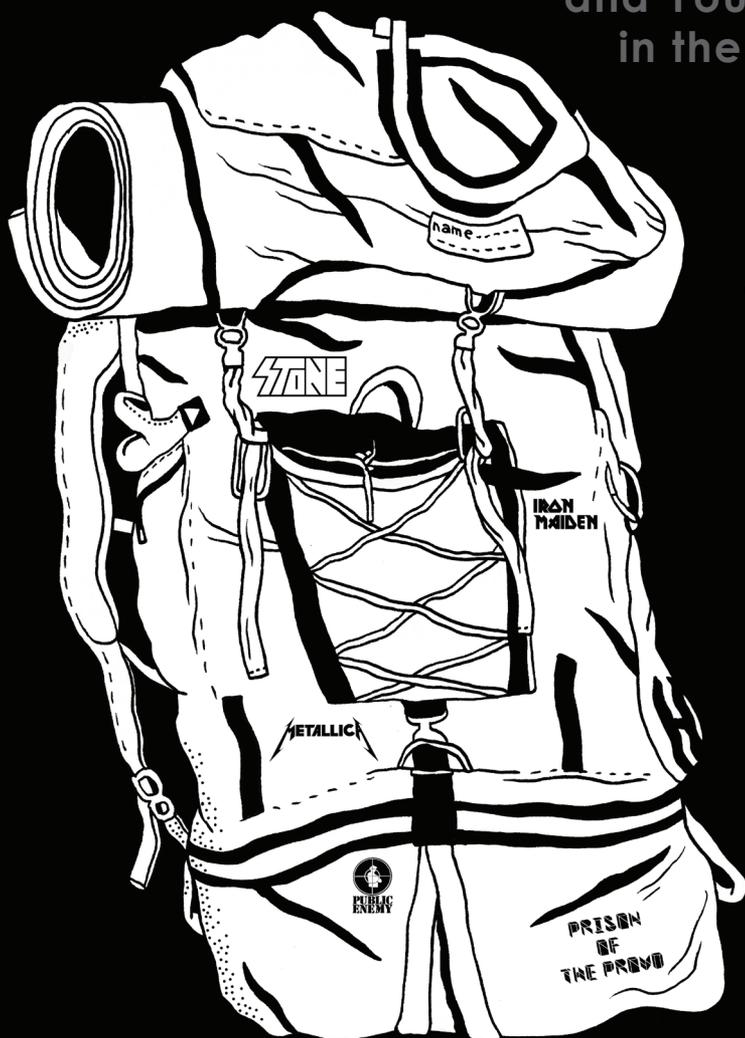


I AM FIRE BUT MY ENVIRONMENT IS THE LIGHTER

A Study on Locality, Mobility, and Youth Engagement in the Barents Region

TOMI KIILAKOSKI



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In gratitude

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Introduction: Barents on my mind

“Not only history but also space is open. In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished.” (Massey 2005, 11.)

I didn't know that I lived there.

I was in Rovaniemi in Northern Finland, attending a meeting on the youth policy in the Barents Region. The name of the meeting was “Barents on my mind”. At the beginning, the map of the Barents Region was shown to the participants. This map was about to reveal a surprise to me.

To my astonishment, my hometown of Oulu on the Northern Coast of the Baltic Sea was part of the Barents Region, a fact I did not know. (It makes one wonder how ignorant a researcher can be.) Yet, I had lived there for 10 years. I thought that the Barents Region was a thing of Lapland, not of mine and my loved ones. But there I was, learning new things about myself as a person living in the Barents Region. I immediately started developing a Barents identity, just like that. Surely, these are times of miracles and wonders!

The description above is, of course, an exaggeration. But in all honesty, I started to see connections between myself and the places in the Barents Region I was about to begin examining. There was a common ground, based on the fact that we, the participants of the study, all the people who helped along the way and myself, are among the over five million people living in the region. New relations started to form in my head, and through these relations, I was able to see new things and reflect on the social and spatial dimensions of my identity differently. My experience of space changed: I became aware of being a member in a region connecting different communities and people living in Northern Europe.

Regions have a territorial shape with vague or more explicit boundaries. They also have a symbolic shape: social practices that produce and reproduce the region and which are used to symbolise a region. Regions also produce and are produced by regional identities. However, the relationships between the regions and regional identities are becoming complicated in the mobile and globalising worlds. (Paasi 2011.) To me, a person living in the Barents Region without knowing it, the symbolic shape of the region was associated with Lappish cultures and means of living. I had not, in any way, felt they described what my region was about, where I dwelt or what I felt connected to. This is obviously a rather trivial personal fact, but it may reveal something about the variety of living conditions in the Barents Region as well. It may also tell something about the fragility of Barents' identities. The relatively young Barents Region was politically institutionalised only in 1993 with the formation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council (The Barents Region).



A couple of months after the Rovaniemi meeting, the field period of the study on the Barents Region began. The aim was not to study the regional identities. Instead, the goal was to examine the living conditions of the young by using the concepts of localities, engagements and mobilities. These concepts were derived from previous studies on rural, and to some extent, also urban youth.

The Finnish Youth Research Network started to negotiate the practicalities of the study with the Ministry of Culture and Education, Finland. It was agreed that the study would consist of three locations in three different countries of Barents: Inari in Finland, Murmansk in Russia and Alta in Norway. The emphasis was on the northern parts of the Barents Region. This means that the results of this study are about the northern condition. The issues of mobilities or migration would have been totally different if I had chosen to study my home region of Oulu, a university town with an emphasis on high technology and innovation. Readers should be aware that the aim is not to offer general results on all of the young people living in the region. Instead, the aim is to examine qualitatively aspects of the lives of those youngsters living in the areas that are reconstructed by domestic migration and social norms of mobility (Farrugia 2015, cf. Faber & Nielsen 2015).

There were three main reasons for choosing to concentrate on the very north of Barents, instead of, for example, the cities of Oulu, Rovaniemi or Luleå. First was a criticism on the urban-centredness of youth studies, a subject I had also engaged in myself. This criticism states that youth research is interested in urban youth cultures and that the concepts, theories and maybe even methodologies are developed to understand only the urban lifestyles. To quote David Farrugia (2014, 295), “the sociology of youth has attempted to theorise youth as such, and has ended up with theoretical frameworks based on urban experiences which capture neither the lives of rural young people nor the spatial dimensions of the structures and cultures that make up contemporary youth”. Analysing the smaller communities would help to widen the picture about living conditions of the young in contemporary society and would perhaps also contribute to making visible currently hidden features of youth cultures and youth participation.

The second reason for studying the north was also derived from previous research. The communities in the north may be seen as peripheries and as remote districts suffering from social and economic exclusion. However, from the interior perspective, the people living in the northern communities are at the very centre of their lives making active choices, instead of being victims of global forces. (Lanas, Rautio & Syrjälä 2013.) To understand the cultural landscape of the young living in the north and to engage in discussions with the youth services available there seemed to offer a chance of understanding the experiences of the young, thereby offering counter-narratives to existing ways of understanding what it is like to grow up in Europe nowadays.

The third reason had to do with youth and educational policy in Finland. The network of secondary education, especially vocational education in Finland, has been gradually centring on bigger cities. For many of the young people, this means moving away from the home region and adapting to a new lifestyle and surroundings – a social imperative caused by material inequalities and symbolic hierarchies (Farrugia 2015). The decisions

favouring the densely populated areas seemed to demand examining a phenomenon I later came to call the dialectics of rooting and learning to leave, of being proud about one's social and material surroundings, and at the same time, learning to leave the area.

The starting point of the study was to use art as a research methodology. The idea was to ask young people to produce different works of art, which would tell what it was like to be a young person living in a particular community. As a result, the data of the study consist of written texts, photos, drawings and songs. The totality of the data does not form an easily codable data corpus. Instead, they reveal different traces (cf. Spivak 2013) of what living in Barents is about.

Although I studied the songs, drawings and photos, ultimately, research must transform any research material into words and texts (St. Pierre 2014). Inevitably, something is lost – the rich information of compositions or photographs vanishes. To give readers a glimpse of the material, I have included several photos and drawings.

My intention was to preserve the sometimes fragmented nature of the works of art by writing in fragments. The first chapter of this study sketches three perspectives on Barents, using a language that differs from the traditional research reports. This can be interpreted, if one so wishes, as me interacting as a writer with the pieces of art of the study. This is followed by a description of the study and the methodology used.

The third chapter analyses the spaces of the young in the Barents Region by reading the drawings of the young made in the Inari region. This chapter tackles the theme of localities. Of all the material, this was easiest to turn into research categories. Due to this, the chapter itself describes the themes categorically in the style of a normal research report. The fourth chapter deals with the issues of mobilities – and leaving. The chapter involves a lot of theoretical thinking by “plugging in” with the text through the process of “reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory” (Jackson & Mazzei 2012, 5): looking at the data of the study with the theoretical and critical question of mobilities, the mobility imperative and the periphery/centre-dichotomy. According to the results, the issue of mobility involves overcoming long geographical distances, facing the youth cultural distances, coming to terms with peers leaving (and thus meeting the temporality of social ties due to the fact that you know that your friends will be gone in a matter of years), and learning to leave oneself. The last chapters deal with the issue of engagements – again, not conclusively, but by offering perspectives on the theme – by touching upon the issues of dwelling and feeling at home, as well as the possibility of migrating back to the region in the future. The report also features youth policy recommendations based on the results of the study.

I Three perspectives on Barents: winter, spring and relational geography

It's winter. There is snow on the ground. The river is not frozen. Waters runs free, one can see the waves. There is sunlight on the horizon, which means that it's not the heart of winter. The photo is beautiful and atmospheric. There is an aura of calmness about it. It was taken by a 23-year-old female living in the city of Murmansk in Russia.

The photo was taken as part of the participatory study, the aim of which was to investigate the lives of the young living in the Barents Region. The photo resembles other photos taken by the participants of the study: there is nothing particularly youth cultural about the photo; there are no urban symbols; the photo is about nature, not about the built environment.



Picture 1. Winter

For me, a person with no emotional connection to the site, this is a mere place, albeit a beautiful one. For the person taking a photo, the relationship is different. The site's memories, emotions, acts of people, reputations and atmosphere define it as a space. In a recent literature, the significance of material surroundings, of physical places one engages with, in becoming ourselves and in being who we are is emphasised. Geographical space is not merely a backdrop to actions or a neutral background. Instead, how we engage with our material surroundings is profoundly significant to our social endeavours

(Anderson & Jones 2009). The vastness of the scenery in the above photo is in strong contrast with the youth studies, which point out that small items, such as park benches or sofas in the youth club, may be of great significance to the experiences of the young (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012).

