the beginning and end of the field work) and in-depth interviews (one with each participant) during which, among other activities, the diaries were elicited. In order to study communication that was “visi-

ble” under certain conditions (for example, sharing data on a Facebook "wall"), I performed nethnographical observation on Facebook (Kozinets 2009).

I planned the research as an almost three year project to observe the potential changes in the media behaviour and the teenagers’ relationship to ICT. During these years I organized three meetings – some of which were preceded by data collection on the part of the research participants themselves – where data were collected through methods of individual in-depth interview and through focus groups. I was in continuous contact with the participants by observing them through their wall presence and presentation on Facebook.

I decided to use grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 1998) as the starting point for the data analysis. I used various methods such as qualitative content analysis (Ezzy 2002) and conversation analysis (ten Have 1999). This paper was written before the complex analysis was completed. Perhaps one strong category has already been revealed. In this text I present this category as a result of the analysis of a partial data set informed by one round of focus groups and multiple in-depth interviews. Please consider it a work -in-progress.

Results

School, peer groups and home microsystems saturate teenagers with more and more access to ICT which were once absent or shared with other individuals. There is no longer a single PC or one TV in the living room accessible to and shared by all family members – parents have ceased to be remote control holders and information gatekeepers. In addition, schools were once institutionally controlled territories where one could escape the undesirable class narrative by doodling something on a piece of paper or talking to her or his neighbour under the threat of notice. Now schools grant students free access to online worlds with more heterogeneous offerings.

Based on the findings of the present analysis, ICT have proven to function as tools of empowerment for studied teenagers. However, these technologies did not encourage new types of behaviour and did not radically change the structuring forces. In this text I would like to describe this phenomenon, which is entwined with all the above-mentioned contexts of teens’ everyday lives. First I will explore this phenomenon on the basis of individual identity; secondly, in the context of peer groups and finally through the relationship between teenagers and their parents.

Individual identity

No matter where teenagers are or what they are doing – pursuing classes at school, doing homework or helping parents run the household – they find a way to do what they really feel like doing, not what they should do in terms of a predefined scholastic or home agenda. ICT enable students to enter a world of almost unlimited complexity. It strengthens their control over what will be part of their own biographies and everyday lives and what will not: they don’t have to be exposed to items that are irrelevant to them to

the same degree as before the age of ICT. It empowers them to choose what to pay attention to, what to perceive and who to be in connection with.

This is thanks to the place disconnection features inherent in ICT, which enable teenagers to “fight” the structuring effect of the place in which they are physically located, and to actively search, choose and absorb the elements of one’s identity in another space where they would rather be present virtually. In this way ICT empower teenagers to keep their own personal narratives going (Giddens 1991) – building and strengthening their identities.

Take the example of Matěj: when he comes to school in the morning, he goes to his favourite website uloz, then begins using his smartphone and the school wifi to download movies and games. If there is a class that doesn’t resonate with his inner set-up – a “boring” class – he uses his netbook to read content he enjoys (topics such as mobile phones and football).

Also I use it for example when I get to school in the morning. I start downloading and download three movies during the day. Or I download a game, or whatever. (Matěj)

Likewise, when Míša returns home and her parents are watching something on TV which is irrelevant to her own narrative, she goes to her room, takes her own laptop and watches her favourite serial – “Gossip Girl”. When her peers do not give her the mpeg, she prefers to watch it as an on-line stream because she does not want to wait until it is downloaded. She is not good at searching for and downloading mpegs, anyway.

My Mum would watch some drama on ČT 2, but she would know at least what was it all about, I didn’t have a clue, so I grabbed the laptop. They watch all these soaps and I am not into it so I go and open the laptop... (Míša)

Peer group

Not only can they choose what movies they will watch according to their individual preferences, teenagers can also be in mediated contact with someone they prefer even if they are not currently physically accessible. ICT function as facilitators of social interaction between friends and within peer groups. The nurturing and strengthening of friendship – from school or leisure activities outside of school – is one of the key aspects of the participants’ ICT usage.

The usage of ICT for this purpose is primarily associated with Facebook or mobile and smart phones. Lád’a brings his own laptop to school and when he gets bored, he can hardly resist the temptation to go on Facebook. He sees who is online and potentially plans his day with the present peers.

So I just surf like this. But it kinda sucks when I surf during the lessons 'cause I don't pay attention then. I try... no, I don't try, but I just can't resist. It's because I want to stay in touch with my friends. I am mostly on Facebook, arranging things... if there's time before the exam, with whom to go out, what to do and stuff” (Lád’a)

Monika often cannot stand her Mum. When her Mum tells her something which makes her angry, she writes a text message to Petra describing what her mother said. Of course, if both of them are on Face-

book, Petra replies to Monika through Facebook. After all, it's cheaper, and pocket money matters! ICT functions here as means to escape from an unpleasant place to an absent but preferable other and to share immediate emotions.

Oh, jeez, this again, she was just here and told me this and that, so I have to go to dry the dishes. (Petra, imitating her Mum's voice and laughing)

Besides exchanging music tracks, movies or TV series at school, the participants' primary purpose of using ICT is to be with their peer group members – either virtually or in person at an offline meeting set up with the help of ICT. The mobile phone is often used by young people for communication with their strong ties. Thus, thanks to this technology, teenagers can always have someone at hand whom they trust and who can help them through difficult and unpleasant situations – an instant friend on the phone.

And so, when the road is slippery, I kinda hate it, it's like eight minutes from the bus stop to my place, so I made calls on my way just to kill time (laughing). So we talked, like on the bus we talked on the phone too, talked and talked, I started to unlock the front door and she heard it and said: "Oh, jeez, you're at home already! Bye!" (Klára)

Teenager–parent relationship

Whereas the role of ICT in building teens' identity and facilitating peer relationships is quite easy to describe, when it comes to the teenager-parent relationship things become more complicated. When today's teenagers entered the socialization process, ICT were becoming a regular part of the communication world. But their parents already had their stock of knowledge quite well-formed. Thus, they had to learn and gain new skills to be able to use these new technologies. This might seem to be a potential source of teen empowerment and, at the same time, an opening and broadening of the generation gap between "digital" youth and "tech-unsavvy" adults, (Castells 2001) (a term used by several authors).

"Tech-savvy" teens vs. ICT- illiterate parents?

The higher ICT literacy of the participants compared to that of their parents did not prove to be a strong enough source of teens' empowerment and self-determination in the teenager–parent relationship to lead to a pronounced gap between these groups. Of course, several participants mentioned the lower ICT engagement skills of their parents, but this was not the issue. In the vast majority of cases, the participants did not gloat about their skills. Even if they exhibited the empowerment effect of ICT, they had no need to show off.

Yes... well, it is for example when my Mum tells me she doesn't have the computer on and my sister is not home, so she cannot find me a bus... (Lád'a describing the situation when he has to call an information green line)

Monika and Petra were the only ones who spoke about their parents explicitly as less ICT literate. They form a very tight dyadic couple together. Monika does not have a healthy relationship with her parents at all. She lives with her grandparents. She dismissed her parents with a gesture of: "this is not worth even

speaking about.” She characterized them as being overly critical while not knowing anything. But she praised her Grandfather’s efforts to frequently Skype with her. On the contrary, Petra has a very good relationship with her Mum. She even signified her as her greatest confidant. She framed her Mum as being a conservative, hypocritical cyber-sceptic, but she did so in a friendly and caring way.

This is a typical catchphrase: “You will get crazy from these computers ! ... when the system falls, everybody will break down, because everything is electronic now.” And I say: “Please, Mum!” And then she is able to tell me: “Will you find me the series?” In case she didn’t catch some episode of the series on One (channel number One on Czech television, a public service medium). And she even gives me hell when I try to explain it to her normally. This is the best part (laugh). “And it doesn’t interest me, just choose it for me and tell me what I have to do then. And may I normally close it?” “Now, you put it to sleep.” “I do what...?!” (Petra, laughing)

It seems that the teens’ willingness to accept their parents as regular and equal members of the ICT engagement world depends to a certain degree on the general healthiness of the relationships they have with their parents. When teenagers do not communicate frequently and easily with their parents offline, neither do they do so online. And analogously, when they have a fruitful relationship with their families, they have no need to define themselves to their parents as more ICT skilled and thus empowered.

Where is the control?

Losing or gaining control – this is the typical framework broadcasting media use to speak about the effects of ICT from the parents’ perspective. According to this framework, parents lose control because they cannot always know what their children are doing online, or parents gain control thanks to the fact that mobile phones can connect them instantly to their children. The reality is not so black and white.

Although the preliminary power balance is economically on the side of the parents, netbooks/notebooks/PCs represent the technologies that are beyond their control. As (wireless) internet with no data limit is a regular part of each participant's household, the running of netbooks/laptops/PCs is not an issue in the relationship between the teens and their parents. Furthermore, almost all of the participant's parents initially set rules regarding ICT usage but later neglected to enforce them.

Not now. Earlier... They gave me certain tips. When they told me not to go on the erotic pages, there are viruses, and so on... not to download anything... not to go in for anything... Because I used to click: yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. So it was bad. My Dad told me if a pop-up window asked if I wanted the computer exploded, I would push enter... but that was a really long time ago. (Matěj, laughing)

Compared to netbooks/notebooks/PCs, mobile phones are much more “alive” in the relationship between parents and teenagers. This technology is a subject to parents’ control in two ways. First, parents set up the scale of mobile phone usage: they decide which service package under which to run the phone – whether a monthly plan or a prepaid tariff. The majority of parents inform their children of the financial usage rules, e.g. a prepaid tariff would be for one month of usage only. If the teenagers exceed the given

limit, they may try to negotiate with their parents but mostly they have to pay for it themselves (see Lád'a's case above).

Second, mobile phones represent for parents a sort of remote control thanks to which they obtain a certain permanent surveillance upon their children when they are physically distant. In this case, parents designate particular rules regarding usage. For example, if the child is going to be late coming home from a party, she/he is instructed to write a text message or to call in order to "report" to a parent. And even if this rule was set up in the past and parents no longer care about it to such an extent as before, the teenagers continue to honour it.

Of course, I send text messages on my mobile phone... when I expect a delay... to let one of them (parents) know... (We have) an unwritten agreement... It was at the time I started to stay somewhere, so my Mum told me ok, you can, but let me know about it... And I still keep it today... when one of them knows I am supposed to come at that or this time, and I don't show up, it is kinda weird... (Jiří)

All the participants shared this sense of responsibility. But do not take it the wrong way: these teens are not passively obedient children. They have their strategies of how to keep the rules their parents set up while retaining their "almost adult and thus independent" face. One way to describe the teens' relationship with these ICT in this context is as "reflexive" concerning functionality and social compatibility. The teenagers know how to effectively use the mobile phone to obtain a win-win scenario in certain situations. Klára normally calls her parents if she will be late but in specific situations she prefers text messaging.

If I have already the suspicion I could wake them up (laugh)... Or if I don't want to talk to them at all (laugh)... For example when I am in a space where there are lots of people, or when I have problems (laugh) with articulation... (Klára)

Discussion and Conclusions

More than a factor that broadens a gap and fosters misunderstanding between teenagers and the adult world, ICT play the role of vivid elements used actively by teenagers in their everyday lives to manage their identities and to connect with people they like – be it their friends or parents. Thanks to a place disconnection feature, ICT are weakening the structuring effect of everyday life contexts such as school or home-life. In this way they have been empowering young people to mobilize their agency. This does not necessarily mean that ICT created new structures or types of behaviour in the lives of teenagers. They merely help them to pursue the activities they prefer on a larger scale than their parents could when they were youngsters.

Teens have always tried to escape the adult-dominated world and to find some free space, by, for instance, hanging out at shopping malls after school (Ortiz 1994). While these places of peer culture have changed over time, many of the core practices have stayed the same. Teenagers still follow and chat about new fashion styles, music or movies; they share their secrets and criticize their parents. New communication tools offer them more varied ways to do so, particularly when physical mobility is limited.

Also, ICT usage is determined to a certain measure by existing structures embedded in the everyday life contexts of teenagers. As in common cases such as when parents decide whether or not their child will go to the cinema by giving or denying her/him money, it is also parents who decide which model and which plan or prepaid tariff the teenager will have and use her/his mobile phone. So again, the principle remains the same as it was before the age of ICT domestication. What has changed is the level of parents' control over their children in the face of the quantity, variety and character of new communication tools.

The hereby presented results demonstrate one role that ICT have in engagement with teens. Even though the category "ICT as tools of empowerment" was shown to be quite strong, it was defined based on an analysis of only a segment of a great amount of data. Also as the space of this paper was limited, this preliminary finding was demonstrated on a few cases only. In the light of further analytical work this category can be replaced, reformulated or strengthened. A subsequent analysis will certainly bring out the character of the interaction between ICT and teenagers with its dynamics in a more thorough manner. It will describe the domestication process and uncover the differences between two groups of participants or between the male and female genders and will surely develop other important categories. Thus it will provide a more complex image of ICT-teens relationship.

Considering social shaping and domestication of technology frameworks as an ideal starting point helped me greatly while thinking of the research problem, defining the design of research and analyzing the data. However it turned out to be quite difficult to manage the project in full accordance with these two perspectives. In particular, the dimension of domestication of technology demands much deeper insight in the fieldwork and thus a more rigorous ethnographical approach which was, unfortunately, not possible to uphold considering the time and financial constraints and the researcher's minimal access to teenagers' everyday lives. Also, a wider and more heterogeneous sample could provide a more complex image of the problematic. However, the participatory features of the fieldwork proved an effective way to deal with the aforementioned problems and would be an asset in any future study. Of course, quite an engaging and motivating work has to be done first.

Since the participants grew up simultaneously with the rising penetration and successive development of ICT, it would be interesting and helpful for future researchers to study children born into the age of fully domesticated ICT. Participants in this study framed young adults' and children's relationships to ICT cyber-pessimistically and as unhealthy with a low level of reflexivity.

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YOUTH ONLINE: ANONYMITY, PEER INTERACTION AND LINKED SUBJECTIVITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract – The rapid development of the Internet has changed patterns of social interaction throughout the Western world. Social media (e.g. Facebook and Google+) has been prevalent in the introduction of online network building and anonymous or semi-anonymous interaction to the lives of today's youth. Young people today are more self-networking than ever before, through this new capacity toward online relational frameworks along with instant access to previously unknowable users across the world. Here, online anonymity occurs on a continuum, with various degrees of anonymity in different interactional contexts, from visual anonymity to full anonymity. The culture of peer interaction is shifting with this new technological efficiency, enhanced by the effects of anonymity, affecting issues including trust, risk management, and expression. The how and why are of central concern in this paper, here illuminated by the viewpoints and analyses of the youths themselves.

Introduction and Background

Today, life in Europe and Northern America resembles an ubiquitous information society in which Internet devices define and redefine the fabric of our social, political, cultural and economic world (Castells 2010; Mannermaa 2007). The virtual world experienced through online gaming, communities, and networking has a significant role in the lives of young people, especially in countries leading in technological innovation where future global usage trends are set (Livingstone 2008). The Internet affords many opportunities for new skills acquisition, discovering novel leisure activities and experimenting with identity (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002; Livingstone 2004; Valkenburg et al. 2005). Conversely, the Internet has given rise to debates concerning easy access to pornographic, violent and vituperative material (Brennan 2009; Henry 2009). Various studies also indicate that various risks are present in the online setting, from cyberbullying to different forms of sexual victimization (Juvonen and Gross 2008; Livingstone et al. 2011; Mitchell et al. 2007; Sourander et al. 2010).

The rapid development of the Internet has changed patterns of social interaction throughout the Western world. Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Google+) has been prevalent in the introduction of online network building and anonymous or semi-anonymous interaction to the lives of today's youth. Young people today are more self-networking than ever before, through this new capacity toward online relational frameworks along with instant access to previously unknowable users across the world. Yet, the general rule of Internet user anonymity remains a relatively little studied subject despite its widespread sphere of influence. Here, online anonymity occurs on a continuum, with various degrees of anonymity in different interactional contexts. The conceptual status of anonymity and the processes by which it achieves its effects are

still far from clear. The culture of peer interaction is shifting with this new technological efficiency, enhanced by the effects of anonymity.

This paper explores the meanings of online anonymity for young people. The how and why of online anonymity are here illuminated by the viewpoints and analyses of the 14–15-year-old youths themselves (n=84). How do youth understand the effects of internet anonymity on their behavior? What are their conceptions of anonymous online interaction and what types of experiences have most shaped these conceptions? These questions will be approached with a theoretical framework provided by a look at the individual through Self-determination Theory (SDT) and anonymity through the Social Identity model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE), both supported by empirical findings of student essay writings concerning online behavior. All this toward illustrating the dual role of anonymity a magnifier of individual needs and liberating instrument for identity discovery and exploration.

Toward a theoretical framework of youth online behaviour

The Internet's popularity among today's youth can be attributed to any number of factors, including its provision toward the building of social networks (Dooris et al. 2008; Ellison et al. 2007; Hargittai 2008) and toward exploration and development of identity (McMillan and Morrisson 2006; Moinian 2006). The sphere of multi-faceted social mechanism is far-reaching, through applications known as social media. Social media can take various forms including social networking sites or blogs such as Facebook, content communities such as YouTube, virtual worlds such as Second Life, and collaborative projects such as Wikipedia (Kaplan et al. 2009). Youth peer groups are becoming increasingly computer-mediated, and these online groups are an additional source of identity, acting as a complementary component of social identity processes of the offline world in those individuals seeking high levels of peer confirmation (Räsänen and Lehdonvirta 2011).

Different social networking services function with some level of inherent anonymity, from simple visual anonymity where the participant's features are hidden or unavailable, pseudonymity where participation is carried out using a user-created online identity toward long-term relationship or reputation-building without disclosing a true identity, and, finally, full anonymity where the user participates on a short-term scale without any notable reputation effects or labeling constraints (Pfitzmann et al. 2000). Together, in conjunction, these provide youth a stage for interactive communication and expression. Here, the Internet is a provider of various scales of possible interactive autonomy through a flexibility toward choosing one's desired level of social invisibility through anonymity.

The simultaneously contradictory and complementary nature between the online and offline self points toward the relationship between surface and source motivations, something both self-determination theory (SDT) and the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) address. We propose that the popularity of anonymous internet use among youth is in large part driven by enhanced access to autonomous, socially liberated interaction as the social stage is always within reach online; access which brings about a move toward self-determination by way of behavioral independence otherwise less readily attainable.

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1980; 2000) proposes that an understanding of human motivation requires the consideration of innate psychological needs for 1) *competence*, 2)

relatedness, and 3) *autonomy*. As such, social contexts and individual differences that support the satisfaction of these needs foster natural growth processes including self-motivated behavior and an integration of outside motivations, while on the other hand, those processes hindering autonomy, competence, or relatedness are associated with lessened motivation, performance, and well-being.

These three fundamental needs that SDT proposes are, more specifically, first in terms of competence to engage optimal challenges and experience effectiveness in one's social space, second in terms of relatedness to experience a sense of security, belongingness, and intimacy with others and third in terms of autonomy to self-organize and regulate one's own behavior which involves a working toward inner coherence and integration among regulatory demands and goals (Deci and Ryan 1980; 2000). In STD these three work together to guide the individual toward more socially integrated forms of behavior.

Self-determination theory raises some significant implications having to do with anonymity's effects on social identity development by illuminating the foundational intrapersonal processes which act as prerequisites for social interaction. If anonymity, as its definition alludes, provides a separation from extrinsic forces by providing a form of invisibility, the pace of individual social evolution from the non-self-determined toward self-determined would be affected in a positive way (positive in regards to moving toward an internal locus of causality, regardless of the particular values in question).

SDT states that for integration to occur, there must be opportunities for the individual to freely process social values and regulations without excessive external pressures, controls, and evaluations; autonomy and therefore optimal self-determination and social functioning, require the ability to reflect toward self-determination. Indeed anonymity provides such a respite from social noise, and acts as a magnifier of self-concept, allowing for areas, or identities, of self previously kept in states of harmful amotivation to move toward the socially beneficial visible: from apathetic amotivation to integrated extrinsic motivation, followed by, finally, self-determined intrinsic motivation.

The understanding of the effects of anonymity on the individual brings with it controversy, as there have been a number of conflicting viewpoints as to its social role. Central to this controversy has been the issue of deindividuation, namely the immersion of the individual into the group to the point of losing individual identity through anonymity (Lea and Spears, 1991); this perceived loss of self has brought with it conflicting interpretations of how anonymous behavior is to be understood, with some positions providing a more complete picture than others.

In early research, visual anonymity was generally considered as a social instrument causing negative consequences including, for example, disinhibited and aggressive behavior (e.g., Singer et al. 1965; Zimbardo 1969). Early research on computer-mediated-communication supported this finding by suggesting that anonymity enabled by the use of computers may lead to virulent and offensive communication (Kiesler et al. 1984, 1125). However, there were other studies showing lower levels of aggression and increased affection in anonymous settings (Gergen et al. 1973; Johnson and Downing, 1979). Similarly, research results about self-awareness in anonymous situations were contradictory, others stating that anonymity reduces self-awareness and others stating that it increases it (Lea et al. 2001).

Social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE), first proposed by Lea and Spears (1991) represents an attempt to reconcile these conflicting observations within a single framework, a necessary reconciliation given the range of findings from opposite ends of the behavioral spectrum. According to SIDE, visual anonymity reduces the communication of interpersonal cues within the group, allowing for social group and category formation that is not reliant on social cues, namely a move to thinking in terms of oversimplified categories. This has the effect of shifting perceptions of self and others from the personal to the group level. As such, SIDE proposes that anonymity promotes a shift of self-awareness from the personal to the group self rather than a loss of self-awareness, as proposed by deindividuation theory (Lea et al., 2001).

Thus, anonymity encourages this depersonalized self-perception due to its reduction of the interpersonal basis for social comparison. As such, the individual tends to be perceived more in terms of similarity to the perceived attributes of the social group rather than as a unique individual. Implications of SIDE theory are that that behavior can be highly socially regulated on the Internet (Spears et al. 2002). There is strong research evidence pointing out that anonymity in the group enhances conformity to group norms (Postmes and Spears 1998). In other words, anonymity in online setting might mean actually stronger peer pressure. This is an important notion, especially, when studying young people who struggle to gain not only group acceptance but stable personal identity. Based on SDT and SIDE, we underline the contradictory nature of anonymous online settings. It may provide liberating ways for self-expression, but also enforce normative and restrictive roles. Benefits of freedoms of the Internet might in some cases be flushed away by the various subjective risks, including negative feedback from others.

Material and Methods

Data was collected in February 2012 at a school located in the centre of Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The participants were 14–15-year-old 8th grade students of the school (n=84), 51 girls and 33 boys. The response rate for the 8th grade students was 84%. The first author had agreed with the school and parents that teacher will give students a written tasks that will be used as data. Guidelines on studying children and young people were followed (e.g. Lagström et al. 2010).

Students were asked to answer a question in essay form, describing their conceptions and experiences with Internet anonymity and youth behavior. The exact question addressed to them was: “Online use involves a level of anonymity. Write a story describing a situation where you feel that anonymity affected the behavior or treatment of a boy or girl of your age online. What happened and what caused the situation? How did he/she react and how did it make him/her feel? Would the situation have been different without anonymity? How? You may also explain whether the situation was routine or an exception.” Fictitious examples were requested to enable the free narration about possible events online. The question was formulated specifically so that it would not include any kind of negative or positive connotation.

Narratives were on average 125 words long, the shortest answer being only 12 words and the longest 350 words. Variance between different classes was possibly due the instruction and time given by the teach-

er. In spite of the given instruction, 29 % of the students did not use third person at all, but wrote the complete essay on first person. 46 % included at least a comment in first person. Students of one class in particular wrote shorter answers than others (mean 48 words). Girls wrote longer narratives than boys. Despite the variance, the data fulfilled the expectations. Typically students narrated about a situation someone had ended up in the online setting. They included remarks on their thoughts about how typical this type of activity is online.

The analysis of the data has two objectives. First of all, descriptive analysis strives to understand what kinds of situations are, in general, portrayed in the essays. The data was encoded for A) negative and B) positive phenomena happening online. Negative things include 1) cyber bullying and insults made online, sexual harassment and identity theft or risky false identity. Positive things involved situations which the young people portrayed as explicitly positive, for example gaining new friends or getting positive feedback were among the things mentioned.

Secondly, the thematic analysis focuses on the different functions of anonymity. These are analyzed especially in the light of Self-determination theory (SDT) and the Social identity model of deindividuation Effects (SIDE). The theoretically grounded analysis is explorative and it aims to strive for new openings to a better understanding of not only the current youth online activity, but also its possible future.

Results

Self expression and risk management online

The data reveals the striking contradiction of the online world, which on the one hand enables freedom of expression, while on the other underlining exposure to various types of risks and negative aspects. Remarkably, many students focused on the negative aspects of the Internet. These involved, for example, aggressive communication, vicious remarks and social exclusion, which the young people find themselves having to manage. Some stories tell of a tragedy caused by constant negative feedback. Many girls especially mention eating disorders as a consequence of vicious remarks on the main characters' looks:

Anonymous commenting continued over a year on the girl's blog. Gradually, she began to wither and she faded like rosewood affected by pests, because she thought that she was fat and feared that she would not ever be good enough for anyone. Finally anorexia consumed her and took the victory. (Female, age 14, #14)

In total, 93% make at least some kind of remark about negative things happening online. These are most commonly remarks about cyberbullying and insults online (69%). Many narratives mention also identity theft or risky false identity (35%) and sexual harassment or exploitation (21%). Differences between genders are insignificant. These results perhaps refer to the fact that anonymity as such is often considered negative. The results also indicate the possible "third person effect", which refers to the phenomenon where people exaggerate effects of communications for the other people (Davison 1983). Youth are more willing to disclose negative aspects of the Internet through the perspective of others than themselves (Liv-

ingstone et al. 2011, 46). However, it is also likely that writing in third person form helps young people to express events that might have been otherwise considered too shameful.

45% of the students write explicitly about positive things happening online. Girls write a bit more often about positive things (49%) than do boys (38%). Sometimes, however, the positive and negative things happening are themselves two sides of the same coin. The young people emphasize that often it is not the online activity per se that causes problems, but rather anonymity, as one 14-year-old girl remarks (#38): “This thing probably would not have taken place if the user had been using their own names.” A typical situation involves, for example, someone engaging on chat forums or writing a blog and then receiving negative feedback. Student stories reveal a varied valuation of anonymity, with some seeing the negative aspects as outweighing any benefit, and others feeling that the positive aspects of anonymity outweigh the potential costs.

Despite the negative aspects, student essays show a conception of anonymity as a mechanism for social freedom; this freedom provided by anonymity was viewed as a method for enhanced expression and communication, creating a mindset toward revealing valued aspects of self more freely, in written or visual form. A female student summarizes the issue well, writing, “Anonymously, everything is easier. And online possibilities are limitless” (female, age 14, #74). The essays show a recurring understanding by students as to the liberating effects that anonymity provides, namely in terms of a new willingness to post aspects of self for others to see and evaluate through blogs, comments, or videos, for example.

Often when using the internet anonymously, people have more courage to do more and to tell their opinions directly. It feels safer. This being the case, people do and say more than they would in face to face interaction.
(Female, age 14, #60).

The driving force behind this expression by youth seems to be a strong desire for social validation, namely to enhance self-esteem by both peers and unknown interacting others. Anonymity here allows for insecurities which would otherwise overrule the needs for validation to be cast aside through a relatively safe social invisibility.

A recurring theme resulting from this expressive freedom and communication is the interaction with unknown, anonymous individuals. Youth essays make clear the importance of using the internet as a stage upon which to tell the online world, peers and otherwise, of personal opinions, expressive pursuits, and identity characteristics; students express an entitlement toward taking advantage of the visibility that the internet provides, the new status quo of social interaction among youth online, where personal aspects of oneself are significant enough to need to be shared with a wider audience.

The general narrative provided by the young people can be divided in two sides, pre- and post-harassment. Here the internet is seen, by the majority of participants in a pre-harassment state, as a social stage requiring some form of participation due to its popularity and exploratory benefits; internet expression here viewed as a necessary social mechanism whose benefits for expression overshadowed any risk.

This liberalized expression found in the safety of anonymity is counterbalanced with a theme of an ignorance of the social risks involved, namely severe and damaging harassment by other anonymous users able to provide feedback on displayed material. There is a wide range dismissal of the personal risks in-

volved with vulnerability in a potentially aggressively critical setting until social pain is experienced. Here, social risk is rarely weighed accurately, as the beneficial and even therapeutic expression is so easily attainable and deliverable; that is, until one has been attacked severely enough, which students reveal is quite a regular occurrence.

First, I log in to my blog, and what do you know, a whole pile of comments have been made about my most recent post. I begin reading them. Many positive, and that makes me happy. But when I see the last comment, I am shocked. The next week is agony. Every day I expect to see a new comment from this anonymous individual. I remove my blog. Maybe blogs are only for those who are able to be vulnerable while also being able to stand abuse. It's a shame, it was my favorite hobby. (Female, age 14, #49).

These trends observed among youth answers correspond strongly with self-determination theory (SDT). SDT shows that for individual development to occur, there must be opportunities to freely process social values and regulations without excessive external pressures, controls, and evaluations; autonomy and therefore optimal self-determination and social functioning, require the ability to reflect toward self-determination. Student essays show the value of anonymity in providing such a space free from social judgment, acting as a magnifier of self-concept, and allowing for areas, or identities, of self previously kept hidden to move toward the socially beneficial visible; an often therapeutic and developmentally significant expression of self.

The popularity of anonymous internet use among youth is in large part driven by enhanced access to autonomous, socially liberated interaction as the social stage is always within reach online; access which brings about an ability toward self-determination by way of behavioral independence and thus intrinsically motivated behavior otherwise unattainable. It seems the attraction to such a highly valued mechanism can move youth away from risk aversion, skewing risk management toward behavior that is potentially damaging due to high initial reward. Furthermore, the more opportunities youth have to interact online, the more risk is involved. Here, opportunities and risk go hand in hand; as opportunities increase online, so do the risks involved (Livingstone and Helsper 2010).

Acquaintance effect: toward linked subjectivity

The internet provides an enhanced social arena where access to previously unknowable individuals is opened on a staggering scale. Student essays reveal the tendency and desire toward navigating this interactional spectrum using anonymity. Here, anonymity provides what is perceived as an immunity from reputation effects or relational responsibility, allowing for significantly lessened relational commitment among youth. On one hand there is excitement over the prospect of what types of mystery individuals one might meet, and on the other a distrust of the potentially false identity of the interactional partner.

This may just become a proverb: online, boys are men, men are women, and women are boys, [...] the internet is an unsupervised area, where nothing brings consequences. (Male, age 15, #82)

Students display a recurring strong social connection with those sharing the same opinions, hobbies, or personal experiences. A female student, age 14, notes that “If one sees an anonymous action or opinion

online, one judges only that, because no other information about the author or responsible person is available” (#60). Students show a willingness to form a strong bond with those with whom one shares some significant aspect of self that is not dependent upon the short term relationship that has formed over that very topic, owing to anonymity’s effects of moving one toward interacting and bonding based on oversimplified and thus amplified social categories. This would, more often than not, bring about an overly optimistic trust in the youth, basing much of that traditionally derived from face-to-face communication feedback loops to having something significant in common.

Sometimes you really can find a good and trustworthy person online, but it is quite rare and even if you do find such a person, a young girl may begin trusting everyone. This can be dangerous, because trusting everyone is very naive.

I am sure many girls have found fakers and pedophiles. Understanding these situations is not always easy. Most girls discover this later and maybe even too late, namely what that random person was thinking and what they were really after. This happens almost every day, in the life of some girl. (Female, age 14, #78).

Furthermore, anonymity and its elimination of traditional feedback loops associated with communication, acts to create a fear of interacting partners due to the inherent social reliance on now unknowable individual characteristics.

The situation would not have been strange or oppressive had one of my friends made such a comment, but because you just can’t know who the unknown person is on the other side of the screen and what they have going on in their head. (Female, age 15, #61).

This fear of the unknown is enhanced further by the inability to express oneself fully through the medium of, most commonly, written text. Social and visual cues cannot be relayed, creating a system of oversimplified categorical language based on reactionary premises. This brings about an online relational framework whose foundations can shift more quickly than would be possible in face to face interaction and relationship.

We friends all played in the same clan, doing things together, joking and having fun regardless of race, religion, gender, or age. All of this ended unexpectedly. Friendships built for over 6 months hit a wall that could not be climbed. This 14 year old boy told a joke that was misinterpreted. (Male, age 14, #48).

The social identity model of deindividuation effects illustrates these findings among youth. According to SIDE, the anonymity prevalent online reduces the communication of interpersonal cues within the group among individuals, namely a move to thinking in terms of over-simplified categories, or the sharing of significant aspects of self in common with another. This has the effect of shifting perceptions of self and others from the personal to the group level, creating a sense of belonging to the same identity group with the anonymous interacting partner. Anonymity promotes a shift of self-awareness from the personal to the group, creating an often artificially strong social bond that can open the youth to assuming similar bonds among other identity aspects which do not in reality exist. Individual tends to be perceived more in terms of similarity to the perceived attributes of the social group rather than as a unique individual.

Our analysis shows that youth tend to actively project and then attribute characteristics to the anonymous partner, in a sense creating complementary identity aspects based on the one which is held in common. As this false attribution accelerates, what would otherwise be a weak social tie in face-to-face interaction becomes a strong one due to the capacity of imagination required by the lack of sensory cues. In youth, this process is further accelerated by the widespread theme of self-esteem seeking and personal validation through these anonymous interactions, thus also bringing about the greater pains upon rejection or criticism of expressed aspects of self-disclosed in one-sided trust.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article explores the meaning of anonymity for young people. The analysis based on a small sample of 14–15-year-old students from one school in Helsinki. Despite the certain limitations of the data, it reveals some broader aspects of the lives of young people today. Our results are, first of all, in line with some previous studies, which have noted that the risks and opportunities co-exist for young people online (e.g. Livingstone and Helsper 2008). The majority of young participants of this study portray negative situations including aggressive and harassing communication and cyberbullying. The data also shows explicitly positive things related anonymous online settings. A continual valuation of the internet's expressive freedom is made clear, namely as a stage for exploration of self and social validation toward affirmation and identity development.

