BUILDING TRANSCULTURAL TRUST
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The year 2015 brought a sudden increase in numbers of unaccompanied minors when about 95,000 of them claimed asylum in Europe. This change resulted from worsening long-standing wars and conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. Recent years have, unfortunately, shown that the contemporary protection and integration measures in several EU countries have not been adequate to handle the situation sustainably.

Unaccompanied minors are transcultural subjects. They are in need of protection and care. Moreover, their own agencies, skills and resources also need to be valued. In order to develop sustainable care practices, we need to understand the multiple worlds within these minors. Social support for unaccompanied minors requires a cross-sectoral approach among educators, care providers, child and youth workers, and multiple governing practices.

The Academy of Finland key project TRUST (2016–2017) aims to facilitate this cooperation and centres around the lived experiences of the unaccompanied minors. The TRUST project works together with unaccompanied minors, stakeholders and care practitioners to find solutions to the problems of care and social support.

TRUST develops understanding and practical tools through which the unaccompanied minors can
be supported and protected in an embracing manner in their new host societies. Through field work in Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Australia, TRUST has gained first-hand knowledge of how to ground social integration and belonging in care practices and policies.

This booklet contains 14 blog entries that the TRUST research team published between 2016–2017. The texts centre around the questions of belonging, living and caring. We discuss how the encounters with multiple governing systems, institutions, caring adults and peers are intertwined in the making of these young people’s transcultural belonging.

Furthermore, all the texts argue that academic research, protection and integration policies, and caring practices should not be built on territorially restricted worldviews. Rather, the lived understanding of what it means to be an unaccompanied minor or a migrant youth should be based on the recognition of their translocal and transcultural realities. Only this way are we able to understand the needs of these young people and build workable social support, education schemes and housing.

This collection reflects some of the voices of young refugees and the way in which they built up their transcultural selfhood in the new host societies in different parts of the world. The TRUST team wishes to thank all the young people and the care practitioners who have shared their experiences and time to help us understand these beautiful inner worlds, encounters and challenges.

28 September 2017

Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto
Docent, project leader of TRUST
BELONGING
Home, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is a place where a person lives. A home may also be a social unit, a family living together in one building, a house or a flat.

As simple as that? Not quite. When thinking about mobilities and transcultural belongings, “home” becomes a complicated issue that should not be taken for granted.

We understand home as a private space. It is a symbol of order, rootedness, self-identity, happiness and privacy. We see home often as a place that we are attached to as we assume it is shared by loved ones. Therefore, home contains meaningful memories and feelings of warmth and security. The concept of home may have different scales: it may be a place where you lie down and rest, a room, a community, a county, a country, or even a planet.

We have a tendency to think that people are place-bound, and research has shown that we do have emotional attachments and bonds to places. However, researchers have also, already for many years, stressed mobility, not stability, as an essential feature of places. The
anthropologist Tim Ingold stresses that life is actually not in places but along the paths between these places. I agree with him.

Mobility and life along paths are also true of the place we call home. Our home exists within certain time and space, in a junction of possibilities and restrictions. The past home is not automatically our present home, and the present home is not inevitably our future, imagined home. This gives us the idea that home is not necessarily one specific place, but many places, which may simultaneously exist in the past, the present and the future. Common to all is the fact that a home is lived and experienced. Thus, a place will not be a home without actions.

When our Trust team was doing participatory field work in a workshop organised after the Reetu and Lola puppetry performance, Anne Lihavainen, the leader of the workshop, asked the participants what belongs to a home. One girl, maybe 4 or 5 years old, raised her hand and said, “Heart belongs to a home”. She also made a heart sign with her hands. Recently, I saw a similar sign on a wall of a group home for refugee minors: “A home is where your heart is.” This might also imply that our body is actually our only home.

References:


Every year tens of thousands of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors enter the territory of the European Union. These children and young people have left their war-torn home countries in Asia, Middle East or Africa. Europe is the unaccompanied minors’ ultimate hope for a better future, but their lived realities turn out to be something quite different. Most of them end up in state care institutions for several years. Also, because of the strict immigration laws and regulations in several EU countries, many unaccompanied minors will never be reunited with their families. This means that they stay alone in their new reception countries for the rest of their lives. Thus, their position as transcultural subjects trapped by “nation-state” needs to be carefully studied. The Academy of Finland key project, Transcultural roadmap for supporting belonging among unaccompanied children and young people (TRUST), is responding to this challenge.

In order to gain in-depth understanding of the lives of unaccompanied minors, improve their situation and support their multiple agencies, research and care practices have to actively resign from the prevailing paradigm of victimisation. Instead of emphasising the risks of the migratory movement of children and young people, the TRUST project develops understanding of how the unaccompanied minors can be supported and protected in an embracing manner in their new host societies.

TRUST argues that the current increase in the numbers of unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe, the lack of supranational governance, and the sudden appearance of ad-hoc restrictions in national immigration and family reunification legislations in EU countries have led to institutional ambiguity. This means that no one takes the overall responsibility for the situation and lives of unaccompanied minors. Moreover, several national policies have for many years tried to address the systemic-level integration of unaccompanied children and young people (TRUST), is responding to this challenge.

BELONGING
and schemes take too simplistic, territorially restrictive and objectifying a stance on children’s daily realities.

TRUST will therefore study the possibilities of promoting and governing sustainable solutions from the minors’ experiential viewpoint. The project develops novel ways to recognise and support the transcultural agencies of unaccompanied minors in order to co-construct sustainable daily worlds. Moreover, social integration requires compassionate understanding of the migratory movement and the experiences of the unaccompanied minors in wider society, in other words in daily encounters with Finnish adults and peer groups.