The river, the snow piles, the trees, the sun – there are plenty of possibilities for encounters here – between nature and culture; between human and material; between the lifeless and the experienced. While it would be paternalistic to claim to be able to interpret the exact meanings given to this place by the photographer, we may note that there are plenty of possibilities here, plenty of events to unfold (cf. Rautio 2013). The meaning of these surroundings, of rivers and trees and hills, is tied to the possibility of interacting with the material world.

* * *

It's spring. The water is high. The grey ground is taken over by the green plants. Grass is beginning to grow. This is a period of transition, light, new beginnings and rebirth. The photo was taken by a young person living in Inari, Northern Finland. I do not know the gender; the photo was sent to me via e-mail using a nickname which does not reveal the name of the person who sent me picture number 2. It was sent to me in response to an invitation to take part in a study on the lives of young people in the Barents Region.

A study conducted in Switzerland found that the main reasons for the young returning to their rural roots were friends and families, job opportunities, rural setting, attachment to region and living in an environment suitable for starting a family. Thus, the reasons for returning were a combination of career opportunities, living environment and social ties (Rérat 2014). Similarly, Virpi Vaattovaara (2015, 125-126) shows in her dissertation that nature is important for people living in Lapland. Nature is both the site of recreation and a working place. Furthermore, it is something that people miss when they have to move south. A dichotomy does not necessarily exist between home as a built environment and nature: nature is a continuation of home, a lived space, a space for living and dwelling. (Vaattovaara 2015, 160.) The importance of nature is manifested in the photos and drawings of this study, too. While it probably does not make sense to talk about nature as a youth cultural space, the nature of the Barents Region is clearly something that constitutes an experience of a place – perhaps in a manner that makes it impossible to talk about strong generational gaps.

* * *

It's boring. Nothing happens. It's cold. There is not much to do. Extreme weather conditions mean that it is difficult to do anything outside in the wintertime. Possibilities are therefore limited. There are not that many youth cultural venues or events. The closeness of nature also means that the distances tend to be time-consuming. The urban fascinations are elsewhere. This might mean that the young are prone to feeling isolated from the urban lifestyle, which is available to their peers in the south.



Picture 2. Spring

“Places are what they are precisely as a result of their history and present participation in relations with elsewhere. . . . They do not come to being in isolation. . . . Territories are constituted and are to be conceptualised, relationally. Thus, interdependence and identity, difference and connectedness, uneven development and the character of place, are in each pairing two sides of the same coin. They exist in constant tension with each other, each contributing to the formation, and the explanation of other.” (Massey 2011, 4.)

According to Massey, any place will be compared to other places: the meanings attached to a certain place are formed in comparison to other places. The dimensions of north and south or regional and central also configure in the drawings of young people living in the Barents Region. Studies of youth migration have concentrated on economic and structural issues: education and work opportunities are concentrated in urban areas. This means that many are required to move. Mobility is not only a possibility for the young; for many, it is a societal imperative. (Farrugia 2015.) Moreover, many cultural or symbolic features are concentrated in metropolitan areas and can be seen as examples of urban life styles.

The impact of global youth cultures is felt everywhere, even in places located far away from the urban centres. The virtual digital networks broaden the horizons and enable people living in the north to access the flow of information, images and symbols regardless of the geographic distances (Corbett 2014). This offers new possibilities, but will also mean that one’s own lifestyle is likely compared to urban youth cultural settings. Finnish youth researcher, Päivi Harinen, states that social media helps to bring youth cultures to non-urban areas as well. This has two sides. On the one hand, the young are able to connect to current trends of youth cultures, and on the other hand, they have to compare their immediate surroundings to the urban landscape. There are digital windows to the urban world, while opportunities available in the home region seem limited. (Harinen 2013.) If the urban lifestyle is a yardstick against which the home place is measured, the regions far away cannot be compared to the array of enchantments offered in the urban areas. This will likely seem as though nothing is happening – at least if happening means youth culture.

When the Barents Region is compared to opportunities available in the cities, it is clear that the metropolitan areas offer more possibilities for consumption, and going to concerts, stores and shops. Young people in non-metropolitan areas also form relationships with youth cultures, sometimes admiring them and sometimes rejecting the urban lifestyle in favour of traditional lifestyles and practices. Identities constructed by young people are shaped by their awareness of the urban youth cultures.

* * *

It’s quite complicated actually. When one lives in the centre, there is no need to compare the realities and daily conditions one faces with other places. Living in the margins means that one is compelled to compare one’s own lifestyle with the centre. The drawings, photos and songs show that there are many things one can be proud of and attached to. There are material realities that are rather unique. On the other hand, they also show

that one's own life is likely to be evaluated against the background of urban consumption. Doreen Massey (2011, 12) talks about the "constant interplay between territoriality and relationality". When examining life as seen by the young in the Barents Region, one has to analyse the territoriality and different material, social and cultural phenomena that exist in the region. However, one also has to pay attention to how a place is seen in relation to other places. Also, spatial identity is formed in connection with political and social perspectives: to live in a certain area is spatially rooted, but it is also shaped by how one sees one's relationship with other places.

The current economic realities play a large role in the lives of northern regions. These macro-level structural processes may create new inequalities if the quality and amount of services for the young people in rural areas is significantly lower than in the urban centres (Cuervo 2014; Harinen 2015). Diminishing services (especially in secondary and tertiary education) and the lack of long-term job opportunities mean that people are forced to reflect on their own future outside the immediate environment. Employment opportunities exist largely in the urban areas. Many are forced to move. In addition to this, symbolic dimensions emphasise the centrality of urban areas. Then again, this may be the outside view. The concept of the centre can be interpreted in a more dynamic manner. The people living in the north are in the centre of their own lives, making active choices that enable them to live their lives and enjoy the important features of their lifestyles. In fact, it can be claimed that living in the north requires constant activity: in the social order where the urban lifestyle is the norm, being able to live in the north requires active participation in one's own life. (Lanas 2011.)

Belonging, dwelling and attaching to a place and finding social spaces one can share is a many-sided affair, combining social, material and peer relations. There are "ambiguities and dualities of place attachment and belonging that can and do co-exist within hybrid places" (Abbott-Chapman, Johnston & Jetson 2014, 305). When a place becomes a social space, some of the existing boundaries are likely to converge and reshape. French sociologist, Bruno Latour (2005, 204), states that "no place is self-contained enough to be local". Using a perspective of relational geography, his statement can be taken to imply that any place is likely to be compared to other places and will have relationships and inter-dependencies with a network of other places. One's inner perspective is affected by experiences, conceptions, images and even misunderstandings about living in other places.

The lives of the young in the Barents Region vary, as do the lives of the young in every corner of Europe. There are many life courses, many ways of constructing identities, many ways of reacting to the possibilities and hindrances offered by adult society. At the same time, material and structural realities do limit the lives of the young people in a concrete manner (Harinen 2015). One has to come to terms with the possibilities offered and also, perhaps, with the imperatives of mobility (Farrugia 2015) created by the economic realities in modern society.

The impact of one's environment is nicely illustrated in a drawing delivered to me by the youth workers of Inari. The drawing shows a picture of a burning wolf with the text, "I'm the fire but my environment is the lighter." For me, as a researcher trying to

understand the lives and daily realities of the young in the Barents Region, this is as good a metaphor as any in pointing out that our lives cannot only be explained by our individual motivation or capabilities or how hard we work. Our material, spatial and social environment also affects our life course and choices we make.



II The research questions and methodology of the study

The main themes of the study – localities, mobilities and engagements – were derived from earlier research. The aim of the study, which was also practical, was to provide insights into how the young themselves see their lives in the Barents Region and analyse the youth policy implications of these experiences. The starting point of the research, therefore, was to provide a youth policy-informed applied research perspective on the area. The overall focus of the research was negotiated together with the financing body, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Division for Youth Work and Youth Policy) and the local youth workers in Inari, Alta and Murmansk.

The negotiations and preparations were done in the beginning of 2015. The communities involved in the study were chosen using existing professional networks. The researcher had negotiated the participation of the Inari municipality during 2014. Inari was actively involved in the project, Connecting Young People in Barents, which also featured Alta, the Huset youth house, Murmansk, and the Mr. Pink youth club. The latter was unfortunately closed before the research began. The methodology of the research was to examine pieces of art done by young people, which would reveal their experiences of Barents. To achieve this and to make contact with the young people, co-operating with the local youth workers was an easy choice to make. During the course of the project, the Education Department of Inari became an important partner as well.

Inari is located in Northern Lapland. There are roughly 6,800 people living in Inari, which geographically, is the largest municipality in Finland. The area of Inari is six times the area of Luxembourg. Therefore, Inari is a great example for looking at the impact of geographical distances and mobilities. Alta, with roughly 20,000 inhabitants, is located in Finnmark County, Norway, close to Altafjord. Murmansk is the second largest city in the Barents Region with 300,000 inhabitants (the Russian city of Archangelsk is the largest). Despite the obvious urban nature of Murmansk, the works of art in that area dealt with nature. For research economics and communications reasons, the municipality of Inari was chosen as a main partner of the study. Both the Youth Department and the Department of Education were invaluable in the process, by making the local contacts, encouraging young people to participate, and also in discussing the findings and initial interpretations.

The wide aim was to use artistic methods of the research to explore conditions, youth cultures and daily life situations of the young residents in Barents. Research was qualitative and participatory – the young could choose a form of art and themes they wanted to tackle. The methods were aimed at providing in-depth information on the experiences of the youth.

As background information, it was noted that youth studies conducted in the Barents Region have spelled out the contradictions between the idealised picture of Barents life and the realities. The tensions between moving away and staying, or local traditions and global influences point out the contradiction between established stereotypes of the Barents youth's conditions and the perspectives of the young people themselves. Youth

and regional studies (Lanas 2011; Ollikainen 2008) point out that the local cultures and views of the youth often remain hidden and unseen. This problem has consequences to the general impression of the living conditions in Barents, but also more widely to the services provided for the young people in the region.

Theoretical concepts used to analyse the data were space/place, mobilities and engagements. The study asked three different but interconnected questions:

1. What kind of engagements do young people have with their social and physical environment?
2. How is the local space of Barents affected by mobilities?
3. How is the local space of Barents constructed?

The ambitious original goal was to base the study solely on the artistic production produced by young people. Art offers another way of producing knowledge, which perhaps reveals something about emotions and bodily experiences – using art does not secure better knowledge or more accurate representations, but it is able to provide a different perspective (Känkänen 2013). The initial meeting with the young and the youth workers was held in May 2015. The initial timeline was to end in September, but it was extended to November 2015. Some of the works were sent directly to me by the young, while in some cases, youth workers used their methods to work with the young and facilitate the process. The young were also given the opportunity to offer pieces of art they had prepared earlier, provided that they felt it reflected what being a young person in the Barents Region was about.

