

## **PROMISE: Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for conflicted young people across Europe.**

**WP6: From Conflict to Innovation: Ethnographic Case Studies**

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### **Intergenerational Contests and Spatial Occupations in the City**

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#### **Executive summary:**

Young people and young adults' means of occupying urban space are regulated and their creative and/or political activism is often stigmatised in the public debate. Young people negotiate and struggle over their right to the city, through occupying, inhabiting and transforming places with embodied and material means. This case study explored how young people and young adults become active by using different public and semi-public spaces in Helsinki. The key research context was a youth cultural and community centre, which has its roots in underground antiracist and punk movements. Research participants were 16-30-year-old young people and young adults who participated in different activities at the centre, such as doing subcultural circus and queer theatre. While the life situations of the participants differed, they nevertheless shared, firstly, a distrust towards Finnish society and decision-making, which was voiced as explicitly intergenerational. The participants talked about lack of trust in governmental politics, disappointment in recent political decisions, such as cuts in the welfare sector and experiences of stigmatisation on the basis of age, gender or sexual orientation. Secondly, the participants emphasised the importance of *claiming an own space* and *creating communities* as counter-force to the distrust they felt. Thus, free leisure spaces as well as other spatial occupations (such as protests and performances) became important material processes in young people's feeling of 'belonging' in the city.

*This report should be read in conjunction with the document "Individual case studies – introduction."*



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## 1. Introduction

I was just thinking that if we didn't have these activities in this building, it would for sure be abandoned. There are abandoned buildings in Helsinki that are not used. So precisely these kinds of [activities], like circus, for example, this is a place that's been occupied. Perhaps this wouldn't have been possible somewhere else. [Lotta, 22]

This is how Lotta describes her feelings of having an own space for a certain cultural activity, which was urban circus, in the city. She participated in weekly circus rehearsals at a youth cultural and community centre in Helsinki and was active in environmental activism, both at grassroots and NGO levels. For Lotta and many other young people and young adults, gathering at the centre, having their own space for activities and community-gathering was very important in their everyday life.

Young people and young adults aged 16-30 occupying the youth cultural and community centre are the key informants in this case study. The main objective of the study was to explore how Helsinki-based young people and young adults reclaim urban space to create and maintain communities, become active and form creative solutions against different forms of discrimination they have experienced and to cope with intergenerational distrust that they feel against society. This research objective was arrived at on the basis of, firstly, the ambivalent political and media debates on young people: especially those focusing on regulating and controlling young people in terms of desirable life trajectories. Secondly, the study draws from theoretical perspectives of young people's spatial entitlements and occupations in the city as *counter spaces* and *counter strategies* (Lefebvre 1991; Rannikko 2018; see also Georgiou 2013).

According to Harrikari (2008), in Finnish debates concerning children and young people – whether in the media, in politics or in the professional field – concerns and fears have increased since the economic recession of the 1990s. Further, according to Aaltonen et al. (2015, 9), during the recession, attention turned explicitly to those young people and young adults who were outside of working life and education. The concept of social exclusion – which is most often understood as exclusion from the education and/or labour market, and rarely exclusion from leisure-time resources or social relationships – lies at the core of many stigmatising concerns related to young people.

These discussions were revived recently at the end of the 2000s and at the beginning of the 2010s. During the 2010s there have been several public debates in Finland, where concerns have been voiced on young people in transitions. Consequently, we have witnessed extensive political initiatives and aims to tackle the issue, such as, perhaps most importantly, the debated Youth Guarantee, implemented in 2012. The programme promised to guarantee a study place, or an opportunity for on-the-job training or rehabilitation for young adults under the age of 30 within three months of becoming unemployed (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012). While the programme was successful especially in terms of developing workshop activities and outreach youth work, several researchers have pointed out that the programme has also led to stricter regulation, control and guidance of young people (e.g. Gretschel, Paakkunainen, Souto & Suurpää 2014, 9–11). Further, as Harrikari (2014) states, the rhetoric of the Youth Guarantee has often turned into marginalising and discriminating discourses and practices, where young people are evaluated according to their productivity/the costs they create for society (119).

The recent years have been turbulent in Finnish politics. In spring 2015 a parliamentary election was held in Finland. The election resulted in the formation of a new government with the Centre Party as the biggest party and Juha Sipilä as the prime minister. Already in 2015, in relation to the implementation of the new government programme, Finland witnessed extensive cuts in the welfare sector, including cuts in the student allowance, and tightening of the regulation and control of unemployed people. Funding of the Youth Guarantee was also subject to extensive cuts and the programme was developed further into the direction of the so-called Community Guarantee. As Laukkanen et al (2016) argue, in the government programme, young people are seen from contradicting viewpoints: either as successful images of a bright future, or as passive targets of adult interventions. The programme's tone emphasises innovativeness, productivity and becoming a goal-oriented individual, who is capable of guiding and planning their life. Those who don't fit into normative educational trajectories within a certain timeframe are typically not only seen as an 'at risk' group, but are also subjected to heightened scrutiny and different interventions (e.g. Aaltonen 2012).

Further, as part of the pan-European trend, deepening economic recession, polarisation, youth unemployment as well as increasing racism have been visible in Finland as well. In addition to the growing success of the right-wing populist Finns Party, Finland has witnessed the rise of extreme nationalist movements, such as the street patrol movement Soldiers of Odin, whose agenda is openly hostile towards immigration. (Puuronen & Saari 2017, 9-10.)

This study discusses how young people and young adults navigate in this political and social climate by finding alternative leisure spaces where they can become active and create communities they relate to. The key context in this research is an underground youth cultural and community centre in Helsinki. It is an old industrial building with its walls covered by graffiti and its roots in the punk and house-squatting movements as well as antifascist and antiracist activism (Peipinen 2012). The centre is located in an old industrial area and surrounded by other cultural and subcultural activities, such as circus NGOs, a skate park, legal and illegal graffiti walls and workspaces for creative industries. The centre offers free space for different kinds of autonomous activities, such as music gigs (especially punk), courses, events, cultural groups (such as theatre, circus, Girls Rock! Finland, radical self-defence, radical cross-stitching) as well as gatherings of different politically inclined groups. While the centre is largely funded by the City of Helsinki Youth Services (the building was given to the organisation by the municipality in 2014), its role as an underground (punk) centre remains.

The case study has been informed by firstly, cultural youth studies, especially those focusing on youth cultural belongings (Rannikko 2018; Thornton 1995; Salasuo, Poikolainen & Komonen 2012). The study includes an intergenerational perspective, thus, it aims at looking at young people and young adults' spatial activities and occupations in relation to negotiations between generations. Secondly, the study draws on urban studies, thus highlighting the spatial dimension of young people's activism and urban belongings. Thus, the space is understood as socially produced – social and spatial are constantly intertwined (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014). Focusing on young people and young adults' spatial occupations means understanding the space as being produced through interaction and encounters: the space is understood as deeply material and political (Paju 2015; Pyyry 2015) and in a dialogical relation to youth cultural communities.

Myria Georgiou (2013) writes about the right to the urban space and how different groups of people become part of a global, digital city. As she states, '[– –] the city is a site of struggle', both

for symbolic and material resources. Young people and young adults' different means of occupying urban space are often materially and virtually regulated, and their creative and/or political urban activism is often stigmatised in the public debate. (Georgiou 2013; Tani & Robertson 2013) Different groups of young people and young adults struggle over the right to the urban space, through occupying, inhabiting and transforming places and spaces through embodied and material means and creating their own counter spaces (Rannikko 2018; see also Palmgren 2016).