Belonging to several cultural communities, longing for the familial ties, and experiencing chronic loneliness create a transcultural existence for these young that is not effectively recognised in protection and integration measures. This neglect has led to increasing challenges in wellbeing among these minors and decreased the effectiveness of integration policies in respective national contexts.

Transcultural belonging is an existential condition for these minors and thus should be seen as a right, as a basic need in these children and young people’s lives. TRUST argues that there are four key features to be recognised in order to understand what the transcultural belonging means in practice. First, the existential loneliness experienced by unaccompanied minors has long-term effects on their wellbeing, agency
important social and spatial relations are needed. Second, unaccompanied minors are active agents with multiple capabilities and resources. Taking this agency seriously and supporting it requires new modes of interaction between the minors and their carers that do not treat these minors as victims or passive beneficiaries. Third, many contemporary institutional agents providing care and protection still emphasise belonging as something territorially bound and thus operate with such nationalistic imageries as integration primarily through language, and partly separated education and work training schemes. These really need to be challenged. Fourth, unaccompanied minors hope to gain new social life and friends among their peers in their new host societies, but find this hard to accomplish. These peer relations have to be actively supported in schools and multicultural child and youth work.

With a focus on developing measures in these four fields of life, we are able to support transcultural and translocal belonging of unaccompanied minors and create more embracing care practices in Finland and in Europe.
Schools are nests of bridging and bonding. They are filled with many arrangements that enable and constrain learning but also how people inhabit the shared place and relate to one another.

This autumn I had a chance to spend three weeks observing such arrangements and practices at North Park Primary School near Melbourne, Australia. At North Park, the native language of 88% of the students is not English, the majority of them having recently migrated to Australia. Most of the students live with one or both parents, but some children are unaccompanied minors. You might assume that loneliness and isolation would be a problem in a place like this. But the way North Park has addressed the potential loneliness is extraordinary. Every detail of the school practices, from the physical arrangements of learning spaces to the pedagogical tools the teachers use and the way they address students and their families, is carefully planned with the guiding principle of the school in mind: Positive relationships are at the core of all successful learning. This philosophy goes beyond mere rhetoric. In my field work, for instance, I had to interview the children during their lessons, instead of their breaks, so that none of them would miss valuable socialising time.

The guiding principle also means that instead of only acknowledging isolation and loneliness as common problems of migrant students, the school has the responsibility to fight them. For instance, the teachers do not have a yard duty; they have play support during recess. Adults participate in the games with children, making sure everybody is included. Children’s families and close ones, be they parents, relatives or workers of child welfare units, are included in the spirit of the whole school approach. Also interestingly, considering the school is located in quite a disadvantaged neighbourhood, one of its core values is optimism. Be hopeful and believe that good

1. Name changed
things will come is declared with colourful pictures on the walls.

During my three weeks of ethnographic field work, I witnessed a lot of these ideals in practice. A lively, multilingual chitchat filled the space. Headscarves and dastaars were complemented with hats to protect children from the burning sun, a variety of outfits (ranging from sari to Superman) were combined with school uniforms. Not once did I see or hear of threatening behaviour towards another person. I did see a sad student beating a rattan chair into pieces with a baseball bat, under the supervision of a teacher. Letting the student physically work

Photo: Jennnie Ralph
out his anger in a supervised, safe space indicates that teachers care (rather than punish). Another instance from the recess shows that also students care. I escorted a crying child back to her classmates in the school playground. When I asked the other children whether they would play with the girl, their answer was immediate: Of course! Anyone! Unsure of what I heard, I checked what the children meant. They meant that the inclusive approach was unchallenged: children would play with anyone who came to play, how silly of me even to ask!

In my field work, I experienced several amazing moments with children and young people. I untangled wool in a cross-stitch work as a teacher, which led to untangling complex teenage problems. I discussed domestic violence while painting tabletops together with a group of students with behavioural challenges. I learned about the parenting roles of sea horses (male sea horses have a pouch and responsibility for the offspring) with six-year-olds, who were wondering where they would survive if they were sea horses. Not in their fathers’ pouches, as the fathers were not in Australia. The solution was an agreement that it is good to be human, without having to squeeze into anybody’s pouch. As a parent, my heart sank during many of these conversations, but as a researcher and a teacher, so many issues also astonished me. Children’s joy, optimism and elaborate analyses of how they cope without their parents’ pouches surprised me. While children amaze me everywhere in the world, little things in this Australian school make a world of difference in enabling optimism in children’s lives.

Mervi Kaukko would like to acknowledge the support of Monash University and Dr. Jane Wilkinson in conducting this study. Jane has contributed to the analysis and further publications based on this data.
Doing research with unaccompanied refugee minors includes many moral and ethical aspects. Among these research constrains are the ethical board’s statement, research permits and the participants’ informed consent. Above all these official formulations of research ethics and good research conduct, the most important factor is the lived ethics of the research relationship. This means a particular ability and willingness to be exposed to other person’s presence, which provides an opportunity to build a research relationship.

Thus, the research relationship with unaccompanied minors is not just a case of starting and carrying the research process but attaining and respecting the experiential knowledge of the worlds that these children and young people carry in them. Consequently, the researcher’s non-judgemental and permissive openness to all kinds of narratives and experiences is in the core of knowledge production. While coping with the infinite loneliness that is connected to the existence of the unaccompanied minors, the researcher has to respond emphatically, and yet professionally, to the young people’s need to challenge the adult listener with painful and sometimes pretty brutal narratives of violence or other kind of abuse, for example. However, a very common mistake in research, as well as elsewhere in life, is to view these minors only as victims of their past experiences and ignore the wider capacities and skills that they have. Mervi Kaukko states in her TRUST blog “Coping to live and learn, living and learning to cope” that, the education system of these children and youths often fail to recognise their competencies. Moreover, as Kaukko argues “success is built on safety and belonging, and maintained by good educational practices, genuinely interested teachers and caring friends”. This means that the role of caring and compassionate social relations between minors and trusted adults should also be actively created and embraced. How can this be achieved in research?