The data collection was quite slow, and the material was pretty heterogeneous. During the course of the study, more traditional ways of gathering data were also used. In October, I visited three schools in Inari and asked the young people to do a drawing about their lives within one hour. Also, when plugging in the works of art (Jackson & Mazzei 2012), former interviews on the art projects of the youth started to resonate with my writing and thinking. Seven interviews with young people living in Lapland, both individual and group interviews, were chosen (Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011).

The data of the study consists of:

- 52 photographs (40 in Murmansk, 12 in Inari)
- 74 drawings (all from Inari, 59 collected by the researcher, others sent by the youth workers)
- 3 audio clips (radio interviews, Inari)
- 5 stories or remarks of young people
- 7 CDs of music recorded in Huset, Alta
- 4 songs (2 in Murmansk, 2 in Inari)
- 7 interviews conducted earlier (Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interviews 64–70).

As can be seen, the data corpus does not form a uniform totality and is not easily coded. I chose to look at it using a theoretical perspective and bearing in mind that total interpretations will most likely be misleading. I was influenced by post-qualitative perspectives which state that data analysis is always likely to leave open traces (Kiilakoski & Rautio 2015). The research data will always be partial, incomplete and continue to be re-told. Thinking with theory involves using theoretical and philosophical concepts to analyse the data, creating the appearance of different material and working and re-working with different “chunks” of data (Jackson & Mazzei 2012). During the interpretation process, I was drawn to the issues that talked about moving, leaving and feeling at home. I was especially interested in seeing how the material from the Barents Region compared to urban youth studies – contradicting, supporting or completely avoiding the themes of urban youth studies.

Early on, my interpretational gaze was influenced by the concepts mentioned above and from the title of this research. Also, the importance of nature in the art meant that I took the route of looking at the data through the interactions between the personal and the material. My interactions with the art material produced some ideas, theories and categories which I triangulated with the interviews, looking how they resonated with the different data. Luckily enough there were similarities, which I took to indicate that some of the interpretations were useful for understanding and analysing the data constructed by different researchers earlier. During the interpretation process, the visual material became my primary source of data, while others served as secondary data.

To think with the data, I ended up engaging a lot with rural studies (especially on rural youth). This resulted in the frequent use of the word “rural” in the text. I use the concept more or less heuristically, to refer to the non-urban experience. When I use the word “south”, I am loosely referring to places where the young people of Barents are likely to migrate, such as Helsinki in Finland, Moscow or St. Petersburg in Russia, or Oslo in Norway. Besides concrete places, I refer to “the South” as a cultural symbol which represents the different lifestyles from the North. A Finnish hard-core band, Radiopuhelimit, describes the symbolic differences of the North and the South in their song, “Etelän vetelät” (Radiopuhelimit 1988), in which they sing about lazy freaks of the south dancing in a disco with copper-stained trousers, talking trash and getting excited about the things that others have experienced a long time ago. This ironic take on southern people is an indication of the constructed differences between the North and the South as places to live, but also as lifestyles and identities.

III Spaces of the young in the Barents Region

The environments of the young are not only about physical or material aspects of surroundings – they are also about the social and the experiential. In theories of human geography, spaces are defined as venues of societal processes, and therefore, the essential objects of the study are both spatial dimensions of sociality and social dimensions of spatiality (e.g., Massey 2005). The concept of space is used in this chapter to analyse the localities of the young in the Barents Region. This chapter is based solely on the material gathered in Inari, Finland. The ages of the respondents range from 13 to 18 years.

The notion of place can be distinguished from the notion of space. The former refers to corporeal sites while the latter refers to socially practiced places (Agnew 2005). Space refers to “meanings given to and practices lived within a certain place” (Tolonen 2005, 347). This conceptual distinction can be illustrated by defining a street as a place that is converted into a space where pedestrians and their motion and experiences are added (de Certeau 1984, 117). Space is constructed through experiences, memories, encounters with significant others, shared and individual experiences and available narratives. Spaces of the young are constructed through experiences that may be invisible to other generations. Adults may have difficulty recognising the experiences or memories that are meaningful for the spatial experiences of the young (Semi 2005). Spaces of the young usually combine being together with other young people (peer interaction), hanging around (non-instrumental activity which does not have a goal outside itself), hobbies, the possibility to express oneself culturally, different activities and constructing one’s identity (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012).

At least in the urban environments, city space is a contested area. The young have to face spatial restrictions and exclusions in different public and semi-public spaces. Young people are a visible and easily recognisable group, and are often frequent users of public spaces. The spaces chosen by the young are sites for interacting with other young people during leisure time, and they are often also sites for expressing and creating personal and collective identities. Some public spaces are more or less explicitly seen as adult spaces, which has been a point of criticism for researchers studying the use of public spaces (Grey & Manning 2014; Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012; Pyyry 2015). The challenge for the young people is that freedom in public space is limited from their point of view.

The use of public space can be seen as a democratic issue: public space is by definition space where everybody should have the opportunity to express themselves and enjoy the possibilities of meeting other people and pursue their own good as long as they are not harming anyone. Australian researchers define the child-friendly city by pointing out that “a key characteristic of a child-friendly city is its capacity to provide opportunities for children to have freedom of movement to explore, uninhibited by physical, social, or cultural constraints” (Tranter & Malone 2008, 20). Young people require spaces of their own where they can hang out with peers or make new friends. Sometime these youth-

friendly spaces are not offered, and young people will challenge the spatial regulations by hanging out in malls, gas stations or other public spaces.

Public space available for the young can be analysed using the notions of tightness and looseness (see Franck & Stevens 2007). Tightness refers to spaces that presuppose homogeneity and functionality. Thus, in an extreme form, tight spaces can be used only by a certain type of actors and for predetermined purposes. For example, movie theatres are for watching movies and clothes stores are for consumption. Tight spaces are controlled and unwanted people may be pushed out of these. Tight spaces may reinforce uneven power relations and privilege older generations. Young people may, in fact, be omitted from the plans because they are perceived as threatening or lacking the required capital as a consumer. (Pyyry 2015.)

Looseness as the opposite of tightness represents heterogeneity, change and ambivalence (Franck & Stevens 2007). Loose space can be occupied by diverse people for many purposes. The functions of loose space are open for negotiation and alterations. Loose spaces, with their lack of normative control and hierarchical orders, offer adaptable learning opportunities. They are sites for variety, different identities and outlooks, and changing functions. They also lack mental and physical barriers. Prime examples of loose spaces are parks, which usually contain many different groups of people. By this, parks become sites for meeting people from different backgrounds. In this way, they also serve as public learning environments where people are likely to meet people of different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities or sexualities. The democratic argument for the importance of loose space states that in order to diminish prejudices, sites should exist where different people can meet people from various backgrounds. To achieve this, we need to have public spaces which are inherently loose (Kiilakoski et al. 2011).

Loose spaces serve as non-instrumental spaces: they do not require pre-set goals. They can be used as meeting points. It is debatable how well this concept, however, captures the living conditions of the young outside the centre. The further away young people live from the centres, the more difficult it is for them to enjoy loose spaces. Thus, young people who live far away might face the risk of getting stuck at home. (Harinen 2015, 159.)

In the drawings, there are no urban loose spaces such as parks, street corners or backyards. Instead, they portray nature, home, hobbies and the use of media. For the young people drawing the pictures, loose spaces do not refer to urban space – looseness might in fact be connected to nature. As Finnish researcher Noore Pyyry writes in her dissertation, the experience that something is ours comes from “being meaningfully engaged in it, from dwelling with it” (Pyyry 2015, 76). These meaningful spatial relations and belongings are, according to David Farrugia (2014), a constitutive dimension of the identities of young people.

III.1 Spaces of the young in Inari

There are altogether 59 drawings analysed in this chapter. The drawings were gathered by myself in upper secondary schools and a high school in Inari. Some of the drawings include some written remarks, while others have longer descriptions by the young people themselves. The young people were given one hour to make the drawings. Some of the drawings concentrate on one scene or a single place (e.g., a picture of a sauna or a scene showing a hunter); others portray multiple places or situations.

Analysing the drawings is difficult because one cannot be sure that the researcher, who possesses an outsider adult perspective, is able to interpret the meanings young people attach to the pictures. Furthermore, since the pictures are collected anonymously, the researcher is unable to discuss the drawings with the young artist (Watson, Suurpää & Kiilakoski 2014). When I ran into difficulties interpreting the names or pictures, I asked the teachers and youth workers of Inari to clarify the matters for me. Keeping these difficulties in mind, the pictures were examined and grouped many times. Using this applied content analysis, pictures were grouped into five different categories: nature, home, a sauna, hobbies and the use of media. While the use of media is not a physical place, virtual environments can become experiential spaces if young people dwell on these places and see them as meaningful sites (Kiilakoski et al. 2011).

III.1.1 Nature

The most common theme ($N = 32$) in the pictures was nature. The pictures showed the mountains of Lapland, reindeers and sometimes a river. A popular theme was a snowmobile, a vehicle with which one accesses areas with no roads.¹ Much in the manner of the pictures in the Introduction, the pictures have a large perspective. They show wide areas with practically no people in them. The loose space shown in these pictures is really loose: in nature, different kinds of activities are available. As shown in the picture below, experiencing nature might not have anything to do with peer relations. The picture shows a solitary figure carrying a rifle looking down on the hill. The picture is in stark contrast with urban hanging out; there are no peers, no other generations, no built environment in sight. Hunting as a traditional hobby is not tied to a certain area, and enables one to wander around. In the picture, no game is in sight either; only nature and an individual hunter.

¹ The legal age to drive a car in Finland is 18 years old. However, the age limit to obtain a driver's license to drive a snowmobile is 15 years old.



Picture 5. A hunter

There are other pictures or written descriptions where young people are alone. These include driving a snowmobile, hiking or skiing.² The importance of nature is emphasised in many ways. As one text below a picture states: *“Living here is quite peaceful. The nature is really important and many of my hobbies are connected to nature, for example riding a snowmobile and jogging.”*

Some of the pictures show peer activities in nature. Sometimes, the young are riding a snowmobile together; other times, there are stories about hiking or camping with friends. One picture shows an impromptu cabin in the woods with a bench and a fireplace. An explanation in the background states that this cabin was a place where boys could go to fry sausages, smoke cigarettes and drink beer. According to the writer, this was a fine place to spend an evening with friends. Nature is connected to peer activities as well, and offers opportunities to be freely with other young people outside the supervision of adult society.

