

Participatory photography supporting the social inclusion of migrant youth

In 2015, more people than usual claimed asylum in Finland, inspiring many artists to organize photography workshops with refugees and migrants. This article examines in what respects participatory photography can promote social inclusion for migrant youth and what aspects need more attention. It is based on a Finnish research project titled *Young People in the Limelight*, which investigated ways to support social inclusion, participation and multiliteracies by vulnerable youth through youth work. The action study included five participatory photography workshops with mixed groups of migrants and Finns, most of them between the ages of 15 and 22. The data consist mainly of observation diaries and interviews. In participatory photography, social inclusion is usually understood as ‘having a voice’. Besides this, it was also discovered that participatory photography can facilitate social inclusion by providing experiences of informal, interpersonal acceptance, by increasing perception of the photographer as a skilful person, by solidifying a sense of belonging to a group and society and by facilitating familiarization with new spaces and local culture. The study suggests that experimenting with and analysing participatory photography as a facilitator of social inclusion from the perspectives of listening, transcultural interaction and spatiality should occur more in the future.

Keywords: participatory photography; social inclusion; migrant youth; action research; voice.

Introduction

Finland—a country in Northern Europe with 5.5 million residents—has seldom faced large groups of asylum-seekers arriving in the country. However, in 2015, close to 32,500 people, mainly 18- to 34-year-olds, claimed international protection and asylum in Finland primarily due to conflicts in the Middle East, whereas in 2016–2017, 5,000–

6,000 people came yearly (Migri statistics 2020). This situation was new to Finland, creating polarization in attitudes toward migrants, nationalistic rhetoric and harsh talk in digital media (e.g., Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto, and Tuominen 2018; Tuomola 2018). In addition, the Finnish government considered tightening migration standards. Furthermore, as the arrival in strength was unexpected, state and municipal authorities concentrated largely on organising outward circumstances, such as housing, clothing and food. In this context, many citizens worried that the social services provided by the state and municipalities would not be sufficient to support the asylum seekers' social inclusion in Finland (see Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto, and Tuominen 2018), in the sense of enhancing their experience of being accepted by others (Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011).

Therefore, many NGO's such as the Red Cross organized spare-time activities for asylum seekers in reception centres, and independent artists around Finland decided to implement photography workshops (see, for example, Seppälä/Yle 2016). In addition, between 2015–2016, the author with master's students implemented photography workshops within an action study project for mainly 15–22-year-old migrants and asylum seekers. Besides examining their multiliteracies and media participation, the intent was to discover how photography as a participatory medium can support their social inclusion in Finnish society. Addressing this question could be beneficial for many societies, as migration is more likely to increase than decrease in the future, for instance to Europe, due to political restlessness in parts of the Middle East and huge population growth in Africa leading to massive youth unemployment (e.g., Fangen and Mohn 2016a).

Particular attention should be paid to supporting the social inclusion of young asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, not only for economical and humane reasons,

but also because social marginalisation can be passed down from one generation to the next (Myrskylä 2012). Learning a local language, gaining a basic education and finding employment are often mentioned as key factors in acculturation and social inclusion (e.g., Fangen and Mohn 2016a, 2016b; Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011; Sultana 2010). Finding employment is especially challenging today, as Finland and many European countries have high rates of unemployment, and migrants are even less likely than other citizens to find employment (e.g., Fangen and Mohn 2016b). However, unemployment does not always lead to social exclusion, although it can bring on related challenges such as isolation, health problems and lack of self-esteem (e.g. Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011; Clasen, Gould and Vincent 1998). Furthermore, Rose, Daiches and Potier (2011) point out that social inclusion can encompass issues other than the commonly considered factors, such as employment. The interest here is on these other factors.

Rose, Daiches and Potier (2011) discovered that for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET's), being socially included meant having a sense of informal, interpersonal acceptance by others, demonstrated, for example, through spending time together, having a voice and being heard and recognized for one's skills and experiencing friendliness and respect (see also Kivijärvi 2015; Simpican, Leader, Kosciulek and Leahy 2015). In fact, having a job or even citizenship does not necessarily mean that a person feels this kind of informal, interpersonal acceptance (Fangen and Mohn 2016b). This conceptualization of social inclusion is adopted as a starting point for this article, as it can provide insight into what kinds of social impacts migrants may realize through voluntary-based artistic photography workshops, the purpose of which is not to steer participants in to schools or employment. For practical reasons, 'migrants' in this paper refers to those expecting a decision on their asylum application and refugees who already have a residence.

Instead of looking at the skills and positions necessary for migrants' inclusion, greater focus is needed on whether various activities, practices and environments allow migrants' inclusion in a society from the outset. In fact, since the 1990s, following the Salamanca Statement by UNESCO (1994), notable efforts have been made all over the world towards inclusive education meaning, for instance, that every child has a right to study in a mainstream classroom which would allow bonding with peers living in the same area (e.g., Florian and Spratt 2013). In Finland, however, young migrants still find it difficult to make friends with local youth and so they experience exclusion in Finnish society (Kivijärvi 2015). Loneliness is common among migrants, especially those young people arriving without parents (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto and Tuominen 2018). So, besides standard acculturation programs and school activities, additional means are needed to enhance social inclusion. There are indications that music, visual arts and photography workshops may generate among migrants the experience of informal, interpersonal acceptance and belonging to a society (e.g., Marsh 2012; O'Reilly 2013; Rodríguez-Jiménes and Gifford 2010; Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto 2019). This paper considers in which respects participatory photography in voluntary-based youth work activities can provide social inclusion, where its critical aspects lie and what aspects of participatory photography need more experimenting, critical attention and theorising from the perspective of social inclusion.