It seems the ease of access tied to the convenience of such a broad stage online attracts youth toward a willingness to participate. Furthermore, the social pressures existing online are similar to those offline to the degree that one's offline and online social networks overlap, with peer pressure affecting both arenas, driving youth from one to the other in various ways to enhance self-esteem. This draw toward participation online will continue to strengthen as social media continues to become an interlinked aspect of youth social life, despite its risks.

Throughout student essays, those individuals most involved in harassment are those acting under full anonymity who are then free from any reputation effects. Students are typically unable to accurately weigh the personal risk of expression due to the unexpectedly strong reactions of a fully anonymous few. Anonymity enhances the behaviors and expression of needs of both parties, the blogging youth through visual anonymity, and the venting anonymous aggressor through full anonymity. Only one's expression here comes at the cost of causing distress to another. This instance points toward a possible shift to a social media without the possibility of full anonymity.

This risk involved with the harassment by fully anonymous individuals has to do with the inherent lack of social responsibility and accountability in such a state. Notably, anonymity does not here cause socially destructive behaviors or patterns but rather acts to magnify the needs of the individual in question. The cost burden of those seeking destruction is, according to student responses, disproportionate to the benefits of the stage of simple visual anonymity. As one bad apple ruins a barrel of apples, so a harassing anonymous individual has the potential to cause distress through the use of the internet as a destructive mega-

phone. The lowering of the potency of the destructive megaphone will be central to how anonymous behavior is regulated in the future.

As theory proposed and analysis confirmed, anonymity causes a shift toward thinking and acting in terms of oversimplified categories, thus causing conflicts and relationships based on some few shared characteristics; online, youth see others as representatives of identity groups rather than as complex individuals due to the impossibility of deeper interpersonal knowledge. The internet provides an arena where reactionary behavior becomes natural, a characteristic strengthened by the lessening of social accountability. Interaction becomes more a game than a traditional relational process, where all can be real or fabricated, though, a game carrying great risk for those interacting with individuals of different expectations.

This mismatch of interactional expectations seems to be at the core of youth fears of unknown participants, while others derived great benefit from full anonymity without social harm to others. Here, once again, it seems anonymity magnifies the self, with full anonymity being the maximum magnification online; those fully anonymous with harmful intentions are blatantly visible, while those of neutral expression remain invisible. In all cases, from the point of view of the anonymous youth, anonymity is an expressional benefit in the moment, regardless of whether than expression will lead to harassment from some or to suffering of those who are to be harassed.

It is likely that online social media is becoming a more natural extension of the offline world. We have already seen that the notion of the online world as artificial or synthetic has become outdated (Boellstorff 2008; Mannermaa 2007). To paraphrase Manuel Castells (2010, 403), instead of virtual culture, we are living in a culture of real virtuality. The Internet as such is not a homogenous entity. Publicly available internet represents only a small proportion of the Internet. The Internet is likely to expand in ways which make it considerably less open for anonymous outsiders. The full anonymity of the Internet has already moved underground – to what some researchers call dark web (Fu et al. 2010). At the same time it is likely that the social media industry (e.g. Facebook, Google) will gain more control over users who want to connect with other people. The internet is constantly evolving at a pace set by the needs and motivations of its users; as youth conceptions of needs fulfilled by the internet become more clear, the accuracy of predictions concerning the next stage of the online social arena will inevitably improve.

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FUTURE OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND: LIFE STORIES ABOUT WELL-BEING, EDUCATION AND CAREER PLAN OF YOUNG IRANIANS IN FINLAND

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Abstract – This article examines the role of the Finnish education system and school experiences on the well-being, education and career (plan) of the 1.5 generation¹ of Iranians in Finland. The results illustrated significant failures in the education and education plans. There were poor performances and grades, low degrees, lack of interest in (higher) education and related careers, and interest in emigration from Finland. Individual agency and supportive role model produced interest in higher education. The education system and school were unable to provide a place to belong and lacked professionalism in educating, guiding, and motivating. Since the participants and their close social capital held a weak position, the role of school was the most influential. Their well-being was damaged by similar reason (racism).

Introduction and Background

In young multicultural Finland, children with immigrant background grow up fast and many find themselves living in their fatherland as (partly) Finns. Compared to their parents they have extra obligations and demands on society. If their expectations are not met seriously, the consequences could be serious, emigration² from Finland (Haghseresht, 2011 & Nyrhinen, 2010) or likely occurrence of French phenomenon. Missing this fresh potential labour source of more than forty thousand individuals is a significant loss for Finland after investing financially for their upbringing and education. It seems that the Finnish society including its social order and institutions have not been flexible enough to integrate them and respond well to their new social status. Poor education (UNICEF, 2005), unemployment (OECD SOPEMI, 2011), and blue collar jobs are high among Immigrant (youth) in Finland. There has been little academic attention to the well-being, education, and unemployment of young immigrants in Finland. Additionally, there exist some invalid old explanations due to short immigration experience, or practices, owing to missing knowledge about multicultural services. In Finland, immigrant youth have been studied by disciplines such as sociology, education science, social policy, social anthropology etc.

¹ 1.5 generation in this study means those who are born in the country of origin but grew up in Finland.

² The common interest of my Master's thesis participants was highlighted in Nyrhinen's work: "Young immigrants: If you do not appreciate our skills, we will leave elsewhere."

Research Objectives

This article describes a follow-up research project³ (Haghseresht, 2011) that explores the well-being, aspirations, and education and career plan of young 1.5 generation of Iranians in Finland. The research examines the factors which influence them especially the role of the Finnish education system, school experiences, and accomplishments at school, on life and education and career (plan) of the participants. Originally the research problem came from a Parsi (Persian) language interpreter who wondered why so few young Iranians attend university education in Finland. The study aimed at answering: How the participants evaluate their education in Finland through their life stories, and why? What is the place of the Finnish education system, including the schools, in the life stories of the participants, and why? How the participants justify their education and career choices in relation to Finnish schools, and why? In this paper the meaning of well-being is combination of what each participant considers as well-being plus the definition of this research which is a relative state of physical and emotional health, and satisfaction with one's own life, family, education, career, and place of living. Education indicates formal education. By education plan, I mean the individual's decision on how to continue formal education. Career is defined as a job, an occupation, or profession, especially one requiring special training, followed as one's lifework. Career plan is the individual decision on the kind of long-term or lifelong job or occupation one would like to occupy oneself. Young limits the age from approximately fifteen to less than thirty. Iranian means an individual who is born in Iran or born to Iranian parents.

For several reasons the topic of this research is important and extremely timely. There are recent reports in media detailing that the complications in education of immigrant pupils at Finnish schools have created public interest and concern, and there are important implications for public policy. They comprise poor education and Finnish language skill, complicated experiences, deficiency of motivation etc. There is lack of recognition and research about the needs and challenges of the target group and the whole young immigrant pupils at Finnish schools and high unemployment, which motivated me to study this group. As the influential factors that affect the well-being, education and career (plans) are similar for the Iranian youth and many other young immigrants in Finland, this research indirectly involved the future education and career of tens of thousands of potential fresh members of the labour force in Finland. Some factors are lack of highly educated role models with white collar jobs and similar school experiences in homogeneous Finnish schools. Studying one group was useful to understand more and answer some questions about the whole group. By providing extra knowledge, it attempts to prevent the negative consequences. This supports and contributes to the work of government's plans and non-governmental organisations for the integration of youth with immigrant background. This research could function as the rationale for further research on similar topics by offering new sources of information and measurement. The new elements of this study are its unique topic in Finland, the target group, and the researcher as an ethnic insider.

³ As a paper book, ISBN: 978-3-8484-9578-8 <http://www.amazon.co.uk/School-Miniature-Society-Well-being-Education/dp/3848495783>

Literature Review

Well-being of Young Iranians in Finland

Majority of Iranians have come to Finland since 1990 as the UN quota refugees or asylum seekers (Haghseresht, 2011). Research on Iranians in Finland is very rare. Sirpa Korhonen's (2004) thesis focused on life stories of a group of Iranian refugees⁴ in the city of Jyväskylä. Her participants informed about high number of divorce and cultural changes involving extra importance of self, individuality, independence, privacy, and freedom. Kati 'Turtiainen's [...] central issue is the identity formation of refugee women in a new country, concentrating on Iranian women living alone or being the only parent of the family in Finland.' (Korhonen, 2004: 39). Extra and new kinds of freedom for children, particularly for girls and women, decreasing power of the husbands, and rising divorce rates show those Iranian families face new sorts of burdens and opportunities (Haghseresht, 2011). My target group suffers from two *in between* conditions; being between the cultures (Haghseresht, 1995) and the status of childhood and adulthood. Several Iranian pupils of one Parsi language teacher suffered from (cultural) identity confusion and crisis and that made the teacher concerned about their well-being (Haghseresht, 2011).

Education of Young Iranians in Finland

In Finland, education is free of charge. Education system is flexible and diverse, with academic freedom, and importance of individual development. Schools are relatively very homogenous⁵ and the teaching curriculum is regulated by schools. 'Non-native children are found to be particularly disadvantaged with poor performance in some countries more than three times higher among children of immigrant families than among other children. This is the case in [...], Finland and [...]' (UNICEF, 2005). 'Most young immigrants do not attend upper secondary school.' (Helsingin Sanomat⁶, 23.11.2005) 'Despite the fact that education is free of charge and available to all, refugees in Finland have an exceptionally low level of education in comparison with many Western industrialised countries.' (Lavikainen and Salmenhaara, 2002: 21). There is no new result contradicting those comparisons.

Minority students in general, underachieve and have a higher drop-out percentage, Alitolppa-Niitamo's (2004a) school ethnographic study on education of Somali speaking youth in metropolitan Helsinki confirms. Most immigrant children suffer from some kind of common challenges at school. Unpreparedness of Finnish schools to respond to the needs of immigrant students and school's mono-cultural practices were major variables related to the host society that slowed down the immigrant student performances. Racism and anti-immigrant attitudes caused harsh consequences in terms of self-esteem and access to social capital. Karmela Liebkind et al. (2004) in their study on Vietnamese youth in Finland concluded that, despite their

⁴ One research studies leisure activities (sport) of Iranian refugees as a way of social integration (ibid.).

⁵ Venla Bernelius, Helsinki University researcher, informs the differences between the schools start to be noticed in Finnish school environment (YLE news agency in Helsingin Sanomat, 19.10.2009).

⁶ Leena Nissilä of the *Finnish National Board of Education*; only 1.8% of young people attending upper secondary school - fewer than 1,900, have a foreign background. 'In some schools it is possible to sense an attitude, that immigrant kids are easily encouraged to go to vocational school.' (ibid.)

socio-economic disadvantages, perceived discrimination, a lower sense of mastery and self-esteem, the sample group adjusted to school better than Finnish students. School adjustment was damaged by perceived discrimination. The informants, partly, were considered as disadvantaged in and maladapted to school. Their psychological adjustment and self-esteem may have been damaged by the negative attitudes of the dominant group. My studies contradict some of their results.

Nelli Piattoeva (2010) suggests that recent multicultural initiatives are inserted into an education system that is resistant or even unreceptive to multicultural thinking because the political pre-conditions that have shaped the state-control public education and the uniform comprehensive school have imposed the aims, contents and methods employed in schools. Anna-Leena Riitaoja et al. (2010) claim, since the *secular Lutheranism* of Finnish education is not neutral, and even Finnish National Core Curriculum count on the supposition of a non-political and non-denominational education, schools practice nation-building and make Lutheran religion paradoxically significant. As recent positive changes, ETNO (The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations) and the Central Union for Child Welfare (Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto, 2008) emphasise the need for a quick action to support immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker youth. Additionally, Intercultural Teacher Education Programme in the city of Oulu supports teachers' intercultural learning (Hanna Alasuu-tari et al. 2010).

To the best of my knowledge, in Finland there has not been any previous research or statistics on the education of (young) Iranians except mine. This has produced a challenge for me. Educational success of Iranians in Sweden, a country which shares several elements with Finland, makes one to consider the other factors including the level of *facilities* and *encouragement* that host society offers. As a part of youth with refugee background, young Iranians are underrepresented in Finnish higher education and related jobs. As an insider of the community, researching the community since 1994, my former major subject (sociology), working in early child care, and my previous study (social educator) provided me the confidence to choose this subject area. My previous study (Haghseresht, 1995) revealed that, Iranian youth have extra challenges compared to their parents and younger siblings due to their cultural identity position, being between the cultures. While smaller siblings adapted to Finnish language and culture very fast, parents showed minimal interest in them. Other study (Haghseresht, 2005a) focused on the health and well-being of the Iranian youth in Finland. One aspect that stood out was their education and career (plan). My bachelor thesis explored their education and career (plan).

Careers of Young Iranians in Finland

The average unemployment rate from 2005-2009 was 7.8% for Finns, and 17.3% for foreign born residents (OECD SOPEMI, 2011) with long-term unemployment. The Finnish official immigration policy is integration. The *Integration Act* in 1999 has minimally lowered immigrants' social isolation by providing study/labour chances. EFFNATIS, reported on Finland; 'Stimulated by the very high rate of unemployment among refugees from Third World countries, a discussion has begun to introduce a system of competence assessment of migrants.' (Heckmann et al. 2003: 14).

The next larger group of job seekers in Finland after Russians, Estonians and Iraqis were Iranians (OECD SOPEMI 2006). There have been less unemployment and more diversity in types of their jobs since my last studies. New statistics show that the percentage has reduced to 45% in 2006 (Ministry of the Interior, 2007). However, it has been higher than the average unemployment rate of immigrants. Although there are no statistics on the labour situation of young Iranians in Finland, by considering the community's high unemployment rate and the percentage of youth members on the whole (approximately one third) it is possible to assume that they also suffer from high unemployment. Additionally, combination of being young, belonging to an ethnic minority group, and refugee background suggest their high unemployment rate. More young Iranians try other kinds of jobs than traditionally working in kebab-pizzeria restaurants, but usually blue collar professions as their parents'.

Material and Methods

Data Collection

The target group included young 1.5 generation of Iranians from Pars ethnicity who live in Finland. I chose that group because I am familiar with their language and culture as an insider. The principal participants were eight males and females from age 16-25, when they choose a study direction, and Pars ethnicity who are born in Iran and have lived in Finland for at least five years. However, owing to interruption in their studies due to refugee life, the age choice was flexible. I selected four of them to make the narratives. Sadaf, was 18 years old single female and 8th grade student; Saeedeh, was 24 years old married female and a high school graduate unemployed; Kamyar was 25 years old married male who studied for 9 years plus a security course, and employed; and Mahboubeh, was 18 years old single female student of first year at high school. The indirect participants were their parents. The data collection took place in some Southern Finnish cities during 2003 to 2005.

For testing the reliability of the data, I triangulated them with the the data collected from different sources; by asking similar questions from different participants, comparing fieldwork notes and the second-hand quantitative survey and statistics from standardised sources (e.g. Statistics Finland and OECD). For hearing the own voices of the interviewees about what was important or relevant for them, gaining a more complex in-depth knowledge, and obtaining a broader understanding of the social processes, qualitative methodology was employed. Face to face audio-recorded interviews of each participant individually by use of questionnaire was used. In-depth semi-structured interviews were flexibly planned in to provide enough power to the interviewees and uncovering deeper and diverse meanings. I allowed the interviewees to talk in detail and length. They were free flowing exchanges and conversational. I offered much room for their free involvement in data collection and interpretation. As an insider, I had the advantage to make culturally and linguistically proper questions and interaction during the interviews. Use of participant observation provided opportunity to gain information that might not arise in the interviews, especially non-verbal knowledge. Transcription was not verbatim.

Data Analysis and Presentation

By use of small narratives as interview quotes and participant observation notes, I composed the stories⁷ about the participants' lives with especial attention given to their school experiences. Basically, content analysis collected and selected the main themes and types in addition to find the points of similarities and differences in the experiences and (sources of) ideas about them. In addition to examining *what* participants said, I analysed *how* and *why* they said it, to reveal the intentions. In order to aid the analysis, by collecting the most relevant and important *influential factors*, I expanded the idea of *culturagram* (Elaine Congress et al. 2005). I divided them into pre-conditional and post-arrival factors and in individual, family, and society levels. Since the quotes were micro-narratives, I applied narrative analysis⁸. For measuring the well-being and explain the education (plan), I used the acculturation model (John W. Berry, 2003) that displays immigrant's level of integration. If one has positive attitudes towards origin and host societies' cultures, the strategy is *integration* (e.g. *Iranian-Finn*). When individual's attitudes are negative towards both, one had chosen *marginalisation* or *alienation* (e.g. *Nomad*). Maintenance of original culture and rejection of the host culture is *separation* (e.g. *Iranian*). The opposite is *assimilation* (*Finnish-Iranian*). I developed the theory by fine-tuning the choices (e.g. *assimilated-integrated*⁹) and used it as a total cultural choice and for each aspect of a participant's life (e.g. language learning, cultural adaptation). I added extra alternatives; Alientation could mean *cosmopolitan*, *belonging to nowhere* or to a *hybrid* culture.

Results

The results confirmed significant failures in education and education plan of the participants. There were poor performances and grades, low degrees, and lack of interest in education and higher education. Here are some interesting selected quotes:

It [my education] is ok but I don't like to study. [... I] don't like to listen to the teacher. I get bored and lose concentration. (Sadaf, 18 year old, female)

With a foreign language, [study] needs several times more energy and time. [... Foreign] students cannot consider, with a good spoken language they cannot manage well at school. Academic language is something different, more demanding. (Saeedeh, age 24, female)

Yes. For a few times, I lost my interest about it [university study], [because I expected it is] too difficult. For example, math, in the beginning [was] easier, but now [it's] much more difficult.' (Mahboubeh, age 18, female)

⁷ It was not possible for the interviewees to produce the stories by themselves.

⁸ For detailed information on the narrative analysis procedure, refer to my paper (Haghseresht, 2011).

⁹ This means the participant is more (often) assimilated than integrated.

Informants had dissimilar study plans and ideas about the value of higher education. Individual agency and supportive role model produced interest in higher education. Only Saeedeh planned to study at university. Others had different reasons for lack of interest in university education. Sadaf intends to study tourism in an occupational adult education centre. She does not have any concrete plan. Kamyar's employer provides him opportunity to develop in his field through extra education. Currently, he aims for vocational qualification, and later for specialising in an adult educational centre. Mahboubeh is uncertain about how to continue her studies.

It's my dream to sing [...] not for money but spreading the message of Christianity. I feel I'll succeed in it because I like it and I have my god with me. [...] I don't need to study for this job. (Sadaf)

The ideal is to get into a university and have a peaceful life. [...] My husband encouraged me to study [...]. I have read two books for it. They were very demanding and made me very tired. Then, independently, I chose social work. (Saeedeh)

I never planned for my study. I just decided to do the compulsory stuff and see what happens with the rest. [...] You don't always need to go to university to be successful. [...] Of course, there are some [jobs], which really need higher education. [...] Because] I think, I can develop [...] in this job. I cannot become a doctor. (Kamyar, age 25, male)

My First plan [was that], after primary school, [I study at] upper secondary school and in a vocational school [...]. Yes, I guess so. Possibly, [I] want to continue [my studies]. If [I'll] still like to study hairdressing, [I'll go to] a polytechnic, because I like it now. If not, [I'll go to] a university [and study] computer field there. [...] I don't know well. [I] haven't thought [about it] enough. (Mahboubeh)

The shortcomings of the education system and school played important role in the failures, mainly by inability to provide a place to *belong* and lack of *professionalism* in educating, guiding, and motivating the participants. Some experienced high level of freedom, rights, and equality at schools, and appreciated the free education. However, the equality sometimes prevented them from receiving proper response to their special or extra needs.

I expect them to accept us the way we are [as foreigners]. I expect authorities not to judge people based on the skin colour [...]. [It would be good] if Finns become more open and friendly. (Sadaf)

[...] At] school, you see Finnish students communicating with each other and laughing, but the foreign students are isolated in a corner. When either in the right way or through disturbing the Finns they try to be noticed and join the group, it does not work. Finns laugh at and bully them when they make mistakes while speaking Finnish. This makes them uninterested in education and they become satisfied with only the minimum knowledge for survival. [...] It] was very difficult to study in the beginning. There were age differences between the other students [Finns] and me [and the other refugees]. We could not become a part of them. (Saeedeh)

It was very difficult when I was studying [...] because there were only a few immigrant students at my school. We were bullied because we looked different with dark hair. [...] In] a few schools I changed, I didn't have any friend to talk with about my problems [...] when I was badly in need of a friend [...]. Often, [I felt that I lost my motivation to my education]. [It was] mostly because of bullying. But, soon, the feeling was over. First, I was feeling frustrated, but soon,

I told myself that it'll be over. [... I] just had to take it until school was finished [...]. No [I didn't talk with my parents about it]. You know, children don't talk with their parents very much. I kept all of them in my heart [...]. [... I] thought things would have gotten worse if I had told my parents and they would have come to school. [... If] it became very complicated, like a big fight, I had to [talk about it with the school staff], unless no [I didn't talk with them]. The result was no solution. We all were forced to stay one extra hour or two at school, even me, who was the victim. (Kamyar)

In primary school, some [classmates¹⁰] bullied me, but [later] they didn't laugh when I didn't understand something. Instead, they helped me. [... I've] no problem [with my education] now and treated like a Finn. The reasons, [there is no] big difference in my language but classmates are more mature now. (Mahboubeh)

Sadaf had problem with mathematics, or more precisely, with its teacher. As a reason, some teachers expected less from her performances compared to Finns. That problem decreased in higher secondary school. She likes high level of freedom and rights at schools and felt satisfied with helpful attentions. However, she comments:

[We can prevent] by paying more attention to the foreign students, by using the teachers who like foreign children, who naturally have the patience to deal with and help them. [... By] selecting those who like foreigners and have already worked with them, or by training them well, if it is their first time. (Sadaf)

We had an especial teacher who thought foreign students in small groups and in an easier manner [...]. It had its own benefits and losses. We could not have enough contact with Finnish students or know the regularities of teaching in a mainstream class. The positive thing was that we proceeded slower. We sometimes attended the normal classes. There the study happened very fast. It was not important for the teacher if you understand or not. You just needed to show your coursework [...]. The rules are the same for Finns, but they do not consider the limitations of a foreigner in [...] studying, for example, continuous use of dictionary. (Saeedeh)

No [discrimination] happened to me. I heard that it happened to some others [...]. The teachers expected no less no more from me compared to the Finnish students. [...] Language teacher was not good. When the first day at school I took spoon and fork to eat rice, s/he immediately brought a fork to show how we should eat rice, thinking we don't know how to eat properly. It was not racism but just s/he taught we don't know. Of course, there are always some racists at schools but they didn't show it openly. [...] It was difficult to study in the beginning. I had a language course for one year. Then, when I went to ordinary schools, it was very difficult to write in Finnish; but after two months, it became ok. Teacher was reading and we had to write quickly. They didn't wait for us. From the fifth class we started having some subjects (history) that I didn't expect. It was very hard. (Kamyar)

[... They] took me as a foreigner, and gave me the points I needed easier, because my mother tongue is Farsi, but also I got extra support. (Mahboubeh)

¹⁰ Marzieh, Mahboubeh's mother explained that Mahboubeh's behaviour was Finnish and did not match with her foreign out-looking. Therefore, some Finnish and *immigrant students* disturbed her.

Informants received dissimilar advice and help with their study plans.

The study advisor, for the future education plan of the students, talked about it with us. She was very helpful. We could ask our questions from her. [...] From the ninth grade, we met once a week. That person guided us very much. It was very useful because we were told about things we didn't know, like the grades we needed to be able to choose our interest subjects. (Sadaf) Once she asked the interviewer: Do I have to go to university after vocational school to get a job or not?

[After] they decided in which class I should start, we did not have any meeting. (Saeedeh)

Yes, sometimes [at school we talked about my study plan]. In ninth grade, [...] it happened twice or three times altogether during my whole study. [...] They were] useless. Because my mind was somewhere else, all times. When you became very tired you [...] It was] because of bullying at school. Sometimes I felt I didn't want to continue, but finally, I decided to finish it. (Kamyar)

I get support from both parents and schools staff. Youth leader is interested about our plans, gives advices for the plan and encourages us. (Mahboubeh)

Except Saeedeh, the rest had interest in blue collar jobs.

I think I am poor even I am entitled to a small income. It disturbs my emotional health. My family's financial situation was much better in Iran. I prefer to have more job possibilities here instead of going to social office. [...] I] like very much to be a teacher in [...] psychology and speech therapy. (Saeedeh)

I'm very satisfied now. I have a wife, a child and job. When I was jobless, it was difficult. I never planned for my job. It just has happed by itself. [...] For] three years after military service, I tried to find a job in this field [security guard]. They didn't take me because I was foreigner. They didn't mention it straight. [...] I] didn't give up. I tried another job, but kept trying this job as well, until I got it. They are culturally backward. [...] They [mostly] don't know [...] who foreigners are and why they come here, even the youth. [...] Many] prefer to offer job to Finns. (Kamyar)

If [I'll be] in Finland, certainly [I'll] work in my own hairdressing saloon [...]. If [I'll be in] another country, [and there's] a little chance for that, if [it's] computer [field], [I'll] work for a firm. [...] Maybe [I'll work as a] program assembler/mechanic in computer field. [...] Now I don't know. (Mahboubeh)

Some informants had similar reasons not to feel well enough in Finland.

Once a woman hit me and we went to police office. [...] Police said, even a Finn in abroad can face similar situation. [...] I said you don't know how to treat people. Since then I dislike Finns. [...] I don't like to see racism grow here. (Sadaf)

It [racism] has existed and will continue to exist. No law can destroy it. This is because it exists in the system. (Saeedeh)

No [I don't feel happy about my life in Finland]. [It is] because Finns hide they hatred towards foreigners. They showed it before but now I don't know if the [Finnish] person sitting beside me hates me or not. (Kamyar)

Now [my happiness depends on] Friends around me, studying well, good relation with my parents, and having my own residence. (Mahboubeh)

Indeed acculturation categories are not absolute¹¹ and cannot cover all aspect of one's lifespan. However, generally, Sadaf chose *separation*, Saeedeh, *alienation* (marginalisation), Kamyar, *integration*, and Mahboubeh, *assimilation*. Some showed their hidden thoughts and feelings after a delay, which surprised me sometimes.

I'm Iranian-Finn¹². I'm more Finn than Iranian, but I'd like to be more Iranian, because I don't like Finland and Finns. I don't like much to be with Finns. I like foreigners very much. I am in their side, even if they make crimes. (Sadaf)

We should change thoughts and behaviours of Finns from the base. They are hard [unkind] people though they show the opposite. [...] I feel I am isolated here, which is difficult for a young person. I do not cope with Finns. They disgust me, because I have many bad experiences with them. [...] I also find myself responsible for my isolation. (Saeedeh)

[I'm an] Iranian-Finn, who is better than an Iranian and a Finnish person because of the language and cultural richness. [I have some] cultural problems because, even I grew up here, there are some issues about Finnish culture that I disagree with. [It's because] I grew up with my parents here, and naturally, I'm influenced by my homeland culture indirectly. [...] But we have to live with it and solve it. [...] Because we have to live with Finns! [...] Finding a friend is important and it is easier now than before. (Kamyar)

[Positive things about Finland are] beautiful landscape, [and] good people, if you know how to deal with them. [In] general [there's] no difference [between different ages] but those who have more age [are older], live alone not at home [with their parents] any more, and have a better life! (Mahboubeh)

The participants had interest in emigrating from Finland as a transnational thought. Sadaf is the only one who has visited Iran. Kamyar would like to go to a warmer country, which will not be Iran, and develop his career there.

When I was small, I didn't know anything about [Iran]. After I visited Iran, I started to know and like it more and like to be Iranian. Now I want to be Iranian. Before, I had wrong ideas about Iran. [After] five years, I'm with mom in US. (Sadaf)

Five years from now, I hope that I am not in Finland. I would like to enter university and study for at least two years, but within a few years, I will leave Finland. I cannot stay here. (Saeedeh)

First I planned to go to the USA, but plan changed [and I] went to high school [in Finland]. (Mahboubeh)

¹¹ For instance, Mahboubeh is an *assimilated-integrated Finnish-Iranian* woman.

¹² I explained that the influence of Iranian culture is more in her, if she uses that term.

Discussion and Conclusions

Basically the narratives, except Kamyar's, represent *psychological novel* owing to the dominance of *states* (situations). Second leading aspects are *mental activities* (processes) of feeling, planning, and remembering, but fewer *physical activities*. *Accomplishments* and *achievements* are rare too. The *semantic role*¹³ usually is *recipient* (receiver). Consequently, their *subject position*¹⁴ is *undergoer*. That explains the weak positions and failures plus why and how they had little control on their lives, education, and (original) education plan. They relatively hold the role of a *patient* and *experiencer* of the unwanted changes. However, there was variation in it. That, in addition to the lack of belonging, partly was the result of school's shortcomings. They produced particular study plans out of compulsion, when there was lack of hope for better choice. To conclude, since the participants and their close social capital held a weak position in controlling participants' lives, the role of school was the most influential in producing education and career plans. Temporal focus of all stories is future, for fulfilling several dreams. It is a sign of hope, meaning that Finnish society and schools still can help.

There were practical and theoretical outcomes from this research. The new data from comparing the participants were valuable since such data production is in its early stages in Finland. The immigrant background of the participants was not identical, neither were the consequences. Additionally, the study provided explanations for the differences and the similarities, and the consequent results in shape of attitudes, choices, feelings, plans etc. Furthermore, the research underlined the importance of recognising the variances between the education experiences, expectations, and roles of people with immigrant origin. The more new generations are Finnish, the more their expectations are Finnish. The established ideas about policies and practices that might work well with the first generation's education do not necessarily function as good as expected with the following generations. New developed understandings emerge. Thus, the study challenges and modifies the outdated ideologies about the concept of immigrants as a social group, and their education and career in contemporary Finland.

Not only the choices of the participants regarding their education, career and place of living had consequences for them but also their families and Finland, causing plans to distance from them by plan to move away from home or early family formation, and/or emigration. In return, these strengthen their interest in blue collar jobs and lower education as fast tracks. The result displayed how similar or different the education services, environment, and experiences have been for the participants. When similar shortcomings existed, the study examined how the system has recognised and responded to them. It displayed if the system was willing to accept the needs and provided the necessary new policies or not.

This research would benefit school staff and education policy makers to understand the experiences of their clients and the possible consequences better, recognise how the need of (different) clients may change

¹³ The *activities* helped to uncover the *semantic roles*. I found an informant's position between the two extremes; *agent* who maintains the most and *receiver* who upholds the least control on one's own life.

¹⁴ The dominant alternative among *semantic roles* is the *subject position* of the informant.

over time, and advance the roles played by different professionals. This may result in development of (education) policies, and eventually, the way Finns and immigrants coexist. For education policies, it provides the knowledge that demonstrates the usefulness of ethnic teachers (not only first language teachers) and insider researchers. Furthermore it functions as a source for stimulating additional exploration in social science particularly quantitative studies of young immigrants' education and career in Finland.

The Future

I have planned to perform a new study on this topic. This research will focus on the well-being, cultural identity, aspirations, education, and career (plan) of young Iranians in Finland. It will examine the role of the Finnish education system and (school) experiences on well-being, and the education and career (plan) of the second generation of Iranians, as new participants, to be compared with the 1.5 generation. This will demonstrate and explain whether there are any progress in the performances and plans of the two groups or/and the quality of Finnish education system's services or not. I would like to know if and how the education system has adopted its services to meet the demands of the new generation. The other aim is to compare and discover how different these two groups are. The new group, since it was born and grew up in Finland, holds higher expectations as well as obligations for Finnish society.

Research Paradigm: The study will employ a qualitative research design indicative of an interpretivist epistemological approach to knowledge production combined with a relativist ontology. A mixed method approach to data collection will be employed utilising semi-structured face to face interviews, participant observation and group sessions. These will be complemented by drawing on secondary sources of quantitative data from national and international statistics and surveys, and school curriculum, to be compared by triangulation. Theoretical standpoints will include acculturation, transnational migration, and narrative explanation. Multiple methods of analysis will assist the analytical procedure, while narrative analysis and content analysis will be dominant. The participants will be 16–25 years old Iranian origin males/females who are born and raised in Finland, and live in some Southern Finnish cities. The data presentation will compose of narratives about the participants with especial attention given to their school experiences. The study will be indirectly involved with the future of many tens of thousands of youth with immigrant background in Finland as potential fresh labor forces. The results can be useful for (education) decision makers, school staff, employers, researchers, teachers and students of education and social sciences etc.

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INTERPRETIVE FUTURES INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT – The purpose of this paper is to outline philosophical hermeneutics perspective on futures studies what could be stated to interpretive futures inquiry in general. As a practical implication of this interpretive approach I propose a definition on weak signals. Also methodological guidelines for futures studies are discussed.

Introduction and Background

Different philosophies on science frame how we conceptualize things, how we view different methodological choices in research, and what we regard as scientific knowledge in general (Kakkuri-Knuuttila & Heinlahti 2006, 131–132). Therefore, it is essential to engage conversations on different perspectives on philosophy of science for developing new theories and methods in futures studies (see e.g. Longino 2002).