Key questions of this case study are

- How do young, active urban people negotiate intergenerational conflicts and stigmas that exist in today's political and social climate in Finland?
- How do these young people use urban space to achieve innovative resistance?
- What are the arenas, opportunities and barriers of creative counteractions?

## 2. Methods

The case study employed an urban ethnographic approach and applied participant observation, semi-structured interviews and visual methods, including photographs, taken by two participants and myself. This methodological combination places the project in the field of ethnographic youth (and leisure) studies, where the research field is formed and materialises in the encounter between the researcher and informants – and of the material places and spaces the participants occupy (Käyhkö 2006; Ojanen 2011; Thornton 1995). Throughout the fieldwork and analysis, the research has been informed by an explicit aim to acknowledge and reflect the power relations and the place and positions of the researcher both in the field and when writing about the results (see e.g. Coffrey 2009; Ojanen 2011; Skeggs 1997) and disseminating them. This has especially meant reflection on the researcher's different positions in the research field while navigating in groups with varying hierarchical structures, conventions, activities and rules.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I chose to mainly focus on urban creative activism in two groups gathering at the centre: an urban circus and a rainbow group. The circus group got together in weekly circus rehearsals to practice with different props, such as balls, clubs, poi and hula hoops, to meet friends and hang out. For many it was a very important social gathering. The rainbow group gathered once a week as well to hang out, meet friends and participate in different activities, such as theatre. I also interviewed two young adults who were working at the centre as trainees. The initial reason behind the choice to include both the circus and the rainbow group in this case study was a hypothesis of a shared understanding of urban activism, including environmental and animal rights activism as well as anti-racism and intersectional feminism, among the participants. I arrived at this hypothesis on the basis of initial visits to the centre, discussions with the director as well as my first visits to the groups. As the fieldwork proceeded I noticed that there were several differences between the groups in terms of age, how the activities were planned and how much they identified in activism described above, as exemplified by protests and other urban occupations. However, most members in both groups nevertheless shared a distrust and criticism towards Finnish party politics, as well as an attachment to their own community and free leisure spaces, as exemplified by the youth cultural and community centre. Thus, the thematic focus was slightly altered over the course of the fieldwork period. Based on reflection and discussions with the national steering committee (NPPN) as well as the principal investigators of the PROMISE project, the thematic and theoretical focus was reorganised to address the key themes of intergenerational distrust and spatial occupations in leisure spaces and communities.

The most intensive period of fieldwork was done over three months, between February and May, in spring 2017, but I did return to the field a couple of times in autumn 2017, mainly to discuss the use of photographs collected by the participants. During the most intensive months I participated in weekly circus trainings (3 hours/week), rainbow group meetings (3 hours/week), office meetings (1-2 hours/week) and other events, gigs and performances (around 15 hours over three months). The data set consists of 20 semi-structured and recorded interviews (average length 50 minutes), written field diaries, of which a sample of 14 journal entries (approximately 800-900 Finnish words each) is used in the analysis, and 20 photographs collected by the researcher and two respondents.

Among the research participants, 10 were female, 7 male, 2 identified as non-binary and one identified as transgender. This gender profile mirrors the overall profile of the groups. The age range of the participants was between the ages of 16 and 30. This wide age range meant there were certain differences in the participants' life situations and this became evident in their descriptions of how they experienced life in Finland. However, the groups were nevertheless based on a shared experience of, either discrimination, exclusion and/or distrust and, thus, finding alternative ways of becoming active and, importantly, communities that they could relate to. Importantly, many participants' life trajectories can be mirrored with the concept of prolonged youth, characterised by longer periods of education and/or finding a place in the labour market and non-linear paths to adulthood (Aaltonen & Kivijärvi 2017, 8). Eight of the respondents had moved to Helsinki fairly recently. As for the educational and work background, the participant group was rather heterogeneous, which also reflects the overall profile of the centre [see Appendix for more details]. Most of the participants were of an ethnically Finnish background.

Already during my first visits to the field I had reflected on how to do research in a context that explicitly tries to distance itself from most explicit rules and structures. This seeming lack of structure meant that I came up against many other, often unspoken rules that were tied to the youth cultural conventions (see Thornton 1995, 3-4; Rannikko 2018). Navigating through these conventions became a key issue during my fieldwork, which I tried to manage and solve in different ways, depending on the context. My presence in all groups was characterised by participatory ethnography, which I applied in various ways. Sometimes I cleaned and made coffee, at other times I learned how to juggle and participated in improvisation theatre workshops. At times I also noticed I had to balance maintaining my role as a researcher while trying not to slide into being a youth/social worker. The participatory nature also meant that while I was in the field, writing a field diary was almost impossible and I thus wrote the entries in the evening after the group meetings, based on the short, written notes I had made in the field.

Negotiating access to the field was done firstly, with the director of the community centre, secondly, with the key persons in the circus and rainbow youth groups, and, thirdly, individually with each participant. Signed consent forms were collected from the director of the community centre and from each participant. Due to the different hierarchical structures and conventions, different approaches were used when informing the people in the circus group and the rainbow youth group about the research. While the 'welcome round' tradition of the rainbow youth group (where everyone sat down in a circle for a short introduction to any new members) offered a good opportunity to inform the participants each week, the circus group lacked any opening structure and was based on loose hanging out. Therefore, my approach was different in the circus group – I informed each participant I approached during the fieldwork individually. This choice also meant that potentially not every participant knew about the research, especially as there were almost



always people who just decided to drop by with a friend –I have not included these people in the field diaries.

After the fieldwork, the interviews were transcribed and anonymised and the field diaries were anonymised. In order to bring the different data sets together, the analysis drew from thematic close reading and qualitative content analysis. I used the NVivo11 software as a tool in the analysis of the interviews, field diaries and photographs.

Next, I will present the key findings of this study. The following section is divided into three main sub-sections. Firstly, I will discuss the intergenerational distrust and conflicts the participants voiced in terms of party politics as well as experiences of stigmatisation and not belonging in the urban space. Secondly I will analyse how the participants used and occupied different leisure spaces for activities and community building as forms of innovative counteractions and experiences of agency. Thirdly, I will present some critical notions on the inside hierarchies, power relations and exclusions of the groups and communities in focus.

### 3. Key Findings

#### 3.1. Intergenerational Distrust

There's a lot of uncertainty in relation to employment, education... It is very difficult to get into a school. Or alternatively we are pushed to study something we don't really want to study, but we have to be pushed somewhere. Or we are forced to make zero-hour contracts [job contracts with no guarantee of sufficient working hours] because we don't have any... Or people think that you don't have that much experience or any basic training. Or at the Employment Office they just put you somewhere with the pay subsidy because you have to work somewhere. And in practice they can then pay you less. So, it is, like, we young people are guided a lot. And, umm, we're not stupid, we realise that we are being guided and that puts us down a lot. [Utu, 25]

Here, 25-year-old Utu, who identifies as a rainbow activist, describes their distrust in the Finnish society. Utu's words echo of the changes in recent years in Finnish politics, implemented by the Youth Guarantee in 2013 and the government programme in 2015, affecting young people's situation in education and employment. The interview quotation can be mirrored with what Harrikari (2014) has written about the Youth Guarantee as a means of intergenerational control: society aims to keep young people in the system as productive individuals at minimal costs: -'It [the Youth Guarantee] aims at integrating young people. However, in comparison to previous initiatives, the boundary conditions are harder, the social control is harsher, and the responsibility is put on the individual' (119).

