

SUSANNA ÅGREN

Epistemological Dissonance of Worker-Citizenship

Young vocational students' and graduates'
negotiations of societal belonging within
the changing labour market

SUSANNA ÅGREN

Epistemological Dissonance
of Worker-Citizenship

Young vocational students' and graduates'
negotiations of societal belonging within
the changing labour market

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of
the Faculty of Social Sciences
of Tampere University,

for public discussion in the auditorium B1096
of the Pinni B building, Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere,
on 26 January 2024, at 12 o'clock.

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
Tampere University, Faculty of Social Sciences
Finland

<i>Responsible supervisor and Custos</i>	Professor Päivi Honkatukia Tampere University Finland	
<i>Supervisor</i>	PhD Tiina Rättälä University of Eastern Finland Finland	
<i>Pre-examiners</i>	Professor Tero Järvinen University of Turku Finland	Docent Anna-Maija Niemi University of Turku Finland
<i>Opponent</i>	Professor Emerita Carmen Leccardi Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca Italy	

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

Copyright ©2023 author

Cover design: Roihu Inc.

ISBN 978-952-03-3227-3 (print)
ISBN 978-952-03-3228-0 (pdf)
ISSN 2489-9860 (print)
ISSN 2490-0028 (pdf)
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-3228-0>



Carbon dioxide emissions from printing Tampere University dissertations have been compensated.

PunaMusta Oy – Yliopistopaino
Joensuu 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was young, I dreamed of being able to tell other people how to make the world a better place for everyone. Talking to other people, however, was not so easy for young Susanna. In general upper secondary school, I got fascinated by philosophy. I was spellbound that I could spend time during studies to think about the ultimate purpose of life and other things. I dreamed of being a philosopher, a poet, or a writer.

Nevertheless, the academic world was still very far away. There were no academics in my family and the whole academia was a great mystery for me. However, my father always encouraged studying further. After upper secondary school, I applied to study psychology, philosophy, religious sciences, and aesthetics, I had a crooked pile of entrance exam books!

The doors of academia did not open back then to the enthusiastic young adult. After a few gap years, I started in HUMAK University of Applied Sciences to study Civic Activities and Youth Work which is where my path in the field of youth work began. After graduating in 2007, I worked for a few months as a youth worker in Herefordshire, UK, after which I returned to Finland and started to work at a vocational institute until the early 2010s. During these jobs, I met young people from a variety of backgrounds and my passion for knowing more, which smouldered beneath the surface, was aroused and especially the desire to make a world better for these young people. Therefore, I applied to Tampere University for a master's degree in Youth Work and Youth Research.

After graduation, I worked at the Cultural and Sports Association of Finnish Vocational Education and Training SAKU, where I was involved in developing various models and activities that aimed to support vocational education students' well-being and participation during their studies. Vocational education has been a precious field for me to work in; I have met many great people during my work history who work hard for the well-being of young vocational students. You are doing important work with young people!

Vocational education was thus an obvious choice as a context for my dissertation, however, this dissertation is not a study on vocational education. Instead, this is a

study on young adults and their views and experiences relating to societal belonging. As a youth researcher, my thoughts are always on the side of young people which is also something that has driven me to ethical dilemmas during my work history. With the dissertation, I finally have words to describe and discuss those dilemmas. Hopefully, this youth-centred perspective on worker-citizenship might open new discussions also in the field of vocational education.

I am happy and grateful that the intensive work I started in 2018 on my dissertation has ended, and I am happy to have my research read by you. There have been moments of joy and inspiration in these years, but also many feelings of anxiety that could not have been avoided. The doctoral degree is a big dream for me and thanks to the achievement of the dream belongs to many of you.

First, I would like to thank my doctoral thesis instructors Päivi Honkatukia and Tiina Rättilä. Thank you Päivi, you have already been an inspiration as a youth researcher since my master's studies. Since the very beginning of my dissertation journey, you have made me feel like a competent researcher and part of youth research community. Thank you for your trust in me, your professional guidance and for the many intriguing discussions we have had and will have about youth research.

Tiina, thank you for the many inspiring thoughts, your dedicated comments, and the wisdom and emotional support whereby you have guided me during my dissertation. You have both always been reachable when I have needed support, and I am extremely grateful for that. Without both of you, I would not have been able to go through all of this as a whole person.

I would also like to thank my pre-examiners, Professor Tero Järvinen and Docent Anna-Maija Niemi, for your constructive and careful comments on my dissertation. In advance, I would also like to thank my opponent, Professor Emerita Carmen Leccardi.

Thank you also Antti Maunu, you have been a great support in the research field of vocational education, and your comments have been helpful during the dissertation process. Thank you, Mirja Määttä, for the opportunity to use the data you have collected. I would also like to thank Professor Stephen Billett for the discussions on vocational education and your support.

Thank you everyone in ALL-YOUTH, I have experienced myself as part of the ALL-YOUTH community since the very beginning of my dissertation journey. Thank you, Iikka Pietilä, for helping me with the quantitative data and for your co-writing in the first article of my dissertation. Thank you, Reetta Mietola, for your support and our hilarious discussions about the mysteries of the academic world.

Thank you, Miia Lähde, Annika Valtonen, Henna Juusola and Niina Meriläinen, for co-writing and friendship.

Especially thank you, Jenni Kallio. You have been a tremendous support, friend, and inspiration during this dissertation. I am grateful to have you as a colleague and as a friend, with whom I have been able to share all the thoughts relating to this often not so fair world; our conversations have given strength to many grey days.

Thank you, Maaria Hartman, you have been a huge emotional support during this dissertation struggle. Thank you also Vesa Välimäki. Our debates on research and extended lunch breaks have been the driving force behind the dissertation. Thank you, Antti Seitamaa and Riikka Suhonen, for the inspiring discussions on vocational education during these years. Thank you all in the Youth Research Seminars!

In addition, I would like to thank my former colleagues in Herefordshire, in the former Pirkanmaa Educational Consortium and in SAKU. Especially Saija Sippola for your friendship and support.

Thank you also to Finnish Youth Research Society, working in the board has opened up many new perspectives for the ‘young’ researcher, both in youth research and also in the wider academic world.

I am also very grateful to all of you who have participated in the interviews and workshops, without you this dissertation would not exist. I am also thankful for the vocational education providers from which I was permitted to collect data.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends; thank you, my dear mother, and my siblings for your love. I am sorry I have not been around lately. I also want to especially thank the centre of my universe, my beloved Jani. You have kept me relatively alive and sane through these years. Without you, this dissertation would not even matter, my life would be empty. The world is a better place if you have someone to share everything with and someone who unconditionally loves you.

Thank you, my dear father, who would have earned many more years. I miss you every day, without your encouragement and warmth I would never have been here where I am now. Life is fragile, valuable, and never self-evident.

In beautiful Tampere, November 2023,
Susanna

ABSTRACT

Within work-based societies, the function and value of individuals are guided and judged through their involvement in work. This means that the characteristics and conduct of the individuals are guided through worker-citizenship ideals. According to youth scholars, young adults particularly face worker-citizenship-related pressures and are expected to strive towards worker-citizenship; education and employment policies not only support but coerce young adults towards efficient labour market integration. However, the labour market has allegedly become more unpredictable and young adults are also required to obtain entrepreneurial-like skills to respond to its risks and changing needs.

Youth researchers have discussed how these institutional work-related expectations create contradictions for young adults when they negotiate their choices and plan their adulthood within an unpredictable contemporary labour market. They claim that within current ‘new adulthood’, contemporary young adults may not have the same opportunities to find a stable foundation for their adulthood as earlier generations. These contradictions described within youth research interests me. Vocational upper secondary education is an intriguing context for young adults’ negotiations as it aims to guide them mainly to become committed and skilled worker-citizens.

I will approach the contradictions by combining Martha Nussbaum’s idea of ‘life worthy of human dignity’ and the academic discussions on the concept of societal belonging. I empirically ask how young vocational upper secondary students and graduates aged 17 to 25 negotiate with the worker-citizenship ideals and understand and position themselves as worker-citizens within the contemporary labour market (RQ1) and how their understandings and experiences as worker-citizens appear regarding societies’ responsibilities to guarantee them the preconditions for societal belonging (RQ2). I examine these questions using group interviews with young vocational students, individual interviews with vocational graduates, and quantitative Finnish Youth Barometer 2019 survey data.

The dissertation contains four research articles. The first article shows how young vocational students—maybe more than other young people—rely on worker-citizenship and their occupational field’s possibilities. The second article shows how

vocational students' views on post-graduation societal belonging are constructed around worker-citizenship. The third article shows how vocational graduates shape their worker-citizenship within quite a complex adulthood. The fourth article focuses on the critical insights of young adults related to worker-citizenship and shows how young adults perceive that the worker-citizenship ideals conflicts with their well-being, life situations, personalities, and hopes.

To summarise and discuss the contradictions within young adults' negotiations on their societal belonging, I introduce a new concept of 'epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship'. Using that concept, I demonstrate young adults' complex negotiations on their worker-citizen selves (who they are, who they want to be, who they should be and who they can be), their societal belonging and their rights to experience societal belonging with the sometimes unrealistic worker-citizenship ideals and within the current conditions of the labour market and post-graduation adulthood.

Based on my findings, I present recommendations for policies guiding vocational education and young adults' post-graduation employment services. I argue that the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship constructs a complex and contradictory context for young adults' negotiations on their societal belonging. I also argue that the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is not solved with individual skill-building as it is part of the structures of current society and a reality for young graduates. Therefore, vocational education and post-graduation employment services should have secured resources to better acknowledge the related dissonances. Finally, I argue that understanding the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship within young adults' lives is also a question of a sustainable future.

Keywords: capabilities approach; new adulthood; labour market change; societal belonging; worker-citizenship; vocational education; youth research

TIIVISTELMÄ

Työkeskeisessä yhteiskunnassa yksilöiden tehtävää ja arvoa yhteiskunnassa ohjataan ja arvioidaan sen kautta, miten onnistuvat osallistumaan työhön. Toisin sanoen, heidän persoonallisia ominaisuuksiaan ja käyttäytymistään ohjataan niin sanottujen työntekijäkansalaisuuden ideaalien kautta. Nuorisotutkijoiden mukaan erityisesti nuoret aikuiset kohtaavat työntekijäkansalaisuuteen kytkeytyviä paineita ja heidän odotetaan pyrkivän yhteiskunnassa työkansalaisuutta kohti. Koulutus- ja työvoimapolitiisesti nuoria ei ainoastaan tueta vaan myös painostetaan tehokkaaseen työmarkkinaosallisuuteen. Työmarkkinoista on väitetysti tullut myös vaikeammin ennustettavat, jolloin nuorilta myös vaaditaan yritteliäisyyden kaltaisia taitoja, jotta he pystyisivät vastaamaan nykytyömarkkinoiden riskeihin ja muuttuviin tarpeisiin.

Nuorisotutkijat ovat keskustelleet, miten nämä institutionaaliset työhön liittyvät odotukset luovat ristiriitoja nuorille aikuisille, kun he neuvottelevat kuulumisestaan ja valinnoistaan koskien aikuisuutta ja suunnittelevat sitä vaikeasti ennustettavilla työmarkkinoilla. Nuorisotutkijat väittävätkin, että nykyisessä uudessa aikuisuudessa nuorilla aikuisilla ei välttämättä ole samanlaisia mahdollisuuksia löytää tasaista perustaa aikuisuudelleen kuin aiemmille sukupolville. Olen tässä väitöskirjossa kiinnostunut näistä ristiriidoista. Ammatillinen toisen asteen koulutus on kiinnostava konteksti nuorten aikuisten neuvotteluille, sillä se pyrkii pääosin ohjaamaan opiskelijoitaan valmistumaan sitoutuneiksi ja osaaviksi työntekijäkansalaisiksi.

Lähestyn näitä kuvattuja ristiriitoja yhdistämällä Martha Nussbaumin ajatusta ihmisarvoisesta elämästä sekä akateemisia keskusteluja, jotka liittyvät yhteiskunnallisen kuulumisen käsitteeseen. Kysyn empiirisesti kuinka ammatillisissa toisen asteen oppilaitoksissa opiskelevat ja sieltä valmistuneet 17–25-vuotiaat nuoret ymmärtävät ja asemoivat itsensä työntekijäkansalaisina nykytyömarkkinoilla (RQ1) ja millaisina heidän ymmärryksensä ja kokemuksensa työntekijäkansalaisina näyttäytyvät suhteessa yhteiskuntien velvollisuuteen turvata heille lähtökohdat yhteiskunnalliseen kuulumiseen (RQ2). Lähestyn näitä kysymyksiä hyödyntämällä ammattiin opiskelevien nuorten kanssa toteutettuja ryhmähaastatteluja, ammatillisesta koulutuksesta valmistuneiden nuorten yksilöhaastatteluja sekä määrällistä vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometrin kyselyaineistoa.

Tämä väitöskirja koostuu neljästä tutkimusartikkelista. Ensimmäinen artikkeli tuo esiin, kuinka ammattiin opiskelevat nuoret luottavat ja tukeutuvat työntekijäkansalaisuuteen, kenties enemmän kuin muut nuoret, ja samoin myös heidän omaan ammattialaansa. Toinen artikkeli tuo esiin, kuinka ammattiin opiskelevien nuorten näkemyksissä valmistumisen jälkeinen yhteiskunnallinen kuuluminen rakentuu työntekijäkansalaisuuden varaan. Kolmas artikkeli tuo esiin, kuinka ammattiin valmistuneet nuoret muokkaavat työntekijäkansalaisuuttaan hyvin monimutkaisessa aikuisuudessa. Neljäs artikkeli taas keskittyy nuorten kriittisiin työntekijäkansalaisuutta koskeviin näkemyksiin ja tuo esiin, kuinka heidän ajatuksissaan työntekijäkansalaisuuden ideaalit ovat ristiriidassa heidän hyvinvointinsa, elämäntilanteidensa, persoonallisuksiensa ja toiveidensa kanssa.

Esittelen väitöskirjassa uuden 'työntekijäkansalaisuuden epistemologisen dissonanssin' käsitteen tiivistääkseni ja keskustellakseni niistä ristiriitaisuuksista, joiden keskellä nuoret aikuiset neuvottelevat yhteiskunnallisesta kuulumisestaan. Tämän käsitteen avulla havainnollistan nuorten aikuisten monimutkaisia neuvotteluita joskus jopa epärealististen työntekijäkansalaisuuden ideaalien kanssa liittyen heihin itseensä työntekijäkansalaisina (ketä he ovat, keitä he haluaisivat olla, keitä heidän tulisi olla ja keitä he voivat olla työntekijäkansalaisina), heidän yhteiskunnalliseen kuulumiseensa ja heidän oikeuksiinsa työntekijäkansalaisina keskellä nykyisiin työmarkkinoihin ja aikuisuuteen liittyviä ehtoja.

Näiden havaintojeni pohjalta esitän suosituksia ammatillista koulutusta ja nuorten aikuisten valmistumisen jälkeisiä työllisyyspalveluita ohjaaville poliittisille linjauksille. Väitän, että työntekijäkansalaisuuteen kytkeytyvä epistemologinen dissonanssi koostaa monimutkaisen ja ristiriitaisen kontekstin nuorten aikuisten neuvotteluille yhteiskunnallisesta kuulumisesta. Väitän myös, että tämä epistemologinen dissonanssi ei ole ratkaistavissa yksilökeskeisellä taitojen vahvistamisella, sillä se on osa nyky-yhteiskunnan rakenteita ja siten todellisuus, jonka nuoret joka tapauksessa kohtaavat. Tästä syystä esitän myös, että ammatillisessa koulutuksessa ja ammattiin valmistuneiden kohtaamisissa työllisyyspalveluissa tulisi tunnistaa paremmin tämä kuvaamani dissonanssi. Lopuksi väitän, että tämän nuorten aikuisten elämiin kytkeytyvän työntekijäkansalaisuuden epistemologisen dissonanssin ymmärtäminen on myös kysymys, joka liittyy kestävään tulevaisuuteen.

Avainsanat: capabilities approach, uusi aikuisuus, työmarkkinoiden muutos, yhteiskunnallinen kuuluminen, työntekijäkansalaisuus, ammatillinen koulutus, nuorisotutkimus

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	15
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	23
2.1	Worker-citizenship and young adults	29
2.2	Worker-citizenship and vocational education.....	36
2.3	Worker-citizenship, human dignity, and societal belonging.....	41
2.4	Research questions	47
3	DATA AND METHODS	49
3.1	Science philosophical starting points.....	51
3.2	Data construction	55
3.2.1	Vocational upper secondary education students.....	56
3.2.2	Vocational upper secondary education graduates.....	61
3.2.3	Using data collected by another research project	64
3.3	Analysis methods	66
3.3.1	Vocational upper secondary education students.....	67
3.3.2	Vocational upper secondary education graduates.....	70
4	RESULTS.....	74
4.1	Vocational students' trust in worker-citizenship	74
4.2	Worker-citizenship as an enabler of societal belonging	77
4.3	The desires and inequalities shaping worker-citizenship.....	80
4.4	Value beyond worker-citizenship.....	83
5	DISCUSSION	86
5.1	The epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship	89
5.1.1	The worker-citizen self and labour market realities	90
5.1.2	The worker-citizen self and the worker-citizenship ideals	94
5.1.3	Rights for societal belonging.....	98
5.2	Recommendations for education and employment policies	101
6	CONCLUSIONS.....	111
7	REFERENCES.....	116

List of Figures

Figure 1. Visual collage about an unsuccessful working life transition, made in autumn 2018 by young vocational students studying electrical engineering and automation technology58

Figure 2. The dimensions of societal belonging (Article II)79

List of Tables

Table 1. The datasets.....50

Table 2. The recommendations for vocational education and employment-related policies101

Table 3. Themed group interview questions, 2018 and 2019134

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I Ågren, S., Pietilä, I., & Rättilä, T. (2020) Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun esiintyminen ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteissa. [Paid-employment-centred thinking in the working life orientations of vocational education students] In: L. Haikkola & S. Myllyniemi (eds.) Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019. [Good work! Youth Barometer 2019]. Helsinki: Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 157–178.
- II Ågren, S. (2021) Exploring Vocational Education Students' Visions of a Successful Transition to Working Life from the Perspective of Societal Belonging. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4 (1), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00037-5>
- III Ågren, S. (2023) Shaping worker-citizenship: Young vocational education graduates' labour market positionings within new adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009>
- IV Ågren, S.¹ & Kallio, J. (2023) Young adults' perceptions of citizenship outside and beyond labour market citizenship. In: P. Honkatukia & T. Rättilä (eds.) *Young People as Agents of Sustainable Society. Reclaiming the Future*. London: Routledge, 113–127. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003345114-8>.

¹ Names are in alphabetical order, both were first/corresponding authors.

1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation concerns young adults² studying in vocational upper secondary education (here, vocational students) and young adults who have graduated from vocational education and are navigating the contemporary Finnish labour market (vocational graduates). I focus on their working life transitions and the related ideals that may shape and guide their societal belonging; I am interested in how young vocational students and graduates understand and experience the so-called worker-citizenship and the related societally constructed norms and ideals.

In the youth research field, there has been a long-standing discussion on how, in contemporary society, young adults face increasingly normative expectations about how to participate in society and what kind of persons they should be: They should be active, take care of their coping and well-being, know how to find the services they need, and develop their working life skills and work ability to meet the labour market demands as effectively as possible (Kelly 2001, 2006, 2013; also, Brunila, Vainio & Toiviainen 2021; Brunila, Mertanen & Batista-Costa 2020). These debates claim that in current society, the actions and choices of young adults are assessed and guided by how rational they are from the perspective of the labour market's needs and by their ability to commit to the above expectations, even despite their sometimes-limited resources and opportunities, which are defined by their societal position (Avis & Atkins 2017; Nikunen 2017; France 2016; also, Atkins 2017). When they do not meet these expectations, society intervenes by attempting to improve young adults' employability, meaning their skills and characteristics to respond to the labour market requirements and then integrating them into the labour market, for example through short-term trainings, courses, work trials or retraining (Crisp & Powell 2017; McQuaid & Lindsay 2005; also, Nikunen 2017, 2021). When they fail to adjust to these measures or consider them unsuitable for themselves, the welfare system can appear punitive in its aim to keep young adults on a direct path to working

² As 'young people' is a broad concept (in the Finnish legislation, everyone under 30 is considered a 'young person'), I use 'young adults' to refer to young people who are near or have already turned 18, are becoming independent and starting their adult lives, and are negotiating their place in the labour market (cf. Honkatukia et al. 2020). The young people in my study are aged 17 to 25.

life (Jørgensen, Järvinen & Lundahl 2019). Here, the ambition of the current Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government programme (Finnish Government 2023, 80) is a good example:

“The current model of labour market support will be reformed. An extensive initial assessment will be ensured for people who have become unemployed, after which they will receive individual and employment-promoting services linked to certain obligations. In particular, young people under 30 years of age will be quickly referred to employment services.”

Relying on the youth research discussions underpinning my study, I interpret that the political ambitions of the current labour market expectations towards young adults are based on *the social norm of worker-citizenship* (or labour market citizenship³, as some define it, see Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999). With this, I am referring to the societally accepted notion that participation in paid work is a prerequisite for one's ability to fully function in society (Weeks 2011; Gorz 1999). Accordingly, the social norm of worker-citizenship ties young adults' societal function mainly to their employability; their rights and responsibilities in society are defined and assessed through their working life skills and their participation in work (Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999). While society secures equal opportunities for young adults through education, their duty is, in return, to pay back these opportunities following graduation by actively engaging with the labour market and, thereby, with society (see Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999; cf. Marshall & Bottomore 1992, 41, 45–46). Hence, political decision-making usually directs resources and measures focusing on the social inclusion of young adults towards improving their employability and preventing their exclusion from working life (Mertanen, Mäkelä & Brunila 2022; Nikunen 2017).

In such a society that relies on the social norm of worker-citizenship, there are ideals of the characteristics and conduct that young adults should possess as worker-citizens. This dissertation discusses these characteristics as *worker-citizenship ideals*. Ideally, a young person follows the social norm of worker-citizenship, shows responsibility as a worker-citizen, eagerly learns an occupation, commits themselves to labour market participation, and eventually pays their taxes. However, in the current labour market, obedience to this 'traditional' ideal may be insufficient. The contemporary worker-citizenship ideal is constructed around responsibilities that expect young people to be flexible, entrepreneurial, and ready to change their personalities and future plans according to the labour market's uncertainties and

³ I discuss these concepts in Chapter 2

changing demands (Kelly 2006; Sennett 1998). These characteristics are required from individual workers in the uncertain labour market where careers are precarious, fragmented, and difficult to predict (Beck 1992, 2000; Standing 2014). As typical in current circumstances, the ideal sets the responsibility for the risks of coping in the labour market on young adults' shoulders (also, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Youth scholars have highlighted how, despite these uncertain conditions, young adults are required to make choices about their future and learn to live in uncertainty (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). This is not an easy environment for young adults to negotiate their place in society and start their adult lives.

Familiarising myself with these discussions has led me to study the concept of 'new adulthood' more closely. The proponents of this concept argue that contemporary young adults have weaker opportunities for secure and stable starting points for planning their post-graduation lives than older generations (see Dwyer & Wyn 2001; Wyn & Dwyer 1999; Cuervo & Wyn 2016; Woodman & Wyn 2015). They state that a contradiction exists between the institutional expectations (e.g. education and employment policies) regarding young adults' transition to adulthood and the realities young adults face after their education. Regardless of how responsible, active, and entrepreneurial-minded young adults would be to dedicate themselves to education and working life in an ideal manner, the secure adult life promised through education may not be realised as such (meaning jobs cannot be found or are irregular or uncertain regarding continuity or livelihood, their skills are insufficient, their starting points are unequal, etc.). In my dissertation, I am interested in this contradiction between the labour market-related expectations placed on young adults regarding worker-citizenship (the worker-citizenship ideal) and the above 'realities' of the new adulthood they may face after graduating from vocational upper secondary education. More specifically, their negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideal within this allegedly contradictory context interest me. I will approach this question empirically by studying young adults' views and experiences on worker-citizenship, i.e. their views, hopes, concerns, and experiences relating to work, working life, and their participation in the labour market and society.

In empirical terms, I approach the described contradiction through the visions and experiences of young vocational upper secondary education students and graduates. To shortly describe, in Finland (see Cedefop 2019), young people apply for the vocational upper secondary institution (leading to occupation and work) or general upper secondary education institution (more academic institution, leading to

matriculation examination) at age 16 when they finish 9-year comprehensive school⁴. After 2021, staying in upper secondary education has been compulsory for young people until they turn 18. Finnish vocational education includes young people who have come there after their comprehensive school and are subject to this obligation and students of all ages over 16⁵. The education lasts approximately three years but is shaped according to individual study plans and contains eight fields of education (arts and humanities; business and administration; natural sciences; information and communication technologies (ICT); engineering, manufacturing, and construction; agriculture and forestry; health and welfare; and services), including 42 basic vocational upper secondary qualifications.

Vocational upper secondary education is relatively respected in Finland: although the number of young people applying for vocational education has decreased in the past year, approximately 40% choose vocational institutions after finishing comprehensive school (Statistics Finland 2022). Moreover, vocational qualifications are well known among employers and working life, and vocational institutions generally work closely with industry and the working life (Cedefop 2019, 56–57; also, Wheelahan & Moodie 2017).

It is claimed there are no dead-ends in the Finnish school system (see Cedefop 2019); for instance, doing general upper secondary studies and performing matriculation examination while studying in vocational institution is also possible. After vocational upper secondary education, it is possible to continue to tertiary education (to vocationally orientated universities of applied sciences or universities) as all qualifications ensure eligibility for higher education. After accumulating a certain amount of work experience in one's field, it is however possible to also continue to further or specialist vocational education. In addition, in the universities of applied sciences, it is possible for vocational upper secondary graduates to study a vocationally oriented master's level degree; still, in practice, one must have several years of work experience in their field to be eligible for these studies after bachelor's degree (see Böckerman, Haapanen & Jepsen 2019). Generally, young adults with vocational upper secondary education are still a minority in higher education (Haltia, Isopahkala-Bouret & Jauhiainen 2021).

⁴ Comprehensive school includes elementary school, grades 1 to 6, and lower secondary school, grades 7 to 9.

⁵ The 2018 reform in vocational education merged young people's education (meaning those students who had come to vocational upper secondary education directly after finishing comprehensive school) with adult education (meaning those who came there, e.g. from the working life, to study another upper secondary education, or complete their upper secondary education).

One major thing that has guided me to study vocational students and graduates is my work history within vocational education. First, I worked in a vocational institution with vocational students who needed help with their vocational studies. After that, I worked in a non-profit association supporting the well-being, workability, and participation of vocational students. I worked with numerous national projects that developed models to support vocational students' transitions, including their transitions to working life. During my work history, I paid attention to how intensively young vocational students are guided towards 'worker-citizenship' while paying attention to young people's struggles with the related demands. I began pondering whether discussing vocational graduates' well-being, lives, and futures solely through worker-citizenship was sustainable in the long run. From the perspective of the critical youth research debates described above, I consider vocational education intriguing as it concerns young adults' negotiations on societal belonging.

As an institution, vocational education relies on the social norm of worker-citizenship, meaning its purpose is promoting the students' employability and the national economy (Rosenblad 2023; Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Hakala et al. 2013; cf. Billett 2011). Originally, Finnish vocational upper secondary education was formed to respond to the increased labour demand of the industrial sector and has undergone several reforms over time to better respond to the changing labour market needs. The changes in the economy or the shared concern about the 'social exclusion' of young adults have especially increased political interest in developing vocational education (Stenström & Virolainen 2018; also, Varjo, Kalalahti & Hooley 2022; Tervasmäki, Okkolin & Kauppinen 2020; Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019). The government programme of the Prime Minister Orpo (Finnish Government 2023, 96) is no exception in this regard:

"We will strengthen cooperation between vocational education and training and business and industry to make sure that vocational education and training better meets the needs of working life. The provision of education and training will be reformed to better meet the needs of working life and business and industry, taking into account the needs of regions with export businesses and industries."

Accordingly, the kind of worker-citizen ideals I described earlier are reproduced in vocational education. Scholars have noted that vocational education teachers aim to ensure the students learn the skills, attitudes, and conduct mainly appropriate to their occupation so they can integrate into their occupational field (Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Suhonen et al. 2023; Leeman & Volman 2021; Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Käyhkö 2006; Colley et al. 2003). Alongside this, the

contemporary ‘post-Fordist’ worker-citizen ideal emphasising individualism and an entrepreneurial mindset is also present in vocational education. Competency-based Finnish vocational upper secondary education guides students towards individual working life paths that requires them to develop skills for self-governing, independent decision-making, and entrepreneurial mindset so they can effectively integrate into the contemporary labour market (Suhonen et al. 2023; Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Rintala & Nokelainen 2020; Niemi & Jahnukainen 2020; Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019). Along with youth researchers, the scholars researching vocational education have stated that these ideals risk creating a conflicting context for young adults’ negotiations on societal belonging if they do ‘not meet the everyday life of young people’ (Niemi & Jahnukainen 2020, 1155–1156).

In the context of my dissertation, I understand that worker-citizenship shapes the conditions for young adults’ *societal belonging* (see May 2013, 83, 89–90, 2011; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006). I understand the worker-citizenship ideal and the related labour market expectations as something that young adults must take a stand on as they are part of a society where the social norm of worker-citizenship has a stronghold and as their choices and conduct are guided and judged through the ideal. This also means that negotiating their values and meaning in society through worker-citizen ideals is in their everyday lives. I also consider young adults as active agents in these negotiations. They can simultaneously adopt the ideal but question it when the ideal contradicts how they understand themselves, their societal belonging, and their chances in society to act according to the ideal (Berger & Luckmann 2011; Burr 2015). My dissertation will show how young adults handle the described tensions in their adulthood as part of their lives, how they negotiate their worker-citizenship, and, thus, their worker-citizen selves with the different ideals, who they are or who they want to be as worker-citizens, or even if they want to be such worker-citizens, in my interview data (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 40–46, 2019a, 709, 2019b, 1087).

As a theoretical tool, I approach their negotiations in this contradictory context of the new adulthood by combining elements from Martha Nussbaum’s (2013) *Capabilities Approach Theory* and the academic debates relating to the above-mentioned concept of societal belonging. I became interested in these theoretical discussions while familiarising myself with a long debate within youth studies (and the media) about the ‘well-being crisis’ of young adults (see Madsen 2021). According to this debate, young adults are experiencing increasing pressures and problems with coping in society. The crisis is suspected to be connected to the social norm of worker-

citizenship and the related contemporary worker-citizenship ideal (e.g. Rikala 2020). From the perspective of Nussbaum's theory, I will discuss the responsibilities of societies that would guarantee young adults with experiences of a '*life worthy of human dignity*', regardless of whether they succeed in fulfilling the worker-citizenship ideal. In other words, I will present recommendations in this dissertation (Chapter 5.2) and, in line with Nussbaum's understanding of capabilities, discuss the institutional responsibility (of employment and education policies related to vocational education and post-graduation employment services) to guarantee opportunities for young adults to experience being a valued member in society as what they are and for their ability to determine the meaning of their lives within this uncertain new adulthood.

To complement Nussbaum's thinking, I will use the above-mentioned concept of societal belonging (see May 2011, 2013; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006) to empirically discuss how the worker-citizenship ideals relate to young adults' visions and experiences of their value and meaning in society (Chapter 5). My findings reveal the diverse negotiations they engage in regarding their societal belonging, value, and opportunity to determine their lives in post-graduation adulthood and how they interpret their post-graduation societal belonging and its terms through the worker-citizenship ideal. I consider these as questions of well-being; thus, in Chapter 5, I will discuss my findings from the perspective of the sustainability of the worker-citizenship-related ideals (compared to Helne & Hirvilammi 2022; McGrath et al. 2022; McGrath & Powell 2016).

This dissertation empirically analyses the visions and experiences of young vocational students and vocational graduates aged 17 to 25 regarding worker-citizenship and their negotiations with the related ideals within the contradictory labour market. The dissertation, conducted under the auspices of the ALL-YOUTH research project⁶, contains four mainly qualitative research articles. The first two articles concentrate on the perceptions of vocational students about their nearing working life transitions, asking what meanings they give to worker-citizenship and paid work and how they interpret their post-graduation societal belonging from the perspective of the worker-citizenship ideal. The third article focuses on examining the working life experiences of vocational graduates on the negotiations they

⁶ ALL-YOUTH—All Youth Want to Rule Their World research project (2018–2023) is a multidisciplinary research project of three universities in Finland (Tampere University, University of Helsinki, and University of Eastern Finland). It examines young adults' (aged 16 to 25) visions on well-being, sustainability, and the future, as well as the possibilities and obstacles to their participation in society. The Strategic Research Council (SRC), project/grant number 3121336548, funded it. This dissertation is part of ALL-YOUTH's subproject, 'From Dreams to Reality', led by Professor Päivi Honkatukia.

undergo with the worker-citizenship ideal and how they understand their position in the contemporary labour market. Finally, the fourth article examines young adults' insights that criticise or challenge the worker-citizenship ideal.

In the chapter following this introduction, I will describe the theoretical discussions related to worker-citizenship. The first subchapter (2.1) introduces worker-citizenship as a concept and then discusses it from the perspective of youth studies (subchapter 2.2) and vocational education (subchapter 2.3). After that, I introduce Nussbaum's capabilities approach and the concept of societal belonging as a theoretical lens to my empirical findings (subchapter 2.3). Chapter 3 presents and discusses the data and the methods applied; Chapter 4 introduces my findings. Chapter 5 develops a new concept of 'the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship' to summarise and discuss my findings. In its development, I utilise discussions in youth research and will contribute to the youth research field on young adults' societal belonging. I also present recommendations for the policies on vocational education, working life transition, and young adults' employment services. Chapter 6 will summarise my conclusions.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Society highly values work: individuals can redeem their opportunities for functioning through work and face certain societal expectations regarding their participation in the labour market. In other words, individuals strengthen their relationship with society by working.

The social norm emphasising work as a condition for the individuals' function in society is closely linked to social citizenship: an achieved status in a particular society guided by rights and obligations based on a shared ideal of how the members of society should function (Marshall & Bottomore 1992, 18). To earn one's social rights, members of society have a responsibility to act for society's benefit; this responsibility is most closely linked to education and, through it, to work, occupation, tax payments and, further, to one's position in the labour market (Marshall & Bottomore 1992, 41, 45–46). Thus, their participation in the labour market can also be regarded as forming a basis for a well-functioning society (Weeks 2011, 6; Bauman 2005, 45–46). For instance, the idea of a welfare state was established to protect individuals in situations where they risked being excluded from the labour market and thus from earning a livelihood (Bauman 2005, 99).

Scholars (e.g. Gorz 1999; Beck 2000; Weeks 2011, 8) named a society where citizenship is based on such a social norm as a '*work-based*' or '*wage-based*' society. In such a society, working is considered a driving force behind people's activities, and the emphasis on work relates to the means of control. Working has been the fundamental solution to control poverty and maintain order in society and has been thought to guarantee meaningful activities in people's everyday lives; people have been and are defined as part of society through working (Beck 2000, 12–13). Thus, over time, work has obtained an unquestionable social status, as people socialise, participate, and interact through work and work-related skills and capacities (Gorz 1999, 3–4; Weeks 2011); these activities relate to *worker-citizenship* in this dissertation.

I use the concept of worker-citizenship. However, academics have also used other concepts to describe the relationship of work, labour market, and citizenship, such as labour market citizenship (see Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999). In Article IV, we used the concept of 'labour market citizenship' with Jenni Kallio to describe the societal expectations of how every young adult is expected to be prepared to navigate

the labour market and negotiate the conditions of their societal belonging with employment and social services (also, Kallio 2023, 363–37, 109). In Articles II and III, I ended up using worker-citizenship, as this concept has been used more frequently in the vocational education-related previous literature (see Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Hakala et al. 2013; Spring 1980). Notwithstanding these decisions, I regard that the differences between these concepts are volatile, and in general, have been used to describe similar phenomena: the concept of labour market citizenship has been used for vocational students (Lappalainen 2014); in international literature, worker-citizenship is generally a more commonly used concept and very similar to how Asko Suikkanen and Leena Viinamäki (1999) defined labour market citizenship.

For example, Ulrich Beck (2000, 13, 73, 76) uses the term ‘working citizen’ or ‘worker-citizen’ to describe the new risks and societal trends (e.g. individualisation, globalisation, digitalisation) challenging the importance of paid labour as the basis of the welfare state and the opportunities for individuals to function as citizens through paid labour. Judith Bessant (2004, 390) demonstrates how young adults’ participation in society is often evaluated and guided in related policies through participatory programmes, narrowing their participation in society to ‘citizens-as-workers’. Also, researchers focusing on migrants (e.g. Krivonos 2019; Suvarierol 2015; Anderson 2015) use the concepts of ‘citizen-worker’ or ‘worker-citizen’ to discuss the socially set conditions and norms related to paid work and the opportunities of people with migrant backgrounds to participate and experience inclusion in society through worker-citizenship. In sum, I use the concept of worker-citizenship in this integrative chapter for the sake of clarity—as an expectation for vocational students that they must graduate as workers and into occupations to participate in society (such as Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014) but also more broadly as a condition defining the rights and responsibilities of young adults in a work-based society (such as Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999 and Beck 2000).

Generally speaking, in a work-based society, worker-citizenship refers to a social contract tying one’s daily activities, responsibilities, and opportunities in society to work and employment (Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999, 190). This link means that one’s position in the labour market classifies their social status and defines their rights and chances to function—thus, the preconditions for their everyday lives (Suvarierol 2015; Bauman 2005, 17; Gorz 1999, 84). This kind of worker-citizenship has allegedly become a societal norm. The *social norm of worker-citizenship* is unquestionably powerful in societies where it is socially constructed and reproduced through daily discussions, such as in families,

educational institutions, youth guidance services, immigration services, workplaces, and other communities, and through various political instruments and documents through which individuals' activities in society are assessed, classified, and valued (Foucault 1980, 93–98; see also Kelly 2013, 47). The norm is realised within the societal structures through the political ambitions, legislation, or the practices and expectations of, for instance, the welfare and employment services or the educational institutions (Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999, 190–191; Dean 1998). At a personal level, the possibilities and responsibilities of the individuals to act as worker-citizens are thus reciprocally shaped around their education and qualifications, employment opportunities, social and cultural background, and their social status (Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999, 190–191; Suvarierol 2015). While worker-citizenship is not a self-evident position in society, according to critical considerations, due to the 'working to earn a living' thinking, the selves and choices of the individuals are mainly judged through their participation in work (Weeks 2011, 4; Dean 1998; also, Beck 2000, 1992; Bauman 2005).

Therefore, an ethical dimension exists in worker-citizenship, which relates to the moral and cultural ideals of where and how individuals should spend their time in society and participate in maintaining it (e.g. Lewis & Flink 2004, 43–53). Following Max Weber's (2001, 19–20) thinking, the social norm of worker-citizenship is an integral part of modern capitalist culture and a moral guideline that determines how the members of society should view their societal tasks. He believes this dedication to the labour market and market forces has a stronghold in Western history and is based on how, over time, work has become a socially agreed norm in the lives of morally (and religiously) decent people (see Weber 2001, 33–34, 40, 116). In this sense, the modern capitalist society does not leave a choice for people; commitment to paid work and the labour market is necessary if one does not want to remain outside society (Weber 2001, 123).

Paid work is also crucial in today's late-capitalist society as it helps secure an individual's basic needs (home, food, etc.) in the form of income, their possibilities of achieving social status, and their access to social welfare, pension systems, and possibilities for consumption (Weeks 2011, 6; Bauman 2005). In the contemporary welfare state, people have a 'moral responsibility' to participate in paid work as they must participate in safeguarding the economic continuity and competitiveness of society, while their dependence on social support and other taxpayers is regarded a failure and morally questionable (Bauman 2005, 85–86; Dean 1998). Weber's image of one's work ethic as a moral guideline for the welfare state and its economic

continuity is thus not an outdated idea, although the ways, amount, and meanings of work have changed (Kelly 2013, 54; Weeks 2011, 75).

However, although work has maintained its prestigious social position, the associated norms and ideals are prone to change. The labour market has always changed and will continue changing in line with the needs of the surrounding society and culture or particular occupations: the needs of the individual (e.g. as workers), the community (e.g. of employers), the society (e.g. of the economy or legislation), the environment (e.g. global events, natural resources) or, e.g. by the technological developments all constructing the understanding of what kind of work and skills are required from the individual and how work is valued as part of people's lives (Billett 2006a, 21, 27–28, 42, 106–107; cf. Weeks 2011). These needs within the surrounding society also create the basis for the social construction of *worker-citizenship ideals* of what kind of persons and workers people should become.

Many academics have highlighted that industrialisation and, later, technologisation and globalisation, have changed the relationship between individuals, society, and work. Accordingly, they claim the labour market has transformed towards being more competitive, individualistic, risky, insecure, and consumption-based—these scholars have described or criticised these changes or the new demands in the labour market using terms such as second, reflexive, post-modernity, post-Fordism, new economy, and flexible capitalism (see Kelly 2013, 51; Sennett 1998; Beck 1992, 2000; Standing 2014; Weeks 2011; Gorz 1999; Bauman 2005). Regarding these, the 'earlier', *Fordist*, or *first modernity* labour market is described as a period when industry moved to mass production and employment, where most workers could be guaranteed regular pay to maintain their consumption and quality of life, where the post-war future seemed safe and predictable and the continuity of the welfare state and economy could be trusted: Back then, work was claimed to provide a secure basis for life and future planning and, for some, social mobility (Beck 2000, 68–69; Sennett 1998, 40–43; Bauman 2005, 27).

However, according to these discussions, post-industrial technologisation changed the ways of working by making work more efficient. Due to improved productivity and broader markets, companies and factories had to separate themselves from a country which was a driving force for globalising the market. This means that instead of national states, consumption, global market forces, and associated institutions such as the OECD increasingly drive the value and meaning of work as part of the welfare state (Bauman 2005, 24; also, Gorz 1999, 14–15). This transformation is illustrated by the concept of *post-Fordism*, which describes a labour market that is less secure and more individual-oriented than the previous and more

predictable Fordist labour market. Accordingly, the current worker-citizenship ideal is based on the supposed needs of the post-Fordist labour market. The post-Fordist labour market is assumed to require more flexibility and reflexivity from individuals so they can better respond to the uncertainties of the labour market. Accordingly, a worker-citizen should have the skills for continuous self-development, adaptability to the changing needs in the labour market, and the ability for self-marketing and competition (Sennett 1998, 87–90; also, Bauman 2005, 27; Beck 2000, 70–71; Gorz 1999, 42–43).

According to critical interpretations, the described change in the labour market has transformed society into a *risk society* where the worker-citizen's secure position and future become more unpredictable (e.g. Beck 2000, 70–71, 1992). Hence, the contemporary labour market increasingly relies on one's skills, where individuals are forced to compete for jobs and are responsible for their own success. Some claim this is due to the transformations in the nature of paid work: People's participation in the labour market has allegedly become increasingly more part-time-based and precarious; moreover, self-employment is promoted as a means of transferring the risks of the labour market concerning coping to the individual (Standing 2014; Gorz 1999, 48–53). These changes in the forms of employment might have changed how some people participate in the labour market; however, work will hardly lose its social role and position (although some argue so; see Gorz 1999), even if the forms and numbers of work and the ways of working change (Beck 2000, 38–39; also, Kelly 2013, 54). Nevertheless, these overall changes in the labour market set new questions related to worker-citizenship (e.g. Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999).

Traditionally, a worker-citizen has been expected to follow an ideal linear path from education to work, to work as devotedly as possible in the same occupation and workplace, and to retire after a long and uninterrupted career (Suikkanen & Viinamäki, 1999, 194). However, as described, the context of worker-citizenship has changed: individuals cannot rely on the permanency of working life in as secure an institution as before, working careers cannot be planned long-term in all occupations, and unemployment is not necessarily as short and temporary as societally expected in the support systems (Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999, 196–198). Thus, the problem in worker-citizenship relates to how when the climate of the working and labour market has changed, the social, political, and economic rights (e.g. social security and the pension system) of the individual are still connected to the idea of full-time and full-paid work (e.g. Gorz 1999, 64–65; also, Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999, 207–208). This means the institutionally maintained ideal can conflict with the surrounding context and that different worker-citizenship ideals are

produced simultaneously and, in part, contradictorily; individuals must permanently dedicate themselves to their careers and the labour market while remaining flexible and adaptable to the labour market's uncertainties.

Accordingly, the other problem of worker-citizenship relates to the changes in the labour market and its new requirements towards worker-citizens; also, how people learn to interpret their value as persons and as members of a work-based society are prone to change and contradictions. According to Kathi Weeks (2011), in a post-Fordist society, work ethics are no longer solely linked to the pressure for one to consume and pay back their rights to society; rather, more problematically, work has become an important tool for self-development and self-reflection while the risks and expectations of employment have become more individualised. In other words, the current labour market increasingly relies on individual skills and capacities and on what kind of worker-citizens people are; therefore, people must be flexible to constantly change their character as needed in their working life (Weeks 2011, 56, 70, 74–75; also, Sennett 1998, 87–90). The ideal worker-citizen in the post-Fordist labour market actively modifies their skills and attitudes as required and integrates themselves and their personal lives into their work and working life.

Therefore, the worker-citizenship ideal is something through which people interpret their value: who they are, who they should become, what kind of life and future plans they should have, and how they should act and live their life (Weeks 2011; Farrugia 2019a, 2021a; Kelly 2013, 93). For example, Peter Kelly (2013, 14, 73, 2006) has suggested that in the contemporary (post-Fordist) labour market, individuals are required to be *entrepreneurial*, i.e. they should act independently, show their activity and their capacity for self-reflexivity and adaptability, and have the suitable capabilities and skills to respond independently to the risks and changing demands of society. While individuals in contemporary society can develop themselves and their lives in the direction they want, this kind of action is also an obligation. The responsibility for making the kinds of choices that help people construct a life according to their plans, society's ideals, and their changing life situations lie only with the individuals (Beck 2000, 53–54, 1992, 136). Such an ideal of self in contemporary society is not a problem per se. The ideal may strengthen the experience of meaningfulness and success for individuals who manage to act according to the ideal. However, what is relevant in the context of this dissertation is the kind of message the ideal gives to those for whom it is unattainable, to whom the risks and uncertainties accumulate and whose lives are not ideal for such self-fulfilling and flexibility because of their social position (e.g. Kelly 2013, 110–113; Bauman 2005, 35). While contemporary society maintains such worker-citizen ideals

of how individuals' lives should be, what they should achieve, and what kinds of choices they should make, unemployment or an insecure position in the labour market might be 'social suicide' if one does not have the resources to live and consume as societally expected (see Bauman 2005, 31, 38, 69, 107–108).

The following subchapters will present my perspective in more detail: First, I will elaborate on the critical discussions within youth research that relate to worker-citizenship more generally; next, I will discuss vocational education and its connection to worker-citizenship in more detail. Following these viewpoints, I will present my theoretical considerations in this dissertation based on Nussbaum's understanding of the *capabilities approach* and the theoretical debates relating to the concept of *societal belonging*. Finally, before proceeding to Data and Methods, subchapter 2.4 will present my research questions.

2.1 Worker-citizenship and young adults

David Farrugia's (e.g. 2021a, 2019a) studies show that young adults are guided towards the contemporary post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideals, which might direct how they perceive themselves, their value and meaning as worker-citizens, and as members of society. Young adulthood is particularly shaped by work-related expectations and obligations as the societal task of young adults seems to be to find their 'thing', meaning something by which they can find their place in society and participate in by securing the continuance of society and economy (Farrugia 2021a, 6–7). The social norm of worker-citizenship has thus a firm hold, especially on young adults. Some scholars (e.g. France 2016) have claimed that, especially after the great recession in 2007 and in most neo-liberal countries like the UK, the US, and Australia, *the active labour market policies* have tightened their hold on young adults who are regarded as socially 'at-risk' because of their struggles with their labour market participation. Along with the contemporary worker-citizenship ideal, young adults are considered in these policies as individually "responsible for their future life chances through the choices they make with regard to school, career, [and] relationships" (see Kelly 2001, 30).

Accordingly, scholars claim that the social norm of worker-citizenship places strong responsibilities on young adults regarding their working life attachment. In the related policies, young adults' responsabilisation in the labour market is perceived as the main means of solving societal problems considered to risk society's economic continuance and originate from the individual, such as social exclusion among young

adults (France 2016; also, Brunila 2014; Kelly 2001). This argument is neither unfamiliar in the Finnish context (see Kananen 2012; Mertanen, Mäkelä & Brunila 2022): this view obligating the individual and the beneficiary towards labour participation also has a strong foothold in the Finnish context where the attachment of young adults to education and employment and their guidance in such ‘transitions’ is considered the most vital solution for supporting young adults’ participation in society (also, Jørgensen, Järvinen & Lundahl 2019).

Thus, contemporary work-based societies can be claimed to place worker-citizenship-related expectations, particularly on young adults. Young adults’ relationship to the social norm of worker-citizenship has also been debated under the term ‘*political economy of youth*’, especially from an economic viewpoint. According to this perspective, current society perceives young adults as mainly future earners and the labour force and considers economically efficient worker-citizenship as their main societal task (Côté 2014b). Although this perspective has been criticised, e.g. because it overrides the diversity of the ‘youth’ by treating young people as a homogeneous and passive group subordinated by adult society (see France & Threadgold 2016), the debate describes the implications of economic thinking on how we understand young adults and their societal tasks and how policy interests, particularly in young adults’ working life transitions, may be driven by the ideals relating to economic continuity and the continuity of the related worker-citizenship ideal (e.g. Sukarieh & Tannock 2016; Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017). From this viewpoint, guidance services focused on young adults (e.g. in the field of education, employment or social services) mainly aim to guide young adults towards *employability*. This means that by applying the ‘post-Fordist’ worker-citizen ideal, these services attempt to support, strengthen, and boost young adults’ skills and competencies to proceed through the transition and better respond to the labour market’s requirements so they can fulfil their societal responsibilities as tax-paying worker-citizens (McQuaid & Lindsay 2005; Crisp & Powell 2017). Young adults are expected to constantly complement their skills and competencies and modify their life plans, bodies, and personalities to maintain their position and improve their opportunities in the labour market—their employability—so they can contribute to sustaining economic growth and not burden the social services (Nikunen 2021, 2017; Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017; McQuaid & Lindsay 2005; also, Kallio 2023).

Generally, young adults’ *working life transitions* are related to several expectations by governmental (education, employment, and youth) policies that strive to guide young adults’ lives through ‘normal’ transitions (e.g. a smooth transition from primary to secondary school, to the labour market, or higher education) and are

directed in particular ways towards young adults who are considered as being in a 'risk group' in each ideal transition (Cuervo & Wyn 2014, 904–905). The ideals of how the 'working life transition' should proceed is claimed to be institutionally formed around cultural traditions, expectations, and standards that define, for instance, the role and responsibilities of education in attaching young adults to the labour market (Walther 2022). Furthermore, these ideals are formed around the skills and competencies young adults should acquire to succeed in the labour market and also around the processes and service systems that control and guide young adults' labour market participation. In other words, the ideals relating to young adults' post-graduation working life transition are constructed upon the social norm of worker-citizenship; they are discursively constructed upon the time-related *social expectations* that relate, for instance, to the importance of work and worker-citizenship in society and upon *the social practices* associated with the 'normal' transition to working life (e.g. graduating from education and getting a job). However, the ways the transitions eventually realise relate to young adults' *personal opportunities* to negotiate with the expectations and make their own decisions in the transitions (Settersten Jr, Stauber & Walther 2022; Walther, Stauber & Settersten Jr 2022, 8–9).

According to critical youth researchers (who rely on discussions regarding late/post/second modernity and individualisation, e.g. to Ulrich Beck or Zygmunt Bauman), transitions to work and adulthood have now become more complex and riskier for young adults (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel 2007; Walther 2006; Wyn & Dwyer 1999). In this context, it is claimed that young adults cannot predict their future yet must learn to take the risks of their choices. Due to contemporary ideals, they learn to lean on their sense of personal responsibility and take ownership of their failures as part of their '*epistemological fallacy*' (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (2007) use epistemological fallacy to describe how, although social, cultural, and economic structures and inequalities still determine young adults' chances in the labour market, in contemporary society based on individualisation ethos, the causes and solutions for one's struggles in the labour market are mainly sought individually from the young adults. Thus, young adults learn to take the risks of uncertainty instead of identifying the effects of these structural factors.

Some researchers have (optimistically) claimed these changes make young people's transitions to adulthood more complicated, education, for instance, has extended the period of youth, meaning young adults now take more time to find their place in society (e.g. Arnett 2000). Others, conversely, have claimed that in the current context of an unpredictable labour market and society, opportunities for such voluntary self-seeking and self-actualisation are unequal, and some are forced

to strive for a rapid working life attachment regardless of their difficulties in finding a secure status in the labour market (Côte & Bynner 2008, 252, 256; Bynner 2005, 378–380). Hence, the institutional ideals connected to young adults' working life transitions and worker-citizenship might not recognise the relative nature of transitions; neither the context and time where transition-related choices are made, nor how the contradiction between transition-related expectations and young adults' own wishes, life situations, resources, and opportunities could modify their experiences of their value and meaning in society (Cuervo & Wyn 2014; Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021).

However, some researchers have stated that uncertainty has always been part of youth and young adults' working life transitions (e.g. Goodwin & O'Connor 2005). According to them, the transitions of young adults have never been smooth and unproblematic for all but have always been associated with some degree of uncertainty and risks (Goodwin & O'Connor 2005, 218). In the Finnish context, discussing insecure labour markets is a particularly complex issue. While the Anglo-American labour markets (like the UK, the US, and Australia) are more driven by the free market, the Finnish labour market is coordinated by the state with labour unions and businesses based on negotiations and equality and is, perhaps, at some levels, more stable than the Anglo-American labour market (Sennett 1998, 54–55; also, Wheelahan & Moodie 2017). Working life researchers say *the Finnish labour market* has remained relatively unchanged. They have noted that the amount of insecure work (especially, peripheral contracts and seasonal, fixed-term or agency work, etc.) has not generally increased in Finland; however, its adverse effects are accumulated among certain groups, such as the low-skilled, migrants, or young people, for which accumulating insecure work may predict exclusion from the labour market and even an incapacity for work (Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a; Ojala, Nätti & Lipiäinen 2018; Rasmussen et al. 2019). According to the quantitative working life studies, the impact of the working life changes mentioned earlier (e.g. technologisation, digitalisation, globalisation) are related in the Finnish context to how these changes have, in some respects, reduced the number of routine and lower-skilled jobs. This, according to them, however, depends on the sector, the local demand for labour (e.g. there might be more demand in the service and social sectors) and the type and size of the employer in question (e.g. jobs in the public or service sectors are better protected than those in private commercial companies) (see Pajarinen, Rouvinen & Ekeland 2015; Kerr, Maczulskij & Maliranta 2020; Pekkala Kerr, Maczulskij & Maliranta 2016; Asplund, Barth & Lundborg 2011; Maliranta, Nurmi & Virtanen 2010).

Scholars have claimed that in the Finnish labour market, the economy and the employers have better knowledge of the occupational skills learned in vocational education; thus, the education is better linked with certain occupations and, accordingly, vocational education might be better appreciated than in the Anglo-American labour market (see Wheelahan & Moodie 2017). Notwithstanding with this, earlier studies suggest that too-field-specific skills may make finding employment for vocational graduates difficult if there is no demand for their skills or if they cannot apply their skills to another occupation and thus cannot gain the necessary work experience (Buchs & Helbling 2016). This problem of matching skills to the available occupations due to the labour market changes is also discussed in the context of Finnish vocational education, where the local and field-specific demands in the labour market shape the employment opportunities of vocational education graduates (Maczulskij & Karhunen 2017; Maliranta, Nurmi & Virtanen 2010, 533). However, working life changes have been suggested as not significantly hampering the employment prospects of Finnish vocational graduates, especially of young adults who are content with their vocational studies (Silliman & Virtanen 2019). In addition, vocational higher education in one's occupational field may improve further vocational upper secondary graduates' employment opportunities and working life prospects (Böckerman, Haapanen & Jepsen 2018; Böckerman, Haapanen & Jepsen 2019). Generally, research concentrating on the Finnish context presents an optimistic picture of young adults' working life prospects. Based on quantitative observations (similarly to Goodwin & O'Connor 2005), the uncertainty and back-and-forth movement in the labour market is a normal phase of young adults' working life transitions as most of their working life paths will eventually lead to more secure working life relationships; accumulating insecurity among these paths is marginal in the long run (Saloniemi et al. 2021; Ojala, Nätti & Lipiäinen 2018, 151; Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a).

From this dissertation's perspective, whether there is enough work for all or how 'smoothly' young adults proceed in their working life transitions, are only one side of the contradiction relating to the 'uncertainty' and the increased demands young adults experience today. In this context, a too uncritical view of the claimed post-Fordist labour market changes may ultimately direct (without wishing to) political decision-making even further to emphasise young adults' personal responsibility to develop skills and capacities corresponding to the assumed changes (Fevre 2007, 531; also, Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a, 364). However, a broader understanding of young adults' experiences in the current labour market is needed. Relying on purely quantitative observations, such as described above, might bypass the diversity of

young adults' experiences: Not all experiences of injustices, uncertainty, and insecurity are quantifiable (Kelly 2013, 54). What do the employment figures in a particular occupational field actually show about young adults' labour market experiences and how they perceive their lives, choices, and the demands in the labour market? While most Finnish young adults eventually find a stable place in the labour market; however, the drawbacks of involuntarily temporary work may still accumulate on some of them, such as those who are unskilled, have a migrant background, or are considered 'at risk', also because they are not heard by the education and employment services (e.g. Honkatukia, Rättilä & Rinne 2021; Haikkola 2021, 2019; Tokola et al. 2019; Krivonos 2019; Ojala, Nätti & Lipiäinen 2018, 151).

Therefore, I will follow the discussions within youth research regarding *new adulthood* (cf., e.g. Dwyer & Wyn 2001; Wyn 2020). According to the debate, the institutional valuing of a single working life transition narrows the understanding of youth merely to a psychological phase after which all can eventually find a position in secure and stable adulthood. This kind of viewpoint on young adults' lives bypasses the time-related and place-specific social factors that influence their possibilities to progress according to the worker-citizenship norm and shape themselves according to its ideal (Woodman & Wyn 2015, 75–76; Wyn & Dwyer 1999, 16–17). The new adulthood debate claims that such a one-dimensional view on young adulthood politicises and institutionalises the working life transition as a norm in young adults' lives, turning it into something that must be controlled while ignoring the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways through which the social change shapes the lives of young adults (e.g. Woodman & Wyn 2015, 75–76; Wyn & Dwyer 1999, 16–17). The new adulthood debate stresses that young adults' experiences of uncertainty and 'messy' transitions also result from the contradictions that young adults face when the institutional expectations and obligations conflict with the current realities that shape their adulthood (Woodman & Wyn 2015, 78–82; Wyn & Dwyer 1999).

In other words, from the perspective of the 'new adulthood' debate, due to the increased flexibility, efficiency, and activity requirements in today's working life, i.e. the current 'post-Fordist' worker-citizen ideal, young adults face a much more demanding labour market than previous generations, making the uncertainty of it much more 'scarring' (Cuervo & Wyn 2016; Woodman & Wyn 2015; Dwyer & Wyn 2001). Young adults are living and making choices within very different and more rapidly changing social conditions than previous generations, where young adulthood has become a vaguer position influenced by changes in the social, political,

and ecological environment (e.g. Wyn 2020). Future planning has become a continuous process in the new adulthood, while its risks are directed at young adults themselves and affect, for instance, their working life experiences and their chances to experience well-being and live the life they aspire to (Cuervo & Wyn 2016, 132). In new adulthood, young adults are forced to constantly and self-reflexively shape their choices regarding their lives and future, while these social expectations (connected to the post-Fordist ideal) that individualise young adults' responsibility to make choices contradict their equal possibilities to plan their future according to the ideal (Cahill & Leccardi 2020, 80; cf. Kelly 2013; Beck 1992).