Unaccompanied minors are very sensitive to the genuineness of the adult’s presence, and quite often, particularly in the first stages of the research relationship, put the adult and the trust to test. For the researcher this means a continuously
evolving emotive-cognitive process in which trust is being negotiated with regard to the diverse daily encounters within the political, cultural and social contexts the young person finds important.

How can the researcher then respond to and operate in these emotionally challenging and thick moments of field work? I have argued that one of the key ways is to utilise the power of compassion as social emotion. Human compassion emerges for instance when witnessing another person’s physical or mental pain. The person who experiences compassion does not experience the same feelings as he or she observes or expects the person suffering the pain to feel, but relates to the other’s experience.

Compassion as a methodology directs the researcher to pay attention to emotionally thick everyday situations. Besides verbal expression, it expands the research to observe the body and the senses. In the field work that the TRUST project has conducted, these emotionally thick sites have included young people’s experiences of mental and geographical placelessness and outsideness. In addition, loneliness, the adversities of daily life and the worry about their family were visible in the young people’s being, manner and speaking. One can respond to a young person’s loneliness by being
genuinely present; yet, at the same time, it is necessary to reflect more deeply on how the understanding gained through exposure changes the research relationship and the researcher him/herself.

Moreover, it has to be remembered that although it is the young themselves who pass on their experiences and decide what to tell the researcher, the understanding gained can still hurt them by bringing up painful past experiences and uncertainty. This pain can also be mirrored back to the researcher, albeit in a different way, as a helplessness to expose injustices and inability to change for example the dominant social structures the young person’s experiences have revealed. Despite these risks, I believe that conducting research can genuinely and openly be based on a politics of compassion.

References:
LIVING
How do you imagine that escaping from home, missing out on education and having to start over in a strange country would influence a refugee child’s future chances of doing well in school? Scanning through the research in the fields of education, cognitive and social development, and child migration, you might come to a conclusion that these children are doomed to fail. Fortunately, the relationship between forced migration and educational outcomes is not as simple as that.

Recently, I interviewed 45 refugee students who were all nominated by their teachers as being successful in school in Finland and Australia. Students told me about their school experiences in a form of school path pictures and narratives. Many of the pictures were painted in dark colours; dangerous sea crossings, dead families, fear, neglect, and abuse. Assyrian Rebqah told me about her family being torn apart, her schooling being interrupted and her working as a cleaner at the age of eight or nine. Kumara from Sri Lanka told me about his long stay in different Australian offshore detention camps, where too few teachers tried to teach too many students, under the burning sun and without suitable material. Iraqi Aarif, like the majority of the children, recalled the pain of being hit by teachers.

Asking Kumara, Rebqah and Aarif whether their past experiences could explain their current school success might sound like a stretch; what good could come out of such hardships? Well, it was less of a stretch than I expected. The answers painted clear and colourful pictures of the resourcefulness and elasticity of these children as they coped to live and learn, and lived and learned to cope. Kumara learned that he loves to study, and that he must orchestrate his own possibilities to do so despite poor resources. Rebqah learned that cleaning is not what she wants to do, she is much happier in school. Aarif learned he wants to end violence in Iraq, and that he might start from schools. Today, these are all happy, engaged and successful students with big plans.

These children are not “miraculous exceptions”, nor are their stories uncommon. Stories such as these are just too often submerged by...
deficit discourses that position the children as victims of barriers due to their background, and schools as remedial places. This is understandable as many traditional research methods fail to acknowledge the child’s own view, and consequently, focus on the trauma and the trouble. This, in turn, strengthens the well-meaning but counterproductive deficit discourse. Furthermore, because of this, the ears of adults are not tuned to hear what children want to share.

Tuning our ears towards more positive frequencies is necessary if we wish to hear a full, stereophonic story of ordinary school life, which the refugee children want to share. Success that makes sense in the situation of a refugee child is more than measurable academic excellence. Success is built on safety and belonging, and maintained by good educational practices, genuinely interested teachers and caring friends. Importantly, refugee children want to belong in and contribute to their education, not to be fixed by it. Like all children, they want an opportunity to live and learn, not only cope.

Photo: Mervi Kaukko
I had a great opportunity to take part in an urban gardening project at a temporary housing unit for asylum seekers during my stay in Bremen, northern Germany, in 2015. In this blog, I reflect on my experiences as a volunteer but also on how these social gatherings improved the daily life of the asylum-seeking youth.

The aim of the urban garden project, “Kulturgarten Abergen”, was to create a space where different actors from different cultures could meet. The objective was to create a space where every family could have their own small plot of land to cultivate but also where the residents of the refugee shelter and the local people could organise different activities and celebrations. The project was funded by the non-profit organisation Eko Stadt Bremen e.V and it was built with the help of the AWO Bremen Refugee Centre. The nearby refugee centre offered transitional residential accommodation (Übergangswohnheim) for families with a permission to stay in Germany, but who had not yet received permanent housing.

