Youth in time – launching a qualitative longitudinal study on youth in Finland

Sinikka Aapola-Kari, Senior researcher
Finnish Youth Research Network
Email: Sinikka.aapola-kari@youthresearch.fi
Youth in time – a qualitative longitudinal research project

Background: Need for holistic and longitudinal knowledge about young people

Usually youth research focuses on a particular theme and one point in time only

*Three focus areas of knowledge in FYRN:
Transitions, generations and the life-course
Democracy, equality and inequality
Youth services, youth action and youthwork

-> all these will meet in ’Youth in time’

-> An ’umbrella’ project: many researchers with varying research interests will cooperate in creating a joint data base that will be shared with the research team
Youth in time – a qualitative longitudinal research project

The goal is to include approx. 100 young people from around Finland followed for 10 yrs

Young people born in year 2000, from varied backgrounds

First contact mainly through schools

Various qualitative, participatory and arts based methods will be used: aiming to cooperate and negotiate with research participants

Ethical questions in longitudinal research

Special challenge: how to motivate young people to participate for a long time: creating trust in a research relationship
Local differences – different life paths

The aim is to include youth from at least five different research sites.

The sites are chosen so that they represent different types of living environments, opportunities and expectation horizons for young people – some places offer plenty of choice close by, others barely a minimum, far away.

Benchmarking: British longitudinal qualitative project ’Inventing Adulthoods’ (Janet Holland, Rachel Thomson, Henderson et al.)
Five to six research sites

*Capital region: a socially and ethnically varied suburb in the city (Southern Finland)
*A wealthy area close to a large center: an affluent, mainly white, bilingual local center close to Turku (Western Finland)
*A remote area under restructuration: socially varied, rural, working-class (Eastern Finland)
*A small town in the rural zone: socially and ethnically rather homogeneous (Middle Finland)
*A northern town: socially and ethnically varied suburb in a bigger town (Northern Finland)
(*A coastal town: international, socially varied, bilingual (Western Finland)
Theoretical starting points

Structures, agency and interpretations:
how gender, social class, ethnicity, locality and the resources attached to these formulate young people’s possibilities, expectations and choices, and how they interpret and negotiate their life-processes

Young people’s communality, contested memberships and participation + exclusion: feelings of belonging, action for common goals, creating divisions

Life-course perspective: negotiating one’s life-paths, transitions, cumulating experiences, critical moments
Research themes

Linked with youth barometer (quantitative yearly survey with different themes)
At different data generation rounds the themes and methods will vary; young people themselves can also suggest themes
Everyday life: an ordinary day / week
Family, friends and other social relations
Belonging, membership, participation
Locality: relationship to the homestead
Services: youthwork, social and health services
Hobbies, leisure activities
Studies, work-life
Life-line: life-events, turning-points
Future plans, hopes, dreams
Methods

Getting to know the young people gradually: the basic principle: the same researcher builds a research relationship with certain young people for the duration of the project

Focus-group discussions with some photos and other etc. to stimulate discussion

Individual and pair interviews with those interested

Participatory methods: engaging in interaction with the young people: f.ex. walking interviews, life-line, texts, "diaries"-> negotiations

Arts based methods: photo workshops, maps etc.

Contact via social media, cell phones etc. ?

-> "Young people’s panel"
Ethical issues

Formal permissions from the schools
Informing the young people and their parents about the research
Permissions from participants -> to be renewed for each data generation round, voluntary
Anonymisation of the data before its shared and analysed by the research team and before archiving in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive for secondary use
Research sites to be announced openly? Smaller research sites: more difficult to preserve participants’ anonymity
Possible harm or benefit for young people
Pilot studies

A research team will cooperate in each site
Contact to key informants in each research site: school personnel, youth workers, local NGOs, police, church, local young people, youth council ..
Observational visit of several days at each site
Information to parents of the students we shall visit at schools
Group discussions with small groups of students: what topics they think are important to study, how they view their homestead -> what it offers to young people; visual triggers, maps etc.
Research team and cooperation

Coordinator and most researchers from FYRN
The project will also cooperate with researchers Helsinki University and University of Eastern Finland

Cooperation with City of Helsinki Youth Department – project to promote leisure activities for youth at socially and ethnically varied schools

Cooperation with Finnish Social Science Data Archive where the data set will be archived for secondary use (with permission from FYRN)

Cooperation with Ministry of Education and other funders
Locality, space and youth

Locality is linked with young people’s identity formation, local community

Different living environments:
* Geographical location
* Population: number and structure

City, town, municipality; urban – rural

Forms of livelihood

Educational and other institutions

Youth services and youth spaces: public and third sector

Civil society: (youth) NGOs

Commercial services: private sector
Preliminary timetable

Spring 2015: Pilot studies in three research sites: Ethnographic observations, contacts with key informants, info to parents, info to students, group discussions, focus-groups and some interviews
Summer 2015: Preliminary analysis, possible changes in methods and themes;
Autumn 2015: Continuation of pilot studies, first actual data generation, interviews with young people, analysis starts, funding applications
Spring 2016: Additional data gathering, first reports of data analysis, funding applications, contact with young people in social media (Participants graduate from comprehensive school, apply to secondary education)
Autumn 2016: Check-up of young people’s situation
Report of the first phase of the project. Plans for cont.
Literature


Finnish Youth Research Network

*a research network, founded in 1999
*Finnish Youth Research Society in the background
*not affiliated with any university
*funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture – Youth department
*multidisciplinary research in cooperation with universities and research institutes
*approx. 30 researchers, based in Helsinki but researchers also elsewhere in Finland

The aim is to produce knowledge that has meaning for youth policy makers and youth professionals and to listen to young people and give voice to them

www.nuorisotutkimus.fi/en