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Past, present and potential friendships

- sources of coping and support among asylum-seeking young people in Finland

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“FRIENDSHIP AS POTENTIAL? Inclusionary friendship practices and managing teenagers’ risk of marginalization”

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Can friendship nurture inclusion beyond peer group, i.e. in relation to a broader community and/or society?

- studying the structure, meanings and practices of friendship and the negotiations concerning it, to advance understanding of contemporary teenagers’ peer relations and promote recognition of the friendship practices that may create resilience and inclusion

Friendships can be seen as private and “hidden places” (Wood 2013). However, they “do not occur in a vacuum, but are interconnected with the broader social, economic and cultural environments.” (Holt, Bowlby & Lea, forthcoming)

“If we do not interest ourselves in children and young people’s friendships, we are missing a huge part of what is important in their lives and focal to their wellbeing.” (Dunn 2004)

Friendship and young asylum-seekers/refugees

“Triple challenging” life situations of young asylum-seekers and refugees: past traumas, current difficulties, insecure futures

Earlier research on young refugees “has placed the vulnerability of the young people on the agenda, but little is known about how and under what conditions they are coping with life in exile” (Omland & Andenas 2017, 2).

“The supports offered by their social relationships have not been studied in detail”

“the young people’s intersectional positioning as both minor and immigrant translates into a minimalistic and bureaucratic apparatus of care that often fails to accommodate the young people’s actual needs.” > “focus on relationships” (De Graeve & Bex 2017, 80)

Particularly “refugees without parents explicate a deprivation of support. For unaccompanied refugee minors, it appears of special importance to create a *friendship network*” (Sleijpen et al 2017, 360-361)

The focus on friendships positions the youths not only as refugees but as *young people*; not only as objects but as *actors*; not only as victims but as people with *strengths and resources*. Friendship per se highlights the *positive* and resource-building elements of everyday life.

The challenges that the young people face and the lack of/changes on traditional support networks make the significance, meanings, practices of and negotiations on friendship visible