To my surprise, the project was especially favoured by the children, who participated playfully, if somewhat irregularly, in the gardening work. This meant that the function of the project changed during the process and it became a place for the children to play, bustle about and do things. For the children and the young people, it was important that the place was lively and exciting. Whenever there was an activity in the garden, children would join the work or just come to play there. Interestingly, the children did not seem to play in the garden if there was no one gardening at the same time. Most of the volunteers were young adults, which meant that it was a good place for the young residents of the shelter to make contact with local people. This was important because many of them lived in extreme uncertainty, making it challenging for them to create these contacts. Furthermore, adults were comfortable with leaving their children to play in the garden under the supervision of other trusted adults so that they could have their own time to take care of their daily errands.

Doing things together with adults helped asylum-seeking children and youth to overcome the difficulties they encountered in their dai-
ly lives filled with waiting and constant uncertainty. The various kinds of construction projects we had (e.g. building a warehouse or a yurt tent) and the different festivals and celebrations we organised certainly helped to improve the atmosphere in the refugee shelter. During my voluntary work, I really understood the meaning of being and hanging out together. I would argue that for refugee children and young people, spending time socially with different people is one of the most important things in making their daily lives more secure.

I noticed during my voluntary work that children and youth have many social skills and wish to actively participate in various activities. Doing things together offered them a short release from the harsh and burdensome period of their lives characterised by waiting, uncertainty and concern for the wellbeing of their family members. Supporting transcultural belonging and doing things together are important steps toward creating a more sustainable and secure environment on a daily basis for asylum-seeking children and youth. In addition to the carers, it is important to bring together another group of trusted adults that will spend time with the refugee children and youth and this way support their inner worlds and multiple agencies.

“Kulturgarten Abergen” in Bremen, Germany (Photo: Anna Bartholdy)
WEAVING VOICES TOGETHER – COLLABORATING ACROSS CULTURES THROUGH MEXICAN MASK-MAKING

KRISTIINA KORJONEN-KUUSIPURO

The TRUST project collaborated in the autumn of 2016 with two artists, Anne Lihavainen and Rosamaria Bolom, in a Mexican mask project for unaccompanied minors and Finnish art class pupils. We met in four workshops where the masks were made and also attended a party where the pupils performed with their masks.

The aim of the art project was to offer a platform for cross-cultural communication and interaction and to support mutual understanding and solidarity among the young people. For us researchers, this art project offered a perfect opportunity to examine how collaborative methods actually work and how communication between different groups evolves. Our research method was participant observation: we talked with young participants and photographed their working for research purposes. We also worked as “helping hands” for Anne and Rosamaria when necessary. Some of the schoolteachers were also present in the classes.

During the workshops, we witnessed various ways of communication. At first, there seemed to be no relations between the unaccompanied and Finnish youths, some even rejecting others. However, with the artists’ support, we began to notice some small acts of communication. At first, these were non-verbal (such as eye contact, smiles etc.), but as people became more familiar with one another, verbal communication also began to take place. This verbal communication, however, needed a lot of support from the workshop’s leaders. Language seemed to form a barrier to deeper communication – the unaccompanied minors seemed quite uncertain about their Finnish skills even though they had learned Finnish extremely fast. At the same time, some of them seemed uncertain about the Finnish pupils’ interest in them. “They are probably not interested in us”, one of the boys commented. In our understanding, Finnish pupils actually wanted to socialise but hesitated communicating because they felt that using Fin-
nish might prove too difficult for the non-native speakers. In a way, each group tried to protect the other and avoid embarrassment.

Three of the workshops were organised in a school environment and the fourth in a group home of unaccompanied minors. The school environment differed greatly from the home environment. At school, the pupils behaved in a very organised way. They seemed to act as if programmed by teachers to perform school tasks and mostly obeyed without questioning. At the home environment, the young made an effort to create activities for themselves, for example playing volleyball while others were finishing their masks. The young people were much more active at the group home than at the school.

All in all, we observed constant negotiation of visibility within the entire group: some of the Finnish pupils were very noisy during the classes and confronted the adults while others worked silently and obeyed orders very literally. Unaccompanied minors were polite to the adults but were constantly moving around and in and out of the classroom. They also used their mobile phones very cleverly to hide

Photo: Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro
from social interaction if they felt unable to join in. The boys from the preparatory class also constantly negotiated whether or not to participate in various workshop tasks.

The photographing collaboration in the workshops was my responsibility. We had agreed on how and when to do it, we had explained it to the pupils and had their written permissions. Despite this agreement, one of the unaccompanied minors constantly questioned my right to photograph. Sometimes he looked at me in a challenging way, shook his head or just watched me very sternly. Once he even played the headmaster (sitting behind the teacher’s desk) and told me not to take photos. I interpreted his way of behaviour so that he was worried about where his or others’ photos might be shown – even though we had tried to explain that we would take photos only for research purposes and not show them anywhere. However, my interpretation may not have been correct because at the same time he kept asking me to take pictures of him and posed very eagerly for me with and without masks. He also liked to look at the pictures I had taken of him. In a way, he used his power on me. For me as a researcher, this meant that I had to be ready to constantly negotiate the means of research with participants to make it collaborative. I also needed to consider that ‘the accepted means’ of working together are not always the most suitable ones; and neither are ‘the non-accepted’ ways always wrong in collaborative research. In our case, none of the boys ever asked me to delete any pictures. I interpreted this as an acceptance of my research method.

In many ways these collaborative mask workshops were a success. We heard and saw all kind of voices from different cultures woven together. While at first these voices were rather weak, they were nevertheless seeds of some kind of deeper understanding between young people from different backgrounds. It must be remembered that collaboration demands time to develop and we only managed a glimpse of it. In order to support the communication and strengthen the belonging of these lovely young pupils, we need ways that maintain relationships between young people and trustworthy adults, such as the artists Anne and Rosamaria. Working together is one way to create these necessary relationships. This kind of work requires a lot of social skills, empathy and compassion from the facilitative adults as the artists Anne and Rosamaria showed us.
“HOW ARE YOU, MY BROTHER?”