This paper aims to outline philosophical hermeneutics perspective, a form of interpretive research, on futures studies. While it has already been proposed as one perspective to futures studies (see e.g. Seppälä 1985), it seems that hermeneutics have not yet rooted to the research practice.

In general, interpretive research has been used for inquiry of cultural and social phenomena and in particular, for anticipating changes in these (see e.g. Moisander & Valtonen 2011, 2). It is suggested here, that this approach is suitable for studies aiming at interpreting and understanding the culturally and socially fragmented reality that the youth of today lives in.

To demonstrate how different philosophical approaches affect on conceptualization and using of concept in research context, I analyze literature written on weak signals. I argue that the conceptualizations of weak signals have been through positivist philosophical approaches and this has affects on how weak signals are seen in research context and how the scientific knowledge produced by utilizing them is seen.

Weak signals are also used as a way to show what interpretive futures inquiry could be like. This is why I propose a new definition to the concept and through that outline what kinds of characteristics might this kind of perspective to futures studies have.

On first section of this article I will present a short analysis of weak signals on how they are conceptualized in previous literature. On the second section, a short introduction to tenets of philosophical hermeneutics is presented. On third section I will propose a definition of weak signals from the point of view of philosophical hermeneutics and discuss over epistemological and methodological guidelines for futures studies that interpretive perspective has to offer.

Material and Method

To demonstrate how philosophical approaches affect how we conceptualize things and how we use these concepts in scientific context, I conducted a form of concept analysis to researches and writings previously made on weak signals. The goal of this analysis was to find recurring features that seem to have influence on how the conceptualization of weak signals has been done (more of concept analysis see for e.g. Kakkuri-Knuuttila 1998 and Ahonen & Kallio 2002). The material consists mainly on researches made after year 2000 with an exception of the first article wrote on the subject, Igor Ansoff's (1975) "Managing Strategic Surprise by response to Weak Signals".¹⁵

Weak signals are chosen as analysed concept because there is a large amount of contradictory researches made concerning it. I argue that the main reason why there has not been an exclusionary definition to weak signals is because the background assumptions relating to conceptualization differ from one research to another. Futures studies is an extra multidisciplinary research tradition where researchers fields range from medicine to economics. That being mentioned, I do not believe it is neither possible nor necessary to strive to exclusionary definition.

Results

The inventor of the concept of weak signals is said to be Igor Ansoff, who in the 1970's wrote about weak signals as part of firms' strategic management. Ansoff defined the concept as vague information about firms' potential threat or possibility concerning its future (Ansoff 1975, 21–24). It has been almost 40 years from the introduction of weak signals and the definition of it has slightly shifted from its roots. Still it seems that new researches about weak signals have been made mainly from managerial point of view and especially as a tool for anticipating the future.

The first theoretical researches about weak signals have started after the year 2000 and the discussion has been most active within the Finnish research community (Hiltunen 2008, 247). The Finnish Society for Futures Studies started the theoretical discussion through Delphi research conducted by Osmo Kuusi, Elina Hiltunen and Hannu Linturi (Kuusi et al. 2000) and it was criticized by Maisa Moijanen (2003) for its inconsistent definitions. The most notable contribution to the theoretical discussion of weak signal comes from Elina Hiltunen, whose doctoral thesis was about weak signals (Hiltunen 2010).

As the results of my analysis on researches made on weak signals, I have divided three different themes on how the concept is defined and how it affects the concepts applications on research context. These themes are reductionism, dichotomy and signal-ontology.

In a nutshell, reductionism means a philosophical idea that knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon can be generated by breaking them down into constituent parts and then studying those simple

¹⁵ The research material is listed separately in reference section.

parts in terms of defining a cause and effect relations to that phenomenon (Flood 2010, 269). In conceptualization of weak signals this has meant a few different approaches. The definition and understanding of the concept is being strived through dividing weak signals to its most simple parts (see e.g. Hiltunen 2008, Kuusi et al. 2000 and Coffman 1997a). On the other hand reductionism is seen on how weak signals are treated epistemologically by situating it to be the starting point of some phenomenon. In this way the emergence of phenomena can be explained and forecasted by reducing them to weak signal where it all started (see e.g. Harris & Zeisler 2002 and Mannermaa 2004).

A dichotomy is a term that describes how two things are treated as exclusionary to one another (Pantzar 2003, 73–74). In weak signals and their conceptualization this have meant two things: dichotomy between subject and object interpretation of weak signals (see e.g. Moijanen 2003, 55), and dichotomy between right and wrong interpretations (Mannermaa 2004, 117–118). Both of these dichotomies are generally based on the assumption that researcher is a separate part of reality who can make object interpretations out of object reality. This is to say that reality is something that is not depended on someone to take note of it (see e.g. Hiltunen 2008, 251). The thing to criticise this dichotomous approach to weak signals is that it dismisses the cultural and social boundaries that guide the interpretations made (see e.g. Moisander & Eräranta 2006, 174–175 and Longino 2002). Also it makes an ethical statement that someone has the power to set the right and objective interpretation over some other interpretations.

Signal-ontology is a term that describes an approach, which conceptualizes weak signal in an ontological matter. This means that weak signals are treated as an ontological metaphor, which can be referred to, categorized, and reasoned with (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 25–26). In this way the phenomenon that weak signal is referring to, is seen to have same features as the ontological metaphor it refers. For example when weak signals assimilated to radio signals, the phenomenon it refers to, is treated to have same qualities as radio signal and it can for example “amplify” Coffman (1997a, 1997e) or it can have “signal spikes” (Kuosa 2005, 5). Same kinds of ontological metaphors can be interpreted in Mannermaa’s (2004, 115) weak signal as catalyst metaphor and Harris and Zeisler’s (2002) weak signal as abstract living organism metaphor. In this way the interpretations made on weak signal are made with the conditions of the ontological metaphor rather than the phenomenon it refers to. Also the context is faded from research setting and phenomenon can be treated to have universal qualities. This can be interpreted to be a positivist approach to philosophy of science (see e.g. Kakkuri-Knuuttila 2006, 56 and Lagerspetz 2006).

In this analysis I have somewhat brought up a positivist approach on conceptualization of weak signals¹⁶. Before I propose a different philosophical hermeneutics approach to this subject, I briefly describe the tenets of philosophical hermeneutics and its relation to other forms of hermeneutic approaches.

¹⁶ This is no means meant to be inclusionary analysis, but the intention was to emphasize the characteristics of a positivist approach to conceptualization. For more thorough analysis of weak signals see Parhiala (2012).

On philosophical hermeneutics

Interpretive perspectives to scientific inquiry are commonly positioned as an opposing perspective to positivist philosophy of science. This is mainly done because the interests on knowledge differ from one another. As where positivist philosophy on science emphasize objective scientific knowledge and prognostication through causalities, interpretive perspective emphasizes understanding and interpretation of unique phenomenon (Lagerspetz 2006, 37 and Kakkuri-Knuuttila 2006, 54). The differences between these two philosophies of science are not always this straightforward and I argue that the interests on scientific knowledge might not be that different as are the epistemological approaches to it.

On this article I try to outline philosophical hermeneutics perspective, a form of interpretive research, on futures studies which could be stated as interpretive futures inquiry more generally. I have chosen philosophical hermeneutics as the background philosophy of science because it is one of the leading genres of interpretive research and because it emphasizes the dynamic and holistic characteristics of understanding and interpretation process.

The concept of hermeneutics derives from ancient Greeks messenger of gods, Hermes, who was said to interpret messages from gods to mortals. Partly because of this origin hermeneutics have been synonymous with biblical interpretation as such. Over time, the meaning of hermeneutics have shifted to mean more generally textual understanding and interpretation i.e. reality is made sense through words. The expansion from text to textuality made possible to implement hermeneutics to variety of different branches of science. (Arnold & Fischer 1994 and Prasad 2002.)

Still hermeneutics is not a homogenous body of science or philosophy but a notion that holds a variety of different perspectives within. The main branches of hermeneutics can be argued to be hermeneutic theory, philosophical hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics and phenomenological hermeneutics. Each of these embraces a different aim and practice of epistemology, understanding reality and so forth. (Arnold & Fischer 1994 and Prasad 2002.)

Still, hermeneutics in general has some elements that tie different perspectives loosely together. From the point of view of this article the three most significant elements are the above-mentioned concept of textuality, the concept of hermeneutic circle and the view that understanding is contextually related.

The contextually related understanding is articulated in various ways in hermeneutics, but basically it means that all understanding is seen to form as a relation to other things. No understanding is formed in a vacuum, but as a relation to other things we already understand. The key concepts in hermeneutics related to this are hermeneutic horizon and prejudices (Arnold & Fischer 1994, 56–59; Prasad 2002, 18–19; Thompson, Pollio & Locander 1994, 432).

The concept of hermeneutic circle can be understood as way to describe on how understanding is consisted. On the one hand this means the relation of part and whole: in order to understand the whole, one must understand the parts it consists of and vice versa (Prasad 2002, 17). On the other hand the concept of hermeneutic circle also describes the dynamic approach to textuality and understanding. Understanding is an on-going process, which never ends. It always starts with some prejudices to subjects through which the

understanding is formed, and it changes those prejudices. On this account, hermeneutic circle is seen as a spiral of understanding, which expands endlessly as understanding develops (Varto 2003, 190).

From the above-mentioned different perspectives on hermeneutics, in this article I have chosen the philosophical hermeneutics as the background to philosophy on science, mainly because it highlights the ontological status of understanding and interpretation. What this means is that understanding is not something that is produced through following some kinds of rules or methods, but it is a very condition of being human (Schwandt 2000, 194-195). We always take something as something and as a consequence interpretation and understanding are inseparable from each other. This also means that in philosophical hermeneutics above-mentioned hermeneutic horizon and prejudices are not something that one can free oneself from (Varto 2003, 190). As a consequence in philosophical hermeneutics free and objective interpretation or understanding does not exist i.e. there is no objective scientific knowledge (Arnold & Fischer 1994, 59).¹⁷

Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to outline interpretive futures inquiry. This outlining is not inclusive, but meant to reinforce academic conversation on different philosophical approaches in futures studies done previously (see e.g. Slaughter 1998 and Tapio & Hietanen 2002). My aim to do this outlining is done through emphasizing the differences between positivist and interpretive philosophies of sciences. This way the very different philosophical approaches come to more concrete form. I presented a short analysis on how weak signals are conceptualized in previous researches. I argued that these researches imply dichotomous, reductionistic and signal-ontological worldviews and that those kinds of perspective towards weak signals and reality are in line with positivistic philosophy of science.

Still, I do not argue that a positivist philosophy of science is neither right nor wrong than any other philosophical approach. They just produce different kinds of researches and construct world in different ways. This is a key background assumption of this article: the philosophical approach we take towards research and science affect the way we define concept, what kinds of methods we use and how we understand scientific knowledge in general (Kakkuri-Knuutila & Heinlahti 2006, 131–132).

I approach the outlining of philosophical hermeneutics perspective to futures studies through proposing a definition to weak signals from this viewpoint. This way I can bring the abstract philosophical assumptions to methodological context and that way give them more concrete form. In this regard, I would like to propose a following definition to weak signals: Weak signal is an interpretation on some matter to be somehow significant regarding the futures.

In this sense weak signal is more of an epistemological concept than methodological tool, and which cannot be generalized by its qualities. The concept concerns interpretation and understanding in a temporal

¹⁷ This is by no means an inclusive description of philosophical hermeneutics. For more detailed descriptions see e.g. Arnold & Fischer 1994 and Prasad 2002.

sense and the temporality towards future is the reason to appoint this with its own concept instead of speaking just interpretation. Without the futures perspective weak signal would just be a general concept for interpretation.

This approach differs from previous definitions from the fact that it does not generalize weak signals to any particular temporal scope (see e.g. Mannermaa 2004, Moijanen 2003 and Hiltunen 2008). Neither does this approach connect weak signals to any particular phenomenon or thing in a concrete sense. From the philosophical hermeneutics perspective, weak signal only concerns the interpretation and things that guide that. That is to say, it is not important to sort out what is the concrete form of weak signal (if there even is such a thing), but why and how we interpret something to be meaningful in temporal sense towards future. So a weak signal could be a meme, a firm, a social practice or just an abstract intuition.

As mentioned previously, in philosophical hermeneutics, interpretation and understanding are seen as ontological status of being a human (Schwandt 2000, 194). I argue that weak signals also have in this regard the same ontological status. This is based on the assumption that human beings have a temporal conceptualization through modern culture (see e.g. Inkinen & Gustafsson 2009). In this regard, futures thinking is part of being a human and weak signal is a conceptualization of how this thinking works.

In an epistemological sense, weak signals do not itself represent the futures knowledge (as an entity), but are part of how we build it up. This comes from philosophical hermeneutics idea that knowledge can be seen as processual and dynamic understanding (Schwandt 2000, 190–191). Knowledge is seen as an endlessly spinning hermeneutic circle that develops through time (Varto 2003, 189-190). So weak signals are in a sense the force that spins the hermeneutic circle to build up futures knowledge.

An important epistemological aspect to weak signals is to see how the futures significance is seen. Why do we think something means something in temporal sense? From philosophical hermeneutics point weak signals are significant because of their context. It is the interpreters hermeneutic horizon ja prejudices that makes something seem as something (Prasad 2002, 18–19). As a consequence, when every interpreter has his own unique hermeneutic horizon, no interpretation is exactly alike. In that sense there is no subject-object dichotomy in philosophical hermeneutics perspective on weak signals.

This kind of conceptualization to weak signals sets new kinds of challenges to epistemology and methodology of researches and it gives a perspective to how we could outline interpretive futures inquiry in general. For example weak signals cannot be used on scientific methods in a sense that they are “gathered” or “amplified”. Neither can a research frame be articulated so that purpose of a futures study would be collecting weak signals. More accurate would be to state the research frame so that the purpose is to produce futures knowledge (as an understanding) through weak signals, by using some kind of scientific method. In this way weak signals are more of a perspective and aim to research than an actual method.

An interpretive futures inquiry sets also a different criterion to assess the quality and ethics of a research. When knowledge is conceptualized as understanding and interpretation, the validity and reliability of a research are different kinds of questions than for example in quantitative research. The quality of an interpretative futures inquiry could be assessed by the way the interpretation in the research is argued. That is to say how extensive is context of the interpretation articulated. This idea is analogous to the idea

how assumptions of philosophy of science affect on the way how we conceptualize things, apply methods and see scientific knowledge in general in researches, and how those assumptions should be articulated (Kakkuri-Knuuttila & Heinlahti 2006, 131).

From the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, ethical issues on futures studies come to close assessment. For example, if dichotomy between researcher and the research subject is being rejected, and researcher is not free from his/her hermeneutic horizon in the research situation, the fact how much and which ways the researcher effects on the results is placed in a frame. Then we cannot dismiss the personal values, motives, purposes of the researcher, and the socio-cultural context of research community. From this perspective, countless social, cultural and habitual matters affect on how research is done and what kinds of results is produced (see e.g. Longino 2002). From this viewpoint, different scenario methods appear ethically challenging. How do we value different scenarios as desirable and others as undesirable? From what perspective and context do some scenarios seem as utopia and others as dystopia?

Conclusions

In this article I have aimed to outline aspects on how interpretive futures inquiry could be seen from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. My intention is not to offer exclusionary way to practice futures studies, but merely to engage conversation on philosophical approaches we take on to researches. Interpretative approaches to futures studies could give a new perspective on how we study on culturally related matters, such as youth and things related to it.

I did not seek to make contribution to any practical method or give a prescription on how to make an interpretive futures inquiry. Hermeneutic philosophy in general is more concerned to understand understanding as an ontological state (Arnold & Fischer 1994, 66). That is why more academic and philosophical discussion is required before practical interpretive futures methods could be utilized in to research practice. For example the ontology of temporality and reality need more research and discussion before determining methods to acquire knowledge from them.

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GET A LIFE! SIMULATING THE FUTURES OF WORK

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ABSTRACT – Get a Life! is a futures-oriented work life simulation tool for students and counselling personnel in tertiary education. The simulation is built by combining futures studies theories and methods, theories of experiential learning and future-oriented counselling, as well as the use of simulations in a novel way. The result is an online, open-access tool promoting personal futures cognition, self-awareness, and proactivity.

Introduction and Background

The need for understanding complexity, large systemic entities, and causes of change has also entered the lives of individuals, and calls for the ability of futures-orientation and long-term thinking. Young adults in particular need to be encouraged to 1) have a personal interest in the future, 2) understand personal life in a greater context, and 3) believe in their capacity to make an impact in this context. In the futures field, there is need for appropriate theories, methods, and tools to support the development of personal futures cognition, long-term thinking, and proactivity.

Tertiary education is, by its nature, exclusionary, focusing on building narrow, well-defined expertise on a limited, well-defined area of interest. The learning environment of universities, drawing from scientific tradition, does not encourage or provide opportunities for systemic thinking, gaining a holistic view, or looking for novel combinations of knowledge and expertise. Even in more practically oriented universities for applied sciences, student perspectives on the possibilities of their future lives and careers seem to be quite limited. Introducing futures thinking, alternative scenarios, and opening up various possibilities for future events in work life might have a positive impact on students, encouraging them toward mental time travelling, exploring alternative choices, and self-reflection of goals, values, and worldviews.

Futures thinking abilities are needed especially in the context of life management and study guidance. The effort of supporting learning for the future leads us to experiential learning approaches and theories, which highlight contexts, social structures, settings, interactions, emotions, and moreover the development of individual reflective abilities and interaction with surrounding systems. (see e.g. Mezirow, 1997; Dewey, J., 1998; Alheit, P., 1995). These theoretical starting points, together with futures studies frameworks, provide a rich and fruitful field contributing to guidance pedagogy and didactics.

The combination of 1) futures studies theories and methods, 2) experiential learning theories, and 3) the human capacity of simulating the future has much potential for creating suitable simulation tools for promoting futures-oriented thinking and capacity building. In this paper, we will present an online futures-oriented work life simulation tool for university students. With the simulation tool, users create personal simulations of their life and career up to 20 years from now, testing alternative futures paths with the ele-

ments of discontinuity and chance. In the project, we developed a dynamic and holistic counselling model for the simulation tool, to support the personal processes of exploring possibilities, decision-making, and self-reflection in alternative situations.

Futures research and the use of simulations

At the moment, one of the limitations in futures studies is the lack of theoretical and methodological approaches to personal futures. Most of the practices and methods have been developed for community uses and group processes, overshadowing the development of long-term futures-oriented tools for individual use (for one exception, see Wheelwright, 2005, 2009, 2010). Supporting personal futures orientation and building tools for exploring alternative futures could benefit from the combination of the futures research interest in the possible with the emancipatory interest of knowledge: the strive for increasing alternatives and expanding the domain of possible (Mannermaa, 1986). In futures studies, the topic of personal futures thinking is also discussed within the emerging concepts of futures cognition, futures consciousness (e.g. Lombardo, 2011a, 2011b), and experiential futures (e.g. Candy, 2010).

The main task of futures studies is to explore three alternative futures: the possible, the probable, and the preferable (e.g. Amara 1981a, 1981b, Masini 1993, Bell 2003). Mannermaa (1986) connects the interests of futures research to Habermas' three interest of knowledge: technological, hermeneutic, and emancipatory:

Table 1. The tasks and interests of futures research (Mannermaa, 1986).

Interests of knowledge	The Futures Field		
	<i>Possibility</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>Desirability</i>
Technical	The aim is to search for trends (objectivity); alternatives are irrelevant	Forecasting is the main task of a study	Inessential Unscientific Self-evident
Hermeneutic	Main purpose is communication between people in a society, different tasks of futures research melt into a common understanding of the social reality		
Emancipatory	Increasing alternatives, making 'impossible' into possible	'Probable' is considered a reference alternative and (usually) an object of criticism	It is more important to impact than search for a 'probable' alternative

The combination of a) possibility and b) the emancipatory approach – interest in alternative futures and expanding the domain of possible – offer a fruitful starting point for advancing futures orientation on a personal level. This process can be described as explorative.

Supporting the exploration of futures on the individual level could also benefit from the methodology of experiential scenarios. According to Candy (2010), the aim of the experiential approach is to expand the representation of scenarios beyond traditional statistical and textual means. By applying the experience-

based approach in design, Candy draws from the pragmatic tradition, adopting from Dewey the idea that an experience lives on in further experiences:

With experiential futures, then, we are paradoxically creating real memories of hypothetical experiences, the point of these strategic memories of course being that they will leave us better prepared for life's actual challenges.
(Candy, 2010, 114, emphasis in the original)

Candy states that learning real lessons from constructed or simulated experiences is possible, especially in the case of futures where experiences are not about the factual (Candy, 2010, 114). These elements – creating real memories and learning from hypothetical experiences – are key elements in building futures-oriented simulations for personal learning.

In futures research, the use of models and simulations has its roots in modelling the structure and change of dynamic systems both in formal and informal ways. Typical examples of formal use of simulations include extrapolative quantitative models of dynamic systems such as population, waterways, climate, and economics (e.g. Hughes, 2006; Meadows, D. & Meadows, D., 1972). These models are used in scenario processes as background data for creating alternative futures paths and simulating e.g. various policy choices. In a futures context, simulation games can be used, for example, in education, training, operational testing, experimentation or research, entertainment, therapy or diagnosis, forecasting, and advocacy. (Bell 2003, 272–273).

Although most simulations are created for modelling a system or part of it as is, they need not be about the actual. The main advantages of simulations are the possibilities for 1) exploring and increasing awareness of future possibilities and choices, 2) constructing, testing and evaluating various models – such as scenarios – in a risk-free manner, 3) revealing and reflecting values and attitudes, and 4) increasing the experience and understanding of complex systems.

The great advantage of utilising simulations for the purposes of futures-oriented thinking and actions lies within the power of creating simulations also about the possible. Grüne-Yanff and Weirich (2010) argue that “we learn from models about the possible even if we don't learn anything about the actual world.” (Grüne-Yanff & Weirich, 2010) Unlike real life, simulations can be constructed to provide users with an opportunity to go back and choose differently, and thus explore various future paths. In simulations, it is possible to produce new situations of which the user has no previous experience of and thus expand the boundaries of learning.

Constructing a futures-oriented work life simulation tool

The goal of the Get a Life! simulation tool is to introduce futures orientation and long-term thinking as a transformative process from short-term planning. The simulation tool can thus be seen as a part of a scenario process in which the user's choices create individual futures paths within the limits of a pre-programmed set of alternatives and futures images. The idea is that the user will spend some time contemplating personal decisions and their consequences, and perceive new opportunities and optional courses of

action. This way, the user can find new horizons and discover decisions that may be important for personal happiness. Another purpose is to initiate contemplation of one's capabilities, life, and the various scenarios of future work life.

In order to build a simulation tool for supporting the exploration of the possibilities of alternative futures, we have combined the futures research task of exploring the possible with the emancipatory interest of knowledge. Following Van Notten's scenario typology (Van Notten, 2006), the futures images behind the Get a Life! simulation tool can be described as a qualitative, descriptive, and explorative approach, as opposed to a quantitative, normative, and linear approach. In the content creation process, the adopted perspective is that of experiential futures, with the aim of forming strategic memories of hypothetical events, in creating experiences of the future and opening up the possibility of and possibilities in alternative futures.

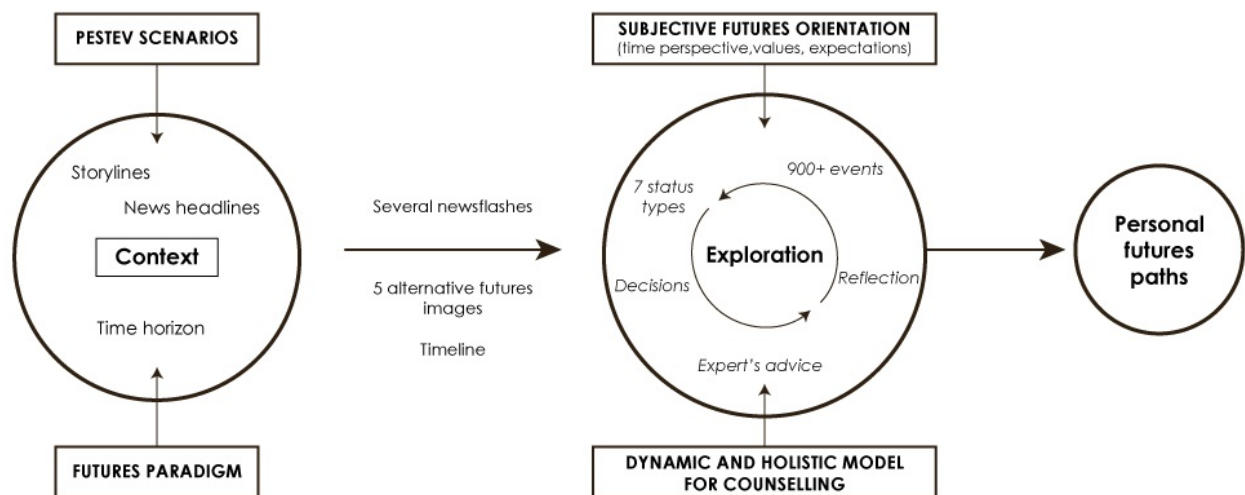


Figure 1. A personal futures-oriented work life simulation tool format. (Adapted from Valkering et al., 2012).

Note: PESTEVS=political, economical, social, technological, environmental aspects, and values.

The simulation format (Figure 1) consists of 1) the context of future work life, 2) an exploration process of facing probable but also surprising events during the simulation run, and 3) creating a personal futures path by making decisions on upcoming events and reflecting on personal choices. These elements are explained below.

The context: futures of work

The simulation begins from the year following the actual year of the simulation run and continues for 20 years. The context is Finnish society and the life of a student who is about to graduate from university. The futures-orientation of the simulation is built on five alternative scenarios that are the result of a process that involved professional futurists, public and private employers, as well as contributions from many interest groups such as teachers, students, and employment professionals. The scenarios were formulated into five futures images that serve as the simulation's storylines. These storylines each depict an image of the future:

a snapshot of Finland in 2030. These images include several aspects of work life: societal, technological, economic, environmental, and cultural, giving the user a view on alternative possibilities for future events. A timeline and a number of future news headlines based on each image provide the future horizon element and give a sense of time passing during the simulation run.

Simulation structure and dynamics

The content of the simulation tool was created as a participatory process in which various interest groups such as employers, academic workers, entrepreneurs, students, and career counsellors produced both experience-based and imaginary ideas of possible future events in the life and career of academic graduates. The project team collected these ideas and modified them into content: over 900 event cards, each including a) a description of a possible event in the future, b) 3-5 choices, and c) the consequences of these choices. In order to depict the discontinuities and nonlinear dynamics of personal and work life, a number of coincidental event cards are included in the simulation.

The simulation presents events that require action, namely choices made by the user. During the simulation, the user faces a variable number of events, making choices concerning studies, employment, career, and social activities. The user is also faced with several unexpected events (coincidences) that may have an effect on their career and life. Seven types of user statuses (studies, studies and work, studies and entrepreneurship, work, unemployment, work and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship) define the possible situations of the user. The simulation allows returning back to the previous situation and choosing differently. The simulation also includes an auto save function so that the user can end a session and return to the simulation later.

Creating personal futures paths: reflection and guidance

This type of textual simulation is demanding for users as they create personal simulation experiences drawing from the storyline, description of the events, and previous personal experiences and memories. In a computer simulation, this process is enabled by the simulation design: engaging elements, usability, context, input, and pedagogy (Aldrich 2009). The user enters the simulation with their personal futures orientation, facing simulation events that require decision-making and reflection. As facilitating elements, some events include advice from career experts. This advice is based on the dynamic and holistic counselling model discussed below. At the end of the simulation, the user is presented with a summary of the events of the simulation run. This personal futures path is designed for self-reflection and as a textual document that can be shared and used in various guidance settings.

Futures-oriented career management skills and guidance

Career and life management skills in higher education are currently underrated despite all the discussions about the importance of counselling in learning and education. The institutional curriculum framework and learning conditions do not seem to match with the needs of students in organising and preparing their fu-

ture work. We can identify a structural lack of “care” and support for futures thinking skills for higher education students. The presentation and preparation for futures orientation are inadequate, as there is a lack of counselling resources, methods and tools, limited use of social media, and other forms of peer support. Our aim is to contribute to the number of easy access tools for futures-oriented counselling, transparency in consciousness building, futures-oriented life management counselling, and theoretical discourse.

The purpose of the Get a Life! simulation tool is to promote proactive attitudes and futures thinking skills in the context of future work life among higher education students. The theoretical foundation of the futures-oriented career and life management framework lies in socio-dynamic approaches in career guidance discourse. The produced framework highlights the need for long time spans in student guidance practices, and the potential of simulations as methods for future career planning and management. The theoretical framework underpinning the futures-oriented guidance framework is multidisciplinary, combining critical reflective learning, futures thinking, and other-than-rational decision-making. It incorporates these issues with the simulation as a method for stimulating proactivity and self-efficacy in long-term career management.

As futures are emerging and ever changing, reflective skills and self-awareness are critical competences in managing one’s life in general, particularly in career development. Futures awareness and knowledge are vital in the process of identifying career possibilities. The key question is how do we validate information, analyse it, and make useful conclusions from a fuzzy set of beliefs, assumptions, images, and other inputs. The futures-oriented guidance model is a holistic approach to support personal decision-making and life management. The key idea in the model is supporting self-reliance and awareness of one’s qualifications and assets in constructing the future. The model helps learners to reflect the grounds of their actions and build stepping-stones toward an unknown future (Lean et al., 2006, 227-242).

The futures-oriented dynamic and holistic model for counselling (Figure 2) is designed to give inspiration and to support thinking, and, to some extent, planning the transition from education to work. Transition phase guidance focuses on self-efficacy and vocational growth by promoting comprehensive and personally meaningful representation of the work self. Long-term futures orientation puts emphasis on alternative futures, happenstance, uncertainty, and context. Guidance practices involve reflective discussions on individual consciousness of future expectations, ways of thinking and acting in different situations and contexts.

Dynamic and holistic model for counselling

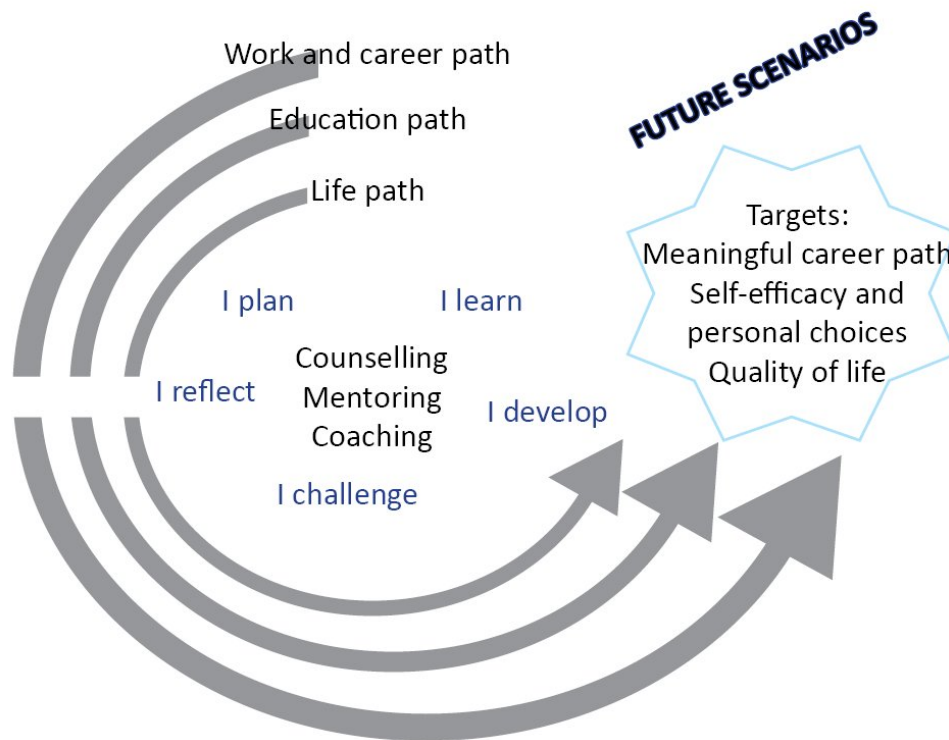


Figure 2. *The dynamic and holistic model for counselling (Römer-Paakkanen, 2011).*

Learning for the future of life and work involves much more than just practising and using one's knowledge and skills, or the strict achievement of concrete results. The future-oriented model links to self-awareness and supports personal development. The call for practice is embedded in a way of individual or group thinking that is not only geared to the future of work but also to the needs of everyday life (Thomson, 2012).

Feedback and further development

The tool was mainly tested and piloted in groups with a tutor. The group of tutors consisted of project team members, teachers, and career counsellors from participating organisations. Briefing and debriefing in most of the tutored pilot sessions included 1) an introduction to the tool, 2) reflection on the experience and 3) feedback on one or more of the simulation features: its visual appearance, the user experience, its content, the sense of time passing, and the simulation logic. The majority of the participating students and teachers were from tertiary level institutions in Finland.

The feedback was collected in the test phase with an online feedback tool within the simulation and through interviews. The 64 interviews linked to test sessions of the tool were conducted in May-November 2011. The interviewees included both students and career counselling personnel.

One of the goals of the project was to encourage proactive attitudes concerning the future. Many of the users did not seem to perceive the futures orientation of the tool. Their comments focused on the flaws in the overall simulation logic and the erratic nature of the events. Some also criticised the tool for offering only predestined paths and not much help for career planning. The expectations of these users seem to have focused on receiving actual, concrete advice about the future of work life. This feedback was particularly interesting, because the tool does not strive to provide concrete career planning advice. (Ahvenainen Mi. interviews, 2011) Furthermore, it might be that the whole concept of career planning does not resonate too well with radical changes. In fact, a predictable environment is a sine qua non for the whole concept of planning, and radical changes have no place in that world.

