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Conducting Research with young people and developing the MTW Approach - a methodology that grasps young people's perspectives

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Abstract

In this article we present our qualitative mixed-methods methodology that we name *the Map-Talk-Walk Approach* (MTW Approach). We developed the approach to better grasp young people's understandings of youth, normality and belonging, which make up the thematic framework of our current youth research. The MTW Approach is based on three phases, 1) Researcher-initiated workshops, 2) Focus group interviews, and 3) Walk-and-talks in the young people's local environments. In the article, we discuss the ethical complications related to doing research *with* young people and positioning them as experts in their lifeworlds. Our ambition is to create a democratized research process that allows the participants ownership, and we find this to be a challenging task. In the closing section, after a thorough presentation of the three phases, we discuss some of the pitfalls we experienced during the process, in which approximately 70 students from 8th grade in three different lower secondary schools in a Danish Provincial Town (in this article called Lomby) participated.

Keywords: Youth Research, Qualitative Research, Mixed-Methods Methodology, Research Ethics, Young People's Perspectives

Introduction

The basis for this article consists of the methodological outlines of the still ongoing research project: *Conceptions of Youth and Normality in the Provinces*. In this project, we developed and implemented a qualitative mixed-methods methodology that we name *the Map-Talk-Walk Approach* (MTW Approach). The aim of the article is to present this approach and sketch out the main frame of our ongoing methodological reflections and ethical considerations related to carrying out this endeavour in the research process.

Thematically, our research focuses on how Danish 8th graders in three lower secondary schools experience, define and construct youth, normality and a sense of belonging in their local environments. Young people's everyday lives are lived in many spheres, and in this study, we look deeper into the spaces and places (Kirkeby, Gitz-Johansen and Kampmann, 2005; Malone, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004; Hviid, 2007; Fotel, 2007) young people use, inhabit and construct in their leisure time. What role do unstructured settings (Gravesen 2015; Gravesen and Frostholm, 2015a; Gravesen and Frostholm, 2015b) play for young people's communities, sense of normality and belonging, and how do young people balance between the unstructured settings and the various structured, adult-organized and pedagogical settings, such as the school, leisure clubs and part-time jobs? How do they cope with external expectations and to what extent do they need, use and create places and spaces of their own? However, as the article's emphasis is on our methodology, we will not be carrying out analysis on these thematic interests. With that said, the things you do and the interests you have as a researcher are closely interrelated, so to some extent the thematics of youth, normality and spaces will shine through.

Doing research *with* children and young people

It is evident that a key element of the research project is exploring, testing out and hopefully adding empirical experience to a body of different methodological strategies all situated within a broader frame of our ethnographic fieldwork (Hastrup, 2010). In exploring and sorting out the different data-collecting strategies, it is a crucial focal point for us, that whatever methods we chose they should all be applicable in grasping the young people's perspectives and offer a glimpse into the lifeworld of the young people in the provinces in Denmark.

Doing research *with* children or young people is by no means a new ambition or invention. For at least two decades researchers discussed the challenges related to understanding the world from a child's or a young person's point of view, and to do so, as Punch (2002) puts it, "adults must strive to abandon the commonly held assumption that adults' knowledge is superior to that of children" (ibid.: 325). For many researchers (Morrow, 2008; Alderson and

Morrow, 2011; Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller, 2005), the focus has been centered on the development of strategies “that are ‘fair and respectful’ to children as the subjects rather than objects of research” (Barker and Weller, 2003: p. 208).

Research methods and research ethics interconnect as methodological and ethical issues interrelate and weave their way through the process of most research work (Morrow, 2008). Ethical considerations are undoubtedly important, however they cannot, in fact, be boiled down to rigid schemes or absolute rules. Researchers must undertake ethical judgements, confront, and deal with ethical considerations as they go – and in that sense act ethically according to context (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 219-228). Following the notion of *ethical situationism* (ibid.: 219), as suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson we seek to navigate according to context, distinguishing between right or wrong along the way as many social researchers have done before us.