As argued previously, while the life situations and personal histories were considerably diverse, most participants did share a critical view towards society, which I have named *intergenerational distrust*. While the perspective of generations was directly included in the research questions – 'what's it like to live in Finland as a young person' – the informants also came back to consider this matter in several other parts of the interviews. 22-year-old Susanna stated in her interview:

Heta: You told me that you could attend [a protest], against the parliament. What would you like to change?

Susanna: The present government. Can we have a new election, please? These politics run by Sipilä [prime minister], and all this.

### 3.1.1 Distrust in Party Politics

The distrust in party politics acted in many ways as a catalyst in the participants' ways of becoming active in the city. In Finland political activity among young age groups, if measured in terms of voting activity and interest towards political parties, decreased significantly between the 1960s and the 2000s (Hellsten & Martikainen 2002). According to the Youth Barometers<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Myllyniemi 2014), the low levels of political participation do not necessarily reflect young people's disinterest in society and political matters in a broad sense, but rather the difficulties in finding ways to channel these interests. Further, disinterest might tell more about a possible shift towards non-conventional modes of participation.

However, the results of the Youth Barometer 2013 tell quite a different story. According to the Barometer, Finnish young people's trust in the Finnish democratic system was growing. Young people felt a growing sense of belonging to Finnish society and it seemed that this relationship had become closer by comparison to the 1990s. (Myllyniemi 2013, 6.) Considering these results, the respondents in my case study seem to live in a rather different society or that something had drastically changed.

While a couple of the research participants felt that Finland was a good country to live in and they appreciated the societal structures, for most of them parliamentary decision-making and party politics appeared to be, either uninteresting, or distant, false and done from the perspective of older generations. Further, even those who thought that Finland was a good country, voiced concern over the recent cuts in the student allowance and economic polarisation. Juho (25) voiced his desire for young people's stronger involvement in Finnish party politics by stating that he sees how 'the older generations make decisions that have an impact on our lives, but not necessarily on their lives'. He also stated that 'young people are angry' and continued:

For thirty years we have had these bourgeois people in the parliament, as the main thing, and they have fought for their cause for a very long time. So, I'm waiting for our time to come for a change, to fight for our cause. [Juho, 25]

This distrust and clash with the results of the Youth Barometer 2013 can be interpreted from several viewpoints. The societal and political climate in Finland has undergone turbulent changes during the past three years – changes that the participants often referred to. Further, quantitative surveys such as the Youth Barometer offer a selective view: those who feel positive about their possibilities to influence and participate are those who are more likely to respond to the survey (Myllyniemi 2013, 7). Also, the respondents in this case study were a specific group in terms of their political views. Many of them were greatly influenced by the global protest movements and becoming politically active outside parliamentary or municipal structures. Thus, their activism can be understood as part of non-conventional modes of participation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Youth Barometer is an annual research series that, since 1994, has been measuring the values and attitudes 15-29-year-olds living in Finland. The Youth Barometers are based on telephone interviews and the themes change annually. The research is conducted by the Finnish Youth Research Society in collaboration with The Ministry of Culture and Education.



Importantly, the cuts implemented by the Finnish government in 2015–2017 had a direct influence on many respondents' lives, since most of them were either working part-time, as trainees or studying full-time. Thus, their economic situation was increasingly fragile, especially as they were living in Helsinki, which has been ranked among the top 20 of the most expensive cities in the world. 20-year-old Reuben, who studied full-time at a vocational school and was living independently alone, commented on the cuts in student allowance as a key issue causing distrust against the political system in Finland. In his words 'society attacks poor students like this by minimising student allowance and so on. Everything's already so expensive so how am I going to finance my studies [- -]?'

Further, he took a stand for voting, which was a topic that divided the research participants. While some informants (especially those who identified more with anarchism and non-conventional forms of participation) didn't see voting as a means of making change in society and had decided not to vote, many found voting important and necessary, and underlined the importance of choosing young candidates to make a change.

Who do they think will take their side in the Parliament if they don't vote for those who speak up? Like, it is very, very alarming that young people don't vote so much anymore, because it means the Parliament will be full of these bitter old men who hate everyone and hate their own life probably... Because if young people don't vote for young people into the Parliament, who will then speak up about things such as, 'we have this issue here, we can't cut from them, because if we cut from them, it'll have an impact here...' Because those old grandpas in the Parliament don't care about studying. They don't need to study anymore. [Reuben, 20]

### 3.1.2 Experiences of not Belonging to the City

Besides party politics, another important context for experiencing intergenerational distrust was related to the complex negotiations of belonging to the city. Different urban spaces are produced socially (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014) and can be understood through struggle for belonging and as arenas, which produce us as subjects of a certain gender, age, ability and ethnicity. Urban encounters between people reflect and remake urban racialised, class-related, age-related and gendered hierarchies. (Georgiou 2013; Massey 1994.) For example, feminist studies have pointed to sexism and harassment in the public space (e.g. Aaltonen 2006). Further, as Päivi Honkatukia and Arseniy Svyrenko state in their article about young people's different encounters on the Helsinki Metro and at Metro stations, young people often talked about pleasant encounters, such as those between peers, nice and safe adults, and even Metro guards. However, they also recollected unwanted encounters, which were almost solely intergenerational: the person who evoked the feelings of fear, anger or refusal was an adult. (Honkatukia & Svyrenko 2018, forthcoming; see also Aaltonen 2006.)

Especially the rainbow group members voiced experiences of discrimination in the public space. During a party to celebrate gender equal marriage which was organised at the centre, Julinette (16) wrote on a Post It Note: 'My biggest dream is that I could hold my future girlfriend's hand safely in every part of the world' [see Plate 1].