While some focused on the lacking simulation logic, other users seemed to perceive the underlying futures orientation of the tool: “I think that the simulation is mainly about the effects of your personal choices on the future. At one point I felt like that it also enables the testing of changes in one’s moral values and principles on career development.” (Ahvenainen Mi. interviews, 2011). This is a very promising signal about the accomplishments of the project. According to the feedback, some users received new ideas and experienced changes in the way they think about their future, which indicates a successful learning process.

The main challenges for future development include increasing user engagement, enhancing the experience of time and change, encouraging exploration, and defining the user base that will benefit most from the tool. In the near future, the simulation tool will be developed further, to better depict the stochastic environment and complicated choices that the users face during the simulation. This will be accomplished by refining the content and the operational logic. The next step is to take the simulation from screenplay writing to genuinely writing individual interesting events that are tied together in a more logical manner. The current version is too laborious in this respect and most importantly does not allow enough stochasticity. Creating a more functional operational logic will enable the inclusion of more varied later career events, as they will no longer have to be closely tied with previous events. The ties are created through metadata instead, thus diminishing the problems of logical discontinuities. The guidance elements such as briefing, self-reflection support, debriefing, and sharing options will be updated and further developed to support the stand-alone version of the simulation tool.

Discussion and Conclusions

Long-term, futures-oriented explorative simulations could well prove to be suitable tools for enabling people to see 1) the possibility of and 2) the possibilities in alternative futures. With the appropriate guidance models, this type of tool could be valuable especially for young people facing the challenge of adulthood. For this kind of use, these tools and models should be created and tested with professionals working with teenagers and young adults: teachers, guidance personnel, as well as study and career counsellors.

At this stage of development, the simulation tool has proved its value in adding some substantial viewpoints in career guidance and life management discourse. Simulation tools provide a way to stimulate, and possibly also modify and reframe thinking patterns of future work. Learning for the future can be ap-

proached and facilitated in an environment where we can find challenges, uncertainties, and tensions between experiences of using the tool and the user's existing knowledge and attitudes. In the context of futures research and practise, this type of experiential and explorative simulation is adding to the small number of methods and tools for promoting personal futures orientation. Further development of the Get a Life! simulation will include refining the contents and the guidance model. The aim of this process is to deepen the understanding of the concept of futures consciousness, the process to promote it, and the means to link it to critical reflective and autonomous learning and guidance practises.

The Get a Life! simulation tool is the end result of Get a Life! – future-oriented career guidance for university students (2008–2012). The project was primarily funded by the European Social Fund through the Leverage from the EU 2007–2013 programme and its national agencies in Finland.

Project partners: Finland Futures Research Centre/University of Turku, HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences, HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

The Get a Life! simulation tool is an open access, text-based online simulation. The simulation is currently available as a test version in Finnish: <http://getalife.fi> and as a shorter demo version in English: <http://getalife.fi:8080>.

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WHAT DOES A YOUNG WOMAN IN FURTHER EDUCATION KNOW ABOUT A VALUABLE FUTURE? RECOGNITION, OPPORTUNITIES AND INEQUALITIES

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Abstract – Aspiration policies in England are based on a human capital notion of social inclusion and put young adults under increased pressure to equip themselves with the skills demanded by the labour market. At the same time persisting income inequalities make investments in individual skills a necessary but risky business. Exploring an aspiration narrative of a young woman in Further Education unfolds that occupational and competitive economic aspirations are hugely instrumental and that a broader recognition of aspirations as valuable futures is required. Furthermore, this paper suggest that young adults might find it difficult to develop a coherent valued future that includes competitive economic aspirations due to the contradictions with broader aspirations, in particular where they face classed, gendered and raced constraints for achieving their competitive economic aspirations.

Introduction

This paper portrays young adults in the English Further Education (FE) system as holding high aspirations for themselves. Regardless of their gendered, classed and raced position they aspire to live a life they value. The rather tautological argument being that aspirations understood as individual reflections about a valued future are high by definition from one's individual viewpoint. This argument differs from how high and low aspirations were understood in several recent sociological studies on aspirations. Within these studies the desired occupations expressed by the young students were used as signifier of high and low aspirations (Atkins, 2008; Fuller, 2009; Archer et. al., 2010; St. Clair and Benjamin, 2011). Although the existence of a hierarchy of jobs with those having higher status and salaries attached reflecting better life chances appears convincing this paper aims to critically address this reductive concept of aspirations because it covers the underlying values behind career aspirations such as how one's job provides intrinsic as well as instrumental opportunities and constraints for a valued future.

Researching those underlying values is confronted with some serious limitations that need to be considered. Aspirations are rooted in the "thick of social life" (Appadurai, 2004), they exist only as ideas and in order to be observable they need to be verbalised or written down. What they reflect is not necessarily an actual or "real" aspiration. What is meant by that can be demonstrated by asking yourself the following questions: What is it that you really aspire to? Do you express different aspirations if you talk to a professor, your best friend or your mum? Were your aspirations the same 5 years ago compared to today?

The first question points to the difficulty to deal with the future due to its uncertain character. The second question addresses the concerns of St. Clair and Benjamin (2011) that the expression of an aspiration

might be not the actual aspiration but the tool to achieve one's aspirations. The third question highlights that aspirations are constantly challenged and renegotiated.

Although looking at the underlying values of aspirations raises some methodological issues, acknowledging that nobody aspires for a miserable life does help framing FE students as capable architects of their own futures as opposed to a rather instrumental understanding of social inclusion in which the skills-poor are qualified in order to serve the demands of the economy (cf. Williams, 2008:158f). However, it doesn't answer on which grounds individuals' base their assumptions about a good future nor does it explain why some can realise their aspirations while others can't or why some are confronted with huge sacrifices while others aren't. Furthermore, it can't explain how the pursuit of one's aspirations might affect the aspirations of others.

To do so this paper scrutinises English aspiration policies and its relation to inequalities and locates individual aspirations within a broader theory of social structures. The second part introduces the Capability Approach as a framework which incorporates the normative aspect of aspirations and highlights its importance for social justice. In the third part I draw on qualitative interview data collected for my Ph.D. thesis in spring 2011 and spring 2012. A narrative of one female FE student was chosen out of 20 individual interviews and 4 focus groups, as the one that unfolds some key concerns that are in focus of this paper.

Competitive educational aspirations, inequalities and structures

Evidence from studies within sociology of education suggests that young students from disadvantaged backgrounds hold "high" and "respectable" aspirations for themselves in terms of the occupations they want to achieve (Atkins, 2008; Archer et. al., 2010; St. Clair and Benjamin, 2011). This research does confirm the initial idea that young students aim high. In fact, if we only use the lens of desired occupations as criteria for aspirations, we can see that students from disadvantaged backgrounds understand the basic link between certain jobs and better life chances. Those insights are useful in order to critique policy assumptions in which individual students' lack of aspirations is identified as cause for their lack of social inclusion.

However, raising aspiration policies and their reductive and hierarchical underlying conceptual understanding of aspirations and inclusion are not only based on the misleading assumption that disadvantaged people lack high occupational aspirations. They also promote a narrow understanding of "competitive educational aspirations". Reay's (2003:314) study of mature working-class women in Access to Higher Education courses concludes that "although working-class women [...] do not escape processes of individualisation, they are positioned very differently in relation to them". What her research points out is that while the women in her study are confronted with the need for individual self-realisation, their "individual projects" often include aspects of care for others and of "doing it for the family" as opposed to what they see as selfish making of one's career.

“Aspiration policy” in the English educational system

One of English FE policy's main concerns is based around a growing knowledge economy which requires improved levels of skills from its workforce (cf. Coffield et al., 2008; Williams, 2008; Keep, 2011). It is from such a presumption that we can understand that policy documents under Labour government such as the Green Paper *The Learning Age: A renaissance for a new Britain* (DfEE, 1998) or the White Paper *21st Century Skills: Realising our potential: individuals, employers, nation* (DfES et al., 2003) argued that widening participation in education leads to more employability for more people within a competitive global labour market and it is from this perspective that we can derive the further concepts of the governments FE policy such as the understanding of social inclusion as activating people for the labour market. Increasing skills level was one of the central aims under the Labour government from 1997 to 2010 and continues to be so under the Coalition government elected in 2010 based on the idea that improved skills lead to economic growth and social inclusion.

The FE sector developed under the Labour government from the “neglected middle child” (Foster, 2005) to one of its rapidly expanding policies. In 2001 the Learning Skills Council has been established to fund FE. Its budget increased annually: in 2004/2005 the budget was £9.3 billion and its last budget in 2009/2010 was £13.2 billion. Currently there exist 419 FE colleges in the United Kingdom (Guardian, 2011). In 2009/2010 54,000 full time teachers were employed and 5.3 million students participated in FE (DfE, 2011). In the Leitch (2006) report and in subsequent policy documents (e.g. BIS, 2010) a direct link between skills, economic growth and social inclusion has been made. However, focusing on individual skills arguably ruled out other policy levers for tackling social inclusion such as labour market regulations, collective bargaining arrangements, social partnership models as well as active industrial policy and the creation of patient and competent capital (Keep, 2011:25f). Furthermore, it puts young adults under increased pressure to develop what I would define as “competitive economic aspirations”. Therefore, the following part looks at the relationship between a narrow recognition of competitive economic aspirations and income inequalities.

Income inequalities and aspirations

Simply by looking at income inequality in the UK we can assume that increasing skill levels might be beneficial for some parts of the economy, however, steady inequality gaps suggest that there will be some people that find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy. The overall income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient in 2010 is 33% and is one of the highest within the European Union (EU) (Eurostat, 2010a). Among other patterns those inequalities are gendered as shown by the Gender Pay Gap which is defined as the relative difference of gross hourly earnings of women and men for the UK for 2009 was 20.4% which is above EU average of 17.1% (Eurostat, 2010b). One could therefore argue that high aspirations are a risky business for those who come from a disadvantaged background because of the likelihood that they are not going to be met.

The structure of the labour market may not reward all people who are willing to improve their skills, as Shilling (1989:172) noted: “Not only does the rising technical composition of capital tend to displace work-

ers; it also deskills the labour process for many other.” While enhanced skills-levels are presented as the solution, unskilled labour still needs to be done. “By shifting focus towards the ‘skills-rich and the skills-poor’ in the creation of an inclusive society, political emphasis is removed from economic inequalities and placed instead upon those lacking basic skills.” (Williams, 2008:158f). Human capital theory and its idea of investment becomes an essential part of the political logic: “We do not invest as much in skills as we should” (DfES et al., 2003:9) and “no individual should be denied the chance to realise their potential for want of opportunities to invest in their own skills.” (ibid.:18). However, if the structure of the labour market doesn’t change, increased levels of qualification can lead to a devaluation of those qualifications and an increased competition among the available jobs ultimately leading to a reproduction of inequalities. As Reat et al. (2005:163) argue: “Behind the very simple idea of a mass system of higher education we have to recognise a complex institutional hierarchy and the continued reproduction of racialised, gendered and classed inequalities.” While this is not an argument that increased levels of education can lead to wider benefits for individuals it shows that in relational terms, deeply embedded hierarchies and inequalities on the labour market persist despite increasing levels of skills. In addition, within the English educational system there is a strong divide between academic and vocational skills as well as a strong hierarchy along League tables and similar rankings.

From the viewpoint of political economy the attempt to increase wealth through economic growth and trickle down effects has been criticised because of its unequal distribution. A relational perspective on poverty highlights that growing inequalities increase poverty despite a growth in accumulated wealth. As demonstrated by Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) more unequal developed countries are doing worse than more equal developed countries independent of their overall wealth in areas such as level of trust, life expectancy, infant mortality, imprisonment rates and social mobility independent of their GDP. To put it in a nutshell, within a system of growing inequalities, FE students as architects of their own futures are either required to succeed on the costs of others or they are subject to fail. Given the high level of inequalities within the English system one has to conclude that if occupational aspirations are going to increase, more people will fail to achieve those aspirations.

Within a system of inequalities the individual is under pressure to either adapt its aspirations to a form of occupational aspiration that comes at the upper part of the job hierarchy (making sure that one is not overtaken by others), or to foster their own aspirations taking on the risk of being labelled as unambitious and held responsible for one’s individual failure. Looking at the sociological research in the following section helps to understand how classed and gendered constraints may prevent many FE students from disadvantaged backgrounds from developing competitive educational aspirations.

Structured aspirations

A study by Hodkinson (et al., 1996) specifically looked at the career pathways and choices of young students. The results of the study suggest that career decisions are pragmatically rational within the “youth training field” (based on Bourdieu) and that those choices are transitory in nature. They argue that pragmatic decisions of students about job placements are made within their “horizons of action”; they are bound to

a structured field in which they reflect, negotiate, bargain and struggle. A variety of sources such as parents, teachers and career advisors together with resources such as money, knowledge and labour market opportunities build one's students "horizons of action" in which they take their pragmatic decision. The work of Beck et al. on the perception of young people of their post compulsory education and labour market opportunities has shown that "girls and boys from different ethnic backgrounds are finding it very difficult to conceptualise their employment futures other than in very traditional (perhaps even 'safe') ways, and that their current educational experience provides no opportunities for challenging stereotypical conceptions of male and female occupations." (Beck et al., 2006:682). Research on the relation of class and race with conceptions of the good university (Reay et al. 2001:865) has revealed a very contradictory picture on questions of agency and 'fitting in'. While an increasing number of working class students are attending universities they face a hierarchical university system in which the bottom of the system is reserved for them, while a few places available at the top of the hierarchy raise doubts and insecurities because "there are few people like me". However, their choices reveal the picture of multiple and contested identities. The concept of "horizons of action" (Hodkinson et al., 1996:123) is described as relying on bounded decisions which are determined by "external opportunities in interaction with personal perceptions of what was possible, desirable or appropriate" and therefore it also refuses a solely deterministic viewpoint of social structures.

Shifting from the structural to the agency perspective bears some risks: "Whilst most young people may speak a language of individual choice, control and agency, it is only for some that rhetoric is accompanied by requisite resources and opportunities. [...] A 'can do' approach to life may be a necessary condition for progressive personal change, yet it is likely to be insufficient in the face of structural constraints." (Thomson and Holland, 2002:351). In that sense it could even become a burden. The picture drawn in the literature from a gender perspective suggests a more deterministic viewpoint. Archer and Yamashita (2003:129) state in their study about working-class masculinities of 15/16 year old boys that their multiple identities are often located outside of the educational context. Therefore, "...participation in 'alien' (middle-class, white) educational institutions would entail moving outside of the men's familiar spheres of local power." A finding which is very similar to Reay's (2001:337) conclusion "...among its many promises and possibilities, higher education poses a threat to both authenticity and a coherent sense of selfhood for [...] working-class mature students". Later work of Archer (et al. 2007:565) about working class femininities in education reveals the limited space of fitting in: "The young women's accounts of 'change' thus highlighted how there are only narrow discursive spaces available for working class girls to be 'good' within the contemporary UK education system."

Although a theory of social structures highlights the classed and gendered constraints for FE students, more in terms of their identities than financially, a weakness of this critique is that the implications remain implicit. While showing that goals such as widening participation in Higher Education are faced by classed and gendered barriers, it does not offer an explicit premise based on which we would be able to make judgements about whether those inequalities are problematic in itself, whether those barriers for social mobility need to be removed or whether the aspirations outside of the narrow discourse of competitive educational aspirations need to receive more recognition.

A capability approach perspective on a valued life

Aspiring high educationally and occupationally might lead to individual benefits for some and a skilled workforce might benefit some sectors of the labour market. However, high levels of inequalities won't allow everybody to profit in this system or as Robeyns (2003:73) puts it: "The combination of the overly economist focus of human capital theory, together with its exclusive focus on the instrumental value of education, has consequences that play out differently for different groups of people." Moreover, "competitive economic aspirations" are based on a human capital discourse that neglects all non-competitive forms of aspirations. While research from sociology has demonstrated that such a narrow discourse of valuable aspirations poses a threat to the identities and value systems of certain groups and individuals, the normative implications remained somewhat underspecified.

FE students are a very heterogeneous group of people with very different needs and goals in life. A key question is not simply whether their aspirations can be raised in order to fit them into the existing labour market conditions; but whether those students can form their own ideas of a valued life and if they have the opportunities to achieve these aspirations. Therefore, I want to introduce a capability approach perspective into the debates around opportunities and constraints for individual choice and aspirations in FE. I suggest that such a perspective allows addressing the informational basis on which to make conclusions about social relations and the ways how students engage with their futures without replacing the knowledge that we gained from research about the constraining effects of structures on people's opportunities. The capability approach is a particular and normative way to look at society through the lens of social justice. Its basis is the question of what are people really able to be and do. Capabilities are "beings" and "doings" such as "being educated" or "being mobile" or "living in security" that somebody has "reason to value" (Sen, 1999, 2009). According to Sayer (2011:240) normative ideas have been (rightly) criticised for being at risk of developing ethnocentric critiques of others but that "to reject judgement and critique [...] is to protect dogmatism from challenge rather than to refuse it." Following this line of argument it is not enough to critique FE arrangements only according to whether they meet the targets that were set by the policy makers themselves leaving the normative claims that evolve from such a critique implicit. An explicit discussion of our informational basis for what matters in terms of a normative concept of social justice requires looking at all aspects of such an informational basis and the tensions that might evolve in each area. Such a perspective allows not only looking for multidisciplinary explanations of how aspirations and choices are structured but also engages with the question of why aspirations are important. From a capability approach perspective one's individual capability to engage with the future and to form "genuine" aspirations and values is as much at the centre of concern as the opportunities and constraints to achieve those aspirations.

A focus on individual agency shows that the capability approach does take people's individual values very seriously. However, from a critique of utilitarian approaches to human-well being Sen argued that people's preferences might be adapted (cf. Sen, 1999). Many feminist studies have supported such an argument, e.g. Annas (1993:282) argues that "...in societies in which the options open to [women, author's note] are fewer than those open to men, it has always been a common adaptive strategy for women to ad-

just their desires to what they can realistically expect.” While assuming that FE students make misinformed and adapted decisions towards a valued future I still regard them as experts of their own life’s whose underlying valued futures should be at the centre of concern for thinking about social justice. Recognising the human being as a socially embedded actor also highlights the social aspects of individually formed aspirations. In this respect it is important to understand in which ways FE students valued futures are affected by structural inequalities.

Following from this viewpoint, aspirations cannot be a matter of being raised in the way it has been discussed in policy documents which were concerned about raising student’s aspirations in schools (e.g. DfES, 2005a; DfES, 2005b; DfE, 2008; DfE, 2010). Instead I argue that aspirations need to be properly understood in the first place in order to think about a society that accommodates a range of individual aspirations without producing increasing inequalities among them.

Approaching aspirations empirically: Maria’s aspirations

To understand aspirations we need to understand the individual construction of meaning as an open process which needs constant reshaping and is constantly influenced by the social conditions. In order to account for this complex situation I attempted to use problem-centred interviews which aim “...to bridge the individual construction of meaning on the one hand and the influence of social conditions on the other hand” (Scheibelhofer, 2005: 19). Drawing on qualitative interviews in spring 2011 and spring 2012 I explore how aspirations are framed around biographical narratives from an interview with Maria¹⁸, a 24 year old single mother in an Access to Higher Education course.

I first met Maria when she was about to finish her Access course at a Central London college. According to inspection criteria, the college is an example of best practice. Therefore, there might be some sort of self-selection occurring among applicants with high aspirations. However, the college is also located in a very diverse and deprived neighborhood. Maria fits into this description of high aspirations and a diverse and deprived background: Her desire to become a teacher reflects an occupational aspiration at the upper end of the hierarchy. At the same time, she describes her background as working class and her ethnicity as mixed European and Indian; she became a teenage mother when she was 17. She got a second son when she was 22. As a child she used to move between her dad’s place and his family with her stepmother and stepsister and her mum’s place and her brother. While experiencing serious problems and conflicts with her stepsister her experience of living with her mum was coined by physical abuse, alcoholism and depression.

In Primary school she experienced education and books as a “safe place” and learned in that time that she “has a brain”. At the same time she did not very well at GCSE’s due to various difficult circumstances. This experience of failure at GCSE level but some confirmation outside of school or from earlier on that one’s educational abilities are alright might be a shared experience of a range of FE students.

¹⁸ Anonymised name.

The second time I spoke to Maria was when she was enrolled at a London University towards the end of her first year. I was pleased that she was doing well in her course and that she is progressing towards her qualification making it more likely that she becomes a teacher. At the same time one could feel the sacrifices and difficulties that filled her pathway. Maria shows a wide range of ambiguities that occur around aspirations.

Coherence in Maria's aspiration narrative

Aspiration narratives point to the intrinsic valued futures of the interview partners and reveal how the access to or lack of opportunities lead to specific discussion of their aspirations. Archer et.al. (2010:80) argue that “while of course young people do exercise a degree of agency in their choices and produce their aspiration narratives as active individual actors, the nature of their aspirations, and the sorts of identity discourses and resources that they are able to draw on to construct these narratives, are inevitably inflected by the social contexts in which they live.” Maria's main narrative revolves around her being a “family person”. Many of her aspiration narratives are therefore constructed around family values. The ways in which Maria discusses her experiences and opportunities in the light of those aspirations reflects her bounded agency to act towards a valuable future. As opposed to the negative connotations attached to teenage pregnancy Maria describes her early pregnancy with 17 as a positive turning point in her life in relation to some very bad experiences at home and in school.

“I was unhappy at home, with my dad, and moved back to [a middle sized city in the East of England] and suffered a lot of racial abuse from inside there, and that kind of turned into smoking Cannabis and things like that. My mum was on anti-depressives and she was drinking, she was like an alcoholic and she used to beat me quite a lot when I was younger so I didn't have like a stable home with her and she kicked me out when I was 16 and I've been living on my own ever since then and met my older son's dad, which was a wrong move, but I'm glad that I've got [Name of first son] because that's what made me stop everything, like cut those kind of people off and trying cause I didn't want him to be surrounded by those kind of things...”

Maria's narrative suggests that despite not having a stable life at home herself; she still had a strong preference for this kind of home stability considering her own children. Her negative experiences at home and in school might have even increased the desire for stability. Therefore, she is able to reflect on her experience of being in an unstable and abusive home and put this experience into context of her own values such as protecting her children from what she understands as negative influences. By constructing herself as a caring mother Maria develops what Bhatti (2003) called a “need to care” and what Reay (2003:304) described as “a desire to make a difference to the lives of others, born out of their own difficult, and sometimes painful, life experiences and knowledge”. While constructing her children as positive choices she draws an alternative life in relation to drugs, living on the street and “stupid fights” that would wait for her without her children.

“I don't regret having my kids, they are my strength, they are the ones that you know make me do this, you know, if it wasn't for them I would probably be a barmaid in another country, you know, just travelling

around, and just wasting myself, do you know what I mean, but they, they pushed towards eh, do something, that step more.”

When Maria argues that she would most likely just waste her life if she wouldn't have her children reflects a limited range of options on which to build a coherent self. Her mentioning travelling around could be part of her initial aspirations to experience the world, which she confirms in the second interview when she talks about her desire to work in other places in the world and that she would be working behind bars all over the world if she wouldn't have her children. However, it seems that those desires currently have no place in Maria's narrative. Therefore, travelling around in her current situation is coined as “wasting her time” while her postponed travelling plans once her children are provided for are described as experience of different cultures:

“...once I finished this [course], I'm gonna get my council place, do it up really nice and when they are old enough I'm going to leave that house, give that house to them, so that will always be their house so than they don't have to go through like what I had to go like hostels, temporary accommodation, I don't want them to go through that, they can have my house, and I will move abroad, that's my goal. Cause I never really travelled about, I've been to Spain, I've been to Ireland but I haven't really been anywhere else, I've been France but I'd love to go out and actually see places, experience things do things, you know, I want them to come as well but I see if they will have their lives to do they will do that on holidays and things but I want to live there. Because I've got lots of different cultures in my life as well I wanna go there and live in a little village, not where the touristy places are, I wanna go and live in a village and experience what their life is actually like and you know, figure out where I wanna be and what I wanna do from there really...”

Again Maria shows a strong sense of the “need to care” and postpones the care of the self to a future in which her kids become independent adults. Until being redefined, the narrative about caring for herself almost fully overlaps with the need to care for her children. This narrative can be understood as the creation of coherence in changing life situations (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal, 1999). While being a family person allows for a probably indefinite amount of representations, the social context and the experiences of Maria limited her representation of a coherent self to a narrative about providing for and protecting her children while other aspirations that do not fit into the narrative are excluded, postponed or sometimes even presented as undesirable options.

Steering towards a valued future

Looking at aspiration narratives highlighted that aspirations are not only about the opportunities to achieve them but that one's aspiration in itself is highly contested and appears and transforms within a social context. With those ambiguities in the background Maria has a range of opportunities and constraints in order to make her decisions in line with her valued future. The reason for Maria to come to the FE College to do an Access to Higher Education course was to become a teacher. This occupational aspiration is structured by both, the way how the instrumental benefits of being a teacher fit into her narrative of bettering herself,

protecting and providing for her children as well as her experiences and opportunities to know about this career path, to feel capable to do it and to have the means to do it.

Maria describes herself as a family person that wants to “better herself” in order for her son not to become “one of these stupid people”. Her aspiration that her son is doing well is based on certain ideas of a good mother which include her having enough time for her sons, the possibility to support them financially, herself being a role model in terms of educational achievements. In her discussion of why she wants to become a teacher Maria refers to a possible career in IT, but arguing that the unsociable hours in IT exclude it as an option even though she sees more money involved:

“IT was an option or would have been more of an option if I didn't have kids. I mean because there is a lot more money and everything in there and you can go to a lot more places whatever, very unsociable hours, but it just really wasn't an option with me having kids, I couldn't because it would be too much time away from them and it's not something I want to pursue, definitely not...”

Her decisions are in line with her narrative to care for her son. In terms of financial issues, Maria is willing to sacrifice her own needs referring to experience of living of a little amount of money.

“I want to provide for [my son] the way that I should be able to, I wasn't with his dad, his dad left like when he was a few month old and yeah, just wanted to give him everything that I could, showing that he has to put in hard work as well and I didn't want him to turn out to be one of these stupid people out on the street or anything but I wanted him to make something of himself and I've kind of, I've got a plan to try and push him in because I know teenagers and I don't want him to drift off the way that I did, so I'm gonna bribe him with some money when I start working I'm gonna open up an account for him and I'm gonna put some money aside and I figured, because I've been living off a little amount of money at the moment, it's nothing for me to put like 50 pounds each, in an account and I worked it out at the time they are 18 there will be 43 grand in their account and I will say to them if you finish your school, get your grades and you go to college and get your grades and go to university, you can have that money, if not I'll go on holiday for a year...”

Maria keeps emphasising her strong will to do what is best for her sons. With respect to the father of the children who left the family, it could be argued that Maria tries to make up for the lack of the “complete” family that would care for her son in an ideal world. Within the interviews, Maria constantly represents herself as attempting to be a good mother. The way in which Maria describes herself as a determined person shows a sense of self-worth, of being proud for completing a course despite being pregnant, but also as a proof of being a good role model for her son.

“European Computer Driving Licence, yes, I've done that, I found out I was pregnant with my youngest son early on in that but I carried it out and I finished it when I was 38 weeks pregnant, laughing, I carried it on all the way through, I had a lot of problems with my pregnancy at the beginning in the hospital I was taking my books in the hospital while I'm on the monitor, laughing, I'm not going to give this up, I'm going to do this, I'm a very determined person like that, I passed it, and I've got my certificate...”

Arguably, there is a form of rationality behind Maria's choice to become a teacher that derives from her idea of a valued future. Being able to make sense of one's occupational aspirations in line with one's valued future seems to provide a source of strength to pursue such a pathway. However, there could be other occupational rationales apart from becoming a teacher and there are other factors such as experiences, knowledge and opportunities that structure one's occupational aspiration and the way FE students are able to steer towards a valued future.

Opportunities & experiences

In order to become a role model Maria had to get qualifications. However, at first she was lacking support to go to a FE college and it was only until her son got free nursery provided by the government program that she started to go back into education. Talking about how she got into FE, Maria says she was living on her own in a city in the North East of England and had to care for her son. She then moved to London but couldn't rely on her family as a support system to look after her son. Only when she received childcare benefits by the government she was able to attend courses.

Interviewer: But then you got nursing and you did some first courses in IT, how was that?

Maria: I've got the chance to do it, I'm gonna do it and just went off and have done loads of courses, every single chance I could I was doing a course every single day that I've dropped him off at nursery I'd go to the course, do that every day...

In this example childcare benefits reflect an opportunity for Maria to go to college. However, while Maria mentions in the first interview that she would have started to go to college earlier if she would have got that support earlier in the second interview she mentions that when she lived on her own in a city in the North East of England, after being kicked out of the house by her abusive and alcoholic mother, after getting a baby and being left by the father of the child what she needed was time to find out what she wants and needs.

Besides the important role of financial means and support networks for preventing her from going to college her social network, specifically her stepmother who is an English lecturer at a FE college herself, provided her access to educational materials and books.

"I always, always loved English and always been really really good at it, my stepmom is an English lecturer in a [North London] college and when I was living with her she was doing her degree and so like there was loads of material available to me, I mean even before she came on to the scene, like when I was doing Primary school I got higher, in my English, in SATS, I got higher in English than what I did everything else, so I've always, that's something that I've always really loved and it was like an escape for me to read books and get into all of them and it was just, it was nice, my escape from all those problems, but I just, I was always good at it and I always wanted to follow it through but then I thought well I can't do it because now I've got a kid you know, I thought I was too old, and there was nobody there really to support me or to say, do you know what, you're not too old, you can go today you only need a little bit of help to do this..."

This quote does not only reflect the importance of access to books through schooling and one's social network but particularly highlights the importance of rewarding experiences in one's educational career. Rewarding experiences in everyday life from a biographical perspective may sometimes appear to be an issue of luck. However, Robeyns (2006:73) concludes that "many instances of gender discrimination in the labour market [...] are caused by the workings of subtle stereotypes."

Vulnerable values

Related to Maria's commitment of doing an Access to Higher Education course Maria mentions that her time is hugely constrained which doesn't allow her to look after her grandfather which she feels very bad about. Time constraints as well as a lack of mental capacity, at times, hinder her to engage with her mother who suffers from depressions and alcoholism. Maria describes herself as "family person" and her decision to put her children first is a source of strength and agency. At the same time, being a "family person" for her would include looking after her grandfather as well as her mother as much as she can.

"I helped my granddad out once a week because he's old and at the moment he lives in a flat and he has to go up lots of stairs and it's not very good especially when you've got lots of bags so I'll go there and help him pick up the bags and take up the bags for him, make him cups of teas, give him massages on his back, I just always make sure that he's alright and he's happy and I had to put him aside for the last couple of weeks which I feel really guilty for but I'm gonna make it up because I've got from after next week all the way up to the first of October where I can do loads of family things..."

And about her mum she says:

"...it got to a point where I said to here, I have extensions on all my part of all my things, and, I've got units that I have to do, if I don't do these I won't pass the course, I need to do it, and she kind of just pulled out, yeah, but I'm your mum, and it was like, yeah, I'm a mum too, I've got kids, this is my way of providing for my kids and trying to better myself you know, I've done everything I can for you, you know, you are the reason why I've had to take this extensions out, I need this week to myself, just this one week, than, she didn't appreciate it, she didn't like it, we had an argument, and falling out, she was like university isn't gonna make me into nothing and how I'm just wasting my time I'm a waste of space, and I just let her go off, I was just like, I can't deal with it, I can't deal with your negativity, I've got enough on my plate as it is..."

In both cases for different reasons Maria has to stick to plan to become a teacher despite those aspirations interfering with her broader aspiration narrative of being a family person. It is important to highlight that such decisions are not easy decisions, although they surely help Maria to achieve becoming a teacher, contradictions within aspirations lead to difficult decisions that make occupational aspirations very vulnerable. Within economics such decisions have been described as "opportunity costs", that is, if I chose to "better my life" and to invest a certain time into getting a qualification I can't pursue alternative activities during that time. However, Nussbaum (2011:37f) argues that capabilities have intrinsic value and therefore they can't be traded off against each other and if they are, the outcome has to be considered as tragic choices which can't be just.

Conclusion

As seen in the first part of the paper, research in social science has shown that occupational aspirations among disadvantaged young people are higher than the political discourse around lack of aspirations would suggest. However, those young people face classed, gendered and raced constraints for achieving their competitive economic aspirations. From a capabilities approach perspective this raises issues about imagining and achieving a future somebody has reason to value: With regards to imagination, a narrow discourse of recognised aspirations neglects the instrumental value for achieving a valued future which goes far beyond one's expression of occupational aspirations. Exploring the aspiration narrative of Maria has enabled to broaden thinking about aspirations as valued futures beyond occupational aspirations and showed how her narrative of being a family person positioned her in relation to the available discourse of what a good mother is. In terms of achieving a future she values, making sense of her narrative provided Maria with a source of agency and control over her life while looking at the actual opportunities and experiences showed how her decisions were framed by social structures. Highlighting the contradictions within her pathway towards achieving a valuable future also showed, despite her success in the course and her first year at university, how vulnerable those occupational aspirations are in terms of achieving them as well as in terms of making sense of their instrumental value.

Finally, such an individualised view on aspirations needs to be put into a macroeconomic perspective of social justice: Given the high levels of income inequalities in England and the political focus on competitive economic aspirations, one needs to ask whether there exists a valuable future for all; e.g. in the way of Paulo Freire's notion of dehumanisation which highlights the need of any approach to social justice to overcome the mere transformation of making the oppressed the new oppressors. Essential for this understanding is Freire's (1996:26) notion that dehumanisation affects both, the oppressed as well as the oppressors or in terms of income inequalities the poor and the rich. "Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human."