Our conceptualization of doing research *with* young people involves us considering what could be deemed an epistemological challenge, as conceptualising children and young people in their own right, is also acknowledging them in being experts in their field of competence. We see how the young people present in our study have an important knowledge on, and valuable insight into their lifeworld (Featherstone, 1992) and the culturally-bound places and spaces that make up their everyday life in the provinces. This knowledge should not be taken for granted. Recognizing this, we found a valuable way into a world sometimes disguised from external agents.

A pertinent issue regarding the research ethics on social research is whether the use of children’s and young people’s voices in research should be considered and treated as a specific and independent ethical issue. Morrow (2008) points out that the overall methodological and ethical questions concerning most work in the field of social research revolves around the same main topics, whether children are involved or not. It basically comes down to finding an honest way of collecting and disseminating findings as well as protecting informants in the most considerate way possible, while constantly having an awareness on the production of knowledge as a main goal for the research. However, from a cultural and societal point of view the reflections on research design calls for a widened view on some ethical considerations regarding research on those *under age* (Morrow 2008, p. 52-53). Alderson and Morrow (2011) urge that social researchers carefully reflect upon the standpoint from which children and young people are studied. Primarily this means to respect fully the young people’s integrities and competencies, thus overcoming, in their words, a ‘natural’ tendency to take children and young people for granted and ascribing their voices a secondary status in the research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Following this advice, we are considerate about the light in which the young people in this present study are portrayed, doing our utmost to take into consideration how the young people’s narratives are given a

primary place in the analysis, and to which extent the young people are given voice throughout the research findings. Alderson and Morrow (2011) show that adults tend to set themselves up as interpreters and translators of children's behaviour. Advocating that this should be avoided, they advise that children's competencies should rather be seen as somewhat 'different' rather than lesser. Following this advice children and young people are given a voice in their own sense (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; see also Clark & Statham, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2001 for similar discussions in regard to younger children). What we are given is yet another argument for conducting research *with* children.

In the north, not least in the Scandinavian context, there is a strong emphasis on discussions associated to youth participation in social services and social work and particularly the question of the roles of young people in youth research is of interest in this article. A relatively new example of this focus is the Nordic anthology on Youth, Exclusion and Social Chance (Wulf-Andersen, Follesø & Olsen, 2016), in which Fjordside et. al (2016) summarize the transformed focus in children's and youth research, emphasizing the role of children and young people as social and cultural agents in their own environments, and not merely 'incomplete' adults awaiting fully developed competences in a distant future. Such realizations confront researchers when they develop their methodologies, and the following quote sums up the challenges quite well:

“Children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society. The challenge is how best to enable children to express their views to an adult researcher and how to 'maximise children's ability to express themselves at the point of data-gathering; enhancing their willingness to communicate and the richness of the findings” (Punch, 2002, p. 325).

When we discussed our methodological ideas and ultimately developed the MTW Approach we strongly experienced the above challenges. The phases of the Approach is built on the ambition to position the young people as subjects and experts in their lifeworlds, and the desire to collect many different kinds of empirical materials. Therefore, the young people's role, commitment and willingness to express themselves in the different phases are crucial. Our MTW Approach is meant to nurture such engagement.

In the next section, we will shortly present the three phases of the approach, before we, in the subsequent three sections dig deeper into examples, reflections and discussions, related to each of the three phases of the research process. In the concluding section of the article, we sum up the strengths and pitfalls in our methodological approach, in order to contribute to the

ongoing methodological reflection and ethical critique among scholars doing qualitative studies *with* children and young people.

Our MTW Approach

On the basis of theoretical inspiration from relational sociology (Bourdieu, 1999, 2004; Börjesson, 2009; Prieur, 2002), students in three 8th grade classes from three socio-economically different lower secondary school-districts in a Danish Provincial town (to secure anonymity, in this article called *Lomby*), with approximately 57.000 inhabitants, were invited to participate as informants. We approached the students with a qualitative mixed-method methodology (Brinkmann, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Featherstone, 1992; Hastrup, 2003, 2010; Spradley, 1980; Zahavi and Overgaard, 2014), named the MTW Approach, based on three phases. Doing mixed-method methodology gave us insight into the young people's perspectives through the collection of various forms of data, and in the following, we will further describe the three phases.