Thus, youth researchers have highlighted that the opportunities for young adults to pursue 'ideal transitions' or, e.g. attain a safe position in the labour market as a worker-citizen are very unequal (Farrugia 2019a, 130–132; France 2016, 253–254; Woodman & Wyn 2015, 68; in the Finnish context, see Nikunen 2017). Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn (2015, 49–50) refer to Beck's thinking when they describe how the social and economic resources and backgrounds defining inequalities have not so much disappeared but that young adults must constantly renegotiate their relationship with those social structural and institutional truths that may have been self-evident to previous generations (e.g. the educational paths and position in the labour market determined by class or family background). Although young adults may adopt the current ideals as the earlier studies noted, the starting points for implementing the ideals as part of oneself – of who they are and who they want to be – may not be easy (Farrugia 2021a, 130–132, 2019a). This, in turn, can place enormous pressure on them regarding their working life choices (Farrugia 2021b; Ikonen & Nikunen 2019). Therefore, the quantitative methods and viewpoints seem insufficient for understanding young adults' negotiations within the contemporary labour market; instead, there is a need for qualitative understanding.

I agree with Farrugia's (2021a, 10) claim that concerning young adults, worker-citizenship is not just about implementing 'the social contract' regarding the social norm of worker-citizenship, but the ideals through which young adults are guided to construct a relationship with society. It is about how they learn to see themselves and negotiate the terms about who they should be in the eyes of their peer groups, families, and, eventually, society. Farrugia (2021a, 137) states that the relationship between young adults and the post-Fordist ideal should be further examined concerning institutions that maintain and reproduce ideals based on e.g., worker-citizenship. Next, I will discuss vocational education by leaning on his argument.

2.2 Worker-citizenship and vocational education

Education and educational choices have become an important responsibility and obligation for young adults regarding worker-citizenship, at least in the global north (e.g. France 2016). In this dissertation, I agree with the idea that research and solutions in education, employment, and youth policies mainly consider employability and working life attachment as the ideal solution to the current societal problems young adults face (Farrugia 2021a, 7). For instance, the idea of vocational education relies on worker-citizenship. Vocational education is considered ideal for guiding young adults towards the ‘normative’ path, helping them find a unique way to work and thus be part of society as a skilled and professional worker (Billett 2014, also in 2011; Dewey 2003, 2007, 249–252).

In the context of my dissertation, vocational education is particularly interesting due to its special connection to fostering the social norm of worker-citizenship. In general, education’s primary purposes have been to educate and raise younger generations to become citizens who help construct and maintain society, specifically via an occupation through which one redeems their social rights (see Marshall & Bottomore 1992, 37–39). Education’s role has developed around the idea that through it, society can ensure equal starting points for everyone to compete in the labour market and eradicate inequalities, thus creating a basis for the welfare state (Spring 1980). Simply put, where the educational system initially sought to ‘control’ young adults and guide them towards a certain form of political thinking, in the present form, it aims to guarantee the starting points for participation in occupations and working life and, thus, preconditions for worker-citizenship (Spring 1980). Within vocational education, these interpretations of education are especially present. These educational goals linked to the social norm of worker-citizenship relate to vocational education, first, to what John Dewey (2007, 249–252) defined under the term ‘*vocation*’, i.e. that everyone should find a unique way of participating in society that fits in their future plans and personal interests, and second, to young adults’ responsibilities to acquire an ‘*occupation*’ and the skills and capacities to meet labour market requirements and thus fulfil their role as citizens (see Billett 2011).

In simple and general terms, the traditional purpose of vocational education (which is very diverse depending on its historical and social contexts and social setting) has been constructed around the need to educate workers, especially those ‘oriented to practical work’ or who are societally considered being at risk of exclusion; over time, vocational education has evolved to respond to the growing need for skills and capacities due to industrialisation and the idea that without some

basic training, individuals will not have the opportunities to act on an equal footing in society and maintain society's continuity (Billett 2014; Billett 2011; in the Finnish context, cf. Stenström & Virolainen 2018; also, Kalalahti et al. 2020; Acacio Claro et al. 2022). Thus, vocational education responds in two ways to the social norm of worker-citizenship: On the individual level, it is intended to help people build up their occupational and labour market skills, thus preparing them for working life, and to ensure equal basis for young adults to participate and compete in the working life. On the societal level, vocational education is intended to contribute to the economic growth and the economic continuity of society by meeting the educational needs in the labour market and the economy and by ensuring new taxpayers and workers are trained for society's changing needs (see Billett 2011, 145–146).

However, according to some scholars, a certain belief in the supremacy of education marks the current post-Fordist or new capitalist society; the continuous accumulation of education, personal competencies, abilities, merits, and lifelong learning skills allow individuals to equally participate in the changed labour market; conversely, without these accumulations, the individual's worth within the labour market is non-existent (which is discussed under a concept of meritocracy, see e.g. Sandel 2021a, 2021b; Sennett 2006, 106–111). This may challenge whether the worker-citizenship vocational education produces, which traditionally relies on a certain occupation and one's vocation, can compete and respond to the needs of the labour market in a society that places increasing emphasis on merit, higher education, and flexible and continuous self-development (Sandel 2021a, 198–199, 2021b; Sennett 2006, 115, 1998, 89).

In the Finnish context, the social norm of worker-citizenship is connected to vocational education by law. Vocational education's objectives and tasks are linked to work-oriented and employability issues: on a curriculum level, it reproduces a worker-citizen ideal according to which a good vocational student acquires the necessary skills in working life, takes care of their working capacity and consistently makes choices that improve and ensure their employability (Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014; Brunila et al. 2013; Hakala et al. 2013; also, Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019 see also The Finnish Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017). Finnish vocational education has been increasingly steered towards a competency-based implementation, in which the skills learned at the vocational institution have been increasingly linked to the needs of the labour market and enhance the students' transitions to working life (Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019). In other words, vocational education reform in 2018 strengthened the link between vocational education and

working life and transformed vocational studies towards individual paths and working life-based learning (e.g. Rintala & Nokelainen 2020; Nylund & Virolainen 2019). Thus, it could be said that vocational education has sought to follow the current trends in the labour market (also, Stenström & Virolainen 2018). With the reform in 2018 and its attempts to respond to the needs of the changing labour market, the post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideal has raised its head.

The post-Fordist ideal is particularly evident in how competency-based vocational education requires adult-like self-reflexivity and self-governing, interaction, decision-making skills, and adult-like choices from its students—skills that not everyone has due to the lack of as well as the access to fair resources and opportunities (Souto 2014; Niemi & Jahnukainen 2018, 2020). Moreover, researchers have shown that political guidance has particularly sought to identify current labour market trends and thus steer Finnish vocational education to more closely align with the post-Fordist labour market, valuing efficiency and skills for competition, flexibility, and continuous self-development (Tervasmäki, Okkolin & Kauppinen 2020; also, Rosenblad 2023). In addition to the reform in 2018, the responsibilities of Finnish young people regarding their educational choices were increased in 2021 with another reform⁷, extending compulsory education from 16 to 18 years. The new law aimed to guarantee all young adults at least an upper secondary degree, raise the national level of education, and improve the equality of young people concerning their education, welfare, and opportunities in society (HE 173/2020 vp; Compulsory Education Act 1214/2020; see Juusola 2023). Both reforms were motivated by the political need to react to the imagined working life changes and keep young adults on a safe path to employment from the perspective of the welfare state due to the concerns regarding the adequacy of their skills in the working life (e.g. Varjo, Kalalahti & Hooley 2022).

The social norm of worker-citizenship guiding vocational education is, in this sense, linked to so-called *human capital* thinking. This kind of late-capitalist view on vocational education's purpose has been criticised by many scholars researching vocational education (McGrath et al. 2022; Powell & McGrath 2019; Bonvin 2019; regarding Finnish context see Rosenblad 2023). Vocational education is claimed to be guided by 'privileged others': by the political and economic needs to enlarge the workforce, strengthen the employability of young people, and direct them to the labour market (Billett 2014). In this context, human capital relates to thinking based on the assumption that increasing people's skills and capacities, such as by funding

⁷ The data for the dissertation was collected before the reform regarding the extension of compulsory education.

their education and improving their well-being, could positively impact business, nurture society's economic growth, and maintain a consumption-based society (Becker 1975, 9). According to this understanding, one's level of education and skills would be linked to a better position in the labour market and better incomes; education's main aim is to ensure individuals can compete and socially climb in the labour market (see Becker 1975, 10, 54). Education's benefits are thus assessed according to its economic relevance, according to the costs and benefits of education for society from the economic productivity perspective (Becker 1975, 232–233).

First, such a one-dimensional and economic view of the importance and purpose of vocational education is claimed to focus vocational education's purpose on a highly political and bureaucratic motive regarding training workers who produce economic advantage, which is why it simultaneously bypasses the meanings of vocational education for its students, why they are interested in these occupations, and why they want to learn them (Powell & McGrath 2019; McGrath 2012; see also Rosenblad 2023; Billett 2014, 15–16). For example, young people who need special support or have immigrant backgrounds are more easily directed to vocational education than others, sometimes despite their wishes or plans, because vocational education is considered better suited to their needs and to speed up their employment and transition to work (Kalalahti et al. 2020; see also Acacio Claro et al. 2022; Haikkola 2021; Tokola et al. 2019; Krivonos 2019). This also defines the conditions under which teachers and instructors working in vocational education do their job, whether they have the resources and opportunity to see their students as something else than solely as 'future worker-citizens' (e.g. Suhonen et al. 2023; Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; also, Niemi 2010). Second, although vocational education is allegedly shaped and adapted according to the changing working life and society (e.g. Billett 2011, 2006a), it is claimed that because of the 'human capital' thinking by the political discussions guiding its development, vocational education directs the responsibilities of the changes (via 'employability') to the vocational graduate rather than identifies the structural inequalities and complexities that may shape the possibilities of vocational graduates to function in society and have a good life (McGrath et al. 2022). Efforts to emphasise such economic-centred worker-citizenship norms may reduce the opportunities for vocational graduates to participate in and influence society outside of their occupation (Suhonen et al. 2023; Bonvin 2019; Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019).

However, I also consider that the worker-citizenship ideal within vocational education is linked to its traditional culture of valuing vocations (see Article I). Generally, the worker-citizen ideal in vocational education is driven by a traditional

understanding of how learning to do one's job well and devoting oneself to one's occupation and career will help people have a life direction and livelihood and act as 'good [worker]-citizens' in the labour market and society (Sennett 2008, 269; Dewey 2007, 249–253). According to Dewey (2003, 2007, 101–102, 249–251), vocational education's purpose is supporting citizenship by helping (not forcing) their students to find what they can do, thus guaranteeing meaning and direction for their lives. In other words, according to Dewey (2003), vocational education's purpose is not to benefit the economy and employers but to support its students in finding a vocation and provide the skills and capacities for them to make their own choices in the labour market. Richard Sennett's (2008, 2006) concept of craftsmanship can be used simultaneously to describe the vocation-centred ideal linked to the culture and ethos of vocational education: at the heart of craftsmanship is that individuals want to work well, devote themselves to it, and develop their skills by getting absorbed in their work and observing and solving the problems associated with it. Here, vocation is comparable with an activity considered rewarding, where one can utilise their strengths and competencies, thus benefitting society (Dewey 2007, 102, 249–251).

Within vocational education, the worker-citizenship ideal is thus linked to a cultural ethos of what kind of persons vocational students should become when they graduate from vocational education, i.e. what kind of occupation-related values, orientations, and attitudes they should adopt to be ideal workers in their occupational fields (Colley et al. 2003; also, Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Leeman & Volman 2021). According to previous studies, vocational students may adopt this kind of 'vocational', a more 'traditional' occupation-based worker-citizenship ideal as part of their studies. For example, researchers have shown that especially young people who consider themselves 'practical', want to 'work with their hands', or have a working-class background apply more easily (or are stereotypically guided) to vocational education in Finland because they want to get to the working life and start their independent lives as soon as possible (Tolonen & Aapola-Kari 2022; Acacio Claro et al. 2022; Herranen 2014; Lahelma 2009; Käyhkö 2008; Tolonen 2008a, 236–237). Moreover, according to earlier research, they are taught as part of their occupational studies that becoming a worker-citizen and flourishing in their field concerns their professional pride and indicates their attitude as skilled workers towards their occupational field (Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Leeman & Volman 2021; Käyhkö 2006; Skeggs 1997).

In other words, vocational education is an intriguing context behind young adults' negotiations because of the two types of worker-citizenship ideals reproduced in vocational education. Vocational education idealises (by teaching, its curriculum, and

overall, by its practices) worker-citizenship, which rests on the idea of ‘professionalism’, the right occupational attitude and conduct, and the idea of occupational continuity. Conversely, it reproduces a more contemporary interpretation of worker-citizenship: vocational students must be entrepreneurial, independently take responsibility for their competencies, advance through individual paths, and learn skills that help them flexibly navigate within the labour market. I am interested in the kind of epistemological negotiations of who they should be, who they want to be, and who they can be as worker-citizens resulting from these institutional worker-citizen ideals (as Chapter 2.1 discussed) in the current allegedly uncertain labour market and adulthood. I will approach these negotiations through vocational students’ and graduates’ views and experiences of work and working life, which Chapter 3 will further discuss.

However, I am already aware that young adults have diverse views about worker-citizenship, its related ideals, and their post-graduation lives (see Meriläinen & Ågren 2022; also, e.g. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a, 2019b). Although the norms and ideals of worker-citizenship this chapter describes are institutionally maintained (and which vocational education also reproduces as part of society), I interpret that these worker-citizenship ideals are socially constructed; thus, young adults produce and actively shape (or aim to shape) worker-citizenship for their needs and may reciprocally challenge the ideals or the whole socially maintained norm of worker-citizenship (see France & Threadgold 2016; Billett 2006a, 2006b, 2010). However, although I consider young adults as active actors in society, I do not think the structural issues of worker-citizenship can be solved individually and solely by their empowerment and strengthening of their competence and capacities (Brunila 2014; Avis & Atkins 2017, 175–176; cf. Billett 2010, 13–14). Chapters 3 and 5 will discuss this ethical viewpoint further.

2.3 Worker-citizenship, human dignity, and societal belonging

In this dissertation, I am interested in how vocational students and graduates interpret and negotiate their worker-citizenship regarding the institutionally maintained and socially constructed worker-citizenship ideals. In other words, I study how they understand themselves—their *worker-citizen selves*—within the contradictory labour market (see Farrugia 2021a, 40–46; 2019a, 709, 2019b, 1087 and his definition of ‘working self’). With one’s worker-citizen self, I refer to their negotiations about who they are, who they want to be, and who they should be in

the surrounding social world, the understandings and plans they adopt regarding worker-citizenship ideals, and how they interpret their positions and value as worker-citizens within the contemporary context (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 28–31, 2019a, 709; Billett 2010, 7). I consider vocational students' and graduates' interpretations of themselves as worker-citizens to be relative, forming within an active dialogue with worker-citizenship ideals through which their understandings of themselves as worker-citizens and members of society are guided and which they adopt in society through their vocational education (see Billett 2006b, 2010).

I approach their understandings by examining their beliefs and interpretations about their rights and duties in the labour market, their views on their occupations, working life, working life transitions, and their stories regarding their working life experiences. In other words, I make sense of how they position themselves as worker-citizens and negotiate with the worker-citizenship ideals (e.g. Harré 2012). Chapter 3 will elaborate further when describing this dissertation's methods. I regard their negotiations about their worker-citizen selves as their negotiations about their 'value' and 'meaning' in society. This subchapter will theoretically discuss my viewpoint by utilising the concept of *human dignity*, as defined by Martha Nussbaum (2013), and the concept of societal belonging, in which I apply Vanessa May's (2011, 2013; also, Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2006) theorisations regarding the concept of belonging. This was the starting point for the theoretical framework in Article II, which I will utilise more extensively in this summary of my dissertation.

First, Nussbaum (2013, 18–19) defines 'human dignity' as part of the *capabilities approach* theory (or, more precisely, according to her *capabilities approach*). Her vision relates human dignity to the freedoms and possibilities through which one can make choices in society that safeguard their right to live a decent life. In other words, human dignity relates one's potential to live a *decent life* 'worthy of human dignity' where one can feel appreciated; where 'social, political, familial, or economic conditions' do not prevent such a life; and where people are valued with 'equal respect' (Nussbaum 2013, 30–31). However, this does not mean that everyone's life should be the same, but that individuals have equal opportunities to live such a life and make choices they consider important and meaningful (Nussbaum 2013, 31; Sen 2009, 231–232, 235).

On this basis, Nussbaum (2013, 32–36) defines ten related capabilities, which she considers as society's responsibility to guarantee for its members: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment. Among these, I am particularly interested in the capabilities of 'affiliation' and 'practical reason' (and

‘control over one’s environment’, which is, in my interpretation, linked to practical reason), which Nussbaum interprets as the foundation for all other capabilities. According to her, ‘*practical reason*’ relates to an opportunity to make decisions about the meaning of one’s personal life and ‘*affiliation*’ to one’s experience of being valued as themselves and as part of society and nearby communities (Nussbaum 2013, 39). From these perspectives, Nussbaum (2013, 34) sees working as an essential and unquestionable enabler for these capabilities; in a life worthy of human dignity, she claims, everyone can have a livelihood and, thus, control over their environment and an equal opportunity to seek employment and experience that they are part of the working community.

Nussbaum’s thinking has inspired many scholars who study vocational education or young adults’ employment. These discussions are critical towards the ‘human capital’ ideology, in which the societal resources and aims placed on vocational education (e.g. through education and employment policies) are evaluated based on the economic benefit of these acts concerning society’s economic growth and continuance (McGrath 2012; regarding human capital theory; see Becker 1975). For instance, Bonvin (2019, also McGrath et al. 2022) claims that vocational education could distinguish its aims from human capital and economic thinking by applying the capability approach. Instead of trying to strengthen the capacities of vocational students to become more efficient consumers and taxpayers, he states that vocational education-related policies should pay more attention to vocational graduates’ possibilities to live meaningful lives, influence the working life and surrounding society, and change and develop them for theirs and others’ needs (Bonvin 2019). According to Valerie Edgell and Ronald McQuaid (2016, 12, 14–15), the capability approach is a valuable viewpoint regarding young adults’ working life transitions and participation as it underlines their right to make genuine choices meeting their future plans, obtain support for finding a job they value, and make choices that make their lives worthy of human dignity (see Edgell & Graham 2017, 1204).

In Finnish vocational education, this kind of approach these discussions desire is in the law governing it (The Finnish Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017, 2§); however, in practice, the diversity of vocational students’ participation is curtailed to working life at the curriculum level (Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019, 347). Scholars have also criticised vocational education for only transforming due to the requirements of the labour market and economy (including in Finland, see Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019); an economy-centred perspective on vocational education might ignore the diversity of students and the variety of their opportunities and hopes regarding why they apply for education, the

diversity of the life situations into which they are graduating into, and of the starting points from which they implement post-graduate worker-citizenship (Powell & McGrath 2019). From the perspective of these critical discussions, this perspective might limit vocational students' choices that do not conform to the ideal but might support their own lives, their future hopes, their participation in society and their experiences of 'human dignity' (Bonvin 2019, 279).

However, Nussbaum's thinking has been criticised for how it defines society's responsibilities through individual capabilities. According to the critics, her theory does not recognise the relativity of human interaction and the complexities and diversities of the social environment that may shape individual choices (e.g. Dean 2009, 267–268; Taylor 2011, 790). Nevertheless, I regard that, on the contrary, with the theory's help, discussing worker-citizenship at a more structural level is possible as the theory transfers the responsibility of young adults' coping in the labour market to the societal structures and decision-making (also, Rättilä & Honkatukia 2023, 14; McGrath et al. 2022). According to Nussbaum (2013, 35), her capabilities approach theory stresses the responsibilities of societies to guarantee everyone the possibility of 'human dignity' with equal respect instead of interpreting diverse groups of people as homogenous units. Regarding this, Simon McGrath et al. (2022) have suggested, for instance, that due to the social changes and breakages—such as climate change, the changes in the labour market or the welfare state, and the various crises associated with them—reassessing the purpose of vocational education is needed, particularly from a perspective that values 'human dignity' and evaluates vocational graduates' post-graduation opportunities for a decent life.

Second, I use the concept of *societal belonging* as a necessary addition to Nussbaum's thinking, as it highlights how Nussbaum's 'human dignity', or the experience of being a respected part of society, is linked to young adults' interactions with the social environment, with their friends, peer groups, family, educational communities, work communities, and society around them. Generally speaking, belonging as a concept relates to how one understands themselves, their value, and their meaning in their social community and in relation to the norms and expectations in the communities into which they wish to belong (see May 2011, 368, 2013; Anthias 2006, 21). Inspired by Nussbaum, I want to emphasise the 'societal' when discussing belonging to stress the relative connection of worker-citizenship ideals to young adults' senses of belonging (see Rättilä & Honkatukia 2023, 8). By this, I also mean the responsibilities of society to recognise the political, social, cultural, and ecological conditions and obstacles that shape young adults' belonging and young adults' own perceptions and hopes regarding societal belonging.

I acknowledge the various definitions of belonging within the academic debates and how the sense of belonging is constructed in young adults' everyday encounters with their friends and peers, family members, teachers, and others and is not solely shaped by the worker-citizenship ideals (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016; May 2011). However, I focus on societal belonging from the perspective of the social norm of worker-citizenship and its related institutional expectations, which are described, for instance, under the 'new adulthood' debate. Like May, I consider the sense of societal belonging not a static state but a complex and constantly developing mutual relationship between the individual and surrounding society and close communities. Societal belonging is thus a workable concept to describe how young adults negotiate with the changing conditions (and ideals) of worker-citizenship in their everyday lives and shape their senses of themselves regarding the changing labour market and its related expectations (May 2011; May 2013, 90, 150–151). The sense of societal belonging requires continuous negotiation with others about one's position and value in society; it is a feeling that one is accepted in one's near communities and, more widely, in society (May 2013, 83, 89–90).

In this context, the debates regarding societal belonging enable to discuss how young vocational students' and graduates' interpretations of how society values them and how their life should proceed are constructed in their negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals. With the debates relating to societal belonging, I can approach their visions and experiences of belonging from two perspectives (see Antonsich 2010). First, when approached at a *personal level*, I can discuss how they negotiate their worker-citizen selves—who they are, who they want to be, and who they can be—with their peer groups, occupational communities, employment services, etc., in the interview data⁸ when describing their working life-related hopes, concerns, and experiences. This point relates to May's (2011) idea of how belonging is structured in one's everyday personal life meaning that young adults negotiate the above opportunities of societal belonging in their daily lives.

Second, when approached at an institutional level, I can discuss more theoretically how the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals institutionally place boundaries and terms on young adults' societal belonging, i.e. regarding what kind of persons they should be and how they should participate in society so they will feel they valued. This point relates to the concept of 'politics of belonging' by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), referring to the societally constructed ideals and norms (of worker-citizenship) that shape the conditions for individuals' belonging in society and through which their belonging is assessed and valued. I think Nussbaum's thinking

⁸ Subchapter 3.3 will discuss my methodological choices.

is a sound addition to these academic discussions about societal belonging, as she highlights societies' responsibilities to guarantee young adults the opportunities to live and plan their lives according to their hopes and plans and feel appreciated as they are, regardless of their life situations. Altogether, this conceptual framework suggests that young adults' experiences of societal belonging are built on a complex relationship between the individual and society and that society is responsible for supporting this relationship.

From a youth research perspective, the approach allows for discussing how worker-citizenship-related institutions (e.g. vocational schools or employment services) might shape young adults' interpretations, opportunities, and experiences of worker-citizenship and makes visible how young adults actively construct their relationships with others and society in their everyday lives when negotiating with the societal ideals connected to worker-citizenship (Cuervo & Wyn 2014). This kind of approach stresses that worker-citizenship is more than just about livelihood and social integration; it is about young adults' experiences of society appreciating them. According to youth research debates, education and labour policy discussions that interpret young adults' participation in society solely through the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals are bypassing the other ways that might build and support young adults' experiences of societal belonging (Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 97, 154–156). Although the meaning of these policies is good, they might ultimately hinder young adults' possibilities for societal belonging.

Thus, I feel combining these two theoretical viewpoints (of Nussbaum's capability approach and the academic debates relating to societal belonging) brings an important critical perspective to the worker-citizenship-related ideals reproduced by vocational education (cf. McGrath et al. 2022). I interpret this approach as a needed perspective in the context of societal change, where the future and adulthood of today's young adults are marked by a wide range of related crises, such as health, safety, and climate (cf. Wyn 2020). Therefore, the question of worker-citizenship relates to sustainability: the social, ecological, and economic sides of sustainability are relatively intertwined (Raworth 2017). Worker-citizenship-related expectations holistically shape one's opportunities for a decent life for sustainable well-being, as Tuula Helne and Tuuli Hirvilammi define it (see 2015, 2017, 2021; Allardt 1976): Who has the potential to make choices that are meaningful to themselves and are environmentally balanced regarding worker-citizenship? Is the income from worker-citizenship adequate and fair? Does worker-citizenship support the well-being and coping of a young adult? Is it in balance with the values and loving relationships (relating to people, animals, and nature) important to a young adult? I discussed these

in Article IV with Jenni Kallio⁹. Therefore, worker-citizenship-related ideals define not only one's possibilities for a decent life, well-being, and societal belonging but connect to the well-being and sustainability of society and the planet.

According to critical debates, the relationship between vocational education and sustainability is complex; simultaneously, when the purpose of vocational education relates to promoting economic continuity and society's competitiveness, it also guides some of its students towards occupations and working life that are not necessarily sustainable, socially or ecologically (Suhonen et al. 2023; McGrath & Powell 2016). Vocational education's readiness to transform in line with the skills and competencies required by the labour market (see Billett 2006a, 2011) can be problematic if these skills and competencies are based on worker-citizenship ideals, working life, and work, which turn out to be unattainable and unfair for some young adults regarding their possibilities to make sustainable and ecological choices (Anderson 2009). The scholars have thus suggested that vocational education should re-examine its relationships with the working life, labour market, and worker-citizenship to contribute to a more sustainable society (Anderson 2009, 53; McGrath & Powell 2016; McGrath et al. 2022). This is also why this dissertation concentrates on the views of young vocational education students and graduates.

The choices young adults make, want to make, or can make as worker-citizens are matters not only of equity between them but of sustainability, of what kind of labour market and future they are constructing or can construct with their choices as members of society, and as inhabitants of our planet (e.g. Gough 2017, 37–38; Helne & Hirvilammi 2017, 38–40). This dissertation's discussion will ponder worker-citizenship and the related ideals from the perspective of its sustainability concerning the changing labour market, adulthood, and society.

2.4 Research questions

My dissertation consists of four research articles. Summarised below are the research questions my dissertation articles answer (Research Articles I–IV). Chapter 4 presents the articles and answers these empirical questions.

I. What kind of perceptions do vocational students have on working life and worker-citizenship, and how do they differ from other young people?
(Article I)

⁹ see Chapter 4.4

II. What kind of visions do young vocational students understand their post-graduation societal belonging and its relationship to worker-citizenship? (Article II)

III. How do young vocational graduates negotiate their positions as worker-citizens when describing their working life experiences? (Article III)

IV. How do vocational students' and graduates' views challenge worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals how their thoughts appear from the perspective of sustainable society? (Article IV)

These four questions form the sub-questions of my dissertation research. Based on these sub-questions, I prepared the main research questions for my dissertation, which Chapter 5 will discuss. By combining Nussbaum's theory about a 'life worthy of human dignity' and the debates on societal belonging and sustainability, I examine the worker-citizenship ideals from the perspective of young vocational students' and graduates' visions and experiences. This means, that I empirically examine **how young vocational students and graduates negotiate with the worker-citizen ideals and understand and position themselves as worker-citizens within the contemporary labour market (RQ1)**. In answering this question, I will particularly focus on how they negotiate their worker-citizen selves while recounting and describing their working life-related hopes, concerns, and experiences. I also study more theoretically **how their views and experiences on societies' responsibilities to sustainably guarantee them the preconditions for societal belonging (RQ2)**.

This integrative chapter will also present recommendations based on my empirical findings, which I hope will be useful for policy discussions concerning vocational education and young adults' employment. As a youth researcher, I have a moral duty to develop society so every young person can perceive themselves as an important part and can bring out their visions and experiences. Therefore, my duty is to also conduct research that aims to make the world better and more sustainable for young adults today and the generations after them (cf. European Commission 2010, 25; Resnik 2015). I shall now detail these epistemological and ethical considerations and introduce my data and methods.

3 DATA AND METHODS

This dissertation is mainly qualitative and contains two kinds of empirical datasets: group interviews with vocational upper secondary education students and individual interviews with vocational upper secondary education graduates. I will shortly describe the datasets in this dissertation and their connection to each other. Then I will present my data and related methods in more detail.

One main principle in designing my study was to understand young adults' 'working life transitions', which is well debated in youth research, especially regarding the complexities of the transition within the changing society (e.g. Cuervo & Wyn 2016, 2014; Woodman & Wyn 2015, 76–81; Côté & Bynner 2008; Walther 2006; Wyn & Dwyer 1999). Therefore, I felt it was important to research young adults' views and perceptions of worker-citizenship and the related ideals before and after the transition to understand the complex conditions within which the societal and institutional expectations regarding working life transitions are placed. More specifically, I felt it was critical to understand how young vocational education students' hopes and expectations regarding working-life transitions compare with the labour market experiences of young vocational graduates and their negotiations on their worker-citizen selves after graduation.

Table 1 illustrates all the datasets that have been part of this dissertation. First, I had two datasets with data collected from young vocational students. **The dataset 1** was collected with the ALL-YOUTH research project¹⁰ from two vocational education providers. The other education provider permitted me to conduct research in their institution as part of the ALL-YOUTH research project and its existing research permission; from the other, I applied for a permit independently, which the board of the education provider granted. The data was collected by organising six workshops for vocational educational students utilising participatory methods: first, the workshops' participants created visual collage works from magazine cuts to illustrate their ideas regarding a successful or unsuccessful working life transition; after this crafting part, they participated in group interviews (see Appendix 1)

¹⁰ See footnote 6.

facilitated by ALL-YOUTH researchers. Articles I, II, and IV are based on this workshop data.

The dataset 2 was quantitative (see Appendix 2). This data was used only in Article I, which was part of Youth Barometer 2019 ‘Hyvää työtä!’ (Good work!) report published by The State Youth Council and the Youth Research Society in Finland¹¹. With Iikka Pietilä and Tiina Rättilä, we wrote a mixed methods article about vocational students’ thoughts on work and working life.

Table 1. The datasets

Dataset	Qualitative/ Quantitative	Description	Articles
Dataset 1 Six workshops for vocational students with two vocational education providers with the ALL-YOUTH research project	Qualitative	Date: Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019 Participants: 58 (56 in the interviews ¹²) aged 17 to 25 ¹³ from six vocational upper secondary programmes: 1. business and administration + 2. information and communications technology (1 interview), 3. electrical engineering and automation technology (5 interviews), 4. food production (1 interview), 5. hotel, restaurant, and catering services (3 interviews), and 6. social and health care (2 interviews). Data: 26 collage works, 12 group interviews Collected by ALL-YOUTH and me	I, II, IV
Dataset 2 Finnish Youth Barometer 2019	Quantitative	Date: 2019 Theme: ‘work and entrepreneurship’ Participants: 1900 15- to 29-year-old respondents; 195 were studying vocational education Implemented and published by The State Youth Council and the Youth Research Society	I
Dataset 3	Qualitative	Date: Autumn 2020	III, IV

¹¹ The State Youth Council and the Youth Research Society annually conduct a Youth Barometer examining the orientations and views of Finns aged 15 to 29 on changing themes. In 2019, the theme of the barometer was work and entrepreneurship.

¹² Two workshop participants had to leave before the interviews. Also, one young person consented to the study but did not participate in the given task, leaving the workshop; thus, this person was not counted as a workshop participant.

¹³ We did not ask their age but informed the participants that the views of those under 25 interested us. The youngest participants were second-year students in vocational education; because the interviews occurred in spring, all participants were at least 17.

Follow-up interviews for vocational graduates who participated in the workshops during their vocational studies		Participants: 18- to 25-year-old vocational education graduates Data: 4 individual interviews via Microsoft Teams Collected by me	
Dataset 4 Individual interviews conducted in one-stop-centres (Määttä 2018, 2019)	Qualitative	Date: 2018 and 2019 Participants: 18- to 25-year-old vocational graduates Data: 28 individual interviews containing 11 follow-up interviews Collected by 'Ohjaamoista työelämään' [from one-stop guidance centres to working life] research project led by Määttä (2018, 2019).	III, IV

Second, I had two datasets containing individual interviews with young vocational education graduates aged 18 to 25. **Dataset 3** contains individual interviews (see Appendix 3) with young vocational graduates who participated in the abovementioned workshops during their vocational studies. While participating in the workshops, vocational students had a chance to give their consent to be contacted after graduation regarding a follow-up interview. Twenty-two gave their consent; I interviewed four in early autumn of 2020. These interviews were rich in content from the perspective of my research questions, but I felt I needed more variation to the data; therefore, I also decided to use the other data made available for researchers in ALL-YOUTH by Mirja Määttä's research project as a form of research collaboration. **Dataset 4 contains** thus individual interviews (see Appendix 4) with young vocational graduates. These interviews were collected by the 'Ohjaamoista työelämään' research project (from one-stop guidance centres to employment) with young adults who had a vocational education degree in 2018 and 2019. These two datasets (3 & 4) contain working life stories from young vocational graduates with varied working life backgrounds, mainly from graduates who had faced complex working-life paths. Articles III and IV are based on these datasets.

3.1 Science philosophical starting points

This dissertation examines young vocational students' and graduates' understandings, their visions and understandings of working life, worker-citizenship, and post-graduation societal belonging. My approach to vocational students' and

graduates' understandings and visions is mainly based on social constructionism. I follow the classical idea of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2011) about how society is discursively constructed around the social interaction between individuals. The surrounding society determines how individuals construct and interpret their role and function as members of it; there is no society without interpersonal dialogue, and a discursively constructed society reciprocally guides individuals' understandings of it. In other words, while living in the same Finnish society and studying in a similar kind of educational institute, vocational students, and graduates share, in some respects, a common-sense understanding of worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals. While their understandings differ somewhat, we can have a joint discussion about worker-citizenship construct; in interview situations, we also produce understandings about it and I interpret these understandings from the perspective of academic debates (Berger & Luckmann 2011, 46–48, 61–63; Schütz 1962, 53–56).

In this context, I interpret the worker-citizenship ideals as being based on a *discourse* relating to the social norm of worker-citizenship, meaning these ideals embody social and political power structures that seek to govern and guide the lives and participation of young adults in society and create truths about what kind of young adult is an accepted and valuable member of society (Foucault 1980, 93–94, 199). This discourse of worker-citizenship thus shapes and has implications on young adults' lives and their interpretations of, e.g., societal belonging in linguistic form, for example, through the discussions in politics and media or in the various social encounters young adults have, for example, with friends and parents, or in educational institutions and employment services (Burr 2015, 20–21, 85, 137–139). Following Berger and Luckmann's (2011) view, the norms and ideals related to worker-citizenship are socially and discursively constructed, as are young adults' interpretations of their positions as worker-citizens.

Society, its structures, and worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals, are non-existent without individuals' discursive interaction and participation in creating and maintaining them (Berger & Luckmann 2011; Burr 2015, 211). As the social norm of worker-citizenship has acquired a position of a common-sense understanding in society, questioning or presenting counter-speech against it can be difficult; such explains why education, employment, and youth policies and practices rely on it regardless of the academic debates criticising it (Berger & Luckmann 2011, 61–63). Questioning might also be difficult for young adults and professionals working with young adults as they are part of a society where worker-citizenship has a hegemonic position and is taken for granted. A critical understanding may require a scientific orientation towards society and resources to recognise the institutionalised nature of

worker-citizenship; critical views require ‘knowledge’ about how society is structured (see Berger & Luckmann 2011, 122–123, 242). However, this knowledge is inseparable from the common-sense understanding of society and the experiences of young adults participating in my study (Schütz 1962, 62–64). There is no power without resistance; while people discursively construct and reproduce the worker-citizenship-related ideals, they can become aware of these discourses and power structures and negotiate with them and about their positionings in society (Van Langenhove 2017; Burr 2015, 138; cf. Foucault 1980, 142, Foucault 1984, 94–96). I acknowledge that young adults have experiences through which they can be rather critical towards the socially constructed ideals of worker-citizenship, also without scientific orientation (see Kallio 2023; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022).

I consider that while I may be aware of the youth research debates related to worker-citizenship ideals and their related problematics, only by hearing the visions and experiences of these vocational students and graduates can I try to understand how worker-citizenship ideals and norms as social constructs appear to them from their diverse perspectives. However, this requires that I thoroughly reflect on my position and views as a youth researcher. While reflecting on and positioning my role in producing data and constructing worker-citizenship ideals, I have stayed aware that I have worked amongst vocational education and its development (through several development and coordination projects), which is why I possess certain values through which I interpret worker-citizenship ideals and which also shape, on some level, information production in this dissertation (Burr 2015, 177).

I share a thought that as a social scientist, I cannot detach myself from these social contexts; thus, the kind of reflexive approach I have chosen is needed so that I can ethically reflect on my choices as a researcher and my interpretations of the data, albeit it might be uncomfortable in some situations (Burr 2015, 23; Högbacka & Aaltonen 2015; see also Pillow 2003). In other words, reflexivity helps me develop as a researcher—to ethically contemplate my choices and practices—not only to subsequently point out mistakes but to understand and give reasons for everything I have done when implementing the research in practice and reporting on the dissertation process (Högbacka & Aaltonen 2015). I chose a reflexive approach not to make my research more ‘valid’ or ‘truthful’, but to make visible my construction of information and the complexity of the chosen research aims, ethics, and data-gathering methods when they were implemented in practice (Guillemin & Gillam 2004; Pillow 2003).

Accordingly, my constant self-reflection as a youth researcher guided setting the research questions and answering them (cf. Guillemin & Gillam 2004, 274). My work

history shapes my preunderstandings of how worker-citizenship ideals might determine and possibly delimit vocational graduates' societal belonging and chances to live a decent life through worker-citizenship; being aware of these preunderstandings and the systematic reflection allows me to make my relationship to the subject transparent (Gadamer 1977, 38–39). Understanding and interpreting the responses and thoughts of young adults in my datasets requires scepticism about my interpretations of worker-citizenship and its related norms and ideals; whether worker-citizenship is, in principle, a determinant of their societal belonging; why I feel that studying their understandings of worker-citizenship are important; and what guides my thinking regarding these questions (e.g. Burr 2015, 23; also, Schütz 1962, 59)? From the perspective of the reliability of my research, I feel that openly reflecting on my commitment is important.

Thus, interpreting James Côté's (2014a, 22–23) thinking about the different positions of youth researchers, I share a critical paradigm in youth research and see worker-citizen-related norms and ideals as shaping young adults' opportunities for societal belonging. I see it as my obligation to discuss, e.g. how the young adults in my data actively negotiate and shape the social construct of worker-citizenship and the ideals of the kind of persons they should become. Although young adults become socialised into a society where worker-citizenship may have a hegemonic position as a determiner of their value, meaning, and functioning in society, they also contribute to the discourse on worker-citizenship with their interpretations, visions, and working life stories; produce and maintain that discourse; and possibly question it (Berger & Luckmann 2011, 136–137, 222–223; Burr 2015, 78, 211). Despite trying to be aware of my position as a researcher, I stay aware that my findings are still my interpretations of their visions and experiences, not 'truths' of any kind or due to me overcoming my 'adult-centred' perspective on their understandings (see also Pillow 2003). As a youth researcher, however, considering the participants in my research as active constructors of societal discourses is an important ethical choice; therefore, I think this approach is an important ethical counter-speech to how young adults are often perceived in societal discussions through victim- or risk-speech.

I follow Steven Threadgold (2020, 692) and am aware that research concentrating on worker-citizenship may be at risk of reproducing misunderstandings of youth; these viewpoints might see young adults as merely passive victims of the worker-citizenship norm or their visions completely driven by its related ideals. In line with his thoughts (also, France and Threadgold 2016), I consider these young adults in my research as active constructors of social reality who actively negotiate with society's ideals and can transform and criticise them (see Kallio & Honkatukia 2022).

For instance, Article IV named our approach as ‘deconstructive’. We utilised Jacques Derrida’s (1997) term primarily as a heuristic ethos to demonstrate our approach in which we wanted to delve deeper into our datasets to search for young adults’ worker-citizenship-related critical voices—even though most regarded worker-citizenship as an important and meaningful guarantor of societal belonging (also, Burr 2015, 20–21). Instead of solely seeing young adults’ critical voices in the data as stemming from their labour market position, interpreted as problematic, we regarded that their critical insights may point to noteworthy contradictions between the societal expectations regarding worker-citizenship and their everyday experiences and senses of societal belonging (see also Kallio 2023, 2022; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; cf. e.g. Derrida 1997, 73). In the data analysis, these kinds of critical perspectives and voices may be considered a minor voice in the overall data (e.g., in my studies, for the majority, worker-citizenship was a crucial way and even an obligation to participate in the labour market; see Articles I, II and III), but we believe they might highlight relevant issues concerning the construction of sustainable society (see also Helne & Hirvilammi 2022).

In summary, I am interested in understanding how young vocational students or graduates interpret or experience the hegemonical norm of worker-citizenship and the related ideals of who they should become to bring out their varied understandings and elaborate on the multifaced nature of worker-citizenship in their visions. I think empirically discussing young vocational students’ and graduates’ interpretations and negotiations of worker-citizenship might bring out new perspectives on how worker-citizenship should be understood and challenged in contemporary times. In other words, I am particularly interested in the views of young adults rather than the institutionally maintained examination of worker-citizenship, such as at the curriculum level, because I see that young adults not only reproduce but actively modify the societal structures they are participating in. As far as my analysis is concerned, this means I interpret that young adults participate, with their various social resources, dialogically in maintaining and shaping the ideals; thus, their perceptions of worker-citizenship can bring out the multifaced nature of the ideal and its consequences on their lives.

3.2 Data construction

My approach to young adults participating in the data was to see them as active actors and constructors of society; therefore, I aimed to choose data-gathering methods

that sought to value their participation in the research situation. However, ethical issues are associated with such a participation-valuing approach, which I will discuss in greater detail. I will also reflect on my ethical considerations regarding the use of data collected by another project: ‘Ohjaamoista työelämään’ (from one-stop guidance centres to working life) project. While writing the following subchapters, I have been open with my ethical considerations and the ethical concerns I faced while gathering data. I find this kind of reflexive approach valuable because reflexivity helps me be sensitive to these young vocational students’ and graduates’ experiences during research participation and to acknowledge possible places, situations, and decisions that may be or might have been ethically tense (cf. Guillemin & Gillam 2004). Next, I will more specifically describe the data-gathering methods I chose.

3.2.1 Vocational upper secondary education students

Under the auspices of the ALL-YOUTH project, we arranged workshops for young vocational upper secondary students, which we thought might create a more comfortable environment for their participation and our interaction with them. We had an idea of data collection where young adults could use creativity in envisioning working-life transitions and where their research participation would be more than just answering the researcher’s questions (Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023). Consequently, we had six workshops with two vocational upper secondary education providers¹⁴. The idea for implementing these workshops came from my dissertation, so I was responsible for planning the structure, the themed interview questions, and the workshops’ overall organisation and data construction. However, the workshops were done with other ALL-YOUTH researchers who were co-facilitators¹⁵ in the group interviews. These 1,5- to 2-hour workshops included a crafting task of approximately 45 minutes and group interviews of 30 to 40 minutes. The workshops had two parts, including creative working and the following group interviews, as we

¹⁴ Anonymising these vocational education providers proved difficult. Since some of the biggest vocational education providers are in a large area and cross municipal boundaries, some may be identifiable, e.g. through provincial specifications. Therefore, I wanted to avoid this definition and gave a very general description of the locations of the data collection; however, my attempt was unsuccessful: One can misinterpret the location and even associate it with the wrong education provider. This is an ethical dilemma; although it does not risk the anonymity of the study participants, it may steer some readers’ thinking in the wrong direction.

¹⁵ There were two to five of us present in each workshop; I was present in all workshops, and Mari Kettunen, Jarmo Rinne, Miia Lähde, Tiina Rättilä, and Päivi Honkatukia participated according to their schedules and the number of participants in each workshop.

wanted the research situation to allow the students to have fun and creatively reflect on the maybe vague, stressful, or even scary transition to working life. Thus, I came up with the idea of applying the method of empathy-based stories (MEBS) because it creatively approaches data collection, which I thought would be a good orientation for the group interviews (Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg & Eskola 2019).

In MEBS, the participants receive a framework for a story, of which there are different variations and on which they prepare written or visual output and imagine how the given situation will work out in their thoughts. In the analysis, the researcher compares these stories and examines, e.g. the differences between the narratives the researcher frames (Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg & Eskola 2019, 525–526). Therefore, MEBS is suitable for future-oriented research (see Särkelä & Suoranta 2016); in this case, I divided the participants into small groups of two or three people, where they pondered what a successful transition to working life could be like or what the transition to working life would be like if it failed. Here, it was essential for us in ALL-YOUTH to offer the students alternatives for participating, as many other researchers working with young people have recommended (e.g. Davidson 2017; Lyon & Carabelli 2016). The vocational students could choose how to work from several possibilities: whether they write a story, collect images for a PowerPoint presentation, or craft a collage from magazine clippings to describe their thoughts. All groups chose a crafting task (see Figure 1). In my interpretation, the value of this method is that the young adults could creatively deal with a difficult topic in the third person (Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg & Eskola 2019, 529–530; about creativity, see Wright 2020, 43). This method of applying MEBS, which was developed in these workshops and was part of my dissertation's data construction design, was also utilised later in another ALL-YOUTH's data collection (regarding the extension of compulsory education) as the experiences from these workshops were considered good (see Juusola 2023). Our book discusses the value of participatory methods with ALL-YOUTH researchers (see Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023).



Figure 1. Visual collage about an unsuccessful working life transition, made in autumn 2018 by young vocational students studying electrical engineering and automation technology

Before we started this creative part of the workshop, we introduced ourselves; I explained to the participants what my research is about, why their participation is important, what kind of things they can influence with their participation, and what participating in research simply means. I was primarily responsible for implementing the workshops and instructing the participants on the research and assignment. In the orientation, I verbally stated their rights as research participants, the voluntary and confidential nature of research participation, and the processing of their research data. Following the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK¹⁶, I aimed to ensure the students could choose to participate in the research with sufficient and understandable information: I wanted to open up their rights as research participants to them verbally first (and by utilising MS PowerPoint slides) because internalising the research information is not easy for everyone. I wanted to ensure they could consent based on the best possible understanding of what participating in the research meant, what the purpose of the research was, and if they decided to consent to being contacted after graduation for follow-up interviews, how their contact details are dealt with and stored. My ethical decision was to make their participation in the research as easy as possible; I find it unethical to require young adults to read and adopt lengthy and complex documents, so I aimed to lower their

¹⁶ TENK (2019) The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland. https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf, accessed 13.12.2022.

threshold to participate in research with a verbal introduction and interpersonal discussion, which some scholars note is required so that the research participants can genuinely give informed consent (see Guillemin & Gillam 2004, 272). I also found this critical because some may have prejudices against research participation or negative experiences from interview situations or formal conversations (cf. Pakkanen 2006). After the verbal introduction, young adults had time to concentrate, read about the study, and familiarise with the consent form.

Everyone who participated in the workshops signed a consent form; 58 agreed to participate in the study (and 56 to the interviews, see footnote 12) and were 17- to 25-year-old second- or third-year students in vocational education. My first intention was to interview only students nearing graduation; however, because many of these groups of students were in their work practices, some groups of second-year students also participated in the study in the spring of 2019. Three students did not want to participate at all, and three left in the middle of the workshop; the other two actively participated in the crafting task but had to leave early due to other appointments. However, one seemed immediately distressed by the research situation when she arrived at the class; she came to the workshop late (following our orientation), seemed irritated, and asked if she wanted me to verbally open up the consent form and the research information for her. Although she consented to the research, she went on a break while working on the collage and did not return. The latter example highlights the particular importance of our approach in the orientation, which was meant to make the research situation safe for the participants. The example also stresses the importance of our emphasis on voluntarism and our attempts to make young adults' refusing or discontinuing their participation comfortable (see Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023).

Following the crafting task, the students participated in the group interviews¹⁷. In each group interview (of 3 to 6 participants), their task was to introduce their college work and their thoughts related to a successful or unsuccessful working life transition to other participants in the interview. The intention was that each group would have both: a working pair (or a small group of three participants) whose task would relate to the positive outcomes of working life transition and a pair whose task would relate to negative outcomes. However, in two groups, the students had exchanged the given framework story with each other; in these situations, when there were, e.g. only working pairs with collages on successful transition, the facilitator guided them to also discuss the opposite side of the transition. Each group had an ALL-YOUTH project researcher as a facilitator who consulted with the students more broadly

¹⁷ Metadata is available at <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:att:2a0901af-2c01-4d40-b17d-03e63beac1e7>

about their collage works and their visions and expectations about working life participation, the nearing transition, their good lives after graduation, and their future in general. As noted, the thematic interview questions aimed to only support the group interview situation; the focus was on the reciprocal discussion and the students' views. Three participants did not consent to their interview being recorded, so I took their notes by hand, which was a crucial part of their consent. We agreed that if they dared participate in the study, I would not record the interview; at the end, they were enthusiastic participants in the interview discussion (see also Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023).

All the workshops were arranged during the school day. However, the workshops were not part of any grades, and their participation was voluntary. One of the workshops was arranged with another project, so the students were unfamiliar with us and with the contact person with whom we arranged the workshop. Other student groups and the time and place of the workshop were arranged by the vocational education provider's own contact person. Before each workshop, I emailed the contact teacher/person the starting points of research participation and discussed what kind of study contents the workshop could fit into. Based on my work experience in vocational education, I knew it was easier to have a research-related workshop in an educational institution if the topic was suitable and useful for their studies; however, I stressed at the beginning of the workshop that declining consent has no influence on their studies and that they can interrupt their participation at any level during the workshop (cf. Meriläinen 2021). What the workshop gave the students, as some stated, was the chance to discuss with their peers the nearing working life transition and their expectations and worries relating to it.

Here, it was also important to note that the nearing transition might be a sensitive subject for some students; dealing with it may awaken many kinds of feelings (cf. Daley 2015). Therefore, using the crafting task as an icebreaker for the group interview by allowing them to imagine the transition in the third person and use humour and creativity in their envisioning, we may have made it easier for them to talk about things that might worry them in the forthcoming transition or future labour market participation (see Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde, 2023; cf. Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg and Eskola 2019, 529–530). Earlier studies have supported our observation: These kinds of creative and playful research methods might make their participation easier and more relaxed (e.g. Hower, Smith & Fergie 2019). However, we also noted that creating this kind of atmosphere required much more from us researchers where all the students involved in the workshop were not from the same study groups or none of the instructors or facilitators was already familiar with them

(see Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023; cf. Warr 2005). Thus, observing the atmosphere of the group and the involvement of young adults was a crucial part of the research method; I walked around the class during the crafting part of the workshop and asked whether they needed help or additional guidance and chatted freely with them so they could feel their work was meaningful, their own thoughts important, and their use of humour and playfulness allowed in the situation.

During the group interviews, noting the influence of power relations and the differences in participation was important for the facilitator (e.g. Hollander 2004); by asking specifying questions with a sensitive approach, we aimed to ensure that each participant in the group could participate in the discussion and that the discussion was safe and comfortable for all and allowed multiple ways to participate (cf. Katainen & Heikkilä 2020; Warr 2005, 222). However, as we have collectively, acknowledging or dealing with these issues during the interview is not always easy for a researcher (see Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023; Holland et al. 2010). Participatory methods always require self-reflection from the researcher before, during, and after the data collection (Goessling & Wager 2021). In the analysis, I thus aimed to acknowledge that the group situation may shape young adults' sayings during the interviews: Some may just take the role of observing, some may take the lead on the discussion and in focus group interviews, and some may present sharper opinions they would normally have but comply with the common opinion, e.g. because of peer pressure, humour, or other group dynamics (e.g. Katainen & Heikkilä 2020; Morgan 2011; Hollander 2004). In addition, my research task and, accordingly, the crafting task that was constructed around the meaning of work after graduation may have guided the students to interpret decent life and societal belonging solely through worker-citizenship ideals. I pondered after the workshops if I should have given more space for young adults' imagination in the assignment and whether the frame story excessively guided their thoughts.

3.2.2 Vocational upper secondary education graduates

Along with vocational students' group interviews, I had a dataset that included 32 individual interviews with young vocational education graduates who had post-graduation experiences in the labour market. During the workshops, 22 of the participants consented to be contacted after graduation to participate in the follow-up interviews. However, when I tried to reach them in the autumn of 2020, I noticed the same thing to which Jenni Kallio, Päivi Honkatukia, and Annika Valtonen (2022)

refer in their article regarding follow-up interviews: vocational graduates' lives after graduation were in a phase where their life situations may have been changing quickly; they were starting their adult lives. Moreover, in the autumn of 2020, all this happened during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, I was not surprised that I did not reach most of them; many things may have happened in the lives of these young adults after graduation. I cannot assume that after 0.5–1.5 years, they will still be able or willing to return to my research. Eventually, I managed to reach four of them willing to participate in the follow-up interviews, which were rich in content from the perspective of my research.

I reached two of the 22 emailed: One was enthusiastic to participate; the other politely refused. I reminded the graduates about the study with two other emails, but after receiving no response¹⁸, I pondered other options. Because there was no certainty whether young adults could afford to reply to the text messages, I used WhatsApp and attached a research info sheet and a data-protecting notice¹⁹ to the message. Using WhatsApp, I reached more of the young graduates than by email and saw when they had read the message. I also knew not to further disturb young adults who had read the message but did not respond to my inquiry and could delete their contact details (as they had initially been promised). Using WhatsApp, three more young adults agreed, and three refused²⁰ to be interviewed. Similar kinds of dilemmas of a youth-centred research approach have been noted by Kallio, Honkatukia, and Valtonen (2022): The university's privacy guidelines may be inconsistent with what might be characteristics and a natural way of communication for young people. However, I am aware of WhatsApp's problems with privacy; six months after the interviews, I deleted all content from the app (I had deleted young adults' phone numbers immediately after they refused to participate or after the interviews) and the app from my phone. However, I was left pondering whether any of the young adults might have tried contacting me after deleting the app. Nevertheless, I considered their numbers and data remaining in the application as a bigger risk, although no discussions in the app related to the content of the study.

¹⁸ One-half to one-and-a-half years had passed after graduating from a vocational institute; the inquiry was done amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in August 2020.

¹⁹ The workshops were conducted as part of the ALL-YOUTH research project; the data protection notice of the project also covered the workshops. However, during the workshops, I drafted a specified data protection notice for my research, which I forwarded to those who had permitted to being contacted after graduation. I prepared a data management plan for my research, including the specified data protection notice mentioned. During my doctoral dissertation, the guidelines on data protection have become more specific, meaning my data storage practices require constant reviewing.

²⁰ The reasons for refusing related to being in the army, further studies, changed life situations, or other personal reasons.

I arranged the follow-up interviews in September via Microsoft Teams and considered the best option to conduct the interviews from the perspective of data security in line with the university guidelines. I sent a link to the meeting to the young graduates' email addresses. Getting written consent from them during the Covid-19 pandemic was difficult; thus, as they had expressed their willingness to participate in their email/WhatsApp message, I stressed at the start of each Teams interview the voluntariness of research participation and their other rights and asked if they had any further questions. I verbally requested their consent to record the interview and open the data in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD), if considered, as ethically as possible. All four participants consented, and these discussions are documented in the transcriptions of the interviews. However, the data is not openly stored²¹ despite their consent as FSD does not take datasets under ten interviewees, and they only gave permission regarding FSD.

I encouraged the participants to choose a place for the remotely organised interview that they regarded as comfortable and where they could have peace and privacy to concentrate on the interview. They could leave the camera off if it made their participation more comfortable; one of the interviewees chose not to have their camera on. My ethical premise for these interviews was to appreciate the fact that these four young adults were willing to share their lives after graduation and acknowledge that their stories can include a wide range of significant experiences in their lives, requiring, from me, a sensitive approach to listening (cf. Daley 2015). I understood that I might be the first adult to enquire about their post-graduation lives and thus might find myself in a situation where they ask for advice or consider choices related to their life situations, such as work or education. I considered it my ethical obligation to help these young graduates if I knew where they could get additional assistance. Kallio, Honkatukia, and Valtonen (2022) have also considered this kind of guidance as an ethical issue related to their research on young people.

Furthermore, when reflecting on my chosen way of interviewing, I acknowledge that my style comes from my work experience with young people and my education in youth work; when reading the transcripts, I am very responsive to the issues and ideas young adults raise. As Päivi Honkatukia (2018) noted, this kind of orientation towards young adults can be useful in research with young adults and in creating a confidential conversation atmosphere. My interviewing style may have contributed to the rich and open content of these interviews, but it also brings ethical considerations. All these interviewees were very open about their lives and experiences; in some cases, I pondered, like Kathryn Daley (2015), whether the

²¹ Metadata is available at <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:att:6c28c3dd-fed1-49aa-abf0-6d876ea7ca59>

young person may regret being too open in the interview; however, I considered it unethical to interrupt their storytelling; as one of the interviewees illustratively described, telling and discussing these things with me felt important. However, as Daley (2015, 134) highlights, I wanted to ensure the young person's positive experience by asking at the end of the interview how it felt, what the experience was like, and if they had any messages they wanted to pose through their research participation. I stored their data in an encrypted and anonymised form and removed the passages from the interviews that are irrelevant to the research questions.

A vital ethical principle for my research orientation is the social dimension of conducting research. I agree that the ethical function of research is to develop society from the perspective of future needs (see Bulger 2009). According to the European Commission's (2010) policies regarding research ethics, science is responsible for safeguarding society's well-being since society guarantees science its potential for action. From this premise, I provided each young graduate I interviewed with a summary of the results of my first two articles, which focused on group interviews in which they participated while still studying vocational education. In the interview, I asked what they thought of my interpretations regarding the group interviews and whether they had any critical thoughts associated with them. One interviewee stated that he certainly presented more critical thinking than shows up in the results, or his thinking has noticeably changed since the workshop. His viewpoint inspired me and Jenni Kallio in the Article IV.

However, not including this form of their participation in my articles seemed ethically problematic. Likewise, their ideas during the interview about what they would like to influence regarding my research topic through their research participation was excluded from my articles. I will thus reflect on their thoughts in the discussion section of this dissertation (see footnote 26).

3.2.3 Using data collected by another research project

In addition to the individual interviews I implemented, I also attained interviews from vocational education graduates, which were conducted by the 'Ohjaamoista työelämään' project led by Mirja Määttä (2018, 2019). Next, I will reflect on my ethical considerations relating to data that another researcher collected.

First, when comparing the two datasets and their transcripts, I recognise that mine and Määttä's and others' ways of interviewing young adults differ. My interviewing style was more conversational (as noted), whereas in 'Ohjaamoista

työelämään' data, the interviewer adheres to the questioner role. Nevertheless, since the interview questions are strikingly similar in both datasets and relate to how the young adults' working life paths have progressed and their ideas about work, the labour market, and their future, these datasets complemented each other from the perspective of my research questions (see Appendixes 3 and 4). This leads to the second point: The data from the 'Ohjaamoista työelämään' project covered interviews with 21 vocational graduates, 11 of which were follow-up interviews. Respondents were reached for the first interview through (one-stop) guidance centres²² ('ohjaamo'), meaning the vocational graduates in this dataset were encountered when they needed support concerning their employment.