Although the young in Lapland are able to criticise stereotypical images of Lapland as a nature resource, they can also renew that image when telling about the way of life

² A referee of this study pointed out that hiking and skiing could be seen as youth cultures. All of the above mentioned activities are something that every age group in the region does. They are also not “generational popular cultures not tied to age” (Côté 2014, 160), such as hip-hop or punk cultures.

in the North (Ollila 2008, 90–91). For the people living in Lapland, nature is a site for recreation and leisure, and also a means of livelihood (Vaattovaara 2015). The drawings by young people also show the latter, with pictures of reindeer and writings about helping the family herd reindeer. According to one description, helping the family with reindeer is an integral part of how the respondent spends his or her free time.

The importance of nature is clearly seen in these pictures. This, of course, is not surprising. The importance of nature was also visible in a comparative study using visual methodology where Finnish young drew more nature than their peers in other countries. Researchers have also noted that nature and countryside are seen as the normal way of living in Finland. (Béneker et al. 2010.) In the drawings, nature is connected to feeling safe.

The drawings showing nature do not have anything youth cultural in them (with the possible exception of drinking beer in a shack). They show traditional ways of enjoying nature, such as skiing, jogging, hiking and riding a snowmobile. At least this part of the lives of the young is connected to a lifestyle that prefers nature activities (Vaattovaara 2015). Also, the natural environment in the pictures perhaps refers to the fact that there is no built environment where the young can congregate. In the urban areas, different places are divided generationally. Spaces of the young differ from spaces of the adults. These urban generational places are in contrast with the wide shared landscape pictured in the drawings.

Karen Malone has criticised the anthropocentric mode of interpreting the interactions of children and the young with nature. She has also pointed out that adopting the perspective of human exceptionalism, i.e. that human beings differ drastically from nature and genuine interaction with nature is impossible, makes it difficult to interpret those human/nature/body/space-relationships that differ from the middle class urban experience. Different encounters with nature offer learning experiences that the new nature movement with its emphasis on materialism tries to analyse. (Malone 2016.) The encounters with nature suggested in the drawings might be examples of facing the challenge that “it is critical for the future of the planet to find ways to reconnect children with nature in order that they will develop the necessary skills to live more sustainably” (Malone 2016, 2). This is not meant to romanticise the nature/human-relationship, but to point out the fact that by studying young people outside the urban way of life, different relationships to the environment cannot be analysed using the denaturalised categories of urban youth cultures.

III.1.2 Home

Given the long distances and the lack of cultural youth venues, especially for those youngsters who live further away from the central areas, the importance of home is not surprising. The pictures show many elements of home life, including eating, doing household chores and sleeping. There are also some hobbies, such as weightlifting or media. Home is depicted as a safe environment where the young can spend time with their families, and which is generally seen as a safe growing environment.

Some of the respondents talked about the rather limited opportunities available to them. This means that they spend a lot of time at home, which brings the family relations to the centre of their life.



“Nowadays, I am pretty much at home with my family. I may play something with my younger siblings, either outside or inside. Otherwise, we just spend time together with the whole family.”

The National Quantitative Youth Study in Finland in 2013, an annual youth barometer, shows that the most common family activities enjoyed together are eating, watching TV, doing homework, visiting friends and practicing sports. According to the research, there are different types of families. A family- or home-centred lifestyle emphasises the first three activities (Myllyniemi 2013, 75–76). One may postulate that this type of family lifestyle is common for those youngsters who either actively choose to live a family-centred life, or who are more or less obliged to choose that lifestyle because of long distances or because they have to follow the livelihood of their families.

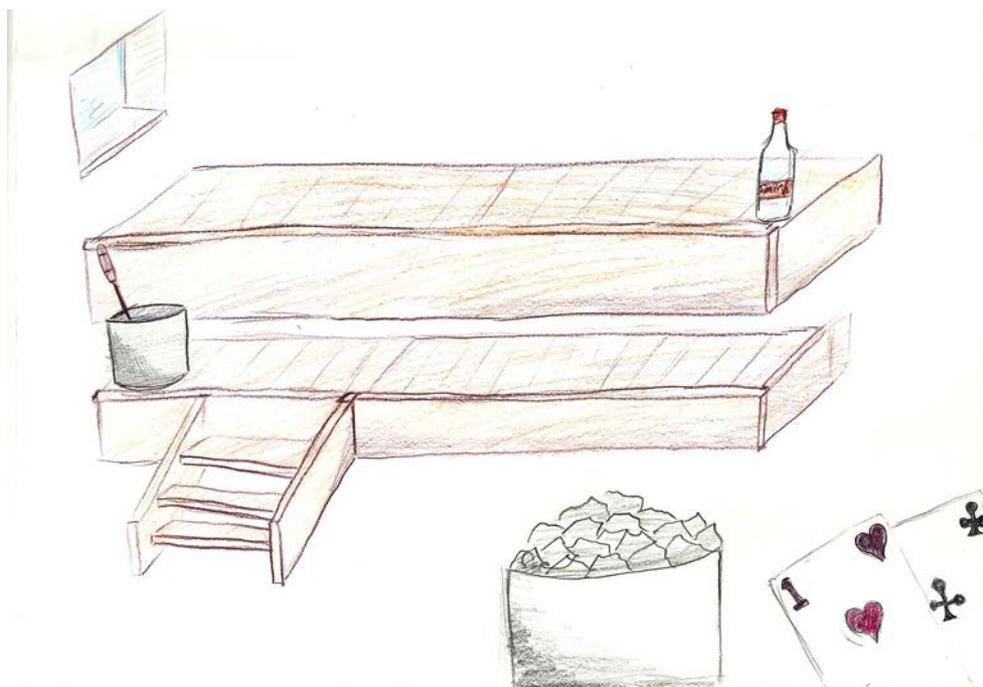
In a study on the future expectations of the young in Lapland, the importance of home was part of the narratives people shared when talking about a successful life. Especially for girls, happiness and a good life were combined with happy homes and the company of relatives. Social and family relations at home were considered an integral part of living a good life and the ability to feel safe. (Ollila 2008, 162–163.)

The centrality of home as a growing environment means that inter-generational relationships play a large role in the lives of the young people in these areas. Different growing environments offer different kinds of opportunities to grow as a person. The importance and impact of home as a learning environment is emphasised by the fact that only a limited number of other growing environments exist. Using a theoretical perspective of participation, one can claim that the young are potentially capable of belonging to different communities and, consequently, participating in different settings, thereby presenting the possibilities of meeting several significant others and learning different skills. The lack of opportunities in one growing environment may be substituted by the possibility to be a respected member of the community in other environments (for example, lack of participation in school may be substituted by a hobby; a dysfunctional family background may be substituted by good peer relations). (cf. Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2012.)

Obviously, home is especially important for many of the respondents. While good family relations are probably a resource for many young (Aaltonen & Lappalainen 2013), there might be cause for concern here as well. The safety of home may mean that the young face difficulties with leaving home and continuing their life far away in a different cultural environment (Harinen 2015). On the other hand, a home is not always a safe growing environment. In one interview, a boy describes his family as consisting of “a drunk, a grandmother, brother, sister” and a mother who stays at home when she is unemployed. By a drunk, he means the new husband of his mother (Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 66). He also describes that he hasn’t got many friends, but meets people from different countries when playing games in the Internet. The quality of home as a growth environment varies. If home is practically the centre of one’s life, there are no possibilities to enjoy the benefits of different learning environments.

III.1.3 Sauna

One of the striking differences to urban experiences is the importance of a sauna in the pictures. Saunas are pictured as parts of the collages showing different aspects of the lives of the young. Some of the pictures show only the sauna. Obviously, a sauna is an important space for some of the young people. The sauna pictures, however, do not show sauna solidarity or peer interactions. Instead, the sauna is pictured without human beings. In the picture below, one can see a sauna, a traditional bath whisk made of birch and a bottle of vodka. (There are also two playing cards, perhaps indicating games played with friends.)



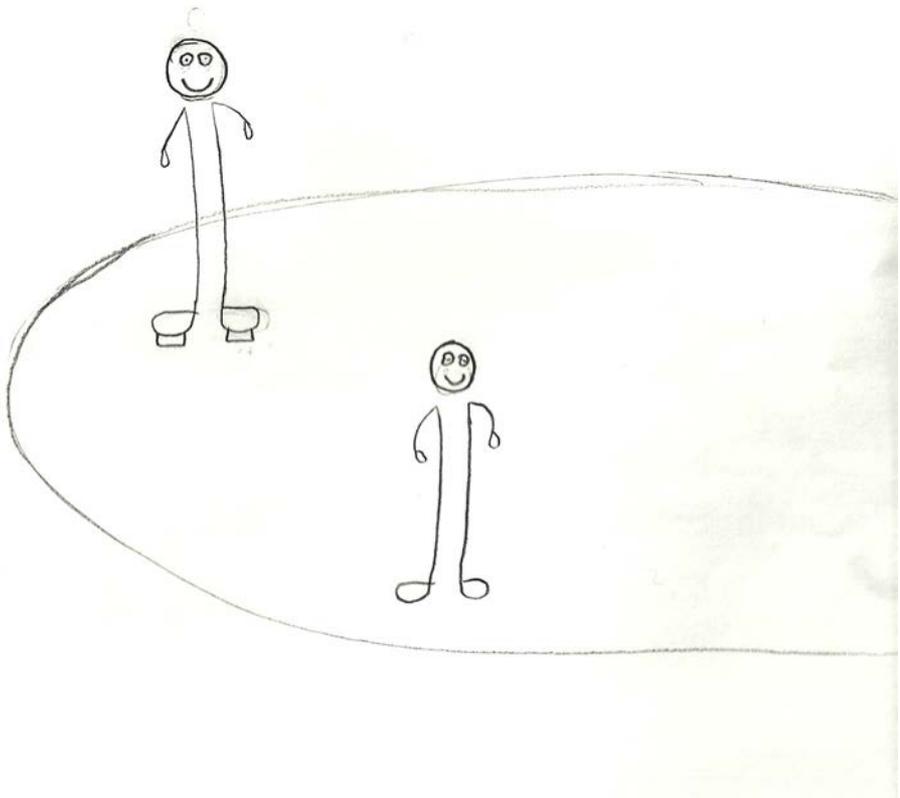
Picture 6. A sauna

It is commonplace for young people to feel comfortable in places that are not owned or symbolically marked by a certain group of people. In urban spaces, these can be street corners, back alleys or backyards. Hanging around in these types of places is allowed because no user group is able to claim the space as their own. (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012.) In a similar manner, one may postulate that the reason that there are no living rooms in the pictures, but plenty of saunas, may mean that the sauna can become important space for the young because it is not owned by anyone – it belongs to all members of the household. Saunas also serve as private spaces where one can enjoy the silence and be with oneself. It may also be taken as a sign of belonging to a more traditional lifestyle.