JAAKKO TUOMINEN

During the spring 2017, I had the pleasure of conducting nine weeks of ethnographic fieldwork as a TRUST-researcher in a family group home for unaccompanied refugee minors in Bremen, Germany. I visited this housing unit for nine boys, aged between 17 and 19, two to four times a week, and wrote a research diary about my experiences with them. In this blog, I discuss the different roles I had to adapt during the fieldwork, as well as the flexibility required to conduct research with respect and care for the youth taking part in it. My roles ranged from an unknown visitor to a researcher and a volunteer, and as we spent time together, a friend, and sometimes even a “brother” or an adult figure to talk to. My relationship with the youth changed with each type of encounter and where it took place.

Before entering the field, one of my main worries was whether the teenagers would accept and welcome me into their home. Would they see me as trustworthy enough to invite me into their private space, accepting me as an adult friend, or would they see me just as another adult quickly passing through their lives? Refugee youth are balancing between their past and present, between different identifications and transcultural belonging. Unaccompanied refugee minors are displaced persons; therefore, for them, the meaning of a home as one’s own safe place bears a specific and crucial meaning. This has to be carefully considered in research design, too, because the family group home is, after all, a place where they should be able to sustain this feeling of “home”.

In that sense, I felt it was important to tell them about where I come from, but also to be honest and clear about the temporary presence I would have in their life. At the first meeting, I gave a short presentation on Finland and showed some images of my hometown. I wanted to show them that Germany was not my home country either, and that I was not fluent in expressing myself in German. After the presentation, I asked the youth if they would allow me to spend time with them in their home. Luckily, one Afghan teenager declared out loud: “No problem! You are a nice man!” This statement meant a great deal to me; the boys themselves welcomed me in their home. For the upcoming weeks,
I helped them with their homework, we played table football and football, went swimming several times, cooked together, and so on. Spending time together had an important meaning for these young people, who often expressed loneliness and lack of adult presence in their daily lives. As Mervi Kaukko states in her blog “The power of hammocks and jumpers”, refugee children, like any other children, will not speak about important things if there is no genuine presence of adults in their lives.
lives. They might invite us into their world if we show them we are interested and available.

Spending time with these young people activated a diversity of roles for me that proved challenging sometimes when I struggled with the switch from one role to another. For the youth, my being a researcher seemed something abstract, formal and rather hard to understand. Therefore, the different interactive roles were necessary, and also supported the research. After a while, I became more like a volunteer worker and an adult friend for them, while still conducting the fieldwork for the research. However, this new role as a trusted adult created some challenging situations, with the youth sometimes testing me to find out if I were trustworthy. They started to share their personal experiences and confided their frustrations, disappointments and other issues of everyday life to me. I frequently heard comments like: “Don’t tell this to my supervisor”; or “I don’t care if you tell this to someone...”. In such situations, I was trying to balance between the different roles of researcher, friend or volunteer worker. After a while, some of the young started calling me “akhi” (my brother in Arabic) or “Bruder” (brother in German). These names meant that I was somebody they considered equal to them and part of the group.

Often practitioners, supervisors and other adults who work with youth are those who define the relationship with the youth. I believe that the fact that the boys called me “akhi” meant that they were actively challenging the power relation by defining their relationship with me by themselves. As such, navigating between the different roles of researcher, friend, volunteer worker and “brother” was challenging not only for me and for them, but also for the structures within which we acted. It is a hard task for any researcher, whose interest it is to understand the personal world and the daily lives of unaccompanied refugee minors, to stay only in the researcher’s role. Therefore, I argue that multiple roles are not only a part of the process, but a requirement for the understanding of the everyday life of refugee youth.
Relatedness is claimed as one of the intrinsic needs or motivations of humans and a key outcome of positive youth development (e.g. Deci & Ryan 2000; Silbereisen & Lerner 2007). Evoking relatedness and a sense of community has also been a goal of my current research Young People in the Limelight: Towards Agency through Multiliteracies (YPAM), which concentrates on young people living in Finland who are at risk of dropping out of schooling and society for diverse reasons, such as learning and social difficulties. The YPAM study has a connection to the TRUST project, as it is in part focused on migrant youth.

YPAM is an action research based on media workshops organised around Finland by several researchers of the University of Tampere, in cooperation with youth institutions, such as youth centres. I will discuss the YPAM pilot and four workshops that focused on photography with multicultural groups. These workshops were attended by 40 mainly 15 to 20-year-old people, of whom 25 were born outside Finland (e.g. in Afghanistan, China, Congo, Iran, Mexico). 16 of them were unaccompanied asylum-seekers while others had arrived in Finland with their families in the last few years. Most of them had limited language skills and faced challenges in adjusting to the host country.

The idea behind the workshops was to encourage the youth to create self-expression based media content (e.g. photographs) and to publish it in online and offline forums (e.g. Instagram, youth magazine, art exhibition). The aim of the researchers was to observe the challenges of young people’s social and media participation and to experiment ways to support them in participation. Photography as a popular youth medium proved a suitable tool of self-expression especially for the multicultural youth.

To begin with, photography is a kind of low-threshold medium, as these days everyone is able to take pictures and create something nice-looking even without knowing any camera technique. Being based on a single frame, photography allows quickly accomplished mini-tasks and does not require long tutoring or a lot of verbal co-operation compared to editing a film, for instance. Easy and fast success may in turn invite quick positive feed-
back and admiration from peers and adults. In the YPAM study, such experiences of competence, which were rare for the young participants, were discovered to be important in building their self-confidence, and in addition, their willingness and courage to relate to peers.