First, this paper sheds light on participatory photography as a method and conceptual approach. Then, an empirical case study titled "Young People in the Limelight" (YPAM) is introduced, consisting of participatory photography workshops with young migrants, and its data and methods are described. Then three results dealing with the potential of participatory photography to support social inclusion are discussed. The final section summarises and discusses the results and suggests further research.

Participatory photography fostering social inclusion through offering a voice

Participatory photography's ability to provide social inclusion has been explored in various fields, including educational, health, social and visual studies (e.g. Aldridge 2016; Cabanes 2017; Duffy 2011; Lykes 2010; Wang and Burris 1997). However, this issue is often discussed within the ideas of social integration and exclusion and marginalisation (e.g. Duffy 2011; Lykes 2010; O'Reilly 2013; Singhal *et al.* 2007). Therefore, the concept of social inclusion has been associated, for example, with employment, income, housing and education, hiding its possible meaning for excluded persons themselves which is here adopted for exploration: social inclusion as a sense of informal, interpersonal acceptance by others (Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011). Furthermore, participatory photography is utilised in communities of practice, for example by artist-instructors. PhotoVoice, for instance, is a registered charity implementing photography community projects in the UK and around the world and offering training courses on the method (see more at <https://photovoice.org/>).

As in the YPAM study, participatory photography refers usually to participants documenting their lives and/or surroundings, reflecting on their identities and/or communities and discussing together the taken photos (e.g., O'Reilly 2013; Prins 2010; Raven 2015; Wang and Burris 1997). The projects typically conclude with public voicing: making a creative product, such as an exhibition or a book, and advocating participants' politically-oriented insights (e.g., Lykes 2010; O'Reilly 2013; Prins 2010; Wang 2006). Participatory photography, covering diverse methods, is here understood as an umbrella term, entailing for example auto-photography (Noland 2006), empowering photography (Savolainen 2009), Participatory Photo Mapping (e.g., Dennis *et al.* 2009; Teixeira 2015), PhotoPAR (Lykes 2010), participatory photography (e.g., Prins 2010; Raven 2015), PhotoVoice (e.g. Orton) and photovoice (e.g., Duffy 2011;

Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler III 2014; Wang and Burris 1997), the last of which comes closest to the YPAM study.

While the talk about social exclusion draws attention to the exclusion and marginalisation of certain people from society, the discussion of social integration and inclusion focuses on individual integration and societal ability to include all people (e.g., Moberg and Savolainen 1999; Rania et al. 2014; Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011). Similar viewpoints and aims can be found behind participatory photography, which has been used especially with marginalised groups, those underrepresented in society, and vulnerable people (e.g., the illiterate, homeless and disabled) (e.g. Aldridge 2007; Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler III 2014; O'Reilly 2013; Prins 2010; Singhal et al. 2007; Wang and Burris 1997). While participatory photography strives to disclose the life experiences and tacit knowledge of marginalised and vulnerable people and give them a public voice, it implicitly suggests that 'having a voice or a say' is central for social inclusion (see also Dreher 2012). By voice, it is usually referred, as in YPAM, to participants expressing their experiences, opinions and/or views more or less publicly to others through photographs with accompanying discussions and/or texts (e.g. Noland 2006; O'Reilly 2013; Orton 2009; Singhal *et al.* 2007; Wang and Burris 1997).

Offering a voice is undeniably a benefit of participatory photography. Yet, it has other fine utilities, such as raising self-esteem and self-competence, providing valuable reflection and insights into one's community, becoming a community change agent and offering useful contacts (see more e.g., Cabanes 2017; Catalani and Minkler 2009; Duffy 2011; Foster-Fishman et al. 2005; Noland 2006; Singhal *et al.* 2007; Prins 2010; Wang and Burris 1997). To sum up, most utilities mentioned in scientific studies emphasize some aspect of individual empowerment and education which implies an underlying assumption, corresponding with one view of social integration, that the

excluded persons can be integrated back into society through improving their self-efficacy and diverse skills (e.g., Moberg and Savolainen 1999). Especially the discussion about social inclusion has shifted attention more towards the practices and environments of society, including the media sphere, enabling inclusion for all people from the outset (e.g., Moberg and Savolainen 1999; Simpican, Leader, Kosciulek and Leahy 2015). This shift is significant, as it provokes societies to renew their practices and environments and innovate fresh ways to support social inclusion. Therefore, this text focuses more on participatory photography as an activity and practice supporting the social inclusion of migrant youth than on improving their skills.

Participatory photography's strong emphasis on voice stems from its four theoretical roots: documentary photography, Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, feminist theory and participatory (action) research (e.g. Wang and Burris 1997; Wang 2006). Documentary photography has given rise to the idea that giving a voice through the act of visualization is powerful in representing vulnerable and marginalised people (Price 1997; Rania et al. 2014). Traditionally, however, documentary photography depends on a photographer documenting communities as an outsider (Price 1997). While working in literacy programmes with marginalised groups, Brazilian educator Freire (e.g., 1972; 1987) realized the importance of an insider view: to bring about a permanent community change, people themselves need to identify and become critically conscious of the social, political and historical conditions oppressing their communities. In supporting the empowerment of participants, Freire (1972) leaned significantly on visual methods such as photography to provoke the necessary reflection and dialogue among participants and to provide a channel for publicity (see also Singhal *et al.* 2007). Yet, participatory photography differs from Freire's dialogic pedagogy, which leaves unquestioned the issue of male dominance, for instance (Wang and Burris 1997). It then

draws on feminist theory, questioning and discussing all kinds of inequalities, social hierarchies and power relations (e.g., Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler 2014). In addition, participatory action research (PAR), on which photovoice, especially, leans, has introduced the idea of engaging researched people in a study as co-researchers to investigate and express the issues of their concern (Wang and Burris 1997; see PAR, e.g., Reason and Bradbury 2006).