III.1.4 Hobbies and youth work

Hobbies in general are an important part of leisure time for young people. According to the Finnish Youth Barometer in 2015, 87 per cent of the young (from 15 to 29 years old) have at least one hobby. In addition, 86 per cent also exercise or participate in some form of sport. Only 6 per cent of the young people do not exercise, participate in sports or have some other sort of activity or hobby. (Myllyniemi 2016.) Some form of sports is part of ordinary life for most young people. In a similar manner, the Inari pictures show different hobbies, including going to a gym, playing hockey or attending the youth work services in the region.

In contrast to the pictures about nature and saunas or even home, pictures about hobbies show a lot of young people together. There are a lot of happy faces and symbols of love, such as the heart. Gym and ice hockey arenas seem to be important places for peer interaction.



Picture 7. Skaters

Written remarks also emphasise the importance of hobbies and youth work. Several mention the possibility of spending time with friends. For these reasons, personal benefits can be gained by being able to reach sports arenas, such as having meaningful things to do and being in good physical condition, as well the social feature of peer interaction. For these reasons, it is important to provide every young person with the possibility to enjoy hobbies.

The families' economic status is one hindrance preventing the youth from enjoying hobbies (Myllyniemi 2016). It has been claimed that young people who live further away from the centre may be in a more vulnerable position, because significant resources are required for them to attain their hobbies. Families have to be able to support their children and finance the sometimes long trips. Thus, a certain amount of social capital is needed to reach these venues. In addition to this, one has to be able to cover the associated expenses of the activity. (Harinen 2015, 165-166.) This concern is manifested in the drawings as well. Some complain about the distances, some talk about economic difficulties. As one paper notes, *“the lack of money complicates things more. No possibilities to have hobbies -> physical condition worsens -> marginalisation -> depression”*.

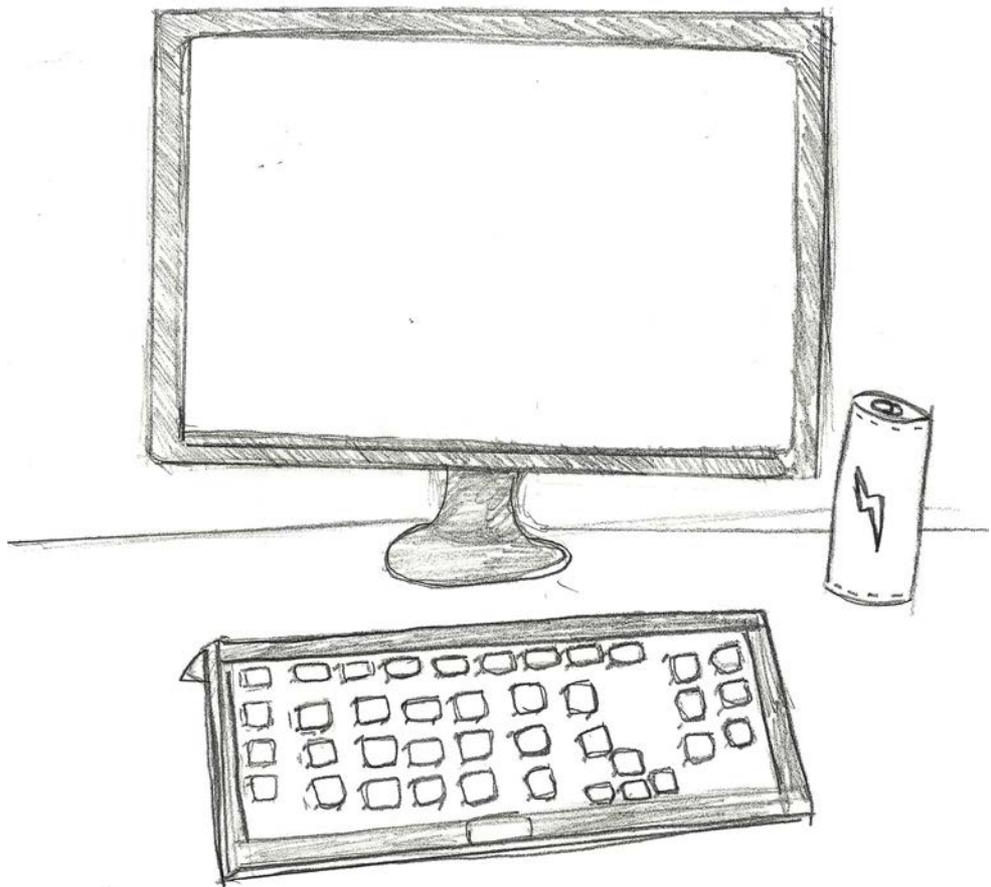
III.1.5 Media

In a quantitative study conducted in the city of Kokkola, Finland, 1,300 respondents described their need for meeting places. For some of the young people, the only requirements for the meeting place were to have a place to hang around, with sofas and cafeteria-type amenities, but no games. For others, a good meeting place was where they could exercise without the pressures of competitive sports. For another group of young people, having the opportunity to play digital games together was important. The conclusion drawn was the variety of needs among the young, which might be hard to respond to by providing only one type of meeting place. (Kiilakoski 2016, in print.) Similarly, some pictures emphasise the role of media culture.

Some mention computer games, such as Grand Theft Auto 4. Computers and cell phones are also an important part of life. In addition, watching Netflix is mentioned several times in the pictures. While some of the pictures depict nature and reindeer, some of the pictures show the mediated daily affairs of the young, which are accessible in the Barents Region as well. Geographic distances can be overcome by using social media, joining the gaming culture, or watching television series through Netflix. This, of course, requires technical skills and abilities, which – despite the wide-spread conception of all young people as digital natives – are not equally distributed within different groups of the young (Kaarakainen et al. 2013).

A (stereo)typical combination of a computer and an energy drink is shown in Picture 8.

A positive perspective towards using technology emphasises that digital cultures enable even the young living in rural areas to join youth cultures and, thus, use technology to overcome existing geographic obstacles. These digital cultures can be an important form of communality and may have a significant impact on the well-being of the young (Eriksson 2015, 172). Taking a wider perspective, it can be claimed that even the places located far away from centres are changing because they are drawn into larger networks



Picture 8. A computer

of production, consumption, migration and information exchange (Corbett 2009, 175). There are promises of digitalisation, both in being able to connect to youth cultures and organising services using digital media.

A critical perspective adds that having a computer and a working Internet connection is not a given for all young people (Harinen 2015). Therefore, a decent technological infrastructure, connectivity and resources are needed to ensure that the young are able to connect to the digital youth cultures, let alone use the digital learning environments which are sometimes seen as a solution to the educational dilemmas of rural areas with a declining network of village schools (Corbett 2014).

III.2 Spaces of the young

It would be easy to analyse the drawings by pointing out differences from the urban experience. The question about built and natural environments seems to be divided. There is an appreciation of nature in the drawings, in a manner that is hard for an outsider to interpret fully. The relationships to nature and the spaces in nature are multifaceted: there are traditional ways of livelihood, there are human-animal interactions with reindeers (cf. Malone 2016), and there are hunting, hiking, jogging or riding snowmobiles. Nature is a meaningful part of ordinary life. Affectual geographies of everyday life (Pyyry 2015, 28) in the Barents Region are connected to nature, to wide landscapes rather than street corners or park benches.

In an urban lifestyle, the young usually hang around in the places that are not too tight. The concept of loose space refers to spaces that allow different types of behaviour. The loose spaces of youth cultural spaces in the data seem also connected to nature. The aspects of the built environment drawn in the pictures are rather tight spaces – hobby arenas in particular. So-called third spaces, spaces outside home and school, are somewhat scarce. Perhaps the importance of the sauna in some of the pictures can be taken to mean that saunas function as loose spaces for some of the young living in the region. Overall, urban spaces seem to be subservient to nature, with not too many obviously youth cultural spaces (with the exception of the local youth club).

Lived space is by definition something that is experienced and seen as valuable. The memories, emotions, social action, reputations and atmospheres define it as a space. In this way, localities are affected by the physical and social environment and by daily interactions. Because of this, there is no uniform spatial experience of the young. “Any space can be interpreted differently, and even in opposite ways” (Okunev & Romanov 2014, 102). Therefore, it is not surprising that for some of the young, living in the region is about digital cultures, while for others it is about being among nature.

IV Leaving: How is the image of Barents affected by mobilities?

Mobility is one of the priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, a European Union (EU) programme for education, training, youth and sport. This underlines the importance of mobility for constructing the European identities and European citizenship of the young. According to Howard Williamson, a scholar of European youth policies, the strategies of the EU and the Council of Europe should be read together to ensure that policy, provision and practice is based on a common value basis. According to him, both strategies “have at their heart the promotion of rights and of participation, the combating of discrimination and of exclusion and the enhancement of skills and of competence for effective engagement with the labour market and civil society. Underpinning all of these is a commitment to mobility, exchange and dialogue” (Williamson 2015, 85). In addition to youth policy, mobility is also integral in European educational policy. For example, one of the aims of the Bologna Process in higher education is eliminating obstacles to mobility (Eta 2015, 169).

Mobilities can be seen as individual reactions to the demands of globalisation, but individuals also change the structures of societies by their mobilities and competencies learnt while being mobile (Weichbrodt 2014). Mobility is seen as a way of inter-cultural learning and the possibility of acquiring different competencies. Promoting mobility means that young people are able to enjoy the benefits of non-formal learning, and acquire different personal, social and cultural competencies (Kiilakoski 2015). Mobility across the Europe offers plenty of learning experiences and mobility itself can be seen as a learning environment. According to a research and development study on international youth work and youth camps, the most important competencies learnt were teamwork and interpersonal skills, openness and tolerance, understanding diversity, communication competencies, and foreign language skills (Stiehr 2015). Mobility is one way of promoting tolerance and openness, and creating possibilities to learn about different European cultures.