Photography as a visual medium allowed the youth to communicate with others even with limited verbal skills, since it is literally possible to point out many things in or through photographs. Photography also offered an alternative way of expressing oneself for those less verbally oriented or with limited language skills. Despite this opportunity for visual communication, the young people often did not understand each other, and yet, seemed content in being able to reach out to others at least in some limited ways – this in turn formed a basis for the growth of relatedness and community spirit.

Many young people felt very insecure about communicating with others, as young people often do, but also because of their different
cultural backgrounds and other difficulties, such as language skills or being traumatised. However, especially photography excursions outdoors with peers and youth workers appeared to help in experiencing relatedness without pressure. During the excursions, each individual was carrying out a photography task independently. Yet, it was also possible to feel a sense of belonging to a group as the young people were walking around in one big group. On the one hand, as everyone had a camera, it was natural to stand alone in front of some intriguing object – for a reason of photographing or just because one wished to be alone. On the other hand, the loose, informal group allowed them to easily relate to others if they felt like it. In other words, the photography excursions, and other independently performed media tasks, enabled the youth alternatively to be alone or to relate to others in a manner they could cope with at the particular moment of their lives. The excursions outside the youth centre and their own homes were also meaningful in the sense, that they made it possible for the young people to observe near neighbourhood with a tranquil yet focused manner within the ‘security’ of the group. This opportunity to get to know the neighbourhood in detail seemed to make them more relaxed in them and might even facilitate the young migrants to acculturate to their new environment.

To sum up, photography as a medium contains diverse ways to support the creation of relatedness and a sense of community among multicultural groups, as it is an ‘easy’ visual medium enabling youth to experience competence and to relate to others even in challenging conditions. Based on YPAM, it is not only important that the migrant youth’s basic needs (e.g. appropriate housing) are fulfilled; the experience of relatedness is also crucial for their wellbeing.

References


CARING
Social marginalisation is an alarming aspect of the increasing migrant youth population in Europe. Even if these young people learn the local language, gain a basic education and find employment, they may not feel well enough to truly participate in their host society. A challenge even in one dimension of well-being can increase the risk of social marginalisation. According to the sociologist Erik Allardt (1976), ‘having’, ‘loving’ and ‘being’ are the key components of human wellbeing.

For wellbeing, one needs to have for example appropriate housing, sufficient income and satisfactory health (‘having’). One also needs loving relationships and a feeling of belonging to a community (‘loving’). Furthermore, one should be able to influence one’s life and to make a difference in relationships or the surrounding community (‘being’). In practice, these dimensions are intertwined. For example, appropriate housing is closely related to having a community to belong to. (Allardt 1976.)

My research interest lies in the category of ‘being’ and its aspect of ‘self-actualisation’, which is rarely discussed. By self-actualisation, Allardt (1976) refers to the fact that each individual longs for the subjective experiences of being treated as a unique person, getting respect from others and fulfilling oneself for instance through hobbies and spare-time activities. He also claims that one should have an opportunity to participate politically. In other words, self-actualisation is about the possibility to express one’s individual characteristics, creative abilities and personal opinions through a variety of actions.

In my current research project, Young People in the Limelight (YPAM), I study how the wellbeing and social inclusion of vulnerable young people, such as migrant youth, can be supported by artistic media production in youth work. This has a link to the TRUST project, which also explores innovative and caring ways to enhance the wellbeing of migrant youth, particularly unaccompanied minors. The YPAM art and media workshops were implemented by several researchers acting in diverse youth institutions,
such as non-governmental organisations, municipal youth centres and a refugee centre for unaccompanied asylum-seeking boys. The participants were mainly 15 to 20-year-old young people (altogether close to 100 people). In the workshops, the youth were encouraged to create art and media content, such as journalistic writings, poetry, photographs, and videos. Most of the creative tasks had loose frames and plenty of possibilities for self-actualisation (e.g. create a meme, write a fairy tale, photograph something people do not usually see). Some tasks were done individually and others with peers. The youth were also given a chance to publish their artwork and media content in social media (e.g. Instagram) and in mainstream media or public spaces (e.g. in a youth magazine, an exhibition).

Based on the results of YPAM, the wellbeing of vulnerable youth was enhanced through producing art and media together with peers and publishing it. The young people needed to feel competent for instance through mastering a technique or creating a unique work of art (e.g. photograph, video, novel). Many of them also felt contentment when being able to have a say about social problems or
even global issues (e.g. racism, poverty, wars, climate change). In addition, the creation of media content gave them a chance to explore their strengths and weaknesses. Getting positive feedback from peers and adults they trusted was important in creating or strengthening their experience of competence. Through showing their competence, they had a chance to gain respect from others as individuals. Publishing the creative work in art exhibitions, magazines and social media turned out to be particularly important, as the youth interpreted the act of publishing as a sign of adults’ appreciation and their own competence. The experience of competence, in turn, seemed to build their self-confidence, create an anticipation of pleasant things to come, and increase their willingness to work with others and take part in future projects.

References
THE POWER OF HAMMOCKS AND JUMPERS

MERVI KAUKKO

The fast pace, the criteria of “evidence” and the push to publish make research with children challenging. In particular, it becomes difficult to understand what matters for children. Refugee children, just like any other children, do not just tell us about important things if we ask. What they might do is invite us to their worlds and show us, but only if they believe we are interested and available.