Where the four interviewees in my dataset had mainly progressed linearly to employment or further studies (except for one who was in seasonal work and doing evening courses at general upper secondary school), young adults reached from the guidance centres had gone through more complex paths after their graduation (they had been unemployed; had employment experiences, e.g. from temporary or part-time work to zero-hour or agency work contracts; had studied for another vocational degree; or continued in further education). Many were also older than my interviewees. However, I feel this diversity of data is interesting from the perspective of my research questions and the data is a good supplement to the individual interviews collected by me (see also Määttä & Westerback 2022; Westerback & Rissanen 2020). As Chapter 3 (see page 51) mentioned at the beginning, these 32 interviews helped me understand the variety of young vocational graduates' labour market positions after graduation and the related 'working life transition'.

Some ethical considerations are involved in analysing research data that other researchers collected. Usually, the most common critique considering these issues relates to the concern that the re-used data does not fit with the new research questions or whether the researcher using someone else's data sufficiently understands the context of the interview that is not transmitted through the transcriptions to make plausible interpretations of it (see Hammersley 2010). Regarding the first, the similarity of interview questions helps compare the datasets, and, as Martyn Hammersley (2010) points out, the research questions tend to take shape as the data is interpreted and as the research process progresses. My research question was formed in Article III in a dialogue between the two datasets (i.e. how vocational graduates negotiate their positions in the labour market). Concerning the

²² One-stop guidance centres are multi-agency service points for people under 30. These centres combine employment, guidance, and social services with a low threshold for young adults. Approximately 70 centres are all over Finland (see Määttä 2019).

second, Hammersley (2010) also highlights that the original data collector makes interpretations and choices in the interview situation and about everything they hear, experience, and feel in the interview situation. Thus, subjective interpretations of the context cannot ever be assumed to be true; the reflection of one's choices and interpretations of the analysis is necessary for the person who re-uses someone's data and for the person who initially collected it. Ultimately, I am not analysing these individual interviews in any more different situations than the group interviews conducted in the workshops; some of these interviews were also facilitated by other (ALL-YOUTH) researchers.

3.3 Analysis methods

My first approach to all my datasets was always data driven. Here, I followed Alfred Schütz's (e.g. 1962, 62) idea that the researcher should strive to understand the meanings the research participants give for common-sense understandings of certain social constructs, in this case, for worker-citizenship ideals in their lives and biographies because these meanings relate to how the participants understand and experience their social lives. I believe this means that before I interpreted young vocational students' and graduates' understandings from the perspective of my theoretical framework, I needed to concentrate on what kind of things they were talking about in the interviews, how they responded to the interview questions regarding how I presented the questions, what seemed to be a relevant topic of discussion from their perspective, and how they talked about working life transitions, work and working life, and their importance in general. After that, I applied a more theory-driven analysis (see Braun & Clarke 2006, 83–84): Depending on the article, I examined their views and working life stories from the perspective of theoretical discussion relating to paid-employment-centred thinking, societal belonging, the capabilities approach, or worker-citizenship ideals.

However, analysing the datasets required reflective dialogue between these approaches. I read the data many times from multiple perspectives and experimented with diverse analysis methods before choosing those I wanted to use. By repeatedly re-reading my datasets, refining my thematisation and coding of it, and writing my observations in the research diary, I strived to make transparent to myself my pre-understanding of the relationship between worker-citizenship and vocational education and its influence on my interpretation; the data often surprised me (Gadamer 1977, 45, 67). With this rather hermeneutical approach, I aimed to

understand the stories and thoughts of young adults in my study as richly as possible and to notice perspectives that might remain unacknowledged under my theoretical underpinnings. However, with my approach, I don't think that even through this kind of reflection and hermeneutic interpretation, bringing out a single type of 'social truth' behind my research participants' understandings is possible. Instead, I can maybe illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of their understandings relating to the worker-citizenship construct in their lives as a kind of truth that might influence their interpretations and their opportunities to belong and live a decent life in Finnish society (see Côté 2014a, 15–16; cf. Berger & Luckmann 2011, 169; Burr 2015, 211).

3.3.1 Vocational upper secondary education students

At the end of the workshops, I had 12 transcribed group interviews and 25 collages to analyse. During analysis, I primarily focused on the group interviews where vocational students explained their thoughts behind their collages: what they had meant with the words and pictures they had chosen for their collages. I noted that concentrating on the collages may overtake their views as their explanations in the interviews differed from my first interpretations based on the mind maps I had made from the collages. Other researchers have also stated that creative and art-based data may thus lead to an overly researcher-centric interpretation (see Lyon & Carabelli 2016; Tilley & Taylor 2018; Honkatukia, Ågren & Lähde 2023). Thus, for me, these collages were more of an orientation to group interviews, which were the main data.

In the analysis, my first approach to the data was inductive; I reviewed and coded the meanings the study participants connected to a successful or unsuccessful working life transition when explaining their collages and what kind of meanings they connected to post-graduation adult life. After that, my analysis was more theory-driven; here, I utilised thematic analysis, which I thought worked well with my rich and varied qualitative data (see Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun 2017). Moreover, I regarded thematic analysis as a flexible tool for analysing the data because it is not linked to any theoretical framework and, for the researcher, allows an interpretive and reflexive approach to the data (Clarke & Braun 2017). With the first inductive reading and coding of the data, it was possible to familiarize myself with the data and specify my research questions; however, in both articles considering this data (I and II), I was after the 'latent themes'; I was examining how or if the ideals of worker-citizenship reproduced in vocational education shape vocational education students' visions and interpretations of post-graduation

participation in the labour market, societal belonging, and a decent life. My analysis method was theory-driven, I examined the meanings young adults gave for these from the perspective of my theoretical understanding in the articles (see Braun & Clarke 2006, 83–84).

My first article, written with Iikka Pietilä and Tiina Rättilä, was part of the 2019 Youth Barometer. The article utilised quantitative barometer data about young adults' orientations on work and entrepreneurship (questions K19, K20, K21, and K22 in the barometer, which we interpreted as reflecting young adults' answers relating to our research questions, see Appendix 2). The mixed methods approach worked for the article because, in addition to implementing quantitative principal component analysis (PCA) on the data by Iikka Pietilä, I could examine quantitative findings more deeply with my group interview data and compare them to our discussions with vocational education students and to their visions about working life, working life participation, and working life transitions. With Iikka, we came up with four sum variables, naming them 1) paid-employment-centred thinking, 2) uncertainty and concern towards working life, 3) orientations identifying working life changes, and 4) orientations that question paid-employment-centred thinking.

The quantitative examination showed that vocational students were more paid-employment-centred in their thinking than other young people who responded to the barometer. I approached the group interview data from these perspectives. I examined if these thoughts of vocational students aligning with a paid-employment-centred mindset were visible in the group interviews: what kind of meanings they gave for their participation in the labour market, what kind of expectations and concerns they related to the working life transition, how they talked about changing working life and their employment opportunities, and if some also questioned paid-employment-centred thinking. In practise, our four sum variables theoretically drove my qualitative analysis. I systematically reviewed the data and compiled codes from each group interview into a table where I could compare different interviews under each analytical research question (relating to the sum variables) and mark similar thoughts with colours. By comparing these observations, I constructed main themes that, in my interpretation, well-represented vocational students' thoughts in the interviews. I also noted exceptions from the group interviews where the thoughts of some vocational students differed from other participants. Finally, I compared my qualitative observations with the responses of vocational students in the barometer questions from which our sum variables were formed.

In the second article, my theoretical approach to data analysis was through the capabilities approach and the concept of societal belonging. I examined how and if

the vocational students in the group interviews connected societal belonging and a decent life (especially on being valued in their social communities and their opportunities to determine their own life) to worker-citizenship. I approached the data similarly as in the first article; first, I coded the data inductively and then collected these codes into a table where I compared the visions of each group interview to others and grouped codes that described the meanings the vocational students gave for self-determination in their imagined post-graduation lives—codes that described the meanings for being appreciated in their social relationships, (working) community or society, and finally, codes that described their understanding of their responsibilities as worker-citizens after their transition. After that, I constructed themes that described, in my interpretation, the varied meanings of, societal acceptance in their visions of post-graduation societal belonging. I drew up a four-field where I sought to describe the diverse meanings of worker-citizenship as a guarantor of societal belonging in vocational students' visions of a 'successful' working life transition.

In the thematic analysis, the data is read back and forth, and interpretation and analysis are done frequently (Braun & Clarke 2006, 86–87): this is exactly what I did. I refined the codes several times, wrote openly about my thoughts on possible main themes and observations, and attempted, through close and repeated readings, to mark and highlight possible differences from the data with which I sought to avoid generalising interpretations of the data. In Articles I and II, while constructing my main themes; I reflected on my interpretations of my theoretical framework and my observations of the data in my research diary as I tried to avoid too simplistic interpretations of the data (cf. Braun & Clarke 2006, 91). In this regard, one could say I sought, through theoretical reflection, to examine the common-sense interpretation of vocational students regarding labour market participation and societal belonging more theoretically to explain and reflect on my scientific choices as part of scientific discussion and by delineating my observations to the research questions and theoretical framework of the particular article (Schütz 1962, 36–39, 62–63). However, I found difficult to analyse and interpret the data as varied as possible; I recognise that the researcher's thinking and interpretation are always guided by one's pre-understanding, in this case of worker-citizenship (see Gadamer 1977, 45, 67); my attention was easily diverted initially to the most critical thoughts of young adults because of my theoretical considerations of the subject (e.g. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a). Therefore, I tried to stay aware of these ethical problems by repeatedly reading the datasets to give space for the varied meanings of worker-

citizenship in the views and experiences of young vocational students and graduates in the datasets (Braun & Clarke 2006, 95).

3.3.2 Vocational upper secondary education graduates

I approached the varied pile of interviews with young vocational graduates by reading the interviews several times consecutively and compiling a summary of each interviewee, including their transitions, diverse working life paths, and working life experiences, during which I regarded their working life experiences as stories told by young adults, and tried to form some kind of an understanding of the choices these vocational graduates made in the post-graduation labour market and of their negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals in those selected situations. I compiled 21 descriptions, 11 including observations of the interviewees' follow-up interviews.

After this part, I refined these descriptions with themes I constructed during analysis using the positioning theory. I consider the positioning theory a good tool to approach the data, as the theory made it possible to observe more systematically the interviewees' negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals. For the theory, the concept of a position equates to the assumption that not everyone has the same opportunities for the rights and obligations that are relevant at that moment, and individuals have vastly different opportunities in society to negotiate their position regarding, in this case, to the worker-citizenship ideals (Harré 2012, 193; also, Van Langenhove 2017, 11). Therefore, as Rom Harré (2012, 194) argues, the theory is interested in how those rights and responsibilities are distributed and how different positions reinforce or possibly change their distribution. According to the theory, the negotiation, e.g. with the worker-citizenship ideals, is best evident in everyday social acts, i.e. in conversations, and, more specifically, in one's personal beliefs, which reflect the individual's perceptions of rights and duties that are narratively visible in how the person describes their everyday experiences in the conversation (Harré 2012; Harré et al. 2009; Davies & Harré 1990).

According to the theory, positioning can be explored from the conversations by looking at three interacting aspects of conversation: 1) the storylines, 2) the positions one takes or places on others in the storylines, and 3) the speech acts that embody negotiations with such positions (e.g. Harré & Van Langenhove 2010, 109; Harré 2012, 196; Davies & Harré 1990). I encoded passages from the interviews in which young adults told about their working life or labour market experiences (storylines),

in which they described their rights and responsibilities relating to worker-citizenship or their occupation and where (and how) they explained their labour market choices in those situations (speech acts). Thus, I compiled a table comparing these encodings between the interviewees.

However, these tables and descriptions were only a tool for me to develop a certain understanding of the multi-faced life situations and experiences of the young adults in both datasets. I was aware that the labour market positionings visible in the datasets are dynamic and changing, i.e. the interviewees negotiate with a wide range of positions in each interview through which they seek to define their place and role in the post-graduation labour market. Moreover, they reproduce and interpret their positions in the labour market from a wide variety of perspectives and working life experiences which I interpret as follows: The position of a worker-citizen is not unequivocal for these study participants but is a multi-interpretive and constantly changing position in the contemporary labour market (e.g. Harré 2012, 193–194). Thus, I did not want to create stereotyping categories about the interviewees and their positionings (like some have done when applying the positioning theory) but examine discursively in Article III how or if my interpretations make their negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals visible and how or if their diverse working life experiences and negotiations with worker-citizenship relate to the insecurities and increased demands that may connect to their choice-making within the contemporary labour market and adulthood.

First, I themed my coding into positionings illustrating the various negotiations the young graduates went through about their labour market positions in their working life stories, e.g. I interpreted them as wanting to be positioned as skilled workers when they stressed their occupational capability as professionals while explaining their labour market choices or negative working life experiences. Second, from the perspective of the debates relating to the worker-citizenship ideals and new adulthood, I examined in Article III why 1) most wanted to be positioned as skilled and taken as serious workers—as ‘professionals’, despite their current position in the labour market, 2) wanted to be employed or in further education, which felt as meaningful (i.e. being interesting and where they could use their occupational competencies), 3) resisted the idea of having ‘failed’ but stressed the responsibilities of the employers or the demanding labour market and 4) some emphasised their right to make employment- and education-related choices supporting their life situations and future-related hopes and plans. In practice, I did this by drafting a table in which I wrote open these positionings, meaning which views and experiences of young graduates related (or did not relate) to the worker-citizenship

ideals and the uncertainties that have been problematised in the new adulthood debate. Thus, I wanted to make visible the diverse conversations young adults had in their working life stories and their multiple views on these positionings.

The experiences of the graduates significantly differed in the labour market at the time of their interview: some were employed; some were in education; some had more work experience, while others had less; and some had experienced long-term unemployment and uncertainties in the labour market. However, I interpret that they were nonetheless negotiating quite similar issues which, according to my interpretation, were attached to the worker-citizenship ideals they had adopted (or criticised) and to their very diverse possibilities to negotiate with the ideal in the current labour market and new adulthood. Furthermore, although my data contained mostly young adults with non-linear transitions to the labour market, I think the data made it possible to illustrate the difficulties and negotiations vocational graduates may have to undergo about their value in the labour market if they encounter the problems discussed in youth studies regarding the concept of new adulthood.

We also applied the positioning theory in Article IV with Jenni Kallio and especially the theory's narrative interpretation. We aimed to concentrate on the critical voices that do not necessarily receive enough space in research but which we thought might be important ways to demonstrate points that require rethinking in society. We regarded the interviews as small stories told by young adults in our datasets and interpreted that with their labour market narratives, they are interactively constructing their understanding of themselves and others concerning the normative discourses in society, in our case, the worker-citizenship ideal (Bamberg 2004). In practice, we extracted passages from our datasets (in my case, group interviews with vocational students and individual interviews with vocational graduates) where our interviewees brought critical insights towards worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals.

We compiled these interview excerpts in the same file, from which we first divided them into two categories: 1) where their stories related to their struggle to be/remain outside work and education and their criticisms towards this position (= 'outside worker-citizenship') and 2) where they described participation that differed from worker-citizenship and thus highlighted the narrowness of the associated ideal (= 'beyond worker-citizenship'). After that, we approached these passages theoretically and categorised each quote with Helne and Hirvilammi's (2017) dimensions of sustainable well-being (having, loving, being, doing). We divided this analysis work in such a way that we first read our respective citations, after which we read and complemented each other's observations. Finally, one took responsibility

for writing on the positions related to being outside worker-citizenship (e.g., being unemployed) and the other for those that related to position beyond the worker-citizenship (participating in society beyond paid work). Before doing the analysis, we discussed and reflected on how we understood the critical voices to achieve a shared understanding, at least at some level, of the phenomenon we are studying and being able to study it together (as discussed regarding social constructionism, Burr 2015; Berger & Luckmann 2011). While doing the analysis, we read and edited each other's interpretations and challenged each other's thoughts. This was an important part of the analysis and one of the most important learning experiences during my dissertation. Reflecting on one's observations intensively with another researcher felt important; this analysis process also brought to the fore how inspiring article writing can be and how academic dialogue can be the driving force and purpose of research.

4 RESULTS

Next, I will introduce the main findings of my four articles. As noted, I wrote two independently (Articles II and III) and two with other ALL-YOUTH researchers (Articles I and IV). In my first article, written with Iikka Pietilä and Tiina Rättilä, I am the contributing and first author and oversaw the theoretical framework, the qualitative analysis, and the overall reflection of the findings from the perspective of the article's theoretical considerations. The fourth article was written with Jenni Kallio on an equal basis: we each had our own datasets, discussed and shaped the theoretical frame together, and had many intensive debates and discussions about the analysis, findings, and conclusions.

Next, I will present the findings of each article. I will summarise the results in a way that illustrates how the results form a coherent story and the development of my thinking during the dissertation process. After that, I discuss about my findings.

4.1 Vocational students' trust in worker-citizenship

The article examined young vocational education students' perceptions of work and working life utilising quantitative Finnish Youth Barometer 2019 data and qualitative group interviews collected by the ALL-YOUTH project. We explored how their perceptions about working life differed from other young people participating in the Finnish Youth Barometer and how these perceptions aligned with or questioned the 'paid-employment-centred thinking' that we interpreted as being maintained in vocational education and Finnish society. By separating the institutional and cultural sides of paid-employment-centred thinking, we aimed to demonstrate the bipartite nature of worker-citizenship (or labour market citizenship, as used in the article), connecting not only to the institutional pressures on young people to participate in the labour market as active employees and taxpayers but to the cultural appreciation of work maintained through vocational education.

Our interpretation of paid-employment-centred thinking was based on Andre Gorz's (1999) critique of wage-based society and its problems confronting societal changes. As a background for the article, we regarded that paid-employment-centred

thinking in society, i.e. the worker-citizenship ideal, has two dimensions: institutional and cultural. We believe the institutional dimension of paid-employment-centred thinking related to neoliberal efforts in helping young people and young adults in society become responsible through paid employment and to an increasing demand placed on young adults to be active and entrepreneurial in the labour market (France 2016; Kelly 2001). We claimed this kind of institutional paid-employment-centred thinking is present also in vocational education, which emphasises, especially after its reform in 2018, its students' adult-like responsibilities, such as self-governance and their prompt attachment to working life (Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019; Souto 2014). Second, we related the cultural dimension of paid-employment-centred thinking to the societal appreciation of work: We shared Weber's (2001) classical idea that Western society places a high moral value on work and regarded that contemporary young people might have learned to thus highly value work (Pyöriä & Ojala 2016b) and that this appreciation of work might be especially visible in the culture of vocational upper secondary education (e.g. Käyhkö 2006, 2008; Tolonen 2008a). Utilising these two sides of paid-employment-centred thinking, we asked (sub-question I of this dissertation) how the vocational students' thoughts on work and working life related to paid-employment-centred thinking, how their thoughts differed from other Finnish Youth Barometer respondents, and whether we could find any kind of criticism from the datasets that question paid-employment-centred thinking, i.e. the norms and ideals of worker-citizenship.

As noted, we used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative data) to answer these questions. First, Iikka performed a principal component analysis (PCA) for the quantitative data. For the PCA, we selected questions from the Youth Barometer that best embodied the dimensions of paid-employment-centred thinking as we had defined it. As noted, PCA produced four latent constructs (sum variables) formed through statistical tests: 1. paid-employment-centred thinking, 2. uncertainty and concern towards working life, 3. orientations identifying working life changes, and 4. orientations questioning paid-employment-centred thinking. Iikka tested the differences between the categories 'Studying at vocational education' (n=195) and 'Not studying at a vocational education' (n=1711) using the Mann–Whitney U-test and learned that vocational students' thoughts regarding paid-employment-centred-thinking (sum variable 1) differed significantly from others in the Youth Barometer.

Second, we wanted to look more deeply at this finding through qualitative analysis. I was responsible for the qualitative analysis and used the four sum variables in a theory-driven thematic analysis. I looked at how the vocational education students in our workshops (58 participants, 12 group interviews) reproduced or

challenged the paid-employment-centred thinking in the group interviews, how they expressed concerns related to working life, or how their thoughts connected to the changing working life. I compared my qualitative observations with the Youth Barometer data and the distribution of vocational education students' responses in the barometer to other respondents' answers.

Our main finding was that vocational education students had adopted the institutional and cultural sides of paid-employment-centred thinking and were more orientated towards this kind of worker-citizenship ideal than other young people in the Youth Barometer. The quantitative and qualitative datasets demonstrated how, in many of their thoughts, the responsibility regarding success in labour is (and should be) on the shoulders of the individual (cf. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and how they had adopted the ideal of an active and self-directed worker-citizen in vocational education (e.g. Käyhkö 2006; Souto 2014). This belief was reflected in the quantitative responses, where vocational students seemed more adamant about their responsibilities as worker-citizens than other respondents, as in the qualitative group interviews conducted in the workshops. For example, about 64% of vocational students agreed that living on social security is too easy, while 52% of other respondents agreed. In qualitative interviews, paid-employment-centred thinking was visible in their understanding of paid work as one's moral responsibility and an important way of maintaining society. Moreover, from a cultural perspective, participants in the group interviews visualised paid work as a guarantor pursuing and planning their independent and meaningful lives. We interpreted that these findings echoed previous research on young vocational students (see Käyhkö 2006, 2008; Tolonen 2008a; Maunu 2018).

We also discussed the reverse side of their paid-employment-centred thinking: According to quantitative responses, like other respondents, one in three vocational students expressed concerns about their future coping in the labour market. These concerns were also evident in qualitative responses, where their concerns about the nearing working life transition related to the work community, their increased responsibilities as skilled workers after graduation, and the balance of work and leisure. Nevertheless, we noted that most vocational students were optimistic about their working life chances in their occupational field and saw unemployment only as a temporary stage in attaching to post-graduation working life. We interpreted that they seemed to trust the worker-citizenship and that the optimism of their chances in the labour market might be due to paid-employment-centred thinking—of the contemporary worker-citizenship ideal—that emphasises individual coping and responsibility (in accordance with Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Kelly 2001). We

interpreted that previous studies (e.g. Franceschelli & Keating 2018) supported our findings. Although our data brought out young vocational students' concerns regarding the future, in the qualitative data, the vast majority felt confident in their employment prospects and performance in the labour market.

Our main result was that these findings in our article demonstrated the importance of worker-citizenship for young vocational students; they value paid employment and have embraced their responsibility as worker-citizens through general institutional paid-employment-centred thinking and the cultural side of it more adamantly than other respondents in the youth barometer. We interpreted that for most vocational students, fulfilling their labour market-related responsibilities to society was most important for the individual; these young vocational students in our datasets trusted that they could do so through their vocational education. Moreover, while the cultural appreciation of work among vocational students is strong, they also want meaningful work where they can have influence, use their skills, and enjoy a flexible work-life balance. In summary, we concluded that their expectations and hopes relating to their working life transition and their optimism towards their post-graduation chances describe well the importance of worker-citizenship for these young vocational students and vocational education's role in their worker-citizenship-related perceptions.

4.2 Worker-citizenship as an enabler of societal belonging

The second article aimed to better understand the importance of worker-citizenship for young vocational students and thus re-examined the group interviews. In other words, I made a new qualitative theme analysis to the group interview data and explored their visions of post-graduation societal belonging, particularly the worker-citizenship ideal's visibility on these visions. I wanted to understand how the ideal may shape their understanding of their responsibilities and chances in the post-graduation labour market. My interest was especially based on my observations during the first article, according to which, in their understanding, a decent life was related to finding a paid job.

Theoretically, I leaned on May's (2013, 2011) understanding of (societal) belonging and Nussbaum's (2013) understanding of a decent life and human dignity. I was interested in societal belonging as a constantly changing process where these young vocational students negotiate the terms and experiences of their societal belonging while interacting with their peers and family, the vocational education's

ideals and, in general, the surrounding society and its ‘politics of belonging’ (see May 2013, 2011; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davies 2006). From these respects, I applied Nussbaum’s (2013) capabilities approach, more specifically, her understanding of how the capabilities of practical reason (to be oneself and determine one’s life) and affiliation (to feel valued in one’s community) constitute a basis for one’s opportunity to live a decent life. With the capabilities approach, I thought I could examine the societal side of belonging: vocational education’s responsibilities in guaranteeing its students a sense of being a valuable member of society after graduation. In Article II, I asked (sub-question II of this dissertation) how the experience of societal belonging is constructed in the visions of young vocational students’ and how the worker-citizenship ideal, sustained by vocational education, may help or hinder their opportunities for societal belonging.

I aimed to answer these questions with the qualitative data I used in the previous article. That means my empirical data contained the same 12 group interviews collected from 58 vocational students from two vocational education providers. During the workshops, they participated in group interviews where we asked them about their visions regarding a decent life, working life, labour market participation, and future. I analysed the data by applying theme analysis: I made a theory-driven analysis and searched from the data how they described the meaning of post-graduation social relationships and communities, their visions of their personal decent life regarding Nussbaum’s capabilities of affiliation and practical reason, and their expectations that related to their societal belonging after transitioning to the working life. In other words, my thematisation formed around 1) the meanings they associated with societal belonging, 2) Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, and 3) the ‘politics of belonging’, how or if they connected worker-citizenship, as well as the related responsibilities, to their understandings of post-graduation societal belonging.

This article came up with two dimensions through which young vocational students in the dataset described their post-graduation societal belonging: self-acceptance and societal acceptance. I divided these into those meanings related to working life and those constructed outside the working life (see Figure 2).

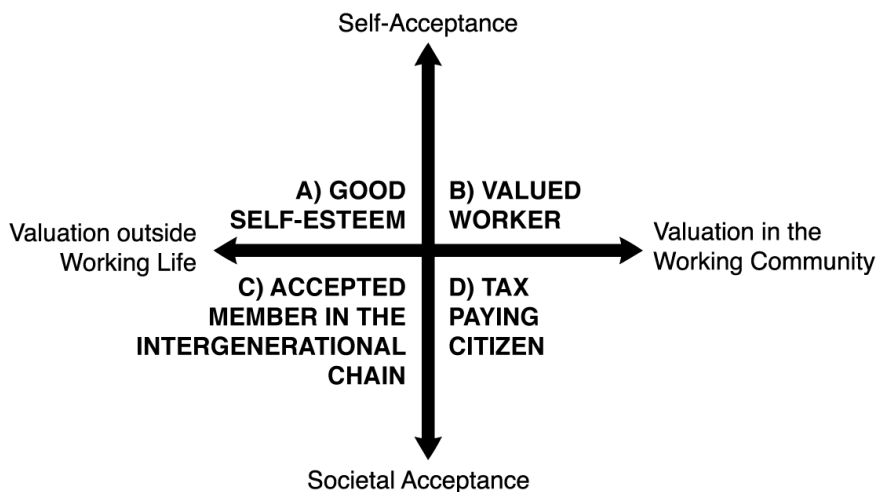


Figure 2. The dimensions of societal belonging (Article II)

First, I discovered that young vocational students want to feel like valued workers. They saw a successful transition as being welcomed into their work community and encountered as seriously taken professionals but supported as new graduates. Second, they regarded that ‘self-esteem’²³—their self-acceptance—was constructed around how they could determine their life after graduation and realise their working life transition-related expectations, hopes, and plans; to get a job and salary, have meaningful leisure time with friends, gain independence, and start their own life. Here, I interpreted that Nussbaum’s (2013) affiliation and practical reason are connected; from a self-acceptance perspective, I interpreted that it is important for vocational students to feel part of their occupational community and maintain their

²³ I used ‘self-esteem’ mainly as a heuristic concept, which vocational students mentioned in the empirical data; in here, self-esteem is used similarly to self-confidence when describing how e.g. ‘failing’ in the working life transition might feel like. I use ‘self-esteem’ to describe how self-acceptance is part of societal belonging, how a young person interprets how their life should proceed after transition, what kind of adulthood they should pursue, how their hopes and possibilities relate to these expectations (see May 2013, 83–85), and how they succeed in realising the kind of worker-citizen selves they dream of or assume they should realise (e.g. Farrugia 2019a).

social relationships with their friends and peers while having the opportunity to build independence after graduation.

From a societal acceptance perspective, I learned meanings related to being a member of the intergenerational chain and, conversely, member of society as a taxpayer. With the first, I illustrated how many described their hope to proceed in their working life transition as their parents or other adults expected and at the same pace as their peers. In other words, it was important for them to find a job and start their adult life as expected and as they supposed all their classmates and friends would after graduating from vocational education. The other observation related to how many described the importance of being a good taxpayer, thus fulfilling their societal responsibilities. Here, align with May's (2011, 2013) understanding of how the sense of belonging is constructed, I interpreted that in vocational students' visions, their sense of societal belonging relates to other people's acceptance, and to the worker-citizenship ideal reproduced through vocational education.

As a main result, this article illustrated the varied and intertwined sides of post-graduation societal belonging for young vocational students from the perspective of worker-citizenship. In their visions, worker-citizenship seemed to shape an important 'politics of belonging' behind their experience of being a valued member of society in the eyes of their peers, parents, and others—and in their own eyes. Moreover, I illustrated the strong link in their visions between the working life transition and their aspired adulthood. They believed that departing from the normative track of adulthood was associated with failure, and getting a paid job after graduation was associated with an opportunity to start an independent life (including a chance for meaningful leisure time with friends). Therefore, I argued in the article that by following Nussbaum's (2013) argumentation regarding the capabilities approach, vocational education's responsibility towards its graduates relates not only to their chances of attaining paid employment but to the needs to acknowledge these varied ways in which vocational students construct their visions of post-graduation societal belonging through the worker-citizenship ideal.

4.3 The desires and inequalities shaping worker-citizenship

Where Articles I and II focused on the views of young vocational students, Article III concentrated on examining the labour market experiences of young vocational education graduates, i.e. their post-graduation worker-citizenship. More specifically, I looked at how young vocational graduates understand their positions in the

contemporary labour market and how they negotiate with the terms of the changed working life. Article III was specifically inspired by the concept of new adulthood linked to the Australian youth research debate, which argues that because of the current societal insecurities, there might not be a secure adulthood anymore into which young adults can transition (e.g. Wyn 2020; Cuervo & Wyn 2016; Woodman & Wyn 2015; Dwyer & Wyn 2001). This debate interested me, because in my previous articles, it seemed that despite the current conditions in the labour market, young adults might learn to trust worker-citizenship as enabling their ascent into their good adult lives.

My research findings in the previous two articles showed that vocational students highly value and rely on worker-citizenship and greatly count on it regarding their independence, adulthood, and societal belonging. This article intended to look at how the working life experiences of vocational graduates are displayed considering these expectations. As a theoretical background, I pondered the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals concerning labour market change and changed adulthood within the ‘new adulthood’ framework. While vocational education’s purpose is constructed around the employers, worker-citizenship, and equipping its students with the occupational skills and attitudes needed in the labour market (e.g. Billett 2014; Colley et al. 2003), as the theoretical framework elaborated, the labour market that students face after graduation demands these graduates stay adaptable and flexible to its changing needs, can navigate within its insecurities, and can tolerate the unpredictability of their working life paths (e.g. Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999; Sennett 1998; Beck 1992). Accordingly, I found the debate on new adulthood within youth studies as inspiring because it is constructed around an argument about how the adulthood young adults face after graduation may not be as predictable as for earlier generations (Woodman & Wyn 2015): Their possibilities to plan their lives further—e.g. get a secure job, buy a house, start a family—are vaguer, placing many more pressures on young adults because simultaneously, they are institutionally expected to fulfil their responsibilities as worker-citizens similarly as everyone else has done before (e.g. Wyn 2020; Dwyer & Wyn 2001).

Thus, I intended to examine (sub-question III of this dissertation) how young vocational education graduates negotiate their labour market positions—their worker-citizenship—within this changed adulthood. As noted, the data contained 32 interviews, including 11 follow-up interviews with young adults who had graduated from vocational education. With the data, I could also examine how, in some cases, young graduates’ understanding of their labour market positioning might change over time. By applying the positioning theory, I searched points from vocational

graduates' working life stories where they described their rights or duties as worker-citizens or their negative or positive working life experiences and how they verbally explained their choices regarding these rights and duties to see if they reproduced or challenged the discourses connecting to the worker-citizenship ideals. By that, I could examine if their experiences had any connections to the challenges and pressures described in the 'new adulthood' debate.

For many vocational graduates, positioning themselves as responsible and skilled workers was important. Regardless of their negative working life experiences or changing their occupational field, many described their knowledge in their field and their decency as worker-citizens. Leaning on previous research (e.g. Leeman & Volman 2021; Farrugia 2019a; Colley et al. 2003; Skeggs 1997), I interpreted that this might be because they have learned to evaluate their value through their success in the labour market and sought working life participation and their dedication to their occupational field as their ethical responsibility. Second, aligning with Helen Cahill and Carmen Leccardi's (2020) arguments, I interpreted that stressing their rights to be recognised as skilled workers in the interviews might be their coping strategy against negative working life experiences and the insecure labour market in new adulthood. Some of the interviewees, in their stories, faced many kinds of injustices and challenges in the labour market. They criticised the exaggerated demands of the employers and the employment services and their lack of understanding the realities of the modern labour market. They described their mistreatment and issues in working life, the situations that made them change their occupational field, and their difficulties finding work and planning their lives further. I believe their purpose was to convey that the complexities of working life participation were unattributable to them; they knew how to act in the labour market but the problem was in the new adulthood.

Third, because of these two findings, I interpreted that in the contemporary labour market, young adults continuously negotiate and shape their worker-citizenship. However, I also noted how their chances to shape their worker-citizenship towards their aspired direction is not an easy task, while some can rely on their entrepreneurial mindset to eventually achieve the position of worker-citizen that aligns with their life plans; for others, it is much more complicated to negotiate on worker-citizenship (cf. Farrugia 2019a). According to the debate on new adulthood, this inequality is one characteristic feature of new adulthood (e.g. Woodman & Wyn 2015). Despite that, for many of the interviewees, pursuing one's kind of worker-citizenship was a great aspiration to find something to do they are good at (per their vocational qualification) that fits their life situation; can bring

security to their lives; fair treatment; and appreciation as skilled (young) workers (cf. Farrugia 2019b, 1094–1095). Thus, I interpreted that for these reasons, some were confused or even frustrated when they did not get to implement such worker-citizenship (as promised) or when they felt they were guided towards worker-citizenship that was not aligned with their competencies, hopes, and needs.

As the main result, I concluded by claiming that vocational graduates shape their worker-citizenship within a quite contradictory adulthood. The worker-citizenship ideals reproduced in vocational education do not sufficiently acknowledge the shaping young adults are forced to endure regarding their worker-citizenship after graduation. For some of the vocational graduates, their education has been unable to redeem its promises of worker-citizenship in their occupational field and, through it, the promises of adulthood (as the vocational students aspired to in Articles I and II). Therefore, the article argues that to build sustainable vocational education and society, vocational education should pay more attention to these changed conditions of adulthood affecting the opportunities of vocational graduates in shaping their worker-citizenship towards their desired direction.

4.4 Value beyond worker-citizenship

Jenni Kallio and I had been sharing our thoughts regarding the meaning of work for young adults from the perspective of their experiences of appreciation and societal belonging in Finnish society. In both our datasets, some young adults recounted problems and injustices related to their participation in the labour market; they even had a tense tone or described their concerns that related to their coping and well-being in the labour market (regarding Jenni's datasets, see Kallio 2023, 2022; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022). We pondered whether it would be possible to look under the surface at these thoughts we interpreted as a criticism of the worker-citizenship ideal. Our earlier articles had already discussed how vital paid employment is for young adults to adhere to society and how they rely on their worker-citizenship as a gateway to their desired adulthood (Articles I, II and III; Honkatukia et al. 2020). However, from the perspective of societal change and building a sustainable society, we believed that concentrating on these critical voices, which we referred to as 'transformative voices', would be worthwhile.

In the article, our leading idea was that the education and employment policies' ways of narrowly understanding young adults' citizenship through being 'inside' or

‘outside’ worker-citizenship does not acknowledge their societal belonging and the various ways they participate in society that may support their overall well-being in society (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021; Cuervo & Wyn 2016). As in my previous studies, we saw it as problematic if young adults understand their worth in society merely through their success in working life (Farrugia 2021a). However, this article also acknowledged that young adults may have many critical thoughts on how worker-citizenship should be developed, such as regarding sustainability (e.g. Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). We were also interested in examining their experiences of societal belonging and participation beyond worker-citizenship—on its fringes or despite it—which are not acknowledged by the normative understanding and dichotomy of worker-citizenship.

The article utilised the theory of ‘sustainable well-being’ by Tuula Helne and Tuuli Hirvilammi (e.g. 2021, 2017, 2015), which they developed based on Erik Allardt’s (1976) needs-based well-being theory. In their understanding, the basic needs of having, loving, being and doing relatively construct the basis for sustainable well-being, and these needs should be in balance with nature and the surrounding social environment. Therefore, the article examined (sub-question IV of this dissertation) what kind of thoughts young adults had in our data about their societal belonging and participation, how they related to the norms and ideals of worker-citizenship, and how their thoughts appeared concerning the theory of sustainable well-being. This article merged our datasets: the data I had used in my previous articles, i.e. from young vocational students participating in my workshops (58) and individual interviews of vocational graduates (32) and Jenni’s data containing life course interviews with young adults becoming independent (36). Initially, we reviewed our own datasets from the perspective of our research questions, after which we started compiling passages from our datasets where interviewees presented ideas that deviated from or criticised the norm of worker-citizenship into a common anonymised document. We examined their interviews as stories of their participation in society through which they negotiate with the social and hegemonic narrative of worker-citizenship (Bamberg 2004). Methodologically, we had a theory-driven approach to data. Initially, we searched the data passages describing young adults’ thoughts or experiences of being ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ the labour market. Then we coded these passages using Helne and Hirvilammi’s understanding of basic needs (having, loving, being, doing).

We learned that some young adults’ stories had strong critical views against the worker-citizen narrative when young adults were deemed ‘outside’ the labour market. These young adults felt they were left outside the worker-citizenship no matter what

they tried and that there were many reasons for their obstacles in meeting the worker-citizen's ideal: they felt their personalities, life situations, or working life experiences did not fit the ideal. In their insights, working life was unjust, burdensome, and stressful. **As a main result we suggested that their critical thoughts show how the labour market does not meet their well-being, life situations and needs; they do not want to lose their friendships, free time, and well-being (being and loving) for a labour market where they are not valued or encountered as they are (being).**

We discovered that the young adults in our datasets wanted to belong to and participate in the labour market and society as who they are, demanding a society and labour market more flexible and open to their various needs and hopes. Balancing their lives and well-being with their working lives was important for them; they called for more alternatives for their worker-citizenship and participation in society. Thus, we found it important that some described their participation in society as not linked to worker-citizenship but emerged through voluntary work and hobbies, supporting the doing, loving, and being sides of their well-being.

We concluded by claiming these critical views of young adults—their transformative voices—from outside and beyond worker-citizenship should be considered in various social, employment, and educational institutions when evaluating the sustainability of the labour market and society. According to Weeks' (2011) thinking, we interpreted that these voices might reveal a need to re-evaluate the relationship between work and citizenship. Accordingly, we proposed that instead of labour-market-based citizenship, young adults' citizenship should be understood through their lived well-being, how they experience that well-being in their everyday lives, and when they negotiate their societal belonging.

5 DISCUSSION

My findings suggest that while young people studying vocational education may learn to rely on worker-citizenship and their vocational qualifications and working life skills as a way to achieve their aspired adult life, for young vocational education graduates, worker-citizenship is a complex position involving negotiations about their value, life plans, and adulthood. Here, it would be tempting to interpret these young vocational students' visions as signs of their '*epistemological fallacy*' in line with Furlong's and Cartmel's (2007) classical argument. They use this concept to describe how, because of the individualisation ethos in current society, young adults, like vocational students in my data, learn to trust their chances in the labour market while ignoring, e.g. the structural inequalities that might hinder their possibilities; thus, they learn to blame themselves for their struggle to fulfil societal expectations. From the perspective of vocational graduates, an example of such an epistemological fallacy could be how many stressed in the interviews their own competencies, activities, and ambitions in implementing worker-citizenship in their occupational field despite the complexities they had faced. Another example could be how some were frustrated or ashamed of their struggles due to their trust in their competencies.

Researchers (see, e.g. Franceschelli & Keating 2018) have also discussed this kind of 'optimism' under the concepts of '*cruel optimism*' (see Berlant 2006) and '*cognitive dissonance*' (see Festinger 1985). Cruel optimism, for instance, describes how a young person may embrace the current post-Fordist promises that by staying entrepreneurial, flexible, and positive enough, they can attain worker-citizenship and an independently good life while their efforts to pursue this ideal might damage their well-being (Brunila, Vainio, Toiviainen 2021; Berlant 2006, 21; also, Honkatukia & Lähde 2021). Similarly, cognitive dissonance describes one's conduct in conflicts and in cases where individuals' self-perception or beliefs about their possibilities may be at risk of conflicting with reality or new information (Festinger 1985). Young adults may avoid conflicts that challenge their perceptions about themselves as worker-citizens by consciously bypassing the labour market realities or adapting them to their thinking in a way that is advantageous for them (they have good job-seeking skills and know how to navigate within the labour market regardless of the realities),

so they maintain the consonance of their beliefs and future plans (also, Franceschelli & Keating 2018).

These interpretations repeat a similar story as the ‘epistemological fallacy’. They regard the ‘dissonance’ and contradictions, e.g. in worker-citizenship, as constructed solely within young adults’ individual perceptions, whereas I regard them as socially constructed, and young adults realistically point to contradictions and create realistic strategies through which they navigate within the contradictions (see France & Threadgold 2016). Nevertheless, I do not disagree with these viewpoints, as I think they demonstrate well how the worker-citizenship-related ideals may govern young adults’ perceptions and lives in contemporary society (e.g. Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022; Brunila, Vainio, Toiviainen 2021; Ikonen & Nikunen 2019; Franceschelli & Keating 2018; Pimlott-Wilson 2017; Burrows 2013).

However, in my interpretation, young vocational students’ and graduates’ negotiations with the worker-citizenship-related ideals are more complex than the above viewpoints suggest. Furthermore, based on my empirical findings, I agree with Threadgold (2020, 690; see also France and Threadgold 2016; Billett 2006b, 64) that their ‘false consciousness’ because of the false promises of their education or the prevailing ‘entrepreneurial’ mindset (see Kelly 2006) is only one side of the story. In my interpretation, many of the young adults in my study were also quite aware of the current working life realities and were active in their negotiations with the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals (also, Honkatukia & Lähde 2021). As is visible, e.g. in Article IV, some were critical towards the institutional expectations based on the contemporary post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideal, which could be considered a noteworthy counter-speech against the ideal (also, Kallio & Honkatukia 2022). However, my intention is not to romanticise their views but to make visible how their negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals shape their worker-citizenship in practice (see Billett 2006a, 42; 2006b) and how actively shaping worker-citizenship is actually mundane for them within current adulthood. Adapting and responding to the labour market expectations requires resources and strategies from young adults—as well as the negotiations they are conducting on their positions as worker-citizens (also, Cahill & Leccardi 2020).

This chapter will demonstrate how it is not their epistemological fallacy as worker-citizens but the *epistemological dissonance* relating to their negotiations on worker-citizenship that better describes my findings. I believe this kind of complex, continuous, and often contradictory negotiation of who they are (i.e. their interpretations of their competencies or decency as worker-citizens), who they want to be (i.e. their worker-citizenship-related hopes and life plans), who they should be

(i.e. their interpretations of worker-citizenship ideals), and who they can be (i.e. their labour market experiences) as worker-citizens may be part of young vocational graduates' post-graduation adult lives, despite their position in the labour market (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a; Kelly 2013, 93; also, Billett 2006b). Moreover, through their vocational education, young vocational students might adopt a certain type 'vocational' ideal of what kind of proper worker-citizens they should be from the perspective of societal belonging, as can be interpreted from Articles I and II (cf. Leeman & Volman 2021; Colley et al. 2003; Skeggs 1997, 2004, 77, 178), which can make their negotiations within the contemporary post-Fordist labour market even more complex, as can be interpreted from Articles III and IV. In this context, of course, the prospects for employment in their occupational field vary, including on what kind of work is available locally or what kind of work and competencies are needed at that time and moment, as the theoretical framework (see Billett 2006a; e.g. Buchs & Helbling 2016; Maliranta, Nurmi & Virtanen 2010, 533) discussed. However, I will discuss how I agree with other scholars (e.g. Cahill & Leccardi 2020; Leccardi 2014; also, Beck 1992, 135; cf. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a) on how this kind of dissonance of worker-citizenship, as I name it, might still be an unavoidable part of young vocational graduates' adult lives. I believe the prevailing conditions of worker-citizenship and adulthood are fertile ground for 'epistemological dissonance' when young vocational students and graduates construct and negotiate their worker-citizenship; meaning when they balance their experiences, the worker-citizenship-related ideals, the life plans they relate to their worker-citizen selves, and their sense of societal belonging (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a).

From these starting points, I will first discuss this 'epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship' regarding how young vocational students and graduates negotiate with the worker-citizenship ideals and understand and position themselves as worker-citizens within the contemporary labour market (RQ1) from three perspectives: 1) young vocational students' and graduates' negotiation between their 'vocational' worker-citizen selves and the realities of the labour market, 2) their negotiation between their worker-citizen selves and the worker-citizenship ideals, and 3) their negotiation between their rights as worker-citizens and the demands in the labour market. In these subchapters, I reflect on the concept through the results of my dissertation articles (which answered sub-questions I–IV) and earlier research. After that, I will reflect on how these negotiations appear concerning society's responsibility to sustainably guarantee them the preconditions for societal belonging (RQ2) by shaping recommendations for policies relating to vocational education and young adults' employment services. When shaping these recommendations, I utilise

Nussbaum's (2013) understanding of a 'life worthy of human dignity', the theorisations on societal belonging, and the debates on sustainability.

5.1 The epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship

I use the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship to describe the constantly shaping negotiation young adults may have to engage in after graduating from vocational upper secondary education and when they are balancing their hopes, life situations, and working life experiences with the conflicting labour market demands, i.e. their value and meaning as worker-citizens with the worker-citizenship-related ideals. Unlike in epistemological fallacy, as Furlong and Cartmel (2007) define, when trusting (while studying vocational education) or stressing (when already within the labour market) their competencies, decency, and activity as worker-citizens and the chances of their vocational qualifications in the labour market, I claim that young adults are not unaware of the labour market realities but are constructing negotiation strategies with the worker-citizenship ideals within the labour market (also, Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022, 839; Honkatukia & Lähde 2021, 1207). In this context, the individualisation claim, e.g. of Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002), is not only limited to how vocational graduates might learn to interpret their possible 'failing' as worker-citizens as their own fault; rather, I believe they engage in much more complex negotiations on how they see themselves and their chances as worker-citizens within the contemporary labour market.

Here, I lean on Woodman and Wyn (2015, 38) when interpreting that individualisation is visible in these young adults' visions and working life stories as a personal attempt or requirement to 'hold together' their worker-citizenship, i.e. their sense of themselves as being taken seriously as proper worker-citizens and the preconditions for their life planning. I also lean on the thinking of Cahill and Leccardi (2020; see also Leccardi 2014) in my interpretation that this epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is part of their mundane lives where they constantly renegotiate their labour market-related choices according to their changing life situations, work experiences, or the labour market's demands (such as those of the employment services or, e.g. the availability of jobs in their field) and thus may continuously shape their worker-citizenship while 'on the run'.

5.1.1 The worker-citizen self and labour market realities

In this context, these young vocational education students and graduates negotiate between their worker-citizen selves and the realities of the labour market. As noted, my findings demonstrate how young vocational students and graduates have adopted an ideal of how they should be ready to flexibly shape their personalities, skills, and life plans in the contemporary labour market to prove their activity and decency as vocational graduates to the employers as claimed to be characteristic for the contemporary labour market (see Kelly 2013, 14, 73, 2006, 2001, 30; Sennett 1998, 87–90; Beck 2000, 70–71). However, I think there is something more to their stories and visions that demonstrate how they do not necessarily take the worker-citizenship-related expectations for granted and the reasons they want to be acknowledged as such worker-citizens. I claim that although they contribute to such a worker-citizenship ideal, they negotiate with it through their ‘vocational’²⁴ worker-citizen selves and from the perspective of their working life experiences, working life, and adulthood-related plans.

Regarding their ‘vocational’ worker-citizen selves, my observations in Articles I and II show that although young vocational students had some concerns that related, e.g. to how they will integrate into their working communities or if their future work will be in good balance with their coping, leisure, and social relationships, many, nevertheless, deemed worker-citizenship important and as a foundation for societal belonging. In Article III, I interpreted that despite their inconveniences in the labour market, most young vocational education graduates wanted to present themselves and preserve their position as good, active, respectable, and skilled worker-citizens during the interview discussions. Here, my observations and the earlier studies (e.g. Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Leeman & Volman 2021; Colley et al. 2003) suggest that the context of vocational education may, for its part, guide young adults to rely on and place such importance on worker-citizenship. Accordingly, young adults in my data considered themselves proper and skilled worker-citizens who have the ‘right’ attitude towards work (see also Käyhkö 2006, 84–87, Skeggs 1997) and stressed, as part of their worker-citizenship, their rights to be acknowledged as serious ‘professionals’ (see Article III, Skeggs 2004, 178).

In other words, for many vocational students and graduates, their occupation and occupational field may be important parts of themselves and their future hopes (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 81–84, 88, 2019a, 2019b, 1094–1095), which is why it might even be

²⁴ meaning the attitudes and conduct they have adopted as an ideal in their own occupation as part of their vocational studies (cf. Colley et al. 2003, who have named this as ‘vocational habitus’).

ethically questionable to regard their trust on worker-citizenship and their working life skills as wholly problematic. Claiming trust in their vocational worker-citizenship results primarily from their ‘epistemological fallacy’ or ‘cruel optimism’, diminishing the importance of their occupation as part of their life plans and as a source of their societal belonging (see Billett 2006a, 21, 88). Although their trust in their occupational competence and personal coping might, in some parts, be a learned attitude as a response to the post-Fordist labour market demands (see Franceschelli & Keating 2018; also, Ikonen & Nikunen 2019; Nielsen et al. 2017; Burrows 2013), being competent and respected worker-citizens might as well be something they genuinely want to become and commit themselves into, as part of their ‘vocational’ pride (see Dewey 2007, 249–252; Sennett 2008).

However, I also regard that such pride might be one reason for the epistemological dissonance of their worker-citizenship, particularly if the labour market does not allow them to implement it (cf. Farrugia 2019a, 717–718, 2019b). As interpreted in Article III, due to this pride, some of the vocational graduates to whom the labour market insecurities had accumulated after graduation or who may have had to change their occupational fields wanted to defend their position and be taken seriously as worker-citizens. They aimed to highlight (realistically, I believe) problems in the labour market structures (also, Cahill & Leccardi 2020). After gaining experiences from the labour market, they have become aware of the injustices that shape their worker-citizenship (see Niemi 2022, cf. Määttä & Westerback 2022). Per the research on new adulthood (e.g. Cuervo & Wyn 2016), these graduates experienced that the employers or employment services do not always recognise the contemporary labour market’s realities but demand excessive work experience or competencies from young workers who have not received actual opportunities for gaining them or to whom gaining such is almost impossible.

Some scholars connect these contemporary realities with the so-called precariousness in the labour market, i.e. with temporal and non-standard jobs (e.g. agency work, zero-hour contracts, part-time and fixed-term work, platform work, self-employment, etc.), which they claim are comparable to job instability and a low or uncertain income and may thus require from young adults the abilities to tolerate uncertainty in planning their lives (see Standing 2014; Kalleberg 2012; also, Rasmussen et al. 2019). Related to this, some young adults (see Articles III and IV) described, quite bitterly, how young adults are guided towards taking jobs no one else wants and do not offer a secure basis to plan their lives further. Particularly, young vocational graduates who were interviewed in the one-stop guidance centres recounted how they or young adults in general are treated unfairly in the labour

market (cf. Cuervo & Chesters 2019; Pimlott-Wilson 2017, 292; Cuervo & Wyn 2016; Burrows 2013). Their views obtain support from research; in the Finnish context, young adults face, more often than others, insecure and temporary jobs, although scholars note that it might be a temporary phase in their working life paths (see Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a; Ojala, Nätti, Lipiäinen 2018; Rasmussen et al. 2019). Previous studies also suggest that for some, these uncertainties accumulate, especially if their education does not meet the working life requirements, if they have an immigrant background, do not gain experience in their field of work, or are, in principle, already in an unequal position in the labour market (Rasmussen et al. 2019; Ojala, Nätti & Lipiäinen 2018, 151; Buchs & Helbling 2016; also, Haikkola 2021; Nielsen, Dyreborg & Lipscomb 2019; Tokola et al. 2019; Krivonos 2019).

Based on my empirical findings in Articles II, III, and IV, and of other youth researchers (see Chesters et al. 2019; Cuervo & Chesters 2019; MacDonald and Giazitzoglu 2019; Nielsen et al. 2017; Cuervo & Wyn 2016), young vocational graduates' experiences of above 'precariousness' should not be seen only as a 'phase' as it shapes their chances for well-being, life planning, and societal belonging, as well as their interpretations of their worth regarding their peers, their occupational community, and others in society. For young vocational graduates, it is frustrating and even humiliating to be stuck job seeking where they are forced to repeatedly prove their worth and occupational competencies if they cannot gain the needed work experience or if the job they happen to land does not correspond to how they interpret themselves as occupationally skilled worker-citizens (cf. Farrugia 2019a, 718–719). Moreover, it is also frustrating for them not to get an opportunity in the labour market to start their adult lives, i.e. to get a sufficient and continuous income to start a family, leave their family home and attain an own one, pay their bills, and determine their (social) lives (cf. Honkatukia et al. 2020; Cuervo & Chesters 2019; Chesters & Cuervo 2019; Pimlott-Wilson 2017; Cuervo & Wyn 2016).

However, I also claim the contemporary labour market realities (including their precariousness) relate not only to the availability of work but to the unrealistic expectations of what kind of worker-citizens young vocational graduates should be and to their unjust experiences in the labour market, e.g. due to unfair work contracts or their inappropriate treatment in the working life as Articles III and IV discussed (also, Wyn 2020; Cahill & Leccardi 2020). Therefore, young vocational graduates negotiate with the worker-citizenship ideals from the perspective of their working life experiences and their future or working-life-related hopes. My point is that although vocational education might offer rather good preconditions for employment for many of them (alternating between their occupational fields

concerning local demand for work or regarding the type of work required in each period of time, see e.g. Billett 2006a; e.g. Buchs & Helbling 2016; Maliranta, Nurmi & Virtanen 2010), their education alone is not necessarily enough because the complexities of worker-citizenship in this sense are not about just gaining a paid job. Based on Articles III and IV, negotiating within the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship requires resources and opportunities from young adults to respond to the worker-citizenship-related demands. Moreover, I think it requires them opportunities to shape their worker-citizenship in such a way that, in addition to guaranteeing their livelihood, they can adapt their skills, personalities, and the rest of their lives (including their social relationships) to its complexities and coincidences and still be able to keep their adult lives sufficiently good and plan them further according to their hopes and dreams (also, Chesters et al. 2019; Cuervo & Chesters 2019; see also Cuervo & Wyn 2016).

I interpret that, altogether, young vocational students and graduates seem to balance a complex worker-citizenship construct, including controversies relating to its sometimes unrealistic expectations, its injustices, their position as newly graduated young worker-citizens, and their chances to plan their future and receive a sufficient and just income. Therefore, the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship is in their negotiations of who they sense they are and their chances regarding their life planning as vocationally qualified worker-citizens in the post-graduation labour market. In this context, I regard that all these young adults in my study live in a time when they (some more than others) must still adapt to the unpredictability of their future. While they must actively reflect and evaluate their choices and hopes to find something they would like or are suited to do in the labour market, they must be ready to change their plans and adapt to the changes if their life does not proceed as planned (see Cahill & Leccardi 2020, 80). I believe young vocational students’ and graduates’ trust on their occupational knowledge or working life skills is not, either in this sense, a sign of their ‘epistemological fallacy’ but may reflect their flexible orientation towards their future: It might be more logical for them to think things will shape up nicely at the end and that there is no sense in worrying too much as their future is, in any case, unpredictable and ambiguous (also, Niemi 2022, 186; Cahill & Leccardi 2020; Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022; Woodman & Wyn 2015, 88; Burrows 2013, 389–390; cf. Määttä & Westerback 2022).

The ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship is not limited to their ‘transition’ but is a starting point from which they negotiate and construct their good adult lives (cf. Cahill & Leccardi 2020, 70). Therefore, I interpret, particularly the young adults in my data who have faced complexities in the labour market, stressed

that it is not them who need better working life skills but the employers and people in the employment services must acknowledge the negotiations they have to engage in today's labour market regarding their worker-citizenship (cf. Nielsen et al. 2017). This kind of 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship was not only in such working life stories but also in interviews with young vocational graduates who were in a permanent job or further education and were hesitating whether to change their job for the sake of their well-being, whether they could cope in their studies, or whether they demanded too much of themselves. Thus, I will discuss the diverse perspectives from which young adults negotiate with the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship.

5.1.2 The worker-citizen self and the worker-citizenship ideals

Second, I claim that vocational education students and graduates negotiate between their understanding of themselves, their possibilities as worker-citizens (regarding their choices, hopes, and value as worker-citizens), and the ideals of worker-citizenship. My findings demonstrate the contradictory nature of worker-citizenship in these young vocational students' and graduates' understandings when they negotiate their worker-citizen selves. As the previous subchapter discussed, while many might interpret their societal belonging, value, position, and choices in society through their vocational understanding of their worker-citizen selves (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 2019a, 2019b; Colley et al. 2003), they are simultaneously aware of the current realities of the labour market, and, as a result of their education, of how they must be flexible and self-governing worker-citizens to manage in the post-graduation labour market (e.g. Niemi & Jahnukainen 2018, 2020; Souto 2014; also, Kelly 2006; Sennett 1998, 87–90). Amidst these sometimes contradictory expectations, I interpret that young vocational graduates negotiate their worker-citizenship and try reconciling it with their wishes, life situations, experiences, and opportunities to implement it as such (cf. Benjamin, Koirakivi & Kuusisto 2022).

In this context, the 'vocational' worker-citizenship ideal that the young vocational students and graduates seem to adopt in my data has similarities with the working-class narrative Farrugia (2019a, 2019b, 1094–1095, 2021a, 81–82; see also e.g. Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022) described; as noted, work and occupation were an important part of their life plans, and most wanted to be deemed respectable and skilled worker-citizens. However, based on my findings, I claim their negotiations about their value and meaning as worker-citizens are more complicated than placing

their perceptions solely in the category of ‘working-class’: the epistemological dissonance of their worker-citizenship relates here to how they want to implement their worker-citizenship, what their chances are to implement the worker-citizenship as such, and how they relate their worker-citizen selves to the contemporary and more post-Fordist ideal of a flexible, reflexive, and entrepreneurial worker-citizen ready to shape their skills and choices according to the prevailing working life demands. Here, shaping worker-citizenship resulting from this epistemological dissonance can occur in vastly different ways, depending on their current opportunities, resources, life situations, and life plans (cf. Farrugia 2019a).

The epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is not, e.g. always negative or problematic for young adults with vocational upper secondary education. Some young vocational graduates, although few in my data²⁵, manage to entwine these sometimes conflicting worker-citizenship ideals with their life plans and find this ‘epistemological dissonance’ of their worker-citizen selves and a constant negotiation about their worker-citizenship as a normal and manageable part of their participation in the labour market (as the working life researchers suggest, see e.g. Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a). While many young vocational students trusted that their worker-citizenship would manifest as such, as elaborated in the previous subchapter (also, Articles I and II), some vocational graduates continued to describe how their (occupational) choices were ‘wise’ in the labour market or how their activity, conscientiousness, and entrepreneurialism in the labour market has helped them (or will help them) get employed or in further education (cf. Westerback & Rissanen 2020; Franceschelli & Keating 2018).