For many young people, mobility is a *possibility*, something that can be enjoyed outside their ordinary way of living, traveling and then going back, returning to their surroundings. For many of the young people living in the Barents Region, mobility is an *obligation*, something they are forced to do because of economic pressures, structures of the labour markets, the location of educational opportunities, or simply because they want to go shopping or have hobbies that are not accessible in their immediate surroundings. For this reason, the mobility imperative (Farrugia 2015) is a social fact that must be faced. Young people need to develop competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes), which can help them respond to this social necessity. This means getting used to traveling and leaving the place where they grew up and where their roots are. This is the reason, as David Farrugia states, that mobility is a resource for some young people, while others must confront the possibility of placelessness (Farrugia 2014) – leaving their roots, going away, and getting accustomed to living in strange surroundings.

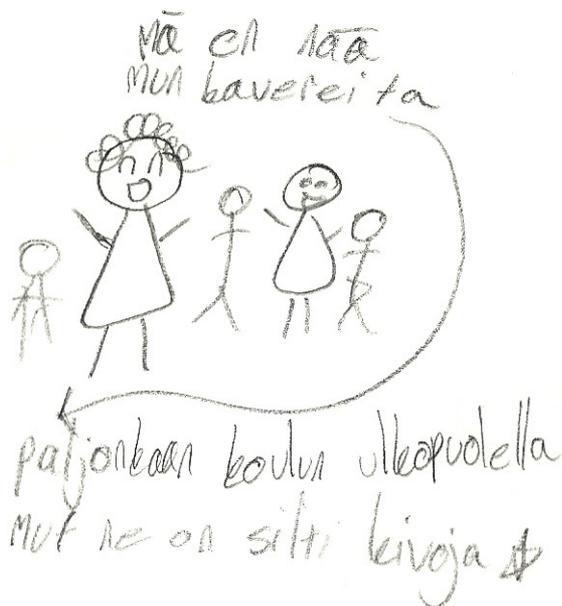
Mobilities refer to intercultural learning but also the actual or the potential need to leave the area. Studies on young people in rural areas have indicated the need to research the different dimensions of mobilities. Getting access to hobbies may be difficult due to long distances and will probably require a certain amount of economic and social capital, meaning that not all families will be able to provide these for their offspring (Harinen 2013, 2015). Different youth cultural venues are often located far away and access to these venues is limited. This can result in feeling that one's own place is backward (Farrugia 2014.) Narratives of being successful may require moving away from the home place (Ollila 2008). Accessing schools can be difficult from early on, and the availability of secondary yet alone tertiary education is likely to be limited (Corbett 2014; Ollila 2008; Siivonen et al. 2011). In one Finnish study, young people from Lapland were critical towards the quality of education and the frequent changes in school personnel (Siivonen et al. 2011, 172-174). Schools in Lapland need to balance different tensions between the traditional lifestyles and the late modern condition, such as the local and global and staying and leaving (Lanas 2011). One needs to simultaneously feel rooted while learning the necessary capacities to travel, to be mobile and to leave the place, perhaps never to return.

The abovementioned issues highlighted by previous studies in similar places are, according to my interpretation, also clearly visible in the data of this study. I have categorised the imperative of mobility into four categories: 1. daily distances; 2. youth cultural distances; 3. the impact of leaving on peer and family relationships; and 4. the necessity of leaving as a personal task. In addition to these perspectives, I have added an educational reflection on how to deal with distances and the imperative of mobility.

IV.1 Daily distances

The impact of distances is a concrete material fact (Harinen 2015). If distances are long, the tasks that are easy for the young living in urban areas require a lot more from those who do not. For example, meeting friends becomes harder if one has to cycle or roller skate 15 kilometres to meet one's best friend, as one of the drawings shows. Some of the activities are too far away, and participating in the activity becomes impossible for some young people who cannot cover the distance.

The impact of distance is clearly visible in the young people's drawings. For those young people who live in the Ivalo (a central district of Inari), the drawings show skating and other hobbies and usually include other young people as well. For some of the young people, the drawings tell about being alone without their peers. There is always, of course, the difficulty of telling the difference between autonomy and loneliness, between being able to enjoy the benefits of doing something without outside pressures and being forced to be alone because the material conditions do not allow one to see friends. This is indicated in a drawing which says, "I do not see my friends much outside school but they are nice anyway."



Picture 9. I do not see my friends that often outside school

This is clearly a challenge to public services intended for young people. Schools, youth houses or hobby arenas are located in the centres. Going to school might take a long time, with the young spending a lot of time traveling by bus. In this way, the bus becomes a youth cultural arena in their leisure time where young meet their peers. Sometimes, it is the only place outside formal institutions where one can be with friends and enjoy the company of peers. Thus, travelling distances becomes more and more a meaningful social time and space for the young. (Harinen 2012.)

Many of the drawings show lonely cars riding on long roads. This creates an interesting contrast to the concept of the backseat generation, which is used to discuss the spatial realities of those who are unable to investigate their surroundings because they are driven everywhere by their parents in a private vehicle. Consequently, their sense of their surroundings is mostly formed by sitting in the backseat of a car. (Malone 2007.) However, if distances are long and some of the young people are unable to meet their friends because they cannot cover the distance, this might mean that those youngsters

that do belong to the backseat generation in Barents are, indeed, the lucky ones who are privileged enough to meet peers and get to know the different locations of their communities.

The organisation of public services is likely to become more centralised because of the migration within the country, especially when the younger generations concentrate in urban areas. At the same time, the young should have equal opportunities in creating their identities and fulfilling their potential. For the youth services, this becomes a hard task to do. What can be done with the young who are living far away? How can they be helped and encouraged to participate? How can we ensure that concrete geographic distances do not create unnecessary structural inequalities? In practice, this means that time-consuming and expensive ways of traveling have to be provided. Distances become concretised when bringing a young person to a youth council meeting takes one and a half hours one way. However, if the goal is to enable everybody's participation, this is something that has to be provided.

IV.2 Youth cultural distances

Commercial spaces are important spaces for the young (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012; Semi 2010). Spending leisure time in these spaces is part of the urban experience. Besides consumption, commercial spaces are connected to different social and psychological factors: they are places for meeting peers, spending time and having fun (Béneker et al. 2010, 125). For the young, commercial spaces signify being together, hanging around and getting access to services that are targeted for the age group they belong to. They may represent alternative modes of being compared to the home environment or the public services such as schools with their relatively controlled and normalised modes of behaviour. Commercial spaces allow individual choices and lifestyles, at least for those young with money to spend. (Kiilakoski & Kivijärvi 2012.) For these reasons, commercial spaces are sometimes seen as islands of freedom (Semi 2010, 185).

The lived space is experienced in connection to other spaces. Living in contemporary mobile societies means that local places are always defined in contrast to impressions and experiences of other places. For the young living in the Barents Region, especially in the North, these commercial spaces are not accessible. Going shopping and hanging around are not things they can enjoy. The lack of commercial spaces means that they have to enjoy other factors offered by their living environment. However, living in a world where different youth cultures are spread around the globe by the media means that young people are aware of the opportunities available in different locations. In one drawing, the lack of shopping is connected to the coldness and boredom of one's home place. Shopping and other consumer venues are located far away. This can be interpreted that the youth culture attractions offered by the living environment are not enough. The drawing shows a girl saying: "Why it is so cold and dark here?/I would go to south but the trip takes the whole day/Sigh/Luckily, we have the Northern Lights."



Picture 10. Why it is so cold?

Finnish youth researcher, Mikko Salasuo, talks about youth cultural geography. By this terminology, he is pointing out that a youth cultural space is affected by geographic and material distances as well as transportation possibilities, the availability and accessibility of services, and hobby possibilities. The young are usually not able to choose their living environment. The availability of different affordances contributes to what opportunities exist for youth cultures. (Salasuo 2007, 214-215.) Living in smaller villages or towns in the Barents Region means that the urban youth cultures are far away. This

can be seen as something that troubles the young, because they are unable to enjoy the urban lifestyles. On the other hand, the urban way of life is contrasted with the safety and cosiness of the home place.

K: Is it good or bad that you live in the middle of the forest?

G1: It depends. Worst fashion trends do not enter our place immediately and when you go to bigger places, you get to hear that “this is old stuff”, although it is a new thing to me. Getting info is sometimes like . . . I live SO far way. And once in a while I’m like “luckily I do not live in a big city”, that . . . you have school and everything, which is a good thing.

(Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 68.)

Mainstream youth cultures are sometimes seen as a manifestation of a dominant consumer perspective (Côté 2014). Consumption and other youth cultural alternatives, such as concerts or graffiti walls, are not available everywhere. According to the critics, youth cultures are often urbanised cultures that overemphasise the urban experience and are located in the urban centres. David Farrugia formulates this criticism as follows: “However, youth culture is produced in, and for, urban spaces, and promotes the desirability of urban ways of life. This combines with processes of cultural distinction which are also spatialised: urban sophistication is placed against rural backwardness in order to construct the glamour and excitement of metropolitan youth cultures” (Farrugia 2014, 302). Living far away means that the young have to come to terms with this youth cultural distance; although they have access to different digitalised cultures, the long geographic distances still remain. For some of the young, this is troubling; for others, the peacefulness and safety of the home place are things worth appreciating.

IV.3 Peers leaving

The imperative of mobility means that a lot of young people have to move away. For those who stay, this means that they will have to get used to the fact that a lot of their friends are not there any longer. This brings about *a temporality of social ties*: in everything one does one has to take into account that some people won’t be around for too long. For example, when forming a band, the young have to take into account the timeline when band members are likely to move away. These types of reflections reveal that peer relationships are affected by mobilities as well.

In an interview conducted by Siivonen and Kotilainen, this temporality of social ties is manifested in an excerpt where a girl is talking about her home village. According to her, there’s not that much to do and her one friend is soon moving away. The opportunities available are rather scarce.

G2: There are not many children, and not much to do.

K: Mmm. How big is the village? How many houses are there roughly?

G2: I can't tell.

K: So many that one cannot count them immediately?

G2: Well, I haven't been in the back.

K: So the area of the village is large then.

G2: Yep. It's like a large area, but there are pretty little houses.

K: Where are your closest friends?

G2: Well, in our neighbourhood, there is a girl who is one year older than me, but even she is moving away from here.

K: She will move soon?

G2: Yes.

(Kotilainen & Siivonen 2011, interview 65.)

The importance of peers for young people has been noted repeatedly in youth studies. Living far away from other young people is challenging, because the opportunities for peer relationships are not available for everyone. Also, the older one gets, one has to face the fact that peers are moving away and gangs, hobby groups such as bands, or love relationships are likely to face difficulties because of mobility.