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FROM POLITICS TO PLEASURE AND PROTEST: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD IN THE POLITICAL ARENA, GIVEN THE ALLEGED GROWING “YOUTH DE-POLITISATION” TODAY?

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Abstract – Young people’s mode of political participation in recent years has been an object of concern and debate among political scientists and youth researchers. Research-based evidence has shown that many of them are not interested in politics like the youth of yesteryears. This trend has been described as “youth de-politisation” or youth political disengagement. Young people are said to now find comfort in pleasure and “protest politics” which often do not lead them to political positions in government or in governance institutions. Some researchers have thus described them as a ‘protest generation’ in contrast to the ‘political generation’ of their parents and grandparents. This could have crucial political implications in the future, more so because a large proportion of the world’s population today consists of young people as the UN has documented. This paper thus seeks to examine these political implications (which have received little attention from researchers) from two theoretical perspectives: political science and youth studies. Questions as to whether this alleged growing youth de-politisation is jeopardizing or will jeopardize future democracy and governance, especially from the point of view of competent political leadership, or if it is merely a replacement of traditional and/or institutional forms of politics by young people with new patterns of expression and participation that some researchers term ‘juventization’, is examined. The cause(s) of this de-politisation is also looked into, and suggestions about youth participation in the future are made.

Introduction

Participation in politics among young people today is allegedly taking a down turn, and thus has been a serious object of concern and debate among political scientists and youth researchers in recent decade. By politics, I mean the art of government and/or governing and the processes that lead to it. And by youth, I mean ‘young adults’ or those aged between 18 and 30.¹⁹ Political science often interprets them as the least experienced cohort in the society, while youth studies perceive them from three perspectives: a young generation, a life stage, and a social group (Kovacheva 2005:21, 24). However, the youth is not however a homogenous entity. Except in age groupings, they are virtually heterogeneous in many things: from diverse origins to social background variables. In the globalizing world of today, their heterogeneity seems to have become their strength – i.e. a unity in their diversity – in the face of incessant political and economic crises that the world has turned into. This unity in diversity essentially brings with it a fecund source of ideas, cre-

¹⁹ There are varied opinions on the age category that describes the youth. For the UN, it is 16 to 24; Africa Union: 16–29; EU Commission/Council of Europe: 13–30. Various agencies and researchers also have their own age conceptions.

ativity, innovations, actions and activism against existent traditional structures, especially in the political arena, largely perceived by them as outdated and counterproductive, hence needing *change*.

In this paper, I shall first discuss youth and politics yesterday and today, using various research-based evidences and arguments as well as some examples from some countries. Subsequently, I shall examine young people's alter participation or new patterns of political expression and participation today. Finally, in the conclusion, I shall discuss the political implications of these in the future, and suggest better ways forward for young people in the political arena.

Youth and politics yesterday and today

Until the late 1980s, the youth were active backbones of the mainstream traditional political process, especially political parties and movements, in many countries. In the 1950s through the 1980s, various nationalist vanguard movements were engineered, headed, or energized by young people usually under the aegis of 'youth wings' or youth political organizations. In Africa as well as in some parts of Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, for example, such was the case. Youth political organizations thrived vibrantly through many years after independence, and were a major source of recruitment of new young members for political parties. In this way, these parties and indirectly, governments, were continually rejuvenated, reformed and enriched demographically and ideologically. In Finland, for instance, Flack (2009) argues that 'political youth organizations' were an essential part of the Finnish political system because in addition to organizing political fairs to awaken young people's interest in politics, they also serve as recruiting centers for political parties through which future decision-makers are recruited and trained to run societal affairs in the political space.²⁰ This training is usually done through active participation in party affairs. Besides, key youth party members are also periodically appointed to key party and/or governmental positions as part of this training process (ibid). Such was also the case in Africa where a good number of young party members emerged as MPs, government ministers and/or political ambassadors, including also high officials in regional and international organizations. For example, in Nigeria, late Matthew Mbu became an MP at the age of 23 in 1952, a minister of labor at 25, high commissioner to the UK at 26, a defense and naval minister at 31, and a high representative in Washington DC at 36.²¹ In Turkey also, Lüküslü (2005) affirms that a young political generation emerged at the start of the twentieth century under the aegis of Young Turk Movement. Its main aim was a rapid transformation of the political and social systems of Turkey from the ruins of the Ottoman rule. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk eventually became the young leader of this movement, leading it to success, and eventually becoming the founding father of modern Turkey. As a result, his Kemalistic ideology was

²⁰ Cf. Marianne Flack (2009). *Political Youth Organizations: Strengthening the Voice of Youth in Politics. The Finnish Experience*. Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication, p. 3.

²¹ For more information, see for example, <http://www.thenationonline.net/2011/index.php/editorial/36293-matthew-mbu-1929-2012.html> Accessed 20.3.2012.

taken up by later generation of Turks in continuing with the modernization project. A similar youth political wing was also witnessed in Eastern Europe in the struggle against communist rule where young people played a great role in the fall of the Iron Curtain through their ‘juventized’ underground mobilizations (Kovacheva 2005). As the result, they were viewed as an active and committed group that produced new values that rejuvenate and build society (ibid).²² It was not perhaps lack of qualified old breed politicians or over-ambitious tendencies that made these youths embrace politics and political governance with vigor and intensity, but possibly their sense of duty and dedication to their countries. They did not possibly see politics as an enterprise reserved only for gerontocrats, but as an avenue to national service and development, as well as international cooperation.

Today however, researched-based evidence has argued that young people of nowadays are not interested in politics, or at least not as much as those of yesteryears. For example, youth voting during elections has dropped drastically in all regions of the world (Bergdorf 2007; Karlsson 2007; Johansson 2007; Hooghe and Stolle 2005; EC 2003). Also youth membership in political parties has declined over the years (Muxel 2001; Hooghe and Stolle 2005; Karlsson 2007; Johansson 2007). Their abstentions and/or protest votes at the same time have increased tremendously (Pleyers 2005). Even those young people who used to be politically active have now allegedly become withdrawn, and instead have invested their time and resources in nonpartisan and nonpolitical organizations and interest groups.²³

Furthermore, an international comparative study recently conducted in 38 countries showed a high rate of disinterest and lukewarm attitude of young people towards politics. Finland, for example, was “ranked at the bottom” of other countries, followed by Sweden, Belgium, Slovenia and Norway. In other words, young Finns are said to be “not interested in politics and societal issues”.²⁴ Only 27% of them support a political party, whereas the international average is 48%. Also, only 12% plans to join a political party in the future (as adults) while the international average is 27%. But majority (85%) however plans to vote in the future. Except this, many “are markedly more interested in organized leisure activities, such as sports and athletic clubs” (ibid) than in political activities. These findings corroborate the European Social Survey (2006) which showed similar trends around Europe. The survey argues that many young Europeans aged 16-29 “show a low interest in politics”. Only 6% declared interest. Interest is said however to increase with age: 36% of people aged 30 and above was “quite interested in politics” in contrast to those below the age range. Gender difference also plays a part. Young men seem more interested in politics than young women. But overall, the level of interest was bleak. 62% of young men and 70% of young women are found to be hardly interested in politics. The survey researchers thus conclude that the “European youth is seemingly still distant from politics” (ibid).

²² See also Mahler (1983) and Mitev (1982)

²³ Cf. Timothy Bergdorf (2007). *Untapped Resources: Problems and Possibilities Pertaining to Meaningful Youth Participation*. Master’s Thesis. Göteborg: Goteborg Universitet. p. 4.

²⁴ Cf. “International study of 38 countries: Civic knowledge of Finnish young people at top level”, <http://www.alphagalileo.org/ViewItem.aspx?ItemId=79994&CultureCode=en> Accessed 17.8.2010.

In Africa, a similar trend is also evident. A local poll carried out in southeastern Nigeria in 2009, for example, showed that 48.3% of young people belong to a political party. But out of this figure, only 20.3% said they are active in politics,²⁵ which implies that more than half (i.e. 28%) is passive (Ndukwe 2011). Like young Europeans, many of them are more interested in leisure and pleasure activities as well as in nonpolitical organizations than in the political (ibid). This growing phenomenon has been interpreted as youth depoliticisation (Vrcan 2002), youth political disengagement (Norris 2003), youth disenfranchisement with the current political order (Adsett 2003), and youth disillusionment with traditional political structures, institutions and actors, which has consequently led to a decline in political capital, and the rise of a ‘protest generation’ in contrast to the ‘political generation’ of their parents and grandparents (Pleyers 2005). Overall, it is now rare to see any political figure, including government ministers and international governance officials, within or below the age of 30.

Opinions have varied among researchers on why this is so. Some have attributed it to nature. For instance, Kuhar (2005) argues that life-cycle theories of political interest maintain that the relationship between age and interest in politics is curvilinear in nature. In other words, that as people age, their interest in politics allegedly grows. Interestingly, a study of voter turnout in Nigeria in 2007 conducted by Michael Bratton of Michigan State University, USA, also argues in similar manner, pointing out that “older people are significantly more likely to vote than youngsters”.²⁶ Bratton did not give us any reason for this however, but a similar study conducted in South Africa by Michael Sachs, appears to confirm that age could play a role in political interest and participation. Sachs argues that voter turnout amongst the youngest category of South Africans increases as they approach middle age, and then reaches highest level (about 93%) as they approach 60 and 69 years old, but slightly declines as they grow much older.²⁷ He further argues that this is because interest and participation in politics naturally require an acquisition of certain social resources such as political knowledge, skills, proper integration in one’s community, familiarity with parties and candidates, and good knowledge of the electoral process, which older people appear to have more and better than young people.

On the other hand, Lagos & Rose (2007) in their multi-continental survey argue that albeit older people might be more likely to vote than young people, the reason is not really of age but some other factors, like education and work. In other words, that young people are often in motion, moving between education and work and unconsciously creating technical obstacles to active politics. They also argue that when it comes to politics, young people are usually “more idealistic in their goals and thus less loyal to established tradi-

²⁵ See Soren Okocha’s (2009) survey in Nigeria, “How do you socialize politically?” cited in Thaddeus Ndukwe (2011). *Political Godfathers in Nigeria. A Study of Anambra State, 1999-2006*. Master’s thesis. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä. p. 33.

²⁶ See Michael Bratton (2008). “Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns”. *Afrobarometer Working Papers* No.99 (June): p. 16.

²⁷ Michael Sachs (2006). “Youth and Politics in Democratic Order”, http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-96209-201-1-do_topic.html Accessed 8/4/2010.

tions”²⁸ than adults. This makes them record a “lower interest in politics (2%)” and “lowest satisfaction with democracy (1%)”²⁹ than adults.

However, Casciani (2002) argues that the reason is neither age nor education and work, but the frustration that young people experience with traditional politics, political institutions, political actors and authorities who they see as deceptive, cold and unresponsive. He points out that young people often want effective and ‘interesting politics’. This argument is confirmed by the opinions of some young people in an interview. They emphasize that: ‘politics is very boring’; ‘politicians are dangerous’; ‘they are liars and dubious’; ‘politics is a do-or-die affair’, ‘it is an avenue for embezzling public fund’; ‘it is an expensive venture’; ‘it is not an honorable profession’, ‘it belongs to old people’.³⁰ These allegations are also further confirmed by the findings of the National Centre for Social Research, Belfast, which argues that the biggest barrier to the Irish youth political engagement, for example, is politicians’ ambiguous attitude to politics and governance. Most Irish young people, it says, “view politicians in a negative light, perceiving them as remote, untrustworthy, self-interested and unrepresentative of young people”.³¹ Pleyers (2005) also adds that this is likely because young people today are “profoundly marked by our era” – an era that is beset with political and economic crises that have made them orphans of the twentieth century ideologies which promised them brighter tomorrow but have failed. This disappointment, he argues, is further reinforced by the structural weaknesses in our representative democracies that has led to the loss of governability³² in local and global affairs – a phenomenon that has also apparently grown with globalization and consequently led to the widening gap between political institutions and young citizens (See also Norris 2003; Beck 1997; Touraine 1999).

On a different note, Hooghe and Stolle (2005) attribute youth de-politization to change of gear in political parties which have stopped investing money and resources on youth political organizations to attract, recruit and retain young members as they used to do before. Instead, in the face of growing media-dominated political landscape, they now delegate much of their work to the media, professional bodies and specialized forums, including also social and religious groups, to play much of those roles traditionally meant for young people in mainstream party politics. Hooghe and Stolle thus conclude that instead of arguing or alleging that young people are no more interested in politics, we should rather ask: are political parties still interested in young people? This argument also finds validity in the claims of some young people that they indeed have active interest in politics but are often not recognized or encouraged by political parties either in party affairs or in vying for electoral positions, or in being appointed to political positions in

²⁸ Cf. <http://archive.idea.int/df/99df/daniela-int3.html> Accessed 17.8.2011

²⁹ See <http://archive.idea.int/df/99df/figur1.html> Accessed 17.8.2011

³⁰ Fieldwork in Nigeria and Europe, 2010

³¹ National Centre for Social Research (2000). “Young people’s politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds”. England, YPS. See also Smyth et al. (2004). “The Impact of Political Conflict on children in Northern Ireland”. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research. In Africa, Asia and Latin America also, a similar perception of politicians and political institutions also exists.

³² This argument has also been postulated by Crozier et al. (1975)

government. Instead, they are often relegated to the political background and used only for campaign rallies and menial errands (Ndukwe 2011; Luksulu 2005).

New ways of participating, or alter participation

Perhaps, in the face of all of the above situation, the youth now resort to different patterns of political expression and participation, or alter participation, which researchers summarize as political “juventization” (Kovacheva 2005), “politics of the new generation” (Mencin Čeplak 2002), or alter-globalization activism (Pleyers 2005) where young minds deliberate on change and innovation to create a (new) path for the future outside of traditional structures. This “politics of the new generation” mainly includes (but is not limited to) protests, demonstrations, counter summits & seminars, sit-ins, strikes and boycotts merged with youthful music, arts, sports, picnics and pleasure, and coordinated mainly through text-messaging, net-posting, chatting and net-surfing. Text-messaging and net-chatting particularly provide great avenues for essential quick discussions and knowledge-sharing, sensitization and mobilization for protests and other ad-hoc political activities. I call this digital process *e-juventization*. Thanks to the evolution and advancement of digital technology. It also played a great part in the mobilization and success of the Arab Spring because all relevant information was disseminated through the process (especially through text-messaging and facebook) in a timely and effective manner. From the point of view of political socialization also, this alter participation serves as a platform for networking and multicultural exchanges (Pleyers 2005) where young people socialize with new visions of politics and ideologies different from those of their forebears as well as their parents’ and grandparents’. Pleyers also argues that in this alter-participation, young people are participating in the democratic project through freedom of speech and expression, especially because their main primary aim is to provide counter power logic to existing power logic (ibid) aimed at initiating a new political order in a fast globalizing world.

Be that as it may, alter participation is however said to be creating frictions and contradictions between the “old” and “new” generation, with the latter questioning the authority of the former upon whom the traditional system has for long been laid (Georgeon 2004). In *Untapped Resources: Problems and Possibilities Pertaining to Meaningful Youth Participation*, Bergdorf (2007) argues that such a questioning is very necessary since the world has changed and is still changing, yet our political system and its mode of participation has remained the same for more than a century. To better meet the demands of a true democratic society then, as well as incorporate all voices in the process of political governance, he argues that new methods and mechanisms of expression and participation must be developed. These mechanisms and methods are the alter-participation techniques and processes already mentioned, and which have made it possible for young people to participate in the political space without fear or favor. Their ‘protest politics’, for example, while not new in history, has taken a new dimension today in the sense that it is characterized by astute coordination, flexibility, informality, pleasure and excitement (Wieviorka 1998) that are not commonly seen in main-

stream politics. This is part of juvenitization - which is basically conceived as a pro-active and problem-solving youth approach in social transformation of societies³³ – and which is gradually leading to political transformation. The Arab Spring, for instance, is a case in point. Energized by their hope for a better future, the Arab youth alter participation took the form of demonstrations, shouts, songs, gestures (including placard-carrying) and political speeches, where a combination of rhetoric and lyrics were used to send their messages to those they are meant for. The same was also applicable during the 2010 Europe-wide protests³⁴ (including separate ones in Spain³⁵ and Greece respectively), the 2011 British Riot, the 2011 Israeli nationwide protests, the 2011 youth protests in Senegal, the 2011 Algerian protests, mass demonstrations in the Philippines, China, South Korea and the US respectively, as well as the Nigerian week-long strong protests in January 2012 and a similar one in Indonesia in March 2012, and many others. And in all of these protests, the main motivation was a very deep sense of alienation from, and/or neglect in, the process of political and economic governance.

Theoretically, some youth researchers have perceived alter participation from a youth bulge perspective, arguing that it came into being because of huge young population in many countries today. But, as Gunnar Heinsohn – the proponent of youth bulge theory – clarified recently, a youth bulge is not just about *huge* young population, but about huge young *male* population. He argues that a youth bulge really occurs only when about “thirty to forty percent of a nation's young *males*... between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine” are involved in political and/or social uprising and violence; and that “even if these young men are well nourished and have good housing and education”, a youth bulge could still occur when “their numbers grow much faster than the economy can provide”; more so, because “they (would have) become frustrated, angry, and violent” for lack of jobs or other alternative good means of livelihood, and thus are ready to be “enlisted quite easily into radical groups and terror organizations”³⁶ against governments and/or governance institutions. The emphasis here then is on young *males*, not on all young people, which makes this theory unable to explain alter participation (which includes both male and *female*) in a comprehensive sense. The main emphasis in alter participation is not on *gender* but on *common deprivation* and *agitation*. From this perspective, youth bulge theory cannot therefore properly apply.

Furthermore, recent developments in democratic theory have tended to link the rise of alter participation to the sociological theory of post-materialism (Kovacheva 2005). The post-materialist hypothesis has

³³ Cf. http://youth-egames.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=97 Accessed 24.3.2012. See also Lonnie R. Sherrod, *Youth activism: an international encyclopedia*. ebook, p. 223.

³⁴ See David Brunnstrom (2010). “Tens of thousands protest against austerity moves (in Europe)”. *Reuters*. 29 September. This protest was held in almost all major EU cities, including Athens, Paris, London, Madrid, Lisbon, Dublin, Rome, Riga, Warsaw, Nicosia, Bucharest, Prague, Vilnius, Belgrade, and Brussels

³⁵ Especially at the Galician region against unpopular university reforms and Prestige oil spillage off the coast of Galicia.

³⁶ See interview with Gunnar Heinsohn by Clark Whelton on “A Demographic Theory of war: population, power and ‘the slightly weird’ ideas of Gunnar Heinsohn”, 5th October, 2007, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/014/185jeplm.asp> Accessed 9.4.2012.

tended to link changing dimensions of political participation to a socio-cultural shift in the society (ibid). Its trends and values have also been found to involve less support for authority and traditional institutions (Blanch 2005). However, Ronald Inglehart (2008, 1997)³⁷ argues that the trends are much more visible in the post-industrial (affluent) societies than in industrial and pre-industrial ones. This indicates, he says, that post-industrial societies have switched from materialist values such as economic and physical security to post-materialist values such as individual autonomy, self-expression, human rights, individual improvement, personal freedom, citizen input in government decisions, and the ideal of a society based on humanism among others. He further alleges that in these societies therefore, young people seem more likely to embrace these post-materialist values faster than adults. But he calls this tendency a ‘silent revolution’ and a sign of intergenerational *value* change³⁸ rather than something more radical. Nonetheless, his emphasis is mainly on developed nations, and this seems to imply that people in developing nations are not likely to clamor for such humanistic values as *self-expression, citizen input in government decisions, personal freedom, and human rights* since their societies are not yet post-industrial. But recent events, especially the Arab Spring and others, have shown the contrary – that is to say that they clamor for such values. This implies that a society does not need to be post-industrial or affluent in order to long for the humanistic values necessary for personal fulfillment. Such values are desiderata for every human existence. In the foregoing therefore, we may argue that the post-materialist theory fails to explain fully the phenomenon of alter-participation today.

I therefore propose that the *globalizing youth theory* can explain it fully. This theory postulates that the 21st century youth is a globalizing generation, not a ‘protest generation’ as has been alleged. It argues that this globalizing generation has the key trappings or characteristics of being increasingly outgoing, audacious, fearless, vocal, collectivist, mundane technology-savvy³⁹, and resilient. Even though it is collectivist in action (through astute mobilization), it also maintains an individual autonomy in outlook. This autonomy is not at all ‘a retreat to the private sphere’ (Pleyers 2005:133), but the basis for new forms of commitment and new cultures of participation. Thus, in their collectivist characteristics, they are easily connected by events around the world through mundane technologies and are united in their quest and clamor for better and improved livelihood for all regardless of countries of origin and levels of development. They believe that better livelihood can be made possible through effective political governance since politics is the center around which every other sphere of human society revolves. The inability of governments and governance institutions to live up to this expectation today has thus continued to ignite their anger and fuel sensitization and mobilization in varied forms such as vibrant demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and abstentions from voting and other sundry political activities. Pleyers (2005) could therefore be right in his argument that the youth of today are “profoundly marked by our era” – an era that is beset with political and economic crises that have made them orphans of the twentieth century ideologies that promised them brighter to-

³⁷ Inglehart is credited with developing this sociological theory of post-materialism in the 1970s.

³⁸ See Inglehart, Ronald (1971) “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies. *American Political Science Review* 65, 4: 991–1017.

³⁹ Mundane technology includes mobile phone, texting, internet, social media such as facebook, twitter, etc.

morrow but have failed. With their present and future life under threat, and their anger high, the globalizing youth are therefore bent in securing their future from traditional structures. In *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Della Porta and Tarrow (2004) examine the communication and interaction of non-state actors (such as the youth) who operate spontaneously, inspired by grievances against governments and governance institutions, and facilitated by improved communication technology, advanced means of transport and less-hassle travels across borders, and discovered that it has advanced rapidly because these non-state actors are autonomous from the state and therefore could oppose government and institutional policies with intensity and vigor, making their actions have profound effects on global governance, democracy and development itself.

Notwithstanding, we might need to ask a crucial question: can alter-participation eventually help the youth achieve a tangible and lasting solution to their aspirations, especially in the political arena? Has their 'protest politics', for example, had any tangible impact on governments and institutions against whom they are directed to? In many instances, this does not seem to be the case. In Spain's Galicia, for example, Blanch (2005) tells us that large youth-filled protests, demonstrations, 'boycotts, lock-ins, and graffiti' against the government's severe university reforms, oil spillage off the Galician coast and the Iraq war endorsement did not yield any significant result, and neither did it even deter the ruling party then from winning an incoming municipal elections despite large anti-campaigns in this regard. No doubt, this indicates an essential loophole in alter participation. Kovacheva (2005) argues that if young people protest on specific issues but at the end do not have any serious impact on governments and/or governance institutions, this could contribute further to their anger, disaffection and further alienation from politics and other civic engagements. Sometimes, the youth even get themselves in trouble in such protests as it, for example, happened after the 2011 British Riot when many young people were arrested and charged to court for public disorder. Although the Arab Spring was deemed quite successful by many due to change of regimes, there is a single reason however why it should probably not be totally deemed so. Tanter and Midlarsky (1967) argue that a successful revolution occurs only when, as a result of a challenge to the governmental elite, the insurgents are able to occupy principal roles within the structure of political authority. In this regard, we may ask: did the Arab youths occupy principal roles within the structure of political authority after ousting the old regimes? Were they incorporated in the new regimes? Was it not the same old brigade politicians and/or soldiers – some of whom are allies or estranged allies of the ousted regimes - who occupied those roles and are still holding sway? Has there been any significant change in what the youth had agitated for? Has any of their grievances been addressed? Shadi Hamid (2012) argues in his "Promise of Arab Spring eluding Egypt?" that many Egyptians are now disillusioned because the promises of better political and economic governance upon which the revolution was made have now eluded many. He further asserts that currently, some old autocrats have "repackaged themselves as newly believing democrats" in the Egyptian political space⁴⁰ while giving no room to "the children of the revolution" to take part beyond being wooed

⁴⁰ Cf. http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/29/opinion/hamid-egypt/index.html?iid=article_sidebar
Accessed 30.5.2012

to support their (i.e. the autocrats') candidacies.⁴¹ In this circumstance, how then could the youth learn the rubrics of governance and leadership? How could they be part of decision/policy-making? Would they continue to be at the political periphery and the fringe of governance? Pääkönen (2012) argues that the distribution of power and the structures of the society do not often correspond with the demography, with the youth often at a disadvantage. The only success that can be attributed to the Arab Spring is the evolving power, determination, coordination, boldness and resilience of young people who made it happen. Yet, because they are still relegated to the background; still at the political periphery, still at the fringe of governance from where they launched their revolutions in the first place, something more tangible and durable would need to be done.

Conclusion: What can be done?

If young people are pushed to the political periphery and/or fringe of governance advertently or inadvertently, or they themselves willingly choose to be there for any reason(s), it would have serious political implication for the future. Basically, it portends danger for the possibility of rejuvenating governance, democracy and development around the world. It also entails serious security problem. With their growing political disenfranchisement, there is the possibility that when the present crop of political leaders retire and/or die, for example, there could be a yawning political leadership *competence vacuum* due to potential lack of competent young hands to take over the mantle of political leadership and governance. A situation like this could trigger more power thuggery, more coup d'états, resulting in political anarchy and leading to all manner of insurgencies. Such a situation would in turn affect, strain and jeopardize national developments, transnational relations and international security, and could lead to regional and/or global war(s) that could be more complex and devastating than previous wars. Thanks in part also to all manner of nuclear weapons being developed today. Another effect could be the crumbling of the political, social and moral fabrics of the society. Life in itself would fall apart since the center of society can no longer hold. All kinds of abhorrent crimes would surface and seek legal recognition. Survival of the fittest would become the rule of the day. These anomalies could last for decades if not centuries, and would need strong moral and political will and power to redress and rebuild.

In a situation like this, alter participation might go into oblivion, unable to checkmate the occurrences. We cannot therefore deem it a replacement of, or an alternative to, traditional and/or institutional forms of politics; more so, because its pattern of political expression and activism are at the *horizontal* level rather than *vertical*. In other words, it can neither lead to competent political leadership nor the process of political (and economic) governance for that matter. Even though young people today seem to understand that a better way to influence substantial change in the society is through influencing political structures, because

⁴¹ See Yolande Knell, "Egypt candidates hope to woo children of the revolution". *BBC News*, Cairo, 28 May 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18243317> Accessed 28.5.2012

as already pointed out, politics is the center around which every other sphere of the society revolves, they however seem not to understand yet that this cannot happen, at least not substantially and sustainably, if their manner of approach (or counter power logic) remains horizontal – that is, mainly based on protests and demonstrations and other social forms, and not on the *vertical* (i.e. on direct political involvement) which leads to political leadership, decision/policy-making and governance process. It is in fact important to ask here if the best way to influence governance is by being part of decision/policy-making or decision/policy-protesting; the mainstream or the periphery; protesting from inside or outside?

Azikiwe (1973) argues that democracy and politics cannot develop well or be better transformed if young people shy away from *mainstream* politics. By mainstream, he does not strictly mean the *traditional* but rather *full involvement* in *realpolitik* in whatever legitimate means. And it does not matter if this is done through traditional or non-traditional method/approach so long as the approach is or can be legitimate enough to bring people to government and/or political decision-making process. Such a political involvement could stimulate young people at an early stage to learn relevant political skills such as negotiation, decision/policy-making, conflict resolution (YIMD 2007) as well as broad diplomatic power play abilities. It will also stimulate attention for youth issues and create an incentive environment for a long-term societal development. In addition, it could also make young people to no more, or rarely, use *violent* means to show their disguests in the society since they are now incorporated tangibly in societal governance and must have learned the aforementioned political skills which are also necessary for good inter-human relations (ibid).

Therefore, if alter participation can be adjusted from horizontal to vertical, it would achieve better and long-lasting results in the future than it is currently. In other words, rather than always dwell on protests and demonstrations, the youth should aim at getting fully involved in *realpolitik*. However, since some of them have argued that they indeed have great interest in politics but are always discriminated against in ‘adult’ political parties by party officials who see them as mere instruments for campaign rallies and menial errands (Ndukwe 2011; Luksulu 2005), formation of their own political parties seems the best way out. With their own parties formed and registered, they should field their own candidates during elections and vie for any electoral positions that they are eligible for. With their strong numerical strength,⁴² they could win any electoral positions they set their eyes on. Shying away from *realpolitik*/mainstream politics, or being denied the chance to do so by anybody or institution therefore, would amount to gross ‘democratic deficit’ as Ayco (2008) has, for example, argued.⁴³ Ayco makes it clear that the youth should be given electoral opportunities since it is their patriotic and moral duty to run for political positions aimed at building a better society for all. Bergdorf (2007) also points out that they must now be seen as *partners*, no longer as *problems*,

⁴² The Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has in its *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, argued that people 24 years old or younger make up almost half of the world’s 7 billion population, and that their percentage in some developing countries is even already at its peak.

⁴³ By democratic deficit, Ayco means the lack of a concrete voice of a people or group in the political/democratic governance. For more information, see Ramon T. Ayco (2008). “Youth Participation in Local Governance”, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12914338/Youth-Participation-in-Governance> Accessed 16.5.2011

of society, because they also possess the unique *characteristics* and *abilities* that could be utilized for the elevation (and rejuvenation) of society within the realm of political governance.

Interestingly, some political leaders seem to have recognized these characteristics and abilities. For instance, in the 17th ordinary session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State, President Jonathan of Nigeria told his counterparts that there is “*the need for greater integration of the youth in political dialogue and development initiatives* on the (African) continent”.⁴⁴ Efforts must therefore be scaled-up, he says, “towards the Pan-African Youth Union and encourage the participation of African youths in national and continental dialogue” in this regard because not only are they future leaders, they are also viable agents for peace, stability and prosperity in the world of today (ibid).

To concretely help the youth get involved in *vertical* political process then, I suggest the following key steps (in addition also to the ones already discussed above):

1. There should be a legalized quota (about 25%) for young people in all electoral positions (including political appointments at all levels of government) in all countries as well as global governance institutions, just as there are similar quotas currently for women in line with the *Beijing Affirmative Action* for women (1995).⁴⁵ In line with this *Affirmative Action*, women are usually given priority in certain vacancies in governments, regional and international organizations, like in the following words: ‘Women are encouraged to apply, and where women and men have equal qualifications, women would be preferred’. Such a priority could also be given to young people, especially in the wake of increasing youth unemployment today and its attendant restiveness. For example, a vacancy advert in governments, regional and international organizations could also read: ‘Young people are encouraged to apply. Where young people and (older) adults have equal qualifications, young people would be preferred’. John Dewey (1916) calls them ‘the nucleus of the society’,⁴⁶ that hold the key to the continuous existence of present and future societies.
2. A law would need to be passed by national parliaments to make election campaigns less expensive generally so that youth political parties can compete on level-playing ground with ‘adult’ political parties, unencumbered financially. Where such a decree could not be made, governments could map out Youth Campaign Fund (as part of its Election Fund) to support the electioneering of youth electoral contestants. Such a thing was, for example, done for women electoral aspirants of

⁴⁴ Juliana Taiwo (2011) “Youths our greatest assets, Jonathan tells African leaders”. *The Sun* newspaper, Abuja, July 3.

⁴⁵ This *Affirmative Action* argues that women should be given equal treatment with men (and in some cases even priority) in all spheres of society. Cf. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fpexcerpt.htm> 20.5.2012.

⁴⁶ See John Dewey (1916). *Democracy and Education*, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DewDemo.html> Accessed 20.2.2009.

all political parties in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections by the federal government. A total of N100 million (c. US\$900,000) was disbursed to all of them to aid their electioneering.⁴⁷

I have strong belief that if the above suggestions are adopted and implemented, the possibility of young people's active participation in political governance would be enhanced, and the future of competent political leadership guaranteed. Steve Sharp⁴⁸ argues that what we often see among young people today is that if they are *involved* in decision-making and are listened to, their overall sense of participation in the society improves even more rapidly and broadly.

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⁴⁷ See Nkechi Onyedika & Laolu Adeyemi (2011) "Govt Gives 100m To Female Candidates". *The Guardian*, Abuja, 26 March. The People's Democratic Party (the ruling party) also let their female candidates to obtain nomination forms (which usually cost between the equivalent of \$500 – \$10,000, depending on which electoral position) free of charge. A similar thing can be done for those youths who choose to remain with 'adult' political parties.

⁴⁸ Cited in See Casciani, Dominic (2002) "Youth wants interesting politics", http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2493485.stm Accessed 23.8.2011

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FINNISH YOUTH WITH SOMALI BACKGROUND PERFORMING THEIR EXPERIENCES AND BELONGINGS

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Abstract – In this article I will discuss my current art-based participatory research project and share some of the ideas that the material produced by the contributing youth have brought up when I have been analyzing their products. I will argue that participatory research methods help researchers to be involved within the transformative process that youth create when negotiating their spaces and belongings. This provides means to understand the perspectives of youth and their future horizons. Projects that offer a possibility for youth to produce research material themselves, also gives them an opportunity to be active citizens and agents of their own concerns. I have collected my data in the workshops that I have organized together with photographers and art educators in several youth centers and schools in Helsinki during 2010–2012. In these workshops youth have been creating material such as photos, videos and recordings. Based on the material we have produced and will producer productions and exhibitions. In this piece of writing I will focus on the workshops conducted in the Youth’s Multicultural Living room Youth Centre in Helsinki, mainly in 2009–2010, and the productions based on the material made during the workshops. The exhibition *My Helsinki* which included photos and a documentary film *Minun Helsinkini/My Helsinki/Magaaladeydii Helsinki* made by several young men with Somali background was shown for the first time in Library 10 in central Helsinki 21.12.2010–21.1.2011 and in many other venues during 2010–2013. In 2011 we produced a radio program entitled *Mis on mun tila?* (Where is my space?) and a book *Mun stadi* (My town) that was published in summer 2012.