Expressing oneself through photography does not, however, necessarily lead to results that fully represent one's voice. "Giving participants cameras does not automatically overcome power issues between researcher and researched", O'Reilly (2013, 40) points out. For this reason, it recommended a photography project to begin with a discussion about power issues and ethics, besides introducing basics of photography (e.g. Lykes 2010; Prins 2010; Wang 2006). A project usually contains many kinds of decision-making, such as who decides the topics to be photographed, publicly viewed, and so on. While reviewing photovoice projects, Catalani and Minkler (2009) discovered that in some cases researchers met participants only for project introduction and, later, for collecting photos. In other projects, participants not only took photographs, but also selected them, generated picture stories, disseminated findings and evaluated projects (Catalani and Minkler 2009). So, having a voice through participatory photography has many dimensions. Moreover, although marginalised, vulnerable or at-risk participants might be invited to accomplish all the above-mentioned activities, as in YPAM, they may not be able or willing to take on all these tasks.

Furthermore, although participants are usually voluntarily participating in a workshop, they are hardly aware of all power issues and possible effects and consequences related to their participation. For example, inviting people to a workshop

to express their voices, means implicitly suggesting a certain way to get one's voice heard in a society and exposing one's life under inspection or even 'control' through on published imagery, without knowing how one's voice is received in public. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) bring up that participatory photography can cause embarrassment by exposing sensitive facts about the participants and even representing them in a false light (see also Prins 2010).

Introduction to the YPAM action research project, methods and data

This article draws on the data from a nationwide media education research project titled "Young People in the Limelight: Towards Agency through Multiliteracies" (YPAM) (2015–2017, Finland). The aim of the research was to develop practice-based media education to empower and include young people at risk of dropping out of society in groups, society and the public media sphere. It also aimed to reinforce participants' multiliteracies, especially media literacy, for building skills to participate in contemporary literacy-driven, mediatized society. In the research project, at-risk youth were invited to voluntary-based media workshops by youth workers within youth centres in different parts of Finland. Altogether eight workshops were held as sub-studies, of which five relied on photography and were attended by youth coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper focuses on these photography workshops.

The five workshops were implemented by five researchers in cooperation with municipal and non-governmental youth institutions, and they were attended by a total of 40 young people, most between ages 15 and 22. One researcher with previous work experience in art photography (the author of this text) implemented three workshops with girls, and two workshops were held by pairs of master's students of media education. One workshop was held for Afghan boys, and four included mixed groups of

Finnish and migrant youth. The workshop with boys also included a professional art photographer as a third instructor.

The workshop with Afghans was carried out in a reception centre with 16 newly arrived unaccompanied boys seeking asylum in Finland. Another workshop was held with a group of boys and girls in a café-style youth space, where especially migrant youth hang out after school or work. The rest were organized with groups of girls in a youth centre especially targeted at at-risk youth, including migrant youth, where they could spend their spare time and attend diverse groups (e.g., cooking, arts, photography). The four latter workshops included Finnish participants (15) and first-generation migrants with roots in Afghanistan (1), China (1), Congo (2), Iran (2), Mexico (1), Spain (1) and Turkey (1). Most of them were still attending school. All 40 youth were active users of Internet and diverse media. Based on a delivered background questionnaire, there were no indications that their parents belong to a certain social class. All parents had finished comprehensive school, some had even higher academic degree and they were in diverse occupations. Information about the parents of the unaccompanied boys could not be asked for ethical reasons and as the boys were in the process of seeking asylum. This text focuses primarily on the migrants.

The migrant participants were experiencing phases of transition in their lives. They were living youth as a life phase during which people in particular try out and take on diverse culturally determined roles and statuses, as did the Finnish participants. These positions shift as desires, values, beliefs and habits constantly fluctuate as youth explore their identities and negotiate their membership in society (see also Wilkinson 2015). Moreover, the asylum-seekers and newly-arrived migrants were living in a liminal phase between socio-spatial contexts, as they led transcultural lives and had ties with the people, culture and language of their origin while, at the same time, they

adjusted and re-positioned themselves in the new culture (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Kuusisto and Tuominen 2018).

As in many Nordic countries, Finland has a well-established, nationwide network of youth centres providing youth with plenty of leisure-time activities and spaces to hang out. Some centres are targeted at at-risk youth, including migrant youth. For instance, a social worker familiarized with a youth and his/her life situation can recommend the person to attend such a centre. In practice, such recommendation means confirming the at-risk status of the person. The YPAM study approached such centres to organize media workshops. Since the at-risk status of the participants was then confirmed prior to their participation in the special centres, it was not again confirmed individually for the purpose of this study, as it is a delicate matter to discuss with the participants due to stigmatization. Moreover, these centres were created as spaces where at-risk youth can mingle with peers without the pressure of adults and authorities observing and constantly asking questions of them. Therefore, delivering a background questionnaire was not desirable, though a limited one was delivered. As the workshops were offered for the youth as a part of regular, voluntary-based activities of the centres, the participants were not compensated of their participation in the workshops, except for the gift of a movie ticket in thanks for participating in a separate interview.