The Norwegian band, Ekko Ekko featuring Sebastian, from Alta, has made a video to a song titled “Helt Til Sola Ramle Ned”³ (“Until the Sun Falls Down”). The group sings about a typical pop song theme, a boy meeting a girl and the relationship facing difficulties. The winter is long and the boy has to wait. There is a summer romance, and when the sun falls down, the girl will disappear to the South. The lyrics of the song may be taken as an example of pop poetry: when simple sentences are combined with personal truths, one is able to transcend the limits of the three-minute song structure. In a song describing the brief love affair, the relationship ends not because of the difficulties in a relationship, but because the girl has to go to the South, perhaps to study or work.

Growing up in places where most of one's peers are likely to move away, to disappear to the South, means that one has to face the fact that relatives and friends are likely to go away. This, of course, requires having to face the temporality of social ties, and find ways to cope with the fact that peers are likely to disappear to different locations and communities. In a study by Vaattovaara, some of the informants said that most of their friends had gone to the South and are working all over Finland. Coming back to one's home, therefore, is affected by the fact that the people one grew up with are not there anymore. (Vaattovaara 2015, 161–162.) The social space of Barents is affected by mobilities.

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvgXjuEdGdM>

IV.4 Facing the imperative of mobility

Having an education and getting into the labour market are integral parts of normative life stories in contemporary society. The young are expected to make life course choices that will result in smooth transitions from school to further education, employment or training. This has been seen as a way of fighting social exclusion. The young are expected as individuals to be solely responsible for their career choices. However, different institutional (the quality of guidance in schools), social (the social capital and educational level of parents) and structural (economic status, social class) issues are diversified and are seen as factors which contribute to the ability to make a successful transition to secondary or tertiary education (Pemberton 2008). Among these structural issues is the availability of education in one's own neighbourhood. A lot of people are practically forced to migrate south (Vaattovaara 2015). The critical perspective states that this is an example of the fact that "the innovative potential of rural youth is benefiting cities, impoverishing the labour resources of the countryside, diminishing its hope for an improved demographic and social situation" (Gur'ianova 2013, 87). The young will leave and take their innovative and new ideas to bigger cities.

Previous studies have shown that educational policy plays an important role in the life courses of the young in the Barents Region. The availability of education is limited in the north, and different fields of study and points of interest may, in fact, require moving to the South. Thus, living in the North is not an option regardless of the social or emotional ties a young person has to her environment (Vaattovaara 2015). The educational system does not always value the skills and dispositions needed in the traditional way of living. Besides actual leaving and going away, the educational system may require distancing oneself from one's own cultural background as well (Lanas 2011). In the narratives of young people, marginalisation is due to the lack of education or work in the home place (Ollila 2008, 190–192). Moving to the South is in itself seen as a way of getting a job (Ollila 2008, 165). The transition to education may in many cases require getting away, and mobility is a necessity for these young people. These studies in the Barents Region share similarities with rural studies elsewhere. The mobility imperative of the young is connected to expectations about education. According to Michael Corbett (2009, 164), "most youth in isolated rural places have come to understand that they themselves must 'change places' and move on to higher education and, probably, communities outside their family's lifeworlds".

Restructuring of economies has meant that many traditional fields of industry have faced difficulties. Urban centres usually have within them many different ways of making a living, whereas many smaller places are dependent on certain industry. For this reason, changes in the market economy and consequent changes in the lives of young people have spatial dimensions as well. David Farrugue states:

[T]he same global economic processes that have reshaped the lives of urban youth have profoundly influenced rural young people, whose transitions demonstrate the spatial dimensions of these changes.

In particular, economic shifts at both the global and national levels have created new geographic inequalities with profound consequences for young people outside urban centres. (Farrugia 2014, 298.)

Moving and preparing oneself for education was part of the informal discussion we had during my observations. However, perhaps due to the initial request of describing living in one's environment, the perspective of education was not present in the research data. It may also be that the young are living in the moment. For some young people, having a future perspective is simply not attractive. Petri Paju found in his study in Finnish basic education that even looking a couple of months ahead might be too much for some of the young (Paju 2011). Similarly, in one interview, a young girl who dreams of university education says that her high school counsellor has given them material, but she has not yet read it. "I haven't had time to go through it yet. Let's just live one year at a time!" (Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 69.)

The imperative of mobility described by earlier studies does not manifest itself in the research data of this study. One may point out, however, that learning to be mobile is something that will probably help the young to move away when they are making their transition. This type of disposition is documented in a photograph showing a packed rucksack. It also features a quote of a Finnish song, "Matkustaja" ("A Passenger") by Finnish band, Egotrippi. It says "always going somewhere". This can be taken to express that at least some of the young people learn to be mobile and face the imperative of mobility simply by learning to be mobile. Obviously, learning this skill requires a learning environment that supports one's mobility and helps one to develop capacities needed to adapt to different environments.



Picture 11. Always going somewhere

IV.5 Learning to leave

One of the texts written by the young states that the idea of leaving feels hard and even scary. The home place is described as “*a quiet and peaceful place*”. The text continues: “*Now that I am used to the peacefulness, quietness, loneliness and small number of people, it feels scary and almost impossible to leave here for a ‘BIG’ city*” (emphasis in the original text). Leaving, at least for the young person who wrote this, becomes an increasingly difficult task to do.

The questions of distances, traveling and leaving point to the fact that, for the young living far away from the urban and youth cultural centres, mobility is a social imperative. This means that they will have to deal with the fact that their friends or loved ones are likely to move away and with the fact that they themselves have to move away. They have to be equipped with the necessary capacities, skills, attitudes and dispositions that help them cope with the reality that they will most likely live in different surroundings than they are used to. This can be interpreted to mean that they will have to cope with instability and uncertainty and react to those in a reflexive manner.

The uncertainty involved in moving to another location was a theme handled in the song recorded by the Inari band, Prison of the Proud. The song, “Broken free”,⁴ deals with the issues of leaving the old hometown and settling in the new place. The first verse describes the feelings of uncertainty in the future, and the latter verses describe arriving home and finding a place to grow. The first verse quoted below takes the imperative of leaving as a starting point, and describes the settling period.

*There's nothing left for me here
I've closed the doors, it's all behind
I will need a world where
I'll have a peace of mind.*

*Just a few steps outside
With my life in the portmanteau
Found a place to subside
Where my roots can grow.*

*Far away from the old, it's all gone
Is my new home a jail or heaven?
Find a way to carry on.*

David Farrugia (2013, 691) states that reflexivity is “created unevenly across young people from different locations and mobilised in relation to different local structural conditions. . . . active reflexivity is not an automatic response to structural insecurity – it requires options, and the resources required to navigate instability”. To put this in other

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eV14iAw3odM>

words, material circumstances, spatial conditions and local social ties contribute to how well young people are able to make their transitions to education and the labour market.

From the viewpoint of educating the young, this means that education has a twin task. On the one hand, young people should be provided with a sense of rootedness to their surroundings and the occasional unique conditions they face. As indicated in chapter 1, living in the Barents Region is connected to nature and sometimes to traditional ways of living. In addition to this, the young in the Barents Region are part of global youth cultures through the use of media. On the other hand, the young should be able to face the temporality of their social ties and even their own lifestyle in the region. They should be able to make the transition to other surroundings and live a good life there. There is a dialectic between staying and being proud and leaving and being able to cope in a different setting. It can be claimed that the young in the Barents Region are required to possess necessary skills and dispositions to be able to live in the North, while at the same time learn to be mobile. This is obviously not an easy task to achieve, since one has to be able to oppose “the southern perspective [that] gains the most footing in Finland, becoming naturalized as the ‘truth’ in the spatial projection of social exclusion on the rural north” (Lanas 2011, 45) and at the same time be able to meet the requirements of moving.

The task for the local community will be to create learning environments and communities supporting growth that help the young to move away from the local community and to cope with the instability of social relations. One has to be able to navigate one’s course in a society of risk, and most likely to places that are different and require different dispositions than those needed at home. “Students who choose to leave – and many will – should be adequately prepared to do so and encouraged to pursue their goals. Such students are not necessarily less attached or committed to their home communities than students who stay; moreover, they are not all lost, never to return.” (Theodori & Theodori 2015, 388.)

Sometimes, people do return, sometimes not. Yet, being able to choose, to be reflexive, not to drift but to lead one’s own course requires social support and personal competencies which need to be supported early on. Michael Corbett talks about learning to leave. Education needs to encourage young people to transcend what is known and what is obvious. The young need to learn how to leave, but they should also learn where they want to build their identities and find out where they belong. (Corbett 2007.) There is a dual mission of learning to leave and to be mobile, while at the same time, being able to understand the value of their surroundings and community.

V Localities and engagements

The preceding chapters have pointed out the importance of nature, young people's different spatial and social engagements, and also youth cultural distances to the urban lifestyle. The impact of mobilities has also been examined. In this chapter, some concluding sketches about the engagements of the young in the Barents Region will be offered. The relationships the young have with their environment is also a question about their relationship with the lifestyle and material conditions surrounding them. There may be disappointments, but also reasons for being satisfied and proud. "Peripheral location can be interpreted either as backwardness in comparison to the center . . . or as an opportunity to shape own local historical narratives" (Okunev & Domanov 2014, 102).

V.1 "It's the best place": A lot of nature and few youth cultural activities

A study by Anne Ollila describes elements of a good life in Lapland as seen by the young. These include hobbies, animals, living close to nature, safety and peacefulness. The girls also emphasised families and other human relationships. The boys talked about their professions. (Ollila 2008, 163.) These same features were seen in the data of this study. Some of the drawings stated that their home place is the best in the world and that their environment is simply wonderful. There was genuine pride in their surroundings. The sense of safety compared to urban insecurities is an important feature for liking a place.

K: Tell me what kind of place your home village is.

?: It's a nice place.

?: A safe place.

(Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 64.)

Nature is an integral element in most of the drawings, photographs and music videos. The relationships to nature are manifold. Most of the photos and drawings, however, were taken in the summer. The long winter and cold weather is sometimes mentioned as a depressing period when it is hard to go out and engage in activities. There are also other, more positives opinions. The song done in Inari, called "Talvibiisi" ["Winter Song"] opens with these lines:

"Kaamos on pimeä ja väsyttävä

Silti voi kelkkailla ja pulkkailla



Vai häh? Vai häh?”

”Polar night is dark and tiresome

But you can still go snowmobiling and sledding

Or what? Or what?”

The song continues with descriptions of different winter activities that can be done in the region. The song points out that although the weather conditions are harsh, there are still plenty of things to do if one likes outdoor activities. Although there might not be urban activities, this does not mean that there won't be anything to do. The ordinary life of some of the young consists of being close to nature and having connections to different material places and traditional activities. An important part of engagement has to do with nature, and many hobbies are connected to encounters with nature. *“Our village is pretty dry, there is not much to do, but I go hiking a lot and when I like, well, sing”,* says a girl (Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 69).