Introduction and Background

My research project *A Finn, a Foreigner or a Transnational Hip-hopper? Participatory Art-Based Research on the Identification Negotiations and Belongings of the Second Generation Finnish Immigrant Youth* deals with the themes of cultural in-between spaces of the second generation Finnish immigrants that I have approached before from various perspectives. My aim is also to examine how narrative and performative methods can be used to create wider understanding of diverse contemporary social and aesthetic realities and transnational spaces. (Oikarinen-Jabai 2008, 2011) When youth create productions themselves they act as active members of society, take part in producing popular knowledge and are able to reach other community members and policymakers (cf. Wang 2004 & all). Also, as co-researchers youth can be planners of their own future horizons.

In my study the concepts *diasporic space* and *horizon* are the central theoretical tools. Bill Ashcroft notes that while in the postcolonial world there is no “outside” from which to view cultural relationships, there is a conceptual horizon beyond them within which they can be viewed. Everyday actions as performed in diasporic and hybrid spheres allow people to create “the location of an experience and an identity that is always pushing beyond itself.” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 193)

The landscape created in the context of performative participatory research reveals many kinds of practices of differentiation, as well as a variety of negotiations of identification, and also how these are reconstructed. When embodied and expressed by visual and textual narratives, these discourses open the liminal ‘potential space’ in-between objective and subjective reality experienced by the informant, thus enabling him/her to deal with his/her identity configurations (cf. Ballengee-Morris, Stuhr 2001; O’Neill 2008; Oikarinen-Jabai 2011). This also lends support to considerations of citizenship and Finnishness from new perspectives. For example, when in the documentary one of the young men plays with the derogative namings connected to race and ethnic backgrounds, he makes the viewers realize how categorising and ridiculous these kinds of stereotyping labels are. Another participant deals with his identifications by taking numerous self-portraits where he expresses his different belongings and dreams. In the book one of the one of the young men says:

Even though I don't see myself as a Finn, this is my home country or something in-between. I have a lot of friends here. I went to school here and I grew up here. I get along in Finland. After school I would like to see the world a bit, but I think I'll stay here. I'm used to living here. My friends are also from all parts of the world, but I often speak Finnish to them. I guess we are some kind of a new generation of Finns and each one also slightly something else. (Mun stadi 2012, 5)

Material and Methods

In the workshops the participants receive tools to negotiate with their belongings when they act as co-researchers by producing the material that will be – besides other documentation and observations collected during the field work – an important part of my research data and research reporting. In this way the research participants are part of theory and methodology development of intervention approaches that community researchers across multiple fields embed in their studies. (Scencul & Trickett 2009)

The workshops conducted in Youth’s Multicultural Living Room were organised by photographer Sami Sallinen and I during the autumn 2009 and in 2010. After the introductory course the youngsters – most of who were of Somali background – could borrow cameras to video and photograph their everyday lives. During the spring, summer and autumn 2010 we gathered regularly and had workshops in video shooting, editing and photography. As part of the process the participants also interviewed each other and friends.

In December 2010 – January 2011 we installed the photo/video exhibition *My Helsinki* in the Music Library situated in the City Centre of Helsinki. The exhibition was presented again 27.2.–13.3.2012 at Stoa, the Cultural Centre of Eastern Helsinki and 1.4.–30.4.2012 at the Finnish Museum of Photography as part of the Young Helsinki exhibition (part of the Urban Helsinki 2012 Photography Festival) This exhibition was organized together with the Finnish Museum of Photography, several art teachers, photographers and youth from different parts of Helsinki. Right now the exhibition is on view at the *Institute of Migration*, including photos and an installation by a young Somali woman. The documentary film *Minun Helsinkiäni/My Helsinki/Magaaladeydi Helsinki* has been screened in various festivals and seminars.

In spring 2011 we produced a radio program *Mis on mun tila?* (Where is my space?) based on interviews and recordings made by young male participants during the project. In addition, I interviewed a female participant for the programme. In 2012 the photo book *Mun stadi* (*My city*), based on the stories and photos of seven young men with a Somali background, was published.



Figure 1. The poster promoting the exhibition *My Helsinki* in Stoa, the Cultural Centre of Eastern Helsinki.

I think in the research context the narratives based on different genres and styles and different ways of knowing are useful if we want to perceive and describe the intersecting in-between spaces and embodied landscapes where the participants encounter (cf. Dunlop 1999). When the research objects participate in the research process and generate the results, it helps in producing 'unfinished knowledge' (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The perspective of unfinished knowledge ruptures the idea of a narrative as a monolith, thereby also opening up fresh standpoints to the composition and interpretation of the stories. This enables the dynamic expression of opinions, acting and interaction of research participants, researcher and audience in the different phases of the work course (Denzin 2003; Finley 2005).

In this kind of dialogue local and global practices and thoughts connected to cultural values can be assessed (cf. Oikarinen-Jabai 2011). The concept of unfinished knowledge makes it also possible to examine the multiple cartographies of diaspora and follow the path of scholars who have dealt with embodied hybrid spaces by using various approaches (cf. Anzaldúa 1987; Behar 1995; Bhabha 1996; Canclini 1995; Soja 1996; Trinh 1991).

Visual narratives, photography and films have played an important role when creating colonial relationships and national images (Ajagan-Lester 2000, 241; Araeen 2002; Landau 2002). On the other hand, visual images and pictures also offer an empowering tool for the subjugated people and minorities (Doy 2000, 156; Hall 1997; Oikarinen-Jabai 2008, 95; Sawyer 2000, 184-185). Bell hooks notes that photographs may help to reclaim and renew one's life-affirming bonds. By using images we can connect ourselves to our empowering memories that enable us to construct fresh identities and images of ourselves that transcend the oppressing ones (hooks 1995, 64).

Besides giving to the participants certain tools for re-representation of the subordinating images and using their own know-how, performative and visual narratives can widen our ideas about aesthetic styles in general, as well as teach participants and the audience how to employ them as self-expression. Methods that combine scientific, popular and local experiences and knowledge are also likely to help in developing cross-disciplinary emancipatory research and practices. (Denzin 2003; Oikarinen-Jabai 2011.)

In our project the material that is produced also gives an important perspective to Finnish discussions about migration and immigrants that I often find patronising and which bypass the subjective experiences of the immigrants themselves. Audio-visual methods allow participants to empower the research space and give them tools to act as co-researchers. When they take part in the productions that emerge from the project they become the main actors of the research. In our project the productions are created in a way that will interest the wider public, not only the academics and authorities. In this way the published material helps in creating the reflexive discourses within the members of the researched groups and between the "majority" and minorities.



Figure 2. From the book *Mun Stadi*, page 3.

*It was at the Women's Clinic that I was born
I and my twin brother
then we used to hang out in Kannelmäki
I was the wild one*

Mun stadi 2012, 3.

Results

Maggie O'Neill argues that the participatory process helps the participants to gain a voice and claim a personal and political space against the wider socio-political context. It offers a 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1971) between ethnography and arts practice, a potential/dialogic space where transformative possibilities and visual and textual products can emerge through the 'subject-reflexive feeling' (Witkin, 1974, O'Neill 2009, 298). I think this happened in the workshops and during the time we have been processing the material. Overall the work that we have been doing together with the young people has had an empowering effect and they have gained more tools to deal with the possible negative attitudes and obstacles that they meet in the society. In the radio program the female participant expressed her concern for everybody in the Finnish Somali community and other immigrant communities:

Personally I have thought for some time that it should not be this way. That these children and youth should not be all the time looking for their own place, but they should make their own place...so that they would feel that they belong to somewhere... Because in the end we don't have a place almost anywhere. (Where is my space? 2011)

When presenting their everyday life the youth could show their connections to various sides of Helsinki and they could be proud of their belongings to different “racial”, “ethnic” and local communities. When watching the video and listening to the radio programme as well as when getting feedback from others, they noticed that when sharing the experiences of racism and differentiation they had spoken about the issues that many people in Finland share with them. In the guest book of the exhibition one of the visitors commented: *“You showed the Bright side of Helsinki! It is always gonna be Our Helsinki! Photos that bring a smile.”*

Ambivalence is a central idea that one can come across when analysing the narratives of the participants. They seem to share the same reality as most Finnish youngsters. On the other hand, the participants are concerned about their cultural and “racial” backgrounds and “difference”. They are forced to see themselves from the point of view of the third party. They are at the same time responsible for their own bodies, for their race and ancestors. (Fanon 1986, 112.) Thus, simultaneously, these youth are sharing the same reality as their Finnish fellows. To cope with this reality they look for different strategies even though sometimes it can feel that it will take time before the things are going to change as one of the participants supposed in the book:

*In the future there will probably be more different kinds of people also in Finland
but not in our time
now we have to live under a rock and cross our fingers
that soon here are more people here
and people with many different backgrounds everywhere in the society*

Mun Stadi 2012, 61.



Figure 3. Picture taken by Jabril Aka Dice in Suomenlinna, a fortress island in front of Helsinki.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is noticeable that the second generation Finnish immigrants participating in the workshops felt frustrated because they were persistently counted as immigrants or foreigners. Most of them thought that they are more familiar with Finnish society than with living in the home country of their parents. They have their memories, friends and close relatives in Finland. Those who had visited Somalia said that they did not feel themselves as natives there either. Still, when made to choose they all identified themselves as Somali, not Finnish, even though they have Finnish passports and citizenship. On the other hand they said that if they are abroad and asked where they come from, they usually introduce themselves initially as Finns. (Oikarinen-Jabai 2010)

According to Bill Ashcroft, boundary marking is central to (post)colonial relationships, ranging from the most concrete material forms of spatial enclosure to the more abstract forms of Western thinking. The force of imperial authority lies in the invisibility of boundaries, because they are part of social regulation and become ways of understanding 'how things are'. (Ashcroft 2001, 182) The youth participating in the project are conscious of the boundaries that restrict, label and place them in the special enclosures. However, they refuse to be victims of the situation. Instead, it seems that the processes and negotiations in-between various values can give them the means to deal with the experienced othering and categorizing (cf. Hautaniemi 2004, 165; Oikarinen-Jabai 2011). The youngsters are able to create dialogues that partly mock the boundary categories such as 'nation', 'race' and 'class', thereby creating new kinds of resistance discourses and approaches (Ashcroft 2001, 186; see also Yuval-Davies 2004).

Ashcroft remarks that while boundary is central to the Western epistemology horizon – in which location and possibility merge, it is a most productive principle for a postcolonial subjectivity. As a confrontation to concept boundary, it is not another boundary, but its opposite: *horizontality* (Ashcroft 2001, 183). I think that the chiasms of political, social, economic, and psychological spheres of influence that intersect in diasporic spaces and places are situated on the horizon (cf. Brah 2001). Many second generation immigrants become experts of these domains. Also the youth that participated in the project place themselves – or are placed – on a blurred horizontal sphere, providing them with a spatial possibility, a space and an opportunity to understand the rhizomes involved in the postcolonial metaphoric and embodied realms (cf. Ashcroft, 2001, 183).

The horizon is created in language (Ashcroft 2001, 185). In my opinion, the constant changing from one language (place) into another could support youngsters to move and also find alternative visual perspectives. To a certain degree this happens naturally. But I think they should be encouraged to express and narrate their experiences for example in the school context. Also participatory ethnography and artistic research methods could approve of special cultural knowledge that youngsters living in-between different ethnic and social realities share (cf. Finley 2005). The spaces involved in the artistic projects can also act as holding spaces, which can be therapeutic for everyone, as well as supportive of social justice through a politics of recognition (O'Neill 2009). Accordingly, a challenge that any researcher is likely to encounter is

“translating” “unfinished” understanding and styles created on diasporic or horizontal zones (Oikarinen-Jabai 2011).

Second generation immigrants encounter many expectations from the outside world, diasporic community and from families. A young woman said in the radio program:

As Somalis we are also at home like bridges to everywhere, for example you take care of the issues between the outside world and your family. Then when you are in the outside world, you are expected to be a typical Somali. We should find here in between, in the centroid of the identity crisis, some nice box where everyone could go, where they would fit. (Where is my space? 2011)

Even though the second generation immigrant youth sometimes think that they have difficulty in figuring out where they belong, it seems that for most of them the continuous negotiations of belongings and de- and restructuring the surrounding culture gives the tools to understand the intercultural and in-between spaces which we all inhabit in the contemporary world (cf. Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004, 119–120). Balancing on the horizon gives the youth good qualifications for becoming cultural mediators (Oikarinen-Jabai 2011). As specialists in matters connected with their own lives, with specific phenomena and images not openly discussed in Finnish society, the youth with an immigrant background are able to recognize and transgress certain conceptual borders and national images. Because they have the capabilities to open new perspectives to Finnishness and global citizenship, they can take part in creating new paths toward different futures.

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ACTIVE WELFARE CLIENTS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRAJECTORIES IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

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Abstract – This paper focuses on the transition phase of the young people from school to work and the social policies designed to facilitate this transition. The emphasis is on the opportunities provided by the welfare institutions and the wellbeing of the young as defined by the capability approach. In addition, the theoretical part of the paper includes an overlook on the discourses given to a young participant in a welfare measure as implied by Active Labor Market Policies (ALMP's) in Switzerland. The theoretical review is framed by the description of empirical analysis taking place in a transitional measure for young people without a professional solution. The preliminary results of interviews and observational measures imply a problematization of the self within the frame of activation as well as the responsibility of unemployment imposed on the participants rather than the structural factors within the society.

Introduction and Background

The transitional phase manifests a source for vulnerability for young people facing the challenges of becoming an adult. Moreover, the challenge is to successfully move from school to employment, which has been further complicated by the risks of the post-modern society. The so called 'risk society' (Beck 1992) introduces new types of vulnerability linked with instability of the economic and social structures including changing labor markets, insecurity of employment and educational pathways. The destandardisation and fragmentation of transitional pathways named as yo-yo transitions (EGRIS 2001; Pais 2003; Biggart & Walther 2006) exposes the youth to the stress of making the right choices and thus to the risk of being socially excluded (du Bois-Reymond 1998).

Moreover, the post-modern society demands for a stronger dependence of individuals on labour markets and the welfare state rather than on traditional institutions such as family and church (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992) thus widening the employment opportunities available. However, this dependence brings along new types of challenges specifically concerning social security and welfare measures provided by the state. The activation policies introduce new ways of managing the unemployment by resorting to inductive or constraining means in order to activate the beneficiaries in exchange for the benefits. The implications of these policies on the responsabilisation and activation of individuals has been widely recognized (Handler 2004, Borghi & Van Berkel 2007, Van Berkel & Valkenburg 2007). While the objective of the activation policies is the reduction of unemployment levels and reintegration of the beneficiaries in the labor market, the issues of social justice and the wellbeing of the beneficiaries are left aside (Bonvin & Orton 2009). The capability approach offers tools for identifying the pitfalls within these policies and proposes policy recommendations by focusing on "real freedom of the individuals to lead the life they have reason to value" (Sen 1999).

The aim of the paper is to bring forward the role of the active labor market policies as well as welfare institutions in the implementation of a Swiss integration measure. The intention is to outline the implications for the future development of policy measures that take into account the wellbeing of young people. This is to promote not only the young people as policy targets that have an important role to play in building up the future society but also, as outlined by the capability approach, the importance of the wellbeing of the youth as an end in itself. The aim is to disclose certain implications of the current policy development in terms of capabilities and thus present ideas for the future directions for social policies for young people. The research presents the idea of capability for voice as “the ability to express one’s opinions and thoughts and to make them count in the course of public discussion“ (Bonvin & Thelen 2003, 1). The notion of the capability for voice brings importance to the democratic process and opportunities of the individuals to express their ideas and desires and to participate in the decisions made for their behalf. As a consequence of this emphasis, a special focus in my research has been given for the young people themselves to express their ideas on what meanings activation could have in their transition.

For this purpose, another research perspective is presented indicating the "clienthood" (Hall et al. 2003) as construction of the participants in discourses of activation. As the activation policies pose certain expectations and demands for young people, the constructionist point-of-view enables the analysis of these expectations as carried by the institution. The discourses of individual responsabilization and contractualization tendencies (Andersen 2007) of activation policies have certain implications on the meanings given to the participants as well as on the institutional identities constructed by the participants themselves, the "institutional selves" (Gubrium & Holstein 2000). The interest is in the meanings given to the participants as clients of institutional interventions, for whom the institutional reality often appears as given, externalized reality and provides the frame for self-identification. The social constructionist point-of-view then provides tools for uncovering human activity in constructing these institutions and the process through which they become externalized in interaction (Berger & Luckmann 1966.) By unfolding the institutional realities it becomes then possible to review the capabilities of the participants specifically in terms of their capability for voice. The activation policies in their implementation level necessary contain such constructions of the institutional actors and thus implications on the opportunities to participate in reproduction of institutional identities

Material and Methods

For discovering the degree to which the activation based welfare measures promote capabilities, a beneficial approach is to examine the particular informational base (IB) developed by Amartya Sen, the pioneer of the capability approach. The IB designates "the information that is taken into account when assessing a person or a situation, to the exclusion of all other types of information" (Dif-Pradalier et al. 2012: 2) and has a great impact on the design and implementation of public policies thus contributing to shaping the social reality (Bonvin & Farvaque 2005). The IB enables the discovery of whether the focus is on capabilities or employability, the latter of which is formulated by ALMPs at worst associating unemployment to personal

failures and deficits of the individual (e.g. Pohl & Walther 2007). The informational base in terms of the capability for voice depends very much on the legislative framework, institutional infrastructure and practices, and social norms as well as the beneficiary's discursive competencies. In order to attain a full comprehension of the capability for voice of the beneficiaries, all these dimensions should be taken into account: the formal aspects of the policy-making process such as the degree of involvement of concerned individuals in the public policy process implied by legal provisions, the margin for manoeuvre of the welfare agents and the skills and other internal prerequisites of the individuals to express him/herself (Bonvin & Thelen 2003.)

The focus of this paper is mainly on the data gathered within the level of implementation that is, semi-structured interviews with program participants and professionals as well as participant observation within the program. In addition, preliminary exploration of the legal frame of unemployment insurance and analysis of the conventional agreement between the service provider and the cantonal authority of employment measures gives frame for the interviews conducted. This stage aims at discovering certain institutional logics that prevail and set the base for the capability for voice. The conventional agreement outlines the requirements and expectations from participants and the welfare agents alike. It constitutes the base for evaluation processes thus providing an understanding for the action of the actors in the implementation level.

The interviews and participant observation has been done in one out of six service providers of Motivation Semester (SeMo) in Western Switzerland. SeMo is a measure for activation and integration for young people designed for helping them to realize a professional project for future employment. The target group is unemployed young people aged 15–25 without professional plans that have finished their obligatory schooling. SeMo is financed by the unemployment insurance regulated at the state level and managed by the cantonal authority of employment measures, through which the participants receive an allocation of 370e per month. SeMo offers professional experience in different workshops, individual guiding, classes and external internships. Interviews were conducted with the director, seven of the participants and five of the social and educational professionals in the program. In addition, the participant observation took place during one week, which enabled a one-day exploration of the practices in each workshop.

As an analytical tool, critical discourse analysis is used in order to capture the meanings given to the participants. The approach takes into account the discourse practices as shaped by power relations and the effects of discourses upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge (Fairclough 1992). The attempt is to discover the relations between discourse structures and power structures, in this case, the power imposed by the policy level taking the form in the everyday speech of the institutional actors. The supposition is that the power structures then become apparent by the discourse analysis on the implementation level, whereby the actors reproduce meanings of the policy discourses based on activation.

Results

The Motivation Semester as a transitional measure is in general terms a non-profit-making state-subsidized program. However, the preliminary results based on observations and expert interviews imply that there are significant differences between the different SeMo-service providers within the canton. In the case of the

particular SeMo – organization, activities based on aliment and service production are very much favored. The workshops simulate small factories run by the direction. The participants are the productive force of the workshops working eight hours per day, five days per week making it possible for the measure to finance part of its activities with the sales revenue of the products. However, half of the day is dedicated for the individual work, such as preparing job applications. Every workshop is run by a responsible of the workshop in charge of the production and the participants, and usually is assisted by an intern or another employee with qualifications.

The objective of the organization is that the workshops are supposed to provide a simulation of the labor market for the participants in order to prepare them to the demands and entry into the labor market. There is a very strong association between the labor market and SeMo participation sustained by the interviewees. The emphasis on respect to the professionals highlights this link, as there seems to be a recurrent occurrence of professionals within the context of labor market participation, thus representing future bosses of a company. The practices of the program also refer to the professionalism as the demand of using the polite form of "vous" as a sign of respect, since this is expected from the participants later in the labor market. Similarly, the underlying logic was manifested in the interviews with professionals whereby the current problematic attitudes and behavior of participants in SeMo is expected to be replicated in the future employment and should thus be put under intervention.

Later on in reality euh the young people tho...those who arrive in delay here, arrive also in delay to the boss.

(Workshop responsible)

The market logic of the program goes in line with the current trends of marketization of public services. The market actors are now increasingly involved in the provision of social services, emphasizing the factors of output, outcome and performance and introducing market mechanisms in service provision. The main aim with the logic is higher expectations of efficacy and quality of services (Van Berkel & Valkenburg 2007). As the market logic normally refers to the co-operation of the private sector with public services, in the case of the particular SeMo, the logic starts from within the service by marketization of the organization itself, creating a new emphasis on social and educational work. For instance, there is a constant need for balancing of professionals between the role of the "boss" of a company and a social and educational worker. The duty of the latter is to help with the job search and individual guiding whereas the former is distinguished from the employees by his/her higher status in hierarchy demanding for a professional distance. The multiple roles of the professionals seem to pose certain challenges in their relationship with the participants such as the requirement of keeping the distance to the participants when more personal intervention is needed.

Yeab, I think you really have to...once that you have posed the limits...of the relationship...and euh...and you have to stay at the professional, it is really very very important to stay at the professional, otherwise you adopt them, then you take them home. (Workshop responsible)

The problematic issue is visible also from participants point-of-view, as in dealing with the institutional demands for self-exploration and sharing the intimate aspects of their transition with the professionals. The

idea of SeMo as a facilitator of the transitional phase requires a certain dialogue about the problems that impede the young people in finding a job. The assumption is that the problematic behavior or attitudes are to be managed during the time in SeMo, which then increases the chances of entering the labor market. As this necessarily needs more intimate tackling of the problems, the requirement for professional distance poses a contradiction for some of the participants:

No, I will not confide euh...confide...say the personal things to the responsables...well, I don't know it's (long pause) we're here first of all to do job search...not for talking about our lives. (Patricque M16)⁴⁹

The SeMo is rather seen purely as a preparatory phase for entering the labor market, as the program that enables assisted job search without the inclusion of the psychological and cognitive services. The latter perspective is then negotiated in terms of not needing the services offered, since the aim of the program is mainly oriented to labor market integration. However, the existence of problematic behavior and attitudes is widely recognized by the participants themselves:

Well...at school...in march april or something, like I didn't still have an apprenticeship...then euh...well at school I'd say...that I was...I had the problems of discipline I'd say. (Céline F16)

The individual deficiencies and behavioral problems are at the core in the discourses related to labor markets. As the starting point of the preparational aim of the program, the underlying assumption of the individual is that of problematic and in need of help in order to access the labor market. These assumptions in Michel Foucault's (1979) terms are dominant discourses that set the conditions of possibility for individuals for the construction of troubled selves. The ways of presenting ourselves needs to be coherent with these discourses and the familiar identities in order for them to make sense. Therefore, as a consequence of the focus on labor market participation, the young people position themselves accordingly. The construction of institutional self (Gubrium & Hostein 2001) through the activation logic implies a certain exposure of the self in the discourses of individual factors as the causes of unemployment. Thus, the self and one's skills are posed at the center of attention implying a construction of individual responsibility of unemployment. The responsabilization of the self in the discourses of the active welfare state and new governance refer to the responsibility of the individual in preventing unemployment and seeking for self-sufficiency (Van Berkel & Valkenburg 2007). The construction of the self through the lines of these discourses imply an active, responsible and self-sufficient individual. Along these lines the self is then held responsible in making use of the opportunities provided by the welfare institutions in order to pay back the benefits later on:

Well, they (the professionals and the director) expect that I find quickly a job, for...because here I'm more using the money of the society rather than the...I make myself useful for it...so in the end I think it's that. (Henri M16)

⁴⁹ The names of the participants have been changed.

The implications to the individual as a burden to the society apply to the human capital (see Becker 1993) emphasis on the individual skills, abilities, education and training. The duty of the individual is to invest on one's human capital without posing a material burden on the welfare system (Dean 2006). The human capital approach has been very much criticized by the capability approach. The responsibility inflicted on the individual is problematic as long as s/he is not provided with the necessary resources. Along Sen's ideas of capabilities, the capacity to act should be complemented by freedom of choice along with the resources and conversion factors allowing for the real functioning of the person. The welfare state should then bare a part of the responsibility by providing the opportunities for enabling the individuals to bare their part of the contract. What this refers to, indeed then, is a citizenship based on contract, whereby the access to rights is conditional upon active participation in the labor market (White 2000, Handler 2004). The state is seen as the provider of opportunities and for the exchange of benefits the individuals' duty is to make use of them by maximizing their employability. The contractual nature of the welfare naturally has its form also in the frame of the welfare measures. In SeMo, the enrollment is based on creating an individually tailored professional plan, including objectives of a minimum amount of internships and the rules of the organization. The objectives are negotiated with the participants, agreed upon and controlled by the cantonal employment center. A failure in following these objectives leads to sanctioning measures, the loss or reduction of allocation and eventually suspension of the program.

The responsabilization and contractualization discourses both imply a certain power imbalance whereby the individuals are the focal point of intervention. Similarly, this imbalance can be seen in the discourses of welfare subjectivity whereby the participants are constructed as the subjects of institutional intervention. As an implication to the lack of the option of voice explained earlier in the paper, the participants resort to construction of themselves through passivity and "placability" from a welfare measure to another. There is a representation of welfare subjectivity of the self as being in the hands of the institutional forces whereby the self-placed, put, sent, or taken.

Eub...it's the...the director, I think...or the secretary, they placed me like that. (Isabelle F16)

I sent a letter, I had an interview...then after they...they sent me to the workshop. (Adèle F17)

The passivity poses a paradox on the activation measures where the subject is activated by the welfare measure but expected to adapt to the situations without questioning the base of these measures. Thus, the activation discourse presents a contradiction between an active and activated individual, the former proposing a rhetoric of adaptability and flexibility and the latter an externally motivated, dependent individual (Crespo & Serrano 2004). The adaptability emerged as a lack of initiative by the participants introducing the lack of opportunities to make a difference.

Well, pff...I cannot change anything so I go with that. (Agnes F16)

You can go until twenty four with the sanctions, I think after that you are sent away...so here I have what...five six (...) so if they don't want to believe me...I cannot do much. (Isabelle F16)

The disagreement with the institutional practices or the conduct of the professionals is evident but there is clearly a sense of inability to make a difference. The institutional logic is taken for granted as the reality that they need to adjust to, since there is no other choice. Following Hirschman's (1970) classification of three dimensions of loyalty, exit and voice, the "passive selves" imply the option of loyalty. Whereas the exit option is present in the form of sanctions followed by an eventual dismissal from the institution, the loyalty to the practices creates reluctance in choosing the exit. As such, the loyalty is imposed, since the exit option is constrained by the fact that there are no more options available after SeMo other than unemployment. This factor then implies a constraint for the individuals to voice their concerns or challenge the practices due to the fear of being sanctioned.

Within the frame of the capability approach, such constraints are considered as crucial since they impede the fulfillment of the actual freedom to express oneself. The so-called conversion factors are the factors that influence the achievement of functionings, the outcomes of the capability or the opportunities as they are realized. Thus, in between the resources and functionings there need to be the factors that convert the resources into capabilities as they are realized (Robeyns 2005.) As the resources are provided within the program in the form of encouragement to speak and meetings organized for making appeals, the institutional level imposes an obstacle for the conversion of these resources into the actual functioning of voice. As the young people are offered the option of SeMo as their last chance, the obligation is imposed on them to do the best they can, within the time limitation that they have, the actual opportunity to participation in the decisions and design of practices is rather limited by this factor.

Indeed, the SeMo is seen to the participants as the last chance, which caused feelings of fear and anxiety. The discourse of chance is accompanied with the need to find a place during the year and the scenario of a threat of the possible future if this does not happen. The matter of time seems to be a great issue, causing a certain inner dialogue about the need to hurry up, to focus on this moment and to keep track of time. As a power element, the dialogue serves the ends of the institution aiming at reintegration and fast placement of the unemployment to the labor market. Foucault (1988) links this to the process of self-government whereby the "technologies of the self" imposed by the societal reformers bring the individual in moral government of the self. In fact, the issue of time pressure is often introduced in line with the stories of self-improvement imposed by the time limit, by the threat of not having anything to do. Thus, the power imbalance becomes clear as the young people are exposed to the subtle ways of self-government of their own employability thus profiting the institutional discourse.

Discussion and Conclusions

The transitional phase with the current economic and social political environment certainly poses new threats and challenges for the unemployed youth. As within the discourses about the need for policy change to the direction where activation is encouraged, this change is presented as a necessity for economic development. Uncovering the underlying meanings and power relations is important when the policy targets have relatively little influence on the policy design and implementation. One of the purposes of this paper

has been to bring emphasis on the importance of including the youth in the processes concerning themselves and their futures.

As such the active labor market policies promote integration to the labor market as well as prevention the exclusion of individuals. The main goal is to increase the human capital and thus employability of the unemployed, whereby the discussion boils down to the discourse of individuals as the target of measures thus obscuring the issues of well-being and individual freedom. The danger of these discourses lies on the view of individuals as the tools for improving economic growth, not as ends of the policy. By the problematization of the individuals shown by the results, the future consequences and quality of the employment are not put under debate. From the perspective of long-term employment, the effects of the active labor market measures are still unclear and focusing mainly on the effects from a purely economic perspective (see overview in Gärtner & Flückiger 2005, Aepli 2006). In these studies, the social dimension of the programs is left aside, which raises the question of whether the actual freedom of the individuals to pursue the life they have reason to value, is taken into account. In order to build up successful transitions that lead to long-term employment and secure futures, the youth should be able to actively participate in the design and implementation of their professional plans. This means that they should have an impact on the design of the integration measure in order for them to correspond to their individual needs.

Problematization of the self, individual responsabilization for unemployment and the following passivity of the participant imply that not all the aspects of capability for voice have been taken in consideration. As the contradictory meanings of active and activated individual shows, there is a certain frame given for the unemployed to bring forward their desires and wishes. However, the expressions of voice outside the frame defined by the activation policies, outside the frame of adaption, are less accepted. Therefore, what risks to be ignored, is the personal career development effectively starting from the premises of the young people themselves, not as imposed activation but from real freedom for self-development. Instead, with the strict frame of activation based on constraint and threat of not being integrated, tensions built up for labor market entry, possibly leading to self-blame and further risks for marginalization. While offering more opportunities and flexibility, the effects of globalization bring insecurity and inequality in the labor market. As the unemployed with low qualifications benefit from the integration measures, the jobs created are often precarious and rarely offer a sustainable solution for these young people (Blossfeld et al. 2005). As a consequence, the youth in the most vulnerable situation risk to be further marginalized unless their futures can be built in a constructive way, enabling the acknowledgement of structural factors for unemployment. Thus, the ideal path for the design of future policies would be to enable the responsabilization of the individual as long as the opportunities for its realization have been guaranteed. As the young people themselves are the experts of their transitions, they should be included as a crucial element in this process particularly since they will be the future decision makers as they grow up.

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CRAFT AND DESIGN CAREERS IN THE FUTURE – A LOCAL CRAFTSMAN OR A GLOBAL DESIGN JOURNEYMAN?

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Abstract – This study focussed on alternative images of the future of craft and design professions. The images of the future were examined through various methods, such as expert interviews, future workshops, future storytelling and the Delphi method. Alternative images of the future were explored with the help of four fields: the operational environment, professional key competences, the operational model and professional identity. The data was collected from different perspectives by interviewing experts in creative industries and in a workshop with experienced entrepreneurs, collecting the visions of students in vocational schools, polytechnics and universities, and carrying out a three-round Delphi expert panel. The students' narratives were reflected in the perceptions of experts. The results of the study were examined from the perspective of the four preceding fields. Four alternative images of the professional future are constructed with the following dimensions: the speed of change in society and global sustainability and responsibility. The results challenge educators to pay much greater attention to the future and to ongoing changes in the operational environment. The students in the fields of craft and design are in need of new employment opportunities. Design educators should reconstruct the domain's operational models and invest strongly in career-building practices.

Introduction and Background

The purpose of this article is to discover images of the future of craft and design professionals in Finland. Today's youth are tomorrow's professionals, so the challenges are related strongly to vocational training. According to a number of researchers, a craftsperson's success depends on personal skills, products and services, and mastery of the whole design and craft process (Dormer 1997; Risatti 2007; Fillis 2008). On the other hand, craft and design practitioners are often limited by exiguous economic and personal resources. Further, the motivation and success factors in the creative industries are different from those in other business fields. Well-being and a better opportunity to manage one's own career seem to be appreciated more highly than economic success

(Walker & Brown 2004; Reijonen & Komppula 2007; Chaston, 2008; Schwarz & Yair 2010; Jackson 2010).