These views align with the contemporary entrepreneurial mindset (see Kelly 2006). I also interpret that in some of these cases, the young graduates have been privileged to proceed in their working life transition according to the worker-citizenship ideal or implement their hopes or even passions without notable problems or conflicts (also, Franceschelli & Keating 2018). When they diminish the complexities of worker-citizenship or regard the system as good and effective, it is also because they have not had to negotiate their value in relation to it, they can rely

²⁵ It is impossible to elaborate on the intersectional differences in the young adults’ social backgrounds in my datasets further than this because these questions were not asked of the young vocational students in the workshops or the young vocational graduates I interviewed. However, I think it is still possible to discuss these perspectives, as my observations from the data highlight very similar findings that Farrugia (2021a, 2019a, 2019b) noted in his studies regarding young adults with working-class backgrounds. In Finnish vocational education, it is usually the young people who think they are more practical workers, have a working-class or immigrant background, are considered to benefit from fast labour market attachment, or apply for or are guided to vocational upper secondary education (see Tolonen & Aapola-Kari 2022; Acacio Claro et al. 2022; Kalalahti et al. 2020).

on their own opportunities and resources or simply have someone they trust will catch them if they face difficulties (see May 2011, 370). Nevertheless, I believe young graduates can experience and approach the complexities of worker-citizenship in many ways. As noted, these kinds of orientations may also be coping mechanisms in the labour market (cf. Cahill & Leccardi 2020; Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022, 16; also, Nielsen et al. 2017, 17; Burrows 2013); for some, being in precarious jobs or jobs that are not aligned with their understanding of their worker-citizen selves or desires in life might be okay if their experiences of societal belonging arise elsewhere or through another ‘approved’ way of implementing worker-citizenship (May 2013, 88).

Nevertheless, as noted in the debates on ‘new adulthood’, it might be those young adults who face most of the contradictories and complexities between, e.g. the labour market expectations and their actual opportunities, who already have fewer resources to make reflexive choices about their future (Woodman & Wyn 2015, 68). Young vocational graduates’ opportunities to control their adult lives, make reflexive and sometimes more courageous choices in the labour market, and desirably modify their worker-citizen selves are much better when they can trust their education, family background, and the support of their social circles within the unpredictability of the labour market (see e.g. Chesters et al. 2019; Cuervo & Chesters 2019; Cuervo & Wyn 2016). There were relatively few, although some, young adults in my datasets who genuinely could (and were privileged enough to) take their education, skills, income, and coping mechanisms in the labour market as given facts and could regard the labour market only as a tool for their self-fulfilment or choose a less secure job, voluntary work, travelling, or hobbies as their principal way to act in society (cf. Määttä & Westerback 2022, 34; Farrugia 2021a, 55–56, 71, 2019a, 714, 717, 2019b, 1099).

Therefore, I interpreted, based on earlier studies (see Skeggs 2011, 2004, 60, 139; Farrugia 2019a, 2019b, 2021a, 71–72, 130–132), that the post-Fordist ideal of a worker-citizen who is flexible with their choices and can adapt their skills and life situations to the labour market needs and implements their passions in the working life might prove to be too middle-class of an ‘opportunity’ for some of these young vocational graduates in my data, to whom their occupation and vocational education is something through which they assess and plan—and want to plan—their lives and future (also, Kelly 2013, 110–111). Navigating in the current labour market seems dependent on who can make choices that differ from their vocational education-based worker-citizenship and reflexively ponder their choices and construct worker-citizenship that is reasonable for them from the perspective of their wishes, changing

life situations, well-being, and needs (Skeggs 2004, 60, 139, 2011, 508; cf. Määttä & Westerback 2022; Nikunen 2017; Tolonen 2008b).

As the articles (particularly in Article III and with Jenni in Article IV) demonstrate, shaping oneself according to the post-Fordist labour market demands is distressing and frustrating for young adults, especially if they feel they cannot be themselves or are not valued as they are, e.g. as skilled worker-citizens (also, Nikunen 2021; Rikala 2020; Ikonen & Nikunen 2019). Notably, in this context, all their labour market experiences modify their senses of themselves as worker-citizens and as part of society; their understanding of who they should be or who they are not, and what they should become and who they want to be (see Billett 2006b; also, Farrugia 2021a, 28–31, 2019a, 709; Kelly 2013, 93). For young adults who have learned to interpret their value through their success in work, who are taught to be ‘good and skilled workers’, failing to gain a position into which they have spent an enormous part of their young lives during their vocational studies might feel like a tremendous failure (cf. Farrugia 2019a, 717–718). Some vocational graduates in my datasets had faced situations where their education no longer sufficed or supported their well-being; some told stories of how they had been guided or forced towards education, second vocational upper secondary qualification, or shorter job trainings to improve their suitability for the labour market. These situations were not always desirable, and they learned in practice that they must be ready to change their occupation (sometimes against their will) and worker-citizen selves to please their employers (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 104; Nikunen 2021).

Thus, I believe the ‘epistemological dissonance’ is not only about how young vocational graduates’ possible ‘working-class’ kind of interpretation of their worker-citizen selves might collide with their actual chances to implement such worker-citizenship. Here, the ‘epistemological dissonance’ is also about young vocational students’ and graduates’ negotiations between their commitment to working life as decent worker-citizens (they know they should aim for employment and have aspirations aligned with the labour market realities) amidst their desire to make passionate choices in the labour market and their lives in general (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 150–151, 2019a, 2019b). In my data, most wanted to implement flexible worker-citizenship shaped along with their hopes, values, and needs; some were frustrated because they could not find jobs suiting them, their lives, personalities, hopes, and occupational competencies (cf. Farrugia 2019a, 717–718, 2019b), but also because labour market/employment services did not let them make choices supporting their (and others) well-being, to live out and work for their passions, and choose work that merges with their other attempts to realise themselves and their dreams similarly

as young adults with better resources to make such choices (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 125, 2019b, 1099; Westerback & Rissanen 2020; Nikunen 2017). Thus, their worker-citizen selves are not only narrowed to ‘working-class’ kind of worker-citizenship, but they demand rights to implement worker-citizenship—exactly what the post-Fordist labour market ideally awaits from them: the rights for making reflexive choices per the post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideal and getting a job that is like a lifestyle and a passion like an entrepreneurship (see Kelly 2013, 14, 73, 2006; cf. Farrugia 2021a, 150–151; Nikunen 2021, 212).

The epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is present in diverse ways when they negotiate their worker-citizen selves: Some young vocational students and graduates aim to be appreciated worker-citizens in their occupational field, while some have the opportunities and resources to shape their worker-citizenship aligning with their passions, life situations, and plans, and others, despite their unfavourable situation in the labour market, stress their rights to implement worker-citizenship, which balances with their interests in life, life situations, and well-being. This will be discussed next.

5.1.3 Rights for societal belonging

Finally, I claim that vocational education students and graduates negotiate their rights as worker-citizens, their rights to experience societal belonging, and the institutional expectations that do not acknowledge the realities of epistemological dissonance in their worker-citizenship (see also Kallio 2023). While many young vocational students and graduates wanted to attain worker-citizenship that would shape in line with their hopes and life plans, Articles III and IV show how young adults also discussed the unfairness of the labour market, the unjust conditions of their work contracts and work communities, and their unfair treatment from employers or in the labour market, all of which prevented them from making self-fulfilling choices (cf. Farrugia 2021a, 109–110).

The worker-citizenship ideal that expects young adults to modify their personalities per the needs of the labour market was not a desirable position for all, as Articles III and IV stated; some young adults did not want to interpret themselves and their value through a post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideal they regarded as unfair and unrealistic. Interpreting Skeggs (2004, 2011, 508–509), I assume this might be their counter-speech against the middle-class worker-citizenship norm, which they consider unjust or unattainable or does not fit into their life situations, well-

being, values, hopes, life plans, or possibilities to live according to the ideal or their ‘passions’ (cf. Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Farrugia 2021a, 150–151). Choosing this kind of orientation, as Articles III and IV discussed, and opposing the demands related to worker-citizenship may be how they realistically protect their well-being and sense of societal belonging within the contradictory labour market (cf. Rikala 2020, 1030; Cahill & Leccardi 2020; May 2011, 373).

Therefore, while young vocational graduates, e.g. negotiate the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship, they shape the labour market with their choices and reproduce the related ideals and constructs of ‘proper’ worker-citizenship; they might also have the power to negotiate worker-citizenship’s conditions, especially if they have enough resources to do so (Billett 2006a, 42, 2006b; Foucault 1984, 94–96; Kallio 2022; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022). However, I also agree with other scholars that the sense of societal belonging is such a relevant part of one’s well-being and of being human that although young adults may resist the narrowness of the worker-citizenship ideal, they still want to be part of something—to feel they are valued and an important part of society—which create tensions if worker-citizenship is the only valued way to participate in society (May 2013, 88, 2011, 371). Worker-citizenship may be a very distressing and unpleasant position for some and is not at the centre of all vocational students’ and graduates’ lives and future plans, despite the adult-centred assumptions of vocational education (see Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Meriläinen & Ågren 2022; Niemi 2010).

I agree with Alan France (1998) that the desire of the young vocational students and graduates to act according to the social norms and ideals of worker-citizenship—to be ‘proper’ and skilled worker-citizens—also depends on how their rights as worker-citizens are realised: Why should young adults implement worker-citizenship, which they consider unjust (because of poor salary or conditions, underemployment, or exploitative treatment) and where they experience their wishes or life situations are unacknowledged? Vocational students should graduate as skilled worker-citizens, learn to care for their well-being, cope in the labour market, and, after graduating, continuously develop their skills, shape themselves to the needs of their employers, and eventually learn to be decent professionals and worker-citizens while also learning that their choices, wishes, and successes are judged from these perspectives (cf. France 1998). I believe young adults’ working life stories in Articles III and IV demonstrate how they underline their rights as worker-citizens in response to these institutional demands: They have a right to a sufficient and just salary for support and guidance in working life and employment services, to become independent and start their adult lives, to be recognised as proper worker-citizens,

respected in their work communities, dream and plan their future, make choices supporting their well-being, and simply, realise their right to a decent life (France 1998; also, Kallio 2023, 109–110; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Westerback & Rissanen 2020).

For vocational students and graduates, societal belonging is much more than being inside or outside worker-citizenship, as Articles III and IV (also, Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 97) show: Despite landing a job in one's occupational field, that job may not be long-term, some might find a job in their field but cannot fully use their skills, some do not even get to show their occupational skills and accumulate their work experience, some have very negative experiences from their occupational field, some are forced to change their field, and some note that the occupation was unsuitable for them, their well-being, or life situation (also, Cuervo & Wyn 2016, 130). Moreover, young adults' lives are filled with simultaneously occurring changes and negotiations (see Kallio, Honkatukia & Valtonen 2022). After graduating from vocational education, they are creating, maintaining, and negotiating social relationships, establishing families, learning to be independent, engaging in hobbies, influencing society, struggling within the jungle of guidance services, and are facing joy, grief, losses, misfortune, success, and coincidences—all kinds of occurrences in their lives that shape, construct, or challenge their sense of societal belonging and who they are and their chances to plan their lives (see Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021; Cuervo & Wyn 2014). Worker-citizenship and the associated social norms, expectations, and complexities are not always central issues in young adults' lives; instead, what happens in their everyday lives and relationships can make the starting points of their adulthood much more complex and distressing (Kallio 2023; Käyhkö & Armila 2022).

Therefore, I lean on other scholars and argue that it is wrong to consider the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship as something young adults could solve themselves, i.e. that certain skills or working life competencies could help them balance while assuming their societal belonging is possible mainly through worker-citizenship, which they should aim to stabilise as their societal task (see Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 83–86). Following May (2011, 368; 2013, 83, 89–90, 150–151), young adults' societal belonging through worker-citizenship is constructed relatively and interactively between young adults and others and the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals, meaning the young adult alone cannot shape their experiences of societal belonging. Overly obligatory worker-citizen ideals prevent some young adults' opportunities to experience societal belonging if the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship is unacknowledged by the employment services,

vocational education, or the policies guiding the labour market structures (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 154; also, Pimlott-Wilson 2017, 293). Thus, I believe the complexities described with the ‘epistemological dissonance’ are one way to demonstrate how these young adults navigate the current labour market realities and demands and how it feels to balance one’s well-being and future hopes with the contradictory worker-citizenship ideals (cf. Cahill & Leccardi 2020, 72; Cuervo & Wyn 2016, 132).

5.2 Recommendations for education and employment policies

Next, I shall discuss the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship in young vocational graduates’ post-graduation experiences and everyday lives, which appears from the perspective of Nussbaum’s (2013) capabilities approach and the theoretical discussions relating to societal belonging. Based on these discussions, I present four recommendations²⁶ (see table 2) for policies pertaining to vocational education, employment, and the guidance services that might shape young adults’ lives after vocational education.

Table 2. The recommendations for vocational education and employment-related policies

Recommendation	Summary
Recommendation 1: Vocational education and employment-related policies should acknowledge how the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is intertwined with young adults’ senses of post-graduation well-being and societal belonging.	Worker-citizenship is not only about finding employment and a position in one’s occupational field. It is also about how vocational students and graduates (as all young adults) understand their value in society and thus, about their chances to experience belonging, that they are valued in society, and can determine and plan their good adult lives. The ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship within which they must navigate and negotiate their societal belonging constructs a complex and contradictory context for their negotiations.
Recommendation 2: Vocational education and employment-related policies should reduce the pressures on young adults to fulfil the ideal of worker-citizenship by identifying its ‘epistemological dissonance’ in the current labour market.	All young vocational graduates do not have the same opportunities to navigate within this epistemological dissonance; there are differences in their starting points, in their life situations and in their work experience while their needs and life situations also change. The expectations and measures of ‘proper’ worker-citizenship should not be too narrow as the dissonance of it is reality for young vocational graduates. I regard that the ‘epistemological dissonance’ is not ‘solved’ with individual skill-building as it is structurally constructed within society.

²⁶ The viewpoints presented by vocational graduates who participated in my follow-up interviews after their graduation inspired the shaping of these recommendations.

<p>Recommendation 3: There should be sufficient and secured resources and knowledge in vocational education and related employment and guidance services to acknowledge and encounter these dissonances in young vocational graduates' post-graduate lives.</p>	<p>This knowledge of youth studies is needed within the vocational education and in the post-graduation employment services, and particularly in the policies guiding them. The institutional expectations regarding worker-citizenship are constructed also by the guiding adults that young vocational students and graduates encounter in their everyday lives. They have a huge responsibility in how these young adults learn to interpret their value and chances within the complex and contradictory conditions of their adulthood.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Vocational education and employment-related policies should note and involve the views and experiences of young vocational students and graduates to the discussions regarding the development and sustainability of vocational education and labour market.</p>	<p>The experiences and perceptions of young adults should be involved in the debates of how the worker-citizen ideal and the opportunities of young adults to implement it could be fairer and more sustainable. In a welfare state constructed around worker-citizenship, it should matter towards what kind of worker-citizenship we are forcing young adults into, especially when it is regarded as a contradictory, unsustainable and unfair construct.</p>

Next, I will elaborate on the recommendations and related arguments further. **My first recommendation** relates to how it seems necessary from the perspective of my empirical findings that these policies would aim to acknowledge how the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is intertwined with young adults' senses of post-graduation well-being and belonging. Based on my findings, while young vocational upper secondary students may learn to rely on their coping and chances as worker-citizens (see Articles I and II), Articles III and IV show that their post-graduation negotiation with the worker-citizenship ideals involves complexities that shape their understandings of their value in society and shape or even hinder their well-being and their possibilities to determine and plan their adult lives.

In this context, I think it is important to note that vocational education plays a part in why these young adults give such weight to their occupation and paid work when interpreting their value, choices, and lives in society: Part of vocational education's purpose is to teach them their occupation, do their job well while teaching them to value their work, have the 'right attitude' towards working life, and be skilled workers so they can participate in maintaining society (see Billett 2011, 145–146, also 2014; Pietilä & Lappalainen 2023; Leeman & Volman 2021; Stenström & Virolainen 2018; Colley et al. 2003). When young vocational graduates negotiate their societal belonging within the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship, while they aim to be recognised and taken seriously as skilled workers, their negotiation is emotional because they want to be part of something into which they have studied and of an occupational community in which they have embraced work ethics and work pride as part of their studies (see Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). However, societal belonging means more than just acquiring a vocational

qualification and obtaining a job—it is about who they are and how they interpret their chances to plan and live their lives, which is why their emotional ‘investment’ in worker-citizenship needs more attention, also in vocational education. As Article II discussed, while entering the labour market and starting their adult lives, they negotiate their societal belonging with their peers, work communities, and families or, e.g. with employment services and want to be taken seriously in these relationships (e.g. May 2011; Anthias 2006, 21). Simultaneously (and continuously) they also interpret their worth in these negotiations regarding how they assume their life should progress after graduation and about their opportunities to fulfil those expectations (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203; May 2013, 83–84; Antonsich 2010, 652–653).

Therefore I regard that in the context of worker-citizenship, young vocational education graduates’ negotiations about societal belonging are also about entering adulthood, forming their good adult lives, experiencing being a valuable part of their communities, and having good conditions for starting their adult lives where they can determine their choices: to decide with whom and how they want to spend their time, get their own place, have relationships, and make a sufficient income to bring all these sides of their adulthood together and shape their adulthood according to their needs, desires, and changing life situations (cf., e.g. Käyhkö & Armila 2022; Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022; Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 97; Cuervo & Wyn 2014, 2016). In other words, applying Nussbaum’s (2013, 39) thinking, worker-citizenship guarantees the preconditions for a ‘life worthy of human dignity’ as affiliation and practical reason are building blocks for their societal belonging and, accordingly, for their adulthood. As Article II (also, Articles III and IV) shows, this means if a vocational graduate faces inconveniences when attempting to reconcile the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship with some sort of balance with the worker-citizenship-related institutional expectations along with their own desires and actual chances to hold together their post-graduation adult lives, it may also shape their experiences of societal belonging—of how they see their worth in society (see May 2011, 370).

Therefore, I claim that within the discussions considering vocational education’s development, the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship with which young vocational education graduates negotiate their societal belonging should be better acknowledged because young vocational graduates’ experiences of injustices, complexities, and insecurities in the context of sometimes unrealistic institutional expectations may be a commonplace part of their adulthood and the conditions under which they try negotiating their worker-citizenship (Woodman & Wyn 2015, 82). As my findings demonstrate, the ‘messy’ and contradictory nature of worker-

citizenship in their lives not only shapes young adults' possibilities to gain work experience and utilise their occupational skills as 'respectable' worker-citizens but their experiences of how they can live the kind of adult life they desire for, care for their well-being, maintain important social relationships, and feel valuable in the eyes of others (also, Cuervo & Chesters 2019; Cuervo & Wyn 2016, 132).

Within vocational upper secondary education, which has undergone several reforms in the past years (see Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019), it might be more tempting to search for solutions for this contradictory nature of worker-citizenship from individual skill-building rather than heading towards another structural reform. A solution like this can be more attractive in a political climate emphasising personal responsibility (see Woodman & Wyn 2015, 82). However, from the perspective of my findings, a more structure-based debate is needed within vocational education and the labour market's development; this 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship may also be of interest at a policy level if it is acknowledged that young vocational graduates' experiences of frustration and injustices may shape their coping or desire to participate in a long-term labour market according to the institutional expectations (see Rikala 2020; cf. Maczulskij & Böckerman 2019). In this context, I interpret that the current funding system of Finnish vocational education, which obligates vocational education to quantitatively monitor and evaluate young vocational graduates' post-graduation placement in the labour market (one year after graduation), does not recognise the overall complexity of vocational graduates' post-graduation lives. By relying on Nussbaum's (2013) thinking, I stress that it is the responsibility of vocational education-related policies to qualitatively strive to understand how vocational graduates' post-graduation worker-citizenship is constructed in contemporary society to guarantee the opportunities for societal belonging (cf. Kelly 2013, 54).

Accordingly, **my second recommendation** relates to how, in this context, these policies should aim to reduce the pressure on young adults to fulfil the worker-citizenship ideals by identifying the diversity, complexity, and inequalities of worker-citizenship—its 'epistemological dissonance' in the current labour market—in the lives of its young graduates. Scholars claim that vocational education often attracts political interest, as it is considered the key solution for initiating young adults to the working life and ensuring society's economic continuity; this interest is directed especially towards those whose societal belonging is problematised because of their background or because they are considered at risk of 'social exclusion' (see Avis & Atkins 2017; also, Kalalahti et al. 2020; Acacio Claro et al. 2022; Stenström & Virolainen 2018; Billett 2011, 2014). Vocational education is subject to expectations

that every young person studying there must acquire occupational and working life skills that improve their abilities to operate and participate in the constantly changing labour market. However, as my findings illustrate, in practice, these skills do not necessarily secure young adults' possibilities to negotiate and shape their post-graduation worker-citizenship. While the labour market might be full of complexities, contingencies, and randomness, young adults have unequal resources to negotiate and make choices in those situations not only because of their socio-economic or racialised background, gender, work ability, or disability but because of the given work opportunities, their negative or unjust experiences at work, their lack of work experience, or because of their diverse life situations in general (cf. Käyhkö & Armila 2022; Avis & Atkins 2017; Woodman & Wyn 2015, 68; Skeggs 2004, 139, 2011, 508).

Young vocational graduates' chances to negotiate with the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship and shape it according to their passions may require social support and resources or the courage to make such choices and even more if they aim to make choices differing from the worker-citizenship ideal (cf. Skeggs 2011, 508–509, 2004, 57–60, 139; also, Farrugia 2021a, 71–72, 130–132; Chesters et al. 2019). From this perspective, understanding the societal purpose of vocational education only through its ability to individualistically equip young adults with the appropriate occupational skills, let alone with the 'right' work attitude, is seemingly an unsustainable way of interpreting the value of vocational education from the perspective of my findings. This kind of understanding might reproduce inequalities between vocational graduates when positioning some of them and their labour market situation as an individual-centred problem while bypassing the complex or unfair starting points from which young adults approach the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship and negotiate opportunities for their post-graduation lives (Articles III and IV; cf. Avis & Atkins 2017; Atkins 2017).

Therefore, how the worker-citizenship-related policies could be more flexible and more understanding towards these complexities must be discussed. As young adults in Article IV stress, labour market policies should allow more diversity for worker-citizenship; alongside worker-citizenship, there should be more accepted ways to experience societal belonging. From the capabilities approach perspective (Sen 2009, 231–232, 253; Edgell & Graham 2017, 1204–1205), I believe this means that young adults in vocational education or with vocational qualifications should have flexibility and support for changing their minds within the labour market, dealing with injustices, and taking the needed time-outs according to their changing life situations. They should also be free to choose work supporting their senses of their worker-

citizen selves or their values in general. In this context, I believe the main question regarding the fairness of post-graduation opportunities for young vocational graduates is constructed around how the worker-citizen-related institutional expectations are regarded at the societal level, how those expectations appear to young vocational graduates in their daily lives, and how their lives, choices, personalities, and societal belonging, are guided, governed, and judged concerning their real chances of fulfilling those expectations (see Fraser 2009, 293; also, Kallio 2023). Here, some of their worker-citizenship is assessed through expectations that are unreachable for them, to which they have no resources or needed starting points in their life or decent opportunities (e.g. enough work experience, fair work contracts, and equitable opportunities to show their competence or that support their life situations or life plans) with which they can live and plan their good adult lives (see Skeggs 2004, 178).

My third recommendation thus relates to how the policies concentrating on Finnish vocational upper secondary education and employment services should guarantee enough time and resources to hear and encounter the concerns and injustices young adults experience relating to the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship and the complexities of their adulthood. In other words, I believe young vocational students, especially young vocational graduates, need support in dealing with the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship, on which they still must take some kind of stance in their post-graduation lives as described.

As the sense of societal belonging is something constructed relatively in social encounters, how young adults are encountered in vocational education, employment services, or the working life—how their different concerns and hopes regarding worker-citizenship and the contradictions and injustices of worker-citizenship they have experienced are acknowledged and accepted by the teachers, counsellors, instructors, employers, or other professionals guiding them—construct their interpretations of their value and opportunities in society and give messages for them about how they should belong in society (May 2013, 83–84; also, Kallio 2023). Therefore, these encounters with professionals who aim to guide them in their everyday lives are also places where young adults, in practice, negotiate the conditions of their societal belonging with their life situations, competencies, and needs for support; they are also places where they want to be heard as they are and from the perspective of their hopes, life plans, and experiences (May 2011, 368–370). Regarding my study, this means while the worker-citizenship-related expectations and demands, as these professionals present, create, and produce structures for young adults’ opportunities to sense societal belonging within the ‘epistemological

dissonance' of worker-citizenship, these young vocational students and graduates (as I have demonstrated) must also continuously renegotiate the conditions of their societal belonging due to their changing life situations and the complexities and contradictions they face in post-graduation adulthood (see May 2011, 372; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006).

Therefore, I claim that it is important for professionals guiding young adults (be the guidance counsellors, youth workers, working life coaches, etc.) to acknowledge the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship. I claim that they should understand the negotiations young vocational graduates must engage with the structural conditions of worker-citizenship so they can be more sensitive and responsive to these young adults' hopes, life plans, life situations, and opportunities. Guiding young vocational graduates' lives towards directions that might seem morally 'proper' from the perspective of normative worker-citizenship ideals might eventually guide them towards situations that make their negotiations about their societal belonging within the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship even more complicated (Article IV; also, Kallio 2023; Haikkola 2019, 340–341). I believe the professionals who have a guidance relationship with young vocational students and graduates should aim to identify and critically interpret the discourses through which they assess, obligate, and control the future and choices of young adults; therefore, I claim that the knowledge of youth studies is needed to educate and train these professionals (cf. Kallio 2023; Haikkola 2019). Accordingly, the criteria used in the educational institutions or the employment/guidance/social services for assessing young adults' worker-citizenship must be reviewed qualitatively—whether it acknowledges their complex negotiations with the worker-citizenship ideals and the contradictory situations that shape their sense of their value and participation in society (Sukarieh & Tannock 2016; Kelly 2013, 54; Powell & McGrath 2019).

Accordingly, **my fourth and final recommendation** relates to how the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship should be discussed within Finnish vocational upper secondary education with its students; these discussions should be about how to transform the labour market, make the different occupational fields more sustainable, and support young vocational graduates' well-being from the perspective of their views and experiences. Based on my empirical findings, the support young vocational graduates need regarding the 'epistemological dissonance' of their worker-citizen selves also relate to their chances to participate in the discussions about a sustainable and fair labour market and their right to demand and shape a kind of worker-citizenship that balances with their well-being

(cf. Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017, 184). Thus, scholars have discussed vocational education's responsibility for what kind of labour market it educates its students for and whether these labour markets are socially and ecologically sustainable (see McGrath & Powell 2016; Anderson 2008). The perceptions and experiences vocational students and graduates have about the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship, which may point to shortcomings in the labour market, should be central in developing vocational education; they should be consulted on how to make the labour market and the worker-citizenship-related expectations more sustainable (see also McGrath et al. 2022; Bonvin 2019; Powell & McGrath 2019).

As this dissertation demonstrates, for most vocational students and graduates, worker-citizenship is important because it facilitates the preconditions for their adulthood and supports their sense of societal belonging; these students and graduates also thought work should be fair, meaningful, and in balance with their values, well-being, and social life (see Articles I, II, III and IV). Other studies (e.g. Böckerman, Bryson, Kauhanen & Kangasniemi 2020) support their insights on how these vocational graduates are treated or encountered in the labour market with their life situations, their support needs, life situations, and values, e.g. by the employers or the employment services, may shape their coping and well-being as worker-citizens. Thus, from an ecological perspective, I believe these social perspectives should be included when discussing the future of vocational education. According to Simon McGrath and Lesley Powell (2016, 18), vocational education "should be grounded in a view of work, and hence skills for work, that is decent, life-enhancing, solidaristic, gender-aware, environmentally-sensitive and intergenerationally-minded." Here, interpreting Nussbaum's (2013) thinking, my findings suggest that vocational education should promote a more sustainable worker-citizenship ideal that is fair from the perspective of its graduates.

I believe a more sustainable approach to worker-citizenship in vocational education is something that aligns with one's values and interests, is flexible in different life situations, and acknowledges participation that might challenge the normative boundaries of the worker-citizenship ideal (cf. van der Klink et al. 2016, 76). As Article III and particularly IV demonstrate, some young vocational graduates may be frustrated because they cannot handle the 'epistemological dissonance' of their worker-citizenship in which the labour market expectations (including their own expectations in some cases) may conflict with their opportunities (e.g. regarding work experience, life situations, or injustices concerning how they have been treated at certain jobs or what kind of work contracts are available for them), or these expectations demand them to be completely different people than who they feel they

are or can be. Finding a ‘golden mean’ within the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship does not thus, as discussed, relate solely to an income in my interpretation but to how they balance their chances to live and plan a meaningful life as they regard it and feel valued in the eyes of their peers, family, work communities, and society. As Article II demonstrates, I believe these connect to Nussbaum’s (2013) capabilities of ‘practical reason’ and ‘affiliation’ and their experiences of societal belonging, the value and meaning of their worker-citizen selves in their everyday lives negotiated with the institutionalised societal expectations (see May 2011).

Therefore, in Article IV, we suggested with Jenni Kallio that the most sustainable approach to young adults’ societal belonging in the context of the complex worker-citizenship ideal could be to understand their participation in society through their lived well-being—meaning in the context of my study, what kind of things and relationships support vocational education graduates’ senses of societal belonging in their everyday lives within the contradictory expectations and realities of worker-citizenship (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021). In this context, and aligning with Helne’s and Hirvilammi’s (2015, 2017, 45–47) thinking, young vocational students’ and graduates’ visions and experiences that demand stable income concerning life planning, meaningful ways to implement worker-citizenship, and opportunities to maintain their social relationships and experience societal belonging are something that constructs their experiences of well-being. Therefore, the insights of young adults that describe the kind of worker-citizen selves they would like to implement, the reasons they want to make choices that deviate from worker-citizenship ideals, or the injustices in the labour market may highlight noteworthy places for development from the sustainability perspective (cf. Helne & Hirvilammi 2022).

In this context, the responsibilities of a sustainable working life and labour market that is fair and supports young workers’ well-being cannot be individualised on the shoulders of young vocational graduates, although they should be involved in these discussions (cf. Bessant 2020, 258). As I have illustrated, negotiating complex and sometimes contradictory worker-citizenship and shaping it towards their values and well-being is a complicated task. Moreover, many adopt the post-Fordist worker-citizenship ideal through vocational education; different vocational fields might promote different understandings of worker-citizenship and sustainability; these understandings may also depend on the choices of their occupational teacher or the practices in certain occupations (see Suhonen et al. 2023; McGrath and Powell 2016; Anderson 2009, 52–53; cf. also Leeman & Volman 2021). Therefore, a broader

discussion of worker-citizenship and its structures is needed in the Finnish labour market.

Therefore, if the aim is to make the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship fairer and sustainable for young vocational graduates, the working life as well as the education and employment policies require transformations. From this perspective, a more flexible understanding about worker-citizenship and its social standing is needed (see Weeks 2011; Helne & Hirvilammi 2022, 2021). Although worker-citizenship is already a complex construct for these contemporary young vocational graduates in their post-graduation lives, it might more or less require further transformations due to sustainability (also, Dixon-Decleve et al. 2022; Helne & Hirvilammi 2017). By applying the ideas of Earth4All collective (Dixon-Decleve et al. 2022), I claim that within these complexities and required changes of worker-citizenship, young vocational graduates need support helping them navigate these changes and implement more sustainable worker-citizenship or participate in society in other creative ways if worker-citizenship is unavailable or unsustainable for them. As Article IV discussed, some kind of basic income or other kind of alternative way to support young adults’ societal belonging is needed; these questions, however, require more research discussions based on my findings (cf. Dixon-Decleve et al. 2022; Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017, 182; Weeks 2011; Standing 2014, 296; Gorz 1999, 83; cf. Gough 2017, 186).

6 CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation demonstrated that young adults negotiate with the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship after they graduate from vocational upper secondary education. Based on my findings, in vocational education, young students may learn to trust their opportunities in the labour market while being realistic about how the labour market is constructed and worker-citizenship-related expectations. However, I claim that after graduation, they are in a situation where they must negotiate their worker-citizen selves between the sometimes unrealistic worker-citizenship ideals and the actual labour market opportunities, as well as their rights for societal belonging and the preconditions for starting their adult lives. As labour market experiences accumulate, vocational graduates realistically become aware of the inequalities, injustices, and insecurities shaping the conditions of their worker-citizenship in the labour market (also, Niemi 2022).

This dissertation argued that Furlong and Cartmel’s (2007) ‘epistemological fallacy’²⁷ does not sufficiently acknowledge young vocational students’ and graduates’ active negotiations about their worker-citizen selves. Instead, based on my findings, I claim that although vocational students seem to rely on worker-citizenship ideals in their personal working life transitions, vocational graduates are well aware of the opportunities, injustices, expectations, and obstacles in the labour market that shape their worker-citizenship (cf. Niemi 2022). They also actively negotiate about their worker-citizen selves from the perspective of their current life situations, life plans, occupational competencies, needs, values, and hopes in their everyday lives (cf. France & Threadgold 2016, 618–619; also, Kallio 2023; Käyhkö & Armila 2022; Nikunen & Korvajärvi 2022; Cahill & Leccardi 2020).

Accordingly, I have shown how their active negotiations within the ‘epistemological dissonance’ of worker-citizenship construct their senses of societal belonging and how the worker-citizenship ideals, reproduced in vocational education, create conditions for their societal belonging through which their worker-citizenship is continuously re-evaluated and judged in society. I have also shown how

²⁷ meaning how contemporary young adults may be ignorant about the societal structures that hinder their societal belonging and learn to take the responsibility on their own shoulders because of the individualised society.

they interpret and defend their value in society from their unequal resources, not only relating to their social background, *et cetera*, but to the injustices they face in the labour market as young workers (cf. regarding belonging May 2011, 368, 2013, 83–84, 89–90; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006, 203; regarding injustices and inequalities Skeggs 2011, 508–509, 2004, 57–60, 139; Farrugia 2021a, 131–132, 2019a; Chesters *et al.* 2019; Cuervo & Wyn 2016; MacDonald & Giazitzoglu 2019). I have demonstrated how the contradictions in the contemporary labour market and the obstacles to realise themselves through work acquire support and fair starting points for realising their own kind of adulthood, and how responding to the labour market requirements may confuse, frustrate, and push aside some of the vocational graduates (cf. e.g. Cahill & Leccardi 2020; Westerback & Rissanen 2020; Cuervo & Chesters 2019; Farrugia 2019a; Cuervo & Wyn 2016).

In other words, I claim that in these young adults' post-graduation lives, 1) the institutional expectations of how they should implement their worker-citizenship, 2) their working life experiences and diverse life situations, 3) their chances to make labour market choices and start their post-graduation adult lives, and 4) how they see themselves as worker-citizens, all construct the 'epistemological dissonance' within the labour market through which they negotiate their value and meaning as part of society (cf. e.g. Benjamin, Koirakivi & Kuusisto 2022). Thus, young adults also realistically highlight needed transformations in the labour market, stress their rights in it, and even criticise the narrowness of the worker-citizenship-related norms and ideals and the unrealistic demands they experience as related to it (also, Kallio 2023; Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Helne & Hirvilammi 2022; Cahill & Leccardi 2020; Honkatukia & Lähde 2021; France 1998). Therefore, this dissertation claims the ideals of worker-citizenship should be re-thought from the perspective of young vocational graduates' negotiations, which they must undergo within the post-graduation 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship about their societal belonging, worker-citizen selves, and adulthood (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 156). Thus, I have introduced four central recommendations for the policies relating to vocational education and employment services guiding young adults' lives from the perspective of a more sustainable worker-citizenship ideal.

In my interpretation, the recommendations have obvious connections to what Nussbaum (2013) describes as a part of life worthy of human dignity—about how these young adults should have the freedom and right to feel valuable in society and make decisions that support their good adult lives. I see my findings as a question of fairness because, as discussed, the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship is a complex position to negotiate within, and, from my perspective, it seems

unsustainable to assess vocational students' and graduates' working life transitions through a too narrow ideal of worker-citizenship (cf. Fraser 2009; France 1998). In the context of my study, the whole construct of worker-citizenship seems problematic; it does not seem fair to reproduce a narrative according to which only those who can eventually navigate the complex labour market—independently or with our support—are valuable and worthy of our appreciation (see Skeggs 2004, 178–179; also, e.g. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021; Farrugia 2021a, 2019a).

Vocational education is inherently formed around the social norm of worker-citizenship to equip its students with the necessary occupational skills so they will integrate into society and working life as straightforwardly and independently as possible (see Rosenblad 2023; Billett 2011, 145–146). However, as this dissertation has discussed, the complexity of worker-citizenship can also be seen in the policy measures and related discussions concerning young vocational graduates' labour market positions in Finland. The reform of Finnish vocational education in 2018 and the extension of compulsory education aimed to ensure young vocational graduates' efficient transitions to worker-citizenship and could be interpreted as following an idea that a vocational qualification would guarantee young adults the opportunities to societal belonging (Varjo, Kalalahti & Hooley 2022; Tervasmäki, Okkolin, & Kauppinen 2020; Rintala & Nokelainen 2020; also, Juusola 2023). They followed the very traditional belief that vocational education helps young adults participate in society through occupation and work, thus, through worker-citizenship.

Conversely, the aim of extending compulsory education was also to raise the level of national competence, and the reform in 2018 was guided by concerns that vocational education would not keep up with the labour market changes (Varjo, Kalalahti & Hooley 2022; Tervasmäki, Okkolin, & Kauppinen 2020; also, Juusola 2023). Simultaneously, Finland set a national policy goal to increase the share of young adults in higher education by 2030 and thus respond to the growing need for skills in the labour market (Finnish Government 2023, 99, 2019, 175). Education is strongly believed to guarantee equality in worker-citizenship; however, the idea also exists that young vocational graduates should develop further and be flexible in their worker-citizenship because that is what the post-Fordist labour market demands.

The ideals of worker-citizenship collide also in these discussions. When a young adult is put in a situation where the ideals and expectations are contradictory, and the realities of the labour market do not allow for the kind of worker-citizenship and adulthood experiences they were promised, their negotiations of societal belonging entwine around the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship. Young vocational students and graduates are given a very contradictory message about the

value of their education and worker-citizen selves in the labour market and what their value is when, despite their desire and effort, they fail to find a balance within the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship (see Sandel 2021a, 198).

The problem is that the societal belonging of young adults with vocational upper secondary qualifications is discussed mainly in terms of worker-citizenship while, as I sought to demonstrate in this dissertation, worker-citizenship is a complex, ever-forming, amoeba-like position for them to negotiate their worth and societal belonging. Many scholars have noted, also in Finland, that vocational education tends to emphasise efficiency, competitiveness, and the sufficiency of vocational graduates' occupational competencies in the labour market while the overall aims of equity, sustainability, and young adults' own interests—and their life situations, hopes, dreams, well-being, and societal belonging—might get ignored (Suhonen et al. 2023; Tervasmäki, Okkolin & Kauppinen 2020; Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosval 2019; cf. McGrath et al 2022; Powell & McGrath 2019). Teachers and other professionals working with young vocational students might be well aware that a broader understanding of worker-citizenship, young adults' lives, and the breakages within the surrounding society shaping their lives should be acknowledged; however, the practices, curriculums, and political decisions do not necessarily allow for such work on a practical level (Suhonen et al. 2023). Instead, young adult's views on societal belonging and the other dimensions of their lives may be overtaken by the 'moral panic' that drives policies to react to the post-Fordist labour market requirements, thus narrowing their participation in society solely to the volatile worker-citizenship (Fevre 2007, 531; Pyöriä & Ojala 2016a, 364; Niemi 2010).

Therefore, further research concentrating on the epistemological dissonance of worker-citizenship and young adults' sustainable well-being is needed from the perspective of vocational education and employment-related policies guiding young adults' lives. I argue that it should be understood in policies guiding vocational education that worker-citizenship is not simply about attaining an occupation and income but is unequal, complex, and constantly shaping position; sometimes it is a contradictory, unpredictable, and unattainable construct for young vocational graduates to negotiate with. It is immaterial how efficiently young adults get their vocational qualification; they must still take some kind of stance towards the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship. Therefore, young vocational graduates need more structural support within the 'epistemological dissonance' of worker-citizenship, and their societal belonging should be understood in a broader sense than in terms of worker-citizenship. I consider this pivotal as the issues of sustainability undoubtedly make worker-citizenship even more complex, which is

why the results of my research should be taken seriously when discussing the well-being, coping, and participation of young adults in society (cf. Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). Climate change may force us to re-think economic growth-based worker-citizenship and its role as a guarantor of societal belonging (see Helne & Hirvilammi 2022, 2017; Gough 2017). As Article IV discussed, a certain kind of basic income or other kind of support allowing more creative and flexible ways of implementing worker-citizenship or experiencing societal belonging outside of it might be needed for young adults, as well as the related research debates (cf. Dixon-Decleve et al. 2022; also, Edgell & Graham 2017, 1205).

In conclusion, I suggest there is a need to reshape the purpose of vocational education and the guiding policies from a perspective of responsibility towards young adults and future generations that align with Nussbaum's (2013) thinking and with sustainability (McGrath et al. 2022; Gough 2017, 46–47; Helne & Hirvilammi 2015, 2017, 2022; McGrath & Powell 2016, 18). When developing vocational education, the labour market's changing needs should not be merely recognised as changes in certain occupational tasks but as a broader cultural debate on what society expects from young adults and younger generations as worker-citizens; what kind of participation we value, and what opportunities young adults have on equal footing to meet our demands. The needed debate is challenging (cf. Gorz 1999, 54; Weeks 2011, 255; Article IV). However, we cannot avoid the debate if the attempt is to better respond to the realities with which young vocational graduates negotiate their value and meaning in society. My recommendations regarding this require multidisciplinary discussion, not only from the perspective of youth research but of working life research, critical educational research, social policy research, economics, and sustainability research.

7 REFERENCES

- Acacio Claro, P. J., Koivusilta L., Vainikainen, M-P. & Rimpelä, A. (2022) Psychosocial reserve capacity, family background and selection of an educational path – a longitudinal study from Finland. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 27 (1), 166–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2022.2043916>
- Allardt, E. (1976) Dimensions of welfare in a Comparative Scandinavian Study. *Acta Sociologica* 19 (3), 227–239.
- Anderson, B. (2015) ‘Heads I Win. Tails you Lose.’ Migration and the Worker Citizen. *Current Legal Problems* 68 (1), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clp/cuv012>
- Anderson, D. (2009) Productivism and Ecologism: Changing Dis/courses in TVET. In: J. Fine, R. Maclean & M-G Park (eds.) *Work, Learning and Sustainable Development: Issues, Concerns and Prospects*, vol 8. Springer Dordrecht, 35–57. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8194-1_3
- Anthias, F. (2006) Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations. In: N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabirān & U. Vieten (eds.) *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. London: SAGE Publications, 17–31.
- Antonsich, M. (2010) Searching for belonging – an analytical framework. *Geography Compass* 4 (6), 644–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x>
- Arnett, J. J. (2000) Emerging Adulthood. A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties. *American Psychologist* 55 (5), 469–480.
- Asplund, R., Barth, E. & Lundborg, P. (2011) Polarization of the Nordic Labor Markets. *Finnish Economic Papers* 24 (2), 87–110.
- Atkins, L. (2017) The odyssey: school to work transitions, serendipity and position in the field. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38 (5), 641–655. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1131146>
- Avis, J. & Atkins, L. (2017) Youth transitions, VET and the ‘making’ of class: changing theorisations for changing times? *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 22 (2), 165–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2017.1314678>
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Positioning with Davie Hogan. Stories, tellings, and identities. In: C. Daiute & C. Lightfoot (eds.) *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 135–157.
- Bauman, Z. (2005) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Second edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE

- Beck, U. (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Becker, G. S. (1975) *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. Second Edition. New York and London: Columbia University Press.
- Benjamin, S., Koirikivi, P. & Kuusisto A. (2022) Nuorten elämänkulun haasteita ja vastoinkäymisiä: Näkökulmia resilienssiin kestäväen hyvinvoinnin teorian valossa. *Nuorisotutkimus* 40 (3), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.57049/nuorisotutkimus.9122544>
- Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (2011) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc.
- Berlant, L. (2006) Cruel Optimism. *Differences* 17 (3), 20–36. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2006-009>
- Bessant, J. (2020) *Making-Up People: Youth, Truth and Politics*. London: Routledge
- Bessant, J., Farthing, R., & Watts, R. (2017) *The Precarious Generation: A Political Economy of Young People*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, N.Y.: Routledge.
- Billett, S. (2014) The standing of vocational education: sources of its societal esteem and implications for its enactment. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 66 (1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2013.867525>
- Billett, S. (2011) *Vocational Education. Purposes, Traditions and Prospect*. Springer Dordrecht. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1954-5>
- Billett, S. (2010) Lifelong learning and self: work, subjectivity and learning. *Studies in Continuing Education* 32 (1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01580370903534223>
- Billett, S. (2006a) *Work, Change and Workers*. Dordrecht: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4651-0>
- Billett, S. (2006b) Relational Interdependence Between Social and Individual Agency in Work and Working Life. *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 13 (1), 53–69. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327884mca1301_5
- Böckerman, P., Haapanen, M. & Jepsen, C. (2019) Back to school: Labor-market returns to higher vocational schooling. *Labour Economic* 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.101758>
- Böckerman, P., Haapanen, M. & Jepsen, C. (2018) More skilled, better paid: labour-market returns to postsecondary vocational education. *Oxford Economic Papers* 70 (2), 485–508, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oeq/gpx052>
- Böckerman, P., Bryson, A., Kauhanen, A. & Kangasniemi, M. (2020) Does job design make workers happy? *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 67 (1), 31–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjpe.12211>
- Bonvin, J-M. (2019) Vocational education and training beyond human capital: A capability approach. In: S. McGrath, M. Mulder, J. Papier & R. Suart (eds.) *Handbook of Vocational Education and Training: Developments in the Changing World of Work*.

- Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 273–289. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94532-3_5
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2), 77–101.
- Brunila, K., Vainio, S., Toiviainen, S. (2021) The Positivity Imperative in Youth Education as a Form of Cruel Optimism. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4, 313–327. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00047-3>
- Brunila, K., Mertanen, K. & Batista-Costa, S. (2020) Economic Worries—Therapeutic Solutions? Entrepreneurial and Therapeutic Governing of Transitions of Young People. In: K. Brunila & L. Lundahl (eds.) *Youth on the Move: Tendencies and Tensions in Youth Policies and Practices*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-3>
- Brunila, K. (2014) The Rise of the Survival Discourse in an Era of Therapisation and Neoliberalism. *Education Inquiry* 5 (1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v5.24044>
- Brunila K., Hakala K., Lahelma E. & Teittinen A. (2013) Avauksia ammatilliseen koulutukseen ja yhteiskunnallisiin erontekoihin. In: K. Brunila, K. Hakala, E. Lahelma & A. Teittinen (eds.) *Ammatillinen koulutus ja yhteiskunnalliset eronteot*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 9–16.
- Buchs, H. & Helbling, L. A. (2016) Job opportunities and school-to-work transitions in occupational labour markets. Are occupational change and unskilled employment after vocational education interrelated? *Empirical Research in Vocational Education Training* 8 (1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40461-016-0044-x>
- Bulger, R. (2009) Social Responsibility. UC San Diego. <http://research-ethics.org/topics/social-responsibility/#summary>. Accessed 5 May 2023.
- Burr, V. (2015) *Social Constructionism*. Third Edition. Hove & New York: Routledge.
- Burrows, S. (2013) Precarious work, neo-liberalism and young people's experiences of employment in the Illawarra region. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 24 (3), 380–396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304613498189>
- Bynner, J. (2005) Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood? *Journal of Youth Studies* 8 (4), 367–384
- Cahill, H. & Leccardi, C. (2020) Reframing resilience. In: J. Wyn, H. Cahill, D. Woodman, H. Cuervo, C. Leccardi & J. Chesters (eds.) *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pty. Ltd, 67–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3365-5_5
- Cedefop (2019) *Vocational education and training in Finland: short description*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/841614>
- Chesters, J., Smith, J., Cuervo, H., Laughland-Booÿ, J., Wyn, J., Skrbis, Z. & Woodman, D. (2019) Young adulthood in uncertain times: The association between sense of personal control and employment, education, personal relationships and health. *Journal of Sociology* 55 (2), 389–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318800767>

- Chesters, J. & Cuervo, H. (2019) Adjusting to new employment landscapes: Consequences of precarious employment for young Australians. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 30 (2), 222–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304619832740>
- Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2017) Thematic Analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12 (3), 297–298. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- Crisp, R. & Powell, R. (2017) Young people and UK labour market policy: A critique of ‘employability’ as a tool for understanding youth unemployment. *Urban Studies* 54 (8), 1784–1807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016637567>
- Colley, H., James, D., Diment, K. & Tedder, M. (2003) Learning as becoming in vocational education and training: class, gender and the role of vocational habitus. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 55 (4), 471–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820300200240>
- Compulsory Education Act [Oppivelvollisuuslaki] 1214/2020. <https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2020/20201214#Pidm45949345494448>. Accessed 2 November 2022.
- Côté, J. (2014a) *Youth Studies. Fundamental issues and debates*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Côté, J. (2014b) Towards a new political economy of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (4), 527–543. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.836592>
- Côté, J. & Bynner, J. (2008) Changes in the Transition to Adulthood in the UK and Canada: The Role of Structure and Agency in Emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11 (3), 251–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260801946464>
- Cuervo, H. & Chesters, J. (2019) The [im]possibility of planning a future: how prolonged precarious employment during transitions affects the lives of young Australians, *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work* 29 (4), 295–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2019.1696654>
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2016) An Unspoken Crisis: The ‘Scarring Effects’ of the Complex Nexus Between Education and Work on two Generations of Young Australians. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 35 (2), 122–135. doi:10.1080/02601370.2016.1164467
- Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2014) Reflections on the use of spatial and relational metaphors in youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (7), 901–915. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.878796>
- Daley, D. (2015) The wrongs of protection: Balancing protection and participation in research with marginalised young people. *Journal of Sociology* 51 (2), 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783313482365>
- Davidson, E. (2017) Saying It Like It Is? Power, Participation and Research Involving Young People. *Social Inclusion* 5 (3), 228–239. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i3.967>
- Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1990) Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20, 46–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x>

- Dean, H. (2009) Critiquing capabilities: The distractions of abeguilg concept. *Critical Social Policy* 29 (2), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018308101629>
- Dean, M. (1998) Administering Ascetism: Reworking the Ethical Life of the Unemployed Citizen. In: M. Dean & B. Hindess (eds.) *Governing Australia. Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government*. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 87–107.
- Derrida, J. & Caputo, J. D. (1997) *Deconstruction in a nutshell. A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Edited by J. D. Caputo. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Dewey, J. (2007) *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision Publications, LLC.
- Dewey, J. (2003) Learning to earn: the place of vocational education in a comprehensive scheme of public education. In: J.A. Boydston (ed.) *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953(2nd Release)*. Electronic edition by L. Hickman. Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 145–151.
- Dixson-Decleve, S., Gaffney, O., Ghosh, J., Randers, J., Rockström, J. & Stoknes, P. E. (2022) *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity. A Report to the Club of Rome (2022) Fifty Years After the Limits to Growth (1972)*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.
- Dwyer, P. & Wyn, J. (2001) *Youth, Education and Risk. Facing the Future*. London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Edgell, V. & Graham, H. (2017) A Capability Approach to Unemployed Young People's Voice and Agency in the Development and Implementation of Employment Activation Policies. *Social Policy & Administration* 51 (7), 1191–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12262>
- Edgell, V. & McQuaid, R. (2016) Supporting Disadvantaged Young People into Work: Insights from the Capability Approach. *Social Policy & Administration* 50 (1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12108>
- European Commission (2010) *European Textbook on Ethics in Research*. https://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/textbook-on-ethics-report_en.pdf. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- Farrugia, D. (2021a) *Youth, Work and the Post-Fordist Self*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529210071>
- Farrugia, D. (2021b) Youth, Work and 'Career' as a Way of Talking about the Self. *Work, Employment and Society* 35 (5), 856–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020947576>
- Farrugia, D. (2019a) How youth become workers: Identity, inequality and the post-Fordist self. *Journal of Sociology* 55 (4), 708–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319865028>

- Farrugia, D. (2019b) Class and the post-Fordist work ethic: Subjects of passion and subjects of achievement in the work society. *The Sociological Review* 67 (5), 1086–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118825234>
- Festinger, L. (1985) *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fevre, R. (2007) Employment insecurity and social theory: the power of nightmares. *Work, employment and society* 21 (3), 517–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017007080013>
- Finnish Government (2023) A strong and committed Finland: Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government 20 June 2023. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-818-5>. Accessed 16 August 2023.
- Finnish Government (2019) Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government 10 December 2019. Inclusive and competent Finland - a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-287-811-3>. Accessed 17 November 2023.
- France, A & Threadgold, S (2016) Youth and political economy: towards a Bourdieusian approach, *Journal of Youth Studies* 19 (5), 612–628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1098779>
- France, A. (2016) *Understanding youth in the global economic crisis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- France, A. (1998) 'Why Should We Care?': Young People, Citizenship and Questions of Social Responsibility. *Journal of Youth Studies* 1 (1), 97–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.1998.10592997>
- Franceschelli, M. & Keating, A. (2018) Imagining the future in the neoliberal era: young people's optimism and their faith in hard work. *YOUNG* 26 (4), 1S–17S. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1103308817742287>
- Foucault, M. (1984) *The history of sexuality. An introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Edited by C. Gordon. Translated by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mephram & K. Soper. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fraser, N. (2009) Who Counts? Dilemmas of Justice in a Postwestphalian World. *Antipode* 41 (s1), 281–297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00726.x>
- Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (2007) *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1977) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated and edited by David E. Linge. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Guillemin, M. & Gillam, L. (2004) Ethics, Reflexivity, and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10 (2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>

- Goessling, K. P. & Wager, A. C. (2021) Places of possibility: youth research as creative liberatory praxis. *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (6), 746–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1764920>
- Goodwin, J. & O'Connor, H. (2005) Exploring complex transitions: Looking back at the 'Golden Age' of from school to work. *Sociology* 39 (2), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505050535>
- Gorz, A. (1999) *Reclaiming Work. Beyond the Wage-Based Society*. Translated by Chris Turner. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gough, I. (2017) *Heat, Greed and Human Need: Climate Change, Capitalism and Sustainable Wellbeing*. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Haikkola, L. (2021) Classed and gendered transitions in youth activation: the case of Finnish youth employment services. *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (2), 250–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1715358>
- Haikkola, L. (2019) Shaping activation policy at the street level: Governing inactivity in youth employment services. *Acta Sociologica* 62 (3), 334–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699318784341>
- Hakala, K., Brunila, K., Teittinen, A. & Lahelma, E. (2013) Työntekijäkansalaisuus tekeillä ja käsillä. In: K. Brunila, K. Hakala, E. Lahelma & A. Teittinen (eds.) *Ammatillinen koulutus ja yhteiskunnalliset eronteot*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 257–265.
- Haltia, N., Isopahkala-Bouret, U. & Jauhiainen, A. (2021) The vocational route to higher education in Finland: Students' backgrounds, choices and study experiences. *European Educational Research Journal* 21 (3), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904121996265>
- Hammersley, M. (2010) Can we re-use qualitative data via secondary analysis? Notes on some terminological and substantive issues. *Sociological Research Online* 15 (1), 47–53. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2076>
- Harré, R. (2012) Positioning theory: moral dimensions of social-cultural psychology. In: J. Valsiner (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*. New York: Oxford University, pp. 191–206.
- Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (2010). Varieties of positioning. In: L. Van Langenhove (ed.), *People and societies*. New York, NY: Routledge, 106–120.
- Harré, R., Moghaddam, F. M., Pilkerton Cairnie, T., Rothbart, D. & Sabat, S. R. (2009) Recent Advances in Positioning Theory. *Theory & Psychology* 19 (1), 5–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354308101417>
- Harris, A., Cuervo, H. & Wyn, J. (2021) *Thinking about Belonging in Youth Studies*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75119-7>
- HE 173/2020 vp. Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle oppivelvollisuuslaiksi ja eräiksi siihen liittyviksi laeiksi. <https://okm.fi/delegate/file/77638>. Accessed 2 November 2022.

- Helne, T. & Hirvilammi, T. (2022) Balancing needs: young unemployed Finnish adults' discourse on well-being and its relation to the sustainability transformation. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 18 (1), 158–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2022.2030115>
- Helne, T. & Hirvilammi, T. (2021) *Puristuksissa. Nuoret ja kestävän hyvinvoinnin ehdot*. Helsinki: Kela.
- Helne, T. & Hirvilammi, T. (2017) The relational conception of wellbeing as a catalyst of the ecosocial transition. In: Matthies A. L. & Närhi K. (eds.) *The Ecosocial Transition of Societies. The Contribution of Social Work and Social Policy*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 36–53.
- Helne, T. & Hirvilammi, T. (2015) Wellbeing and Sustainability: A Relational Approach. *Sustainable Development* 23 (3), 167–175. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1581>
- Herranen, J. (2014) ”Kaikki on iha jeees”. *Ammatillinen koulutus nuoren silmin. Nuorisotutkimus* 32 (4), 3–18.
- Hewer, R., Smith, K. & Fergie, G. (2019) The Social Functionality of Humor in Group-Based Research. *Qualitative Health Research* 29 (3), 431–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318800675>
- Högbacka, R. & Aaltonen, S. (2015) Refleksiivisyyden ulottuvuudet. In: S. Aaltonen & R. Högbacka (eds.) *Umpikujasta oivallukseen. Refleksiivisyys empiirisessä tutkimuksessa*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 9–31.
- Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. J. & Hillman, A. (2010) Power, agency and participatory agendas: A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative qualitative research. *Childhood* 17 (3), 360–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568210369310>
- Hollander, J.A. (2004) The Social Contexts of Focus Groups. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33 (5), 602–637. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986204266988>
- Honkatukia, P., Ågren, S. & Lähde, M. (2023) Exploring the future together with young people. Methodological considerations on playfulness, joy and silence as forms of participation. In: T. Rättilä & P. Honkatukia (eds.) *Young People as Agents of Sustainable Society. Reclaiming the Future*. London: Routledge, 192–207. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003345114-14>.
- Honkatukia, P., Rättilä, T. & Rinne, J. (2021) Sisulla töihin? Kanssatutkimusta pakolaisnuorten työhön liittyvistä kokemuksista. In: T. Rättilä & P. Honkatukia (eds.) *Tutkien ja tarinoiden kohti pakolaistaustaisten nuorten kestävää hyvinvointia*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, 88–106.
- Honkatukia, P. & Lähde, M. (2021) Navigating towards sustainable working life – young people imagining the technologised future of work. *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (9), 1199–1214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1820971>
- Honkatukia, P., Kallio, J., Lähde, M. & Mölkänen, J. (2020) *Omana itsenä osa yhteiskuntaa – Itsenäistyvät nuoret aikuiset kansalaisina*. Tampereen yliopisto.