So, the YPAM participants were considered to be at risk of dropping out of school and society, but not marginalized, as they were not out of the reach of social services, governmental institutions or youth work (Myrskylä 2012). The just-arrived migrants were at risk primarily due to limited Finnish language skills and, for example, unemployment and difficulties in finding local friends and settling into Finnish society and culture. Besides unemployment, the Finns had social, psychological and cognitive difficulties (e.g., depression, attention deficit, learning difficulties). So, at-risk is here

understood similarly to vulnerability: one has reduced motivation or capacity to make individual life choices and to maintain independence or one lacks everyday life skills due to psychological, physiological or situational reasons (see more on vulnerability e.g., Liamputtong 2007).

All the participants and the legal guardians of youth under eighteen years old signed informed consent forms. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntariness of their participation and their right to withdrawn from the study at any moment. Because of the double role of researchers both as researchers and instructors of the workshops, the participants kept forgetting that they were simultaneously attending a research and needed to be reminded of this fact for research ethical reasons. In fact, ethical issues were considered throughout the study because, in participatory research, situations and the inner states of the vulnerable participants can fluctuate greatly during fieldwork and so the best interests of participants should be considered regularly (see also e.g., Pienimäki and Kotilainen 2018).

Action research was adopted as the overall method or orientation in YPAM, as it allows innovative experimentation with a community of practice, that is, young people as co-researchers. According to Hearn et al. (2009), while bridging theory and practice, an action research grounds itself in a different view of knowledge than traditional research, as knowledge is created in a dialogue with research participants. “Knowing through doing” is also appreciated. In YPAM, the researcher-instructors actively designed workshop activities in co-operation with youth centres in order to evoke answers to research questions. In addition, they openly talked about the research questions with the participants during the workshops, asking, for example, what kind of photography assignment inspires them and what they gain by attending a workshop. The youth appreciated the trust given to them as co-researchers, which in part generated

confidence in themselves and an encouraging atmosphere to talk about other issues as well, such as the photos. The instructors also put energy into building the motivation and self-confidence of youth to participate in diverse workshop activities excluding the act of photography, which was initially popular (see also e.g., Pienimäki 2018). So, the YPAM study pursued dialogic and democratic practices of inquiry by involving participants in research.

Reason and Bradbury (2006) explain that an action study differs from traditional hypothesis-testing-based research. It leans on designed action cycles: each four-phased cycle contains the planning of an action, as well as the implementation, observation and reflection upon it. Based on the reflection, a new cycle is then planned and executed with improvements and variations to experiment with how the changes will affect the studied action and to try out new ideas as well. Besides finding best practices, variation-makings enable observation of whether the designed actions actually create the found utilities or whether their appearance is coincidental or due advocating the participants on desired action. So, an action research is not based on standardized cycles, but generates knowledge through a spiral of unique cycles (see also Hearn et al. 2009). In YPAM, these cycles took the form of unique workshops. Furthermore, each cycle (workshop) contained multiple micro-cycles (photography assignments). As the YPAM participants were from the outset particularly interested in photography, they hardly needed encouragement to participate in photography. The critical question was rather what kind of elements, activities or practices of participatory photography can generate for instance social inclusion. As altogether 35 separate photography assignments were executed, containing similar and different aspects, their large amount exposed recurring utilities from coincidental cases.

The five YPAM photography workshops were carried out partially at different times and each workshop used the reflections of earlier workshops in their planning. So, they can be understood as a spiral of a five-cycle action research. The researchers met regularly to discuss their insights and pass them on to others. The understanding of participatory photography and the challenges of participation, social inclusion and media literacy grew through flexible experimentation during the five-cycled inquiry (see more on action research in Reason and Bradbury 2006). Due to experimentation through variations, the durations of the workshops varied from 3 days to 5 months and the content and agenda of the workshops somewhat differed in order to discover, for instance, what kind of assignment and agenda could best enhance social inclusion and multiliteracies. So, the YPAM case study on participatory photography was pragmatic and transformative in nature.

In all workshops, the basic idea was to encourage youth to take photographs of what interested them, discuss the photos together and publish selected photographs in social media (e.g., Instagram), mainstream media (e.g., a youth magazine) and a public space (e.g., library). The photographs were mainly based on self-expression, although some were published in a journalistic context. Thus, the workshops can be said to represent participatory photography. The basics of photography were introduced in the beginning and the workshops contained discussions about ethics and power issues in photography (see also e.g., Lykes 2010; Wang 2006).

In the 5-month-long workshop with Afghans, the participants photographed their surroundings and everyday life and put on a public exhibition at a library. In the youth café workshop of 1.5 months, the prompt was to photograph a societal or personal issue in which one wanted to make a difference. A journalistic text in a youth magazine and an exhibition at the youth café were published. The first workshop with girls was an

intensive 3-day summer course during which the youth photographed subjects that interested them in areas nearby the youth centre. Selected pictures were published as joint photo reportage in a youth magazine. The two other workshops with girls met once a week for about 3 months. The second girls' workshop included short photography assignments with prompts such as "Think of an adjective that is important for you and take a photo illustrating it" and "Unusual self-portrait: take a photograph representing you without showing your face". At the end of the semester, the youth centre was asked to join a regional cultural event for youth, and an art exhibition was gathered to show the photographs taken. In the third girls' workshop, youth concentrated on one big joint project of their interest. The girls wanted to make an art exhibition representing superhero and other fantasy self-portraits. The exhibition was held in a public space, at another youth centre.