Following the ongoing transformation of the creative and culture industries, particularly the students in the fields of craft and design are in need of new career-building opportunities. The global ecological situation has had an impact on production and consumption. The growth of the experience economy, as well as well-being and leisure services, are engendering new customer needs. The craft and design communities require new partners, networks and innovative professional models in order to respond to these future needs. Further, the transition from a product-oriented model to process-oriented and user-inspired models will require novel professional skills and new working practices. These apparent changes inevitably reshape craft and design professionalism (see Fry 2011a, b; Woolley 2011; Evans 2011; Bridgstock 2011).

On the other hand, the long tradition of craftsmanship can hinder radical new innovations – craft is commonly seen as a past traditional practise more than a resource of radical innovations. On the other hand, craft skills and dexterity can ensure survival in an unpredictable and unclear future (Fry 2011a, b; Fuad-Luke 2009).

Material and Methods

The elements of professional images of the future

An image of the future is the product of envisioning a future situation based on the understanding of the present and the past, interpretations, observations, beliefs, expectations, values, hopes and fears. Images of the future have a strong influence in human and social, conscious and unconscious decision-making. A positive or negative appreciation of images of the future motivates and activates personal and social choices and decisions. The effect is dialectic – strengthened through contrasts: decisions made in the present influence the quality of the future, and the quality of the image of the future influences the content of current choices (Inayatullah 1993: 235–253; Rubin & Linturi 2001: 269–272; Ono 2003: 738; Tonn & McGregor 2009: 121–125).

According to many researchers (see Bell 2000; Ono 2003; Rubin 2000), people usually strive for certainty and simplicity compared to uncertainty and complexity. The character of the future is indicated in today's environment, and its changing nature is oppressive. The problems of future interpretation are related mostly to people's natural tendencies of using future-oriented information (Bell 2000; Ono 2003, 739; Rubin 2000).

How one makes one's future is strongly related to one's values. Decision-making, risks, visions and missions are based on values as preferences about what is valuable and what is worthless. Without values there is no motivated activity; a valueless future motivates nobody. To Masini (2009), value creation is a natural part of future studies. That is why the desirability, significance and probability of future situations are often evaluated (Masini 2009: 43; Tonn 2003: 684–687).

In this study images of the future of craft and design professionalism were examined through four fields: the operational environment, the operational model, professional key competences and professional identity (figure 1). The operational environment refers to working environments and conditions. The operational model refers to practical working habits (activities), and professional key competencies include the skills and knowledge needed in work. Professional identity was seen as consisting of working attitudes and personal characteristics. The four fields of the images of the future have a direct effect on each other.

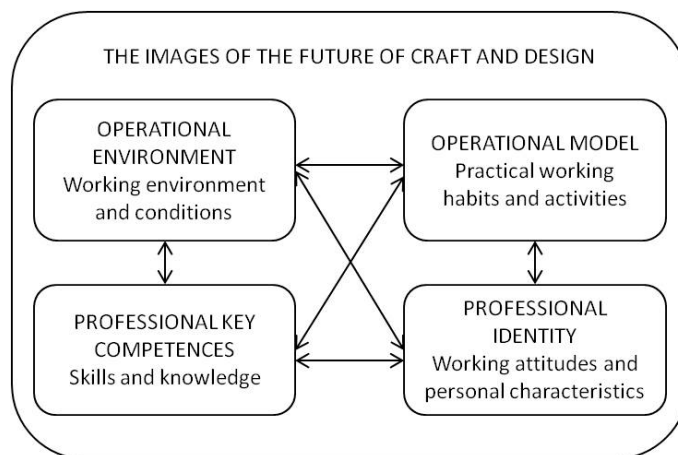


Figure 1. *The images of the future of craft and design* © Kristiina Soini-Salmaa.

Methods

The images of the future were examined through various methods, such as expert interviews, future workshops, future storytelling and the Delphi method. The data was collected from different perspectives by interviewing experts in creative industries (N=3) and in a workshop with experienced entrepreneurs (N=20), collecting the visions of students in vocational schools, polytechnics and universities (N=72), and carrying out a three-round Delphi expert panel (N avg. =37). The expert interviews took place in 2008, the workshop in 2009, and the gathering of the students' data and the Delphi project in 2010.

The data collection progressed iteratively. The theoretical framework was piloted by the expert interviews and the workshop for the entrepreneurs. The viewpoints of the images of the future were opened and evaluated to relate them to the research problem. Most of the students answered the questionnaire during gatherings organized at educational institutes in Southern Finland at which thinking about the future and its importance to one's professional future was the theme. The questionnaire was anonymous, and background variables such as age group, gender, education and working experience were collected. The participants composed narratives about their envisioned professional working situation in 2020 based on the four preceding viewpoints. The data was coded and analysed using an Atlas.ti content analysis program. Content analysis of the data was carried out as a theory-based analysis. The classification was structured on the theoretical framework's themes and research questions.

The vocational upper secondary education and training student participants were enrolled in artisan-level courses, and the polytechnic students were pursuing a University of Applied Sciences Master's Degree in Design. The university-level participants were graduating with a Master of Arts or Master of Education. The data primarily focussed on the designer students' (N=30) and vocational craft students' (N=31) stories. The majority of the respondents (N=50) were aged 20–29 years. Female respondents (N=61) were more numerous.

The Delphi panel was designed on the basis of previous research results and foresight information. Altogether 43 experts, representing different national expertise in the creative industries, comprised the Internet panel. The three-round panel was divided according to the four research viewpoints. The questions included 26 statements about the future, which were evaluated by the expert panellists (see figure 2). Prob-

bility, desirability and notability were evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale and by verbal argumentation. Feedback and iteration were essential in the process. All of the results were returned to the panel after each round.

In 2025 vocational education in craft and design has moved to virtual learning environments. Designing and manufacturing practices are studied through simulations. Workshops are no longer needed.

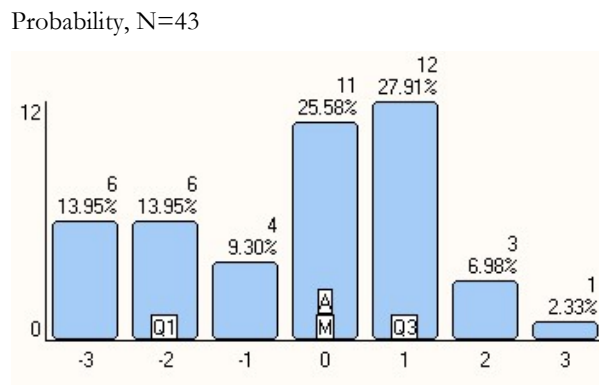


Figure 2. Example of the future statement of the Delphi panel.

Results

The results of all the respondent groups reflected the transition process taking place in the creative industries. The same issues emerged throughout the data, but the focus, attitudes and operational models varied. Attitudes were strongly related to working experience. The future stories of the craft and design students corroborate previous research of young people's images of the future (e.g. Hicks 1996; Rubin 2000; Ono 2003). The students' accounts of the future described the hopes and fears of newcomers to the field – the future presents opportunities but also threats. The spectrum of opportunity was felt to be wide, which complicates making decisions. In addition, the need for security and the pressure to succeed and to balance different life roles were pervasive in the background. A strong entrepreneurial spirit was evident, which is quite natural in the creative industries.

The three-round Delphi panel expressed opinions about 26 future statements, out of which the top 10 future theses were developed. The top 10 theses represented the ongoing transformation in the craft and design sector. The most significant drivers were sustainability and changes in customer needs, as summarized in the list below. The experts in the creative industries (business coaches), the experienced entrepreneurs and the Delphi panel demonstrated an all-encompassing orientation to a professional future. The future of the sector should be seen as a diversified range of possibilities. The professional future of the sector was seen as entailing many opportunities but also many threats. The challenge is how the field can operate proactively to be able to face the coming adjustments in the hybrid world.

Delphi top 10 future theses

1. A maker's economy – quality from father to son
2. Design evolution in recycling
3. Local production and eco-design
4. Revolution in product technology
5. Designed well-being
6. Professional success is based on creative networks
7. Global guild – a new learning environment
8. Craftsman 2.0 – pro amateurs & amateur professionals?
9. Credit for craft skills!
10. An expanded concept of knowledge

The Operational Environment

A number of global megatrends clearly emerged in the data. Changes in manufacturing in Finland were seen as posing an essential risk. Automation and production in cheap-labour countries were also perceived as a threat to design and craft production. Local production networks were seen as more probable than international ones. The students saw employment opportunities as uncertain and noted that global production might concentrate in Asia. The design students, in particular, planned to move abroad; however, the willingness to work far from home was generally low. The need for professional internationalization seemed to be recognized, but orientations towards the future appeared to be more local and traditional. Previous surveys have revealed that the same difficulties emerge when small businesses internationalize (e.g. Lidh 2005; Fillis 2008; Chaston 2008).

The students' working environment descriptions related strongly to working in one's own studio or boutique. The idea was to combine work and family life or to be freer to engage in artistic work. The female respondents preferred the combination of family and home life. Very few students described working with the Internet or in virtual collaboration networks. Some of the respondents thought that the situation of the craft and design field is weakening, which makes their own possibilities uncertain and problematic in the future. The competition inside the field was assumed to tighten, and only the best will be able to attain success. The increased competition was seen as a consequence of the broad and multilevel craft and design education in Finland.

The Delphi panel viewed local design clusters based on self-sufficiency as relevant but not very probable. The experts were more willing to invest in managerial systems in the creative industries. Concerning the development of international manager networks in the future, it was felt that design education should concentrate on business skills, managerial know-how and collaboration competences, and that the new professional guilds could facilitate the internationalization processes by using new learning environments, social media and global networks. The master-apprentice tradition in craft and design education was seen as valuable, but it was thought that the operational models in formal education should change according to future needs. This development also challenges teachers in terms of expertise and competences in vocational education.

The Operational Model

Students at all educational levels believed more or less in the growth of craft production and changes in the values supporting handmade artefacts. The values were associated with quality, aesthetic character, experiences and well-being. In the future, it was presumed to be necessary to know traditional craft manufacturing techniques. Do-it-yourself (DIY) making was also seen as a value in craft making. Craft making nurtures well-being and self-fulfilment and is considered an alternative to consumption. Craft was seen as a counterforce to haste, economic growth and a disposable culture. Craft was preferred as a lifestyle choice or a way to manage one's own well-being. This conflict between lifestyle and economic growth has been essential in craft entrepreneurship, as stated in previous research reports (e.g. Fillis 2004; Reijonen & Komppula 2007; Jackson 2010; Schwarz & Yair 2010).

New ecological values were highly appreciated, and it was hoped that the notion of sustainable development would confirm the value of individualized craft products. Redesign, recycling and vintage fashion were considered to be an operational model, especially by students in clothing design and production. Many believed that a global sustainable development policy would support local production and self-sufficiency. The Knowledge Works Foundation and the Forum for the Future (2011) have predicted the same tendencies.

Sustainable design was also seen as highly desirable by the Delphi expert panellists. If self-sufficiency and the de-growth economy strengthen in the future, a lack of manufacturing resources will force the creation of new operational models. The whole recycling system should be designed and organized in a new way. In this connection, the designers' responsibility for developing recycling innovations was highlighted. Further, innovations in marketing, retail and delivery were considered necessary.

The students' descriptions of future design and production practices followed the traditional models of craft manufacturing in the present. Manufacturing and craft skills as well as material expertise were seen to be important. The future designing process was not described in terms of collaboration with other designers or customers: designing was portrayed as an individualistic artistic process. Noteworthy was the fact that technological innovations in design and production, such as 3D scanners and printers, were not emphasized.

The Delphi panel experts were united about the revolution which is expected to change design and production practices as well as customer behaviour. Being enabled by the new design and production technology to switch to the user's perspective, means questioning the roles of designer and customer. Innovative tools such as 3D printers and body scanners were predicted to change the operational models of consumer practices. These imminent changes should be taken seriously into account in design education. It was felt that designer expertise should broaden to include service design, customer consultancy and collaboration competences. In spite of these developments, it would be quite important during craft education to analyse the potential customers and to design and produce in a customer-oriented way. The illusion in the craft and design field connected with product-oriented thinking still exists: that the designs are mostly based on the maker's preference.

Professional Key Competences

The students' evaluation of the future competences mainly followed the curricula in craft and design education. The objectives of educational institutes naturally emphasize quality, success and professionalism. Professionalism and the criteria for success are defined as multidexterity and networking capability in diverse collaboration. The training programmes highlight the different professional paths and occupations which follow that training programme. Expertise, entrepreneurship, an entrepreneurial attitude and creativity were connected with success.

In the students' stories, manufacturing skills were strongly emphasized, possibly because of the number of artisan students (43%, N=31). Product making, craft skills and material expertise were seen to have a noteworthy role. Almost equally emphasized competences were collaboration, interaction and networking skills. Interaction was understood as important in customer service, such as in tailoring and custom-making products. Design skills were seen as core competences, especially by design students. They were more willing to share other parts of the business, such as accounting and marketing, with other actors in the networks.

In the craft and design sector, the model of one's entrepreneurship dominates one's career; yet traditional, paid, individual work is not common (at least in Finland) and exists mostly in design, retail, marketing, teaching and guidance. Although business competencies were considered important in every curriculum and training programme, they did not play a big role in the students' stories. It is noteworthy that entrepreneurship as a professional identity was very strongly emphasized in the students' future scenarios, but business competences were not mentioned as important skills. They saw craft and design entrepreneurship as more self-fulfilling.

Professional Identity

Personal success factors, such as self-confidence, courage, perseverance, humanity, learning potential, creativity, open-mindedness, carefulness and trustworthiness were described. Such characteristics have been seen as naturally suitable for entrepreneurship or expertise in many previous studies (see Walker & Brown 2004). Confidence in one's own talents and great faith in one's success were emphasized. Such success demands courage, perseverance and social competence when engaged in competition.

An orientation towards well-being was distinctly emphasized in the students' views of the future. One's personal well-being was seen as very important, and craft entrepreneurship was considered a good option in this regard. Craftsmanship and the craft identity were equated with the freedom to make choices, particularly concerning time use and lifestyles. Social well-being (for example, providing craft courses, craft activities or art therapy) as a business model was poorly recognized, although at the moment pro-amateurism and do-it-yourself practices are widely appearing in physical and virtual networks.

Happiness was usually related to family, the living environment and one's own individual strengths. Especially among the female respondents, there was talk about hopes associated with family and children. A desirable lifestyle would be the slow life, and the ambition was to slow down and jump off the treadmill. The dreams associated with work were success in one's own professional arena. Some hoped to be famous

designers with their own brand or collection; some wanted to attain perfection and mastery in their own field.

The experts saw welfare orientation in a larger context, and connected welfare and well-being services with tourism and health care. Challenges were seen regarding new innovations where the well-being business and therapy practices exploit art and craft activities. This development means the necessity of a transformation in product and service design: the operational model must change from a product-oriented to a process-oriented one (also Kälviäinen 2005). The customer will be the creator and the maker, and the added value of the process becomes the customer's experience and embodied knowledge.

Four Alternative Images of the Professional Future in 2025

The images of the future were constructed based on the four different operational environments. The future states were qualified using dimensions such as the speed of change in society and the realization of sustainable development and responsibility. These dimensions were chosen due to the results of analysis; the sustainability was seen as the strongest driver of change. Also the state of global sustainability is strongly guided by the speed of economical, political and social changes (see e.g. Forum for the Future 2010; Mokka & Neuvonen 2009).



Figure 3. The alternative images of the future of craft and design © Kristiina Soini-Salomaa.

Eco Ethics

The main drivers in society are sustainable development and ecology. Stronger global responsibility for production and consumption has been attained through legislation and agreements. The governance policy has confirmed consumers' ecological values and behaviour. Numerous people have achieved well-being and a slower way of life in developed countries. Craftsmanship is regarded as a way of managing one's own life and well-being. The working motivation is strongly connected with self-expression and quality in design and manufacture. Smart recycling, high material expertise, custom manufacturing and master-level craft

skills are appreciated highly as professional key competences. Autonomy, artistry and well-being at work are emphasized in the professional identity.

Redesign

The most important driver is a sense of community. A global consensus on climate policy and sustainable development failed to happen. The national strategies rest on slower economic growth and survival plans of action such as protectionism and self-sufficiency. Professional practices are connected firmly to local networks; the model of designing and manufacturing is co-creation and cooperation. Manufacturing, recycling, redesign and repair are aggregated in co-creation centres, where consumers are activated to learn craft skills and use repairing and redesign services. Advising, training and co-working skills are the key competences needed in the work, where the professional model is more like a facilitator. This future is a challenge also to national and local craft and design organizations and associations.

Globe Local

Sustainable production, supply and consumption have been solved through technological innovations. Most of the globe has developed into a sustainable society where eco-efficiency and lightweight living are the main drivers. Customer needs have steered the operational models and practices of design and manufacture. Lightweight community-based manufacturing means network design, efficient 3D technology applications, customized products, and micromimicry and nanotechnology. The professional key competences are foresight working, high expertise in material intelligence technology and service design. Professional identity rests on expansive know-how and producer competences, which mean that production can be mobilized locally all over the world, helping to respond to trends that create pockets of high demand in specific locations.

Cultural Power

The global sustainability policy has failed, and there is no global framework for climate action and relief. The globe is fragmented; Scandinavian countries have become experts in sustainable technology innovations that allow rich world lifestyles to continue, while low-income countries experience natural disasters. Also, the global balance of power has shifted dramatically. Asia has gained dominance in design and production. The fragmentation means reliance on local and ethnic culture, and the trends are inspired by religious and cultural ideas. Professional orientation and success is based on multi-cultural expertise and the ability to collaborate across networks from around the world. This situation could also be a challenge to smaller localized brands with a long local heritage: is a new wave of Finnish design rising? The global design journeyman is on his way.

Discussion and Conclusions

The methods used provided different perspectives on images of the future. The workshop highlighted the opinions of today's experienced entrepreneurs, while the narrative storytelling of the students opened up images of what the future might be for newcomers. The Delphi panel synthesized the top 10 future theses, which represented the most essential drivers of the future.

The data suggested interesting challenges and developmental tasks for educators. The role of sustainable development is the most essential question when it comes to alternative futures. The concept of sustainable development brings to the fore the challenges facing the craft and design field. Changes in collective and individual values are driving consumer behaviour. The success of the field depends on the ability to respond to these remarkable changes in the operational environment.

The designing and manufacturing of items has been the purpose of craftsmanship over its history. Tomorrow we may see a situation in which new consumer products are much less needed. The alternative futures challenge us to redesign craft and design. According to Fry (2011), craft must be seen in terms of the quality of things in the future, rather than as a past practice. It needs to become intrinsic to the economy and culture of the future. Re-crafting may bring craft into an antagonistic relationship with the existing economic paradigm. The volume of what is manufactured and acquired must be dramatically reduced, while its quality has to improve. Moving to a quality-based economy does not imply an economic collapse, although it would mean a reduced standard of living by current measures, but a higher quality of life (Fry 2011, see Fuad-Luke 2009).

The creative and culture industries are growing. However, the problem is that current education does not match the labour markets; in the craft and design field the reason for this can still be seen as design-oriented education. The young people's expectations concerning education do not necessarily match the reality in the labour markets (see Ministry of Education and Culture 2010). However, the Finnish market can employ only a limited number of designers and craft entrepreneurs. As well, a demand for new services might exist in the welfare and tourism sector, adapting craft and art for new activity innovations that strengthen humans' natural desire to create things manually and produce commodities using co-creation practices.

How do the expectations of craft and design students and professionals align with the demands of the future operational environment? The experts see limited possibilities if the field cannot redevelop the operational models and secure new collaboration with other creative industries. The future of the craft and design sector is replete with opportunities, as seen in the four alternative images of the future (figure 3). In focusing on tomorrow's professionalism, the responsibility of design educators is to reconstruct the domain's operational models and invest strongly in career-building practices. The preconditions for a desirable future must be created today.

The results challenge educators to pay much greater attention to the future and to ongoing changes in the operational environment. As well, in design education the traditional product-oriented model should give way to a service-oriented one. The global need for sustainability is redeeming the philosophy of

craftsmanship. New forms of design are needed, and the present model of professionalism must be reformed. A new designer identity is emerging, and the profession of craft-maker is in full transition and can include a multifold combination of working practices, as represented in the alternative images of the future of craft and design (figure 3). The main question is how education in craft and design facilitates the creation of the craftsmanship of the next generations. The essential factors are the actors' own decisions and abilities with respect to how they respond to rapid change. In design education, more active career building should be emphasized.

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RECOGNISING THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE CONCEPT OF ADULTHOOD

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Abstract – The current concept of adulthood became standardised in the 1950s–1960s, when advanced societies experienced a phase of unprecedented socio-economic prosperity after the Second World War. This allowed the majority of young people to fulfil the criteria for adulthood in a concise period. In opposite, the wider discourse implies that today’s young people lengthen their youth and delay their entry into adulthood, and simultaneously deny their social duties. However, this interpretation is based on an increasingly anachronistic model of transition. Today’s young people experience the consequences of economic downturn and restructuring. They are compelled to adapt to the present conditions and forge new pathways of transition that alter the routes to adulthood established in the past-war period. Profound socio-economic upheavals contributed to transforming patterns of transition. This paper reflects upon empirical research conducted among female university students about to start working life in Finland and France. It discusses the current approach to adulthood and sheds light on characteristics young people increasingly associate with the concept of adulthood: individual psychological and emotional maturity, and mental development.

Introduction and Background

The phenomenon of the prolongation of youth is at the heart of socio-political debates since the past thirty years. Youth experts affirm that transitions to adulthood have lengthened and follow unpredictable patterns. Rather than being synchronised into consecutive sequences, many young people’s routes to adulthood deviate from the ‘traditional’ patterns of transition. The majority of young people in the 1950s–1960s fulfilled the subsequent markers of completing school, getting a permanent job, becoming financially independent, leaving the parental home, settling down, getting married and starting a family in a brief period and linear order. Contemporary pathways of transition have become unconventional, fragmented, unsteady, and might follow a reversal of circumstances (see Bradley and van Hoof 2005).

Youth prolongation started to be noticed in the 1980s (see Galland 1990; Kiley 1983). Recently, several authors have investigated the changing nature of the process of transition and suggested that a new life stage, between the phases of adolescence and adulthood, was taking shape (e.g. Arnett 2004; Côté 2000; Heath and Cleaver 2003). Arnett (2004) refers to ‘emerging adulthood’, a separate stage taking place between adolescence and adulthood, and Heath and Cleaver (2003) to ‘youth-hood’. The process of transition is nevertheless multidimensional and heterogeneous between different sub-groups of young people, rather than uniform (see Miles 2000). Transitions vary according to young people’s socio-economic background, gender, ethnic origins, level of education and geographical location (rural or urban settings). In addition, the different structural backgrounds and ideologies operating in each country give place, for example, to divergent welfare regimes, education systems or family related policies, which undeniably influence pathways of transitions too.

Several studies argue that young people are neither extending the period of youth nor experiencing a new phase in the life span. Rather than delaying entry into adulthood, the youth react to wider socio-economic fluctuations and simultaneously develop new coping strategies (e.g. Blatterer 2007b; 2007c; Hartmann and Swartz 2006; Mary 2012; Settersten et al. 2005; Wyn 2004). One could argue that the life course is taking a new direction, and whether a new life stage is emerging might be wrongly addressed. Young people are simply forging the trail for new routes to adulthood adapted to the context in which they live.

Social concepts, alike social structures, are not impervious to alterations. The current concept of adulthood became standardised in the 1950–1960s, when the majority of young people fulfilled specific markers associated with adulthood at an accelerated pace, and in a chronological order. Advanced societies were experiencing a phase of unprecedented socio-economic prosperity after the Second World War, which allowed young people to reach the qualifiers for adulthood in a condensed period (Blatterer 2007b). In contrast, contemporary young people meet the consequences of socio-economic instabilities. They experience great difficulties integrating into the labour market, which hinders their possibilities of attaining financial independence, an autonomous status, and starting a family.

In this regard, the highlight on the phenomenon of youth prolongation might be a misconception caused by an outdated social concept and outmoded expectations. The current definition of adulthood is eroding in the eyes of many young people, who increasingly associate coming of age with mental and emotional development rather than social indicators. Molgat (2007: 496–497) argues that adulthood is a psychological period founded on existential maturation and an increasing sense of personal responsibility and independence. Reaching adulthood is a psychological process that takes several years to complete, rather than being the mere result of the achievement of a list of social criteria. However, youth experts continue to measure adulthood with the ability to attain these criteria. Several youth researchers propose a redefinition of the concept of adulthood and restructuring of the theoretical framework of transition (e.g. Andrew et al. 2007; Blatterer 2007a; Mary 2012; Wyn 2004). Acknowledging the new routes of transition that many young people follow today would allow a better recognition of their socio-economic abilities and position within the wider societal sphere.

This paper examines the experiences of transition to adulthood of a group of young academic women about to complete their studies and to start working life in Finland and France. The paper first introduces the methods utilised to investigate the apparent phenomenon of youth prolongation. Second, the study results are presented into three parts: 1) Informants' evaluation of the difference between 'being' and 'feeling' adult; 2) The measurement of adulthood with the ability to combine social and individual characteristics; 3) How young women negotiate the attainment of adulthood in contemporary societal context.

Material and Methods

The present paper reflects upon the results of an in-depth empirical study conducted in Finland and France. Mainstream literature on youth transitions essentially comes from English-speaking countries. The theories

emerging in those countries are often taken-for-granted and believed as applying to other advanced societies. However, each country presents a different societal background that influences and shapes youth transitions. New routes to adulthood are empirically under-explored in non-English speaking countries. This study thus investigated patterns of transition in Finland and France, and offers nuances to existing literature and theories on youth patterns of transitions.

The primary data comes from 22 in-depth qualitative interviews carried out with young female university students aged 21 to 30, about to complete their study curriculum and to enter working life. Eleven interviews were conducted in France in Lyon (in French) and eleven in Finland in Tampere (in English and Finnish) in 2008. The research examines the variation between different societal institutions in Finland and France from the point of view of one group of individuals, rather than focusing on various subgroups of young people. Young women were solicited to answer questions in relation to these structural institutions: the higher-educational system, the labour market, and family institution. The study investigated: 1) How young women assessed their own routes of transition in comparison to that of their parents; 2) How informants evaluated the concept of adulthood; and 3) How they negotiated their own status of adulthood in the present societal context.

The study focused on young women as a result of the evolutions of women's social position evolutions since the Second World War, in particular, their increased access to higher education, entry into the labour force and new legal protections. The debate around the prolongation of education and transition to working life guided the choice for examining university students. The research informants shared many characteristics, so as to obtain analogous data. They were from the fields of social sciences and humanities, had reached the end of their curriculum (either Bachelors or Masters), and were about to enter working life or pursue further study. The choice of the respondents has nonetheless influenced the results of the study. Analysing another group of individuals, for instance upper class young women, lower educated young men or simply students from another discipline, would have produced different conclusions.

The difference between 'being' adult and 'feeling' adult

Both Finnish and French young women offered similar interpretation regarding the concept of adulthood and the qualifiers for being an adult. Youth experts assume that young people become adult at a later age than their parents did. I asked the informants to consider this aspect. Several young women agreed that their parents had become adults at a younger age than themselves. However, they explained that they have had no choice but to grow up very fast. Their parents had been forced to become adults at an earlier age as a result of life circumstances. In addition, they were aware that their parents' lives had been entrenched in prevailing social norms and expectations related to the societal context in which they grew up. Nonetheless, the informants stressed that having early responsibilities did not mean that their parents had been more mature than contemporary young people, or more ready to face such obligations. They implicitly questioned their parents' real mental maturity and psychological development.

R: *So, do you feel that [your parents] were adults before, at an earlier age?*

I: *I think they were forced (...) to be adults. (...) When I think of my mum, physically being 20 or 21, I don't think she was an adult, but they were (...) forced to take responsibility much quicker than we are.*

Piia (24, Finland)

I think that they were confronted by the world of work; they took on responsibilities quite early. [But] once again, I don't know if that makes you an adult, because one might handle [responsibilities] so much.

Caroline (25, France)

In their discourse, the informants suggested that their parents might have been able to fulfil the social indicators associated with the concept of adulthood, but they were not necessarily emotionally mature. In other words, abiding by expected social norms produced 'social' adults, but not necessarily 'mental' adults. The young women's reflections pointed towards a clear distinction between playing quantifiable and predetermined roles and being truly able to fulfil them. They considered being mature and 'feeling' adult as the essential attributes of becoming an adult.

According to the current notion of adulthood, one can be an adult while still lacking maturity. Similarly, an individual might act in a mature way and 'feel' adult, despite lacking the alleged qualifications for adulthood (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005: 114). Shanahan et al. (2005: 249) indicate that further research on people's own maturity, experiences and meaning of adulthood is needed, for it is no longer enough to exclusively assess young people's status of adulthood on the basis of demographic indicators. Andrew et al.'s (2007: 233–234, 240) empirical study supports that adulthood is increasingly a state of mind. The present notion of adulthood generated inherent conflicts for the respondents who observed that many individuals acknowledged as adults do not always act responsibly, as 'adults' should do. They openly distinguished conventional demographic markers from characteristics such as acting responsibly and being mature.

Defining adulthood in terms of social roles exaggerate individuals' role-taking. The current definition of adulthood is based on a modernist view that conceives social roles as routinized expectations and presents a static model of adulthood (Pallas 2007: 190–192). This implies that individuals' subjective self is essentially defined by allocated social roles. Social scientists came to adopt this role-based conception of adulthood after post-industrial countries adopted the modernist conception of the self as reliable, consistent and perceptible through action. Nevertheless, the major structural shifts that occurred in advanced societies since the end of the 1970s strongly disrupted the traditional foundations of existence and generated new ontological insecurities. Postmodern societies have become more fluid, unpredictable, and encompassed with a variety of risks at all levels of life (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). As a result, individuals' destiny seems increasingly to rest upon themselves, although it is still undeniably influenced by a web of external structural forces (Giddens 1991). The societal apparatus has changed, yet, the current conception of adulthood is still embedded in the model that took shape in the modern era. The quantifiable indicators of adulthood are nonetheless no longer sufficient when examining patterns of transition (Pallas 2007: 193). Individuals' subjective experiences, perceptions and construction of adulthood equally deserve investigation.

'New' adulthood: A combination of classic and contemporary markers

Many young people experience a diverging path of transition, while others still achieve the conventional social indicators of adulthood at a fairly steady pace. This generates a gap between those having reached a social position granting them a stable social identity, and those whom social status remains ambiguous, although they might feel and act as responsible adults. The research respondents were in that situation; they were students and had acquaintances that already had undergone transition. The study investigated whether they considered the young people who already had a stable job and/or a family more adult than themselves and their fellow students. Surprisingly, some clearly affirmed that having a job and a family did not necessarily make an individual more adult than a student or a childless person. They added that these roles generally increase one's responsibilities and transform one's social status, but do not automatically change a person into an adult.

[Having a job and being married] is not enough [to be considered an adult]. We can play mum and dad; we can play, there are roles that we can acquire.

Caroline (25, France)

R: *The people who work, do you think they're more adults than the ones that are studying?*

I: *Not always, no. I don't think work (...) makes you adult. (...) [If] you have regular working times, it doesn't make you adult; it's yourself and how you behave [that does]. And also studying can [make you] grow up and educate you mentally very much. You can learn a lot of things from there too.*

Suvi (25, Finland)

Some young women made a clear distinction between being able to fulfil the traditional markers of adulthood with a certain level of, or absence of, maturity. Nadège (21, France) emphasised that having a family did not transform a person into an adult. She referred to a young woman who had been with a boyfriend for several years, and had stopped her studies because she wanted to have a baby. For Nadège, ending one's studies at a time when the socio-economic situation is uncertain and demanding was an unwise decision. Tuuli (25, Finland) considered the decision to either study or start working to be an adult decision in some cases, but a lack of maturity in some others. This implies that young people who are perceived as adults because they have achieved markers of adulthood, such as having a stable job or a family, might in fact be immature in terms of life choices and individual behaviour. Social maturity does not necessarily match subjective maturity. In this respect, Pallas (2007: 190, 192) argues that taking on or discarding roles such as being a student, a worker or a parent tells little about how these roles are enacted, and concurrently, whether they are performed responsibly. Some young people might simply lack sensibleness. Under the current socio-economic conditions, individual maturity and an attentive consideration of one's commitments are more likely to contribute to effective integration into the wider socio-economic context than fulfilling the classic markers of adulthood.

[Being adult] is being aware of one's own responsibilities, (...) being able to manage one's own life, and also being aware of other people's lives. Natalie (22, France)

When the informants were solicited to discuss the notion of adulthood and what ‘being an adult’ meant to them, most answered straightforwardly that being an adult was related to taking responsibility, being mature, being both financially and emotionally independent, and being able to manage one’s own life. They viewed adulthood essentially as a mental and individual process rather than a social process. The social markers of transition still held an important place in their eyes, but mainly because of their capacity to enhance individuals’ maturity and level of responsibility.

Tiia (26, Finland) had become a mother at the age of 25. She explained that she did become more adult since becoming a mother, based on the increase in responsibilities for another person. However, what had made her become an adult was not motherhood per se, but the responsible role it had bestowed upon her. According to Westberg (2004: 51), parenthood partly leads to adulthood because it entails serious commitments and being responsible for another person. Andrew et al.’s (2007: 243) informants affirm too that becoming a parent did not necessarily change a person into an adult. Parenthood does not inherently lead to adulthood but acts as a catalyst for the onset of adulthood, for it stimulates sense of responsibility and care.