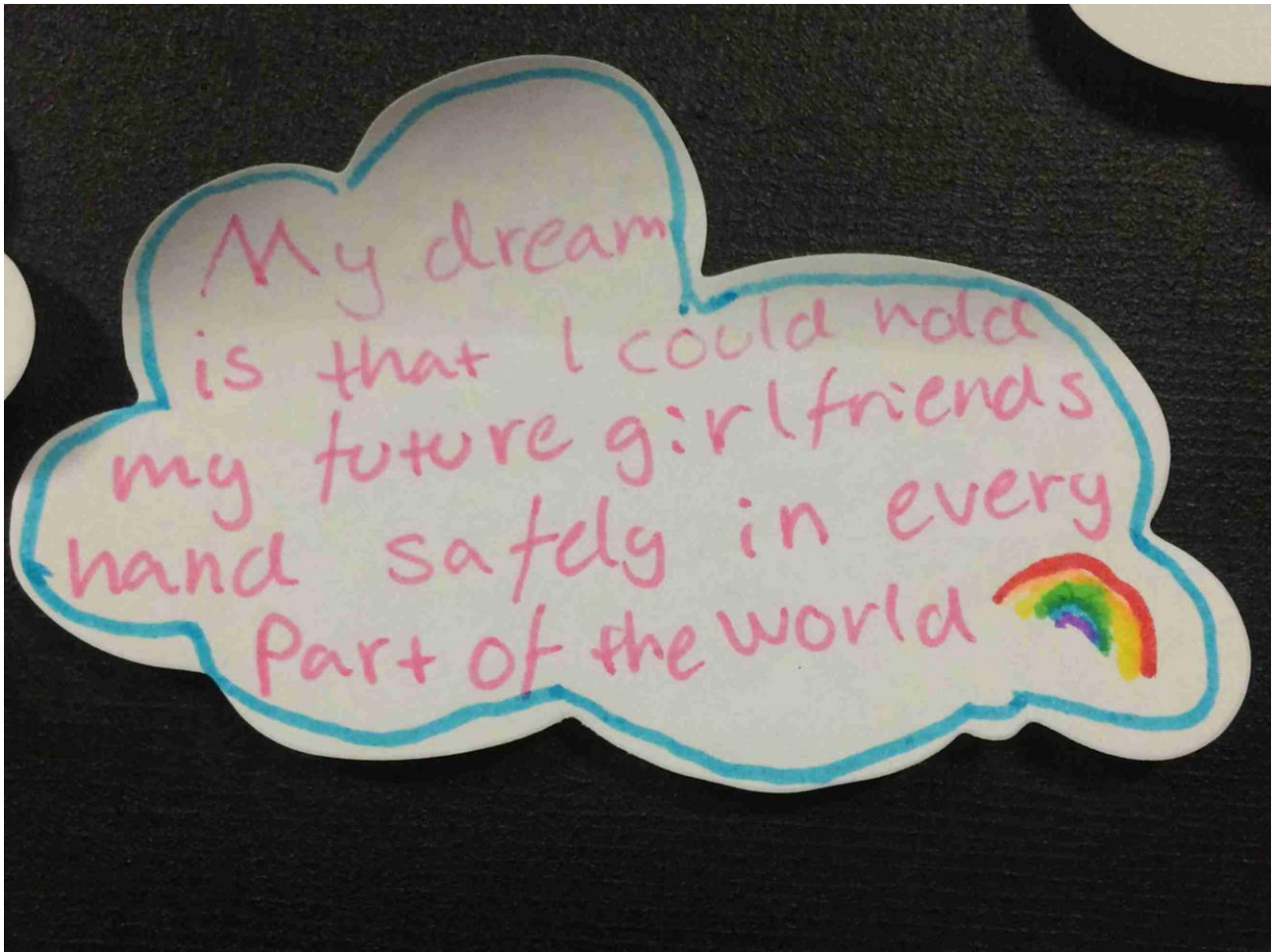


Plate 1.

Further, this is how ET (23) described their thoughts on intergenerational relations towards rainbow youth in the public space:

Heta: What's your opinion on older generations in relation to rainbow youth? Are there any kinds of generational differences?

ET: Well of course there is. Like... Whenever an elderly person notices that I'm wearing a rainbow badge I get a bit scared that soon there'll be a granny shouting at me. Nothing is as horrible as a granny shouting at you. Because if you start yelling back at them, then everyone will stare at you, like, 'there's a rude young person'.

Increasing racism was an issue that the participants recognised and were concerned about. As part of the recent, Pan-European changes of the strengthening of polarisation and extreme right-wing activism, Finland has witnessed the rise of street patrols and other groups whose agenda is openly hostile towards immigration. (Puuronen & Saari 2017, 9-10.) For example, Lotta stated that she was worried about 'the Finland First people who hang out on the Railway square' [Lotta, 22]. Further, a survey conducted by the City of Helsinki Urban Facts in 2016 reveals, that belonging to a visual minority increased especially girls' and young women's insecurity on public transport and other public spaces (Tuominen et al 2014). This research finding can also be backed up by the results of the research project Digital Youth in the Media City (Universities of Helsinki and Tampere, Finnish Youth Research Society, 2016–2018). In this case study, Maryam (16) voiced her recent concern over entering the public space as a Muslim girl:

I do notice that if I'm hanging out with friends who aren't Finnish and so, people do look at us differently than if I were alone in a gang where everyone's, like... And if I speak Arabic on the phone I do feel a bit troubled nowadays because I don't know at all how someone might react to it. And if I'm out with my family we do get those strange looks. [Maryam, 16]

Thus, in the interviews, the urban space was often seen in terms of constant struggle for the right to belong and occupy one's own space.

### **3.2. Spatial Occupations, Counter Spaces and Counter Strategies**

As Sunaina Maira and Elizabeth Soep argue, youth studies needs to be reflexive and critical in its theorisations on resistance, to avoid dichotomous framings of resistance with simplified, and binary understandings of, for example, global commercial popular culture/underground DIY culture or parliamentary, state-led politics/grassroots activism (Maira & Soep 2005, xxxi; see also Thornton 1995, 163-164). The urban activities understood by the research participants cannot be labelled under these binaries either. While they did emphasise the relevance of their actions as a counter-force against the distrust, discrimination and pressures they felt, their means to counter-act differed, exemplified by the question of voting. Further, their urban resistance should be understood as a diverse web of actions and counter-actions – while the participants spoke about creating own spaces and strategies of resistance, their activities were still often realised under the umbrella of the official, municipal uses of the urban space (Rannikko 2018). In this section I will discuss the creative solutions and strategies the research participants found to tackle the experiences of distrust and not belonging into the city.

#### **3.2.1 Occupations in the Urban Space**

As argued, the youth cultural and community centre was one of the key urban spaces the research participants occupied. Access to free leisure spaces, such as the centre, parks and streets was especially important for the participants, since few of them could afford to participate in expensive hobbies, or even had the interest to do so. Such as Juho stated:

People who have been rehearsing for tens of years, so having free rehearsals is quite... It's very difficult to find. Whatever activity you practice, free rehearsals are always a good thing. [– –] Yep, I don't have that kind of money. [Juho, 25]

ET (22) discussed leisure spaces as well. In their interview my clumsy question about pubs shed light on the importance of free public and semi-public spaces for hanging out and becoming active.

Heta: [...] do you go to someone's place, to a café, to a pub?

ET: To a pub... [laughs a little] We are poor. We go out, we go and buy something to eat from a grocery store if we want to. And then, now that it's summer again, we go out. In autumn we stayed out for quite a long time. We stopped doing that two weeks before it snowed for the first time because it was so cold. [ET, 22]

As argued before, the centre is linked to a certain transnational youth cultural tradition, especially that of the punk and house-squatting movements as well as anarchism. The walls and floors of the centre are painted black or covered with graffiti, and all furniture is second hand. Furthermore, the centre explicitly states that it follows the rules of safe spaces and accessibility, has gender-neutral toilets and different kinds of stickers on the walls, most of which carry the political agenda

of the new global protest movements, such as animal rights activism, feminism, antifascism and environmental activism. This material space was intertwined into the communities, lifestyles and activist identities of the participants in many ways: thus, the spatial was deeply interconnected with the social (e.g. Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014; Massey 2005). 'The place is created by its users', voiced Aleks, thus summarising the DIY agenda of the centre and continued: 'The floor is dirty and there are wires hanging from everywhere. But it also offers a possibility, like 'hey! People don't expect anything from me here!'. Further, Juho (25) commented on the political agenda of the centre as follows:

And the Youth Cultural and Community Centre is quite a good manifestation of it... It is a political place but also everything else, too, and there's quite a lot of political, what is it now... messages [in English]. Political messages on the walls. Yep. There's a lot of political messages on the walls. [Juho, 25]