- Honkatukia, P. (2018) Haastattelu nuorisotutkimuksen metodina. In: T. Külakoski & P. Honkatukia (eds.) *Miten tutkia nuoria ja nuorisotyötä*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 149–170.
- Ikonen, H-M. & Nikunen, M. (2019) Young adults and the tuning of the entrepreneurial mindset in neoliberal capitalism. *Journal of Youth Studies* 22 (6), 824–838. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1546383>
- Isopahkala-Bouret, U., Lappalainen, S. & Lahelma, E. (2014) Educating worker-citizens: visions and divisions in curriculum texts. *Journal of Education and Work* 27 (1), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2012.718745>
- Jørgensen, C. H., Järvinen, T. & Lundahl, L. (2019) A Nordic transition regime? Policies for school-to-work transitions in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. *European Educational Research Journal* 18 (3), 278–297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904119830037>
- Juusola, H. (2023) What do young people think about the extension of compulsory education? *Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2023.2263885>
- Kalalahti, M., Niemi, A-M., Varjo, J., & Jahnukainen, M. (2020) Diversified transitions and educational equality? Negotiating the transitions of young people with immigrant backgrounds and/or special educational needs. *Nordic Studies in Education* 40 (1), 36–54. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nse.v40.2127>
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2012) Job Quality and Precarious Work: Clarifications, Controversies, and Challenges. *Work and Occupations* 39 (4), 427–448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888412460533>
- Kallio, J. (2023) *Eletty, opittu, kamppailtu: Itsenäistyvien nuorten kansalaisuuden rakentuminen institutionaalisessa järjestelmässä*. Dissertation. Tampere University, Faculty of Social Sciences. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-3106-1>
- Kallio, J. (2022) “Siitä tuli ihan hirveä paperisota” – Kansalaispätevyys nuorten aikuisten institutionaalisissa kohtaamisissa. *Sosiologia* 59 (1), 19–34.
- Kallio, J., & Honkatukia, P. (2022) Everyday Resistance in Making Oneself Visible: Young Adults’ Negotiations with Institutional Social Control in Youth Services. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 13 (1), 98–123. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs131202220660>
- Kallio, J., Honkatukia, P. & Valtonen, A. (2022) Nuoruuden tiheän elämänvaiheen tutkiminen korona-aikana – eettis-metodologisia reflektioita. *Nuorisotutkimus* 40 (2), 3–23.
- Kananen, J. (2012) Nordic paths from welfare to workfare: Danish, Swedish and Finnish labour market reforms in comparison. *Local Economy* 27 (5–6), 558–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269094212445351>
- Katainen, A. & Heikkilä, R. (2020) Analysing the ways of participating in interview settings: young people’s identity performances and social class in focus groups. *Qualitative Research* 20 (5), 649–666. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119891634>

- Käyhkö, M. & Armila, P. (2022) ”Tasasen paskaa kuuluu”. *Elämänongelmien kirjoa kehkeytyvässä aikuisuudessa. Aikuiskasvatus* 42 (4), 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.122114>
- Käyhkö, M. (2008) Kädenjälki näkyviin – koulupenkkiä väistelevät nuoret työläisnaiset. In: T. Tolonen (ed.) *Yhteiskuntaluokka ja sukupuoli*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 255–273.
- Käyhkö, M. (2006) Siivojaksi oppimassa. *Etnografinen tutkimus työläistyöistä puhdistuspalvelualan koulutuksessa*. Joensuu: Joensuu University Press Oy.
- Kelly, P. (2013) *The Self as Enterprise: Foucault and the ‘Spirit’ of 21st Century Capitalism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kelly, P. (2006) The Entrepreneurial Self and ‘Youth at-risk’: Exploring the Horizons of Identity in the Twenty-first Century. *Journal of Youth Studies* 9 (1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260500523606>
- Kelly, P. (2001) Youth at Risk: Processes of individualisation and responsibilisation in the risk society. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 22 (1), 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300120039731>
- Kerr, S., Maczulskij, T. & Maliranta, M. (2020) Within and between firm trends in job polarization: the roles of globalization and technology. *Journal of Economic Geography*, Volume 20 (4), 1003–1039. <https://doi-org.libproxy.tuni.fi/10.1093/jeg/lbz028>
- Krivosos, D. (2019) The making of gendered ‘migrant workers’ in youth activation: The case of young Russian-speakers in Finland. *Current Sociology* 67 (3), 401–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011392118824363>
- Lähdesmäki, T., Saresma, T., Hiltunen, K., Jäntti S., Sääskilähti, N., Vallius, A. & Ahvenjärvi, K. (2016) Fluidity and flexibility of “belonging”: Uses of the concept in contemporary research. *Acta Sociologica* 59 (3), 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0001699316633099>
- Lahelma, E. (2009) Dichotomized Metaphors and Young People’s Educational Routes. *European Educational Research Journal* 8 (4), 497–507. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2009.8.4.497>
- Lappalainen, S., Nylund, M. & Rosvall, P-Å. (2019) Imagining societies through discourses on educational equality: A cross-cultural analysis of Finnish and Swedish upper secondary curricula from 1970 to the 2010s. *European Educational Research Journal* 18 (3), 335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904118814140>
- Lappalainen, S. (2014) Locality, mobility and labour market citizenship: reflections of Finnish vocational students in social services and health care. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 22 (3), 425–445. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2014.914966>
- Leccardi, C. (2014) Young people and the new semantics of the future. *Società Mutamento Politica* 5 (10), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.13128/SMP-15404>
- Leeman, Y. & Volman, M. (2021) Citizenship in prevocational education: Professional pride as a source. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 16 (1), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197919883252>

- Lewis, G. & Flink, J. (2004) 'All That Heaven Allows': The Worker-Citizen in the Post-War Welfare State. In: G. Lewis (ed.) *Citizenship. Personal Lives and Social Policy*. Milton Keynes: The Open University & The Policy Press, 39–83.
- Lyon, D. & Carabelli, G. (2016) Researching young people's orientations to the future: the methodological challenges of using arts practice. *Qualitative Research* 16 (4), 430–445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794115587393>
- Määttä, M. & Westerback, F. (2022) Nuoret aikuiset työmarkkinoilla ja niiden kynnyksellä – elämänkulun näkökulma. *Nuorisotutkimus* 40 (3), 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.57049/nuorisotutkimus.9122542>
- Määttä, M. (2018, 2019) "Dataset: From Guidance Centres to Working Life". Longitudinal interviews with young people from Finnish one-stop guidance centers. Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Central Finland/South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.
- Määttä, M. (2019) Reforming youth transition support with the multi-agency approach? A case study of the Finnish one-stop guidance centers". *Sociologija* 61 (2), 277–291. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC1902277M>
- MacDonald, R. & Giazitzoglu, A. (2019) Youth, enterprise and precarity: Or, what is, and what is wrong with, the 'gig economy'? *Journal of Sociology* 55 (4), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319837604>
- Maczulskij, T. & Böckerman, P. (2019) Harsh times: do stressors lead to labor market losses? *The European Journal of Health Economics* 20, 357–373. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10198-018-1002-2>
- Maczulskij T. & Karhunen H. (2017) Työmarkkinoiden rakennemuutos ja ammatillisen koulutuksen saaneiden nuorten työttömyys. *Talous & Yhteiskunta* 3/2017, 14–19.
- Madsen, O.J. (2021) *Deconstructing Scandinavia's Achievement Generation: A Youth Mental Health Crisis?* Translated by D. Oatley. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72555-6>
- Maliranta, M., Nurmi, S. & Virtanen, H. (2010) Resources in vocational education and post-schooling outcomes. *International Journal of Manpower* 31 (5), 520–544. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437721011066344>
- Marshall, T. H. & Bottomore, T. (1992) *Citizenship and social class*. London: Pluto Press.
- Maunu, A. (2018) Arjen rytmit ja yhteisöt – ammattiin opiskelevien hyvä elämä ja haalistuva individualismi. *Nuorisotutkimus* 36 (1), 3–21.
- May, V. (2011) Self, Belonging and Social Change. *Sociology* 45 (3), 363–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038511399624>
- May, V. (2013) *Connecting Self to Society: Belonging in a Changing World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McGrath, S., Powell, L., Alla-Mensah, J., Hilal, R. & Suart, R. (2022) New VET theories for new times: The critical capabilities approach to vocational education and training and its potential for theorising a transformed and transformational VET. *Journal of*

- McGrath, S. & Powell, L. (2016) Skills for sustainable development: Transforming vocational education and training beyond 2015. *International Journal of Education* 50, 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.05.006>
- McGrath, S. (2012) Vocational education and training for development: A policy in need of a theory? *International Journal of Educational Development* 32 (5), 623–631. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.12.001>
- McQuaid, R. W. & Lindsay, C. (2005) The Concept of Employability. *Urban Studies* 42 (2), 197–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000316100>
- Mertanen, K., Mäkelä, K. & Brunila, K. (2022) What’s the problem (represented to be) in Finnish youth policies and youth support systems? *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 31 (3), 264–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2020.1752770>
- Meriläinen, N. & Ågren, S. (2022) Ammattiin opiskelevat ja hyvä elämä: työntekijyyttä vai jotain ihan muuta? *Nuorisotutkimus* 40 (4), 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.57049/nuorisotutkimus.9125701>
- Meriläinen, N. (2021) “My Participation is Often Dismissed”: How Vocational School Students Participate in Society. In: E. C. Matto, A. R. Millett McCartney, E. A. Bennion, A. Blair, T. Sun & D. M. Whitehead (eds.) *Teaching Civic Engagement Globally*. Washington, NW: American Political Science Association, 359–373.
- Morgan, D. L. (2011) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412984287>
- Nielsen, M. L., Dyreborg, J. & Lipscomb, H. J. (2019) Precarious work among young Danish employees - a permanent or transitory condition? *Journal of Youth Studies* 22 (1), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1469739>
- Nielsen, M. L., Görlich, A., Grytnes, R. & Dyreborg, J. (2017) Without a Safety Net: Precarization Among Young Danish Employees”. *Nordic journal of working life studies* 7 (3), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v7i3.97094>
- Niemi, A-M. (2022) ‘It hasn’t Been the Best Year, but here I am’: Young Adults Interpreting their Agency in Relation to the Self-Governing Discourse, Social Relations and Life Contexts. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 5, 177–195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-022-00076-6>
- Niemi, A-M. & Jahnukainen, M. (2020) Educating self-governing learners and employees: studying, learning and pedagogical practices in the context of vocational education and its reform. *Journal of Youth Studies* 23 (9), 1143–1160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1656329>
- Niemi, A-M. & Jahnukainen, M. (2018) Tuen tarve, työelämäpainotteisuus ja itsenäisyyden vaatimus ammatillisen koulutuksen kontekstissa. *Ammattikasvatuksen aikakauskirja* 20 (1), 9–25.
- Niemi, A-M. (2010) Työ ja työelämä nuorten ammattiopiskelijoiden ja opettajien puheessa. In: A-H. Anttila, K. Kuussaari, & T. Puhakka (eds.) *Ohipuhuttu nuoruus? Nuorten*

- elinolot-vuosikirja. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Terveiden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos THL & Valtion nuorisoasiain neuvottelukunta, 144–154. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe201205085227>
- Nikunen, M. (2017) Young people, future hopes and concerns in Finland and the European Union: classed and gendered expectations in policy documents. *Journal of Youth Studies* 20 (6), 661–676. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1260693>
- Nikunen, M. (2021) Labour market demands, employability and authenticity. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4, 205–220. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00049-1>
- Nikunen, M. & Korvajärvi, P. (2022) Being positive, being hopeful, being happy: Young adults reflecting on their future in times of austerity. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 25 (3), 824–842. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420935901>
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2013) *Creating Capabilities. The Human Development Approach.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Nylund, M. & Virolainen, M. (2019) Balancing ‘flexibility’ and ‘employability’: The changing role of general studies in the Finnish and Swedish VET curricula of the 1990s and 2010s. *European Educational Research Journal* 18 (3), 314–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904119830508>
- Ojala, S., Nätti, J. & Lipiäinen, L. (2018) Types of Temporary Employment: An 8-Year Follow-Up of Labour Market Attachment. *Social Indicators Research* 138 (1), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1648-7>
- Pajarinen, M., Rouvinen, P., & Ekeland, A. (2015) Computerization Threatens One-Third of Finnish and Norwegian Employment. ETLA [The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy] Brief No 34. <http://pub.etla.fi/ETLA-Muistio-Brief-34.pdf>. Accessed 2 June 2023.
- Pakkanen, M. (2006) Miksi kuulustelin Mirjamia? Kertomus erästä haastattelusta. *Sociologia* 43 (3), 209–225.
- Pekkala Kerr, S., Maczulskij, T. & Maliranta, M. (2016) Within and Between Firm Trends in Job Polarization: Role of Globalization and Technology. ETLA Working Papers No 41. <http://pub.etla.fi/ETLA-Working-Papers-41.pdf>
- Pietilä, P. & Lappalainen, S. (2023) ‘Literacy for labour’ in the competency-based VET in Finland. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 55 (3), 309–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2023.2209148>
- Pillow, W. (2003) Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16 (2), 175–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000060635>
- Pimlott-Wilson, H. (2017) Individualising the future: the emotional geographies of neoliberal governance in young people’s aspirations. *Area* 49 (3), 288–295. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12222>

- Powell, L. & McGrath, S. (2019) *Skills for Human Development. Transforming Vocational Education and Training*. London & New York: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315657592>
- Pyöriä, P. & Ojala, S. (2016a) Precarious work and intrinsic job quality: evidence from Finland, 1984–2013. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 27 (3), 349–367.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304616659190>
- Pyöriä, P. & Ojala, S. (2016b) Nuorten työasenteet puntarissa – eroaako Y-sukupolvi edeltäjistään? *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 81 (1), 31–42.
- Rasmussen, S., Nätti, J., Larsen, T. P., Ilsoe, A., & Garde, A. H. (2019) Nonstandard Employment in the Nordics – Toward Precarious Work? *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 9 (6), 7–32. <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v9iS6.114689>
- Rättilä, T. & Honkatukia, P. (2023) Introduction. In: P. Honkatukia & T. Rättilä (eds.) *Young People as Agents of Sustainable Society. Reclaiming the Future*. London: Routledge, 1–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003345114-1>
- Raworth, K. (2017) A Doughnut for the Anthropocene: humanity's compass in the 21st century. *The Lancet Planetary Health* 1(2), e48–e49. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(17\)30028-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(17)30028-1)
- Resnik, D. (2015) What is Ethics in Research & Why is it Important? <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm>. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- Rikala, S. (2020) Agency among young people in marginalised positions: Towards a better understanding of mental health problems. *Journal of Youth Studies* 23 (8), 1022–1038. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1651929>
- Rintala, H. & Nokelainen, P. (2020) Standing and attractiveness of vocational education and training in Finland: focus on learning environments. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 72 (2), 250–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2020.1744696>
- Rosenblad, N. (2023) *Knowledge and Agency in Vocational Education: An analysis of competency-based training and student counselling utilising a lens of critical realism to cultural historical activity theory*. Dissertation, University of Helsinki. Helsinki: Unigrafia. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-9388-9>
- Saloniemi, A., Salonen, J., Nummi, T. & Virtanen, P. (2021) The diversity of transitions during early adulthood in the Finnish labour market. *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (7), 851–870. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1776229>
- Sandel, M. J. (2021a) *The Tyranny of Merit. What's Become of the Common Good?* London: Penguin Books.
- Sandel, M. J. (2021b) How Meritocracy Fuels Inequality – Part I. *The Tyranny of Merit: An Overview*. *American Journal of Law and Equality* 1, 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1162/ajle_a_00024
- Särkelä, E. & Suoranta, J. (2016) Nuorten tulevaisuuskertomukset ja refleksiivinen oppiminen. *Nuorisotutkimus* 34 (3), 19–38.

- Schütz, A. (1962) Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences. In: M. Natanson (ed.) *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 48–66.
- Sen, A. (2009) *The Idea of Justice*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sennett, R. (2008) *The Craftsman*. Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. (2006) *The Culture of the New Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Settersten Jr, R. A., Stauber B., & Walther, A. (2022) The Significance of Relationality in “Doing Transitions”. In: B. Stauber, A. Walther & R. A. Settersen Jr. (eds.) *Doing Transitions in the Life Course Processes and Practices*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13512-5>
- Silliman, M., & Virtanen, H. (2019) Labor market returns to vocational secondary education. ETLA Working Papers No. 65. <https://www.etla.fi/julkaisut/labor-market-returns-to-vocational-secondary-education/>. Accessed 9 May 2023.
- Skeggs, B. (2011) Imagining personhood differently: person value and autonomist working-class value practices. *The Sociological Review* 59 (3), 496–513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2011.02018.x>
- Skeggs, B. (2004) *Class, self, culture*. London: Routledge.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of class and gender. Becoming respectable*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
- Souto, A-M. (2014) ”Kukaan ei kysy, mitä mulle kuuluu”. *Koulutuksen keskeyttäjät ja ammatilliseen koulutukseen kuulumisen ehdot*. *Nuorisotutkimus* 32 (4), 19–35.
- Spring, J. (1980) *Educating the worker-citizen. The social, economic, and political foundations of education*. New York: Longman.
- The Finnish Act on Vocational Education and Training [Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta] 531/2017. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2017/20170531>. Accessed 10 February 2023.
- Standing, G. (2014) *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Statistics Finland (2022) Entrance to Education 2021. <https://stat.fi/en/publication/cktoccej1p0g0b0036earh5f>. Accessed 17th November 2023.
- Stenström, M.-L., & Virolainen, M. (2018). The modern evolution of vocational education and training in Finland (1945–2015). In: S. Michelsen & M.-L. Stenström (eds.) *Vocational Education in the Nordic Countries. The Historical Evolution*. Routledge. *Routledge Research in International and Comparative Education*, 102–123.
- Suhonen, R., Rajala, A., Cantell, H. & Kallioniemi, A. (2023) From training workers to educating global citizens: how teachers view their opportunities of addressing

- controversial global issues in vocational education. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2023.2266727>
- Suikkanen, A. & Viinamäki, L. (1999) Life paths and labour market citizenship. In J. Christiansen, P. Koistinen & A. Kovalainen (eds.) *Working Europe: Reshaping European employment systems*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 189–209.
- Sukarieh, M. & Tannock, S. (2016) On the political economy of youth: a comment. *Journal of Youth Studies* 19 (9), 1281–1289. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1206869>
- Suvarierol, S. (2015) Creating Citizen-Workers through Civic Integration. *Journal of Social Policy* 44 (4), 707–727. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279415000203>
- Taylor, D. (2011) Wellbeing and Welfare: A Psychosocial Analysis of Being Well and Doing Well Enough. *Journal of Social Policy* 40 (4), 777–794. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279411000249>
- Tervasmäki, T., Okkolin, M-M. & Kauppinen, I. (2020) Changing the Heart and Soul? Inequalities in Finland's Current Pursuit of a Narrow Education Policy. *Policy Futures in Education* 18 (5), 648–661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318811031>
- Tilley, S. & Taylor, L. (2018) Qualitative Methods and Respectful Praxis: Researching With Youth. *The Qualitative Report* 23 (9), 2184–2204. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3482>
- Tokola, N., Rättilä, T., Honkatukia, P., Mubeen, F.E., & Mustalahti, I. (2019) ”Haluan tulla nähdyksi huiviltani” – Nuorten musliminaisten kokemuksia kuulumisesta työelämässä. *Nuorisotutkimus* 37 (2), 21–35.
- Tolonen, T., & Aapola-Kari, S. (2022) Head-first into Upper Secondary Education: Finnish Young People Making Classed and Gendered Educational Choices. *YOUNG* 30 (4), 344–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F11033088221086078>
- Tolonen, T. (2008a) Menestys, pärjääminen ja syrjäytyminen. Nuorten elämäntyyli ja luokkaerot. In: T. Tolonen (ed.) *Yhteiskuntaluokka ja sukupuoli*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 226–254.
- Tolonen, T. (2008b) Success, coping and social exclusion in transitions of young Finns. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11 (2), 233–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260701851129>
- Threadgold, S. (2020) Figures of youth: on the very object of Youth Studies. *Journal of Youth Studies* 23 (6), 686–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636014>
- Wallin, A., Koro-Ljungberg, M., & Eskola, J. (2019) The method of empathy-based stories. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42 (5), 525–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1533937>
- Walther, A. (2022) Welfare States as Transition Regimes: Reconstruction from International Comparisons of Young People's Transitions to Work. In: B. Stauber, A. Walther & R. A. Settersten Jr. (eds.) *Doing Transitions in the Life Course Processes and Practices*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13512-5>

- Walther, A., Stauber B. & Settersten Jr, R. A. (2022) “Doing Transitions”: A New Research Perspective. In: B. Stauber, A. Walther & R. A. Settersten Jr. (eds.) *Doing Transitions in the Life Course Processes and Practices*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13512-5>
- Walther, A. (2006) Regimes of youth transitions. Choice, flexibility and security in young people’s experiences across different European contexts. *YOUNG* 14 (2), 83–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308806062737>
- van der Klink, J. J. L., Bültmann, U., Burdorf, A., Schaufeli, W. B., Zijlstra, F. R. H., Abma, F. I., Brouwer, S. & van der Wilt, G. J. (2016) Sustainable employability – definition, conceptualization, and implications: A perspective based on the capability approach. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 42 (1), 71–79. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3531>
- Van Langenhove, L. (2017) Varieties of Moral Orders and the Dual Structure of Society: A Perspective from Positioning Theory. *Frontiers in Sociology* 2 (9), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2017.00009>
- Varjo, J., Kalalahti, M. & Hooley, T. (2022) Actantial construction of career guidance in parliament of Finland’s education policy debates 1967–2020. *Journal of Education Policy* 37 (6), 1009–1027. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2021.1971772>
- Warr, D. J. (2005) “It was fun . . . but we don’t usually talk about these things”: Analyzing Sociable Interaction in Focus Groups. *Qualitative Inquiry* 11 (2), 200–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404273412>
- Weber, M. (2001) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. London & New York: Routledge.
- Weeks, K. (2011) *The Problem with Work. Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723>
- Westerback, F. & Rissanen, H. (2020) Prekaarit työmarkkinat ja nuorten aikuisten strategiat luovia työkeskeisen yhteiskunnan normien puristuksissa. In: M. Määttä & A-M. Souto (eds.) *Tutkittu ja tulkittu Ohjaamo: Nuorten ohjaus ja palvelut integraatiopyönteessä*. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura, 159–182.
- Wheelahan, L. & Moodie, G. (2017) Vocational education qualifications’ roles in pathways to work in liberal market economies. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 69 (1), 10–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2016.1275031>
- Woodman, D. & Wyn, J. (2015) *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Wright, D. E. (2020) Imagining a more just world: critical arts pedagogy and youth participatory action research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 33 (1), 32–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1678784>
- Wyn, J. (2020) Introduction. In: J. Wyn, H. Cahill, D. Woodman, H. Cuervo, C. Leccardi & J. Chesters (eds.) *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*, 1–12.

Singapore: Springer Singapore Pty. Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3365-5_1

Wyn, J. & Dwyer, P. (1999) New Direction in Research on Youth in Transition. *Journal of Youth Studies* 2 (1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.1999.10593021>

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006) Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice* 40 (3), 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331>

APPENDIX 1

These themed interview questions we utilised by ALL-YOUTH researcher in the workshops organised for vocational upper secondary students in autumn 2018 and spring 2019. They are translated from Finnish.

Table 3. Themed group interview questions, 2018 and 2019

Research problem	Labour market citizenship	Attachment to society	Well-being citizenship	Future
Main theme	Successful working life transition	Decent life and citizenship	Alternative paths and well-being	Changes in working life and society
Theme	fears and concerns hopes and expectations meaning of work unemployment insecurity	support and services meaning for working life belonging definition for citizenship	alternatives for working life meanings/definitions for well-being definition of decent life possibilities and capabilities to act in society	values and attitudes visions hopes and fears future society
Main questions	What kind of hopes and expectations you have regarding working life? (reflection of the task) What kind of fears and concerns you have regarding working life? (reflection of the task) What kind of competencies and skills one needs in term of labour market attachment?	Why working life attachment is important? What kind of support one can get in the working life transition? What kind of support one can get in unemployment? What kind of a person is socially excluded/is not socially excluded?	What are the alternatives to social engagement alongside working life? What does it mean to be outside of working life? Is that allowed? What does well-being mean? And what does a decent life mean?	What will working life look like in the future? What will a decent life consist of in the future (e.g. 20 years from now)?

Sub-questions (if they fit to the conversation)	<p>What are the benefits of getting attached to the working life?</p> <p>What's the harm if you don't work?</p> <p>What thoughts come to mind from the word unemployment?</p>	<p>Is the support provided in the right way?</p> <p>What kind of person is an 'approved citizen'?</p> <p>What does a decent life consist of?</p> <p>What does it mean to be attached to society?</p> <p>What things make you feel like you are part of society?</p>	<p>Can you feel well outside labour market?</p> <p>What comes to mind about the words well-being and working life?</p> <p>What comes to mind from the words well-being and unemployment?</p> <p>In addition to work and education, what can you do in society?</p>	<p>What are your hopes or concerns for the future? What will society be like in the future?</p>
--	---	---	--	---

APPENDIX 2

These interview questions are from the Youth Barometer 2019 ‘Hyvää työtä!’ and are translated from Finnish by me or taken from the English summary of the barometer (see the website mentioned below). The translated questions are not to be used directly in further research. The original Finnish questions (K19, K20, K21, K22) are listed after the translations. The barometer can be found at the website of the

State	Youth	Council,
https://tietoanuorista.fi/nuorisobarometri/nuorisobarometri-2019/ (Accessed 8 May 2023).		

Q19 Do you agree or disagree with the following claims?

(4 Strongly agree, 3 Agree to some extent, 2 Disagree to some extent 1 Strongly disagree, 99 don't know/don't want to say)

- a) If I have worries, I get help from my friends.
- b) One must compete in life.
- c) Success in life depends on yourself.
- d) Living in Finland on social security is far too easy.
- e) Young unemployed people should do work that benefits society in exchange for unemployment security.
- f) A basic income paid to everyone should be introduced in Finland.
- g) The dismissal of the employee must become easier.

Q20 How do you view the following claims? To what extent do you agree or disagree?

(Strongly agree/Agree to some extent/Don't agree or disagree/ Disagree to some extent/ Strongly disagree/99 don't know/don't want to say)

- a) People have often a condescending attitude towards the unemployed.
- b) It is difficult for an unemployed person to plan for life and the future.
- c) When unemployed, one can freely plan their time.
- d) When unemployed, self-confidence disappears.

- e) The competences of the unemployed fall behind the demands of the labour market.
- f) Unemployment is shameful.
- g) The relationships of the unemployed deteriorate.

Q21 Do you agree or disagree with the following claims?

(4 Strongly agree, 3 Agree to some extent, 2 Disagree to some extent 1 Strongly disagree, 99 don't know/don't want to say)

- a) Finnish working life needs more foreign workers.
- b) Nowadays working life demands so much from employees that many people burn out prematurely.
- c) Being unemployed is not a bad thing if the livelihood is secured.
- d) Staying in working life requires continuous education and training.
- e) Comprehensive school diploma alone can provide employment.
- f) Reconciling a career and children is an impossible equation.
- g) An unemployed person must have an obligation to participate in some activity.
- h) An unemployed person must accept any job.
- i) The division of occupations into women's and men's occupations is a problem in our country.
- j) The costs of parental leave should be shared more evenly among the parents' employers than at present.
- k) Both men and women should bear equal responsibility for home and family.
- l) Both men and women must participate equally in earning a living for the family.
- m) Entrepreneurship will become more common in the future.

Q22 Do you agree or disagree with the following claims?

(4 Strongly agree, 3 Agree to some extent, 2 Disagree to some extent 1 Strongly disagree, 99 don't know/don't want to say)

- a) I would rather take temporary work than live on unemployment benefits if the take-home pay is the same.
- b) I don't have to work to be happy.
- c) I'd be prepared to change my municipality of residence to get a job.
- d) I'm prepared to give up a job opportunity for family reasons.

- e) I'd be prepared to postpone setting up a family for work-related reasons.
- f) I will change working place several times over my working career.
- g) I will change occupation several times over my working career.
- h) I'm worried about whether I can cope in working life in the future.
- i) I'm worried about whether I will have a job in the future.
- j) Any job is good enough for me, as long as it pays well enough.
- k) Work must reflect my own values.
- l) I will probably get a permanent job.
- m) I will probably be unemployed at some point.
- n) I will probably exceed my parents' standard of living.
- o) A pension will guarantee a reasonable income when I'm old.
- p) I want to become wealthy so that I can retire before the official retirement age.
- q) I'd like to try entrepreneurship at some point in my career.

K19 Oletko samaa vai eri mieltä seuraavien väitteiden kanssa?

(4 Täysin samaa mieltä, 3 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 2 Jokseenkin eri mieltä, 1 Täysin eri mieltä, 99 EOS)

- a) Jos minulla on huolia, saan apua kavereiltani
- b) Elämässä täytyy kilpailla
- c) Menestyminen elämässä on itsestä kiinni
- d) Suomessa sosiaaliturvalla eläminen on aivan liian helppoa
- e) Työttömyysturvan vastikkeeksi nuorten olisi tehtävä jotakin yhteiskuntaa hyödyttävää työtä
- f) Suomessa pitäisi ottaa käyttöön kaikille maksettava perustulo
- g) Työntekijän irtisanomista on helpotettava

K20 Miten suhtaudut seuraaviin väitteisiin? Missä määrin samaa tai eri mieltä olet?

(Täysin samaa mieltä/Osittain samaa mieltä/Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä/Osittain eri mieltä/Täysin eri mieltä/EOS)

- a) Useimmiten ihmiset suhtautuvat alentuvasti työttömiin
- b) Työttömän on vaikea suunnitella elämää ja tulevaisuutta
- c) Työttömänä saa vapaasti suunnitella ajankäyttöä
- d) Työttömänä itseluottamus katoaa

- e) Työttömän osaaminen jää jälkeen työmarkkinoiden vaatimuksista
- f) Työttömyys on häpeällistä
- g) Työttömän ihmissuhteet heikkenevät

K21 Oletko samaa vai eri mieltä seuraavien väitteiden kanssa?

(4 Täysin samaa mieltä, 3 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 2 Jokseenkin eri mieltä, 1 Täysin eri mieltä, 99 EOS)

- a) Suomalainen työelämä tarvitsee lisää ulkomaalaisia työntekijöitä
- b) Työelämä vaatii nykyisin työntekijöiltä niin paljon, että monet ihmiset palavat ennenaikaisesti loppuun
- c) Työttömänä olo ei ole paha asia, jos toimeentulo on turvattu
- d) Työelämässä pysyminen edellyttää jatkuvaa kouluttautumista
- e) Pelkällä peruskoulututkinnolla voi työllistyä
- f) Uran ja lasten yhdistäminen on mahdoton yhtälö
- g) Työttömällä pitää olla velvollisuus osallistua johonkin toimintaan
- h) Työttömän pitää ottaa vastaan mitä tahansa työtä
- i) Ammattien jakautuminen naisten ja miesten ammatteihin on maassamme ongelma
- j) Vanhempainvapaan kustannukset tulisi jakaa nykyistä tasaisemmin vanhempien työnantajien kesken
- k) Sekä miesten että naisten tulee kantaa yhtä paljon vastuuta kodista ja perheestä
- l) Sekä miesten että naisten tulee osallistua yhtäläisesti perheen toimeentulon hankkimiseen
- m) Yrittäjyys yleistyy tulevaisuudessa

K22 Entä oletko samaa vai eri mieltä seuraavien väitteiden kanssa?

(4 Täysin samaa mieltä, 3 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 2 Jokseenkin eri mieltä, 1 Täysin eri mieltä, 99 EOS)

- a) Ottaisin mieluummin tilapäistäkin työtä kuin eläisit työttömyyskorvauksella, jos käteen jäävä tulo olisi yhtä suuri
- b) Minun ei tarvitse tehdä töitä ollakseni onnellinen
- c) Olisin valmis vaihtamaan asuinkuntaa työpaikan saamiseksi
- d) Olen valmis luopumaan työtilaisuudesta perhesyiden vuoksi
- e) Olisin valmis lykkäämään perheen perustamista työhön liittyvien syiden takia

- f) Vaihdan työurallani työpaikkaa useita kertoja
- g) Vaihdan työurallani ammattia useita kertoja
- h) Olen huolissani omasta jaksamisestani työelämässä tulevaisuudessa
- i) Olen huolissani siitä, onko minulla töitä tulevaisuudessa
- j) Mikä tahansa työ kelpaa minulle, kunhan siitä maksetaan riittävästi
- k) Työni on oltava omien arvojeni mukaista
- l) On todennäköistä, että saan vakinaista työtä
- m) On todennäköistä, että tulen välillä olemaan työtön
- n) On todennäköistä, että ylitän vanhempieni elintason
- o) Eläke takaa kohtuullisen toimeentulon, kun olen vanha
- p) Haluan vaurastua niin, että voin jäädä eläkkeelle ennen virallista eläkeikää
- q) Haluaisin kokeilla yritystoimintaa jossain työurani vaiheessa (EI KYSYÄ, JOS T10 = 3)

APPENDIX 3

The themed interview questions for vocational graduates, interviewed by me in autumn 2020. The questions are translated from Finnish.

1. When did you graduate?
2. From what field of study?

Working life transition after graduation

3. How are you? How's the transition going?
4. Do you work? If so, is your job the same as your education? Is the job what you thought you were doing?

Expectations for employment

5. Was finding employment or applying for a job the way you thought it would be?
6. Did you get the right picture of working life during your studies?
7. What do you think is paid employment? What is it not?
8. What kind of work would you like to do? What kind of work would you not like to do?

Skills needed in the labour market

9. What were the advantages of vocational education? What's the downside?
10. Did you get enough skills from education to function in society in addition to occupational skills? Would you have liked some other skills?
11. What kind of support would you have hoped for after graduation? What kind of support do you think young people need to find work?

Thoughts on the importance of working life

12. What ideas emerged from the research results? What do you agree with, what do you disagree with? (the interviewees were given a short summary of the results in articles I and II, based on the workshops they participated in while studying, see below).
13. Have your thoughts changed since graduation?
14. What do you think about work and doing work?
15. What about unemployment?
16. What do you think are the good aspects of working life?
17. What are the downsides?

18. What do you think are the rights of the individual in the labour market? What are the responsibilities?

Plans for the future

19. What plans do you have for the future?

The summary that was send for the interviewees before the interview:

You have participated in the data collection of my dissertation, the purpose of which is to study the working life transitions of young vocational graduates and their perceptions of future working life. The first data for the study has been collected from two vocational institutions in six workshops. Based on these workshops, two research articles have been created, the first of which has been published as part of the 2019 Youth Barometer. The following research results have been presented in these research articles:

- The students who participated in the workshops seem to value working life and their wish is to find a paid job after graduation where they can utilise their own expertise and feel part of the work community.
- Most of the participants in the workshops felt that work should be done and that working is an important part of Finnish society. A large part also felt that there must be a good reason for unemployment (such as illness).
- Most of the participants in the workshops were confident that they would find work after graduation and, on the other hand, believed that there would be work available, if they apply for it.
- Most of the participants in the workshop also did not think that unemployment would be their own problem after graduation. They were confident that they would receive support from relatives if needed, know how to apply for a job and, on the other hand, that in their own case, unemployment is only temporary.
- Some of the participants in the workshops were worried if there is not enough free time left in the future, but all the time is spent doing the work.
- The ideas of those who participated in the workshops can be interpreted as meaning that finding paid work after graduation is important in order to become independent and start your own life. Independence seems to be important to feel like you are growing up and on the other hand, to feel like you are achieving things similar to other people of the same age.

APPENDIX 4

These interview questions were used in the ‘Ohjaamoista työelämään’ [from one-stop guidance centres to working life] research project led by Mirja Määttä. Interviews were conducted by Mirja Määttä, Frida Westerback and Hanna Rissanen in 2018 and 2019. The questions are an unofficial translation from Finnish and are not to be used directly in further research.

2018

Questions about job-seeking

1. What kind of experience do you have with job search?
2. What has helped in the job search? What has been difficult about finding a job?
3. What kind of questions have you been looking for advice or support when applying for a job or unemployed?
4. Is there advice or support available? What forms of support have been helpful?

Questions about the one-stop guidance centres (Ohjaamo)

5. When did you first visit the centre? What was your situation then? (Did you have a question in your mind?)
6. Different professionals work in the centres – who/who have you dealt with? What kind of issues have you dealt with them?
7. How has your life/things progressed since the centre visit/visits? What has been the role of the centre in your life?

Working life relationships and experiences

8. What kind of education do you have?
9. What is your latest work (life) experience?
10. What kind of employers have you had? What kind of employment relationships and working life conditions?
11. What kind of support or advice have you needed while at work?
12. Is there advice or support available? Where did you get them?
13. Have your parents advised you on these work-related issues? Do you talk to your parents about these things?
14. What about friends?

Last Questions

15. What does work mean to you?
16. What hopes do you have for working life?

2019

How is your autumn? How's it going?

Did you bring a picture of a good future? (Or you can choose from these...)

Discussion of the selected image. What does your good future look like?

What is a good future, what are your hopes for the future?

Last time we went through your path to working life and related experiences... If I remember correctly, you were on

a pay subsidy

apprenticeship

as a job seeker to consider study options...

Now what?

Have you been to the one-stop centre in the past year? Have you received any advice or help here?

What about elsewhere, thinking about looking for a job, studying or working life?

What is there to improve in services related to studying and working life for young adults?

A look at the curve (about your path to working life) drawn last time. What does it look like now?

How does it go on?

(The drawing should be taken away so that the next question does not commit too much to the drawing)

What kind of working life experiences have been significant for you?

What have they taught you?

PUBLICATION

I

Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun esiintyminen ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteissa

Ågren, Susanna; Pietilä, Iikka & Rättilä, Tiina

L. Haikkola & S. Myllyniemi (2020, toim.) Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019. Helsinki: Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 157–178.

<https://tietoanuorista.fi/nuorisobarometri/nuorisobarometri-2019/>

Publication reprinted with the permission of the copyright holders.

SUSANNA ÅGREN, IIKKA PIETILÄ & TIINA RÄTTILÄ

PALKKATYÖKESKEISEN AJATTELUN ESIINTYMINEN AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN TYÖELÄMÄASENTEISSA



VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIAALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

JOHDANTO

Pari vuotta sitten hyväksytyssä laissa ammatillisesta koulutuksesta todetaan, että koulutuksen tarkoituksena on ”kehittää työ- ja elinkeinoelämää ja vastata sen osaamistarpeisiin, edistää työllisyyttä, antaa valmiuksia yrittäjyyteen ja työ- ja toimintakyvyn jatkuvaan ylläpitoon” (laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta 531/2017, 2. §). Ammatillista koulutusta koskevassa keskustelussa on toistaiseksi puhuttu hyvin vähän siitä, millaisia yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymisen mahdollisuuksia – tai niiden puutteita – lain linjaama koulutus tarjoaa nuorille työmarkkinoiden murroksessa. Lisäksi keskustelussa harvoin kysytään, millaiseksi ammattiin opiskelevat nuoret itse kokevat lähestyvän työelämän ja miten he ylipäättään näkevät palkkatyön merkityksen omassa elämässään. Tässä artikkelissa paneudumme näihin kysymyksiin tarkastelemalla ammattiin opiskelevien nuorten työhön liittyviä asenteita. Analysoimme kahta empiiristä aineistoa, vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometrin kyselyaineistoa sekä laadullista työpaja-aineistoa¹, joka kerättiin syksyllä 2018 ja keväällä 2019 ammattioppilaitoksista valmistumassa olevilta opiskelijoilta. Vertailemme aineistoja soveltuvien osin vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrin tilasto-osiossa esitettyihin havaintoihin nuorten työasenteista kolmella vuosikymmenellä.

Tarkastelumme kiinnittyy tutkimuskirjallisuudessa jo pitkään käytyyn kriittiseen debattiin työmarkkinakansalaisuuden merkityksestä nuorten yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymiselle. Työmarkkinakansalaisuus voidaan ymmärtää Asko Suikkasen ja Leena Viinamäen (1999, 190–191)

tavoin yksilön ja yhteiskunnan väliseksi sosiaalisiksi sopimukseksi, joka määrittää yksilön mahdollisuuksia toimia ja pärjätä yhteiskunnassa. Tarkennamme työmarkkinakansalaisuuden käsitettä puhumalla siihen kiinteästi kytkeytyvästä *palkkatyökeskeisestä ajattelutavasta*. Viittaamme käsitteellä normatiivisiin ja poliittisesti latautuneisiin käsityksiin siitä, että palkkatyö muodostaa edelleen keskeisimmän yksilön ja yhteiskunnan suhdetta rakentavan mekanismin (ks. Gorz 1999, 64–65; vrt. Beck 2000, 10, 63). Jaamme palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan edelleen kahteen toisiinsa sidoksissa olevaan alakäsitteeseen, joita hyödynnämme myöhemmin tulkitessamme nuorten käsityksiä työstä. *Institutionaalinen palkkatyökeskeisyys* painottaa aktiivista työvoima- ja koulutuspolitiikkaa, jonka pyrkimyksenä on kasvattaa nuorista työmarkkinoiden tarpeisiin tehokkaasti ja joustavasti vastaavia työntekijöitä, hyviä veronmaksajia ja aktiivisia kansalaisia (Brunila 2014, 13–16; France 2017, 264–265). *Kulttuurinen palkkatyökeskeisyys* puolestaan kiinnittää huomiota palkkatyön merkitykseen yhteiskunnallisena arvona ja moraalisenä normina, joihin ammatillinen koulutus ja sen kulttuurinen konteksti edelleen vahvasti kiinnittyvät. Kulttuurisesta näkökulmasta kiinnostava kysymys on myös, tuottaako palkkatyön normatiivinen arvottaminen työelämän muuttuessa myös syveneviä luokkakajoja. (Weber 1930/1992, 62, 178–179; Kortteinen 1992, 76–77, 302–303; Tolonen 2008, 236–237; Käyhkö 2008, 258; Maczulskij & Kauhanen 2016, 295.)

Artikkelin taustalla on huoli nuorten hyvinvoinnista ja pärjäämisestä ammatillisen koulutuksen ja nopeasti muuttuvien työmark-

kinoiden keskellä. Tutkimuksista tiedetään, että vaikka ammatillinen koulutus nopeuttaa ja sujuvoittaa työelämään siirtymistä (Middeldorp, Edzes & Dijk 2019, 94; Müller 2005, 468–470), siihen liittyy tulevaisuudessa monia haasteita (esim. Buchs & Helbling 2016, 11–13; Korber & Oesch 2019, 9). Keskeinen argumenttimme on, että palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelutapa ei saa kiinni työmarkkinoiden muutoksen synnyttämistä ongelmista: automatisaatio vähentää erityisesti suorittavan työn määrää, ja työvoiman osaamiseen kohdistuvat vaatimukset muuttuvat nopeammin kuin koulutusjärjestelmä pystyy niihin vastaamaan (Green 2019, 52; Rintala & Nokelainen 2018, 58–60; Buchholz & Blossfeld 2012, 23–24). Yhtäältä vähenevä työvoiman tarve ja toisaalta jo pitkään tunnettu työn kysynnän ja tarjonnan kohtaanto-ongelma synnyttävät uusia eriarvoistumisen tendenssejä, joihin yhteiskunnan on pitkällä aikavälillä kyettävä vastaamaan. Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan pulmallisimpiin piirteisiin kuuluu, että se saattaa ylläpitää vääristynyttä mielikuvaa työmarkkinoista (esim. Franceschelli & Keating 2018, 14) ja asettaa osalle nuorista liian suuria vaatimuksia (Souto 2014, 31). Jos hyväksytään oletus, että palkkatyön määrä vähenee tulevaisuudessa pysyvästi, kuten esimerkiksi André Gorz (1999, 53–57) ja Yuval Noah Harari (2018, 47) ovat esittäneet, julkisessa keskustelussa on tärkeää avata palkkatyön rinnalla tilaa vaihtoehtoisille yksilöä yhteiskuntaan kiinnittäville työn muodoille ja merkityksille. Tätä keskustelua artikkelimme pyrkii osaltaan edistämään.

Selvitämme seuraavaksi tarkemmin palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelutapaa nuorten työelämäsiirtymien valossa, minkä jälkeen esittelemme artikkelin aineiston ja tutkimusmetodit. Analyysiosiossa käsittelemme nuorten suhdetta työhön ja palkkatyökeskeiseen ajatteluun neljästä eri näkökulmasta. Johtopäätöksissä esitämme, että palkkatyökeskeisyyteen nojaavissa työmarkkina- ja koulutuspoliittisissa ratkaisuissa tulee huomioida entistä tarkemmin ajattelutavan vaikutuksia nuorten työelämäasentisiin ja koettuihin paineisiin.

AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN TYÖELÄMÄSIIRTYMÄT TYÖMARKKINOIDEN MURROKSESSA

Ammatillisen koulutuksen uudistus ja työelämälähtöisyyden vahvistuminen on tutkimuksissa tulkittu yhdeksi osoitukseksi uusliberalistisen diskurssin yhteiskunnallisesta valta-asemasta (Lappalainen, Nylund & Rosvall 2019, 348). Esimerkiksi Hakalan ja kumppanien (2013, 261–262) mukaan ammatillisen koulutuksen yksilöllisyyttä korostavassa retoriikassa on nähtävissä uusliberalistisia piirteitä, jotka ilmenevät ammattiopiskelijoilta vaadittavina itseohjautuvuuden ja yritteliäisyyden taitoina (vrt. Souto 2014, 31). Ammatillisen koulutuksen uudistuksen tavoitteena oli myös nopeuttaa työelämäsiirtymiä (Valtioneuvosto 2016, 36). Kriittisissä tutkimuksissa tämä tavoite on liitetty vanhempaan, jo 1990-luvun laman synnyttämään ja vuoden 2007 jälkeisestä talouskriisistä pontta saaneeseen keskusteluun nuorisotyöttömyyden yhteiskunnallisista ja taloudellisista seurauksista, joihin julkinen valta on pyrkinyt vastaamaan nuoria aktivoivilla ja syrjäytymistä ehkäisevillä politiikkatoimilla (France 2016, 60; France 2017, 261–262; Kelly 2017; Kelly 2001, 30; Silvasti, Lempiäinen & Kankainen 2014, 13). Artikkelissa nimitämme tällaista työmarkkinoiden ehdoilla tehtävää yhteiskuntapolitiikkaa ja sitä tuottavaa puhetapaa palkkatyökeskeiseksi ajatteluksi. Siinä missä työmarkkinakansalaisuuden käsite kuvaa työmarkkinoille osallistumisen merkitystä yksilön yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymisessä yleisesti, palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan käsite tarkentaa näkökulmaa työ- ja nuorisopoliittisten keskustelujen tapaan vastuuttaa nuoria palkkatyön kautta.

Nojaamme palkkatyökeskeisyyden määrittelyssä Gorzin käyttämään käsitteeseen ”wage-based society”. Gorzin mukaan työ on sosiaalisesti tunnistettu ja normalisoitu instituutio ja työstä maksettava palkka määrittelee ihmisen aseman ja toimintamahdollisuudet yhteiskunnassa. Työn kautta yksilö vastaavasti määrittää

omaa identiteettiään ja yhteiskuntasuhdettaan. (Gorz 1999, 3, 72-73.) Ammattiin valmistumassa olevien ja omaa suhdettaan yhteiskuntaan rakentavien nuorten näkökulmasta palkkatyökeskeisyys muodostuu merkittäväksi ongelmaksi, jos palkkatyön määrä vähenee ja sirpaloituu, kilpailu työpaikoista kiristyy ja työ jakautuu entistä epätasaisemmin eri työntekijäryhmien ja tuloluokkien välillä (ks. Buchholz & Blossfeld 2012, 19-20; Maczulskij & Kauhanen 2016, 295; Green 2019, 52). Vaikka tämä kehitys ei ainakaan vielä näy kovin laajasti suomalaisessa työelämässä, nuorten keskuudessa vaihtelevat työn ja työttömyyden jaksot sekä osa- ja määräaikaisten työt ovat lisääntyneet (ks. Nätti & Pyöriä 2017, 26, 36; Pyöriä ym. 2017, 199-200).

Kysymys yhteiskunnan palkkatyökeskeisyydestä kiertyy samalla nuorisotutkimuksen piirissä käytyihin keskusteluihin nuorten elämänsä muutoksista. Perinteisesti tutkimuksissa aikuistumisen prosessi on liitetty nuoren siirtymiseen koulutuspoluilta työelämään ja vakituisiin työsuhteisiin (Wyn & White 1997, 95). Nuorten työelämäsiirtymiä koskevassa tuoreessa tutkimuksessa on kuitenkin tuotu esiin, että valmistumisen jälkeiset siirtymät eivät enää välttämättä takaa nuorille tietä vakaaseen aikuisuuteen turvallisine työsuhteineen (Chesters & Cuervo 2019, 235). Mutkistuneet koulutuspolut ja työmarkkinoiden lisääntyvä epävarmuus ovat esimerkiksi Hernan Cuervon ja Johanna Wynin (2016, 132) mukaan merkinneet käännettä uuteen, pitkittyneeseen ja epälineaarisesti kehkeytyvään aikuisuuteen, jonka seurauksia ei poliittisessa päätöksenteossa toistaiseksi osata riittävästi tunnistaa.

Artikkelissa analysoimme kahta empiiristä aineistoamme siitä näkökulmasta, heijastuvatko palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun institutionaaliset normit ja oletukset nuorten työhön liittyviin käsityksiin ja niitä koskevaan puheeseen, ja jos heijastuvat, millä tavoin tämä tulee esiin.

PALKKATYÖKESKEINEN AJATTELUTAPA AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN NUORTEN KASVATTAJANA

Työn yhteiskunnalliseen merkitykseen kiinteästi liittyvä kulttuurinen ulottuvuus jää usein työmarkkinakansalaisuudesta käytyjen keskustelujen katveeseen. Tämä näkyy myös siinä, että nuorten työelämäsiirtymiä koskevassa tutkimuksessa ei ole juurikaan selvitetty, miten ammatillinen koulutus rakentaa nuorten käsityksiä työelämästä. Tästä näkökulmasta on erityisen mielenkiintoista tarkastella ammattiin opiskelevien työhön liittyviä asenteita ja arvoja.

Esimerkiksi Matti Kortteisen mukaan (1992, 76-77; ks. myös Weber 1930/1992) suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on perinteisesti kunnioitettu kovaa työtä ja nuoria on kasvatettu arvostamaan työtä hyvään kansalaisuuteen kuuluvana kutsumuksena ja jopa uhrautumaan työlle. Viime vuosien julkisessa keskustelussa on kannettu paljon moraalista huolta työn arvostamisen perinteen murtumisesta ja nuorten työelämäasenteiden muutoksesta yksilöllistyvässä yhteiskunnassa (ks. esim. Pyöriä, Saari, Ojala & Sipilä 2013, 198). Tutkimusten mukaan tällainen huoli on kuitenkin turha. Esimerkiksi Pasi Pyöriän ja Satu Ojalan (2016, 35) tutkimukset osoittavat, että työn arvostus nuorten keskuudessa on pysynyt viime vuosikymmenet vakaana ja että nuorten ja aikuisten välinen ero työn arvostuksessa on itse asiassa kaventunut 2010-luvulle tultaessa (ks. myös Myllyniemi 2014, 66; Pyöriä ym. 2013, 208-209).

Tutkimuksissa on kuitenkin havaittu muutoksia nuorten työhön liittämässä merkityksissä ja odotuksissa. Perinteinen työetiikka ei enää määritä nuorten ajatuksia työstä, vaan nuoret painottavat enemmän ammatillista kehittymistä, osaamisen kartuttamista, onnistumisen kokemuksia sekä vapaa-ajan merkitystä (Haavisto 2010, 36, 38; Tuohinen 2010, 40-41). Muutoksen taustalla voidaan nähdä 1970-luvulta

saakka keskustelua herättänyt individualisoinnin trendi ja diskurssi: yksilön valinnanmahdollisuudet yhteiskunnassa ovat lisääntyneet, mutta samalla yksilö kantaa itse vastuun valinnoistaan ja siitä, millaisia vaikutuksia niillä on hänen asemaansa yhteiskunnassa (ks. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 23–27). Tällaiset merkitykset nousevat esiin myös tämän artikkelin aineistoissa.

Useissa tutkimuksissa on osoitettu, että ammatilliseen koulutukseen ohjautuu nuoria, jotka haluavat opiskella käytännönläheisesti ja valmistua nopeasti (Käyhkö 2006, 96; Herranen 2014, 8, 14–15). Ammattiin opiskelevien ajatusmaailmassa tehtäväorientoituneet työelämäarvot, esimerkiksi työskentelyolosuhteet, vaikuttavat tutkimusten perusteella olevan keskeisimpiä, kun taas lukiolaiset korostavat enemmän itsensä toteuttamista (Masdonati ym. 2016, 204, 206–207; Lechner ym. 2017, 62; ks. myös Maunu 2018, 17). Mari Käyhkön (2006) etnografinen tutkimus siivoojaksi opiskelevista tytöistä avaa hyvin ammatillisen koulutuksen ylläpitämää kulttuurista palkkatyökeskeisyyttä. Käyhkö kuvailee, kuinka opiskelijoita kasvatettiin työelämään painottamalla lähestyvän työelämäsiirtymän merkitystä, työelämän toimintaperiaatteita ja pelisääntöjä sekä opiskelijan oman aktiivisuuden vaikutusta työllistymiseen ja työttömyyden välttämiseen (Käyhkö 2006, 84–87). Käyhkön mukaan ammatillisen koulutuksen kulttuurin keskiössä on arvostus tekemällä oppimista ja ruumiillista työtä kohtaan (mt., 96).

Yksilökeskeisyydestä puhuttaessa on kuitenkin tärkeää ottaa huomioon, että kaikilla nuorilla ei ole samanlaisia mahdollisuuksia tehdä merkitykselliseksi kokemiaan valintoja elämänselityksensä ja työelämäsiirtymässään (ks. Silvasti, Lempiäinen & Kankainen 2014, 10–11). Ammatillisen koulutuksen nykyisin korostamia nopeita työelämäsiirtymiä – ja samalla ammattiin opiskelevien nuorten työelämäsiirtymiinsä liittämistä odotuksia – voidaan tarkastella myös luokkakysymyksenä. Esimerkiksi Päivi Naumasan ja Heikki Silvennoisen (2010,

82) mukaan työväenluokkataustaiset nuoret ohjautuvat helpommin ammatilliseen koulutukseen, sillä se takaa elinympäristöstä tutun ammatin ja mahdollisuuden siirtyä nopeasti työelämään. Toisaalta työväestöön kuuluvat vanhemmat saattavat hyväksyä helpommin lyhyen koulutusreitit. Tarja Tolonen (2008, 236–237) ja Mari Käyhkö (2008, 262) ovat puolestaan osoittaneet, että työväenluokkataustaiset nuoret tavoittelevat tyypillisesti vakaata ja turvallista elämää, mistä syystä he suhtautuvat työhön enemmän instrumentaalisesti riittävän palkan ja hyvän elämän takaajana kuin mahdollisuutena toteuttaa itseään. Kulttuurisesti palkkatyökeskeisyyden voidaan ajatella tuottavan tietynlaista ammattiin opiskelevien työ- ja yhteiskuntaidentiteettiä, mikä saattaa johtaa ongelmiin etenkin joillakin nuorilla. Ammatillista koulutusta koskevassa tutkimuksessa on osoitettu, että osalle nuorista työelämälähtöiset työkyvyn, aktiivisuuden, vastuun kantamisen ja itseohjautuvuuden vaatimukset ovat liikaa ja voivat johtaa jopa opintojen keskeyttämiseen (Souto 2014, 26, 29, 31; Mäkinen 2016, 12).

Kulttuurisen palkkatyökeskeisyyden näkökulmasta on kiinnostavaa tarkastella, millaisia ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteita ja -arvoja artikkelissa analysoiduista aineistoista nousee esiin ja onko niissä havaittavissa muutoksia edellisiin vuosikymmeniin verrattuna. Tässä yhteydessä pidämme oleellisena palkka-työkeskeisen ajattelutavan käsitettä, koska se ohjaa kiinnittämään huomiota myös muihin ei-palkkatyökeskeisiin työn muotoihin ja merkityksiin. Esimerkiksi Ulrich Beck (2000, 58) puhuu monitoimijaisesta (*multi-activity*) yhteiskunnasta, jossa palkkatyöhön kohdistuu uudenlaisia vaatimuksia, kuten joustavuus, osa-aikaisuus ja työajan lyhentäminen, ja jossa palkkatyön rinnalla tunnustetaan myös sellaisia työn ilmaisuja kuin itsensä työllistäminen, kansalaisaktiivisuus ja vapaaehtoistyö. Artikkelissa kiinnitämme huomiota myös siihen, onko aineistoissa merkkejä tällaisesta ”työn eri tavalla ajattelemisesta”.

AINEISTO JA MENETELMÄT

Analysoimme artikkelissa vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometriin osallistuneiden, toisella asteella opiskelevien nuorten vastauksia työelämää koskeviin kysymyksiin. Kaikkiaan 1 907 vastaajasta 195 ilmoitti opiskelevansa ammatillisessa koulutuksessa: 113 miestä ja 82 naista. Heistä 61 prosenttia oli 15–19-vuotiaita, 25 prosenttia 20–24-vuotiaita ja 14 prosenttia 25–29-vuotiaita. Ammattiin opiskelevien vastauksia vertailtiin muihin vastaajiin (N = 1 711). Tulosten käsittelyssä jätettiin pääsääntöisesti huomioonmatta ”en osaa sanoa”-vastaukset. Kyselyaineiston käsittelyssä hyödynnettiin pääkomponenttianalyysia (PCA, principal component analysis) ja kahden riippumattoman otoksen t-testin epäparametrinen vastinetta, Mann-Whitneyn U-testiä. PCA:iin valittiin Nuorisobarometrin aineistosta kohdat K19, K20, K21 ja K22, joiden tulkitsimme heijastavan tutkimuskysymystemme määrittämiä, ammattiin opiskelevien palkkatyökeskeisyyttä ilmentäviä asenteita ja odotuksia. Analyysissa käytettiin iän, sukupuolen ja kielen pohjalta muodostettua painokerrointa. Aineiston määrällistä analyysia avataan tarkemmin seuraavassa luvussa.

Määrällisen aineiston ohella hyödynnämme artikkelissa laadullista aineistoa, joka kerättiin syksyllä 2018 ja keväällä 2019 Etelä- ja Keski-Suomessa kuudessa ammattiin opiskeleville nuorille järjestetyssä työpajassa². Työpajoihin osallistui yhteensä 58 toisen tai kolmannen vuoden opiskelijaa sosiaali- ja terveysalan (2 haastattelua), hotelli-, ravintola- ja cateringalan (3 haastattelua), sähkö- ja automaatiotekniikan (5 haastattelua), elintarvikealan (1 haastattelu) sekä liiketalouden ja tieto- ja viestintätekniikan (1 haastattelu) perustutkinnoista. Osallistujiksi pyydettiin 18–25-vuotiaita opiskelijoita, mutta osa toisen vuoden opiskelijoista ei ollut vielä täyttänyt 18 vuotta. Tutkintoalojen edustus sekä työpajojen osallistujamäärät riippuivat koulutuksen järjestäjän omista aikatauluista ja käytännön järjestelyistä³. Työpajoissa sovellettiin eläytymismenetelmää, jossa nuoret laativat

lehtileikkeitä hyödyntäen kollaasitöitä onnistuneesta tai epäonnistuneesta työelämäsiirtymästä (vrt. Särkelä & Suoranta 2016, 22–23). Tämän jälkeen nuoret esittelivät kollaasinsa 4–6 hengen fasilitoiduissa ryhmähaastatteluissa (yht. 12 haastattelua), joissa he vastasivat myös työelämäsiirtymiä, yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymistä ja tulevaisuutta koskeviin kysymyksiin.