In the five workshops, a large body of mainly qualitative data was gathered using mixed methods (see e.g., Cresswell 1998 regarding mixed methods). The data contains seven observation diaries that function as a kind of fieldnotes which include self-reflection on the researchers' active involvement (10–50 pages each). One of the researchers of the youth café, for example, writes about her own role in the workshop. She ponders if she is too young, too girly or too much a friend with the participants and wonders if she should be more a researcher than an instructor.

In the diaries, the researchers mainly write observations related to research questions and key themes (e.g. participation, inclusion, multiliteracies). To deepen understanding on the key themes, three youth workers were interviewed for 40–80 minutes and twenty-one youth were interviewed for 10–40 minutes each. Some youth were interviewed more than once, as they attended several workshops. All interviews were transcribed by master's students or a trusted agency and later cross-checked by the

researcher-interviewer. Most youth completed background questionnaires, and many replied later to a questionnaire about their workshop experiences. The data were coded (categorised) based on the study's key dimensions, keywords and new themes found through familiarization with related literature and a preliminary reading of the data. First, the data were coded into eight dimensions of (media) participation and social inclusion and, later, into 14 categories using key terms and themes (e.g., motivation, social interaction, empowerment, power relations, influencing). The Atlas.ti software program was used to assist in the data analysis. The double coding of the data was of value, as it revealed subtle aspects linking social inclusion, photography and migrants.

Answers to research questions are mostly found in the research diaries, which is understandable, as YPAM was a developmental study where the focus was mainly on researchers' experimentation. An action research differs somewhat from an ethnographic study, as quotations of research participants may not be significant per se but rather are notable as signs of the functionality of the experimented actions.

Therefore, the YPAM diaries do not contain much word-to-word quotation (see more on action research e.g. Reason and Bradbury 2006). For these reasons, the forthcoming analysis contains participants' quotations limitedly and, moreover, the diaries are highlighted more than interviews. In the next section, three results concerning participatory photography's ability to support the social inclusion of migrant young people are discussed: (1) photography as a visual medium, (2) photography (outdoor) excursions and (3) public photography projects facilitating and generating social inclusion.

Photography as a visual medium facilitating social inclusion

Photography was chosen as the medium for many YPAM workshops because it is currently popular among young people, and it was expected to encourage at-risk youth

including migrants to participate in the workshops, which it did. Another reason for choosing digital photography was its reasonable cost. All youth institutions approached had the financial capacity to organise a photography workshop. In fact, all YPAM participants owned a mobile phone with a camera.

Other benefits of choosing photography as the medium came up during the fieldwork. As digital photography does not require formal training, it produces quick results; one can take innumerable digital photographs and eventually gain some nice pictures (Orton 2009). A researcher of the Afghan boys' workshop, for example, writes in her diary about the first digital photos taken by the youth: "It is obvious that many of the pictures were of good quality and creative" (Research diary, workshop with boys, researcher a). Later, she and the other researcher emphasize how interesting and even creative the pictures were, although the boys did not have much experience with photography. In addition, she mentions their motivation: "They are always excited to go outside and take photographs". The other researcher stresses of the importance of the assignments not being too complex or long, because the boys have difficulties with concentration and comprehension. A long, complicated project might have also been too burdensome for some migrants lacking emotional resources (e.g., due to anxiety or post-migration depression). In all workshops, photography's ability to allow short-term assignments and quickly provide the experience of success was discovered to be beneficial. Experiencing skilfulness and to be publicly seen as competent seemed to increase their enthusiasm and courage to participate in activities (see also Bloustein 2007; Pariser, Carlos and Lalonde 2016). This in turn allowed them to experience social inclusion in a group (see also Pienimäki 2019; Pienimäki and Kotilainen 2020).

As most of the migrants had limited skills in Finnish and English (the latter also being widely spoken in Finland), the language issue could have presented a barrier to

their participation. At the Afghan boys' workshop, there was an interpreter available. However, he was absent for one meeting. One of the researchers writes: "we had no common language, but the assignments turned out well through photo examples" (Research diary, workshop with boys, researcher a). So, as a visual medium, photography offered a non-verbal way to express oneself and participate in group activities. Even with minimal introduction to digital camera techniques, the young participants were able to take some photographs. However, learning the basics of visual expression certainly improved their visual communication. Compared to photography, making a good quality film, for example, requires much more introduction and language ability, as film takes need to be edited using a film editing program, which requires working co-operatively with others (see also O'Reilly 2013, 40–41). Likewise, Marsh (2012, 107) discovered in her ethnographic study with school-based groups of young refugees and newly arrived migrants with limited language skills that a musical activity as non-verbal expression "provides a joint enterprise in which students can engage cooperatively".