Thus, the material elements of the space were filtrated into the lifestyle and other spatial occupations that the participants were involved in and the other way around. Many, although not everyone, were vegans or vegetarians and concerned about environmental issues, gender inequalities, animal rights and racism. While not all participants participated in protests (some voiced concern about attacks and the safety of participating, of felt that demonstrating wasn't their way of making a change), for many, protests were an important way of reclaiming the urban space. For example, Susanna (21) talked about an animal rights protest, which included theatrical elements and was held at the central railway square in Helsinki:

We went to the railway square and showed videos from Finnish animal factories on our laptop. Like, what is going on at these factories. So, it was, like, people wearing anonymous masks were holding the laptop with the video, and then we also projected a video on the wall, which shows what's really going on at the factories. And then we didn't say anything. People came very, very close and were like this, but no. We didn't say anything and we let them react themselves. Well, I didn't have a mask on, but I was giving out the flyers that we had. So, very many people came to talk to us and many people were shocked about that. [Susanna, 21]

During my fieldwork, the central railway square in Helsinki became a symbol for political polarisation and the strengthening of the extreme right-wing movement in Finland. At one end of the square there was a protest camp held by the asylum seekers and at the other end a camp held by the extreme right wing movement Finland First. Some of the circus group participants visited the refugee camp with their props. In a circus act, urban space becomes occupied and transformed: certain parts of the city are turned into small subcultural arenas and pockets of counteractions (Shepard 2010). Juho described their occupations as follows:

And about circus in general, when they had these protest camps for asylum seekers here at the railway station, we were often there with [unofficial circus organisation and social circus NGO], just doing circus and bringing joy and playing with children and... The children had come from difficult circumstances and they felt happy there. That was very nice to see. [Juho, 25]

Further, the research participants emphasised the importance of Pride as a form of reclaiming the urban space for protest, celebration and community-building. While some of them voiced concerns over safety during Pride, 'But I have been too scared to go to Pride for example, because



sometimes there has been egg throwing or something' [Lotta, 22], for most participants it was an empowering way to become visible and feel belonging to the urban space. This is how Julinette (16) emphasised the community-building aspects after attending her first Pride parade:

And then I decided to go to Pride. And after that week I got, I was in, like seven new WhatsApp-groups. I had got to know... A third of them were only quick acquaintances but still I had got to know around forty people during that week, because the rainbow organisation organises a lot of these things. And I'm very grateful for that. Especially during Pride, I attended almost every single one of them. And then I was, like, I can't leave these people, you are too wonderful. [Julinette, 16]

These diverse spaces – both more permanent such as the centre and temporal, exemplified by the protests – used by the participants can be named as counter spaces that aim for rethinking and challenging conventional uses of urban spaces (Lefebvre 1991, 292; Rannikko 2018, 28). Thus, counter space is actualised in concrete material spaces, exemplified by the centre, as well as in acts and performances that remake and challenge the everyday uses of the urban space (Rannikko 2018). Further, the community took a clear stand on official urban planning and conventional uses of spaces, thus creating a counter space both concretely and metaphorically. Terhi (28) voiced her wish for alternative spaces quite concretely:

I'd like there to be more places, spaces, urban spaces in Finland for... People spending time and developing themselves. It annoys me a lot that there's a certain purpose for each space and especially public outdoor spaces. They want to put fences around each space, they want to control them, they want to... they want to limit their uses. [Terhi, 28]

Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep (2005) have used the concept of 'youthscape' to refer to different sites that young people use and occupy, which are not only geographical or temporal, but at the same time social and political. Further, these youthscapes are deeply 'bound up with questions of power and materiality' (xvi). The concept of scape captures the increasing forces of globalisation and digitalisation in young people's lives, and how these processes are deeply intertwined into understandings of the national, local and everyday practices (Maira & Soep 2005, xvi-xvii). This understanding of spatial occupations at the intersection of global, local, material and physical is useful in analysing the centre and other occupations in the urban space. The respondents became active through a deep connection to the different spaces, which were intertwined into global and digital forms of contemporary activism.

### 3.2.2 Peer Learning and Physical Proximity

I feel that the atmosphere is very relaxed. I feel that I often think about how I look and everything and am I doing this right. But here it's very supportive, like... [Lotta, 22]

This is how Lotta (22) describes her feelings about the centre. Peer learning and support were influential and outspoken practices shared at the centre in both groups. Further, many participants pondered this 'different way' of learning and sharing in contrast to the societal pressures of individual success and a goal-oriented, neoliberal life trajectory. Many talked about intergenerational expectations and pressures they experienced from school, work or social services. For example, Eemeli (19) told me how he never really felt at home at school and how he still doesn't 'see that it is the best way to learn anything'. Magnus (21) stated critically:

[- -] for example, a kind of emphasis on efficiency is quite strong in this society and it affects young people... Young people a lot. Already at a young age you have to get... You should know what you want to do already when you are young and... You should have a direction somewhere. [Magnus, 21]

Thus, the theme that brought many of the respondents together were the societal expectations placed on young adulthood that they experienced. As discussed, young people have been targeted in several ways in the governmental initiatives during the recent years. The ideal of an independent, goal-oriented and successful individual was clearly visible in the way in which the participants talked about the pressures they experienced. For Ronja (21), stress and pressures were the first elements that came to mind when thinking about living in Finland as a young adult. In her response, the pressures were linked to not fitting into the mould of a successful individual, 'like everyone else'.

Heta: So, what is it like to be a young adult in Finland? [— —]

Ronja: Well, it's a bit... It is a bit stressful. Or, like, you feel that there are huge pressures after high school... Or even before high school. Go forward into the mould and there are huge and hard pressures coming from everywhere. And I have had all these sick leaves, so I haven't been able to... I just haven't been able to do the same as everyone else, so it has been super stressful, especially because I'm that kind of a person that feels the pressures from it, so... [Ronja, 21]

Further, Aleks (30) commented on the contradictory societal expectations as a dystopia. He described the neoliberal logic of competition and an individual being able to plan their own life and do whatever they want:

They don't set expectations but at the same time they do, so nowadays it's, like... Everything is contradictory. And in a way this kind of... This dystopia that somehow... I don't know. I somehow feel that everything... Nothing is clear. Everything's a mess and there are no answers to anything, if you think about young people. What a young person should do and what they could do. In a way, it is more, like, you can do whatever you want. The doors are open for you. So... So, something like that. And the sense of competition which in a traditional sense has diminished but that's also intensifying all the time. We have to compete with someone all the time. We can't do anything without a goal. [Aleks, 30]

In addition to pressures coming from institutions such as school, some commented on social media as an arena of constant peer pressure to achieve a 'perfect life'. For example, Ronja (21) commented on Facebook as follows:

At the moment, as I am in this phase where I can't live my life the way I would like to, I have left Facebook completely. It was stressing me out too much because all the time I was seeing everything my friends did and felt a complete outsider myself. It was such a big thing that I decided that it was best for me to step out of it completely. [Ronja, 21]



Mirrored against these descriptions, peer learning, and support can be understood as alternative, creative strategies that the research participants used to cope with the distrust and pressures they felt.