In phase 1 we conducted researcher-initiated workshops in the classrooms, using socio matrix-inspired (Beum and Brundage, 1950) cartographic *everyday life mappings* (Anvik and Gustavsen, 2012) to gain insight into the young people's use of and movement between different spaces and places in their local environments. We also asked the students to fill out charts about their relations and leisure-time. In phase 2 we conducted follow-up focus group interviews (Halkier, 2016) with all students, on the basis of inductive readings of the data material from the workshops in phase 1. In phase 3 we moved away from the classrooms where the workshops were situated, to take a more street-based ethnographic approach. This phase was based on walk-and-talks and inspiration from the methodologies related to photo-elicited interviews (Jensen, 2008; Pyry, 2015; Sand, 2014; Schjellerup Nielsen, 2013) and Visual Methodology (Prosser, 2011). In order to gain a more thorough understanding of how the local areas, leisure, normality and external expectations are linked to the young people's sense of belonging, we followed the students when they moved around in their local environments. During these walks we shared informal talks about their everyday lives, and the places and spaces they prioritize. In this phase we also asked the students to take pictures and short video clips and share with us for further discussion, interpretation and analysis.

In the next section of the article, we will give a more thorough presentation of the first phase of the MTW Approach, the workshops and the everyday-life mappings. Of ethical consideration and to secure anonymity, we changed names of schools and participating informants.

Phase 1 – The maps

In late summer 2016 we selected and subsequently contacted three schools in and around Lomby in Jutland, the continental part of Denmark. To ensure a socio-economic and local-geographical breadth among the participating schools, we chose two city schools and a suburban school 10 kilometers from the city center. The two city schools are located in two different areas of the city, one being a wealthy one, the other a more deprived one. The suburban school is located in a middleclass suburb. These choices were rooted in the desire to study social differences between specific places and groupings (Bourdieu, 2004; Börjesson, 2009; Prieur, 2002). Our epistemological position is equally situated between inspiration from Bourdieu's relational sociology and a phenomenological approach based on (the admittedly vague term) everyday sociology (Zahavi and Overgaard, 2014, p. 198; Adler and Adler, 1987). Adler and Adler emphasize that "the strength of everyday life sociology lies in generating sociological concepts or insights from seemingly trivial settings" (ibid.: 230), which is exactly what we pursue through our MTW Approach.

Based on telephone conversations, mail exchanges and the transmission of different information materials to involved teachers and parents, we managed to settle agreements and gain formal consent from the three schools and in October 2016 we conducted the researcher-initiated workshops in the three 8th grade classes, resulting in a sample of approximately 70 participating students. In Denmark, students in 8th grade in lower secondary school are 14-15 years old.

At the start-up of each of the three workshops, we initially explained the focus of our research. We explained our motivation to understand the young people as experts in their everyday lives, and carefully clarified some ethical implications of the process. We emphasized that all statements and conversations in the project would be anonymized, and that we as researchers were not looking for correct answers. We tried to position ourselves as *alternative adults*, different from parents and teachers, clarifying that we would not judge their expressions and use of language, and ultimately, that the research process was based on confidentiality and anonymization, as noted above. We asked every student to accept these confidentiality guidelines, not least to prevent any form of bullying and teasing outside the research space that we shared with the young people during the three phases of the process. We accentuated that the project was not a part of their school curriculum and noted that it would most likely be fun, and indeed different from regular school activities. On that basis, we asked if they were *in for it*, and they agreed.

At the three workshops we brought the following materials; A PowerPoint presentation, maps and charts. Next, in order to exemplify the underlying approach, we describe these materials and give examples of their use in the workshops.

The PowerPoint Presentation

We used a PowerPoint Presentation as a brief presentation of the project and ourselves. Beforehand we created a closed Facebook group for each of the three 8th grade classes that we asked them to befriend. During the workshop we introduced a little exercise, where we asked them to take a walk around the school building and record a short film at a place or location that means something to them and finally share it with us in the Facebook group. We created the Facebook groups as online gathering places for further communication and ultimately as storage places for the photos and video clips that the students share with us.