Laadullisen analyysin havaintoja tulkittaessa on hyvä tunnistaa ryhmähaastattelutilanteen dynamiikan vaikutukset haastattelun kulkuun. Myös tässä tutkimuksessa ryhmien dynamiikka vaihteli: osa opiskelijoista oli äänessä enemmän, osa myönteli toisten puhetta ja osa vastasi fasilitoijan kysymyksiin lyhyesti erikseen kysyttäessä. Ryhmäkeskustelun haasteena on, että joidenkin osallistujien keskeisetkin ajatukset ja kokemukset saattavat jäädä sanoittamatta. Sekä ammatillisen koulutuksen kulttuurissa vallitsevat normit että ryhmädynamiikka voivat vaikuttaa siihen, millaisia asioita ja millä tavalla ryhmän edessä ollaan valmiita tuomaan esiin. David Morgan (1997, 15) puhuu myös ryhmässä tyypillisestä mielipiteiden polarisoitumisesta. Myös tässä tutkimuksessa osa nuorista esitti haastatteluissa välillä kärkeätkin mielipiteitä esimerkiksi työttömyydestä, vaikka ryhmän ulkopuolella heidän mielipiteensä saattavat olla toisenlaisia. Myös itse tutkimustilanteella saattoi olla vaikutusta ryhmähaastatteluiden ilmapiiriin. Hiljaisemmissa ryhmissä yksi tai kaksi opiskelijaa otti keskustelussa päävastuun, ja joissakin työpajoissa aikataulun sanelema kiire saattoi vaikuttaa kielteisesti rennon keskusteluilmapiirin luomiseen. (Morgan 1996, 138–140; Morgan 1997, 12–16.) Haastatteluja tulkitessamme pyrimme ottamaan huomioon tämänkaltaiset kontekstuaaliset tekijät (Vesala & Rantanen 2007, 48–51).

Laadulliselle aineistolle teetettiin peruslitterointi ilman täytesanoja, sanakatkoja ja toistoja. Tämän jälkeen tutkija (Ågren) teki litterointeihin vielä haastattelukohtaisia tarkennuksia. Haastattelutallenteet tuhottiin litteroinnin jälkeen. Analyysimenetelmänä käytettiin teemaanalyysia, jossa aineistosta pyrittiin järjestel-

mällisen teemoittelun keinoin tunnistamaan ammattiin opiskelevien työelämälle antamia merkityksiä (Braun & Clarke 2006, 79). Teema-analyysissa käytettyjen teemojen muodostamisessa hyödynnettiin määrällisen aineiston analyysissa tuotettuja latentteja konstruktioita⁴ (tilastollisissa testeissämme muodostettuja summamuuttujia) teoriaohjaavasti siten, että aineistosta eriteltiin palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelutapaa, työelämän nuorissa herättämiä huolia sekä toisaalta palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelua kyseenalaistavaa puhetapaa selittäviä teemoja (ks. Braun & Clarke 2006, 84). Laadullisen analyysin avulla selitämme syvemmin ja tarkemmin määrällisen aineiston analyysin yhteydessä kuvattujen latenttien konstruktioiden suhdetta ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa opiskeluun.

Analyyssissa olemme kiinnostuneita ammattiin opiskelevien työelämää koskevista asenteista ilmiönä, joka rakentuu yhtäältä palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan instituutionaalisten normien ja toisaalta ammatillisen koulutuksen sosiaalisen ja kulttuurisen todellisuuden kombinaationa (Vesala & Rantanen 2007, 28). Analyyssissa tarkastelemme, miten ammattiin opiskelevat nuoret itse hahmottavat suhteensa työhön ja työelämään. Keskitymme tarkastelemaan seuraavia tutkimuskysymyksiä aineistomme valossa:

1. Millaisia työelämää koskevia asenteita ammattiin opiskelevilla on, ja eroavatko ne muiden vastaajien asenteista?
2. Onko ammattiin opiskelevien työelämää koskevissa asenteissa havaittavissa muita vastaajia enemmän
 - a. palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelua ilmentäviä piirteitä?
 - b. työelämän muutoksen tunnistamiseen viittaavia piirteitä?
 - c. palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelua kyseenalaistavia piirteitä?

TULOKSET

Koko barometrin aineistolle (N = 1 907) tehtiin pääkomponenttianalyysi, johon valittiin kyselystä yhteensä 40 työelämäsiirtymään, työtömyyteen ja työelämässä toimimiseen liittyvää asennetta. Sovelsimme tutkimuksessa pääkomponenttianalyysia yksinkertaistaaksemme dataa seuraavia analyysivaiheita varten ja löytääksemme osallistujien yli keskenään korreloivia muuttujia summamuuttujien muodostamiseksi. PCA sai KMO-testin tulokseksi 0,796 (hyväksyttävä) ja Bartlettin sfäärisyystestistä alle 0,01. Scree-kuvaajan tarkastelun jälkeen PCA:lla ekstrahoitavien komponenttien lukumääräksi valittiin kuusi, joista viimeinen sai eigen-arvokseen 1,56. Lopullinen PCA-matriisi tuotettiin hyödyntäen Varimax-rotatiomenetelmää Kaiser-normalisoinnilla. PCA:n muodostamasta kuudesta komponentista yksityiskohtaiseen tarkasteluun valittiin neljä tämän artikkelin rajauksen kannalta mielenkiintoista komponenttia, jotka nimettiin seuraavasti:

1. Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu
2. Työelämään liittyvä epävarmuus ja huolestuneisuus
3. Työelämämuutoksen tunnistavat asenteet
4. Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun kyseenalaistaminen.

Komponenttien ulkopuolelle jätettiin ne muuttujat, joiden komponenttilatausarvo oli alle 0,300. Taulukossa 1 esitetään muuttujat, joista komponentit rakentuivat, sekä komponenteista muodostettavien latenttien konstruktioiden eli summamuuttujien saamat Cronbachin alfa-arvot. Taulukossa on näkyvillä myös kunkin muuttujan komponenttilataus.

TAULUKKO 1. PÄÄKOMPONENTIT, OSAMUUTTUUJAT JA MUODOSTETUT SUMMAMUUTTUUJAT

		Komponenttilataus				
Summamuuttuja	Osamuuttuja	1	2	3	4	α
1) Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu	Työttömyysturvan vastikkeeksi nuorten olisi tehtävä jotakin yhteiskuntaa hyödyttävää työtä	0,68				$\alpha = 0,726$
	Suomessa sosiaaliturvalla eläminen on aivan liian helppoa	0,68				
	Työttömän pitää ottaa vastaan mitä tahansa työtä	0,61				
	Menestyminen elämässä on itsestä kiinni	0,58				
	Työttömällä pitää olla velvollisuus osallistua johonkin toimintaan	0,58				
	Mikä tahansa työ kelpaa minulle, kunhan siitä maksetaan riittävästi	0,50				
	Työntekijän irtisanomista on helpotettava	0,47				
	Elämässä täytyy kilpailla	0,46				
	Työttömänä saa vapaasti suunnitella ajankäyttöä	0,36			0,32	
2) Työelämään liittyvä huolestuneisuus	Olen huolissani siitä, onko minulla töitä tulevaisuudessa		0,67			std. $\alpha = 0,520$
	On todennäköistä, että saan vakinaista työtä		-0,59			
	On todennäköistä, että tulen välillä olemaan työtön		0,57			
	Olen huolissani omasta jaksamisestani työelämässä tulevaisuudessa		0,47			
	Uran ja lasten yhdistäminen on mahdoton yhtälö		0,39			
3) Työelämämuutoksen tunnistavat asenteet	Vaihdan työurallani työpaikkaa useita kertoja			0,70		$\alpha = 0,502$
	Vaihdan työurallani ammattia useita kertoja		0,31	0,55		
	Suomalainen työelämä tarvitsee lisää ulkomaalaisia työntekijöitä			0,53		
	Olisin valmis vaihtamaan asuinkuntaa työpaikan saamiseksi			0,41		
	Olisin valmis lykkäämään perheen perustamista työhön liittyvien syiden takia			0,39		
	Yrittäjyys yleistyy tulevaisuudessa			0,34		
	Työni on oltava omien arvojeni mukaista			0,31		
4) Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun kyseenalaistaminen	Minun ei tarvitse tehdä töitä ollakseni onnellinen			0,56		$\alpha = 0,376$
	Olen valmis luopumaan työtilaisuudesta perhesyiden vuoksi			0,55		
	Pelkällä peruskoulututkinnolla voi työllistyä			0,50		
	Työttömänä olo ei ole paha asia, jos toimeentulo on turvattu			0,42		

Muodostettujen summamuuttujien sisäistä konsistenssia ja instrumentaalista reliabiliteettia arvioitiin Cronbachin alfa-arvojen valossa seuraavasti: Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu: hyväksyttävä ($\alpha = 0,726$), Työelämään liittyvä huolestuneisuus: heikko ($\alpha = 0,520$), Työelämämuutoksen tunnistavat asenteet: heikko ($\alpha = 0,502$) ja Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun kyseenalaistaminen: ei hyväksyttävä ($\alpha = 0,376$). Näistä kolme ensimmäistä voidaan siis pitää käyttökelpoisena summamuuttujana konsistenssin osalta. Myös neljäs summamuuttuja on sisällytetty analyyseihin, mutta sen luotettavuuteen tulee suhtautua varauksin. Kolmogorovin-Smirnovin testin ($df = 1\ 527$, $p < 0,001$ jokaisella muuttujalla) ja histogrammien tarkastelun jälkeen todettiin, että muodostetut summamuuttujat eivät noudata normaalijakaumaa, joten muuttujien testaus tapahtuu epäparametrisilla menetelmillä.

Vastaajat, jotka opiskelivat ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa, näyttäisivät omaksuneen muita vastaajia vahvemmin palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun mukaiset asenteet (kuvio 1). Testatuksemme eroa muodostetuissa summamuut-

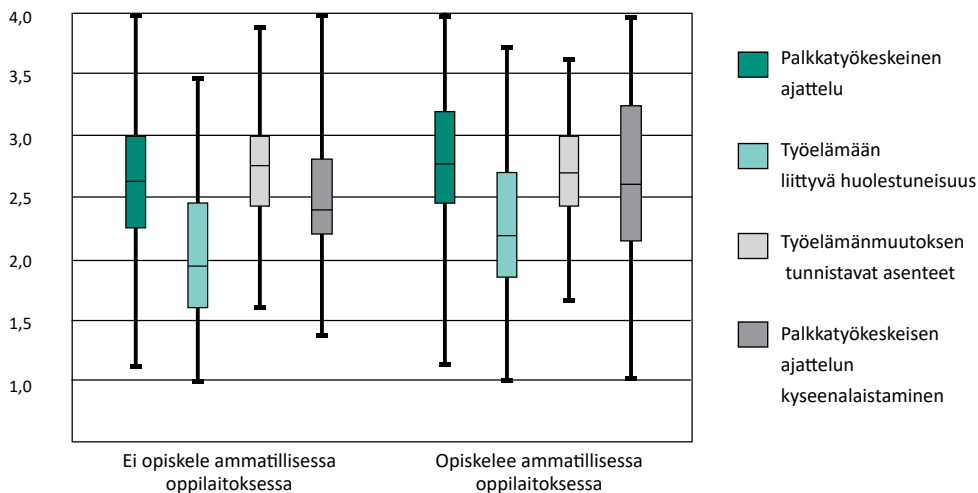
tujissa luokkien ”Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa” ja ”Ei opiskele ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa” välillä teimme Mann-Whitneyn U-testin. Summamuuttujan 1 Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu kohdalle muodostui tilastollisesti merkitsevä ero luokkien välille ($U = 106\ 024,500$, $p < 0,001$). Ero saa Cohenin d-arvoksi 0,10, mikä kertoo pienestä efektin koosta. Muiden summamuuttujien osalta luokkien välille ei muodostunut tilastollisesti merkitseviä eroja. Testin tuloksia voidaan tulkita seuraavasti:

Tutkimuskysymys 1: Ammattiin opiskelevien työelämää koskevat asenteet ja odotukset eroavat muista palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun ulottuvuudessa, mutta eivät huolestuneisuuden, joustavan ja muuttuvan työelämän tai palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun kyseenalaistamisen suhteen.

Tutkimuskysymys 2: Ammattiin opiskelevien työelämää koskevissa asenteissa ja odotuksissa on muita enemmän palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelua.

Seuraavaksi esittelemme, miten edellisessä testissä käytettyjen summamuuttujien edusta-

KUVIO 1. KUVAAJASSA KUNKIN LAATIKON SISÄLLÄ OLEVA VIIVA KUVAA MEDIAANIA. LAATIKKO SISÄLTÄÄ 50 PROSENTTIA VASTAUKSISTA. LAATIKON ULKOREUNAN JA VIKSEN PÄÄN VÄLINEN ALUE KUVAA 25:TTÄ PROSENTTIA VASTAAJISTA. ALUE VIKSEN KÄRJESTÄ LAATIKON ULKOREUNAAN KUVAA SITEN YHTÄ KVARTIILIA.



mat latentit konstruktiot näyttäytyvät laadullisen aineiston valossa. Sen jälkeen tarkastelemme konstruktioita vertaamalla ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa opiskelevien vastauksia muiden kyselyyn osallistuneiden vastauksiin.

Palkkatyö yksilön velvollisuutena

Mann-Whitneyn U-testin perusteella näyttäisi siltä, että ammattiin opiskelevilla nuorilla on muita vahvemmin palkkatyökeskeisiä asenteita. Kun ammattiin opiskelevien vastauksia tarkastellaan väitteen ”Mikä tahansa työ kelpaa minulle, kunhan siitä maksetaan riittävästi” osalta, esiin piirtyy yli kymmenen prosenttiyksikön ero muihin vastaajiin (täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä olevat, ks. taulukko 2).

Vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrissa 85 prosenttia kaikista nuorista ottaisi mieluummin tilapäistäkin työtä kuin eläisi työttömyyskorvauksella, jos käteen jäävä tulo olisi yhtä suuri. Tämä osuus on säilynyt vakaana vuodesta 1994 lähtien (Myllyniemi 2014, 67). Vuoden 2019 barometrin mukaan ammattiin opiskelevista 81 prosenttia ottaisi vastaan mieluummin tilapäistäkin työtä, kun taas muista nuorista näin tekisi 78 prosenttia. Ammattiin opiskelevien ajattelua voidaan tässä avata laadullisesta aineistosta tehdyillä havainnoilla. Työpajahaastatteluissa etenkin sähkö- ja automaatiotekniikan opiskelijat korostivat, että tärkeintä on löytää mitä tahansa työtä, jotta saa rahaa ja tulee toimeen. Myös datanomien ja merkonomien haastatteluissa todetaan, että oman paikan ja

vahvuuksien löytämiseksi työelämässä kaikenlaisia töitä pitää kokeilla.

Ammattiin opiskelevat nuoret ovat myös muita useammin täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä väitteistä ”Työttömän pitää ottaa vastaan mitä tahansa työtä” (taulukko 3) ja ”Menestyminen elämässä on itsestä kiinni”. Ammattiin opiskelevista jälkimmäisen väitteen kanssa samaa mieltä on jopa 90,2 prosenttia vastaajista (taulukko 4)⁵. Kyselyn tuloksia on kiinnostavaa verrata esimerkiksi EVA:n vuoden 2010 arvo- ja asennetutkimukseen, jossa kaikista suomalaisista 73 prosenttia ilmoitti olevansa sitä mieltä, että menestyminen on itsestä kiinni (Haavisto 2010, 65). Nuorisobarometrien mukaan nuoret näyttävät ajattelevan vanhempia ikäluokkia ehdottomammin, että elämässä tulee pärjätä omin voimin.

Kun näitä havaintoja lähestytään kulttuurisen palkkatyökeskeisyyden näkökulmasta, voidaan tulkita, että nuoret ovat omaksuneet ammatillisen koulutuksen työelämälähtöiset normit – mukaan lukien ajatuksen itseohjautuvasta, omaaloitteisesta ja aktiivisesta opiskelijasta (vrt. Souto 2014, 26). Osin aineistoista on nähtävissä myös edellä mainittu yksilökeskeisyyttä korostava puhetapa, joka pyrkii sysäämään palkkatyön saavuttamisen onnistumiset ja riskit yksilön omalle vastuulle (ks. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 24–25). Laadullisesta aineistosta nousee lisäksi esiin ammattiin opiskelevien halu vakuuttaa aikuiset haastattelijat omasta ”kunnollisuudestaan”. Heidän puheensa työ voi esimerkiksi olla hauskaa, mutta

TAULUKKO 2. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Mikä tahansa työ kelpaa minulle, kunhan siitä maksetaan riittävästi			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	1 035	60,8
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	667	39,2
	Yhteensä	1 072	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	91	48,0
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	98	52,0
	Yhteensä	189	100,0

TAULUKKO 3. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Työttömän pitää ottaa vastaan mitä tahansa työtä			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai joihinkin eri mieltä	1 259	74,3
	Täysin tai joihinkin samaa mieltä	436	25,7
	Yhteensä	1 695	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai joihinkin eri mieltä	120	62,8
	Täysin tai joihinkin samaa mieltä	71	37,1
	Yhteensä	191	100,0

TAULUKKO 4. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Menestyminen elämässä on itsestä kiinni			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai joihinkin eri mieltä	255	15,0
	Täysin tai joihinkin samaa mieltä	1 448	85,0
	Yhteensä	1 703	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai joihinkin eri mieltä	19	9,8
	Täysin tai joihinkin samaa mieltä	177	90,2
	Yhteensä	196	100,0

työt pitää kuitenkin aina hoitaa. Toisaalta haastatteluissa työn merkitystä suomalaisessa kulttuurissa kuvattiin myös sarkastisin sävyin. Nuorten mukaan työn tekeminen kuuluu suomalaisen kulttuuriin yhtä vahvasti kuin ”makara, sauna, koskenkorvapullo, Sisu-pastilli ja Reinot” (Sähkö- ja automaatiotekniikan perustutkinto, 2. haastattelu).

Haastattelujen perusteella ammattiin opiskelevat pitävät palkkatyötä myös hyvän elämän rakennuspuuna. Palkkatyö on ikään kuin turvasatama, joka luo tarvittavat mahdollisuudet oman elämän suunnitteluun, kuluttamiseen, harrastamiseen sekä hyvinvoinnista ja sosiaalisista suhteista huolehtimiseen (ks. Maunu 2018, 13; Tolonen 2008, 237). Työttömyydessä ongelmaksi nähtiin vastaavasti arjen rutiinien ja myös työn takaaman elämän mielekkyyden puute. Siinä missä taloudellisen turvan ja rutiinin tavoittelun voi Tolosen (mt., 239) tulokinnan mukaan liittää työväenluokkaiseen pärjäämistä korostavaan elämäntapaan, työn

kautta tapahtuva menestyksen tavoittelu liittyy kunnianhimoisempaan työväenluokkaiseen elämäntyyliin, jossa pelkkä pärjääminen näyttää liian vähään tyytymiseltä. Molemmat työhön suhtautumisen tavat näkyvät artikkelin laadullisessa aineistossa. Yhteistä näkemyksille on nuorten omaksuma ajatus siitä, että palkkatyöhön osallistumalla heistä kehkeytyy itsenäisiä ja riippumattomia aikuisia (Wyn & Dwyer 1999, 14; Chesters & Cuervo 2019, 235), kuten seuraavasta keskustelusta voidaan tulkita:

N2: No joo kyllä, että on onnistunu, tai sillee. Tulee semmonen fiilis.

K1: Niin että pärjää ja..

N2: Joo.

K1: ..on onnellinen. Tääl on sitte että, hyvä olo, liittyys nää sitte siihen hyvään elämään ja siihen että on sitte, unelmia ja..?

N2: Kyllä mä, tai mä ainakin aattelen että jos mulla on semmonen työ missä mä tykkään ni kaikki järjestyy tai, pystyn saada

semmosen elämän ku mä haluan.

K1: Mitä siihen, onnist-, tai siis toivottuun elämään liittyy?

N2: Että saan semmosen kodin mistä mä tykkään ja, saan elää silleen ku mä haluan.

K1: Niin, saa elää kuin haluaa. Onks se sit sitä myös että saa, ite päättää siitä että mitä tekee elämässään?

N2: No joo.

(Liiketalouden ja tieto- ja viestintätekniikan perustutkintoa opiskelevien haastattelu)

Vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrin mukaan työttömyysturvan vastikkeellisuutta kyseenalaistavat asenteet ovat lisääntyneet vuodesta 1994 (Myllyniemi 2014, 73). Tämä pitää paikkansa myös vuoden 2019 aineistossa

muiden paitsi ammattiin opiskelevien osalta. Taulukoista 5 ja 6 on nähtävissä, että vuoden 2019 barometriaineistossa ero ammattiin opiskelevien ja muiden vastaajien välillä on työttömyysturvaa ja sosiaaliturvaa koskevien väitteiden osalta merkittävä. Ammattiin opiskelevista 73,4 prosenttia on täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä siitä, että työttömyysturvan vastikkeeksi on tehtävä yhteiskuntaa hyödyttävää työtä. Muista vastaajista näin ajattelee 65,5 prosenttia. Sosiaaliturvaa koskevan väitteen kohdalla ero on tätäkin suurempi. Ammattiin opiskelevista 63,6 prosenttia on täysin tai jokseenkin yhtä mieltä siitä, että sosiaaliturvalla eläminen on liian helppoa, kun taas muista näin ajattelevien osuus on 51,7 prosenttia.

TAULUKKO 5. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Työttömyysturvan vastikkeeksi nuorten olisi tehtävä jotakin yhteiskuntaa hyödyttävää työtä			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	575	34,5
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	1 092	65,5
	Yhteensä	1 667	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	51	26,6
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	141	73,4
	Yhteensä	192	100,0

TAULUKKO 6. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Suomessa sosiaaliturvalla eläminen on aivan liian helppoa			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	801	48,3
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	857	51,7
	Yhteensä	1 658	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	68	36,4
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	119	63,6
	Yhteensä	187	100,0

Tämänkaltaisten asenteiden vuoksi voidaan ajatella, että ammattiin opiskelevat ovat omaksuneet institutionaalisen palkkatyökeskeisyyden ylläpitämän näkemyksen aktiivisuudesta ja työstä yksilön velvollisuutena (vrt. Kokkonen ym. 2016, 45; Burrows 2013, 393). Tulkinta saa vahvistusta laadullisesta aineistosta. Haastattelussa palkkatyö ja verojen maksaminen näytettyvät nuorten puheessa välttämättömänä osana hyvinvointiyhteiskunnan rakentamista. Vastaavasti useassa haastattelussa työttömien moititaan elävän toisten ansaitsemilla verorahoilla. Aineistossa näkyy nuorten usko siihen, että yksilöllä on moraalinen velvollisuus ottaa vastuu itsestään, olla yritteliäs ja toimia aktiivisesti yhteiskunnassa (ks. Kelly 2001, 30–31). Lisäksi niissä ryhmähaastattelussa, joissa työn tekemistä pidetään vahvimmin velvollisuutena, työttömiin suhtaudutaan kriittisimmin. Esimerkiksi sähkö- ja automaatiotekniikan opiskelijoiden haastattelussa väitetään, että suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on liian helppoa olla työttömänä ja että työttömyyskorvaus on ”vaivatonta rahaa”. Tässä yhteydessä on kiinnostavaa havaita, että vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrin mukaan köyhyyden näkeminen yksilön omana syynä on yhteydessä nimenomaan matalaan koulutustasoon (Myllyniemi 2014, 77).

Laadullisessa aineistossa palkkatyökeskeistä ajattelutapaa osin myös kyseenalaistetaan. Ryhmähaastattelussa sellaiset mielipiteet kuin ”saadut palvelut pitää maksaa [yhteiskunnalle] takaisin” herättivät vastareaktion, joka ilmeni esimerkiksi nauruna ja poleemisena vastakysymyksenä: ”Oikeestikko vai?” Haastattelussa vitsailtiin myös, että työttömyyden osuessa omalle kohdalle ”kaikki otetaan, mitä saadaan”. Huumorin ja sarkasmin lisäksi haastattelussa nousi pieneltä osin esiin myös työttömien ymmärtämistä. Haastattelussa muun muassa mainittiin, että kukaan meistä ei voi tietää toisen ihmisen työttömyyden syitä. Tosin myös ymmärättävissä näkemyksissä korostettiin, että kaikkien niiden, jotka työhön kykenevät, täytyy sitä myös tehdä.

Nuorten huoli työelämästä

Vastaajien työelämään liittämät huolestuneisuus ja epävarmuus nousivat esiin pääkomponenttianalyysin toisessa summamuuttujassa. Koska aineistomme valossa vaikuttaa siltä, että ammattiin opiskelevat ajattelevat muita nuoria palkkatyökeskeisemmin, on mielenkiintoista tarkastella, luottavatko he myös enemmän ammatillisen koulutuksen lupaukseen nopeasta ja sujuvasta työelämäsiirtymästä (Middeldorp, Edzes & Dijk 2019, 94; Müller 2005, 468–470). Laadullisesta aineistosta tämänkaltaisen optimismi on havaittavissa. Työpajahaastattelussa nuorten epäonnistuneeseen työelämäsiirtymään liittämät mielikuvat ovat heidän näkökulmastaan äärimmäisiä esimerkkejä, joita ei tarvitse ottaa kovin vakavasti ja joihin he eivät kunnolla samastu. Valtaosassa haastatteluista nuoret olivat luottavaisia sen suhteen, että töitä löytyy niin omalta kuin muiltakin aloilta. Seuraavasta sitaatista voidaan nähdä, että nuoret luottivat myös työnhakutaitoihinsa:

K: ...tarvisko siinä jotenkin sen työn haakuun jotakin tukea tai mikä ihan jos niinku...

N: No jos ei niitä töitä oo, niin se on ihan sama mitä tukee siinä saa tai niinku keltä. Kyllähän niitä sitte saa niitä töitä. Kyl mä ainakin osaan hakea töitä...

N: Kyl mä siihen. En mä oikeen osaa ajatella.

N: ...ei sen vaikeeta pitäis olla.

N: Ei se ookaan.

(Sähkö- ja automaatiotekniikan perustutkinto, 2. haastattelu)

Barometriaineistosta käy ilmi, että 38,7 prosenttia (N = 74) ammattiin opiskelevista ja 35,6 prosenttia (N = 606) muista vastaajista on huolissaan siitä, löytävätkö he töitä tulevaisuudessa. Vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrissa työttömäksi joutumisesta oli huolissaan puolet nuorista, ja pitkittäisseurannassa näyttää siltä, että vuonna 2019 nuorten huolestuneisuus on

TAULUKKO 7. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

On todennäköistä, että tulen välillä olemaan työtön			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	994	59,2
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	685	40,8
	Yhteensä	1 679	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	95	51,0
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	92	49,0
	Yhteensä	187	100,0

palannut samalle tasolle kuin vuonna 2009 (Myllyniemi 2014, 79–80). Barometriin vastanneet nuoret vaikuttavat suhtautuvan aiempaa optimistisemmin työn löytymiseen, vaikkakin ammattiin opiskelevat pitävät muita todennäköisempänä työttömäksi joutumista (ks. taulukko 7). Työpajahaastattelussa nuoret uskoivat, että mahdollinen työttömyys olisi vain lyhytaikainen elämänvaihe ja jopa luonnollinen osa siirtymää. Laadullisen aineiston valossa taulukon 7 tuloksia voidaan tulkita ainakin osittain nuorten kyvyllä tunnistaa nykyisen työelämän realiteetit (ks. seuraava luku). Saat- taan myös olla, että haastattelussa omaa huolta ei haluttu tuoda esille koko ryhmän edessä. Kaikista barometriin vastanneista kuitenkin lähes 90 prosenttia on jokseenkin tai täysin samaa mieltä väitteestä ”On todennäköistä, että saan vakinaista työtä”. Ammattiin opiskelevista tätä mieltä on 86,1 prosenttia.

Vastaavanlaisia havaintoja siitä, että palkka- työkeskeinen ajattelutapa voi lisätä nuorten työelämäsiirtymään kohdistamia optimistisia odotuksia, on tehty myös muissa tutkimuk- sissa (ks. esim. Franceschelli & Keating 2018, 9–14). Vaikka nuoret vaikuttasivat olevan aiempiin barometreihin verrattuna optimisti- sempia, joka kolmas ammattiin opiskeleva on kuitenkin huolissaan työllistymisestään. Edel- leen on kiinnostavaa havaita, että barometris- sa useampi kuin joka kolmas sekä ammattiin opiskelevista että muista vastaajista on huolis- saan omasta jaksamisestaan tulevaisuudessa. Tämä osuus on pysynyt samana vuoden 2013

Nuorisobarometriin verrattuna (Myllyniemi 2014, 81). Vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometrin ai- neistossa joka kolmas ammattiin opiskeleva on yhtä mieltä ”Työelämään siirtymä pelottaa mi- nua” -väittämän kanssa. Vastaavanlainen puhe nousi esiin myös työpajoissa, joissa kannettiin huolta muun muassa työpaikan ja sopivan työ- yhteisön löytymisestä, vastuun lisääntymisestä, työn suuresta määrästä sekä vapaa-ajan vähene- misestä.

Työpaja-aineiston perusteella nuorten huolta tulevaisuudesta voidaan selittää itsenäis- tymisestä tunnetuilla paineilla. Haastateltavien mukaan yksilö saattaa ottaa itselleen paineita etenkin silloin, jos omat työelämäodotukset ei- vät kohtaakaan todellisuutta. Valtaosin nuoret eivät tuoneet esiin paineita omina kokemuk- sinaan vaan puhuivat niistä ennen kaikkea toisten ihmisten ja yhteiskunnan asettamien odotusten näkökulmasta⁷.

M1: Niin se murskaisi itsetunnon ja sitte varmaan, se masentuis ja sitte sillä ei ois, jaksamista ees hakee lisää töitä. Ja sitte se, ei olis mitään, se vaan murtuis koko maail- ma siihen että, eka opiskellu kolme vuotta tai päälle, ja sitten menee töihin ja sitte se, murtuu niskaan kaikki se työ. Ja sitte me- nettää oman arvostuksen ja on sillee että mä olen epäonnistunut, ihminen.

N1: Jos vaikka yläasteen jälkeen sairastuu tai jotain, sitte ei lähe heti jatko-opiskelee, ni ehkä se voi sit mennä tommoseen.

K1: Niin totta.

N1: Ei uskalla lähteekään sit enää, jää kotiin.
(Sosiaali- ja terveysalan perustutkinto, 1. haastattelu)

Työelämän muutokset ja palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan vastapuhe

Nykynuoret kohtaavat jatkuvassa muutoksen tilassa olevat työmarkkinat (esim. Furlong & Cartmel 2007, 50–52). Tästä huolimatta Nuorisobarometrin mukaan ammattiin opiskelevat uskovat muita todennäköisemmin löytävänsä itselleen pysyvän työpaikan (taulukko 8) ja kaiken kaikkiaan nuoret vaikuttaisivat olevan tässä paljon optimistisempia kuin vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrissa (Myllyniemi 2014, 72). Toisaalta ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa opiskelevista melkein joka kolmas pitää todennäköisenä ammatin vaihtamista. Muista vastaajista näin ajattelee joka neljäs. Näiden tulosten valossa voidaan ajatella ammattiin opiskelevien olevan tietoisia siitä, että ammatillisessa koulutuksessa opittu substanssi-osaaminen valmistaa vain tiettyyn ammattiin, mikä lisää alanvaihdon todennäköisyyttä epävarmoilla työmarkkinoilla (Buchs & Helbling 2016, 12–13).

Nämä havainnot tukevat aiempaa havaintoamme ammattiin opiskelevien optimismista ja toisaalta myös nuorten kyvystä tunnistaa työelämän realiteetit ja haasteet (vrt. Aaltonen & Berg 2018, 15–16). Työpajahaastatteluissa nuoret kokivat, että valmistumisen jälkeinen mahdollinen työttömyys ei ole vakava asia,

koska aikaa oman paikan löytämiseen työelämässä riittää ja opintojen jälkeen on järkevää myös lomailla. Osassa laadullisen aineiston haastatteluista todettiin, että valmistumisen jälkeen saattaa joutua kokeilemaan useampaa-kin työpaikkaa eikä vakinaista työtä välttämättä riitä kaikille. Nuorten realismista kertoivat niin ikään kommentit, joiden mukaan kaikkea elämässä ei pysty suunnittelemaan tarkasti etukäteen ja joskus työelämäsiirtymiin vaikuttavat sattumat.

Kulttuurisen palkkatyökeskeisyyden näkökulmasta on kiinnostava kuriositeetti, että hotelli- ja ravintola-alan työpajassa oli mukana opiskelijoita, jotka suhtautuivat ryhmähaastatteluihin vastahankaisesti. Opiskelijat lopulta suostuivat osallistumaan haastatteluun, kun heille oli pyynnöstä luvattu, että haastattelua ei tallenneta. Kun opiskelijoille haastattelun käynnistyttyä selvisi keskustelun aihe (käsitykset ja odotukset tulevista työelämäsiirtymistä), heistä tuli innostuneita keskustelijoita. Juuri nämä nuoret painottivat muista haastatteluista poiketen, että nuorten pitäisi saada siirtyä työelämään joustavasti omaan tahtiinsa ja että työelämän nuorille asettamia paineita ja velvollisuuksia pitäisi keventää.

K: Pitäisikö nuorilla olla muita mahdollisuuksia [kuin palkkatyö] esimerkiksi hakea paikkaansa?

N: Siinä menee vähän paras ikä hukkaan pelkästään työn teossa. No se on vähän niinkun kuluttaa kaiken jaksamisensa siinä, ei oo aikaa mihkään muuhun.

TAULUKKO 8. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Vaihdan työurallani työpaikkaa useita kertoja			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	850	52,0
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	786	48,0
	Yhteensä	1 636	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	115	61,5
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	72	38,5
	Yhteensä	187	100,0

(Hotelli-, ravintola- ja cateringala, 3. haastattelu, kirjalliset muistiinpanot SÄ)

Tästä huolimatta valtaosalla nuorista oli lopulta tavoitteena saavuttaa tasainen ja turvallinen elämä, joka heidän puheessaan oli mahdollista vain palkkatyön avulla (vrt. Tolonen 2008, 237; Maunu 2018, 13). Nuoret arvostavat työtä hyvän elämän mahdollistajana, mutta se, mitä he työltä sisällöllisesti odottavat, näyttää olevan muutoksessa. Kortteisen kuvaus suomalaisesta työelämästä uhrautumisen kulttuurina ei näytä enää vastaavan nuorten kokemuksia ja odotuksia (ks. Kortteinen 1992, 76–77, 302–303). Laadullisen aineiston perusteella nuoret arvostavat viihtyisää työpaikkaa, jossa voi hyödyntää osaamistaan, johon voi mennä hyvällä mielellä ja jossa vallitsee nuorta tukeva työyhteisö. Epäonnistunutta siirtymää työelämään nuoret kuvaavat käänteisesti ”huonoon työpaikkaan joutumiseksi”, mikä koetaan uhaksi yksilön hyvinvoinnille. Työ ei merkitse näille nuorille itsensä uhraamista, vaan myöhäismodernille yksilökeskeiselle kulttuurille ominaisella tavalla työltä myös odotetaan paljon sisällöllisesti.

Melkein puolet ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa opiskelevista on barometrin vastauksissa täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä väittämästä ”Minun ei tarvitse tehdä töitä ollakseni onnellinen” (ks. taulukko 9). On kiinnostavaa, että näin suuri osa vastaajista ei pidä työssä käymistä onnellisuuden välttämättömänä ehtona. Sama ilmiö on nähtävissä myös laadullisessa aineistossa toteamuksissa, joiden mukaan yksi-

löllä pitäisi olla yhteiskunnassa muitakin mahdollisuuksia toimia kuin pelkkä työ. Toisaalta nuorilla on selvästi hankaluuksia esittää käytännön esimerkkejä siitä, millaista ei-palkkatyökeskeinen merkityksellinen elämä voisi olla. Ammattiin opiskelevien ryhmähaastatteluissa mainitaan lyhyesti harrastukset ja vapaaehtoistoiminta, mutta muutoin nuoret eivät halua tai kykene kyseenalaistamaan vallitsevaa yhteiskuntajärjestelmää ja sen palkkatyökeskeisyyttä korostavaa ajattelua, vaikka näkevät siinä myös ongelmia.

Kun laadullisessa aineistossa esiintyviä työn merkityksiä tarkastellaan suhteessa 2019 barometriaineistoon, esiin nousee muitakin merkityksiä. Vaikka suurin osa vastaajista hahmottaa työksi lähinnä perinteiset työn muodot, palkkatyön ohella esimerkiksi yksityisrittäjyyden ja työnantajayrittäjyyden, noin kolmasosa vastaajista nosti tässä yhteydessä esiin myös kotityöt ja vapaaehtoistyön. Tosin ammattiin opiskelevat pitivät näitä vähemmän työnä kuin muut vastaajat. Suurin ero ammattiin opiskelevien ja muiden vastaajien työlle antamien merkitysten välillä näkyy apurahan-saajana ja freelancerina toimimisessa, joita ammattiin opiskelevat pitävät selvästi vähemmän työnä kuin muut.

Kaiken kaikkiaan ammattiin opiskelevat tuntuvat analysoitujen aineistojen perusteella suhtautuvan työelämäsiirtymiinsä realistisesti. Koska omasta hyvinvoinnista huolehtiminen esimerkiksi vapaa-ajan harrastusten muodossa edellyttää yhteiskunnassa rahaa, palkkatyön

TAULUKKO 9. VERTAILU AMMATTIIN OPISKELEVIEN JA MUIDEN VASTAAJIEN VÄLILLÄ.

Minun ei tarvitse tehdä töitä ollakseni onnellinen			
Opiskelee ammatillisessa oppilaitoksessa		N	%
Ei	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	1 015	60,0
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	675	40,0
	Yhteensä	1 690	100,0
Kyllä	Täysin tai jokseenkin eri mieltä	99	52,3
	Täysin tai jokseenkin samaa mieltä	90	47,7
	Yhteensä	189	100,0

ulkopuolelle ei uskalleta jäädä. Nuorten näkemyksissä ilman palkkaa ei ole mahdollista elää ”täyttä elämää”.

Toisaalta nuoret suhtautuvat perinteiseen työelämään osin sarkastisesti kutsumalla sitä ”oravanpyöräksi”, joka alkaa valmistumisen jälkeen ja päättyy vasta eläkkeellä, jos silloinka. Nuoret näyttävät niin ikään olevan tietoisia työmarkkinoiden murroksesta ja työelämän muuttuvista vaatimuksista ja uskovat, että he pärjäävät muutosten keskellä. Laadullisessa aineistossa nuoret suhtautuivat muun muassa työn automatisoitumiseen ja uudenlaisten työnkuvien syntymiseen kutakuinkin väistämättömänä kehityksenä. Vain muutamissa haastatteluissa tuotiin esiin, että työn muuttuessa ja työpaikkojen kadotessa elämään tarvitaan toisenlaista mielekkyyttä, esimerkiksi vapaaehtoistyötä ja harrastuksia.

JOHTOPÄÄTÖKSET

Olemme tässä artikkelissa tarkastelleet Nuorisobarometrin kyselyaineiston ja sitä täydentävän laadullisen aineiston pohjalta, millaisia työelämää koskevia asenteita ammattiin opiskelevilla nuorilla on. Olemme kiinnittäneet huomiota erityisesti siihen, millainen suhde ammattiin opiskelevilla on palkkatyökeskeiseen ajatteluun. Analyysimme perusteella vaikuttaa siltä, että ammattiin opiskelevilla on muita nuoria enemmän palkkatyökeskeisyydestä kertovia asenteita, mutta samaan aikaan he myös kokevat muiden vastaajien tavoin huolta työllistymisestä ja muuttuvasta työelämästä. Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu nousi esiin erityisesti nuorten puheessa työn velvoittavuudesta sekä työn vahvassa arvostamisesta ja työttömiä kohtaan osoitetusta kritiikistä.

Institutionaalisen ulottuvuuden näkökulmasta voidaan tulkita, että ammattiin opiskelevat ovat joitakin poikkeuksia lukuun ottamatta omaksuneet palkkatyökeskeisen tavan jäsentää työn merkityksiä. Tämä näkyy tavassa, jolla nuoret toistavat yksilön vapautta ja vastuuta painottavia ajatuksia työstä ja työttömyydestä

(vrt. Burrows 2013, 391, 393; Pimlott-Wilson 2017, 292; Franceschelli & Keating 2018, 14). Tämä on havaittavissa myös artikkelin laadullisessa aineistossa. Niissä työpajahaastatteluissa, joissa palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu on vahvinta, myös vaatimukset työttömiä kohtaan ovat tiukkoja. Edelleen, vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometrissa ammattiin opiskelevat ovat muita vastaajia enemmän sitä mieltä, että sosiaaliturvalla eläminen on liian helppoa ja että menestyminen elämässä on itsestä kiinni. Laadullisen aineiston perusteella nuoret ajattelevat työttömyyden olevan luonnollinen osa työelämäänsä siirtymistä, eivätkä he koe tarvetta kiirehtiä työllistymistä valmistumisen jälkeen. Enemmän he kantavat huolta siitä, millaisia tuleva työ ja työyhteisö ovat.

Kulttuurisen palkkatyökeskeisyyden näkökulmasta mielenkiintoisena havaintona aineistosta nousevat esiin palkkatyölle annetut merkitykset. Nuoret arvostavat työtä ja pitävät sitä jopa velvollisuutena, mutta työ ei merkitse heille enää itsensä uhraamista, toisin kuin perinteinen suomalainen työkulttuuri on aiemmin normittanut (Kortteinen 1992, 76–77, 302–303). Sen sijaan kuten Maunu (2018, 13), Tolonen (2008, 237) ja Käyhkö (2008, 262) ovat todenneet, ammattiin opiskelevat suhtautuvat palkkatyöhön välineellisesti keinona taata turvallinen ja tasainen elämä. Aineistomme antaa kuitenkin mahdollisuuden myös toisenlaisiin tulkintoihin. Nuorten ajattelussa mielekäs työ on osa hyvän elämän rakentamista. Nuoret pitävät tärkeänä sisällöllisesti mielekästä työtä, jossa voi toteuttaa itseään, vaikuttaa omaan työhönsä ja hyödyntää osaamistaan, ja osa tähtää kunnianhimoisesti myös jatko-opintoihin (vrt. Tolonen 2008, 239). Osa ammattiin opiskelevista kaipaa työhön niin ikään joustoa ja jopa velvoitteiden keventämistä. Palkkatyön ohella myös vapaa-aika, sosiaalisten suhteiden merkitys ja oma hyvinvointi nousevat aineistossa esiin olennaisina arvoina.

Vuoden 2019 Nuorisobarometrissa jopa yli kolmasosa ammattiin opiskelevista oli huolissaan työpaikan löytymisestä kuten myös jaksa-

misestaan tulevaisuudessa. Sama huoli nousee esiin myös laadullisesta aineistosta, vaikkakaan ei niin selvästi kuin barometriaineistossa. Osalle opiskelijoista palkkatyökeskeisyyden vaatimukset aiheuttavat joka tapauksessa hankalia haasteita. Muun muassa Anne-Mari Souto (2014, 26, 29, 31) on arvostellut tapaa, jolla ammatillisen koulutuksen työelämälähtöisyys asettaa nuorille aikuismaisen oma-aloitteisuuden, itseohjautuvuuden ja vastuunkannon vaateita. Nuoret saattavat antaa liian suuren painoarvon onnistuneelle työelämäsiirtymälle olettaessaan, että se takaa heille mahdollisuuden itsenäistyä ja saavuttaa tavoiteltu turvallinen elämä (ks. Herranen & Harinen 2008, 7–9, 12). Myöhäismodernille yhteiskunnalle ominaiseen yksilökeskeisyyteen nojautuen nuoret ovat kasvaneet luottamaan omiin mahdollisuuksiinsa. Toisaalta ilmiön kääntöpuolena on, että yksilökeskeisessä ajattelutavassa myös ongelmat tuopataan yksilöiden omille harteille. Tällöin omaan työllistymiseen liitetyt optimistiset odotukset voivat muodostua kompastuskiveksi, jos odotukset eivät täytykään – puhumattakaan niistä nuorista, jotka kokevat työelämän vaatimukset jo lähtökohtaisesti lanvistaviksi. (Furlong & Cartmel 1997, 114, ks. myös Pimlott-Wilson 2017, 292.)

Pahimmassa tapauksessa työelämäsiirtymän epäonnistuminen näyttäytyy palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan omaksuneelle ammattiin opiskelevalle ammatillisena epäonnistumisena. Sama ilmiö näkyy myös tutkimustuloksissa, joiden mukaan nuoret ovat yhä stressaantuneempia tulevaisuudestaan ja jaksamisestaan, mikä voi johtaa jopa työkyvyttömyyteen (esim. Rikala 2018, 166). Työmarkkinoiden ulkopuolelle jäämisen on lisäksi useissa tutkimuksissa osoitettu olevan yhteydessä nuorten mielen-terveyden ongelmiin ja kuulumattomuuden kokemuksiin (Vancea & Utzet 2018, 79–80; Gretschel & Myllyniemi 2017, 11–18). Palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelu on eriarvoistavaa etenkin niiden nuorten tapauksessa, jotka eivät kykene palkkatyöhön (Pimlott-Wilson 2017, 293). Työn ja koulutuksen ulkopuolelle jäävillä

nuorilla on hyvin erilaiset mahdollisuudet ja resurssit kiinnittyä yhteiskuntaan kuin niillä nuorilla, jotka täyttävät työmarkkinakansalaisen ideaalin (Kokkonen ym. 2016, 47).

Ammatillisen koulutuksen ylläpitämä palkkatyökeskeinen ajattelutapa kohtaakin monia haasteita. Tutkimuksissa on osoitettu, että lyhyt koulutus kaventaa etenemisen mahdollisuuksia työelämässä, mikä voi vahvistaa luokkaeroja (Korber & Oesch 2019, 9). Lisäksi nopeasti muuttuvilla työmarkkinoilla kapea ammattikuva saattaa hankaloittaa työllistymistä (esim. Buchs & Helbling 2016, 11–13). Tutkimukset antavat niin ikään viitteitä siitä, että ammatillinen koulutus ei suojaa työttömyydeltä ja syrjäytymiseltä, jos valmistumisen jälkeinen siirtyminen työelämään ei ole sujuva (Helbling & Sacchi 2014, 14). Esimerkiksi Lechner ja kumppanit (2016, 99) suosittelevat, että opiskelijoille kerrotaan opintojen aikana avoimesti ja realistisesti työmarkkinoiden epävarmuudesta. Sanna Toiviainen (2018, 46) esittää lisäksi, että koulutus- ja työvoimapolitiittisten järjestelmien pitäisi tunnistaa myös normatiivisen ja lineaarisen koulutuspolun ulkopuolista oppimista. Voidaankin väittää, että työelämälähtöisyyttä painottaessaan ammatillinen koulutus ei kiinnitä tarpeeksi huomiota yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymiseen muilla tavoin (esim. Nylund, Rosvall & Ledman 2017, 804). Ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäsiirtymiä koskevassa keskustelussa olisi tarpeen tunnistaa niin muuttuvien työmarkkinoiden kuin epälineaaristen siirtymienkin vaikutukset nuorten yhteiskuntaan kiinnittymiseen (Chesters & Cuervo 2019, 237; Aaltonen & Berg 2018, 15–16).

Gorz (1999, 64) väittää palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun keskeiseksi ongelmaksi, että se ei tunnista muuttuneita työmarkkinoita vaan kytkee yksilön sosiaaliset, taloudelliset ja poliittiset oikeudet edelleen kokopäivätyön tekemiseen. Omien havaintojemme perusteella nuorille suunnatuissa työmarkkinapoliittisissa toimisissa olisi tärkeää huomioida palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelutavan nuorille luomat paineet ja sen vaikutukset heidän yhteiskunnallisiin asentei-

siinsa. Työn muuttuessa osa-aikaisemmaksi ja epävarmemmaksi yksilön itsearvostuksen saavuttaminen, toimeen tuleminen ja kansalaisuus eivät voi enää perustua palkkatyön varaan yhtä vahvasti kuin suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja kulttuurissa on ollut tapana.

VIITTEET

1. Artikkelin on työstetty osana monitieteistä ALL-YOUTH - Kaikki nuoret haluavat määrätä elämästään -tutkimushanketta. Tutkimusta on rahoittanut Strategisen tutkimuksen neuvosto (STN), rahoituspäätösnumerot 312689 ja 312692.
2. Opiskelijat osallistuivat työpajoihin osana opintojaan. Työpajojen alussa nuorille annettiin tietoa heidän tutkimukseen liittyvistä oikeuksistaan, osallistumisen vapaaehtoisuudesta, tutkimuksen kulusta sekä henkilötietojen keräämisestä. Kolme opiskelijaa kieltäytyi osallistumasta, ja yksi keskeytti työpajan. Vastuunopettajien kanssa sovittiin, ettei opiskelijalle tule sanktioita, jos hän kieltäytyy osallistumasta tai jättää työpajan kesken (Laukkanen ym. 2018, 90–91).
3. Laadullinen aineisto ei anna mahdollisuutta vertailla eri tutkintoaloja edustavien opiskelijoiden työhön liittyviä käsityksiä, koska aineisto on määrällisesti pieni ja koska alat olivat työpajoissa epätasaisesti edustettuna.
4. Latentti konstruktio, eli useasta väittämästä tai kysymyksestä muodostettu laajempi käsitteellinen kokonaisuus, joka rakentuu siihen sisältyvistä väittämistä.
5. Pitkittäisseurannassa mielipiteet elämässä menestymisestä ovat vaihdelleet jonkin verran. Vuoden 2013 Nuorisobarometrin seurantatietojen mukaan vuoden 2008 talouskriisin kontekstissa yksimielisyys väitteestä väheni, mutta sen jälkeen yksimielisyys on jälleen kasvanut. Vuonna 2013 kaikista vastaajista 83 prosenttia oli samaa mieltä väitteen kanssa.

6. Äänitallenteista ei aina ollut mahdollista erottaa puhujia toisistaan. Sitaateissa, joissa viitataan tällaisiin puheenvuoroihin, puhujia ei eritellä numeroilla (esim. N1, N2).
7. Työpajan tehtävänanto saattoi osaltaan johdatella puhumaan ”toisen” näkökulmasta.

LÄHTEET

- Aaltonen, Sanna & Berg, Päivi (2018) Nuorten aikuisten siirtymät palkkatyöhön ja yrittäjyyteen. *Nuorisotutkimus* 36 (2), 31–18.
- Beck, Ulrich (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*. Käänt. Patrick Camiller. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, Ulrich & Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth (2002) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE publications.
- Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2), 77–101.
- Brunila, Kristiina (2014) The Rise of Survival Discourse in an Era of Therapisation and Neoliberalism. *Education Inquiry* 5 (1), 7–23.
- Buchholz, Sandra & Blossfeld, Hans-Peter (2012) Changes in the economy, the labor market, and expectations for the future: What might Europe and the United States look like in twenty-five years? *New Directions for Youth Development* 135, 17–25.
- Buchs, Helen & Helbling, Laura Alexandra (2016) Job opportunities and school-to-work transitions in occupational labour markets. Are occupational change and unskilled employment after vocational education interrelated? *Empirical Research in Vocational Education Training* 8 (1), 1–18.
- Burrows, Scott (2013) Precarious work, neoliberalism and young people's experiences of employment in the Illawarra region. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 24 (3), 380–396.

- Chesters, Jenny & Cuervo, Hernan (2019) Adjusting to new employment landscapes: Consequences of precarious employment for young Australians. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 30 (2), 222–240.
- Cuervo, Hernan & Wyn, Johanna (2016) An unspoken crisis: the ‘scarring effects’ of the complex nexus between education and work on two generations of young Australians. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 35 (2), 122–135.
- France, Alan (2016) *Understanding Youth in the Global Economic Crisis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- France, Alan (2017) Austerity and the ‘Workfare State’: The Remaking and Reconfiguration of Citizenship for the Young Unemployed in the Great Recession. Teoksessa Peter Kelly & Joanne Pike (toim.) *Neo-liberalism and Austerity. The Moral Economics of Young People’s Health and Well-being*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 259–276.
- Franceschelli, Michela & Keating, Avril (2018) Imagining the Future in the Neoliberal Era: Young People’s Optimism and Their Faith in Hard Work. *Young* 26 (4), 1–17.
- Furlong, Andy & Cartmel, Fred (1997) *Young people and social change. Individualization and risk in late modernity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Furlong, Andy & Cartmel, Fred (2007) *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Green, Andrew (2019) What is happening to middle skills workers? *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, 230. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Gretschel, Anu & Myllyniemi, Sami (2017) Työtä, koulutus- tai harjoittelupaikkaa ilman olevien nuorten käsityksiä tulevaisuudesta, demokratiasta ja julkisista palveluista. Nuorisobarometrin erillisnäyte/aineistonkeruu. <https://urly.fi/RLT>. (Viitattu 20.6.2019.)
- Gorz, André (1999) *Reclaiming Work. Beyond the Wage-Based Society*. Käänt. Chris Turner. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Haavisto, Ilkka (2010) *Työelämän kulttuurivallankumous*. EVAn arvo- ja asennetutkimus 2010. https://www.eva.fi/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/tyoelaman_kulttuurivallankumous.pdf. (Viitattu 12.12.2019.)
- Hakala, Katariina & Brunila, Kristiina & Teittinen, Antti & Lahelma, Elina (2013) Työntekijäkansalaisuus tekeillä ja käsillä. Teoksessa Kristiina Brunila & Katariina Hakala & Elina Lahelma & Antti Teittinen (toim.) *Ammatillinen koulutus ja yhteiskunnalliset eronteot*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. 257–265.
- Harari, Yuval Noah (2018) *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. London: Vintage.
- Helbling, Laura A. & Sacchi, Stefan (2014) Scarring effects of early unemployment among young workers with vocational credentials in Switzerland. *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training* 6 (1), 1–22.
- Herranen, Jatta (2014) ”Kaikki on iha jeees”. *Ammatillinen koulutus nuoren silmin. Nuorisotutkimus* 32 (4), 3–18.
- Herranen, Jatta & Harinen, Päivi (2008) Kohti hyvää aikuisuutta. ”Omilleen asettumisen” kulttuurinen kuva. *Aikuiskasvatus* 28 (1), 4–14.
- Kelly, Peter (2001) Youth at Risk: processes of individualisation and responsabilisation in the risk society. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 22 (1), 23–33.
- Kelly, Peter (2017) Growing up after the GFC: responsabilisation and mortgaged futures. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education* 38 (1), 57–69.
- Korber, Mailys & Oesch, Daniel (2019) Vocational versus general education: Employment and earnings over the life course in Switzerland. *Advances in Life Course Research* 40, 1–13.
- Kortteinen, Matti (1992) *Kunnian kenttä. Suomalainen palkkatyö kulttuurisena muotona*. 2. painos. Hämeenlinna: Hanki ja Jää.
- Kokkonen, Tuomo & Närhi, Kati & Matthies, Aila-Leena (2016) Miksi lahjani ei kelpaa? Näkökulmia työelämän ulkopuolella olevien nuorten miesten käsityksiin työelämään osallistumisesta. *Nuorisotutkimus* 34 (2), 35–49.

- Käyhkö, Mari (2006) *Siivojaksi oppimassa. Etnografinen tutkimus työläistyöstä pubdistuspalvelualan koulutuksessa*. Joensuu: Joensuu University Press Oy.
- Käyhkö, Mari (2008) Kädenjälki näkyviin – koulupenkkiä väistelevät nuoret työläisnaiset. Teoksessa Tarja Tolonen (toim.) *Yhteiskuntaluokka ja sukupuoli*. Tampere: Vastapaino. 255–273.
- Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta 531/2017. <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2017/20170531>. (Viitattu 20.6.2019.)
- Lappalainen, Sirpa & Nylund, Mattias & Rosvall, Per-Åke (2019) Imagining societies through discourses on educational equality: A cross-cultural analysis of Finnish and Swedish upper secondary curricula from 1970 to the 2010s. *European Educational Research Journal* 18 (3), 335–354.
- Laukkanen, Tiia & Pekkarinen, Elina & Vilmilä, Fanny (2018) Nuorisotutkimuksen etiikka. Teoksessa Tomi Kiilakoski & Päivi Honkatukia (toim.) *Miten tutkia nuoria ja nuorisotyötä*. Tampere: Vastapaino 75–97.
- Lechner, Clemens M. & Tomasik, Martin J. & Silbereisen, Rainer K. (2016) Preparing for uncertain careers: How youth deal with growing occupational uncertainties before the education-to-work transition. *Journal of Vocational Behavior Volumes* 95–96, 90–101.
- Lechner, Clemens M. & Sortheix, Florencia M. & Göllner, Richard & Salmela-Aro, Katariina (2017) The development of work values during the transition to adulthood: A two-country study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* Volume 99, 52–65.
- Maczulskij, Terhi & Kauhanen, Merja (2016) Työmarkkinoiden polarisaatio ja työvoiman liikkuvuus – mihin rutiininomaista työtä tekevät työntekijät päätyvät? *Kansantaloudellinen Aikakauskirja* 112 (3), 284–296.
- Masdonati, Jonas & Fournier, Geneviève & Pinault, Mathieu & Lahrizi, Imane Z. (2016) The evolution of work values during the school-to-work transition: the case of young adults in the "missing middle". *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 16 (2), 189–212.
- Maunu, Antti (2018) Arjen rytmit ja yhteisöt – ammattiin opiskelevien hyvä elämä ja haalistuva individualismi. *Nuorisotutkimus* 36 (1), 3–21.
- Middeldorp, Marten M. & Edzes, Arjen J. E. & van Dijk, Jouke (2019) Smoothness of the School-to-Work Transition: General versus Vocational Upper-Secondary Education. *European Sociological Review* 35 (1), 81–97.
- Morgan, David L. (1996) Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology* 22, 129–152.
- Morgan, David L. (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Müller, Walter (2005) Education and Youth Integration into European Labour Markets. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46 (5-6), 461–485.
- Myllyniemi, Sami (2014). Tilasto-osio. Teoksessa Sami Myllyniemi (toim.) *Vaikuttava osa. Nuorisobarometri 2013*. Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura, verkkojulkaisuja 71. Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö & Nuorisosiain neuvottelukunta & Nuorisotutkimusseura. 5–99. https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Nuorisobarometri_2013_lowres1.pdf (Viitattu 12.12.2019.)
- Mäkinen, Sanna (2016) Nuorten toimijuuden tilat ja rajat koulutuksen katveista kerrottuna. *Nuorisotutkimus* 34 (2), 3–18.
- Naumanen, Päivi & Silvennoinen, Heikki (2010) Koulutus, yhteiskuntaluokat ja eriarvoisuus. Teoksessa Jani Erola (toim.) *Luokaton Suomi? Yhteiskuntaluokat 2000-luvun Suomessa*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 67–88.
- Nylund, Mattias & Rosvall, Per-Åke & Ledman, Kristina (2017) The vocational-academic divide in neoliberal upper secondary curricula: the Swedish case. *Journal of Education Policy* 32 (6), 788–808.
- Nätti, Jouko & Pyöriä, Pasi (2017) Epätyypilliset työsuhteet, epävarmuus ja liikkuvuus. Teoksessa Pasi Pyöriä (toim.) *Työelämän*

- myytit ja todellisuus*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. 26–41.
- Pimlott-Wilson, Helena (2017) Individualising the future: the emotional geographies of neoliberal governance in young people's aspirations. *Area* 49 (3), 288–295.
- Pyöriä, Pasi & Nätti, Jouko & Ojala, Satu & Saari, Tiina & Koivunen, Tuija & Järvinen, Katri-Maria & Anttila, Timo & Oinas, Tomi & Tammelinen, Mia & Mustosmäki, Armi & Viitasalo, Niina & Ikonen, Hanna-Mari & Virtanen, Pekka & Saloniemi, Antti & Bergholm, Tapio (2017) Jälkisanat: työmarkkinoiden riskiryhmät. Teoksessa Pasi Pyöriä (toim.) *Työelämän myytit ja todellisuus*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 197–202.
- Pyöriä, Pasi & Ojala, Satu (2016) Nuorten työasenteet puntarissa – eroaako Y-sukupolvi edeltäjistään? *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 81 (1), 31–42.
- Pyöriä, Pasi & Saari, Tiina & Ojala, Satu & Siponen, Katri (2013) Onko Y-sukupolvi toista maata? Nuorten työorientaatio 1980-, 1990- ja 2000-luvuilla. *Hallinnon tutkimus* 32 (3), 197–212.
- Rikala, Sanna (2018) Masennus, työkyvyttömyys ja sosiaalinen eriarvoisuus nuorten aikuisten elämäkuluissa. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* 83 (2), 159–170.
- Rintala, Heta & Nokelainen, Petri (2018) Työn murros haastaa ammatillisen koulutuksen. *Talous & Yhteiskunta* 2/2018, 56–60.
- Silvasti, Tiina & Lempiäinen, Kirsti & Kankainen, Tomi (2014) Eriarvoisuuden uudet paikat. Teoksessa Kirsti Lempiäinen & Tiina Silvasti (toim.) *Eriarvoisuuden rakenteet. Haurastuvat työmarkkinat Suomessa*. Tampere: Vastapaino. 7–19.
- Souto, Anna-Mari (2014) ”Kukaan ei kysy, mitä mulle kuuluu”. Koulutuksen keskeyttäjät ja ammatilliseen koulutukseen kuulumisen ehdot. *Nuorisotutkimus* 32 (4), 19–35.
- Suikkanen, Asko & Viinamäki, Leena (1999) Life paths and labour market citizenship. Teoksessa Jens Christiansen & Pertti Koistinen & Anne Kovalainen (toim.) *Working Europe. Reshaping European employment systems*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 189–209.
- Särkelä, Elina & Suoranta, Juha (2016) Nuorten tulevaisuuskertomukset ja refleksiivinen oppiminen. *Nuorisotutkimus* 34 (3), 19–38.
- Toiviainen, Sanna (2018) Sopeutumista, sitkeyttä ja selviytymistä. Nuorten relationaalinen toimijuus siirtymässä marginaalista kohti valtavirtoja. *Nuorisotutkimus* 36 (8), 35–49.
- Tolonen, Tarja (2008) Menestys, pärjääminen ja syrjäytyminen. Nuorten elämäntyyli ja luokkaerot. Teoksessa Tarja Tolonen (toim.) *Yhteiskuntaluokka ja sukupuoli*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 226–254.
- Tuohinen, Titta (2010) Nuorten ’työeetos’ – protestanttisesta etiikasta työyhteisön henkeen? *Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja* 4, 33–42.
- Valtioneuvosto (2016) Toimintasuunnitelma strategisen hallitusohjelman kärkihankkeiden ja reformien toimeenpanemiseksi 2015–2016. Hallituksen julkaisusarja 2/2016. <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10184/321857/Toimintasuunnitelma+strategisen+hallitusohjelman+k%C3%A4rkihankkeiden+ja+reformien+toimeenpanemiseksi+2015%E2%80%932019,+p%C3%A4ivitys+2016/305dcb6c-c9f8-4aca-bbbb-1018cd7a1fd8> (Viitattu 4.6.2019.)
- Vancea, Mihaela & Utzet, Mireia (2018) School-to-work transition: the case of Spanish NEETs. *Journal of Youth Studies* 21 (7), 869–887.
- Weber, Max (1992 [1930]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Käänt. Talcott Parsons. London: Routledge.
- Vesala, Kari Mikko & Rantanen, Teemu (2007) Laadullinen asennetutkimus: lähtökohtia, periaatteita, mahdollisuuksia. Argumentaatio ja tulkinta. Teoksessa Kari Mikko Vesala & Teemu Rantanen (toim.) *Laadullisen asennetutkimuksen läbestymistapa*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. 11–61.