Friends, social support and young asylum-seekers/refugees

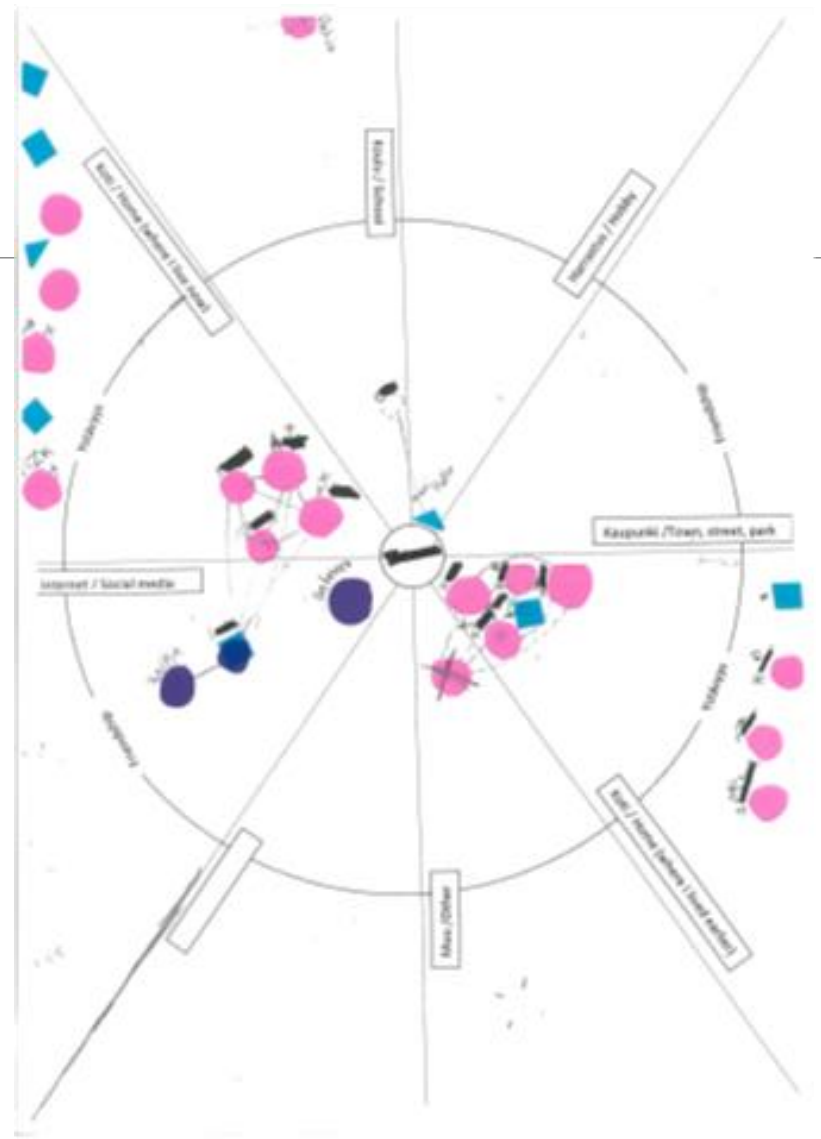
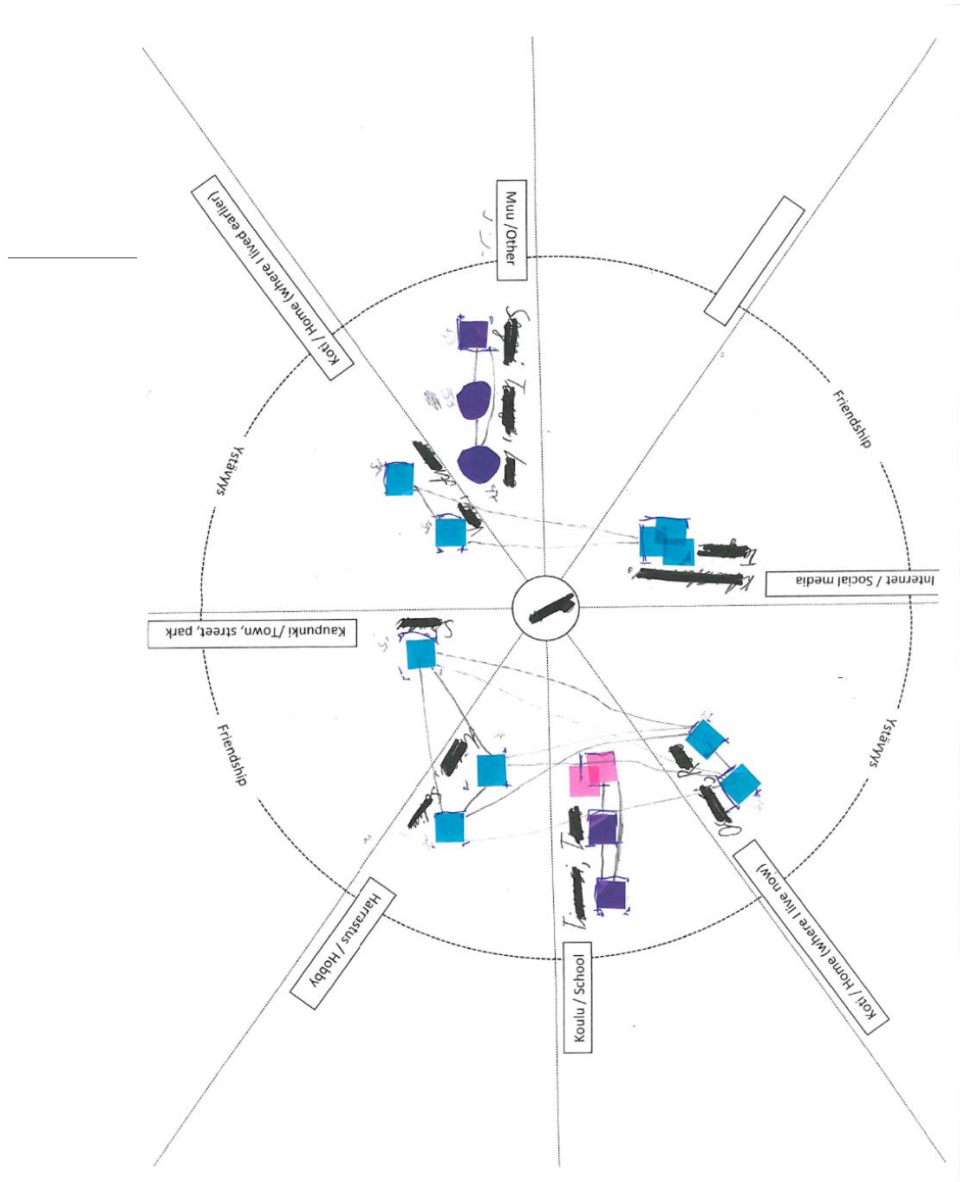
(1) Friendship as a personal project (a form of agency) in a top-down living situation (see Ottosson et al 2017)

(2) “Friendships as families by choice” (Pahl & Spencer 2004) doesn’t unquestionably apply to this group.