The Maps

In preparation for the workshops, we printed out city maps of the three selected school districts in the A3 formats (297 x 420 mm). In addition, we printed out inner city maps of Lomby in order to understand how they use not only the streets, spots and squares of their own school district, but also the city center of their town. We stapled the maps and added blank pages for additional reflections. Also prior to the workshop we designed a colour code, and we asked each student to mark spots and routes on the maps, using the same colours.

- **Red:** Places with adults
- **Blue:** Places without adults
- **Black:** Places you tend to avoid
- **Green:** Your daily routes

We also asked them to describe the places - either in the margin of the maps or on the blank pages. The young people sat in groups of 4-5 and filled in the maps. We walked around and helped them, reminded them of the colour codes and talked to them about some of the places they marked. The picture below (figure 1) shows the sample of maps from the suburban school.



Figure 1

For ethical reasons and to secure full anonymity we cannot show the maps in detail as this would obviously reveal street names and the like. However, what surprised us when we went through the maps was the fact that many students only marked red places *with adults*, indicating that the places they use in their local environment is populated by adults. One example is Camilla who only marked a few green routes and four spots in red, respectively the grocery store, the bakery, the school and the youth club. Oscar marked the places he uses in the city center of Lomby. As was the case with Camilla, Oscar did not mark any spots without adults. In the margin of the map he wrote: "Der er ingen voksne som ikke er nogle steder", meaning: "There are no places without adults". It surprised us that many of the students, like Camilla and Oscar, did not mark places without adults, and in our thematic analysis on youth, normality and spaces, lying ahead of us, obviously we will follow up on such findings.

The Charts

In addition to the Maps, we also handed out another set of materials, a *Relations Chart* and a *Leisure Chart*. On the Relations Chart the students are asked to mark their close and more peripheral relations in their everyday lives. On the Leisure Chart the students can portray their everyday use of leisure activities. The charts provide alternative glimpses into the lifeworlds and daily priorities of the young informants and to offer a quick insight into those materials, below are pictures (figure 2) with examples from two randomly selected Leisure charts – Camilla's (left) and Oscar's (right)

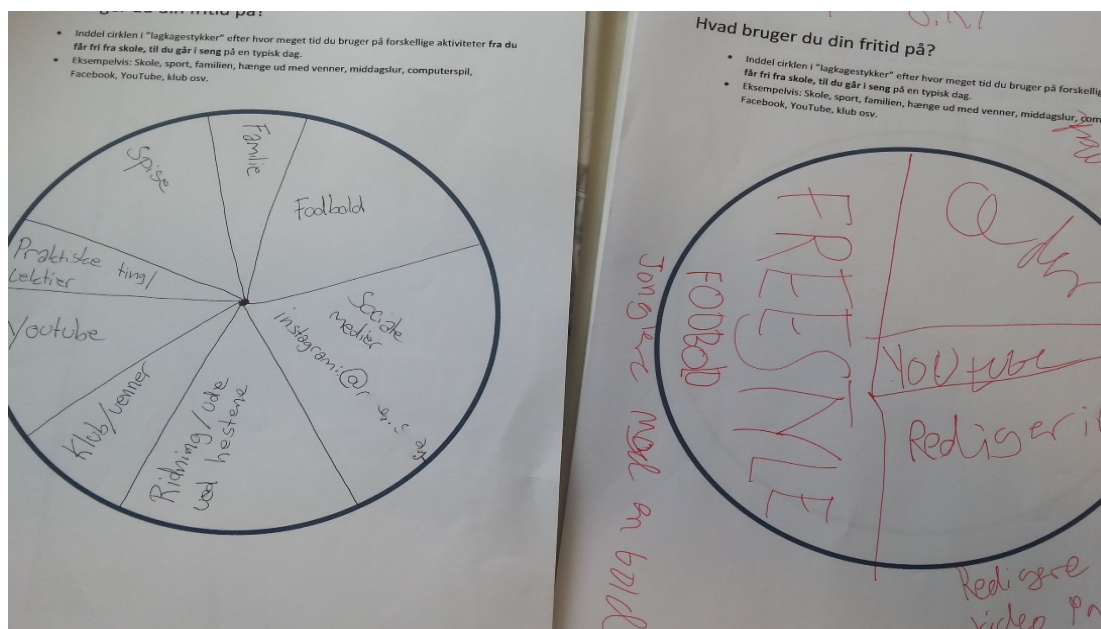


Figure 2

According to Oscars Leisure Chart, half of his leisure time is spent doing freestyle football, while approximately a quarter is spent on eating, and the rest is for YouTube and editing activities on on-line platforms.