The adult status today is increasingly a combination of personal qualities and social roles (see Andrew et al. 2007; Hartmann and Swartz 2007; Mary 2012; Molgat 2007; Shanahan et al. 2005). The social indicators of transition are still important and relevant, but they can no longer be dissociated from young people’s subjective and psychological experiences of transition. Patterns of transition have become moveable, and need reconsideration in the light of contemporary socio-economic fluctuations and developments. Several studies support that the demographic markers measuring adulthood are no longer sufficient to assess the status, but nevertheless cannot be denied or discarded (Andrew et al. 2007: 230; Arnett 2004; Shanahan et al. 2005: 249). Demographic markers still influence young people’s perception of their social role. The authors call for a multivariate model of analysis, using both social and psychological criteria. Hartmann and Swartz (2007: 259–263) maintain that young adulthood is a package based on a combination of demographic and subjective characteristics. Their respondents defined adulthood in terms of independence, maturity, autonomy and responsibility, but also associated these attributes to social roles and statuses. They assessed and distinguished the individual and mental characteristics of adulthood by juxtaposing them to social roles and experiences.

Negotiating the status of adulthood

Although a large number of young people and studies advocate a redefinition of adulthood and additional attributes for being adult, the patterns of transition established after the Second World War still dominate the wider socio-cultural perception of adulthood. The prevailing discourse implies that young people are defying the norms. They are suspected of prolonging their youth before attaining the ‘natural’ patterns of adulthood. In reality, they are striving for integration into a demanding economic apparatus that compels them to follow alternative routes. Nonetheless, these tactics collide with the political and socio-cultural expectations that require young people to rapidly integrate the socio-economic context.

In light of the disruptions to the patterns of transition, the informants were invited to reflect on their own entry into adulthood. Some clearly stated that they did not feel adult yet, essentially because they were still financially dependent on their parents (in particular in France), or simply, they did not feel mature enough. Most felt partly adult, considered themselves as young adults, or showed awareness of being in between two phases and approaching the adult side.

R: *Do you feel adult then?*

I: *Mm ... yeah! From time to time, yeah. (...)*

R: *But not all the time?*

I: *Not all the time, but I think it's only because when you are a child, (...) you think that adults don't worry or don't have any suspicions about anything, but the truth is that it's not easy to be an adult. And you can't (...) know answers to every question, even though you are an adult. So, yes, I feel myself as an adult. (laughs)*

Elina (26, Finland)

The informants were conscious of taking on new responsibilities and hence of becoming adult. In fact, they were negotiating their own positions within the statuses of youth and adulthood during the interview process. They were deliberating and justifying their own social role and level of adulthood. Young people face ambiguities with regards their social position; they struggle to fit in the traditional framework of transition, while simultaneously contesting it. They are clearly caught in sets of contradictions, between socio-economic fluctuations, cultural expectations, available individual possibilities and personal desires.

Not at all! (laughs) Ah not at all! (...) I don't feel adult at all, I don't necessarily even feel ready to be a teacher to be frank. (...) We take a lot of time to become adult; in fact, we are in-between, we are ... big kids actually. Audrey (26, France)

I'd say 60% of me is adult and 40% is still ... Well, (...) I get money from my mum, which basically makes me a child still, but I do think that I'm an adult in the sense that (...) I'm quite responsible. (...) I've gradually moved into adulthood when I've noticed that I like doing things that don't have anything to do with going out and partying ... You know, just calming down a little bit ... Piia (24, Finland)

One of the roots of such negotiations lies in the conventional perception of adulthood. Adult status is still measured with the attainment of social criteria. Those not able to fulfil these attributes are not validated as full adults, such as disabled people, the elderly, or in this case, young people. The dilemma rises from the taken-for-granted definition of adulthood, which is associated to being a normative social category. Individuals' adult status depends on the extent to which it matches socio-cultural norms and expectations of what constitutes the appropriate adult behaviour (Baltterer 2007a: 8–9). This undeniably impacts young people's perception of and doubts about their own status. They struggle to fit in a social category that belongs to another socio-historical period. They are nonetheless aware of their inability to conform to it, and simultaneously reject the normative constraints of the inherited standard. This generates conflicts both at

the individual and social levels (Blatterer 2007a: 10). Some research participants were clearly contesting and challenging the present notion of adulthood.

I don't like the word 'adult'. (...) I don't like the word 'adolescent' either, actually, so maybe I simply don't like categorisations. (...) I don't consider myself to be a teenager, so ... why not an adult actually? Maybe it's the word itself that is too serious actually! I know I attach negative connotations to the word.

Florence (22, France)

Tiia (26, Finland) emphasised that *'for different people adulthood means different things,'* Anna (28, Finland) that *'the "adult" is more in your head,'* and Johanna (26, Finland) that *'it's a "feeling" that you are an adult,'* which leads to a change within *'the whole mental world'.* Päivi's (25, Finland) definition of adulthood encompassed *'being independent, taking care of oneself, (...) being self-sufficient.'* However, she was aware of not fitting into the traditional concept of adulthood.

I: I guess there's this connotation to the word adult, that (...) also means (...) [that a] person (...) already knows what he or she is going to do two years from now ... You know, (...) [a] very fixed lifestyle. (...) I don't think I'm adult in that way. (...) I think at some point [in the past] it might have been, but I'm not sure if [being adult] is that any more. (...) I think the concept is changing a little bit as well.

R: So, you view yourself as an adult, but within a kind of different idea what an adult/

I: Yeah, within my idea!

R: You have your own definition?

I: Yeah, yeah!

Päivi (25, Finland)

A growing number of young people noticeably feel they do not fit in the conventional representation of the model of adulthood, and contest the framework for patterns of transition. Andrew et al. (2007: 234) point out that their respondents too disclosed the ambiguity of their own status, and the growing conceptual gap that takes shape between the current categorisation of adulthood and their own feelings and perception of what being an adult consists in. Mainly, they rejected the static aspects of adulthood. Many young people accept and even embrace prolonged transition, following a flexible lifestyle, and the variety of routes leading to adulthood (Hartmann and Swartz 2007: 265–266; Mary 2012). Arnett (2004) and Galland (1990) claim that young adulthood is a time for life experimentation and identity exploration. However, one may question whether such attitude is generated by young people only, or if it indicates a signal for a broader and deeper reconceptualisation of adulthood. Several research informants affirmed that they did not wish to undergo a fixed and predictable lifestyle anymore, but rather desired to follow the multiplying options and possibilities opening up to them.

Hartmann and Swartz (2007: 277–278) stress that the path to adulthood is changing from being a static status that one achieves to being a journey that one pursues. The authors' respondents generated a new vision of adulthood that is a multidimensional on-going process of development at both the individual and

social levels. Nonetheless, Blatterer (2007a: 9) explains that redefining contemporary adulthood meets considerable tension because adulthood as a social category has meant the opposite of what it is becoming. Adulthood embodied the stationary status that one was reaching on a permanent basis, while many contemporary young adults have adapted to and even welcome uncertainty and the opportunities it brings to them. There is therefore a growing gap between the long-established model of adulthood and the current perspectives many young people hold, which compels them to constantly justify their social position.

Discussion: Recognising the need to reconceptualise adulthood

This paper calls for the need to acknowledge the changing nature of the concept of adulthood. The status is still understood in terms of achieving demographic markers and stationary social positions. However, this interpretation neglects a dimension that young people increasingly identify as the central criteria for adulthood, that is, individual maturity, sense of responsibility and psychological development. Consequently, young people suffer from the widening discrepancy between their perception of adulthood and pathways of transition, and the expectations the wider socio-political and cultural spheres have set on them. In other words, young people's innovative patterns of transition are misinterpreted and misrecognised for a failure to integrate in the broader societal sphere and following a deviant lifestyle. As a matter of fact, young people do not intend to sabotage old patterns of transition or prolong their youth. They are simply establishing new pathways that are more suitable to their own requirements, in response to contemporary socio-economic fluctuations. Many young people, such as research informants, have in fact already begun to reshape adulthood into a more appropriate archetype, based on available socio-economic possibilities and their perspectives of the status.

The theoretical framework of analysis of transition to adulthood is increasingly irrelevant and anachronistic, and thus needs reevaluation. Rapid socio-economic changes have provoked a rupture between older standards and the contemporary pathways to come of age. Following the 'classic' model of adulthood is rarely possible today (Blatterer 2007b: 63–64). Young people grew up in a socio-economic context that radically differs from the world in which their parents became adults. Yet their experiences are still evaluated from within the framework of the previous generation. This undeniably leads to biased interpretations, since the approach is based on an outdated model (Blatterer 2007b: 112). It fails to give the youth credit for their capabilities and pioneering pathways to adulthood.

The mismatch between the faulty interpretation of youth patterns of transition and the strategies of integration they initiate causes further damages than mere misunderstandings. It contributes to the growing gap between institutions, policies and programmes aimed at young people, for youth experts' analyses fail to officially recognise young people's requirements (Furstenberg et al. 2005: 6; Settersten et al. 2005: 536). More empirical qualitative research is necessary to understand present patterns of transition, and young people's aspirations, expectations and requirements.

Rather than focusing on the potential emergence of a new phase in the life course, it becomes urgent to acknowledge the multidimensional scope of being an adult today. The societal structure is malleable and

permeable by wider external fluctuations. History has continuously proved that no socio-economic model is permanent. As such, social concepts are not immune to alterations either. Adulthood is a significant institutionalised concept that has regulated the life course for decades. Yet, wider socio-economic forces have contributed to disrupt its nature. It becomes crucial for youth experts to recognise that the concept of adulthood itself is currently undergoing transition and following the laws of transformation.

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WEALTHY MEN AND BEAUTIFUL WOMEN? CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITY THROUGH CONSUMPTION

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Abstract – Young people live with an escalating variety of consumption alternatives in an increasingly mediated culture, growing into girls and boys and then women and men through various consumer practices. Designer clothes, branded goods and services, and enjoyable leisure time as a whole are seen as constitutive elements of young people's lives. In our article we examine gendered consumption through stories on getting rich written quickly by seventh-grade students. We argue that traditional gendered models of consumerism are still deeply embedded in Finnish society, although stereotyped feminine and masculine positions are changing among young people. Girls' stories speak of consumer dreams that can be interpreted as feminine, such as beauty treatments and shopping, while boys' writings speak about the significance of being athletic in the construction of a masculine self. Concerns about appearance seem to include boys, while girls adopt traditionally male agencies by speaking of fast cars or investing, for example. Although technical objects of consumption such as scooters, mini bikes, iPods and smart phones are part of the day-to-day life of both genders, playing sports or computer games has been labelled boys' activity. Young people also show generosity and willingness to practice charity.

Introduction: Young Consumers and Gender Positions

It has been argued that in late modern societies young people increasingly construct their identity by consuming and that consumption has become the most important way to express one's identity and way of life (e.g. Miles 2000). More than ever before young people are surrounded by commercial products that are made and marketed especially for them (Nayak & Kehily 2008, 126). Youth culture especially is seen as the symbol of enjoyable consumerism, and young people are seen as careless spenders and self-seeking hedonists (e.g. Miles 2000; Wilska 2003). However, young Finns seem to construct their consumer identity mainly on the basis of rational, reflective and economic discourse (Wilksa 2002, Autio 2004). And even though they might assign positive attributes to 'spending', they tend to avoid such expressions as 'pleasure-lover' in describing their consumer identity (Autio 2004). In Finnish consumer culture pleasure seems to be concealed by a national ideology of self-control and thriftiness in consumer narration (e.g. Falk & Mäenpää 1999; Wilksa 2003).

Previous studies have suggested that traditional Puritan consumer ideology and rhetoric are still very influential in Finnish consumer culture (e.g. Sulkunen 2009; Heinonen & Autio 2013). However, the Puritanical peasant model of a rational consumer is characteristic not only of Finnish consumer culture, but also of Nordic consumer culture in general. Pauline Garvey (2003) has argued that Norwegian hedonism is rational romanticism, in which the ideologies of enlightenment and Puritanism are essential elements. Wilk (2005, 11) has also pointed out that almost every aspect of consumption is laden with moral value and meaning, so

that values of and attitudes to consumption are shaped by moral and often religious values that have very little to do with acts of consumption.

The moralistic viewpoint on consuming, especially enjoyable shopping, has been interpreted as a gender-related phenomenon. According to Erika Rappaport (2000, 143), shopping has been identified with women, and shopping itself has often been seen as a wasteful, indulgent, immoral and disorderly pastime. This view originates in Christian tradition, in which carnality, wants, desires and pleasure have traditionally been considered vices (Belk et al. 2003, 331), and associated moreover with women. Thus, uncontrollable cravings, such as want and desire, have become woman's part in the consumer discourse, their consumption viewed as impulse shopping or wasteful and as spending money on 'vanities'; in other words, as an irrational activity (e.g. de Grazia 1996, 19). Girls and women are allowed to discuss shopping and their love of spending money on appearance, including on clothes, jewellery and make-up (Campbell 1998, 243). The role of men in consumer culture is constructed quite differently. Consumer discourse on boys and men does not speak of shopping for fun, but rather of investing and responding to needs (e.g. Campbell 1987, 226; 1998, 243). Furthermore, men's role in consumer society has traditionally been that of the provider for the family (Mr. Breadwinner), whereas women have been given the role of the consumer and household co-manager (e.g. Thompson 1996).

Prior research suggests that girls and boys are socialised differently as consumers, although stereotyped feminine and masculine positions are also breaking down, especially among youth (Kacen 2000, 349). Nowadays, there are multiple forms of masculinities and femininities available to young consumers, and there is more room to blend gender positions (e.g. Thompson & Holt 2004, 334–35). In this article we first study young people's consumption-related dreams of material and social success, and secondly, we analyse how these consuming aspirations and habits are gendered.

Research Design: Material and Method

We used the method of role-playing (e.g. Eskola 2001, 69) to access the ways in which Finnish youth discursively perform consumption and gender. In this method the researcher gives the participants study instructions and an orientation text by which they will write short stories. In Eskola's (2001) study, two different versions of the orientation text were used so that each participant received only one version and was unaware of the other (Eskola 2001, 70). We modified the method and used only one story. The orientation story was the following:

If I were rich...': Imagine that you suddenly had a lot of money at your disposal. Describe what you would do, where you would go and what you would buy with this money – and why. To start your essay give a short description – a few sentences – about your hometown, your school environment and the people closest to you, like your friends and family. Also write a few sentences about yourself.

Earlier studies have approached consumption in realistic terms by asking respondents to write consumer biographies, for example (e.g. Autio 2004). Realistic approaches tend to restrain the willingness of people

to reveal consumer desires. The study's role-playing method overcomes these constraints. The stories written by the youth are not merely fictional, but also based on cultural understandings of objects of appreciation and acceptable (gendered) ways of consuming. 'Free association' is always bounded by society's social and cultural norms (Eskola 2001, 78); thus, the stories can be seen conveying the youths' consumption and gender-related morals and beliefs prevalent in Finland today. It is notable that we do not focus on the influence of family or peers on young consumers' spending habits or aspirations. We are interested in the stories as cultural texts produce stereotypes and representations and that bring out thought patterns and objects of appreciation influential in our culture. We therefore draw on the tradition of cultural research in interpreting the data (Moisander & Valtonen 2006).

The stories were collected in two schools in northern Finland. The pupils were 13 to 14 years of age. Before the research was begun, the headmasters of both schools were asked for their permission to carry out the study. The length of the stories varied from half a page to two handwritten pages. The pupils were asked to state their age and gender, but not their names. The research material consists of 93 stories of which 46 were written by girls and 47 by boys. Girls' stories were longer on average and more detailed, whereas the boys had a tendency to produce stories that resembled shopping lists.

Our study shows that the role-playing method works well in this type of research, producing detailed and vivid stories. The method gave young people the opportunity to reflect on their own understanding of the world we live in and on the socio-cultural norms concerning consumption (e.g. Milner 2006). The age of the young people was visible in the stories. At the top of their shopping list was candy.

First, we analysed the stories with a focus on how the participants would use the money they imagined having, what items they would buy and for whom. We paid special attention to the normative argumentation behind the imagined consumption aspirations. We divided the text into five categories – property, shopping, travelling, generosity and future life plans – to illustrate how the young people discuss their needs, wants and aspirations. On the basis of our analysis we were able to identify two types of cultural narratives: the modest consumer narrative and a rather handsome 'Hollywood' narrative (see Tables 1 and 2). The modest consumer narrative drew on rational consumer discourse, while the handsome 'Hollywood' narrative drew on the hedonist-materialist discourse (see Campbell 1998; Wilksa 2002; Autio 2004). As Sulkunen (2009, 58) argued, the opposing 'twin brother' of the Protestant ethic is hedonistic 'modernism' with its values of instant gratification, pleasure and egoistic individualism. In the second round of analysis we focused on determining the ways in which the consumer habits depicted in the narratives were gendered. Below we will first explore the modest consumption narrative, followed by the analysis of the nature of the handsome 'Hollywood' consumption narrative. Finally, we explicate how the narratives are gendered.

The Modest Consumption Narrative

The modest consumption narrative is the dominant narrative in our data, and it seems to be derived from the rational consumer discourse prevalent in our society (see Wilksa 2002; Autio 2004). This narrative underscores reasonability and modesty in consumption. Here the ideal of a good life includes a house or a flat slightly bigger than the current one, a more expensive car and often a holiday for the whole family in some

warm location, such as Spain, Greece or Italy. A summer cottage also figures on the list of most wanted items. In the Finnish context a summer cottage is not considered a luxury. The modest narratives are lacking details about the items wanted, indicating that luxury materials, design furniture, walk-in closets and fancy bathrooms are not actively fantasised about or desired. Rather the bigger investments made by the youth in these narratives seem to be security- and needs-based – better housing, transportation and clothing. The only hedonistic consumption element was travelling. Yet most travel destinations are very typical and fairly inexpensive holiday destinations. It can thus be concluded that the participant youths fantasised about a rather ordinary life, if a wealthy one. The study indicates that the traditional model of consumer behaviour – being a thrifty, careful and self-controlled consumer (e.g. Wilska 2003; Autio 2004) – is still deeply embedded in Finnish society.

Finnish sociologists Pasi Falk and Pasi Mäenpää (1999) found a similar cultural story in studying Finnish lottery winners and the people who dream of winning. According to their study, people who win the lottery want to travel and build a home of their own with the winnings, as well as buy a summer cottage, a car and a boat – all of these more expensive than they would have been in a former life, but still rather modest overall. However, it seems that this cultural story of modesty is not entirely Finnish or Nordic, but merely a Western dream of a good life. Anke Plagnol and Richard Easterlin (2008) also determined that the most common aspirations amongst Americans are a home, a car, travel abroad and a vacation home. However, given the American consumer culture, the nature of the objects Americans desire might be quite different from what young people elsewhere desire (Milner 2006).

When it comes to consumer products, the youth seem to have more consumption desires, but the objects of desire remain ordinary as the extract below illustrates. The pupils writing the stories want to buy such things as donuts, candy, clothes, CDs, make-up, computer, a flat TV, sports equipment and mopeds. Amongst consumer goods the youth seem to want more of the same stuff they already have. The only exception to the rule seems to be having their own computer or a moped, which the writers do not have. The two extracts below nicely illustrate the rational consumer narratives in our data.

If I were rich, I would buy myself a new set of skiing equipment. If I were rich, I think I would go skiing in the Alps. I would also buy a new skiing outfit, because the old one is too small and torn. The rest of the money I would put into a bank account. – 13-year-old boy –

If I suddenly had a great deal of money at my disposal, I would spend it on something sensible. I like animals very much, so I would probably buy myself a horse and one, maybe two dogs. I would also buy a lot of new clothes, make-up, sweets and CD's... If I still lived at home when I got the money, I would buy my family a bigger house. If I didn't live at home anymore, I would buy myself a fancy and big house and my own mini-bike. The house would have all the luxury stuff. The rest I would give to charity and buy my friends all kinds of cool things and give money to the poor and to my family. I would probably also take a major trip abroad. (13-year-old girl)

Consumer brands are very seldom mentioned in the stories. The pupils' shopping desires for consumer products could be satisfied with a sum of 500 to 5,000 euros. It seems that knowledge of luxury brands is very limited among the pupils, which might be due to the northern location of the schools where the stories were collected. The towns are small, and shopping is done in chain stores where luxury brands are limited

or non-existent. Thus, it seems that in the modest consumer narratives the enjoyable consumerism characteristic of today's youth culture seems to be limited. Designer clothes and branded goods and services are not constitutive of the lives of the young people under study, as earlier studies have indicated (Miles 2000). Regardless of the rational undertone of the narratives, the pupils do, however, express enjoyment in shopping as manifested in such expressions as *'I would buy all kinds of goodies for myself'*; *'I would go to a restaurant with my friends'*; *'I would buy donuts just because they are so good'*. Furthermore, there are cracks in many of the modest consumer narratives, indicating that there might be changes in youth consumerism in northern Finland in the future. Amongst the rational narratives there are individual sentences that indicate hedonistic desires. For example, a desire to have a swimming pool in the new house or a Porsche or a horse, all of which are considered luxury items in the Finnish context.

The youths who were writing modest consumer narratives seemed to be generous as well. They were eager to support their immediate families by buying houses for them, as well as holidays and cars and paying off their debts. Generosity was also often extended to a circle of close friends whom the authors were willing to take shopping for clothes, computers and holiday trips. The study indicates that gift-giving is a valued and acceptable practice for showing love and commitment to family and friends. Furthermore, consuming appears to be a communal activity (i.e. co-shopping, co-consumption; see Thompson 1996).

The handsome 'Hollywood' consumption narrative

Another narrative type found in the data is the handsome 'Hollywood' consumption narrative, which seems a drastic contradiction to the modest consumption narrative. Whereas the modest narrative drew on rational consumer discourse, the handsome 'Hollywood' narrative draws on the hedonistic–materialist discourse (Campbell 1998; de Grazia 1996). This narrative does not follow the traditional Finnish rational consumer culture, but idealised instead the American consumerism portrayed on television series such as *Cribs*, *Gossip Girl*, *The Apprentice*, and *The O.C.* As Sonia Livingstone (2002, 4) pointed out, the media and visual imagery have a pre-eminent role in the construction of cultural significance and the identity of young people. The internet, print media, TV series, music videos, and so on constantly offer new material, allowing people to dream and imagine their futures while evaluating their lives, accomplishments and opportunities. The icons of a 'successful' life are film stars, rock musicians and athletes, as well as businessmen or others who have power. The rich and famous live in huge apartments and villas in London, Paris, Milan or New York and use luxury brands, such as Gucci, Moët & Chandon or Porsche. A 'successful life' also means possibilities: a successful person has the power to make life as he wants it to be (Deutsch & Theodorou 2009, 246), as the next extract of a 'Hollywood' narrative shows.

I'd move to New Port, because it's in the south and by the sea and it'd always be summer. I'd also buy a riverside villa by Kemijoki [a river in Lapland] and some land on the riverbank. After shopping for a house I'd buy a round-the-world trip for my family and go shopping in Paris. I'd save four million [Euros] and buy stocks with the rest of the money, because I'd get really good dividends and then when the stock value got really high, I'd sell and buy stock with another company and keep selling and buying as long as I felt like it. (14-year-old girl)

The narratives describe extravagant living where wealth is excessive and is openly flaunted. The following extract is an illustration of the most extreme version of the handsome ‘Hollywood’ narrative. Here a 13-year-old boy describes his dream house, which resembles the celebrity homes depicted on the television programme *MTV Cribs*:

If I was rich, I'd spend loads of money and invest it in lucrative businesses. I'd buy flats too and rent them out. In addition I'd donate money to my relatives. I'd have a 5,000 square-metre house, which would have five swimming pools, a cinema, a bowling alley and lots of indoor courts. Outside I'd have a bunch of nice cars, a baseball court, swimming pools, a park and other luxuries... Everything in my house would be aquamarine, and I'd have lots of terriers. My house would also have a spa, with twelve 100-metre slides, fifteen Jacuzzis, seven 25-metre and three 50-metre swimming pools; the spa would be 50 times bigger than the Caribia Spa in Turku [Finland]. My house would be located somewhere in America and cost over a billion Euros. (14-year-old boy)

The lifestyle imagined in this narrative can be seen as representing ‘spectacular consumption’ (Watts 1997), made known by the lifestyle of rap artists (e.g. owning, terriers, showing off wealth and possessions). According to Milner (2006), expensive cars, designer clothing and McMansions are all symbols of social class and status in American society. The type of consumption described in the hedonist-materialist stories does not have a Finnish cultural background or general cultural acceptance. However, showing off wealth has become a more legitimate practice during the last two decades in Finland, even though it is also widely despised.

Gendering the stories

In the previous sections we described the general nature of the consumer narratives. On taking a closer look at the narratives, we realised that they were gendered along rather traditional lines, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. The study suggests that consuming is essential among youth in constructing gender identity in Finland.

Table 1. Spending habits in the modest consumer narratives by gender.

	Property	Shopping	Travel	Generosity	Future focus
Girls	Bigger house for the family, summer house	Clothes, beauty products and services Candy and restaurant services Computers and games Horse Scooters	Travel abroad to a warm place (Spain, Greece, far-away places).	Focus on family and friends Third world	Saving
Boys	Bigger house for the family, summer house	Sports equipment and clothes Candy Motor sports equipment (mopeds, motorcycles, snowmobiles, cars, etc.) Computers and games	Travel abroad to a warm place (Spain, Greece) Travel to sports events	Focus on family and friends, but less than in the girls' stories	Savings Stock investing Business start-ups

Table 1 indicates that in the modest consumer narratives, girls expressed keen interest in shopping for clothes and beauty products and using beauty services like hair dressers and cosmetologists. Beauty is often associated with being a successful woman. Girls' appearance is also a sign of success (Ollila 2008, 146–56; Deutsch & Theodorou 2009, 243). While both girls and boys seem to be interested in travel services, it appears that girls dream of places further away from Finland than do boys. Also of interest is that the girls express more dissatisfaction with the town in which they are living: a better life includes buying a flat or house somewhere else. In this respect the girls seem more open-minded, active and adventurous as consumers than the boys. These attitudes seem to be in contrast to the stereotypical notions of women as passive.

In the data sports seem to play an important role in the life of male youths, thus reflecting society's expectations. The majority of the boys wrote about football, motor sports and/or ice hockey and about all of the equipment needed to practice and become better players or drivers. In the following extract a boy tells a rather masculine version of wealth in which his family's well-being also plays an important role:

If I was rich, I'd buy myself a new hunting suit, shotgun and other cool things. I'd also buy my dad a car and a house and give him lots of money. I'd buy my mom a new house and give her money too. If I was rich, I'd come to school in a limo. If I was rich, I'd buy my friends all sorts of things they wanted. If I had a lot of money, I'd go on a long holiday to Spain and live in a presidential suite there... When I'd come back in a month, I'd get a summer house somewhere on the river... I'd buy gym equipment for my house, so I could build some muscles. (13-year-old boy)

In contemporary western society, most young men are still trying to act as is traditionally expected of a 'man' and that applies also to consumption. In western societies 'manliness' or 'maleness' is often associated with an active subjectivity and an active and 'hard' body: some have argued that sports have become the key element in defining masculinity (O'Connor 2005, 20). As Liz Frost (2003, 63) observed, the expression of some important themes in the construction of masculinity, for example, competition, aggressiveness, bravery, independence and leadership, are often linked to the notion of physical strength and prowess; hence, the historically enduring symbols epitomising masculinity: warriors, sportsmen, explorers and all-purpose heroes.

The gendered consumption patterns detected in the narratives seem to emulate the female and male stances promoted in advertisements. Girls appear to be guided to consume in order to improve their appearance, while boys are encouraged to concentrate on sports. According to Jonathan Schroeder and Detlev Zwick (2004, 21), male and female stances are rather limited in advertising: iconic masculine activities such as shaving, driving fast cars, having a hearty appetite, smoking cigars and drinking liquor are juxtaposed with feminine visions of applying makeup, driving a minivan, eating 'light', doing the laundry and decorating the home. The youth under study, however, seem to do gender only partly according to the stereotypes seen in advertisements and society at large. Of note is that the girl pupils also expressed interest in scooters and computers. Thus, motor and technical equipment is not perceived as belonging exclusively to the masculine sphere. Mopeds used to belong to boy's traffic culture in Finland, but recently girls have been buying scooters as often as boys have bought motorbikes/mopeds. Regardless of the blending of the gen-

dered consumer culture, there was a stronger emphasis on motor vehicles, such as mopeds, motorcycles, cars and snowmobiles, in the boys' stories.

Table 2. *Spending habits in the 'Hollywood' narratives by gender.*

	Property	Shopping	Travel	Generosity	Future focus
Girls	Luxury mansion(s) and other luxury housing	Designer clothes Private concerts by famous artists/bands	Paris (for shopping) Exotic far-away destinations	Less focus on family and friends than in the modest stories Charity work (Third World, animals)	Future focus less strong than in the modest stories Saving Stock investing
Boys	Luxury mansion(s) and other luxury housing	Ice-hockey/football teams, sports arenas Fancy cars	Exotic far-away destinations	Less focus on family and friends than in the modest stories Charity work, locally when charity target mentioned	Future focus less strong than in the modest stories Saving Stock investing

In the modest consumer narratives, generosity is not a particularly gender-related phenomenon. Boys can also be very generous when it is a question of their parents, friends and relatives. However, girls seem to be more interested in Third World poverty along with assisting their family members financially. However, boys also expressed interest in stock investing and starting up their own businesses to secure future income. However, we do not see these aspirations as manifesting conformity to the traditional breadwinner role, but rather an attempt to acquire a social status that is socially appreciated in contemporary Finnish society. The gendering of the Hollywood-inspired handsome consumption narratives is, however, somewhat different from the rational stories, as Table 2 indicates. In general, these stories were more individual in nature, and sharing wealth was emphasised less than in the modest narratives.

Girls writing from a hedonist-materialist position emphasised their knowledge of consumer brands, thereby indicating that being rich convincingly and successfully is not only a question of money, but also a question of knowledge and power (Deutsch & Theodorou 2009). To buy designer clothes is to buy social status – and a distinction from those classes that do not have the knowledge or resources for these things. The girls writing from this position also tended to highlight their charity work, indicating that girls and women express success and wealth by being 'caring consumers', as the following extract indicates.

If I were rich, I would try to cure world hunger because I hate to see people suffer because of poverty, as I'd have so much money. I'd move to New York and buy a fabulous penthouse in the middle of Manhattan. I'd buy Prada, Armani and Michael Kors, because who doesn't want a luxury life like that? I might also find a 'home' for the homeless and really poor where they could live and get food and clean clothes, somewhere in India. I might also adopt a child in some developing country. I can't really think of anything else, but there's always something you want to buy. (14-year-old girl)

While charity work and buying designer clothes is typical consumer behaviour in the girls' handsome 'Hollywood' consumption narratives, the boys expressed their material wealth and power by the fantasy of buying successful ice-hockey or football teams and players. Fancy cars and motorcycles are also on the pur-

chase list, and usually more than one. Another aspect that sets the boys stories apart is their unrealistic nature. The extract below as well as the earlier extract describing the dream home serve as examples of the unrealistic expectations of what money can buy.

If I were rich, I would buy a snowmobile, a Hummer, a mansion, Oulun Kärpät [a Finnish ice-hockey team], Dallas Stars, Raksila [a Finnish ice-hockey arena], Counter Strike, the world's best computer, all of Goodman's records, an assassin who would kill all those people who I would like to have killed, clothes, Brazil, the best internet, gym, airport, and Inari, Utsjoki and Saariselkä [large counties in northern Finland], Alaska, the NHL. (14-year-old boy)

It seems that young people who have taken the hedonist-materialist position in writing their stories fulfill the requirements for 'young success', namely being good looking, wearing the right clothes, being rich and successful. Ollila (2008, 146–56) sees 'young success' accomplished through looking good (boys) and beautiful (girls), being a hetero (boys) and being the right size (girls), and wearing the right kinds of clothes. Adolescent boys tend to think that signs of success include money, wealth, a nice house, a good job and a beautiful wife/girlfriend (see also Deutsch & Theodorou 2009). For the girls appearance is a sign of young success – for girls it is looking good themselves and for boys it is having a good-looking girlfriend (Ollila 2008).

Conclusion

Finnish consumer culture has not been very favourable to the enjoyment of consumption, at least in the rhetoric of everyday language and on the ideological level (Wilska 2002; Autio 2004). Our study indicates, however, that whilst modest consumption is still emphasised in the narratives, girls and boys are also producing new narratives that emphasise hedonistic, even show-offish consumerism in which shopping, luxury cars, houses and clothes, as well as international lifestyle are central elements. Regardless of the new cultural narratives, the gendering of consumption seems to follow traditional lines. Girls tend to emphasise consumption practices that can be interpreted as feminine, such as beauty care and looking good in general, whereas boys tend to emphasise sportiness in constructing their masculine self and attractiveness. Girls produce gendered consumer practices through products that target women, such as beauty products, different luxury services and beautiful handbags.

Also worth noting is how generosity is gendered in the stories. Boys' generosity is directed to the immediate family members, whereas girls' generosity is directed beyond their immediate circle of friends and family to the poor and needy, both at home and abroad. Girls also seem to fantasise about adopting foreign children, which can be interpreted in the stories as an appropriate manifestation of success, wealth and womanhood that follows the celebrity examples of Madonna and Angelina Jolie. Thus, the girls are more interested than the boys in the world outside Finland, including international adoption, whereas boys' generosity is limited to those nearby, such as parents, friends and teammates.

For the young people of today, however, it is also acceptable to acquire and experiment with consumption practices that are traditionally connected to the opposite sex (e.g. Thompson & Holt 2004). Regardless

of the new elements in the consumer narratives, our study shows that there are many elements that could be labeled traditional and gendered. One explanation for this phenomenon might be the relatively young age of the informants. While young people have quite a few liberties these days, it seems that they depend on fairly common consumption and role models reproduced by the media and society at large (Thompson 1996; Schroeder & Zwick 2004) to legitimate their consumer habits.

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