In the circus group, peer learning meant transferring knowledge of circus tricks, props and practices to other members, as well as sharing knowledge about the youth cultural elements that the activity was linked to. The practices and non-spoken conventions in the group can be mirrored with Rannikko's research (2018) on different forms of alternative urban physical activities, such as parkour, roller derby and skate boarding. She points out to the subcultural relevance of these activities and analyses the criticism these activities direct at more goal-oriented hobbies. This criticism includes a competition-oriented perspective, discrimination and hierarchical structures. Thus, the inner logic of alternative sports emphasises respect, lack of competition and the rhetoric that 'everyone is welcome'.

In the circus group, the clash between institutional and alternative practices was seen in explicit comparisons with institutional circus schools. The participants emphasised peer learning and teaching, as well as their close community as key attributes in their understanding of circus, in contrast to pressures, competition and goal-oriented learning. Thus, for many, the circus group appeared as an explicit counteraction to these 'official' hobbies. Susanna (21) who studied at a vocational school to become a youth worker and had practiced at an official circus school as a child described the circus rehearsals as follows:

The fact that you can breathe out and take a break from your normal every day life. It is, like, a break where you can stop the time to do something with your hands. To focus on what you are doing, your brain relaxes, your mind relaxes from everything such as school and work. And you meet your friends. It is, like, stopping time for a couple of hours at the rehearsals. [Susanna, 21]

Peer learning was explicitly voiced in many interviews in a positive tone. The participants described it in terms of learning from each other, encouraging one another and finding the courage to face failures in the learning process (in contrast to the ideal of a successful, never-failing individual). This learning was very often non-verbal, such as positioning oneself in pairs or in smaller groups, going to introduce oneself to new members (or not doing so), hugging everyone (or selectively choosing people who to hug). Terhi (28) described the convention as follows:

It is also about supporting everyone and if someone... If someone wants to learn how to use a certain prop so usually there's always someone who comes and helps you get started. Doing it together always gets you excited about doing more and if someone knows how to do a difficult... A new trick so usually they tell others how to do it. [Terhi, 28]

Peer learning and knowledge sharing about the DIY culture and rainbow issues was very important in the rainbow group as well. The theme that brought the rainbow group participants together was of growing up in Finland as a person belonging to a gender or sexual minority. While, following the overall profile of all research participants, most of them shared the generational experience of criticising societal pressures relating to education and work, their descriptions included an extra layer of control and stigmatisation because of their gender or sexual orientation. Many of the rainbow group participants spoke about not finding their place at school or in smaller cities (this was also frequently discussed in the circus group) and emphasised digital media spaces,

moving to Helsinki as well as joining the rainbow group and their first Pride festival as key points in discovering new ways of belonging in the city and finding their own community. In my field diary, there are several notions about thematic sessions aiming for knowledge sharing and peer support, such as watching YouTube videos on, for example, racism or transgender issues together. Most of the participants of the rainbow group felt that the group offered them a free leisure space for peer support and counteracting against the discrimination they felt in urban spaces and, also, at institutional settings such as school. Many felt that they got next to no information about rainbow issues at school or that the information was incorrect, out-dated or non-existent. Further, Maryam (16) commented on how racist and sexist remarks often went unnoticed as joking around without any intervention from teachers.

Importantly, and explicitly voiced in terms of resistance, both groups discussed peer support in terms of physical proximity. In the rainbow group, physical proximity was visible in how the participants located themselves into the space: 'Maryam pulls her legs closer to herself. Reuben sits on the armrest of the sofa and caresses Maryam's hair' [Fieldwork diary 24.5.2017]. In both groups hugging was very common. Especially in the circus group, hugging everyone was a tradition that I already noticed already during my first visits in the field. Magnus (21) commented that he appreciated the 'culture of closeness' that he couldn't see in the university circles and Laura (24) commented on hugging as follows:

One reason why I come here are the hugs! I'm like... Yep. I make these hugging circles sometimes, like, who hasn't given me a hug yet? Oh, that one. I'm gonna go and get one more from [circus participant]. Like, I'm becoming fully addicted to these hugs... I shouldn't probably admit this but yep... During one night you can get more hugs here than an average Finn gets during one year. So... That makes you feel very good. [Laura, 24]

These outspoken and internalised practices: peer learning, peer support and physical proximity can be analysed under the concept of non-formal learning (in contrast to formal learning at institutions such as kindergarten and school), familiar from studies on youth work. Further, these practices can be understood as different ways – verbal, embodied and spatial – of sharing messages between young people in informal leisure settings. While the activities at the centre cannot be strictly labelled under municipal or NGO youth work (because of the non-institutional and underground history and profile), the conventions in both groups shared similarities with youth work. The participants made explicit divisions between formal learning environments (such as school or official hobbies), which they saw as hierarchical, competition-oriented and expensive. According to Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2014), these environments of formal learning can be labelled as 'tight spaces', presupposing 'functionality and homogeneity' (3).

In contrast, the definitions the participants voiced about the spatial occupations of the centre and other urban spaces (both permanent and temporal) as well as the practices of peer learning, support and proximity can be understood under the concept of loose spaces. Loose spaces of non-formal learning are more often open to negotiation and based on changing functions and heterogeneity (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014). However, this ideal of looseness and welcoming everyone should also be critically analysed in terms of inner exclusions and hierarchies. Non-formal and seemingly open learning and sharing strategies can also become exclusive, which I will discuss next.

### 3.3. Critical Reflections: Open Space?

While the research participants shared a critical and generational view of party politics and understood their spatial occupations and communities as important means to counteract, their experiences of belonging to their communities differed. During my time in the field I often pondered the contradictory meanings of an explicitly voiced open space where ‘everyone is welcome’. This rhetoric comes close to what Kiilakoski and Kivijärvi (2014) have written about Finnish youth clubs, that are explicitly based on an ideal of *pedagogical loose space*, meaning little control, lack of adult manipulation and a focus on universalist tendency of welcoming everyone. In the following quotation, Johanna (22), who worked at the centre as a trainee, considers the values of the centre:

I don't know whether ‘no Nazis’ is a value, but, like the ideas of no discrimination towards anyone and that everyone's welcome here as they are, and the gender-neutral toilets and all that. Like, we are an activity that's free from discrimination and the doors are open for everyone. [Johanna, 22]

Thus, the doors are rhetorically open, but what exclusions does this statement include? Rannikko (2018) points out the rhetoric of respect as a key issue in the inner order of alternative urban sports, such as circus, parkour or roller derby. While the rhetoric includes a principle of ‘everyone is welcome’; respecting everyone; and takes an explicit stand against hierarchies based on gender, sexuality or ethnicity, it also includes unspoken rules and inner hierarchies. In this section I will analyse this explicit openness of the space as well as the hidden micro power structures, excluding practices and hierarchies behind naming a space as open and welcoming for all.