Camilla's Leisure Chart depicts more leisure time activities than is the case with Oscar's Chart, which logically leaves less space for each activity. She marks "family" and "practical things/homework" as the least time consuming activities in her leisure life. "Social Media" and "YouTube" take a lot of her time, which is also the case with the outdoor activities "Football" and "Horse riding/being with the horses".

Below is a section of Camilla's Relation Chart (figure 3), where "family", "friends", "the class" is marked. However, closer to "me" in the center of the Chart, Camilla marked "my dogs" and "The horse, I am riding". Camilla indicates that animals are amongst her most important relationships and many of the other young people, especially from the suburban school, also mark animals on their Relation Chart. As it appears, Camilla marks "Teachers" fairly far from the center, where they appear isolated.

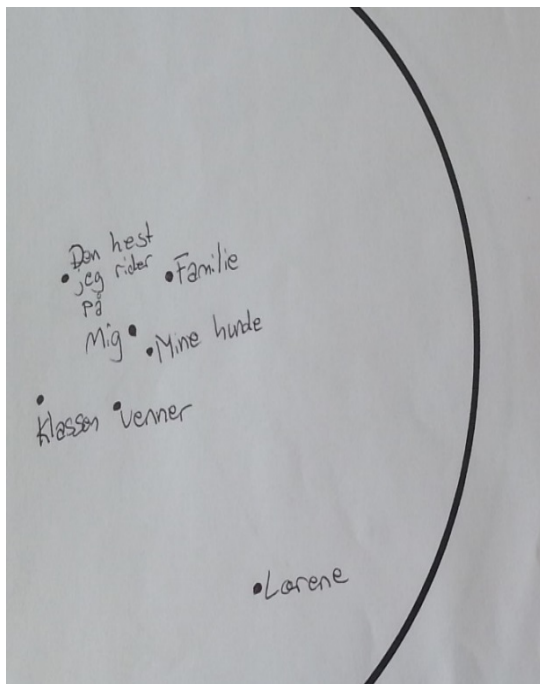


Figure 3

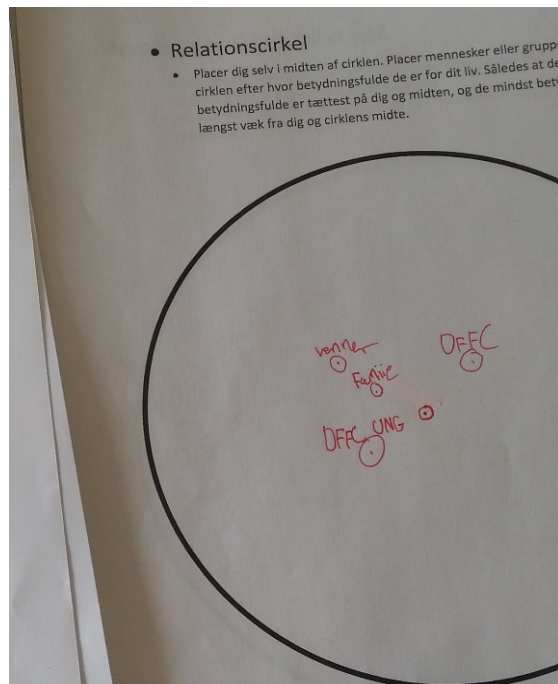


Figure 4

As is apparent in the above picture (figure 4), Oscar does not mark many relationships on his Relation Chart. In the middle, he indicated himself and in addition, his family and a little further away from the center his friends. He also marks DFFC UNG and DFFC, which stands for the Danish Football Freestyle Community. These marks correspond well with Oscar's Leisure Chart, where he marked Freestyle Football as taking up half of his leisure sphere.