As a visual medium, photography also provided an alternative way to express oneself when the experiences of the at-risk young people were too painful to verbalize or too difficult to grasp or capture in words (see also Orton 2009). For instance, one girl with psychological issues created a self-portrait as a photographic collage in which she was holding a huge, drawn smiling mouth in front of her real, photographed mouth (see Figure 1). She titled the work as "Another kind of a smile". She did not want to explain much of her work during the workshop. Later, she was not in a condition to participate in interview where she could have explained the intended meanings of her collage. At the same workshop, an African migrant girl photographed a penguin toy and attached her own eyes to it (see Figure 2). In the collage, the toy penguin was situated in a snowy

landscape, which probably represents Finland. She titled the collage “Like yourself, like you are”. However, was the just-arrived migrant girl saying that her body is the wrong kind in Finland, yet she should accept herself as she is, or was she simply saying that the cold Finnish weather is turning her into a penguin? Although both photo collages and many other photographs were impressive and touching, they are open to multiple interpretations (see also e.g., Dennis 2009), as is usual in art. Since the migrant girl’s Finnish and English skills were very limited and there was no interpreter, she was not able explain the meanings of her collage. She was a shy person, and, when asked to explain more, looked uncomfortable and embarrassed. Consequently, it was unethical to request her to explain her work.

Although photography allowed the youth to spend time together and experience inclusion in a group, the limited Finnish and English language skills available to explain the content of their photographs left then open the question of whether their visual messages were actually “heard” by others. Cabanes (2017) also discovered in his project with migrant minorities that, although migrants’ exhibition photographs contained rich narratives about their lives, locals did not fully grasp their narratives. O’Reilly (2013, 42) in turn noticed in his participatory photography project with asylum seekers that captions or accompanying text are important in this kind of work to communicate the intentions of photographers for audiences larger than the group itself. However, O’Reilly (2013, 42) argues, the need for text to accompany a picture “does not diminish the power of an image to convey meaning in a different way”. In other words, presenting self-expressive media content for an audience can still provide an impressive feeling of being able to express oneself to others, generating an experience of social inclusion and of having a voice (see also Rodríguez-Jiménez and Gifford 2010; Wilkinson 2015). Yet, the social inclusion that public photography offers as a visual

medium without accompanying talk or text is limited, as photographers may not be fully heard, or may even be misunderstood.

In photovoice projects, discussion is also needed to decide, for instance, how to advocate one's viewpoints to policy makers or what kind of (joint) final product is presented to audiences. Many such questions relate to issues of power: who decides what is presented to audiences; how, where and when things are presented; and so on. Although these decisions were explicitly made by the YPAM participants, in many instances, it was somewhat unclear if the participants fully understood the requested tasks and questions. For example, the African migrant girl was asked if she understood that the task was to create a self-portrait. After she answered, "I know it", the interviewer asked for verification. "Only partly?" The girl replied, "Yeah. It was a little bit difficult, your assignment to explain, what we were doing" (Interview, third workshop with girls). At times it was also suspected that the at-risk youth selected the pictures they assumed they were supposed to choose. As acceptance by others is particularly important to young people, their behaviour is in some degree understandable. As the above dialogue exemplifies, some had an interest in pleasing others, as they had experienced great social difficulties in life, and some wanted to behave "correctly" because they wished to fit into the group and Finnish society (see also Rodríguez-Jiménez and Gifford 2010).

A gender difference was, however, noticed; the migrant girls seemed to be more inclined to please. The researcher of the girls' workshop visited the boys' workshop after her own workshops. She described how the professional photographer at one moment strongly steered discussions and decision-making, but the boys resisted and boldly explained liking some other photograph. She comments in her diary: "If my girls had been made such a strong suggestion, they had chosen the suggested photograph"

(Research diary, visitor-researcher, workshop with boys). In many instances, when something was decided, the girls were quick to take on the suggestions of the instructors. Her diaries reveal that this issue was also discussed among instructors of the girls' workshops several times. So, diverse subtle power issues related to participatory photography need to be carefully considered while working with migrant youth.

Photography excursions creating familiarity with spaces and local culture

The explicit goal of the YPAM workshops' outdoor excursions was to provide the participants opportunities to learn to use a camera, practice self-expression and develop the skills of photographic vision. However, the excursions also provided the youth unexpected experiences, such as becoming familiar with nearby spaces and Finnish culture and thereby being a part of the surrounding localities and further society. One YPAM researcher marvels in her research diary: "Although the photography excursion began right from the corner of the youth centre, the environment seemed to interest the youth. Only a few had visited, for example, a nearby bridge or park or [a neighbourhood]" (Research diary, second workshop with girls). In all workshops, most youth liked the idea of perceiving nearby surroundings through the camera more closely than in everyday life.

A camera provided a reason to stop at everyday spaces. No by-passer considered it strange as the young participants stood still for a while, for example, on the pavement observing buildings, streets and people and experiencing these public spaces. During these moments, the youth seemed to feel at ease, as there was a purpose for their stopping. In addition, as the excursions were carried out in a group, the group itself seemed to increase their feeling of safety, facilitating a complete engagement with observing the spaces. This intentional observation of nearby surroundings appeared to

help the youth seize the spaces perceived and lived in during everyday life, and it can surely support the migrants' resettlement in a new society.

During the excursions, the young people pointed out to peers and instructors both details and new aspects of nearby spaces that they had never before noticed. However, there were a few assignments that especially promoted such observing, for instance "City treasure: take a photograph of something in your neighbourhood that others do not usually notice". Yet, as the action study project contained numerous photography assignments, the same results were noticed while photographing other tasks. Consequently, simply photographing the nearby spaces generated a new vision of the lived spaces. However, it should be noted that certain assignments, such as "City treasure", could be purposefully used to encourage intense reflection of the surroundings.