#### 3.3.1 Unspoken and Explicit Rules

As voiced by Johanna in the previous quote, there were certain ground rules and restrictions explicitly stated at the community centre, namely, ‘no alcohol/drugs and no Nazis’. These rules were often discussed in the interviews and were also visible on the signpost on the front door of the centre. For example, at the office meetings and in other discussions with the personnel at the centre, the limitations were often explicitly discussed. On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017 I had written the following in my field diary:

As a principle the place is open for everyone – except ‘Nazis’ – but its DIY spirit is also limited in certain ways. It is not good to be ‘too anarchistic’ or to not take care of something that's been promised. The activities are interestingly situated in between the anarchist and house squatting tradition and more established youth-, civic- and cultural activities. [Fieldwork diary 4.4.2017]

This quotation captures the negotiations of rules in a space, which explicitly tries to distance itself from any rules or hierarchies. If a certain person was known for not taking care of the space or not following the rules of providing information about an event and cleaning up afterwards i.e. too anarchistic, access was either limited or denied. The most explicit exclusion was on the basis of belonging to an extreme right-wing movement or displaying the symbols in clothing or accessories. Alcohol and drugs were forbidden because of, on one hand, Finnish alcohol legislation and, on the other hand, the role of the centre as part of municipal youth work. However, this rule was often bent especially during gig evenings. In line with the legacy of the centre as an underground punk space, moderate drinking was usually allowed if it wasn't seen.

These regulations (and bending them) can be understood, firstly, under the concept of intentional regulations in a youth club context, including restrictions created by the workers (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014, 7). The role of the centre at the intersection of municipal youth work and underground and DIY culture was clearly seen the juxtaposition between left-wing urban activism and extreme right-wing activism, which was banned from the centre. While banning extreme right-wing opinions and symbols is a practice generally applied in municipal youth work as well, at the centre it was explicitly stated in all activities.

Further, the communities included several other, more implicit and communally shared rules as well. While there was a more outspoken and explicit hierarchy in the rainbow group, especially after the arrival of a new community worker who planned different activities for the meetings, a hierarchical structure was also implicitly visible in the circus group. In the circus group, the person holding the key, together with a couple of other participants (all of whom were male), took the main responsibility of welcoming new arrivals to the group and giving them advice on props and tricks. The embodied practices of peer learning, peer support and physical proximity, discussed in the previous section, can be understood as unspoken rules and spatial practices that the participants slowly learned as they arrived in the community (see Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014). This was most clearly seen in the circus group, where the rehearsals followed shared conventions – such as teaching each other, hugging, juggling in pairs, talking and practicing in smaller groups – which were seemingly open to everyone but also required learning circus techniques and how to place oneself in relation to the space and other people. Thus, the space became fully occupied only after learning the social conventions, which were also deeply gendered.

The importance of learning these conventions became visible in many interviews in relation to the question of entering the community for the first time. Some circus group informants stated that they had felt the need to practice at home first before they had the courage to come to the rehearsals – even if the rhetoric of the rehearsals emphasises peer learning and not focusing on any competition or comparison based on skills. Further, the lack of official conventions meant that the new participants had to navigate in the field of learning the conventions created and shared in the group. Susanna (22) describes these uneasy feelings of entering the community for the first time:

And then I went there, all alone, and when I approached the place it was super scary. Because I didn't know anyone, and I was wondering if I can just go there or if I should sign up somewhere or if I can just go there. Then quite quickly I started talking to people and they started asking me, like, hi, hello, who are you, where do you come from and told me stuff. So, I don't think it took, perhaps three weeks and suddenly I had lots of friends there. [Susanna, 22]

In the rainbow group, the question of conventions and rules was more explicitly present, especially as I arrived at the group at a rather turbulent time. The group had been self-organised by the participants themselves and a group of 5-6 active young volunteers for over six months, but a new community worker arrived at the centre about halfway through my fieldwork. The community worker introduced several new rules regarding use of swear words, shouting, and talking openly about sensitive issues, such as drinking, using drugs or mental health.

These rules created debate and were discussed in many interviews. While some of the participants felt that limiting open discussion, especially about mental health issues was welcome, others voiced their disappointment at the rules. This uneasiness was discussed in, for example, Maryam's interview.

Heta: What's the group like in your opinion? What kind of people come here?

Maryam: Well... Everyone's quite nice and so. But because of personal reasons I find it difficult to identify with certain persons because we have come from totally different backgrounds, so I'm not... It is, like, you know, there are certain things that I totally disagree with. And certain people and how they react to certain things, this really pisses me off. And, you know, when I come here I assume that I can be myself and this is a safe space. Well, I do have certain sides of me. I'm a bit loud. I might say... They are... Like, I do use a lot of swear words and I know it and... Then if someone comes and yells at you in a space where you're supposed to feel comfortable... A couple of times I have thought that perhaps there's no point coming back anymore. But, like, this is only my personal opinion.

Maryam was speaking in an offended tone, mentioning her mixed feelings about the rules of not shouting or using swear words during the evenings. Further, through linking her thoughts to the concept of a safe space, her comment can be read as a more widely commentary on intersectional feminism and its inclusions and exclusions. Thus, the rainbow group was by no means uniform according to the age, gendered or sexual orientation, social class or ethnicity. For example, Maryam's outspoken criticism shed light on many inner conflicts in the group. Maryam was from a Muslim family and she was openly critical of the whiteness of Finnish Pride event as well as the media representation of sexual minorities of non-white homosexuals.

Thus, as Rannikko (2018) has argued, the rhetoric of keeping the doors open as well as welcoming and respecting everyone can also turn into a dominant discourse that actually hides any hierarchies or inner struggles in the communities. Further, the new rules can be understood in terms of unintended implications by the youth worker's acts (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014, 8), which describe the acts done by the worker in order to maintain safety and equality in the space. While the rules of not shouting or talking about mental health issues were introduced in order to enhance the safety of the space, for some participants it meant considerable feelings of exclusion. Strikingly, the new situation meant a clash between youth work and self-organising activities and led to confused reactions by the participants.

### 3.3.2 Youth Cultural Hierarchies

While, as argued, the material space including its explicit signs and symbols of environmental and animal rights activism, feminism and punk subculture was intertwined with the overall profiles of the different communities, the groups also carried different youth cultural connotations. Thus, the groups included internal control by the participants themselves as well as certain, shared spatial practices (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014, 9, 15). The youth cultural identification the circus group members often talked about was *hippie*. The rehearsals were often referred to by the concept of 'hippie circus rehearsals'. While the hippie movement originated in the (mostly middle-class) student and protest movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, what I could see in 2010s Helsinki was a local adaptation, deeply tied to its cultural and political context in Helsinki while simultaneously citing the historical legacy and values of the movement.

Hippie was a definition that the participants approached with close identification but also distanced themselves from. Identifying as ‘a circus hippie’ meant relating to shared values such as physical closeness, often vegan/vegetarian lifestyle, communal living and an overall explicit emphasis on empathy and harmony between people. Juho (25) commented on the definition of hippie as belonging that is related to community, values and space as follows:

Juho: It [hippie] is only a word for me. Of course, it describes me quite well. Like, I have tangled hair [points to his dreadlocks] and I use these kinds of clothes and now I’ve found my own place there. Before I didn’t really have my own place, so I think this hippie word somewhat describes it. And it’s nice to belong to a group. Some people don’t like it [the word hippie] but for me it only describes belonging to a certain group. And that’s a good thing.

Heta: Are there any values linked to it?

Juho: Green values and such for sure. Overall being empathetic and sympathetic are the two most important things that are linked to being a hippie and to [the youth cultural and community centre] in general.