Phase 2 – the Talks

The strength of focus group interviews is their ability to gain insight into shared norms, arguments, agreements and disagreements in specific groups (Halkier, 2016, p. 13), making the method suitable for creating collective data. In the second phase of our MTW Approach we conducted focus group interviews with all students in the three selected 8th grade classes. At each of the three schools we divided the students into four groups, resulting in a sample of 12 focus group interviews in total.

When we chose to move on with this particular interview form, the synergistic potential (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 559) of the focus group interview, was important to us. We very much wished to facilitate a “democratization of the research process, allowing participants more ownership over it” (ibid.). Securing democratization is firmly linked to our ambition to grasp the young people’s perspectives, discussed earlier in this article. Maximizing all the informants possibility to express themselves was crucial, and the simple act of asking all the students to participate in focus group interviews was also a pragmatic way of ‘allowing everyone in’, so to speak, instead of only the (confident) ones that would consider this a great chance to express themselves.

In order to position the informants as experts in their lifeworlds, we constructed the interview guides based on findings in the Maps and Charts from the first phase of the research process. When examining the materials we detected patterns and listed the informants selections based on the previously decided color-coding. We also emphasized some findings that fewer students marked, in order to embrace the complexity of the materials. With such inductive readings as our main steering tool, we listed a selection of themes and a number of helping questions. See a section (figure 5) of the interview guide that we created and used in the four focus group interviews at the suburban school:

Themes based on empirical data	Helping Questions
<p>The City/Shopping</p>	<p>Important (+)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's happening in the city? • What's great about being in the city?
<p>Places without adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The schoolyard • The sports fields • The ramp • Between the containers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a little about it... • What are you doing there? • Who's coming? • What does the place mean to you? • Why is it important?
<p>Ghettos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific parts of the town, that they consider ghettos. Many avoid those places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to tell a little about it... • What kind of place is this? • Why do you avoid it? • What's happening over there? • Tell me about the people living there...

Figure 5

The note “**Important (+)**” in the interview guide (just below the headline “Helping Questions”) indicates that many of the informants in the suburban school, where we used this interview guide, find shopping activities and visits to the city center important. Remembering that when carrying out the interview was important, in order to relate the discussions to what we learned from the informants in the first place. Noting that some matters are important at one of the schools and less important in another school gives us insight into Bourdieu’s relational sociology and our scrutiny of differences between the different geographical contexts and the values, norms and doings of the three different groupings. The specific focus of this article, does not allow us to elaborate on this, but we find it important to emphasize that with this inspiration, we exceed the phenomenological approach in the study in order to contextualize

the environments from where the students come from and understand elements of the different socio-economic ballast that forms their everyday realities.

This also leads to another important focal point of our study. The schism between structured settings, promoted and populated by adults and the leisure sphere, more voluntarily organized by the young people themselves, relate to important educational trends and societal imperatives concerning young people in Denmark. In a school reform in the Danish primary and lower secondary school in 2014 school hours were increased for all ages (Gravesen and Ringskou, 2016), and among the OECD countries Denmark rank high on compulsory hours in the classroom, surpassed only by Australia (OECD, 2016, p. 382). In relation to the reform and the OECD statistics, our study is thematically interested in understanding how the young people adhere to societal expectations and to what extent their leisure sphere is actually their own, or more the result of adult management and control. Our preliminary analysis indicates that the more well-off informants from the wealthier school in the city are very busy in their leisure sphere, doing sports, extra-curricular music programs and part-time jobs, adhering to expectations, not least from their parents. The picture is quite the opposite with the students from the lesser privileged school in the city. For them the leisure sphere is rarely permeated by adult supervision and the hours spending just hanging out are many. Such preliminary findings correlate other research documenting important differences in the structure of leisure time use across social classes (De Visscher and Bouverne-De Bie, 2008; Lareau, 2003; Gravesen, 2015). Such findings, we believe, are strongly related to notions of normality, the core concept of the thematic analysis, which lays ahead of us. To ensure interview data that enables us to make comparative analysis on the above questions, at the end of the interview guide we formulated a series of questions that had a more general feel to them. In the group of researchers, we discussed if such general questions were a rejection of our own ambition to base the focus group interviews on the young informant's perspectives and expressions from the workshops. Because undoubtedly these general questions were more generic and formulated in the vein of an adult researcher mind, than strictly based on the young people's viewpoints. This illustrates some of the challenges and difficulties we experienced, when we tried to keep on track with our ambition to base the research on the young informant's perspectives.