Wyn, Johanna & Dwyer, Peter (1999) New Direction in Research on Youth in Transition. *Journal of Youth Studies* 2 (1), 5-21.

Wyn, Johanna & White, Rob (1997) *Rethinking Youth*. London: SAGE Publications.

PUBLICATION II

Exploring Vocational Education Students' Visions of a Successful Transition to Working Life from the Perspective of Societal Belonging

Ågren, Susanna

Journal of Applied Youth Studies 4 (1), 67–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00037-5>

**Publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License CC-BY**



Exploring Vocational Education Students' Visions of a Successful Transition to Working Life from the Perspective of Societal Belonging

Susanna Ågren¹

Received: 10 July 2020 / Revised: 8 March 2021 / Accepted: 19 March 2021 /
Published online: 6 April 2021
© The Author(s) 2021

Abstract

The emphasis on paid employment is strong in Finnish vocational education. However, the world of work is changing and becoming more insecure. Many researchers have expressed concern about the impact of these uncertainties on employment opportunities for young people. This paper discusses vocational education students' possibilities for societal belonging in their transition to the changing labour market in Finland. It explores the students' visions of a successful transition to working life and a decent life after this transition. The qualitative data were collected by organising six functional workshops for vocational students (58 participants). In the conclusion, the paper argues that in the vocational students' visions, paid employment constitutes an important definer of their societal belonging. Furthermore, it demonstrates how strongly the traditional ideals of worker-citizenship fostered in vocational education influence the meanings the second- and third-year students ascribe to societal belonging. The paper suggests that this issue needs to be critically examined in view of the changing labour market. The question is whether vocational training is able to guarantee graduating young people a realistic opportunity to build their belonging to society while at the same time to responding to the needs of the labour market.

Keywords Societal belonging · Worker-citizenship · Vocational education · Youth transitions · Working life · Capability approach

Introduction

Finding paid employment has been a traditional marker of success in young people's transition to adulthood, for example after graduation (e.g. Wyn and White 1997, 95).

✉ Susanna Ågren
susanna.agren@tuni.fi

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

For many young people, this marker of adulthood is becoming more difficult to attain in today's economically insecure society (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Cuervo and Wyn 2016; Chesters and Cuervo 2019). Scholars have argued that some young people hesitate or even refuse to view their success in this transition solely based on its social markers, that is leaving home, finding a permanent job and starting a family (Aronson 2008; Mary 2012). Nevertheless, studies have also shown that the personal feeling of responsibility appears to be a central marker of adulthood for young people today, and in this respect, financial independence remains important (Aronson 2008, 64–65; Mary 2012, 278). For example, according to studies conducted in Finland, young people still value work highly because they see it as a significant tool for self-realisation and a part of a good life (Pyöriä et al. 2017; Myllyniemi and Haikkola 2020). Therefore, this paper is interested in these complex meanings of work in the context of traditionally working life-centred vocational education.

The traditional goal of vocational education, to produce new skilled (young) workers for the labour market, has recently been challenged. While the ideal of the worker-citizen has maintained its importance as the prime motivator of vocational education, the labour market itself has altered significantly. For example, the developments of globalisation and technologisation have affected the availability of jobs, reducing routine and low-skilled work (Pajarinen et al. 2015; Kerr et al. 2020). These differences in employment prospects, however, vary dramatically between regions and vocational fields, with some being more vulnerable to change and uncertainty than others (Ojala et al. 2018, 158; Kerr et al. 2020, 1031). Studies in Finland have found that the relationship between permanent jobs and precarious employment has remained relatively stable since the 1980s (Pyöriä and Ojala 2016; Rasmussen et al. 2019, 24). At the same time, however, precarious (part-time, fixed-term, temporary agency and self-employment) work and related economic uncertainties seem to accumulate to certain population groups, such as young people with low levels of education or young immigrants (Pyöriä and Ojala 2016, 362–363; Ojala et al. 2018, 151; Rasmussen et al. 2019, 16; Maury 2020, 815–816). Some researchers assume that the precarious position of young people is an intermediate stage that will be corrected in the future (Pyöriä and Ojala 2016, 363; Ojala et al. 2018, 151). Others, however, have expressed concern that the working life skills provided by vocational education are no longer able to meet the growing demands of the changing labour market (Rintala and Nokelainen 2018; also, Kerr et al. 2020, 1031).

In this context, it is important to study young vocational students' perceptions of their future working life transitions and determine whether (or if) the changes and the new demands of the labour market are reflected in them. More specifically, this paper is interested in vocational students' understanding of their belonging in society, as well as how the ideal of the worker-citizen impacts their sense of belonging and capability to participate in society. Subsequently, the paper works with two theoretical concepts: societal belonging and capabilities. The paper follows May's (2013, 83) understanding of belonging; in other words, it sees vocational students' experience of post-transition belonging as built on negotiations with various social groups—i.e. with their friends and peers, family, vocational education communities and society in general. Consequently, by belonging, the current paper refers to vocational students' experience of being accepted as meaningful and respected members of these groups (Anthias 2006, 21). This experience, along with the opportunity to direct one's life, helps guarantee

one's well-being in society and ensure that one can live a decent life in it (Nussbaum 2011, 39). Relying on this starting point of Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach (CA), the paper examines how vocational students perceive their opportunities to view themselves as valued citizens after their transition to work. With CA, the aim of the paper is to stimulate discussion about whether vocational education is currently able to guarantee students the capabilities they need to find their place in society, the labour market notwithstanding.

As to its empirical context, the paper focuses on Finland, where vocational education is relatively popular. Finnish young people begin upper secondary education at the age of 16. They can then choose between two three-year tracks: academic (general) or vocational, with the latter strongly geared to the labour market. Approximately half of the young choose vocational education. The basic objective of Finnish vocational education is to provide society with skilled workers and, by the same token, ensure that young people have the skills to participate in society (Lappalainen et al. 2019; Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014). However, several Finnish scholars, adopting a critical tone, have pointed out that vocational education's mission seems to be to educate worker-citizens whose post-graduation participation in society is realised mainly via working life and work communities (Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014; also, Nylund et al. 2018; Lappalainen et al. 2019, 347). Isopahkala-Bouret et al. (2014) have argued that this ideal of citizenship imposes strong responsibilities in the form of employability, activity and well-being on vocational students. Given current labour market changes, this may become a problem, hampering young people's chances to belong to and participate in society. This point will be elaborated on as the argument of the paper progresses.

The data for the study were collected from two Finnish vocational education providers. In cooperation with the nation-wide ALL-YOUTH research project, six functional workshops were organised for vocational students nearing graduation. The participants were second- and third-year students aged 17 to 25 from six vocational upper secondary programmes. The data—collages and group interviews—were analysed by applying thematic analysis.

The next section presents a review of the concept of societal belonging and its relationship to CA, followed by a description of the methodology employed in the analysis and a presentation of the main findings. The discussion of the paper aims to contribute to recent research debates around vocational students' working life transitions given current economic insecurities and their impacts on young people.

Societal Belonging—Opportunity or Responsibility?

According to Wood (2017), by investigating the connections between young people's transition to working life and their sense of belonging in society, it is possible to understand more deeply what it is to be a young person today (see also Cuervo and Wyn 2014). Investigating vocational education graduates' sense of societal belonging can uncover their complex position in the changing labour market (May 2013, 4–6). Hence, it is reasonable to examine how the ideal of the worker-citizen manifests in vocational students' visions of a 'successful transition' and self-perceived potential to achieve societal belonging (Wood 2017, 1182).

Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) highlight the complexity and convoluted nature of the concept of belonging. However, they also find the concept useful for studying people's social relations and practices at the personal, social and societal levels because it directs attention toward the power relationships that justify and sometimes deny belonging (ibid., 241–242). Accepting this argument, the paper views belonging as a two-sided phenomenon, exploring how the personal dimension of belonging is constructed and how society's power relationships enable (or disable) belonging (see Antonsich 2010). By reference to May (2011, 367–368), this paper sees belonging in a person-centred way, paying attention to how people actively construct their connections to the surrounding world in their everyday lives. The aim is to understand belonging not only in terms of the personal longing to be part of something but also in terms of the 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006). The latter refer to the relations of power in the context in which some people are seen as belonging while others are rendered outsiders. In other words, a person's potential to construct a sense of belonging depends on the way other people and wider society acknowledge that individual's right to belong (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203, 207–208; Antonsich 2010, 649–650; May 2013, 83; Lähdesmäki et al. 2016; 239–240; May 2016, 759).

Although the paper's focus is on post-transition belonging among young people, it is worth noting that belonging is a constantly changing process (May 2011, 372). Nevertheless, an examination of vocational students' transition to working life is justified because it raises an important question about the changing labour market. In conditions of increasing precarity, does a successful transition to working life provide sufficient tools for maintaining an enduring sense of societal belonging? According to Wood (2017, 1186), labour market changes and the potential to attain adulthood via employment have noteworthy impacts on young people's experiences of belonging. Some scholars (e.g. Tolonen 2008; Maunu 2018; also, Nikunen and Korvajärvi 2020) have suggested that by choosing vocational education, young—predominantly working-class—people trust that they will obtain a profitable position in the labour market. Vocational education's social context may, furthermore, foster the political and ethical ideal of, for example, the worker-citizen, with expectations of achieving paid employment forming an important part of a young person's sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203, May 2011, 368; Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014, 101–102; Nylund et al. 2018, 112). However, young people's hopes for a successful transition may prove unfounded, from the perspective of belonging, if their expectations of finding employment and a secure position in society are not met (May 2011, 370).

These critical considerations gain further credence through Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach (CA), which holds that every individual should be equally respected in society and society should guarantee them certain capabilities¹ to support this ideal and the possibility of a decent life. Thus, CA provides a framework within which to debate both the politics and structures of belonging and the societal responsibilities of vocational education. In Nussbaum's (2011, 39) view, 'affiliation' (being a dignified part of the community) and 'practical reason' (being able to be true to one's self and direct one's life) are important because they connect to all other capabilities,

¹ Nussbaum (2011, 32–34) lists the central capabilities ensuring a decent life: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species, (9) play and (10) control over one's environment.

such as bodily health, the emotions and control over one's environment. Also, CA facilitates an examination of the ideal of vocational education, whereby the successful transition to paid employment leads to graduates' societal participation as 'good (worker-)citizens' (Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014; Lappalainen et al. 2019). Such an ideal strengthens the social atmosphere in which, according to late modern theorists, vocational students may learn to think of their societal belonging as a personal responsibility and a personal success (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 144; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 24–25; Bauman 2005, 75–76). In this case, the structural frameworks and practices provided by society play an undetermined role in constructing the conditions of societal belonging. By considering the societal perspective and society's responsibilities, CA can enable a more accurate study of vocational students' visions of a decent post-transition life than previous approaches.

Research Methods

The data were collected within the context of the ALL-YOUTH research project. Six functional workshops were organised for vocational students from two Finnish education providers in autumn 2018 and spring 2019. The aim of the workshops was to explore students' expectations and concerns with regard to their transitions to working life.

The 58 students who participated in the workshops were from six vocational upper secondary programmes: Electrical Engineering and Automation Technology (two workshops); Social and Health Care; Business and Administration; Information and Communications Technology; Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services; and Food Production. The method of empathy-based stories (MEBS) was applied in the beginning of the workshop. Using this method, the participants produced their own collective narratives in groups, imagining themselves in someone else's situation by making a collage from magazine clippings (Wallin et al. 2019, 525–526). The method was used as an orientation to the group interviews and to counter potential problems in the group interviews, such as reluctance among participants to express committed personal opinions in front of others, and to build a relaxed atmosphere for the discussions (Morgan 1997, 15–16; Wallin et al. 2019, 529–530). Because the participants had previously experienced working life mainly through work placements or traineeships, it was thought to be easier for them to approach the future working life from a third person's perspective by using MEBS.

The workshops proceeded as a two-phase process. In the first phase, the participants composed a visual output (a collage), in which they reflected on their expectations and concerns about their transition to working life from the perspective of either a successful or unsuccessful transition. They were given magazines, and the assigned task was to cut out pictures or words that they felt reflected either type of transition. In the second phase, the participants introduced their outputs to other students in the group interview sessions facilitated by the researchers. The interviews inquired into the participants' thoughts about their upcoming transition to working life and their future position in the labour market, as well as their understanding of a decent life.

The collected data (collages and recorded and transcribed group interviews) were analysed by focusing on the meanings the workshop participants attributed to their transition to working life. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used to

allow the detailed categorisation of rich and varied data. The analysis was carried out in two steps. First, a data-driven, inductive approach was applied to the meanings given to successful or unsuccessful transitions (ibid., 83–84). The analysis began by mind mapping the themes found in the collages. The interview data were then processed, with a focus on the expectations and concerns the workshop participants associated with the transition to working life. In the second step, the analysis focused on the meanings the participants ascribed to social relationships and independence, social communities and societal expectations in their visions of a successful or unsuccessful transition to working life. This phase was more theory-driven because the thematisation was constructed around (1) the concept of belonging, i.e. the meanings the participants ascribed to post-graduation societal belonging, (2) Nussbaum's CA, with its definitions of affiliation and practical reason, i.e. how they explained their own and others' chances for meaningful social relationships and self-determination after the transition, and (3) 'the politics of belonging', i.e. what kinds of responsibilities they placed on themselves and others with regard to paid employment.

Analysis: Working Life as a Guarantor of Societal Belonging

This section describes how vocational students envision the elements of the 'decent life' promised to them upon their entry into working life. Based on the analysis, the workshop participants seemed to view a successful transition to working life as an essential prerequisite for societal belonging. Figure 1 presents the dimensions of their conception of belonging. In the following sections, the main findings of this paper and these dimensions of belonging will be presented and explained in greater detail.

Self-acceptance—Achieving Independence and Being a Valued Worker

According to the data, the workshop participants' visions of a successful transition can be divided into two categories along the dimension of self-

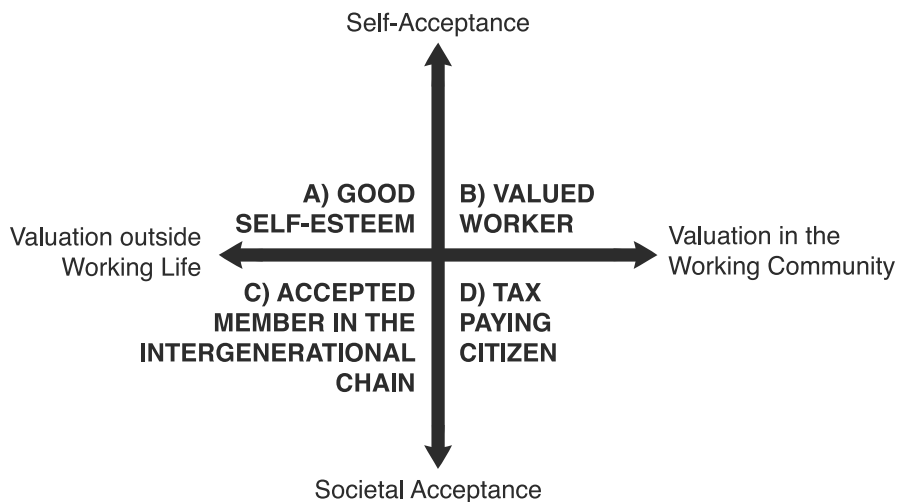


Fig. 1 Dimensions of belonging after the transition to working life

acceptance (above the axis): being a valued worker and achieving independence and good self-esteem.

First, their visions highlight the meaning of belonging to a work community and their urge to be appreciated as skilled workers (B – *a valued worker*). The chance to have a comfortable job where one feels valued and can utilise one's vocational competence was a central element of success in workshop participants' visions of a successful transition. The desire to feel appreciated within the work community relates to belonging as identification and emotional attachment (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). The participants described the desire to be treated as professionals and gain responsibility, and some hoped that the work community would understand that they were new graduates. In either case, the feeling of being a welcomed and important part of the vocational community was central to their visions of a successful transition, as can be noted in the following quotes from various interviews:

Y1²: [The concern is that] the work community won't let you into the community and won't give good instructions for you but will, instead, assume that, now when you have graduated, you should know everything. And, furthermore, [they] won't advise or tell, for example, where one can find tools or what are the customs in the workplace.

Y2: [The hope regarding work] is to have a good work community and a good place to work so that you don't have to go to work every morning feeling annoyed. Instead, you are interested in what you are doing.

Second, the participating students' thoughts were connected to the ability to achieve a life of one's own (A – *good self-esteem*). In other words, finding a job where one feels a meaningful part of a work community and earning a salary were important signs of accomplishing independence after graduation. A successful transition meant the chance to determine one's life independently, regardless of anyone else's opinion or financial support (see also Chesters and Cuervo 2019, 235; Cuervo and Chesters 2019, 306–307). In a similar fashion, previous studies have demonstrated that young people today place a high value on their autonomy—they yearn to determine for themselves what kind of life, adulthood and model of worker-citizenship they would like to embody (e.g. Mary 2012, 319–320; also Arnett 2004, 162). What is noteworthy is that, in the data, achieving independence was related to self-esteem, or, as one participant expressed:

Y3: Well, I wouldn't feel successful [in the transition] if I would have to live with KELA's [The Social Insurance Institution of Finland] money.

Furthermore, the workshop participants also attributed considerable value to social relationships outside working life, though they noted that maintaining

² The quotes are freely translated from Finnish. The code 'Y' means a young person, and the numbering is used to distinguish the quotes from one another. Hence, the consecutive numbers do not indicate that the quotes are from the same interview. The quotes have been selected from various group interviews, and the representativeness of the workshops has been taken into account.

meaningful social relations would be greatly hampered without income from paid employment to facilitate meaningful leisure time. To them, leisure time represents an important counterbalance to work because it allows one to recover and maintain social relationships. In addition, to many of the students, leisure time was more important than work. The ability to spend meaningful leisure time with friends was a significant personal goal in the participants' visions of a successful transition, which can be interpreted as a typical characteristic of today's consumer society (Bauman 2005, 38). Therefore, finding employment was a significant concern among the workshop participants. Without a paid job and an adequate salary, a person may become isolated from their social circles, and this may limit their opportunities to achieve independence. The next excerpts, taken from two different interviews in which participants are describing the importance of finding a job, provide good illustrations of this:

Y4: I think [the benefit of work] is the life itself. You won't get anything out of it if you're just at home eating and sleeping and watching TV. You must go out and be social with other people and explore the world, you know.

Y5: [Work is important], I suppose, so that you can become independent and are capable of taking care of your own affairs and also capable of buying the things that you need and living your life in general.

The findings above suggest that there is an association between students' understandings of a successful transition and Nussbaum's (2011, 34, 39) practical reason—the freedom to plan one's own life—and that this association forms the basis of human dignity. They, moreover, connect with the capability of affiliation. Nussbaum (2011, 34) argues that, just as it is important to guarantee individuals' freedom to create and maintain social relationships, it is also important to ensure that one has a social basis for self-esteem and feels like a respected member of the community. With their visions of a successful transition, the participants placed a considerable value on employment for the sake of attaining desired independence and also an active social life. This value can be demonstrated with the following quote:

Y6: A person needs a job so that one can get money and have a chance to spend time with friends when one is free from work. If one, for example, plans to go for a longer vacation with friends or family, it usually requires a lot of money.

At the same time, the participants expressed that well-maintained social relationships, friends and family are the most crucial protection against social exclusion. Interestingly, they did not expect to become socially excluded themselves but relied on support from loved ones when needed, such as in the case of becoming unemployed. The importance of social relationships and what May (2013, 88) refers as 'alternative belonging' is evident in the following excerpt:

Y7: Whether you feel like you are part of the group depends quite a lot on the group that you are part of or, for example, on your group of friends. For instance, if a large number of people are unemployed, then one may not be so easily ashamed or anything like that, but if everyone else works, then maybe...

Altogether, the findings demonstrate the participants' desire to feel accepted as part of their vocational community and social circles, which forms the foundation of one's experience of belonging (Anthias 2006, 21; May 2016, 759–760). These thoughts of the workshop participants seem to relate to self-acceptance, i.e. to the feeling that one has achieved one's own working life expectations and met the expectations of others. The following section explains how these findings depend on the value vocational students ascribe to social relationships and societal acceptance.

Societal Acceptance—Realising the Expectations of Peers, Parents and Society

Returning to Fig. 1, the dimension of societal acceptance (under the axis) can be divided into two complementary categories that demonstrate the meaning of belonging as follows: (C) *members in the intergenerational chain* and (D) *tax paying citizens*. These meanings were reflected in the views of the workshop participants, firstly, in how they felt it important to move forward in their life at the same pace with others in their social circles to receive appreciation from their peers, family and society. Second, the students viewed a paid job as a vital means of fulfilling their duties as taxpaying citizens (see also Ågren et al. 2020). Their viewpoints, in this regard, share similarities with the political and ethical value systems described by Yuval-Davis (2006, 203), which maintain possibilities for belonging (May 2016, 759). These value systems were reflected in the way the participants emphasised the importance of paid employment as the main means of belonging to society and, thus, reproduced the ideals of worker-citizenship. This is interestingly evident in the following quote on basic income:

Y8: [Basic income] might make some people lazy and make them think that they don't have to do anything because they get the money anyway. Consequently, this laziness itself reduces human contacts and relationships with other people. This, on the other hand, worsens a person's mental state pretty badly. It might turn things even worse so that the person doesn't even want to do anything anymore.

Furthermore, despite the participants' sense that achieving independence is an important part of the transition to working life, it does not appear to be an entirely individualistic expectation. For example, in the next quote, a participant explains why they chose certain words for their collage on failed transitions:

Y9: ['Loneliness' and 'bullied' demonstrate a situation] where one's acquaintances, who are in working life, diminish or bully one for not getting ahead in one's life.

Rather, the longing for independence expresses an individual's need to be part of their peer group and advance in life at the same pace that they do (Nikunen and Korvajärvi 2020, 12). It reflects the need, as well as the pressure, to take part in society in a wider sense, by fulfilling one's duties, achieving paid employment, and building one's life as a respectable taxpayer and consumer (Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014, 104–105). Furthermore, these visions demonstrate the need to realise the socially maintained conception of how the transition should progress and receive appreciation from the older

generation (parents) and society at large. The next quote, in which one of the participants describes the value of work, is a vivid demonstration of this kind of thinking:

Y10: Probably, the most important thing is that you can take care of yourself so that others don't have to or that you don't have to live at others' mercy. And, moreover, that you are taking the responsibility for looking after yourself and do not assume that others will do it for you.

This finding illustrates that, for the participants, societal belonging is formed through other people's acceptance and the value system of worker-citizenship (May 2013, 83). It also indicates how the students aspire to negotiate their place in society by achieving paid employment (May 2011, 368–370). The need to belong to one's age group and become a full citizen is expressed in the desire for self-determination and self-realisation. The failure to realise this desire subsequently leads, according to the participants, to anxiety, shame, the loss of motivation and even giving up (May 2016, 759). The next quote summarises these views well:

Y11: [Getting fired] would crush one's self-esteem, and then, one might get depressed and no longer have the strength to apply for more jobs. After it, one would have nothing. One's whole world would break into pieces, for one has first studied for three years or more, and after finding a job, everything will nonetheless crush into pieces. Consequently, one would lose one's self-esteem and think that one has failed as a human being.

In young people's views, the dimensions of societal belonging are largely dependent on paid employment. However, as noted by the workshop participants, if one is supported by one's social circle, then a 'failed transition' may not be as detrimental as it otherwise would. The optimism of the students was also noteworthy because it manifested in their presumption that they will personally be able to obtain paid employment and, through it, a prestigious position in society. Such optimism has been noted also in some other studies (Mary 2012, 212–213; Franceschelli and Keating 2018; Nikunen and Korvajärvi 2020; also, Ågren et al. 2020). Although some participants acknowledged that anything could happen and that they might be temporarily unemployed at some point, most of them saw unemployment as a distant worry. Graduation also appeared to be a faraway event, even if they were already near graduation. However, according to previous research, these optimistic visions may become more realistic after entering an insecure working life (Mannerström et al. 2019, 1300).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study support the view that paid employment still provides an important foundation in vocational students' visions of societal belonging. Even though belonging is something that is constantly changing in a person's life (May 2013, 90), for the vocational students in this study, achieving paid employment offers an advantageous basis for societal belonging after graduation. What is interesting in the paper's

analysis is that the impulse felt by the workshop participants to achieve independence and adulthood via paid employment stems from the aspiration for societal belonging.

The findings support May's (2011, 2013, 2016) arguments about how gaining the acceptance of others plays an important role in building one's sense of belonging. In the views of the participants, the dimension of self-acceptance within societal belonging depends on how one succeeds in the transition in relation to one's peers or, as Nikunen and Korvajärvi (2020, 12) formulate it, competitors. Departing from the normative track or being forced outside of one's significant social groupings leads to a sense of not belonging after graduation. Furthermore, the data suggest that a person's self-acceptance is dependent on being accepted as a member in valued peer and social groups and in a work community. Therefore, the time spent with friends and family forms an important counterbalance to work and, further, enhances security and well-being within the precarious contemporary labour market. These observations are consistent with those of Furlong et al. (2011, 364), Cuervo and Wyn (2014, 902) and Batchelor et al. (2020, 105). To support vocational students' societal belonging, we may have to acknowledge the various meanings of one's social relationships—in terms of peer groups, leisure activities and work communities—as a pillar of one's self-acceptance within the worker-citizenship construct.

Accordingly, it is important to ask how the social structures and power relationships that reinforce the feeling of societal acceptance enhance young people's sense of societal belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203). The findings demonstrate that worker-citizenship plays the part of Yuval-Davis (2006) 'politics of belonging' within participants' visions of societal belonging. The participants have adopted the ideal of a responsible, taxpaying worker-citizen, as well as that of the consumer citizen (Bauman 2005, 38; Isopahkala-Bouret et al. 2014, 104–105). As noted, most also tended to believe in their personal chances of achieving the ideal. Following the interpretations of Nikunen and Korvajärvi (2020, 13) and Pyöriä et al. (2017, 9–11), this optimism is an attempt to negotiate the demands of worker-citizenship and, thus, also a defence mechanism because they count so much on their employment with regard to their post-graduation belonging. It may also reflect the trust they place either on their friends and family or on their education with regard to their future coping. It can be argued that the emphasis on a 'good worker-citizen' in vocational education gives the participants 'a false promise' regarding their position within a labour market facing insecurities and, thus, places a great deal of pressure on them in terms of employment (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 144; Wyn and Dwyer 1999, 14).

The workshop participants desire acceptance in a work community that values and supports them and want to receive recognition for their vocational competence and as good workers. Hence, 'professionalism' appears to constitute the source of vocational students' sense of both societal and self-acceptance. For the students, finding a job in one's own field and being recognised as a qualified worker connote success as a worker-citizen, providing the means with which to live a decent life (Tolonen 2008; Maunu 2018; Nikunen and Korvajärvi 2020, 8–9). These observations resonate with Nussbaum's (2011, 39) theory, according to which the opportunity to develop the capabilities of affiliation and practical reason—that is, to feel like a dignified member of the community and plan one's own life—are the basis for human dignity. They, moreover, suggest that succeeding as a worker-citizen forms a crucial part of the studied students' visions of societal belonging.

It can consequently be asked whether vocational education aims to guarantee students' sense of societal belonging by helping them attain the ideal of the worker-citizen, and if this is so, how does that affect the experience of acceptance among those who cannot or refuse to fulfil this ideal. Following Nussbaum's (2011, 40) interpretation of CA, vocational education's responsibility to vocational students goes beyond the objective of paid employment, also touching on their sense of belonging and social participation. Therefore, vocational education institutions must work to guarantee at least the threshold level of social equality among students regardless of whether their transition to work succeeds or not (Edgell and Graham 2017, 1205).

In the same vein as Wood (2017, 1186), this paper argues that Finnish vocational education's narrow way of understanding societal participation via worker-citizenship impacts students' visions of how they can belong to society. Worker-citizenship is not completely a negative construct, because, for many vocational students, it can be an important resource of belonging. However, it is a resource only if young people are able to and want to meet its standards. As May (2011, 374; 2013, 150) has argued, because the concept of belonging is sensitive to change, using it allows us to ask how and to whom we can ensure belonging, especially when society is changing. The findings of this paper contribute to discussing how vocational education can support students' actual potential to find paid employment as expected and desired (whether full-time, part-time or entrepreneurship).

When interpreting the results, it is important to remember that young people enter vocational education from diverse backgrounds and that employment prospects vary considerably by degree field. It is also noteworthy that the assignment in the workshops was oriented around the transition to working life and may have strengthened the role of paid employment in the analysis. It may be that the research situation or methods led some of the participants to overemphasise paid employment. For instance, it seemed as if the students were attempting to convince the interviewer of their decency as 'worker-citizens' (see Ågren et al. 2020). These are interesting points, nevertheless, in the light of the research questions. The themed interview questions helped the interviewers broaden the topics discussed beyond paid employment.

In conclusion, this paper poses an important and timely question for future research. How can vocational education and society in general support vocational education graduates, particularly their sense of societal belonging, prior to their uncertain transition to working life? This is a particularly relevant question considering the negative effects of the insecure labour market on young people's well-being and opportunities to plan for their future (Vancea and Utzet 2018; Cuervo and Chesters 2019).

Code Availability Not applicable.

Author Contribution Not applicable.

Funding The study is supported by ALL-YOUTH – All Youth Want to Rule Their World Research Project 2018–2023. The project is funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC)/the Academy of Finland (grant numbers 312689 and 312692).

Data availability The data are available for the ALL-YOUTH research project. Not all participants gave permission for the open distribution of data.

Declarations

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in the study followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Ethical review was not needed as the study did not collect sensitive and identifiable data.

Informed Consent All participants were clearly informed about their rights in data collection at the beginning of the workshops. Participation was voluntary, and the participants signed a consent form. The forms are stored in accordance with GDPR guidelines.

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Anthias F (2006) Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: rethinking translocations. In: Yuval-Davis N, Kannabirān K, Vieten U (eds) *The situated politics of belonging*. SAGE Publications, London, pp 17–31
- Antonsich M (2010) Searching for belonging – an analytical framework. *Geogr Compass* 4(6):644–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x>
- Arnett JJ (2004) *Emerging adulthood: the winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press, New York
- Aronson P (2008) The markers and meanings of growing up: contemporary young women's transition from adolescence to adulthood. *Gend Soc* 22(1):56–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207311420>
- Ågren S, Pietilä I, Rättälä T (2020) Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun esiintyminen ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteissa [Paid-employment-centred thinking in the working life attitudes of vocational education students]. In: Haikkola L, Myllyniemi S (eds) *Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019*. [Good work! Youth Barometer 2019]. Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, Helsinki, pp 157–178
- Batchelor S, Fraser A, Whittaker L, Li L (2020) Precarious leisure: (re)imagining youth, transitions and temporality. *J Youth Stud* 23(1):93–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1710483>
- Bauman Z (2005) *Work, consumerism and the new poor*, 2nd edn. Open University Press, Maidenhead
- Beck U, Beck-Gernsheim E (2002) *Individualization: institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE, London and Thousand Oaks, California
- Braun V, Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol* 3(2):77–101
- Chesters J, Cuervo H (2019) Adjusting to new employment landscapes: consequences of precarious employment for young Australians. *Econ Labour Relat Rev* 30(2):222–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304619832740>
- Cuervo H, Chesters J (2019) The [im]possibility of planning a future: how prolonged precarious employment during transitions affects the lives of young Australians. *Lab Ind: J Soc Econ Relat Work* 29(4):295–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2019.1696654>
- Cuervo H, Wyn J (2014) Reflections on the use of spatial and relational metaphors in youth studies. *J Youth Stud* 17(7):901–915. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.878796>
- Cuervo H, Wyn J (2016) An unspoken crisis: the ‘scarring effects’ of the complex nexus between education and work on two generations of young Australians. *Int J Lifelong Educ* 35(2):122–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2016.1164467>

- Edgell V, Graham H (2017) A capability approach to unemployed young people's voice and agency in the development and implementation of employment activation policies. *Soc Pol Admin* 51(7):1191–1209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12262>
- Franceschelli M, Keating A (2018) Imagining the future in the neoliberal era: young people's optimism and their faith in hard work. *Young* 26(4):1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308817742287>
- Furlong A, Cartmel F (1997) Young people and social change. Individualization and risk in late modernity. Open University Press, Buckingham
- Furlong A, Cartmel F (2007) Young people and social change: new perspectives. Open University Press, Maidenhead
- Furlong A, Woodman D, Wyn J (2011) Changing times, changing perspectives: reconciling 'transition' and 'cultural' perspectives on youth and young adulthood. *J Sociol* 47(4):355–370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311420787>
- Isopahkala-Bouret U, Lappalainen S, Lahelma E (2014) Educating worker-citizens: visions and divisions in curriculum texts. *J Educ Work* 27(1):92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2012.718745>
- Kerr S, Maczulskij T, Maliranta M (2020) Within and between firm trends in job polarization: the roles of globalization and technology. *J Econ Geogr* 20(4):1003–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbz028>
- Lähdesmäki T, Saresma T, Hiltunen K et al (2016) Fluidity and flexibility of "belonging": Uses of the concept in contemporary research. *Acta Sociol* 59(3):233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316633099>
- Lappalainen S, Nylund M, Rosvall PÅ (2019) Imagining societies through discourses on educational equality: a cross-cultural analysis of Finnish and Swedish upper secondary curricula from 1970 to the 2010s. *Eur Educ Res J* 18(3):335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904118814140>
- Mannerström R, Muotka J, Salmela-Aro K (2019) Associations between identity processes and success in developmental tasks during the transition from emerging to young adulthood. *J Youth Stud* 22(9):1289–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1571179>
- Mary A (2012) The illusion of the prolongation of youth. Dissertation, University of Tampere
- Maunu A (2018) Arjen rytmit ja yhteisöt – ammattiin opiskelevien hyvä elämä ja haalistuva individualismi [Routines, social groups and everyday life. Vocational students' conceptions of a good life and fading individualism]. *Nuorisotutkimus* 36(1):3–21
- Maury O (2020) Between a promise and a salary: student-migrant-workers' experiences of precarious labour markets. *Work Employ Soc* 34(5):809–825. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019887097>
- May V (2011) Self, belonging and social change. *Sociology* 45(3):363–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038511399624>
- May V (2013) Connecting self to society: belonging in a changing world. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke
- May V (2016) When recognition fails: mass observation project accounts of not belonging. *Sociology* 50(4):748–763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515578991>
- Morgan DL (1997) Focus groups as qualitative research. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks
- Myllyniemi S, Haikkola L (2020) Tilasto-osio [Statistics]. In: Haikkola L, Myllyniemi S (eds) Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019. [Good work! Youth Barometer 2019]. Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, Helsinki, pp 9–108
- Nikunen M, Korvajärvi P (2020) Being positive, being hopeful, being happy: young adults reflecting on their future in times of austerity. *Eur J Cult Stud*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420935901>
- Nussbaum M (2011) Creating capabilities: the human development approach. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London
- Nylund M, Rosvall PÅ, Eiríksdóttir E et al (2018) The academic–vocational divide in three Nordic countries: implications for social class and gender. *Educ Inq* 9(1):97–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2018.1424490>
- Ojala S, Nätti J, Lipiäinen L (2018) Types of temporary employment: an 8-year follow-up of labour market attachment. *Soc Indic Res* 138(1):141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1648-7>
- Pajarinen M, Rouvinen P, Ekeland A (2015) Computerization threatens one-third of Finnish and Norwegian employment. ETLA [The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy] Brief. <https://www.etla.fi/wp-content/uploads/ETLA-Muistio-Brief-34.pdf>. Accessed 11 November 2020
- Pyöriä P, Ojala S (2016) Precarious work and intrinsic job quality: evidence from Finland, 1984–2013. *Econ Labour Relat Rev* 27(3):349–367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304616659190>
- Pyöriä P, Ojala S, Saari T, Järvinen KM (2017) The millennial generation: a new breed of labour? *SAGE Open* 7(1):1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017697158>
- Rasmussen S, Nätti J, Larsen TP, Ilse A, Garde AH (2019) Nonstandard employment in the Nordics – toward precarious work? *Nord J Work Life Stud* 9(6):7–32. <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v9iS6.114689>
- Rintala H, Nokelainen P (2018) Työn murros haastaa ammatillisen koulutuksen. *Talous & Yhteiskunta* 46(2):56–60

- Tolonen T (2008) Menestys, pärjääminen ja syrjäytyminen. Nuorten elämäntyyli ja luokkaerot. [Success, coping and social exclusion. Youth lifestyles and class differences.]. In: Tolonen T (ed) *Yhteiskuntaluokka ja sukupuoli* [Social Class and Gender]. Vastapaino, Tampere, pp 226–254
- Vancea M, Utzet M (2018) School-to-work transition: the case of Spanish NEETs. *J Youth Stud* 21(7):869–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1421313>
- Wallin A, Koro-Ljungberg M, Eskola J (2019) The method of empathy-based stories. *Int J Res Method Educ* 42(5):525–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1533937>
- Wood BE (2017) Youth studies, citizenship and transitions: towards a new research agenda. *J Youth Stud* 20(9):1176–1190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1316363>
- Wyn J, Dwyer P (1999) New direction in research on youth in transition. *J Youth Stud* 2(1):5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.1999.10593021>
- Wyn J, White R (1997) *Rethinking youth*. SAGE Publications, London
- Yuval-Davis N (2006) Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns Prejudice* 40(3):197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331>

PUBLICATION III

**Shaping worker-citizenship: Young vocational education graduates' labour
market positionings within new adulthood**

Ågren, Susanna

Journal of Youth Studies
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009>

**Publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License CC-BY**



Shaping worker-citizenship: young vocational education graduates' labour market positionings within new adulthood

Susanna Ågren

To cite this article: Susanna Ågren (2023): Shaping worker-citizenship: young vocational education graduates' labour market positionings within new adulthood, Journal of Youth Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 07 Feb 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 208




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Shaping worker-citizenship: young vocational education graduates' labour market positionings within new adulthood

Susanna Ågren 

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

ABSTRACT

Young vocational graduates face many expectations related to the norms of worker-citizenship when entering the labour market. Due to contemporary uncertainties and the new realities of adulthood, meeting these expectations may not be easy. These expectations might also conflict with young adults' desires. This paper examines how vocational education graduates position themselves in the labour market and what kind of worker-citizenship they produce in their working-life stories. The study is based on 32 individual interviews with 18- to 25-year-old vocational graduates with different positions in the Finnish labour market. The findings support earlier research on the importance of assuming the position of worker-citizen for these graduates. In new adulthood, they aim but are also forced to shape their worker-citizenship when, for some, vocational qualification has not redeemed its promises. Based on empirical findings, the article argues that ideals maintained in vocational education may need to be shaped within the unpredictable realities of new adulthood.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 December 2021



Accepted 23 January 2023

KEYWORDS

Vocational education; labour market; positioning; worker-citizenship; new adulthood

Introduction

This article examines how young adults who have completed their vocational upper secondary education negotiate their positions in the contemporary labour market in Finland. It concentrates on vocational education, the development of which is based on the need to guarantee skilled workers to the growing industry and on a moral aspiration to provide young people skills that enhance their employability and promote their social inclusion (Billett 2014). Vocational education also reproduces these objectives: several studies claim that vocational qualification eases young adults' transition to the labour market because their occupation-specific skills enhance their attachment to working life especially at the beginning of their careers (Lavrijsen and Nicaise 2017; Müller 2005, 468–469; Vogtenhuber 2014). Finland has attempted to strengthen this connection with a reform in 2018 by increasing work-based learning and cooperation (Rintala and Nokelainen 2020).

CONTACT Susanna Ågren  susanna.agren@tuni.fi  Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, 33014 Finland

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Traditionally, vocational education has been developed as an education for young people oriented towards practical jobs (Billett 2014). In fact, it is practicality and rapid employment that specifically attract young people to vocational education (Tolonen and Aapola-Kari 2022). This article concentrates on vocational upper secondary education, which in the Finnish context refers to an educational track for which young people aged 16 proceed after completing a nine-year comprehensive school. In Finland, about 40% of this age group choose the vocational track instead of general upper secondary education (Official Statistics of Finland 2020). The length of the education is approximately three years, depending on individual study plans. After graduation, those with vocational qualifications can apply for higher education alongside those with a more general academic upper secondary education. They are, however, a minority in higher education (7% of students in university and 33% in universities of applied sciences) and their paths to it are often complicated (Haltia, Isopahkala-Bouret, and Jauhiainen 2021).

According to several studies, vocational education's drive to educate future workers is influenced by changes in the labour market and its demands – that is, by the availability of work and the labour markets' needs for skilled workers (Buchs and Helbling 2016). Studies have noted, for example, that the benefits of occupational skills fade over time if graduates are not prepared to develop them or if they are not transferable to another field (Buchs and Helbling 2016, 12–13; Lavrijsen and Nicaise 2017; Vogtenhuber 2014). Thus, working-life changes (such as technologisation, digitalisation and globalisation) may have a greater impact on occupation-specific fields (such as technical fields) than on fields with more adaptability or higher demand in the local labour market (e.g. Buchs and Helbling 2016; Maczulskij and Karhunen 2017). For example, employment among Finnish vocational graduates declined by 8% during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020: 62% of the graduates were employed¹ one year after their graduation (Official Statistics of Finland 2022). The greatest decline occurred in the service sector, while the best employment prospects were in health and welfare. However, this article claims that understanding vocational graduates' lives in the contemporary labour market requires also qualitative examination.

This article is guided by the idea that, for the young vocational students, a secure employment is a promise and marker of adulthood (see Ågren 2021). After finishing their studies, they want to be employed in their occupational field and to start building independent lives as their peers do, i.e. pay their own bills, own a home, and get money to spend time with friends. However, according to the debate on 'new adulthood', in the contemporary world, the transitions to work and through it to adulthood are not as linear and predictable as these young adults learn to expect as part of their education (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Wyn 2020). It is possible that not all young adults find a stable position and hence a basis on which to plan their lives further. This makes their choice-making regarding their adult lives a more contingent and complex process than what it was for older generations (Woodman and Wyn 2015). Thus, it may be confusing for young adults to discover that their education does not meet the demands of working life and worker-citizenship, as a path to independence, is not realised as promised by vocational education (Cahill and Leccardi 2020; Cuervo and Wyn 2016; Kelly 2017; regarding worker-citizenship, see Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen, and Lahelma 2014).

This article examines how worker-citizenship ideals shape upper secondary vocational education graduates' interpretations of their positions in the Finnish labour market. With

the help of the conceptualisation of new adulthood, it aims to understand the new conditions under which young adults with vocational qualifications negotiate their worker-citizenship. This article approaches these questions through qualitative interviews containing a longitudinal dimension. The data include 32 interviews with 21 young adults aged 18–25 who were interviewed between 2018 and 2020 (11 of which are follow-ups). First, the article introduces the concept of worker-citizenship and discusses it in the contexts of vocational education and new adulthood. After that, it proceeds to the empirical findings.

Theoretical background

According to Sennett (2008), occupational skills have always played an important part in an individual's (especially that of a craftsman) identity and participation in society. Occupational competence guarantees their dignity and position in the community. Within the current conditions of worker-citizenship, this relationship between society and the individual (or the 'social contract' defining the rights, obligations and ethical characteristics of the desired citizenship; see Lewis and Flink 2004; Suikkanen and Viinamäki 1999), however, changes its character. As a theoretical preamble to the analysis presented later, two interrelated aspects of this change should be noted. The first deals with how the prevailing worker-citizenship ideal redefines what kinds of personal traits are required of young adults in the labour market. The second pertains to how these new demands affect post-graduation life chances, which are debated under the concept of 'new adulthood'.

First, in Dewey's (2003, 2007, 250–251) vision, ideally, vocational education helps (not forces) young people to discover what they are 'fitted to do' in society. Vocational students adopt as part of their education how they should behave to be the 'the right person(s) for the job' and, in accordance with Sennett's (2008) *Craftsmanship*, learn in the best case to dedicate themselves to their occupation, to do it well and to become proud of it (Colley et al. 2003, 488; Leeman and Volman 2021). However, by emphasising the qualities of the worker-citizenship ideal, vocational education does not merely promote young adults' occupational inclusion in their fields (cf. Ågren, Pietilä, and Rättälä 2020). Vocational education's societal function, driven largely by the interests of the national economy, is also to promote young adults' social inclusion through employability (Billett 2014; Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen, and Lahelma 2014; Lappalainen, Nylund and, and Rosvall 2019). At the same time, however, such inclusionary goals attached to worker-citizenship have been found to be vulnerable in the face of ongoing societal and economic changes (Suikkanen and Viinamäki 1999). Research has claimed, for example, that the priorly predictable working-life narratives have been replaced by uncertainty, that the relationship between employment and unemployment has become vaguer, and that traditional worker-citizenship has been challenged by the new risks of precarious work (Beck 1992, 140–142; Standing 2009). As Sennett (1998) points out, a major influence in the triumph of the worker-citizenship model has been 'the new capitalism', which has changed both the ways how the work is done and the personal characteristics that the labour market requires from the workers. According to him, while it used to be ideal for a person to delve into work and become proficient in it, contemporary consumption-based labour markets value the traits of competition,

efficiency and flexibility – in other words, entrepreneurialism is a new personal responsibility (see Kelly 2013). Amid such changes, labour market risks have become individualised, and as traditions and permanence have transformed into insecurity, the worker-citizens are now seen as responsible for their personal biography, as Beck (1992) has argued.

For the second, it can be argued that, due to these new requirements, attaining worker-citizenship has become less manageable for young adults compared to traditional ideals, which in effect also disrupts their paths to independent adulthood. As research has indicated, contemporary employment and education policies work to guide young adults towards 'active', entrepreneurial worker-citizenship to respond to the requirements of the labour market (Kelly 2017; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Nikunen 2017), while at the same time, their resources for implementing such an ideal of a 'proper' worker-citizen are not equally distributed (Skeggs 2004, 60–61). The theorists of new adulthood (see Dwyer and Wyn 2001, 87–96; Woodman and Wyn 2015, 49–50, 68) have claimed that young adults, regardless of their capacities and resources, are compelled to renegotiate their position in society when their life situations or labour market experiences collide with institutional expectations or the (false) promises of education. No stable adulthood exists anymore (referring to issues such as achieving a secure position in employment, house ownership, or safe ground for parenthood and a family) into which young adults can transition; instead, they must make their life choices in a world that is imminently uncertain (Dwyer & Wyn 2001, 87–96; also Woodman & Wyn 2015, 87–88; Wyn 2020). Subsequently, not everyone can achieve a secure position in the labour market, even if such a position is promised, especially for those in vocational education (e.g. Cuervo & Wyn 2016).

The article utilises these ideas from the debates on worker-citizenship and new adulthood to analyse the labour market positionings of Finnish vocational graduates as they themselves understand and narrate them. As to a short characterisation of the Finnish labour market, it is often considered to be more equal and stable than the more neoliberal and market-driven Anglo-American labour market, from which the debates on new adulthood and new capitalism mainly originate (see Sennett 1998, 53–55). According to research, the amount of insecure work in Finland has not increased over recent decades, and young adults' working-life paths stabilise as their work experience accumulates (Pyöriä and Ojala 2016, 363). Furthermore, the positive outcomes of vocational education regarding, for example, income do not appear to fade over time, and despite technological development vocational graduates' employment prospects do not differ from the graduates in general education (Silliman and Virtanen 2019). In this sense, the argument of labour market uncertainties within new adulthood does not seem to apply to the Finnish context, at least not directly. In general, some researchers have cautioned against exaggerating the increase in uncertainty, since it has also been part of previous generations' young adulthood (see Goodwin and O'Connor 2005). However, changes conceptualised as new adulthood are not only related to the availability of work, but also to the growing demands and pressures towards working life at a time where young adults are more responsible for their personal choices (to be congruent with society's expectations) and when their lives have become more difficult to control (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Woodman and Wyn 2015). Thus, also the findings of Farrugia (2019a, 2019b), i.e. how in societies with new capitalism, young adults may learn to

interpret their value and aspirations through their 'working selves', formulate an interesting comparative context for this article (cf. Ågren 2021).

Data and methods

The data consist of 32 individual interviews with 21 young adults aged 18–25 (some of whom were interviewed twice) who graduated from vocational upper secondary education. Of the interviews, 28 were collected by 'Ohjaamoista työelämään' research project led by Määttä (2018, 2019) from Finnish one-stop guidance centres (dataset 1). One-stop guidance centres were established in 2014 as multiagency service points for young people under 30. Approximately 70 centres in Finland currently integrate guidance, employment and social services under the same roof to help young adults with problems related to education and employment (see Määttä 2019). The project interviewed 17 vocational graduates in these centres in 2018, 11 of whom were interviewed again in 2019. A longitudinal perspective is included in the analysis when relevant. The data also contain four interviews with vocational graduates conducted by the author in the autumn of 2020 via Microsoft Teams (dataset 2²). All the interviews took place from a half to six years after the interviewees had finished their vocational upper secondary education. In both sets of interviews, questions were asked about interviewees' work experiences, their attitudes towards working life and the labour market and their conceptions of the meaning of work for their lives.

The data included varied labour market experiences. Only a few of the interviewees had proceeded linearly to employment or further education. At the time of data collection, 16 interviewees were unemployed, four were working (permanent, temporary or zero-hour contract jobs), nine were studying and three were engaged in other activities, i.e. participating in workshops or vocational rehabilitation. The interviewees had experiences also with temporary or part-time employment, agency contract work, undeclared work, unpaid work trials, or had changed or planned to change their occupation after their graduation. Before vocational qualification, a few had originally started (or completed) general upper secondary education. Overall, the interviewees' experiences provide a multifaceted picture of the kinds of negotiations vocational graduates undertake regarding their worker-citizenship.

The article applies positioning theory as an analysis method to understand how the interviewees interpret their positions in the labour market and how they negotiate the related ideals. The assumption here is that the interviewees' perceptions of their rights and duties as worker-citizens are reflected in how they describe their beliefs and work experiences in the interviews (Harré 2012; Harré and Van Langenhove 2010). The analysis focuses on the meanings the interviewees attach to (the ideals of) worker-citizenship, i.e. how they (re)produce, question or reject them; how they explain their working-life choices in relation to those ideals and how their thoughts and choices appear in relation to their various work experiences (Harré 2012, 196; Harré and Van Langenhove 2010, 113–114).

As suggested in positioning theory, vocational graduates' work stories were read intensively by searching and coding passages in which they: (1) describe their positive or negative work experiences and other situations when they have made choices regarding their labour market participation (the story-line codes; marked in the data as, e.g. 'positive

working-life experience: a job from one's own vocational field'); (2) verbalise and explain these choices (the speech act codes; marked, e.g. 'stresses: one's occupational knowledge') and/or (3) describe worker-citizens' rights and duties in such situations (the position codes; marked e.g. as: 'a good and skilled worker-citizen: knows working life') (Harré 2012, 196; Harré and Van Langenhove 2010, 109). The codes that marked speech acts or positions were then grouped into main themes (e.g. the speech acts that describe their negotiation with the labour market demands) to examine how or if the interviewees reproduced or challenged the discourses regarding worker-citizenship ideals maintained in vocational education and how or if their working-life experiences relate to those described by the theory of new adulthood.

In the following discussion, the anonymity of the interviewees was ensured. All job and education identifiers, among other credentials, were removed from the citations. The vocational field is only mentioned if the interviewee's anonymity is not hampered.

Positioning oneself as a proper and skilled worker-citizen

The first finding of the analysis relates to the importance of worker-citizenship for these vocational graduates. It is not, however, unambiguous in their speech, but involves negotiation. The following quote³ from a 24-year-old unemployed machinist serves as an example:

Currently, there [in the field of metal work] is more work available than jobseekers. So if my hand was okay, I would definitely work at the moment. Nevertheless, I have had to think about things over again, as I was also offered the opportunity to change my occupation. I stated, however, that I like [my occupation] so much that I will try it as long as I am able to. Changing my occupation would be the last option.

The interviewee is awaiting a response from his employer regarding whether his fixed-term contract will continue. He is simultaneously concerned about his diminished work ability and reassured that he would be employed if his situation was different. However, he claims that in his field, the demand for workers is high. He experiences metal work suiting him well and convinces his dedication to the field – even though his work experience has been of simpler work tasks requiring less responsibility. His example shows how he wants to position himself as a skilled worker-citizen similarly to the most other interviewees in this study. Earlier studies claim that vocational graduates may learn this pride for their occupation as part of their education (Colley et al. 2003) and aim to position themselves as serious, skilled, competent, and responsible workers (Skeggs 1997).

In other words, for many interviewees in this study, their occupation and occupational knowledge are meaningful parts of how they want to be recognised in the interviews. The above interviewee wants to avoid being labelled as a failed worker-citizen due to his weakened work ability. Compared to Farrugia's (2019a, 717–718) observations, this emphasis on one's occupational competence may be because these vocational graduates understand their success in their post-graduation lives through their vocational achievement. However, alongside this competence, the interviewee also emphasises his activity in his working-life participation during the interview. From this perspective, he is also in a negotiation whether the good worker-citizen dedicates himself to his occupation or changes

his field and shows his flexibility in line with the contemporary labour market demand (see Sennett 1998).

Hence, the machinist in the above example may overly highlight his position as a proper and skilled worker-citizen because, and similarly to the young adults in Nielsen et al.'s (2017, 18) study, he understands himself as easily replaceable in the contemporary labour market in case his ability to work deteriorates. In the same way, other interviewees emphasise their coping or learning to position themselves as skilled workers despite their (precarious) labour market positions, which might be their attempt to stress their entrepreneurialism (also Ikonen and Nikunen 2019, 833–834). In the next quote, a 25-year-old employed interviewee proudly explains how he obtained his current job. After struggling to find work after his first vocational qualification as an electronics assembler, he chose another field⁴, which he considers his dream job. At the time of the interview, he is working in a zero-hour contract in an advertising company, and his contract is only for a few weeks due to the uncertainty of new work projects. Despite this, he is confident that his contribution to work is valued by his employer.

Interviewee: One day, I went to help an old friend from elementary school move [into a new home]. His father was also there, saw me and apparently liked my work attitude [...] and apparently my work pace was good, too. He called me last Saturday and since he's the head of an advertising agency, he said they had a job available, and [asked] 'Would you like to work with us?'. I weighed the options for a day and then concluded that because it would be a paid job and prospects for other jobs were uncertain, I would accept the offer. And even if the contract won't continue, at least I have a foot between their door [...], if they need an employee again [...].

Interviewer: How long is your [contract] for ... ?

Interviewee: Well, basically, I have a zero-hour contract that is always project specific, but I can always express my desire to continue and if they have a new project, they will continue my contract.

Getting into work or education in an occupational field that feels like one's own is described with pride and even with relief in the interviewees' working-life stories. Like in Farrugia's (2019b, 1094–1095) studies, it can be interpreted here that this position enables these interviewees to utilise their competences and to do something where they are good at, where they can fulfil their occupational goals and their task in the labour market – at the same time, they reproduce the ethics of employability maintained in vocational education and demanded by the employment policies (e.g. Billett 2014; Nikunen 2017). Their pride may thus relate to their adaptation into their occupational community and related ideals in vocational education (see Leeman and Volman 2021) and their relief to their time-out from the employability demands, as the following 23-year-old interviewee with an immigrant background explains. Finding work had been difficult for her with her prior foreign qualification in the hotel, restaurant and catering services and limited skills in the Finnish language. In her follow-up interview one year after the initial interview, she recounts that she has started studying hairdressing and describes her relief as follows:

I really wanted to start studying and then when I found out that I got in, I was very happy because I no longer had to think about whether I had to go to a work trial or work or somewhere else.

Interpreting Skeggs (2004, 73), most interviewees adopt worker-citizenship as a proper and valued way to be positioned in society as part of their dedication to their occupation (i.e. craftsmanship) and also as their ethical responsibility in society (also Farrugia 2019a, 2019b; cf. Ågren 2021; Ågren, Pietilä, and Rättilä 2020).