A peripheral location with limited activities might be seen as a hindrance that prevents the young from fulfilling their potential. However, this interpretation would not consider the possibilities that are available for the young. In the urban space, the young have to face the competing uses of public space (Malone 2002) and will often have to fight about the right to hang around. Wandering in nature enables the young to be as they wish without generational clashes. In one interview, the leisure time activities of a boy in Lapland are described as follows:

K: Okay. What else do you do in your leisure time?

B1: I use my computer. In the wintertime, I go snowmobiling, downhill skiing, ice fishing. Now that I am in high school, I try to study a bit. In summer, I go fishing and do all of the other stuff. . . I hike in the mountains and drive around with different vehicles.

K: Do you have your own snowmobile or quad bike or something?

BP1: Yeah, a snowmobile and a scooter.

Engagements through one's surroundings are, in this case, formed by moving around and getting to know places. Encounters with surroundings happen by wandering and seeing new material surroundings. This, of course, requires money – the vehicles are not cheap. Later on in the interview, the boy describes his attachments to the place, stating that it is peaceful and quiet and there is room to wander in nature. In urban lifestyles, the young have to face the social pressures and expectations about the proper use of public space.

B1: I like an awful lot to wander in nature and such. Peaceful place. If somebody likes to be in Rovaniemi or Helsinki, I could not imagine moving from there and adapting here, not fully at least. This is such a small place, with few activities. I enjoy myself real well here.

(Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 70.)

One's own attachments and encounters are contrasted to the people of the city. The activities available are seen as limited compared to the spectre of activities available in the city, but to the boy, that does not matter. Living close to nature enables one to encounter a lot of things. These can, perhaps, be seen as examples of informal knowing, which is unplanned, takes place with spaces or other people and animals, is not easily verbalised and is, therefore, often unnoticed (Pyyry 2015, 60). The importance of nature in the visual images points out that there is a lot of informal knowing connected to nature. As can be seen from the interview, one is also aware that this type of knowing and these types of encounters would probably not satisfy an urban character.

The crucial question, then, is this: if the informal knowing connected to nature and encounters with different material surroundings is unique, what happens to that knowledge if one has to move away? Is it respected? Is it understood? Is it recognised and valued as learning? Or is one forced to silence those voices and learn new ways of relating to the surroundings?

V.2 Hope of returning

The mobility imperative (Farrugia 2015) and moving to the South as a promise of getting employed (Ollila 2008) will probably mean that young people will have to move away from their communities at least for a while in their life course. By doing this, they will go live in communities that are different from their surroundings and that require different skills. A question for education is preparing the young to be able to make the transition and adapt to a different setting. This requires that different educators, parents, teachers, youth workers and other significant adults work towards the same goal.

The essential question for the communities is if those who move away to study or to begin their working careers will come back and choose to live in their home regions. In an article, parents' views of their children leaving the short-term and long-term bonds to the community are described this way:

Hope of the longer-term return of children was a consistent theme, especially when they had married and "settled down". Although bonds with the rural community would be attenuated in the short term, in the longer term, parents hoped they would not be broken. (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2014, 305)

The engagements and attachments the young have with their surroundings are the basis for coming back and perhaps choosing to live in the Barents Region. Studies on return migration show that work opportunities are not the only reason that determine if people return. Rérat (2014, 83) states, "Return migrants are not mere subjects of external forces, and nor do they simply obey the injunctions of the labour market. In reality, economic aspects may sometimes act simply as a facilitator of migrations that are primarily motivated by more social and cultural factors." In her study on the young in Lapland, Virpi Vaattovaara states that return migration to Lapland is an indication

of being an agent in one's own life story, of being able to participate and live a life one ultimately chooses to live (Vaattovaara 2015).

The promise of leaving and experiencing something new is visible in the interviews. Wanting to experience environments that are different from one's own experiences serves as the petrol, providing the fuel to get away. At the same time, going away is not seen as a permanent solution. There might be the possibility of returning.

K: Why would you want to move to the city?

G2: I don't . . . I don't want to be in a small village.

K: Why?

G2: It's like, like, to meet people and such. And it would be exiting to live abroad somewhere where they speak English.

K: Would you like to move permanently or for a short while?

G2: Probably for a short while. I would like to visit some place.

(Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 67.)

Later on in an interview, another girl also talks about maybe returning to Lapland. It's hard for her to verbalise what the exact nature of her attachment to Lapland is, but she strongly indicates that there is a sense of rootedness. The local space is experienced as home, as a space of material and social gatherings. According to German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, meaningful relationships with spaces require that we can locate ourselves with material beings as well, and live with them. For him, "Dwelling is always staying with things" (Heidegger 1978, 353). That is, they are not mere material objects for objectivising gaze; they are things we have relationships with and things that are meaningful to us.

K2: If you think that you could go back, what, in your opinion, makes it a place where it would feel good to go back?

G1: Because one's home is there. It is home.

K: Can you tell me what makes it home?

G1: I really can't say.

(Siivonen & Kotilainen 2011, interview 67.)

It's hard to verbalise senses of commitment. There is no single and easy answer. According to the results of this study, and plenty of other studies done in the North, a sense of community combines cultural (such as the Sami culture), natural and social phenomena. These things provide the framework for ordinary life outside the urban ways of being. In a culture that celebrates urbanities, choosing to live in the North, wanting to live there, is an active choice: "Living in 'the rural' is far more of an active, constantly questioned choice, which must be repeatedly made and remade. Therefore, those of us

living in the city are, in fact, more vulnerable to the accusation of turning necessity into a virtue in our lives” (Lanas, Rautio & Syrjäälä 2013, 397).

Political choices are made that promote urbanisation and centralisation. The young feel the pressure to move away, finalise their studies and make the transitions. They have to negotiate the dialectic of attachment and leaving: how could one have a sense of community and belonging, and simultaneously possess the capacities needed to be able to cope in surroundings that most likely differ from the community where one grew up? And later on the life course, when one has made the transition to education and is making choices for the future, it is important to be able to choose what kind of lifestyle one wants to conduct and in what type of environment one ultimately wants to dwell.

VI Youth policy recommendations

1. The availability of youth services is dependent on the distances to the centres. For this reason, securing the possibility to travel and providing transportation are integral to availing of youth services. The means of transportation should also be seen as an equality and polarisation issue: not all young or their families can afford the travel expenses needed to get to hobbies.
2. The significance of home and the immediate environment is emphasised for those youngsters who cannot reach youth services due to distances to hobbies or youth work. This means that youth policy should be connected to family policy. Also, different cross-generational arenas become important for youth policy as well.
3. Digital services may help the young living far away from the urban centres to reach the activities otherwise not available to them. Especially, digital services for the young should be evaluated by their ability to overcome geographic hindrances.
4. Cutting back on different services in society directly affects the young living outside urban centres. In concrete terms, this means longer and more time-consuming journeys, going away from local communities, and possibly moving away from home. For example, the decisions on vocational education institutes should involve impact assessments utilising the perspective of mobility and moving away.
5. Many of the young people in the Barents Region are forced to negotiate their relationship to moving and mobilities. In addition to being a fascinating possibility, mobility for them is a social norm and an imperative. Training and employment are likely to require moving away to places that differ from where they grew up. For this reason, the young need to *learn to leave*, to use terms borrowed from Michael Corbett. This ability is built into different growth environments. The support and encouragement on how to learn to leave could be one of the aspects of evaluating the quality of the services for the young.
6. When moving to a new environment, the young of Barents face a place and culture to which they have to adapt. It is an open question: what kind of young people have the resources to cope with this change successfully? When thinking about the transition of the young, attention should also be paid to the potential support needed by those young people who are moving away from their home region.
7. The engagements of the young to the local environment are formed through hobbies, nature experiences and, to some extent, digital cultures. The significance of the physical environment (nature) is high for the young in Barents. This is also different from the urban experience. The importance of nature is visible on an individual level, but also as an arena of peer solidarity. This can be an aspect of



evaluating how well services for the young are able to meet the experiences of the young.

8. Some of the youngsters migrate back to the North. Migration back is connected to social relationships, family ties and to the physical environment. The young adults should be considered when thinking about the attractiveness and innovativeness of the communities in Barents. This should be taken into account in housing, industrial and educational policies.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into how the youth of the Barents Region view their lives and to analyse the implications of these experiences for youth policy. The study focuses upon three locations in the very north of the Barents Regions in Inari, Finland, Alta, Norway, and Murmansk, Russia.

The methodology of the research was to examine pieces of artwork done by young people. The data consisted of drawings, photographs, songs, and research interviews. The aim was to use artistic methods to explore the conditions, youth cultures, and daily life situations of the young residents. Accordingly, the research was both qualitative and participatory – the respondents were free to choose the themes they wanted to tackle and the art form with which to do so. The theoretical concepts that were used to analyse the data were space/place, mobility, and engagement.

The youth of the Barents Region emphasise the importance of nature and home. Their relation to nature is multifaceted, such as: traditional livelihoods, human-animal interactions with reindeers, hunting, hiking, jogging, or riding snowmobiles. Nature becomes a meaningful part of everyday life. Additionally, nature is strongly connected to peer activities as it offers opportunities to be outside adult supervision. Furthermore, through media the youth in the Barents region are a part of global youth cultures. These results are in contrast with studies of urban young and youth cultures. A study emphasises when studying young people from outside urban centres, the different relationships to the environment cannot be analysed using the denaturalised categories of urban youth cultures.

Mobility in the Barents region is both a possibility and a social imperative. According to the results, the issue of mobility involves overcoming large geographical distances, facing the youth cultural distances, coming to terms with peers leaving (and thus addressing the temporality of social ties and learning to leave oneself. Furthermore, the this study found that youth should be able to face the temporality of their social ties and even their own living in the region. Due to the mobility imperative they should be able to make a transition to other locations and can live a good life there. There is a dual task of learning to leave and to be mobile, whilst at the same time learning to understand the value of their surroundings and community.

The pressing issues that young people face appear different when seen from the perspective of urban centres or far-flung rural locations. This study focuses on the very north of the Barents Region, examining the conditions, youth cultures, and the everyday life of the young residents in three locations in Finland, Norway, and Russia.

The issues of locality, mobility, and engagement are examined by analysing artworks produced by the youth of the region. The study reveals that for the local young people mobility is not only a possibility, it is a social imperative as well. There is a dual task of learning to leave and to be mobile, whilst at the same time understanding the value of their surroundings and community.

The study provides an insight on how the young people themselves see their lives in the Barents Region and analyses the youth policy implications of these experiences. It offers a counter-narrative to the existing ways of understanding what it is like to grow up in contemporary Europe.

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