See a few examples of the more general questions below (figure 6):

General questions, across the three schools	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a good youth life? • What is difficult about youth life?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you consider a great adult life? • How do you get there?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have enough time for what you want to do in your daily life?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What expectations do you experience in your daily life? - From parents / school / community / friends / yourself / others?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who decides what you should do? - In daily life / leisure

Figure 6

Phase 3 – The walks

Following up on the 12 focus group interviews with a street-based ethnographic approach was based on our ambition to collect different forms of data. Doing the walk-and-talks serves as the last phase, and a dynamic closure, of our MTW Approach. Following the informants through their local environment, leaving the school buildings and exploring trails, playgrounds and local grocery stores gave new and extended meaning to the Maps and Charts and the narratives shared in the focus group settings. The pictures below (figure 7 and figure 8) illustrates how the young people took the lead in the walk-and-talks, showing us directions and focussing on specific places.



Figure 7

Evans and Jones (2011) note that walking interviews generate more place-specific data than sedentary interviews (Evans and Jones, 2011, p. 856), offering access to people's attitudes and knowledge about their surrounding environment (ibid., 850). Jones et al. (2008) also pinpoint that mobile interviewing techniques "provide a means to take the interviewing process out of the "safe" confines of the interview room and allow the environment and the act of walking itself to move the collection of interview data in productive and sometimes entirely unexpected directions" (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs and Ricketts Hein, 2008, p. 8). In our experience, the dynamics of walking ensured exactly that, and in the somewhat loose structure of the sessions, we gained inspiration from what Jones et al. (2008) and Kusenbach (2003) describe as *the go-along technique*, contrary to walk-and-talks with fixed routes agreed upon in advance.

"When conducting go-alongs, fieldworkers accompany (...) informants on their 'natural' outings, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment. A hybrid between participant observation and interviewing, go-alongs carry certain advantages when it comes to exploring the role of place in everyday lived experience" (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463)

On the day of the walks, we met the students in early afternoons, and divided them into the same groups, that served as focus group informants. The researcher that carried out the

focus group interview would also be the one to follow that specific group. We made that choice to ensure some consistency in the process and to build on the trust that was created and shared throughout the focus group interviews. Seemingly the students reacted enthusiastically towards this, following up on shared discussions and experiences from the interviews, while entering the local environments.



Figure 8

Having no fixed routes positioned the informants as the “guides of the tour”, which correlated well with our urge to facilitate a democratic atmosphere focusing on the young people’s perspectives. With that said, in order to secure coherence, it was also important for us to follow up on themes and narratives from the first two phases of the research process, and that ambition, after all, kept the walks “on track”.

Whilst doing the walks we encouraged the informants to take pictures and movie clips and share with us on the Facebook Group. We also used our own cell phones for photos, short movies and sound recordings. While the sit-down focus group interviews were easy to record and subsequently transcribe, go-along dialogues are much more difficult to capture on a small device that doesn’t distinguish between the sounds of passing cars, roaring wind and important notions from informants. However, we also experienced exactly that to be part of the charm, and based on inspiration from photo-elicited interviews (Jensen, 2008; Pyyry, 2015; Sand, 2014; Schjellerup Nielsen, 2013) and visual methodology (Prosser, 2011) we ultimately ended up with a diversity of data, ranging from the Maps and Charts from phase 1, the interview transcripts from phase 2 and the varying and somewhat messy bulk of impressions, pictures, movie clips and fragmented sound recordings of phase 3.