Defending one's worker-citizenship within the realities of new adulthood

The working-life stories of vocational graduates demonstrate how some interviewees try to find a balance between the kind of worker-citizens they perceive themselves and their actual labour market position. While in line with Farrugia's (2019a, 719–720) findings, some interviewees in this study describe their anxiety or even shame when their expectations regarding worker-citizenship conflict with their labour market experiences; many also defend their positions as worker-citizens and resist the idea of their difficulties in the labour market as being their own 'failures'. The excerpt below from a 20-year-old unemployed warehouse operative provides a good example of this kind of negotiation. He had been active in scouting and in the student union and evaluates that he had been successful in his vocational studies. He had nonetheless faced great difficulties in finding work in his field. While describing the termination of his job contracts, he describes how his employers, or the labour market, had been unfair towards him.

If there had been any reason [for getting fired], it would have given me some peace of mind, but they did not give any reason. I asked if I had come late [to work], if I had done any stuff or work wrong because I never got any [complaints] about my job. Or once I did, but then, when it was explained to me, I was right about that thing.

Cahill and Leccardi (2020) have demonstrated how reconciling the present with an uncertain future under the social pressures of, e.g. worker-citizenship ideals, may require young adults to create coping strategies to keep their lives together. Like the above interviewee, most interviewees in such vague labour market positions deny that they personally need help in job searching, but instead stress the insecurities and unfair demands of contemporary working life. As a coping strategy, they want to uphold their rights to be recognised as proper worker-citizens. Several interviewees describe how they had to settle for poorly paid temporary jobs with flawed working conditions, sometimes even outside their vocational fields, despite being skilled workers. Research findings by MacDonald and Giazitzoglu (2019, 10–11) support this finding; as in the first quote in this section, many young adults have experiences of these kinds of 'dead-end jobs' in which their lives are on hold. In the one-year follow-up interview, the interviewee who was waiting for a continuance for his zero-hour contract, recalls that he had experienced several part-time jobs before his current job in logistics. He has no education for his job, nor does he like it. He regards his situation, however, as quite normal in the contemporary labour market:

[Since the last interview] I'm in my fourth or third job. So, the jobs are changing. But that seems to be pretty normal today. [...] In other words, it is difficult to make plans for a longer period, because I have no idea whether the job will be retained or not, and what kind of salary I will have – will I work for free or a mere pittance or will I really get paid?

In the case of these short and uncertain periods of work, the vocational graduates may have to constantly rethink their lives and plans (also Nielsen et al. 2017, 18–19). The next 25-year-old unemployed interviewee who had given up her dream occupation⁵ due to her inability to work is frustrated, as she believes that employment services did not understand and support her new and supposedly clear plans. Instead, she is offered jobs that she considers irrelevant:

I would like a job that does not feel like ‘let’s give those jobs to young adults that no one else wants to do’.

Her interview demonstrates how a perceived conflict between young graduates’ own goals, competence and activity and the unfair demands of the labour market or employment services may even turn into anger or cynicism, as Rikala (2020, 1032) has shown in her study. The inconsistent demands are described below by the 25-year-old unemployed interviewee with a degree in business and administration. She claims that many employers require extensive work experience and do not provide opportunities for young graduates to gain the experience necessary to be recognised as proper and skilled worker-citizens.

At times, it feels like [working life] requires a little too much. [laughs] This reminds me that the depressing thing that always comes to mind when you read those job applications or job announcements. It is that they always require work experience from one to five years. I understand it in a way, but then I think about myself and that I’m not, for example, 18 years old and just graduated from general upper secondary education. I know how to greet a customer and I don’t need to be trained from the start. Nevertheless, they don’t give me a chance.

Consequently, difficulties with getting employed in one’s vocational field or negative experiences at work force some graduates to change or consider changing their field. The next quote is from a 23-year-old interviewee who describes the humiliation she had experienced in her first job after graduation and by her first ‘real’ employer. Instead of understanding a new graduate’s inexperience, the employer downplayed her vocational competence and education as a hairdresser. She explains how she no longer dared to work in her original occupation, and instead, despite good grades at school, she aims to change fields. As with other interviewees who had changed their occupations due to negative work experiences or difficulties in finding work, she states that her vocational education had been wasted.

I thought I was able to do many things, but I didn’t even get a chance to show it. [The termination of employment] was just because of a few awkward customers. So, I said [to my boss] that this was not a thing for me, that I would come up with something else. To that, the boss just said that it was ‘better this way’ and ‘you probably never would have fit into this job’. It was a really negative experience, so I don’t want to work in that occupation anymore. [...] It’s just a pity that, after three years of studying and taking out a big student loan, you get diminished in your first job.

These findings resonate with the new adulthood debate. The experience of vocational education not leading to a promised employment is a key feature of some interviewees’ post-graduation adulthood (see, Cahill and Leccardi 2020; Cuervo and Wyn 2016). As a result, they feel confusion or even frustration towards the expectations of the employers

and employment services, which they perceive as unfair and unrealistic (cf. Cahill and Lecardi 2020; Cuervo and Wyn 2016; also, Farrugia 2019a).

Shaping one's worker-citizenship

Because of the constraints related to new adulthood, vocational graduates constantly modify their choices and desires to fit with their experiences and to the conflicting demands they face in the labour market. Interpreting Colley et al. (2003, 492), the ideal of worker-citizen in vocational education may guide vocational graduates' reflexive choice-making narrowly to their occupational field. In contrast, it seems that within new adulthood, some young adults aim or are forced to cross the limits of their fields. In the next quote, a 20-year-old unemployed warehouse operator describes how logistics no longer feels like the field where he wants to continue working and how he would rather work in an occupation where he can help others. At the time of the interview, he did not yet know what this field might be.

A: Well, [my dream job would be] the kind where I would actually get to help people. This would be my dream job.

Q: What do you hope for in the future from working life?

A: I am hoping that I will be able to become employed and get into the occupation I want to do. And that's what I can't say yet. At least not properly.

A year later, in his follow-up interview, he states that he had started vocational studies in health and welfare. For him, the new vocational field is a new direction and by adapting entrepreneurial mindset that is linked to the modern worker-citizen ideal, problematised particularly by Kelly (e.g. 2013, 14–15), he stresses that anyone can achieve the same if they 'just work for it'. However, as Skeggs (2004, 57–61, 139, 176) has noted and several researchers (e.g. Farrugia 2019a; Nikunen 2017) have indicated, the possibilities for self-reflexive choice-making are not the same for everyone. In accordance with the discussions about new adulthood (see Woodman and Wyn 2015, 49–50, 68), some interviewees are forced to shape their worker-citizenship towards an undesired direction. The 23-year-old unemployed automation assembler demonstrates this with his experiences:

People who don't like to work are forced to do it, whether they want to or not, and then there are those who have found something they want to do as their profession. For them, working is just a plus, and they are even paid for it.

Similarly, as Cuervo and Wyn (2016, 131–132) have noted regarding new adulthood, the above interviewee describes how the pressures and demands of choice-making are even paralysing for him (cf. Rikala 2020, 1032). In his follow-up interview, he has applied to media studies, which he thinks is better for him and his well-being. However, even in this interview, he emphasises that he does not want to make plans because the feelings of uncertainty cause him anxiety. Like him, some interviewees criticise the narrow ideals of worker-citizenship, where they are not able to fit their desires or life situations to their working-life paths and demand acknowledgement of their entitlement to make choices that suit them. For instance, a 24-year-old interviewee with a qualification in hairdressing and beauty care, who is planning to change her vocational field,

criticises the competitive, precarious and performance-oriented nature of the labour market.

What is wrong with wanting a kind of pleasant and easy job that you like? Instead, it is considered a good thing to be in a constant hurry and have something to do all the time and it feels like these features are even required from the worker. It is assumed that you should be ready for it and have a very high tolerance for stress.

In the follow-up interview, she indicates that she has started studies at the university, which allows for critical discussions about injustices with similarly minded people, even though her future profession might not offer a specific job from the labour market. Similarly, some interviewees actively question the rigid structures of worker-citizenship ideals and elucidate injustices that they reckon are unsustainable in the long run. At the same time, as the interviewees aim to implement worker-citizenship to which they can fit their desires and occupational competences (cf. Farrugia 2019b, 1095; in line with Dewey 2007, 250–251), some even proclaim their rights to shape worker-citizenship to match their well-being. Here, a too narrow understanding of work may cause them even to undervalue their choices, which might differ from normative expectations but may also be beneficial for society (such as creative, voluntary and advocacy work, cf. Smith et al. 2005). The next 25-year-old interviewee has two qualifications from vocational education: hotel restaurant and catering and media and communication. Due to many periods of unemployment, she is considering changing her vocational field once again. For her, doing voluntary and creative work are important, and while she has great experiences from them, she is unsure how they could guarantee her a secure income and future.

I perhaps have a bit of a contradiction in what kind of work I'm good at, what kind of work I am able to get along financially with, what kind of work the world really needs and what is vital. And then, finally, my own passion.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has made visible how, in the atmosphere of new adulthood, worker-citizenship is a dynamic construct for vocational graduates with diverse resources in shaping their paths towards their desired direction. Some feel they are forced by the employment services or refuse to engage in worker-citizenship that does not support their desires or well-being. Although these observations come from Finnish labour market, they are alike to those concerning new adulthood and the related labour market (e.g. Farrugia 2019b): it can be concluded that young adults' desire for self-realisation through work, and hence how they shape their worker-citizenship, is conditioned by estimations of one's value through the idea of employability – maintained especially in vocational education (e.g. Billett 2014; Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen, and Lahelma 2014). Acquiring worker-citizenship based on their vocational qualification is an important achievement for most young vocational graduates (cf. Ågren 2021; Ågren, Pietilä, and Rättälä 2020; Farrugia 2019b) that can be challenged by negative work experiences, demands and uncertainties in working life and by their concerns about personal well-being and coping. Balancing their lives within the uncertainties of new adulthood is stressful (Cuervo and Wyn 2016, 132), especially for those vocational graduates occupying an insecure position in the labour market.

Although research has shown that the Finnish labour market has remained stable and that the working-life paths of young adults stabilise as their work experience accumulates and that vocational education is a secure way into the labour market for vocationally oriented young adults (Pyöriä and Ojala 2016; Silliman and Virtanen 2019), for some vocational graduates, worker-citizenship is a continuous negotiation of their value. For instance, while the experiences of the interviewees in this study might support the research findings according to which those vocational graduates who face difficulties with gaining work experience in their field risk ending up in an insecure, unskilled labour market (see Buchs and Helbling 2016), for some, this situation appears even more complicated than this. It seems that even being skilled workers, their secure position as worker-citizens is not self-evident: some attempt or are forced to change their field, not because of the limited vacancies but because they have negative experiences from the labour market, e.g. in the form of unfair work contracts, undervaluing their work experience or unrealistic demands and the pressures for continuous choice-making. Accordingly, sometimes their decision to choose another vocational path is an act of well-being in front of a distressing working life (also Cahill and Leccardi 2020; Rikala 2020, 1031).

Shaping worker-citizenship in a desired direction is not an easy task (see Farrugia 2019a; Kelly 2017). The data in this article includes young vocational graduates with mixed labour market experiences. While many regard achieving one's position as a skilled worker-citizen as a great occupational achievement (similarly as in Farrugia 2019b, 1095; cf. Ågren 2021), for some of them, shaping one's worker-citizenship can be a great struggle (cf. Woodman and Wyn 2015, 49–50, 68). The article does not describe all the vocational graduates' experiences but documents how some young adults with vocational qualifications face issues described in the new adulthood debate. Their vocational qualification has not succeeded in fulfilling its promises in the labour market, as they struggle to integrate into the labour market. They are balancing their well-being with the demands of working life, and their decision-making seems to be a continuous process requiring various coping strategies (Cahill and Leccardi 2020; also, Cuervo and Wyn 2016; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Woodman and Wyn 2015; Wyn 2020). Therefore, understanding how 'failing' to achieve worker-citizenship feels within the new realities of adulthood is important. Like in Farrugia's studies (2019a, 719–720), the other side of valuing worker-citizenship is that young adults feel frustration, inadequacy and some even shame when they cannot fulfil the ideals.

Rikala (2020, 1035) has suggested that, for these reasons, strict obligations related to worker-citizenship's employability goals are the core reason for young adults' problems with mental well-being when they learn to value themselves only by their labour market positions. McGrath et al. (2020), in turn, have presented an alternative perspective highlighting the development of vocational education from the perspective of a just and sustainable society. According to their model, vocational education should acknowledge how labour market ideals and changing societal structures impact young vocational graduates' opportunities to live a good life. Following Harris, Cuervo, and Wyn (2021, 95–96), it can be stated that the education and employment policies, by placing the responsibility of employability on the young adult, may overtake the struggles and negotiations young vocational graduates undergo regarding their sense of belonging within the vagueness of worker-citizenship. Hence, their diverse experiences and views are

important messages for vocational education providers, employers and employment services on how to shape a more sustainable labour market and support young adults' well-being.

Notes

1. 20% were unemployed, 17% in further education and others, for instance, in non-military or military service.
2. These four interviews were follow-ups for group interviews (12) collected from vocational students in 2018 and 2019, analysed by Ågren, Pietilä, and Rättälä (2020) and Ågren (2021).
3. The quotes are freely translated from Finnish to English.
4. The vocational field is not mentioned because of anonymity.
5. The vocational field is not mentioned because of anonymity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work is part of ALL-YOUTH project, supported by The Strategic Research Council [Project/Grant number 3121336548].

Ethical approval

Ethical review was not needed as sensitive data was not collected. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK).

Informant consent

Seventeen interviewees have signed a consent form. Four interviewees have signed a consent form during their first interviews in 2018 or 2019 and have given a verbal consent for a follow-up interview via Microsoft Teams in early autumn 2020.

Data availability statement

The dataset(s) will eventually be archived openly in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive if perceived as ethically possible.

ORCID

Susanna Ågren  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8562-0705>

References

- Ågren, S. 2021. "Exploring Vocational Education Students' Visions of a Successful Transition to Working Life from the Perspective of Societal Belonging." *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4 (1): 67–81. doi:10.1007/s43151-021-00037-5

- Ågren, S., I. Pietilä, and T. Rättälä. 2020. "Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun esiintyminen ammattiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteissa." In *Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019*, edited by L. Haikkola, and S. Myllyniemi, 157–178. Helsinki: Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, Nuorisotutkimusseura, Nuorisotutkimusverkosto & Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö.
- Beck, U. 1992. *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE.
- Billett, S. 2014. "The Standing of Vocational Education: Sources of its Societal Esteem and Implications for its Enactment." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 66 (1): 1–21. doi:10.1080/13636820.2013.867525.
- Buchs, H., and L. A. Helbling. 2016. "Job Opportunities and School-to-Work Transitions in Occupational Labour Markets. Are Occupational Change and Unskilled Employment After Vocational Education Interrelated?" *Empirical Research in Vocational Education Training* 8 (1): 1–18. doi:10.1186/s40461-016-0044-x.
- Cahill, H., and C. Leccardi. 2020. "Reframing Resilience." In *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*, edited by J. Wyn, H. Cahill, D. Woodman, H. Cuervo, C. Leccardi, and J. Chesters, 67–81. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pty. Ltd.
- Colley, H., D. James, K. Diment, and M. Tedder. 2003. "Learning as Becoming in Vocational Education and Training: Class, Gender and the Role of Vocational Habitus." *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 55 (4): 471–498. doi:10.1080/13636820300200240.
- Cuervo, H., and J. Wyn. 2016. "An Unspoken Crisis: The 'Scarring Effects' of the Complex Nexus Between Education and Work on two Generations of Young Australians." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 35 (2): 122–135. doi:10.1080/02601370.2016.1164467.
- Dewey, J. 2003. "Learning to Earn: The Place of Vocational Education in a Comprehensive Scheme of Public Education." In *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953(2nd Release)*, edited by J. A. Boydston, 145–151. Electronic edition by L. Hickman. Charlottesville, VA: IntelLex Corporation.
- Dewey, J. 2007. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision Publications, LLC.
- Dwyer, P., and J. Wyn. 2001. *Youth, Education and Risk. Facing the Future*. London; New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Farrugia, D. 2019a. "How Youth Become Workers: Identity, Inequality and the Post-Fordist Self." *Journal of Sociology* 55 (4): 708–723. doi:10.1177/1440783319865028.
- Farrugia, D. 2019b. "Class and the Post-Fordist Work Ethic: Subjects of Passion and Subjects of Achievement in the Work Society." *The Sociological Review* 67 (5): 1086–1101. doi:10.1177/0038026118825234.
- Goodwin, J., and H. O'Connor. 2005. "Exploring Complex Transitions: Looking Back at the 'Golden Age' of from School to Work." *Sociology* 39 (2): 201–220. doi:10.1177/0038038505050535.
- Haltia, N., U. Isopahkala-Bouret, and A. Jauhiainen. 2021. "The Vocational Route to Higher Education in Finland: Students' Backgrounds, Choices and Study Experiences." *European Educational Research Journal* 21 (3), 1–18. doi:10.1177/1474904121996265.
- Harré, R. 2012. "Positioning Theory: Moral Dimensions of Social-Cultural Psychology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, edited by J. Valsiner, 191–206. New York, NY: Oxford University.
- Harré, R., and L. Van Langenhove. 2010. "Varieties of Positioning." In *People and Societies*, edited by L. Van Langenhove, 106–120. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harris, A., H. Cuervo, and J. Wyn. 2021. *Thinking About Belonging in Youth Studies*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ikonen, H.-M., and M. Nikunen. 2019. "Young Adults and the Tuning of the Entrepreneurial Mindset in Neoliberal Capitalism." *Journal of Youth Studies* 22 (6): 824–838. doi:10.1080/13676261.2018.1546383.
- Isopahkala-Bouret, U., S. Lappalainen, and E. Lahelma. 2014. "Educating Worker-Citizens: Visions and Divisions in Curriculum Texts." *Journal of Education and Work* 27 (1): 92–109. doi:10.1080/13639080.2012.718745.
- Kelly, P. 2013. *The Self as Enterprise: Foucault and the 'Spirit' of 21st Century Capitalism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Kelly, P. 2017. "Growing up After the GFC: Responsibilisation and Mortgaged Futures." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38 (1): 57–69. doi:10.1080/01596306.2015.1104852.
- Lappalainen, S., M. Nylund, and P-Å Rosvall. 2019. "Imagining Societies through Discourses on Educational Equality: A Cross-cultural Analysis of Finnish and Swedish Upper Secondary Curricula from 1970 to the 2010s." *European Educational Research Journal* 18 (3): 335–354. doi:10.1177/1474904118814140.
- Lavrijsen, J., and I. Nicaise. 2017. "Returns on Vocational Education Over the Life Cycle: Between Immediate Labour Market Preparation and Lifelong Employability." *International Review of Education* 63: 257–280. doi:10.1007/s11159-017-9630-9.
- Leeman, Y., and M. Volman. 2021. "Citizenship in Prevocational Education: Professional Pride as a Source." *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 16 (1): 17–30. doi:10.1177/1746197919883252.
- Lewis, G., and J. Flink. 2004. "'All That Heaven Allows': The Worker Citizen in the Post-war Welfare State." In *Citizenship, Personal Lives and Social Policy*, edited by G. Lewis, 39–83. Milton Keynes: The Open University & The Policy Press.
- Määttä, M. 2018. "Dataset: From Guidance Centres to Working Life". *Longitudinal Interviews with Young People from Finnish One-Stop Guidance Centers*. Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Central Finland/South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.
- Määttä, M. 2019. "Reforming Youth Transition Support with the Multi-Agency Approach? A Case Study of the Finnish one-Stop Guidance Centers." *Sociologija* 61 (2): 277–291. doi:10.2298/SOC1902277M.
- MacDonald, R., and A. Giazizoglu. 2019. "Youth, Enterprise and Precarity: Or, What is, and What is Wrong with, the 'gig Economy'?" *Journal of Sociology* 55 (4): 1–17. doi:10.1177/1440783319837604.
- Maczulskij, T., and H. Karhunen. 2017. "Työmarkkinoiden rakennemuutos ja ammatillisen koulutuksen saaneiden nuorten työttömyys." *Talous & Yhteiskunta* 45 (3): 14–19. <https://labore.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ty32017MaczulskijKarhunen.pdf>
- McGrath, S., L. Powell, J. Alla-Mensah, R. Hilal, and R. Suart. 2020. "New VET Theories for New Times: The Critical Capabilities Approach to Vocational Education and Training and Its Potential for Theorising a Transformed and Transformational VET." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 74 (4): 575–596. doi:10.1080/13636820.2020.1786440.
- McQuaid, R. W., and C. Lindsay. 2005. "The Concept of Employability." *Urban Studies* 42 (2): 197–219. doi:10.1080/0042098042000316100.
- Müller, W. 2005. "Education and Youth Integration Into European Labour Markets." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46 (5–6): 461–485. doi:10.1177/0020715205060048
- Nielsen, M. L., A. Görlich, R. Grytnes, and J. Dyreborg. 2017. "Without a Safety Net: Precarization Among Young Danish Employees." *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 7 (3): 3–22. doi:10.18291/njwls.v7i3.97094.
- Nikunen, M. 2017. "Young People, Future Hopes and Concerns in Finland and the European Union: Classed and Gendered Expectations in Policy Documents." *Journal of Youth Studies* 20 (6): 661–676. doi:10.1080/13676261.2016.1260693.
- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). 2020. "Entrance to Education." Helsinki: Statistics Finland. Accessed June 9, 2022. http://www.stat.fi/til/khak/2019/khak_2019_2020-12-10_tie_001_en.html.
- Official Statistics of Finland (OSF). 2022. "Transition from School to Further Education and Work. 2020." Helsinki: Statistics Finland. Accessed June 23, 2022. https://www.stat.fi/til/sijk/2020/sijk_2020_2022-01-20_tie_001_en.html.
- Pyöriä, P., and S. Ojala. 2016. "Precarious Work and Intrinsic job Quality: Evidence from Finland, 1984–2013." *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 27 (3): 349–367. doi:10.1177/1035304616659190.
- Rikala, S. 2020. "Agency among Young People in Marginalised Positions: Towards a Better Understanding of Mental Health Problems." *Journal of Youth Studies* 23 (8): 1022–1038. doi:10.1080/13676261.2019.1651929.

- Rintala, H., and P. Nokelainen. 2020. "Standing and Attractiveness of Vocational Education and Training in Finland: Focus on Learning Environments." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 72 (2): 250–269. doi:10.1080/13636820.2020.1744696.
- Sennett, R. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Sennett, R. 2008. *The Craftsman*. London; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Silliman, M., and H. Virtanen. 2019. "Labor market returns to vocational secondary education." *ETLA Working Papers No. 65*. Accessed September 10, 2021. <https://www.etla.fi/julkaisut/labor-market-returns-to-vocational-secondary-education/>.
- Skeggs, B. 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Skeggs, B. 2004. *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, N., R. Lister, S. Middleton, and L. Cox. 2005. "Young People as Real Citizens: Towards an Inclusionary Understanding of Citizenship." *Journal of Youth Studies* 8 (4): 425–443. doi:10.1080/13676260500431743.
- Standing, G. 2009. *Work After Globalization: Building Occupational Citizenship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Suikkanen, A., and L. Viinamäki. 1999. "Life Paths and Labour Market Citizenship." In *Working Europe: Reshaping European Employment Systems*, edited by J. Christiansen, P. Koistinen, and A. Kovalainen, 189–209. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Tolonen, T., and S. Aapola-Kari. 2022. "Head-first Into Upper Secondary Education: Finnish Young People Making Classed and Gendered Educational Choices." *YOUNG* 30 (4): 344–360. doi:10.1177/11033088221086078.
- Vogtenhuber, S. 2014. "The Impact of within Country Heterogeneity in Vocational Specificity on Initial Job Matches and Job Status." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 85 (3): 374–384. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2014.08.012.
- Woodman, D., and J. Wyn. 2015. *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. London: SAGE.
- Wyn, J. 2020. "Introduction." In *Youth and the New Adulthood: Generations of Change*, edited by J. Wyn, H. Cahill, D. Woodman, H. Cuervo, C. Leccardi, and J. Chesters, 1–12. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pty. Ltd.

PUBLICATION IV

Young adults' perceptions of citizenship outside and beyond labour market citizenship

Ågren, Susanna & Kallio, Jenni

P. Honkatukia & T. Rättälä (2023, eds.) *Young People as Agents of Sustainable Society. Reclaiming the Future*. London: Routledge, 113–127.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003345114-8>

**Publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License CC-BY-NC-ND**

Young adults' perceptions of citizenship outside and beyond labour market citizenship

Susanna Ågren and Jenni Kallio¹

Introduction

This chapter engages in a critical debate on youth citizenship, looking into young adults' perceptions of their future as citizens, especially in terms of participation in the labour market. Our approach is deconstructive. We ask what kind of opportunities to belong and participate in society the current labour market citizenship provides for young adults, and what kinds of participation it excludes. We agree with the arguments claiming that the dominant neoliberal model where people are expected to participate in society as “active”, “efficient”, “responsible” and “entrepreneurial” individuals largely ignores how young adults themselves understand their needs and well-being and the (diverse) forms their societal participation can take (Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021; Kelly 2006, 2017; Smith et al., 2005).

In the chapter, we make the argument that the challenges and complexities today's young adults encounter when trying to position themselves as citizens relate not only to the breakages and insecurities in the labour market but importantly also to the hardened and unsustainable demands of the neoliberal work society (Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017). We recognise that currently waged work holds a virtually unquestionable moral position in society as a determinant of people's identity and citizenship (Weeks 2011, 109), and young adults learn to interpret their value in society through their relationship with work (Farrugia 2021). However, as the labour market and adulthood have become more complex for today's youth in comparison to previous generations (Cuervo & Wyn 2016; Standing 2011), many scholars have highlighted how the demands of the labour market fail to meet the young adults' own values and perceptions of well-being and societal belonging, especially when these values and perceptions fall outside the prevailing norms of labour market citizenship (cf. Helne & Hirvilammi 2022; Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 97).

In this chapter, we seek for a broader way to conceptualise young adults' attachment to society. We take part in this debate from the perspective of the theory of citizenship. Traditionally, citizenship has been seen as a status linked to the formal membership of society, where citizens achieve their rights as citizens by fulfilling their basic obligations to the nation-state. However, understanding citizenship more broadly as a lived, everyday membership in society opens the possibility

of seeing the more mundane aspects of citizenship, including the ways in which young adults negotiate their relationship with society in their daily lives (e.g., Lister 2007). In this chapter, we supplement and empirically demonstrate the idea of a lived, everyday citizenship as part of well-being and construction of sustainable society. In our thinking, citizenship, participation and well-being are intrinsically interlinked in young adults' everyday membership, agency and influencing in society (Isin 2008; Harris, Wyn & Younes 2010). In here, we are inspired by the theory of sustainable well-being and its relational understanding of well-being (see Helne & Hirvilammi 2017, 2022).

The chapter is based on studies in which we have examined the demands and expectations that young adults struggle with when building their relationship to society (Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Kallio 2022; Ågren, Pietilä & Rättilä 2020; Ågren 2021, 2023). By young adults, we refer to young people aged 17–25 going through a phase of life where they are negotiating their belonging to the labour market as a way of being included and respected as members of society. We, however, argue for a wider understanding of young adults' citizenship as a fundamentally social and intersubjective process taking place within different sites of belonging, connections and institutions, which structure their everyday life (Kallio, Wood & Häkli 2020; Moensted 2020, 247). Approaching citizenship in this sense opens up space for recognising different forms of citizenship outside and beyond working life (Smith et al., 2005). By “beyond”, we would like to convey the idea that the traditional understanding of being “inside” or “outside” the labour market poses a problematic dichotomy, predominantly created by the hegemonic narrative regarding the meaning of work in society (cf. Cuervo & Wyn 2014). Our argument is that also alternative (yet equally valuable) ways of societal participation that exist on the fringes and beyond the social norms of labour market citizenship should be acknowledged (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021). Therefore, we are interested in looking beyond the existing model of labour market citizenship by analysing the various forms in which young adults envision their participation and belonging in society.

Debating youth citizenship in the labour market

Critical youth scholars have debated the citizenship of young adults for a long time. Recently, many researchers have been concerned about the growing demands and pressures placed on young adults by labour market citizenship, and how they are (or are not) able to respond to those pressures (e.g., Kelly 2017; France 2016). In brief, labour market citizenship refers to the normative model where people are expected to engage in society first and foremost through waged work (cf. Suikkanen & Viinamäki 1999). Respectively, “good citizens” are defined as autonomous, responsible individuals, and as healthy, resilient, entrepreneurial workers and social actors (e.g., Walsh 2017; Duffy 2017; Kelly 2006, 2017; Nikunen 2017; Rikala 2020). Such “self-making citizens” (Walsh & Black 2020) are expected to actively personalise the project of citizenship, and at the same time function effectively in the labour market, while adapting to its changes and developing their personal abilities

and skills accordingly (Lewis & Flink 2004; cf. Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen & Lahelma 2014). Young labour market citizens are also seen responsible for filling the dependency gap left by older generations to sustain the economic growth and continuity of the welfare society (Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017, 71–73; Nikunen 2017; see also Chapter 3). The expectations to adopt labour market citizenship as a major moral responsibility in turn shape how young adults see themselves and their value in society (Farrugia 2021).

Critical scholars have detected several problems in this way of thinking about citizenship. First, problems arise when the expectations linked to this view collide with the ongoing changes in the labour market. According to some research, there is less full-time work available for young adults, while part-time work, zero-hour contracts and periods of no (paid) work are increasing (Standing 2011, 112–113). Other researchers have claimed that the amount of waged work in general is decreasing, which challenges how the wage-based society operates (Gorz 1999). From the intergenerational point of view, this means that young adults have poorer opportunities than previous generations for stable careers, economic independence, home ownership – and ultimately, achieving a safe and independent adulthood (Walsh & Black 2020; Cuervo & Wyn 2016). Second, researchers have been concerned about the effects of labour market citizenship on young adults' well-being, including whether it meets young adults' own values and expectations (Helne & Hirvilammi 2022, 166). Several studies have highlighted young people's frustration with the increasing pressures stemming from the current labour market, which they find difficult to respond to (e.g., Kelly 2017; Rikala 2020; Farrugia 2021; also, Ågren 2023). Hence, it can be argued that adopting individualised measures – emphasised in neoliberal policies – to promote young people's participation in the labour market, such as seeking to increase young people's resilience and adversity capital, is neither effective nor socially sustainable. Along with many other researchers, we are concerned about how the normative expectations of labour market citizenship affect the abilities of both contemporary young adults and future generations to function in society. We think that young adults' societal participation should be based on their values, well-being and future expectations (Walsh 2017). In our own discussion, we are interested in what kind of experiences and critical ideas young adults have about their societal participation and belonging in relation to (the ideals of) labour market citizenship, especially outside and beyond it.

In order to develop our argument, we will utilise the theory of sustainable well-being developed by Tuula Helne and Tuuli Hirvilammi (2017), in which they conceptualise well-being as something built upon the satisfaction of people's basic needs. To them, well-being is a thoroughly relational construct where alongside adequate living conditions (*having*), the individual also needs love and relationships (*loving*), acceptance and appreciation as persons in their own right (*being*) and opportunities to act on issues they deem important in society (*doing*) to be able to live good meaningful lives (Helne & Hirvilammi 2017, 44–47; see also Introduction and Chapter 3). We will use this conceptualisation when analysing young adults' experiences of working life and their ideas of societal participation.

Critical voices and visions – introducing the data

The discussion of the chapter is based on 68 interviews of young adults (including 22 follow-up interviews) and 12 group interviews (altogether, 104 different interviewees aged 17–25) conducted in Finland in three different contexts: among vocational education students and graduates, young adults who have sought support to their concerns related to becoming independent² and young customers of one-stop guidance centres.³ We regard it important to listen carefully the critical voices in these interviews which are often bypassed in research. In this chapter we make visible how these accounts can interestingly challenge many implicit and normative assumptions in how transitions to adulthood are viewed in society. All interviews included themes related to young adults' relationship and belonging to society, inquiring also about their expectations and experiences of participation in the labour market. We have previously published several independent papers on these data sets, where we especially focus on young adults' internalisation of the ideal labour market citizenship and the problems that have followed when or if their attempts to achieve this fail (Ågren, Pietilä & Rättilä 2020; Ågren 2021; Honkatukia et al., 2020). Interestingly, we have detected that not all young adults take the norms of labour market citizenship for granted; some also criticise those norms and aim to transform them to make them more in sync with their own values and aspirations (Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Ågren 2023).

In the following discussion, we focus on these kinds of “transformative voices” in the data, highlighting how the interviewees negotiate their relationship with the norms of the working life and society in alternative and occasionally disruptive ways. We use the term transformative to describe the aspirations of the young adult respondents to reform the labour market and make it more socially sustainable (see Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). We pose two questions: (1) what kind of (critical) ideas about social participation emerge from the data, in relation to or apart from the prevailing ideals of labour market-centred citizenship? (2) How can young adults' thoughts and experiences of societal participation be interpreted by using the concepts of the theory of sustainable well-being?

In our analysis, we approach the interviews as stories, which express young adults' everyday experiences of participation and citizenship, and which are intertwined with other narratives about their lives. The stories enter in a dialogue with surrounding cultural and societal discourses – variably called “master narratives”, “plot lines”, “master plots”, “dominant discourses” or simply “cultural texts” (Bamberg 2004, 136) – which we understand as socially, historically and locally constructed beliefs and preconceptions about how individuals should operate in society (Atkinson & Delamont 2006). The objective is to analyse what kinds of everyday citizenship young adults are building with their stories, and how they construct themselves as citizens in relation to the hegemonic discourse of labour market citizenship (Bamberg 2004). Moreover, we understand these cultural and societal discourses as important ingredients of young adults' self-definitions (Cahill & Dadvand 2018, 249). Our thought is that while the prevailing cultural discourses

in society affect and define young adults' citizenship, we should also see them as agents who actively negotiate their position in relation to such discourses (also Bamberg 2004, 153).

We use citations from the interviews to illustrate our analysis. However, we do not reveal the interviewees' working life status, their educational background, their needs of support or other related identifiers. The purpose of this strategy is to give greater weight to their messages and thoughts, rather than to categorise their opinions based on their background and current labour market position. We regard this as an ethical choice and as a key premise of our critical approach.

Recognising the diversity of belonging in society outside labour market citizenship

When we talk about the possibility of belonging to society outside of the labour market citizenship, we primarily refer to a phenomenon where that kind of a citizenship is unattainable to young adults no matter how hard they try. Yet, we agree with Bessant, Farthing and Watts (2017), who make the important point that young adults who are not engaged in the labour market are not simply victims; instead, they actively reflect on and negotiate their position in relation to the existing education and employment policies. Talking from such "outside position", some interviewees in our data expressed strong counter-speech against the hegemony of labour market citizenship, with a few even stressing their right to refuse any obligations associated with it. We consider such voices as evidence of how some young adults in society feel the need to critically evaluate the "risk talk" aimed at them by an adult-centred society and defend their right to be treated as valuable and respected members of society, even when they are unable to fulfil the norms of labour market citizenship (Kallio & Honkatukia 2022; Kallio 2022; Ågren 2023).

In Helne and Hirvilammi's (2022) theory of well-being, the dimension of "being" refers to human beings' right to be met and accepted as what they are. In the context of our analysis, this means acknowledging young adults' different experiences and ideas about belonging to society as well as the fact that there are structural inequalities defining their opportunities, or lack thereof, to fulfil the ideals of societal participation (cf. Honkatukia et. al., 2020; Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021). According to the interviews there are many reasons why some young adults in society find it difficult to meet the criteria of labour market citizenship. For example, the requirement to be socially active and engage in networking to enter and succeed in working life is simply too demanding for some. Others feel that they are forced to perform a role they do not feel comfortable with, such as when they are expected to impress employers in job interviews (also Nikunen 2021). Moreover, some feel that their current life situations or work histories are not adequately acknowledged in the institutional system, and that the society only values education and participation in the labour market as a legitimate means to achieve well-being (see Kallio 2022). Similarly to the interviewee below, instead of being forced to waged work, many young adults would appreciate the acknowledgement of their needs:

I think we should first focus on how people are doing, whether things are okay in their life, and only after that see how they can be employed. Instead, we focus on how people can be employed; and only if they won't, we start to wonder if they have other issues in their lives. In my opinion, this order is wrong. It's very hard to get excited about work training if you, for instance, come from a family with problems with alcohol and if you yourself have started to use [substances]. Still, the social service or KELA [The Social Insurance Institution of Finland] states that you must go to work trainings, or otherwise you won't get any money [social security]. It's not the kind of help the person needs; they are forced into the working life when what they really need is something different.⁴

Based on the data, it is evident that young adults wish to be treated humanely in the labour market. If they do not foresee that the labour market would guarantee them decent treatment and livelihood, they might lose motivation to commit to such a form of citizenship. The quote below expresses strong frustration by some interviewees for being forced to mould themselves into the requirements of labour market citizenship:

Well, I don't know. I somehow hate society. Or how could I say it ... It's like, despite being born here, you feel that you cannot cope by just living. You are supposed to do many kinds of things to manage [in life].

Moreover, many young adults have lost their faith in participating in working life as a provider for their interests and dreams. In contrast, they feel as if working life deprives them and reduces them to a mere taxpayer, as the following quote illustrates:

Currently, [work] means that I haven't found anything I would enjoy doing. If I'd find something I enjoy, it would be like a hobby or having fun, from which I'm also paid for. However, currently, [work] means only that the government wants to get taxes from me. I don't personally like being forced to do anything, but I understand that in society, it's your duty to work.

Some interviewees refuse to follow the expectations of labour market citizenship. The first excerpt below brings out an ironic tone with which some young adults in our data value free time more than work, while the second makes visible how some do not want to do stressful work if it does not pay enough to get by:

You waste the best time of your life working. You spend all your well-being for work and don't have time for anything else. [So], social bum, here I come! The society doesn't like it, but I don't care what others think about me.

[Seasonal work] takes all your zest in life. You won't get a proper salary from it and it's so repugnant that you lose your nerves. You just repeat the same process

just like in a factory. I could never work there [again]. You only lose your health. So why the hell would I work there! I wouldn't work there unless I was absolutely compelled, if I wouldn't otherwise survive [financially].

Some young adults in our study feel strongly that they are unfit for the labour market with its demands and norms, which makes them consider the possibility of withdrawing to the fringes of work-centred society or even outside of it. They are not willing to sacrifice their free time, social relationships and intimate life ("being", "loving"), which they value as part of their well-being and coping, for work. Labour market citizenship is therefore not a viable option for all young adults to build their relationship and belonging to society, at least in every phase of life. This kind of sentiment is keenly expressed by the following interviewee:

Well, I don't think it's every person's duty to work. [I say that] because some people don't want to work, and if some people are not capable [of working], then there's nothing to do about it. If someone is against working, they shouldn't be chained and forced to work. That's because I feel that a bad working life oppresses people. Some people prefer being unemployed and enjoying their life [to working in an eight-hour office job].

In a nutshell, the above stories demonstrate how for some young adults who are outside of the labour market can secure their well-being better than being inside of it. Some interviewees persuasively ask which is more expensive for society: to maintain expensive mental health services for young adults wounded by the demands of working life and society or to treat those with respect who cannot or do not want to integrate into the normative and burdensome labour market. The interviewees highlight that despite being unable to work, their need to be accepted and respected in society will not vanish. This important message from young adults should be adequately acknowledged in policymaking.

Beyond the normative labour market citizenship

The interviewed young adults describe their attempts to change the prevailing ideals of labour market citizenship, imagining what working life could exceed its current confines. Instead of positioning themselves as outsiders, they wish to reshape society into being more approving of diversity and adaptive to various needs and aspirations (see Ågren 2023). According to these views, young adults should be allowed to participate in working life more on their own terms, as expressed in an almost surrendering tone by one of the interviewees:

Mostly, I hope that I will find an employment possibility that works for me. [Trying to get employed] has meant for me [several] attempts and failures, and after that, new attempts and failures. I wish that I could find an option that wouldn't be the most important thing in my life but that goes on with its own

weight, and I can concentrate on other things. The fear is that it won't work. My fear is that there won't be jobs that suit me.

Likewise, some of the interviewees emphasise that they wish to be encountered in society as who and what they are, with their values and needs and sometimes limited resources. In such accounts, young adults appear as critical citizens who – by engaging in “doing” – claim justice, rights and responsibilities (Isin 2008, 18) and contest the hegemony of labour market citizenship which rejects diversity and heterogeneity of societal participation. Some young adults in our data describe their struggles in trying to follow the normative transitioning paths to adulthood, and in their efforts to build a career to their own liking (cf. Farrugia 2020). Some interviewees picture themselves as creative or artistic, stating they would enjoy passionate things as part of their work, and this would also support their well-being (cf. Farrugia 2021). They express disappointment at how little support they have received from adult society for such wishes. On the other hand, some admit being supported by their peers, as the following extract shows:

When I'm aiming for [professional] fields that may sound tricky, and others fear whether anything will ever come of it, I hear a lot of not-so-supporting comments and tense feedback from adults. For example, they frighten me that I would never get a job in that field, and that I would fail. But that does scare me. [...] [However] people of my own age see my aims and goals as possible, so their comments are very different.

The transformative voices in the data claim that society should better understand and support the link between work and well-being. Some interviewees point out that their participation in working life depends on whether it will become more humane and equal as compared to what it currently is. Echoing the following interviewee, some of them contemplate whether more alternative ways to integrate in the working life will exist in the future:

I don't know if it is possible that everyone could do something they regard important, but at least there could be more possibilities for flexible working hours. [...] Because currently, all people are forced to the same “box of work”. In my opinion, there should be more alternatives. Much more alternatives.

Young adults try to avoid the narrow model of an active labour market citizenship by lowering their own expectations of success in working life and letting themselves to settle for less in life in terms of work. This desire, however, collapses with the normative ideals of labour market citizenship, directing young adults to proceed along the path sanctioned by society (Ågren 2021; Honkatukia et al., 2020; cf. Cuervo & Chesters 2019). Settling for less is a personalised struggle for many young adults, as they must accept their failures regarding the required norms and career paths, as the next quote highlights (cf. Farrugia 2021, 868):

Finally, I realised that I just don't have that kind of drive. Some people know what they would like to be when they grow up, and for some people, it is not that big of a deal at any level. For me, it's hard to accept it because I had my goals. But now I'm starting to accept the idea that maybe I will never have any vocation, and that I just do the kind of work I can and happen to get. And it is also okay. Because when I was younger, I never thought that would be okay.

Moreover, many young adults who choose a non-normative path position themselves as citizens who act in ways that are meaningful for them in other areas of life than work. The interviews bring out numerous examples of how young adults attempt to realise their citizenship through various ways of "doing", "being" and "loving". They have, for example, been active members in their communities, sought to make a difference in their social relationships, experienced success in their hobbies or in volunteering, and some have sought to influence societal issues through their own lifestyle. In these sites of "being" and "doing", young adults acquire and develop communication skills, critical thinking and knowledge of society's institutions – all important citizenship capabilities (Kallio 2022). One interviewee describes an activity meaningful to themselves in the following way:

I'm there [Youth Shelter run by Finnish Red Cross] as a volunteer, now from time to time due to COVID and my work. But I've been there in the emergency housing and in the evenings, and I cook for the young people there and help the staff. I'm there overnight, and then I leave the next day. And then, a year ago, they started this solidarity project, and I've been a volunteer there.

By engaging in what can be called everyday activism, these young adults act as citizens in ways that override the normative nature of labour market citizenship (cf. Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). However, rather few of them position themselves as citizens who reflexively and actively turn their critical insights into political actions (cf. Rinne 2011, 11). Our understanding is that this may be due to the normative understanding of societal participation mainly as inclusion to the labour market to which all the other activities are subordinate (cf. Smith et al., 2005; Walsh & Black 2020).

As judged by our data, citizenship can mean for young adults "loving" in the sphere of intimate relationships. Citizenship in this sense relates to mutual sharing and feelings of belonging and safety. Moreover, young adults often choose to relate with their peers rather than authorities or professionals, which means that everyday life social relations provide them with important information and support (Bennett, Wells & Freelon 2011). They also highlight the crucial meaning of social relations for one's success in work. Friends and family support in "pinning" the difficulties in the labour market and help if working life becomes too burdensome; one interviewee, for example, was taken to the hospital by their friend because of a burnout. Furthermore, social relationships allow young adults to care for others and

be responsible for them, which allows them to feel valuable and important despite having difficulties in meeting the demands of labour market citizenship.

Indeed, for many young adults, “loving” is an important dimension of societal participation (cf. Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 132). It manifests a responsible citizenship, which (outside of intimate relations) relates to issues such as environmental citizenship, solidarity and caring for the future of humanity (for a similar argument, see Chapter 3). As Smith and others (2005, 437–438) state, this kind of socially constructive citizenship refers to people caring for their community and contributing to it by helping others in vulnerable positions. In our data, some young adults seek to realise such ideals through their own way of life, and some demand more extensive actions from the state in social and ecological issues. Through making sense of their own and other young adults’ difficulties in the labour market, they have come up with ideas on how to reduce mental health problems, which they believe have root causes in society. Moreover, they argue for more sensitivity to young adults’ needs from society’s institutions (also Kallio & Honkatukia 2022). For them, being a respected citizen should not be about “having” in terms of material resources, or about acquiring the standards of living enabled by having a certain status in the labour market. The idea that everyone should have an equal right to realise themselves and receive support as needed to be able to do so is well expressed in the following quote:

There should be many more hobbies that don’t cost that much. Because those people who don’t work ... they don’t necessarily have the money to have a hobby. But they should also have a community to attend to and do things, but which wouldn’t cost that much. In a way, even though you don’t work, because you haven’t got any job, you would have the money to do free-time activities. That would prevent your mental health from breaking down. Because if it’s not possible to have a hobby, it’s very easy to get depressed and have your mental health to collapse. And then, at least, you can’t get a job when you’re depressed.

To summarise our argument, while many young adults have internalised the model of labour market citizenship and want to stay “inside” of it, there are also many who criticise its narrow normativity and express transformative ideas. They wish to reformulate the existing expectations related to work to better suit their abilities, values and needs (cf. Ågren 2023; Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). In addition, they try to carve space for realising citizenship in more diverse ways. It is notable that while not occupying a normative place in the working life, they still develop citizenship capabilities that are important for sensible societal participation (Kallio 2022). As is reflected in the current master narrative of labour market citizenship and the ideology of economic growth, the ideas and aspirations of young adults for alternative forms of citizenship are at risk of being bypassed. This should be avoided. A genuinely sustainable society takes seriously the critical views presented by young adults about their position and participation in society, whether they’re expressed from inside, outside or beyond the labour market.

Conclusion – towards citizenship as lived well-being

In this chapter, we have examined young adults' considerations about their position and participation in society in relation to the hegemonic discourse of labour market citizenship. We have focused on what we have called “transformative voices” in our interview data, analysing young adults' critical views and alternative ways of understanding and living citizenship. Theoretically, we have looked at young adults' societal participation as a dimension of sustainable well-being and identified problematic assumptions in labour market citizenship. According to our observations, it can be claimed that for some young adults, labour market citizenship appears as too narrow, unjust and burdensome model of societal participation which devours other valuable aspects in young adults' lives and citizenship (Ågren 2023; Honkatukia et al., 2020).

The transformative voices outlined above call for rethinking the relationship between work and citizenship. They remind us how important it is to support young adults' societal participation regardless of their position in the labour market and in ways that holistically recognise the importance of societal belonging for their well-being. In our discussion, we take distance from the neoliberal view which places the responsibility of participation and well-being on young adults individually and ties it to their role in the labour market (e.g., Rikala 2020; Duffy 2017; Walsh 2017; France 2016). We also problematise the traditional understanding of welfare citizenship based on the state-financed social services and labour market citizenship as the (tax-paying) guarantor of the system (e.g., Newman & Tonkens 2011). Moreover, we have emphasised young adults' right for well-being and the need to belong and participate in society (Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 72, 92). Altogether, we wish to emphasise that young adults' citizenship and well-being cannot be resolved individually, but it requires collective decisions and critical discussions at the societal level.

Instead of merely labour market citizenship, we propose that the inclusion of young adults in society should be understood through the idea of citizenship as lived well-being. With this concept, we want to highlight the relationship between societal participation and well-being as a fundamental basic need (Helne & Hirvilammi 2017, 2022); being an active citizen requires the opportunity for a person to live and act in ways that they find significant for their relationship to society. This would support their experience of dignity, thereby allowing them to have a meaningful agency not only individually, but also from the perspective of a sustainable society (Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021, 154; Ågren 2023).

Our conceptualisation of citizenship as lived well-being problematises the mainstream youth policies, which direct young adults towards labour market in ways that end up pushing some of them to the fringes of the work-centred society (Ågren 2023). Taking our cue from Weeks (2011, 106–107), we propose focusing on young adults' well-being instead of on their effective integration into working life. This could address many problems caused by the hegemony of labour market citizenship, which portrays young adults in the margins as passive, problematic or risky

(also Kallio & Honkatukia 2022). Instead of emphasising young adults' individual coping skills, it is imperative to consider how society and working life can be made more sustainable and inclusive (Madsen 2021; Helne & Hirvilammi 2022).

The conceptualisation of citizenship as lived well-being helps to acknowledge young adults as actors who have a right to participate in society as who they are and whose diverse ways of societal participation must be recognised and supported. At the same time, our findings may have more general significance in that the transformative voices we identified may indicate broader trends and shifts in societies, needed from the perspective of sustainable transformation of society. For example, our findings call for the realisation that many forms of agency can contribute to society's sustainability. Therefore, participation outside and beyond the labour market citizenship (such as voluntary or advocacy work, hobbies, arts and other forms of self-initiated participation) should not be turned into another institutionalised path to paid employment, which would lead to the creation of a new system based on control and guidance around work. As some researchers have suggested, such alternative activities should also be supported financially, for example, through basic income (cf. Weeks 2011; Bessant, Farthing & Watts 2017, 182; Gorz 1999, 83). In this, the basic income experiment in Finland in 2017–2018 is an encouraging example. The monthly basic income (560 euros) was found to increase the experienced well-being of the recipients, although it did not directly increase their employment (see Kangas et al., 2020, 188–189).

In a society that relies on waged employment, young adults' critique of the labour market citizenship can be easily refuted as idealistic and utopian (Weeks 2011, 255). However, according to the recent Finnish youth barometer, 86% of the respondents aged 15–29 regarded human rights, democracy, biodiversity and animal rights as more important than economic growth (Kiilakoski 2022). In the light of such results, critique towards the economic growth-based labour market citizenship can be seen as a major transformative voice coming from the younger generation (Helne & Hirvilammi 2022). There is a need for new conceptualisations and discourses to re-evaluate the meaning and value of waged work in society and other aspects of life, as stated by Weeks (2011, 35–36):

The problem with work is not just that it monopolizes so much time and energy, but that it also dominates the social and political imaginaries. What might we name the variety of times and spaces outside waged work, and what might we wish to do with and in them? How might we conceive the content and parameters of our obligations to one another outside the currency of work?

From this contention follows a crucial challenge for educational, social and employment institutions: are they ready to acknowledge the value of societal participation outside and beyond labour market citizenship? Are they willing to seriously consider the critical, transformative voices of young adults as to the meaning of waged work in society?

Notes

- 1 Names are in alphabetical order. Both are first/corresponding authors.
- 2 These young adults were reached from the Youth Shelters run by the Finnish Red Cross, where they had sought support for issues related to independence, such as independent housing, economic livelihood or their family relationships.
- 3 One-stop guidance centres (“Ohjaamo”) are multi-agency service points situated across Finland, offering guidance for employment and education matters for people under 30. The original data from the centres were collected by a research project led by Mirja Määttä (2018, 2019).
- 4 All citations have been translated from Finnish by the authors.

References

- Ågren S (2021) Exploring vocational education students' visions of a successful transition to working life from the perspective of societal belonging. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4(1): 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00037-5>
- Ågren S (2023) Shaping worker-citizenship: young vocational education graduates' labour market positionings within new adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2023.2174009>.
- Ågren S, Pietilä I and Rättilä T (2020) Palkkatyökeskeisen ajattelun esiintyminen ammatitiin opiskelevien työelämäasenteissa. In: Haikkola L and Myllyniemi S (2020 eds) *Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019*, pp. 157–178. Helsinki: Valtion nuorisoneuvosto.
- Atkinson P and Delamont S (2006) Rescuing narrative from qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1): 164–172. DOI: 10.1075/ni.16.1.21atk
- Bamberg M (2004) Positioning with Davie Hogan: stories, tellings, and identities. In: Daiute C and Lightfoot C (2004 eds) *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, pp. 135–157. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Bennett W L, Wells C and Freelon D (2011) Communicating civic engagement: contrasting models of citizenship in the youth web sphere. *Journal of Communication* 61(5): 835–856. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01588.x
- Bessant J, Farthing R and Watts R (2017) *The Precarious Generation: A Political Economy of Young People*. New York: Routledge.
- Cahill H and Dadvand B (2018) Re-conceptualising youth participation: a framework to informal action. *Children and Youth Services Review* 95: 243–253. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.11.001
- Cuervo H and Chesters J (2019) The [im]possibility of planning a future: how prolonged precarious employment during transitions affects the lives of young Australians. *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 29(4): 295–312. DOI: 10.1080/10301763.2019.1696654
- Cuervo H and Wyn J (2014) Reflections on the use of spatial and relational metaphors in youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies* 17(7): 901–915. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2013.878796
- Cuervo H and Wyn J (2016) An unspoken crisis: the “scarring effects” of the complex nexus between education and work on two generations of young Australians. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 35(2): 122–135. DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2016.1164467
- Duffy D (2017) Get on your feet, get happy: happiness and the affective governing of young people in the age of austerity. In: Kelly P and Pike J (2017 eds) *Neoliberalism, Austerity, and the Moral Economics of Young People's Health and Well-being*, pp. 87–101. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Farrugia D (2020) Youth, work and “career” as a way of talking about the self. *Work, Employment and Society* 35(5): 856–871. DOI: 10.1177%2F0950017020947576
- Farrugia D (2021) *Youth, Work and the Post-Fordist Self*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. DOI: 10.51952/9781529210071
- France A (2016) *Understanding Youth in the Global Economic Crisis*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Gorz A (1999) *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*. Translated by Chris Turner. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Harris A, Cuervo H and Wyn J (2021) *Thinking about Belonging in Youth Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-75119-7
- Harris A, Wyn J and Younes S (2010) Beyond apathetic or activist youth: “ordinary” young people and contemporary forms of participation. *YOUNG* 18(1): 9–32. DOI: 10.1177%2F110330880901800103
- Helne T and Hirvilammi T (2017) The relational conception of wellbeing as a catalyst of the ecosocial transition. In: Matthies A L and Närhi K (2017 eds) *The Ecosocial Transition of Societies. The Contribution of Social Work and Social Policy*, pp. 36–53. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Helne T and Hirvilammi T (2022) Balancing needs: young unemployed Finnish adults’ discourse on well-being and its relation to the sustainability transformation. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 18(1): 158–170. DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2022.2030115
- Honkatukia P, Kallio J, Lähde M & Mölkänen J (2020) *Omana itsenä osa yhteiskuntaa – Itsenäistyvät nuoret aikuiset kansalaisina*. Tampereen yliopisto.
- Isin E F (2008) Theorising acts of citizenship. In: Isin E F and Nielsen G M (2008 eds) *Acts of Citizenship*, pp. 15–43. New York: Zed Books.
- Isopahkala-Bouret U, Lappalainen S and Lahelma E (2014) Educating worker-citizens: visions and divisions in curriculum texts. *Journal of Education and Work* 27(1): 92–109. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2012.718745
- Kallio J (2022) “Siitä tuli ihan hirvee paperisota”– Kansalaispätevyys nuorten aikuisten institutionaalisissa kohtaamisissa. *Sosiologia* 59(1): 19–34.
- Kallio J and Honkatukia P (2022) Everyday resistance in making oneself visible: young adults’ negotiations with institutional social control in youth services. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 13(1): 98–123. DOI: 10.18357/ijcyfs131202220660
- Kallio K P, Wood B E and Häkli J (2020) Lived citizenship: conceptualising an emerging field. *Citizenship Studies* 24(2): 1–17. DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2020.1739227
- Kangas O, Jauhiainen S, Simanainen M and Ylikännö M (2020 eds) Suomen perustulokokeilun arviointi. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön raportteja ja muistioita 2020:15. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö, Helsinki 2020. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-9890-2> (Accessed January 10, 2022.)
- Kelly P (2006) The entrepreneurial self and “youth at-risk”: exploring the horizons of identity in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Youth Studies* 9(1): 17–32. DOI: 10.1080/13676260500523606
- Kelly P (2017) Growing up after the GFC: responsabilisation and mortgaged futures. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38(1): 57–69. DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2015.1104852
- Kiilakoski T (2022 ed.) *Kestävää tekoa. Nuorisobarometri 2021*. Valtion nuorisoneuvoston julkaisu 69. Helsinki: Valtion nuorisoneuvosto.

- Lewis G and Flink J (2004) "All that heaven allows": the worker citizen in the post-war welfare state. In Lewis G (ed.) *Citizenship: Personal Lives and Social Policy*, pp. 39–83. Milton Keynes: The Open University & The Policy Press.
- Lister R (2007) Inclusive citizenship: realising the potential. *Citizenship Studies* 11(1): 49–61. DOI: 10.1080/13621020601099856
- Määttä M (2018, 2019) "Dataset: from guidance centres to working life". Longitudinal interviews with young people from Finnish one-stop guidance centers. Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Central Finland/South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences.
- Madsen O J (2021) *Deconstructing Scandinavia's Achievement Generation: A Youth Mental Health Crisis?* Translated by Diana Oatley. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.
- Moensted M (2020) Social citizenship aspirations: an alternative line of analysis of the social reproduction of youth inequality. *YOUNG* 29(3): 236–255. DOI: 10.1177%2F1103308820966437
- Newman J and Tonkens E (2011 eds) *Participation, Responsibility and Choice: Summoning the Active Citizen in Western European Welfare States*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. DOI: 10.1017/9789048513437
- Nikunen M (2017) Young people, future hopes and concerns in Finland and the European Union: classed and gendered expectations in policy documents. *Journal of Youth Studies* 20(6): 661–676. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2016.1260693
- Nikunen M (2021) Labour market demands, employability and authenticity. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4: 205–220. DOI: 10.1007/s43151-021-00049-1
- Rikala S (2020) Agency among young people in marginalised positions: towards a better understanding of mental health problems. *Journal of Youth Studies* 23(8): 1022–1038. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1651929
- Rinne J (2011) *Henkilökohtaistuva politiikka. Tutkimusmatkoja refleksiiviseen kansalaistoimintaan*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Tampere. <https://urn.fi/urn:isbn:978-951-44-8341-7>
- Smith N, Lister R, Middleton S and Cox L (2005) Young people as real citizens: towards an inclusionary understanding of citizenship. *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(4): 425–443. DOI: 10.1080/13676260500431743
- Standing G (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Suikkanen A and Viinamäki L (1999) Life paths and labour market citizenship. In: Christiansen J, Koistinen P and Kovalainen A (1999 eds) *Working Europe. Reshaping European Employment Systems*, pp. 189–209. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Walsh L (2017) Treading water? The roles and possibilities of "adversity capital" in preparing young people for precarity. In: Kelly P and Pike J (2017 eds) *Neoliberalism, Austerity, and the Moral Economics of Young People's Health and Well-being*, pp. 103–121. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-58266-9
- Walsh L and Black R (2020) *Rethinking Youth Citizenship after the Age of Entitlement*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: 10.5040/9781474248068
- Weeks K (2011) *The Problem with Work. Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: 10.1215/9780822394723