In my ongoing fieldwork with refugee children in an Australian primary school, I have made a methodological choice to slow down, be available and of use in the everyday school lives of the children. At the same time, I have been thinking how safety, belonging and success, which Ravi Kohli (2011) beautifully describes as being the dimensions of wellbeing for recently arrived unaccompanied minors, come into being in the physical premises of a school. With the luxury of slowness and this framework, some of the seemingly trivial details these children value have started to make perfect sense. Below, I give three examples.

The inside and the outside of the school are equipped with child-made hammocks, hideaways and nooks, which the schoolchildren presented to me with pride. The nooks serve multiple purposes as homes, work places, restaurants and schools. The times tables are easier to learn in a hammock. Lunches taste better in stick-nests. Yet more importantly, these are places of tranquillity and safety. Safety is needed, as one little girl told me, against the zombies walking around in the school yard. Her zombies came from an imaginary game but for others, the zombies felt real.

The sense of belonging presents itself in the form of self-designed sixth-grade jumpers. These jumpers were no less than the best thing in the whole school (according to one of the girls I interviewed), and the feeling is stronger than the burning Australian sun. This girl drew and talked with me for two hours on a hot summer day, telling me she never takes the jumper off. It is more than a piece of clothing, it is
a treasure connecting this girl, with her name printed on the back, with other sixth-graders. While the idea is not unique to this school, its significance may be. For children from a variety of backgrounds, negotiating their belonging across times, languages and groups, a jumper connects them to this moment and this group of children.

The third dimension, success, is as important as the first two. A boy’s discussion about a solar system hanging from the ceiling illustrates this point. While showing it to me, he also told me about the connections between maths, science and the wider world, and his need to learn them all to be able to travel to space. He, like many oth-
ers in this school, began his school journey at a refugee camp, in very unfavourable circumstances. He did not want just to learn the minimum or to survive or to get a better life than his families. He loved to learn and achieve academically because his world was so interesting. The world was made available to him, among other things, with an accessible solar system. Merely asking this boy about his dreams for success might have resulted in a different answer. Letting him speak, in his own words and in his own environment, led the discussion in this direction.

These few glimpses help us appreciate the power of seemingly little things in providing safety, belonging and success in the everyday lives of a multicultural school. Moreover, exploring how these dimensions materialise in hammocks, jumpers and solar systems helps us understand the multiple worlds in which refugee children live in, the worlds they carry in them and the ways in which school can accommodate them.

References:

THE FIRST FRIEND: MENTORING AN UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINOR

JAAKKO TUOMINEN

During 2015, almost 96,500 unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) arrived in Europe. More than 22,300 of them applied for asylum in Germany. From these, the state of Bremen received about 2,600 refugee minors. In comparison, approximately 3,030 unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors arrived in Finland during the same year. In Bremen, these children and youth were first placed in temporary living units, often container homes and festival tents, because the existing refugee centres were already full. Unaccompanied refugee children and youth often lack the support of family and community to integrate into their new host country. This is why they need a lot of support to create a stable and lasting relationship with adults that they can trust. To tackle the problem of insufficient time and presence of supportive adults, one solution could be to create a network of trusted adults, who help the unaccompanied refugee children in their daily lives.

A civil society organisation called Fluchtraum Bremen e.V. organises a mentoring programme for volunteers to support the social inclusion of unaccompanied refugee minors. According to this organisation, the mentor’s tasks are to support, listen and show understanding to the children. He or she introduces them to the new culture and familiarises them with their new home city. The mentor helps with the homework and learning of the language, as well as assists in finding education and accommodation. Fundamentally, the mentor is a trusted adult who supports the unaccompanied refugee minor and helps with his or her daily life. In Germany, every child has a legal guardian, which means that the mentor does not need to take part in the practicalities of the asylum process. He or she is acting outside the official decision-making procedure, which means that the mentor is a neutral person the child can trust and feel comfortable with.

While I was living in Bremen during 2014–2015, I met Felix Göbel, a 29-year-old legal guardian for unaccompanied refugee minors. He used to be a mentor near the end of...
his studies and later became a legal guardian for unaccompanied minors. Felix explains that the role of a mentor is all about being a trusted individual, whose role is to introduce, explain and reassure unaccompanied refugee minors. In addition, he reflects on his role as mentor: “It’s not always just about the bureaucratic stuff. The mentor can also be the first contact in the normal life in the new country. Getting to know the culture, learning the language and getting to know the place you live in are really important things.”

While doing our fieldwork for the TRUST project in autumn 2016
and spring 2017 in Finland, we have noticed that unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth need to have a positive relation with an adult person. Furthermore, they need to have Finnish-speaking friends in order to facilitate their arrival and their inclusion in their new environment. Every single underage asylum seeker in Finland has a legal guardian. The problem is that the guardian’s statutory task is not to be an adult friend and support the daily lives of the refugee minors. Often integration, cultural adaptation and creating social belonging are left as duties to housing units or schools. These institutional settings do not have enough resources and time for individual meetings with the young. Luckily, some meaningful and important projects exist to overcome the deficiency of the state: for instance, the Tutoring programme of Plan International Finland and the Sport Mentor project of Save the Children Finland. However the unaccompanied refugee minors in Finland lack a sustainable and systematic network of trusted adults who could support them by spending time with them and by showing interest in their hopes, fears and dreams.