For migrant youth, close observation with a camera offered an opportunity to reflect local culture as well (see also Teixeira 2015). One young asylum seeker opened up in an interview: "It was interesting to notice how one can here photograph people on a street, it was free here and I could take photos from the street. In [home country] it is not like that" (Interview, a workshop with Afghan boys). Another asylum-seeking boy said, "With a photo, one can express one's culture and learn about Finnish culture. For example, I took a photo of a couple. They appeared to be very much in love. It was great. If in my [home country] old people would walk hand in hand, everybody would laugh" (Interview from a workshop with Afghan boys). So, photography helped the migrants recognise some customs and practices in Finnish culture. After the photography walks, joint discussions concerning the pictures taken further helped the participants to notice diverse aspects of the local culture (see also e.g., Dennis 2009; Foster-Fishman et al. 2005; Orton 2009).

Joint photography projects generating an experience of social inclusion

In the YPAM study, all participatory photography workshops included a joint project. Photography as a medium for a project proved to be suitable for at-risk youth, as their capacity to work together was more or less restricted for various reasons, particularly limited language skills and psychosocial difficulties. In photography, one can quickly learn the basics and rapidly gain many results (photographs). One can take photos alone, and with a fair amount of group work, these shots can be brought together, for instance, in a joint exhibition or a photo reportage, as in the YPAM. As mentioned earlier, making a film requires much more group work. So, photography allowed the youth to take part in group work to the extent they could manage at the time.

Producing a joint project had special value compared to merely developing and exhibiting one's individual skills. For example, gathering photographs for an exhibition encouraged discussion of the content of the photographs, which meant sharing their experiences, impressions and opinions about their new home, surroundings and life in general (see also Orton 2009). Such discussions, even when limited, appeared to form a sense of community among the group members. While asked how the photography exhibition felt, an Afghan boy, for example, replied: "It was nice to see the pictures that I had taken and then we got to choose them for the exhibition. We were together and we decided together what was a good photo" (Interview, workshop with boys). Moreover, as the creative works were visual (photographs), inability to take part in these conversations did not mean exclusion from the joint project. Everyone could experience belonging to a group, a group effort and group ownership of an exhibition.

Creating in a public exhibition generated ambition in many participants to exhibit good work (see also Wilkinson 2015) and, surprisingly, a wish to demonstrate that they are doing well in Finland. Organising the exhibitions inspired the participants

to think about what they wanted to tell other people about their lives, and sharing their lives was clearly important to them. When asked in an interview why exhibiting their photographs to others was important, one asylum-seeking boy answered, “We had a project lasting for a half a year, and it was important to show others what we accomplished. It is important that others [see] that what kind of life we have here” (Interview, workshop with Afghan boys). Another boy had similar comments about the public exhibition: “I thought that it tells Finns about us, that we don’t live at a camp. It tells about our daily life. Now I have familiarized better with Finland and it feels that I can do well and study” (Interview, a workshop with Afghan boys). This sharing of their experiences with the larger community by exhibiting their photographs in open forums (e.g., library, youth houses, online) gave them, besides a voice, an opportunity to experience belonging in the society to a greater extent.

These citations also reveal that the young asylum seekers valued the opportunity to inform other people (mainly Finns) that they are going to do well in the country. Feeling pressure to be or become a good citizen is common among asylum-seekers and refugees (Kuusisto and Tuominen, 2019). So, describing one’s well-doing appeared to enable the YPAM participants to experience interpersonal acceptance, or at least the prospect of it, by local people. The photography projects also allowed them to be recognized as skilful and competent, generating empowerment and an experience of social inclusion in the sense Rose, Daiches and Potier (2011) suggest. For example, one boy said in an interview, “At first, I could not take good pictures and now I’ve taken photographs and now everyone can see them. It is a good feeling. I have accomplished something”. Being recognized for one’s skills may be important for them because migrants are represented in public media in a narrow role, for example, as a model citizen, a victim, or a threat (e.g., Kuusisto and Tuominen, 2019).

The situations in which migrants could interact with local people (e.g., exhibition openings) could have been, however, more than just opportunities to inform others about their lives. These interactions could have been guided towards reflexive dialogues with local people, such as sharing cultural customs on both sides, identifying one's prejudices and discovering similarities in other people's life experiences (see on transcultural competences in Guilherme and Dietz 2015; Koponen and Pienimäki 2019). As the YPAM study was intended to primarily enhance multiliteracies and media participation, provoking transcultural dialogue with local people was not considered in planning the workshops.

Concluding discussion

In the YPAM study, a voice offered by participatory photography turned out to be a significant aspect of social inclusion, as in numerous other studies (e.g., Canabes 2017; Dreher 2012; Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler III 2014; O'Reilly 2013; Singhal et al. 2007; Wang and Burris 1997). As a quickly-learned visual medium, digital photography enabled the migrant youth to express their thoughts and experiences non-verbally and alternatively when their language skills were limited or they had psychosocial difficulties. Publicity about the joint projects gave them an opportunity to share their experiences with a community larger than the group itself and, besides having a public voice, to experience belonging to society. Attending a photography workshop did not only provide them experiences of being skilful and competent but also gave them an experience of being publicly seen as such (see also Aldridge 2016).