“Contemporary youth’s peer relationships as networked, mobile and transboundary” (e.g. Muggleton 2005; White & Wyn 2004) doesn’t unquestionably apply to this group.

(3) Friends are perceived among most important providers of social support by young people themselves (e.g. Rueger et al 2010)

What is the role of friends as sources of social support and coping among asylum seeking/refugee young people in their current everyday life?



The data

Qualitative multi-method study with

29 young people

- 13-18 years of age
- 13 unaccompanied asylum-seekers, 11 accompanied asylum-seekers, 5 quota refugees
- most arrived in Finland with "the big wave" in October-December 2015

Participants were recruited in a local upper-comprehensive school from preparatory education class groups, and also most of the fieldwork has been conducted in school space.

The data includes

- 24 friendship network maps and individual interviews based on the markings on the maps (Oct16-Jan17)
- photographs about friends and friendship by 14 participants and individual photo-elicited interviews (Jan17-March17)
- 21 social support network maps, drawings and writings about "what helps you to do well in life now in Finland?", and individual interviews on those (Apr17-May17)



“What is the role of friends as sources of social support and coping among asylum seeking/refugee young people in their current everyday life?”

Studying the extracts of the data that combine friends/friendship *and* social support

Friendship

- defined by the participating young people
- > data-led categorization according to “friendship type”

Social support

- narratives on seeking, receiving and providing support among people defined as friends
- > categorized according to Cohen & Syme’s (1985) typology: emotional support, instrumental support, companionship support, informational support
- + potentially something else?!

Everyday life

- Alfred Schütz’s (1972; see Schütz & Luckmann 1985) definition of everyday life as spatial, temporal and social
- > in addition to asking *who* (friends) and *what* and *how* (support), asking the questions of *where* and *when* from the friend support extracts

WHO	WHAT	WHERE	WHEN
none x1	--	--	--
one friend (Abdullah) x2	informational support	group home, school	present
group-home boys x10	companionship, informational	group home, school, city, hobby, work	present
same ethn/lang friends at school x2	companionship	school	present
other youths at school x4	companionship, informational	school, city	potential
same ethn/lang friends elsewhere x2	companionship	Helsinki, Turku, internet	present, past
friends in Europe x6	informational, instrumental, companionship	various places in Europe	past, potential
girlfriend x2	companionship, informational, emotional	city, girlfriend's home	present, past
Finnish girls x8	informational	school, city, internet	potential
friend from a hobby x4	companionship	hobby, trips	present, potential
family members x5	emotional, instrumental	home country	past
friends in home country x8	emotional, instrumental, companionship	home country	past
adult friend x3	informational	group home, school, phone	present

Past, present and potential friendships as sources of support

Present friendships – companionship and information

- turning towards each other, "bonding community"
- "friend experts"
- "arenas of comfort", potential for bridging ties

Past friendships – sources of emotional stress and support

- emotional support provided by "old" friends and family members not currently available
- "don't want to think of them" / "thinking of them makes me happy"

Potential friendships – imagined support

- the idea of becoming friends in future "helps to get by" and "keeps me going on"
- potential paths to deeper companionship more information > inclusion
- coping through imagination
- personal projects of belonging

Perceived support is narrated with respect to time and space. The interplay between friendship and support is not straightforward but complex and heterogeneous phenomenon consisting of temporal, spatial and relational practices of which some are "real" and others "imagined".

Not only "actual friendships" but also past and potential "imagined" friendships are important sources of managing the challenging life situation.

New forms of resilience (imagined friendship and support) *and* new forms of friendship (e.g. expert friends) are developing in the context of asylum?

“This is not my good friend yet, this is just someone I say hi to, I don’t have Finnish friends yet. Maybe when I learn Finnish better, then I can go with the 9th grade group. Then I can ask them to help me. (Do you think they will?) Yes they will help me. And I will do stuff with them, then they will be my friends. I have many ‘hi’ friends in Finland, at school and in the mall, but I don’t mark all them, I just put one. (Why him then?) Because he is nice to me, smiles, always says ‘hi how are you’, I think he may be my friend a little.”

Boy 16 yrs



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