The creation of a mentoring or tutoring programme to support the social belonging of refugee children is a necessity if we want to assure their well-being in Finland. To act as a trusted adult does not mean that one should have any official degree in social work for example but that the mentor has the will to help and is sensitive to what the child has been through. In this sense, he or she is more like a first friend in a new and often really different culture. As Felix explains how he sees the role of a mentor: “It’s nice to have people who are not official employees and who bring various ideas of spending free time to the mostly boring life in a living unit. I think the nonconformity of ideas can be one of the strengths of mentoring.”
CASE SWEDEN – FINDING HUMAN-CENTRED SOLUTIONS

KRISTIINA KORJONEN-KUUSIPURO

In April 2017, Anna-Kaisa and I visited the Linköping area in Sweden to interview experts working in the field of migration and to meet colleagues at the university. Finland is frequently compared to Sweden, whatever the issue, and migration governance is not an exception. Both examples of Nordic welfare states, Finland and Sweden are indeed very similar, but in migration issues, they are completely different.

The year 2015 created challenges in both countries, but in Finland the number of people seeking asylum was rather low (32 476), while the number in Sweden was nearly 163 000. A specific challenge in the Swedish immigration peak of 2015 was the fact that 35 000 asylum seekers were unaccompanied minors. In Finland, the number of unaccompanied minors in 2015 was 3 024. Yet, it was in Finland where the system was overloaded and discussion overheated. There is no doubt that the situation was similar in Sweden where the period of 2015 and 2016 has been titled an “immigration challenge”. The notable difference is the way people see the situation now, afterwards. Our interviewees stressed the fact that they survived: “Yes. The situation was horrible, but we managed it”; “We decided that we will manage it somehow. And we did.”

One of the most powerful sentences we heard in Sweden was: “Här i Sverige är vi alla i samma lådan”. In English this means that we are all equal, “in a same box”. This is something you very rarely hear in Finland where people seem to be more concerned about the system than about the people. Therefore, I would argue that we need more human-centred policies, more human-centred ways to approach the inevitable new movements of migrants and refugees. We also need to believe in our capacity to survive and manage these situations. We do not need to see people in separate boxes (as immigrants, asylum seekers or refugees), but as humans we are able and also obliged to help. We also need to concentrate on actions that support the agency of these people. In Swe-
den, we heard that people working in the field of migration have started to think about the universal skills these people might need in their lives wherever that life will be: What are those skills we can teach these people that are useful even if they are sent back?

States can also learn from each other’s’ “best practices” and mistakes. Sometimes, instead of just learning what and how things are done, we could learn from the attitude - how things are addressed. I am not saying that we cannot find innovative solutions here in Finland, but there is surely a lot of talk about the problems and less about solutions. There are some excellent new ideas here, too. I recently found out about Integrify, which is a part of “Vuosisadan rakentajat” (Builders of the Century). Integrify enables integration through technology and teaches coding for refugees, asylum seekers, and recent immigrants. This skill – nowadays compared to a reading skill - may help people to find their place in society. I am sure that Finland will learn too!
In the TRUST project, we have conducted field work in Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Australia during 2016 and 2017. Learning about unaccompanied minors’ lived experiences is a crucial part of the project. Unfortunately, such experiences are still quite rarely recognised in research, let alone acknowledged in policies and integration schemes. Based on insights from our field work, I argue that Europe has to openly discuss the challenges of the human existence these children and young people face in their new home countries. This means that we need to search answers to the following questions from an experiential viewpoint: How and through which practices does the life of unaccompanied minors become overregulated? How do several protective measures and care practices confine them into a national trap that does not recognise transcultural belonging? How does this feel and affect young people’s daily life?

In the spring 2017, TRUST published a policy brief on the housing of unaccompanied minors in Finland. This document was based on the field work with unaccompanied minors and the people who work with them. The field work has been going on since 2014. This long-term involvement with several young people provided a solid ground for our policy brief to describe how minors experience the current care practices. In addition, in the process of making the policy brief, we analysed the care staff’s reactions collected through interviews and a collaborative workshop. This experiential knowledge was then transferred to policy claims on how the needs of unaccompanied minors must be recognised and the care system changed in order to support the agency of these minors.

Translating lived experiences of housing to policy recommendations requires good knowledge of the migration governance, and an understanding of how the care structure is historically organised and what the transcultural needs and ties of unaccompanied minors are. Moreover, the policy brief has to be communi-
cated in a manner that makes sense both to policy-makers and people in the field. This is crucial in order to influence the contemporary practices. Our policy brief was also targeted at the ministries responsible for the matters of unaccompanied refugee minors within a wide spectrum, not only in regard to housing. The TRUST team made this important decision to overcome as many of the administrative boundaries as possible, which are one of the key barriers in developing the current care practices.

Our policy brief was a collaborative effort of a multidisciplinary team of researchers both in writing the actual piece and commenting on the earlier drafts. The recommendations were all based on the experiences gathered in the field work. The policy brief’s launch was targeted at a particular policy process,
namely the public comment round of the Act on the Promotion of Immigration Integration (Laki kotoutumisen edistämisestä). The policy brief was sent out to several institutional actors, ministries, politicians, ELY centres, municipalities, and NGOs in the field. It was spread through social media, tweeted and sent to e-mail lists of care practitioners, such as migration officials and social workers.

Making policy-relevant research is demanded and valued by the funders of research nowadays. Obviously, many research projects can also fulfil this requirement, at least in principle. However, to communicate the findings in a manner that will reach the policy-makers at the right time and in the right format requires extra efforts and detailed planning. On the other hand, policy-makers quite often neglect the experiential knowledge produced by research. In TRUST, we argue that the experience of being part of the practice is the most crucial knowledge for developing practices. If we want to understand how the housing of refugee minors affects the integration and future of these young people, there is no other way to do this than to ask for their opinions, respect their answers and analytically contextualise them within the wider migration governance, along with the demand to change the practices that are unworkable. This is the way to make policy-relevant research – this is how the world changes!
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