Having finished all three phases of our MTW Approach, we are on the verge of moving into the interpretative and analytical stage of our research. Before we get there, however, this article needs closure. In the next section, we will make some critical reflections and concluding remarks on our methodological experiences with the MTW Approach.

Concluding remarks

In this project, we developed and implemented a qualitative mixed-methods methodology that we name *the Map-Talk-Walk Approach*. Using a mixed-method approach also gave us an opportunity to construct the three phases of the process in a way that we hoped would be funny and stimulating for the young people to take part in. Obviously, the different takes on gathering data stimulated and inspired the informants in different ways, cognitively and physically. Collecting the multiple forms of data was fun, but also challenging at the same time. Fun because of the dynamics, wildness and unpredictability of the material, and challenging for the exact same reasons.

It was crucial for us to develop a methodology based on a democratic and inclusive atmosphere that positioned the informants as experts and ourselves as alternative adults without pedagogical agendas. Creating a non-judgmental environment during the workshops, the focus group interviews and the walks, focusing on the young people as subjects rather than objects of the research and respecting their integrities was our ambition. But did we manage exactly that?

Creating the three phases and successively filling them with questions, themes and content based on inductive readings of the young people's expression and narratives in the former phases, is what we consider an important strength of our work. However, handing out Maps at the workshops – our first encounter with the young people - and asking them to fill in their routes and places based on our pre-determined categories and color-codes appear less inclusive when looking back today. Perhaps creating the categories *with* the young people instead of posing them *onto* them, would have been more in the vein of our ethical and methodological ambitions. On the other hand, it might be too ambitious to imagine a completely researcher/adult-free and non-interfering atmosphere, at least in the beginning of the process. As our wording suggests, the workshops were indeed researcher-initiated. In future research using the MTW Approach, we will contemplate the possibilities of more informant involvement also in the first phase of the process. Perhaps this will require even earlier encounters with less fixed structures, where mutual reflections on relevant categories could be developed and subsequently applied to the Maps and Charts.

Related to the above reflections it is worth questioning to what extent our emphasis on *voice* and *democratization* thrives with the fact that formal access and initial consent were negotiated with the teachers and schools, rather than with the young people themselves.

When we chose to situate the first two phases of the process (the maps and the talks) in various class rooms in the school buildings, and start out from the school areas in phase 3 (the walks), was it in fact possible for the informants to opt out, if they felt uneasy? For some, it possibly felt *school-like* that most of the process were located in the school setting, even though others than their regular teachers and school personnel carried out the activities. Such a *school-feel* might have prevented some of the informants from quitting. But not all. At one of the workshops, we actually experienced that some of the students did not come back after the short exercise outside the classroom. We accepted that as a natural abandonment of the project. This anecdotic example illustrates that we were indeed tolerant towards the student's rejection of our endeavour, but with that said; probably most students would not have the confidence to do just that.

Another debateable issue regarding our MTW Approach is the natural fact that it takes time to build trust. Trying to gain just that with the young people – and approximately 70 of them - through three encounters in the three phases is perhaps a bit too naïve. However, we did experience most of the informants to be open and talkative, and perhaps our introductory talk about being *alternative adults*, that were not there to judge their expressions and narratives, was helpful in that regard.

In the group of researchers, we discussed the issue of building trust repeatedly throughout the process, and though we might have liked to prolong the duration of our fieldwork maintaining contact with the informants (or perhaps a selected part of them), we acknowledge that research is also based on pragmatic choosing, structural limitations and ultimately realism.

One last question that we wish to pose is this: Does a greater variation in the data forms actually create more variation or just more data? Darbyshire et al. (2005) argue “that helping children to express themselves in a variety of complementary and congruent ways is valuable but not without pitfalls” (Darbyshire et al., 2005, p. 424). In the article, and namely in this closing section, we have tried to express some of the pitfalls we experienced during our encounters with the young people. We wish to emphasize that it is important to keep experimenting, though challenges permeate all phases of the research process. Leaving adultism is perhaps not a possibility, but reflecting how you cope with it, we believe, is highly important. Not least, when you intend and try to do research *with* children and young people and understand their perspectives.

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