However, the participants of the community recognised the negative values linked to being ‘a circus hippie’, too. Especially inside the wider circus field, they felt that the concept was too frequently used in a pejorative and downgrading way, signalling unprofessionalism, drug use, laziness and lack of circus skills. Terhi (28) described hippie circus as follows:

And this thing that I’ve been focusing on, object manipulation, which is quite a word monster, but it’s a bit difficult to know what one should call it. Yep, it is a bit, in quotation marks, hippie activity. [- -] Only after you start doing fire art, then you come a bit further. A bit closer to circus art. Sometimes I... I have a feeling that it’s somewhat looked down upon. Like it is valued less and seen as some kind of new age foolishness. [Terhi, 28]

Further, everyday rituals that were generally discussed in a positive tone, such as hugging and physical closeness, could sometimes also turn into selective and excluding acts. Laura (24), who explicitly told me that she wasn’t a hippie girl, wondered about the difficulty of entering the rehearsal space, fitting in and spending the evening with the others:

I somehow don’t really understand these hippies sometimes, like... They’re a lovely mystery to me, and I don’t quite understand them. I don’t know whether it’s shyness or whether it is really that they come there to practice their own thing and being social only comes after that... [Laura, 24]

Thus, entering the space and finding a place in the community required considerable knowledge on, besides circus, also on the youth cultural conventions (including appearance and lifestyle, such as identification in urban activism), rules and spatial practices linked to the activity (Thornton 1995; Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2014).



## 4. Conclusions

Myria Georgiou (2013) writes about today's cities as arenas for the constant struggle for belonging. Stepping into the urban space as a person belonging to a certain category according to age, gender, ethnicity or sexuality puts you in a different place in relation to others: gendered, age-related, ethnic and sexual power relations and hierarchies are performed, forced upon and, also, challenged in different urban spaces. These diverse and competing understandings of the city are negotiated simultaneously in physical and digital arenas where the digital is constantly intertwined with the physical. Today's cities are also highly commercialised through entertainment industries: in fact, most of our activities in the city require participation in the commercial culture. Thus, belonging to the city is also a question of purchasing.

In this research project I was interested in intergenerational contests and conflicts, and how young people and young adults negotiate about them in the urban space and more specifically, in the context of a youth cultural and community centre, which is located at the intersection of municipal youth work and the tradition of underground and DIY activism and anarchism. What is extremely relevant is how intergenerational relations and conflicts were intertwined into very many layers of the research participants' experiences of society as well as their ways of becoming active in the urban space. Firstly, the key experiences of conflict and stigmatisation were voiced as generational, including party politics, ideals of individualism and success as well as discrimination in the public spaces. Secondly, the participants shared the understanding that their activities were a generational experience, whether it meant rainbow activism or experiencing agency in a community based on practices such as peer learning. Thus, space was in many ways linked to the social and the understanding of a specific generation. Importantly, while many of the research respondents weren't in a very vulnerable situation socially, their notions echo that of a generational experience of disappointment and distrust in society as well as the need for their own community and spatial occupation.

Further, I wanted to look at the different spatial occupations the young people and young adults were involved in and explore how the research respondents negotiated their place in the city, which kinds of conflicts and struggles they faced and what kinds of spatial pockets of becoming active, experiencing agency and forming communities they found. What became especially important for their belonging to the youth cultural and community centre was the fact that it was a free leisure space with no need to pay fees or to buy anything to gain access to the space. For the respondents, the community-building values of the youth cultural and community centre were deeply intertwined with the material space (Pyyry 2015; Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2015), for example, the walls covered with graffiti and political sticker art, the unisex toilets, the second-hand furniture. Further, the space carried its youth cultural norms following the transnational DIY tradition, which was repeated in, for example, peer teaching and learning, sharing knowledge and creating tight communities.

However, gaining an own space for the community also meant several informal and silenced rules, exclusions and hierarchies. The micro power relations inside the centre and in different groups were marked by subtle hierarchies that became visible during ethnographic fieldwork.

Thus, the case study participates in the scholarly debates on the fields of youth cultural and subcultural studies as well as urban youth studies. The results demonstrate how gaining an own space with its youth cultural connotations is deeply filtrated into the concrete, embodied practices of counteracting and building communities. Here, the theoretical perspective of spending time with the material spaces (rather than in) (Paju 2013; Pyyry 2015) becomes extremely important.

## 5. Future Analysis

The *Economy/leisure spaces* cluster consists of six case studies, all of which focus on youth groups through the themes of spatiality and leisure. Further, all of these case studies are engaged in critical evaluation of non-commercial leisure spaces that young people can use to become active and gain agency in society. I would suggest two possible ways of doing cross-case analysis within the WP6 cluster. Firstly, the logics of different spatial occupations (whether it is about young people who are involved in house squatting, alternative building practices in Spain or creative ways of taking over urban space, such as the circus enthusiasts in Finland and Italy) would be one important theme to look into further. This approach could mean analysing the way in which claiming an own leisure space can act as a way of becoming socially innovative in different geographical contexts. However, I also think it is important to analyse the dynamics inside groups and communities of young people who are somehow in a conflicted situation with the authorities and/or societal organisations. While the shared conflicted situation does, in the light of this case study, work as a strong community-building element, the communities also include inner hierarchies, power struggles and conflicts. Thus, instead of claiming for uniform resistance (which is an easy trap, since the activist movements are highly transnational), we should focus more on the inner uses of power, dynamics and conventions of these groups.

Secondly, based on the themes emphasised in my case study, I suggest focusing on community-building as a counter-reaction against overall intergenerational distrust, such as disappointment in political decision-making or discrimination based on age, gender or ethnicity, and how the communities are created through different spatial and creative means. This could mean discovering Pan-European trends of young people's distrust towards the societal structures and, also, critically analysing how this distrust is used as a catalyst for becoming active in different ways. Occasionally these practices are also transnationally shared with digital means in social media, such as in the case of intersectional feminism.

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## 7. Appendix: table of respondents' socio-demographic data

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Employment	Residential status
Aleks	30	male	Russian	Completed university for applied sciences	In part-time employment	Lives independently with friends
Charlotta	16	female	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In full-time education	Lives independently with friends
Eemeli	19	male	Finnish	Did not complete secondary education and left	Trainee	Lives independently alone
ET	23	non-binary	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In part-time employment	Lives independently with friends
Johanna	21	female	Finnish	Currently at university for applied sciences	Trainee	Lives independently with partner
Juho	25	male	Finnish	Completed general academic secondary education	In part-time employment	Lives independently with friends
Juliette	17	female	Finnish	Currently in general academic secondary education	In full-time education	Lives at home with parent(s)
Kärppä	25	female	Finnish	Completed vocational secondary education	In full-time employment	Lives independently with partner
Laura	24	female	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In full-time education	Lives independently alone
Lauri	25	male	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In part-time employment	Lives independently with partner
Lotta	22	female	Finnish	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Lives independently with partner
Magnus	21	male	Finnish	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Lives independently with friends
Martin	27	male	Finnish	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Lives independently alone
Maryam	16	female	mixed heritage	Currently in general academic secondary education	In full-time education	Lives at home with parent(s)
Matti	29	male	Finnish	Currently at university	In part-time employment	Lives independently with friends
Reuben	20	trans-gender	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In full-time education	Lives independently alone
Ronja	21	female	Finnish	Completed general academic secondary education	On sick leave	Lives independently alone
Susanna	22	female	Finnish	Currently in vocational secondary education	In full-time education	Lives independently with partner
Terhi	28	female	Finnish	Completed university	In part-time employment	Lives independently with partner
Utu	25	non-binary	Finnish	Currently at university for applied sciences	In part-time employment	Lives independently alone