There were noted some critical remarks on photographs appearing without an explanatory talk or text, that is, "photography's inability to fix meanings with finality" as Cabanes (2017, 33, 43) expresses it. This fact leaves open the question of if the migrants were actually heard. For social inclusion in the sense Rose, Daiches and Potier

(2011) suggest, it is not only important to be able to speak up but also to be understood and heard by others. Dreher (2012, 158) calls for a dynamic conception of voice, including a communicative dimension of speaking and listening, in order to guarantee “effective strategies for media and social inclusion”. She stresses, by referring to Couldry (2010), that a voice does not really matter if it does not have an impact on decision-making or policy (see also Cabanes 2017). A voice needs to be associated with political listening, she claims (2012). Although political advocacy is frequently mentioned as a goal and utility in participatory photography projects (e.g., Mayfield-Johnson, Rachal and Butler III 2014; O’Brien and Moules 2007; Singhal et al. 2007; Wang 2006; Wang and Burris 1997), listening is rarely fully analysed.

On the other hand, public speaking that precedes political listening can bring risks, for example for refugees seeking asylum, as their location may be exposed. As re-telling one’s story several times can transform an asylum seekers’ story, it could harm the asylum process. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) also bring up that participatory photography can cause harm, resentment and difficulties for participants by exposing sensitive facts or presenting them in a false light (see also Prins 2010). In addition, Kaukko and Wernersjö (2016) point out that overly high expectations of minor refugees, such as requiring formal participation in society, may diminish their willingness to take on responsibilities later in their lives. Consequently, pursuing social inclusion as informal, interpersonal acceptance by others (Rose, Daiches and Potier 2011) may be more appropriate for newly arrived young migrants than, for instance, provoking them to debate publicly on sensitive social issues. However, since publicity also has empowering effects, it should be further examined.

There are also other aspects to listening in participatory photography. In the YPAM study, it was noticed that the diasporic voices of migrant youth may not be

heard if workshop instructors are not sensitive enough to the effects of subtle power issues. Besides realising aspects of power and being aware that participants may be living through delicate phases of transitions, the task is to carefully listen to migrant youth's utterances and voices even if only a few words are spoken. Without such sensitivities, the workshops can even become anti-empowering for vulnerable people (e.g., Savolainen 2009). Consequently, participatory photography should not be undertaken casually with at-risk participants. Workshop instructors, such as artists, should learn the basic factors in the empowerment process and the nature of power issues through qualified training.

Besides a need for more theorising on listening in participatory photography, attention needs to be paid to what the sociality of participatory photography projects could offer for social inclusion of at-risk migrants. Pienimäki (2019) claims that with at-risk youth emphasis needs to be put more on the socio-cultural aspects of media participation than on provoking them to influence public politics. She (2018; 2020) stresses that the at-risk youth need to first experience a friendly atmosphere, that is to feel welcomed in a society, and to have a motivation and belief in participating in a group and society before public voice and active citizenry can arise. In the YPAM study, digital photography enabled the young migrants to spend time together and take part in a group effort to the extent they could handle it at the moment. Visualizing their impressions, thoughts and experiences through photography and creating a joint project gave them an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions about the new culture and everyday life in it. Showing their photographs and discussing them generated a spirit of community and an informal, interpersonal acceptance by peers that is especially important for young people.

While analysing YPAM data, it became clear that certain aspects of sociality could have been promoted further. Besides a voice, the publishing of photographs, such as in the exhibitions, could have offered the migrant youth a place to interact, not only with the Finnish youth of the workshops, but also with local and online audiences. There a need for further study on participatory photography's ability to enhance transcultural interaction among migrants and locals and so generate cross-cultural friendships and experiences of social inclusion, such as kindness, respect, and acceptance by others (for more on transculturalism, see Guilherme and Dietz 2015). Such friendships would be valuable, especially for migrants who often lack local friends (e.g., Kivijärvi 2015). Cabanes (2017) states that, besides migrants speaking and being heard, participatory photography should encourage migrants to listen after being heard. Photography projects could allow "different cultural groups to refine their ability to 'listen across difference'", he (2017, 43) posits, stressing listening as a part of intercultural dialogue.

However, facilitating transcultural dialogue in and through self-expressive work or art requires that an artist-instructor comprehends a young person as a multifaceted being with many roles, statuses and features, including cultural aspects, and possesses cultural knowledge and sensitivity to the transcultural aspects of living. This implies involving new study content in art schools. Building transcultural competences for artists and organizing such workshops would be worth a try, as innovative, artistic means of provoking sensible transcultural dialogue among refugees and newly-arrived migrants are welcome.

The YPAM study opened yet another aspect of social inclusion. The outdoor excursions in the photography workshops helped the migrant youth to become familiar with new spaces and surroundings, which in turn supported their social inclusion in the

new localities and in further society. Photography functioned as an excuse to attentively observe nearby spaces and local culture. This aspect of spatiality in participatory photography supporting social inclusion is well worth more research.

To conclude, the YPAM study confirms that participatory photography in voluntary-based youth work activities can provide experiences of social inclusion for migrant youth. Besides a voice, it can provide experiences of informal, interpersonal acceptance, by being perceived as a skilful, competent person and by belonging to a group and a society. In addition, it can facilitate social inclusion through familiarization with new spaces and local culture. Whether participatory photography could also be utilised in standard acculturation programs and schools to support social inclusion should be investigated in future studies. Photography is, however, an advisable medium for such efforts, especially with young people, as it is popular among them. Furthermore, the YPAM study suggests the need to experiment and theorise about participatory photography as a facilitator of social inclusion from the perspectives of listening, transcultural interaction and spatiality.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2.