Research Organisation

The Finnish Youth Research Society was established by the Ministry of Education in 1988 to promote cross-disciplinary youth research and scholarly co-operation, and also to disseminate information about this activity. The Society offers a forum for co-operation between research centres, youth researchers and universities. It publishes a quarterly called Nuorisotutkimus (Youth Research), which reviews youth research and organises yearly training courses for post-graduate researchers, and both national and international research seminars for the researchers, youth policy makers and administrators.

The research themes of the partners in the project have focused on different aspects of the lives of young people.

- Dr. Walter Bien (Deutches Jugendinstitut) has specialised in the study of issues relating to youth and the family.
- Professor Lothar Lappe (Deutches Jugendinstitut) has focused on employment and labour markets for young people.
- Docent Dr. Fjalar Finnäs and researcher Sonja Norrgård (Åbo Akademi University) have their research emphasis on the living conditions of Swedish-speaking young people in Finland.
- Researcher Dr. Pia Nyman-Kurkiala (Åbo Akademi University) has focused on the cultural identity of Finland’s Swedish-speaking young people.
- Dr. Peter Waara (University of Umeå), conversely, has researched the cultural identity of Finnish-speaking young people in rural Sweden.
- Docent Dr. Helve (University of Helsinki) has specialised in research into the attitudes, values and changing world views of Finnish young people.
- Professor Dr. Carmen Lecardi and researcher Walter Greco (University of Milan) have recently studied the living conditions of Italian young people and especially youth cultures and cultural politics.
- Dr. Jüri Saarniit and professor Dr. Paul Kenkmann (Tartu University) have studied the problems of Estonian young people in the period of social transition and changes in their value orientations.
Research Director / Co-ordinator

Dr. Helena Helve, Docent (Associate Professor) in Helsinki University and President of the Finnish Youth Research Society, co-ordinator of this project. She has directed the Youth Research 2000 programme. For over two decades her primary research topics have been longitudinal studies of the values and world views of young people (Helve 1993, 1996, 1997). Since 1998 she has been the Nordic research co-ordinator in Nordic Youth Research Information Network NYRI.

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Research Partner

- Dr. Fjalar Finnäs, research director at the Finnish-Swedish Social Science Institute at Åbo Academy, has researched issues concerning young people in both rural and urban areas in Finland. Together with his colleague, Dr. Pia Nyman-Kurkiala, he participated in the two planning seminars setting up this comparative research. Junior researcher Sonja Norrgård from Vasa started gathering data for the project in 1997.

- Senior Researcher Dr. Paul Kenkmann and Senior Researcher Jüri Saarniit from Tartu University, Department of Sociology, have been involved in various empirical projects, including longitudinal studies of educational cohorts, as well as the monitoring of basic social characteristics and value orientations among the primary categories of Estonian young people.

- Professor Carmen Leccardi, Dept. of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milan-Bicocca, has taught for close to a decade (1985-1994) in Calabria University. There she carried out various research projects concerning young people, with special attention to gender roles and cultural orientations. She has contributed data for secondary analysis in this comparative research in consultation with Professor Pierro Fantozzi from Calabria University. Junior researcher Walter Greco from Calabria University has also been as a researcher of this project.

- Professor Dr. Lothar Lappe, head of the Youth and Work Department of the German Youth Institute (DJI), and his colleague, Dr. Walter Bien, have specifically investigated East German young people’s possibilities in the labour market. DJI is a member of many international research networks dealing with the issue of the living conditions of young people. DJI also maintains various data bases (family, youth, youth services, regional data etc.).

- Dr. Peter Waara from Luleå University, the Swedish project
co-ordinator and research partner, wrote his doctoral thesis, *Ungdom i gränsland* (1996) [Youth on the Border] about the exclusion of rural young people in Northern Sweden. He has participated in the planning seminar for this project on rural young people. His contribution to this research project is based on three separate studies in which he has been involved.

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**Key Words**
- Rural dimension / urban dimension
- Living conditions
- Values and future expectations
- Marginalisation / social exclusion
- Unemployment
- Local networks
- Youth work (youth cooperation)
- Youth policy
- Quantitative and qualitative methods

**Research subject**
Living conditions of rural young people (aged 16 - 25) in Finland (Vasa county), in Italy (Calabria), in Germany (Brandenburg), in Sweden (Norrbotten and Västerbotten region) and in Estonia.

**Methodology / Methods**
1. A comparative analysis of the living conditions of young people, their educational and employment situation, participation, future perspectives, attitudes and value orientations in the rural areas of each participating country.
2. A secondary analysis of already existing statistical and survey data.
3. A joint research methodology based on quantitative and qualitative methods including ethnographies.

**Abstract**

This comparative research explores the living conditions and social participation of young people in rural areas of five European countries (Finland, Sweden, Italy, Germany and Estonia), in a situation of risk of social exclusion. The data refer to living standards, housing, education, vocational training, labour integration, health, political and cultural participation, migration and other demographic facts for youngsters between 16 and 25 years old. The joint research methodology was based on quantitative and qualitative methods including ethnographies, comparative analysis, and a secondary analysis of statistical and survey data.

Common phenomena are found at European level, however the study highlights the importance of taking regional, cultural and ethnic specificity into account when designing development policies for these areas.

**Initial Research Objectives**

The main objective was to study the living conditions and participation of young people, especially the marginalisation and exclusion of young people in rural areas. Another objective was to compare youth work in these countries at different levels of economic and social development. Subsidiary objectives were:

1) Comparative analysis of regional economic and social infrastructure as the environment of young people.
2) Comparative analysis of youth's living conditions, including educational and employment situation (supply of higher education and labour markets), integration into work, mobility, participation, as well as leisure activities, future perspectives, attitudes, value orientations and cultural identities and collective representations of youth on a cultural level in terms of the framework defined by gender, class and ethnicity.
3) Comparative analysis of the local networks of youth work (youth workers, youth organisations, unions, etc.) and the methods and forms of youth work.
The aim of the comparative study was to explore the nature of rural communities, the problems facing young people, and a range of approaches for working with young people in the rural areas of five countries in North, South, Central and Eastern Europe.

The aim of the multidisciplinary project was a) to analyse the results in terms of a new framework for youth policy at local, national and European levels; b) to develop new methods for comparative youth research and c) to identify new strategies for youth work in the countries that were studied.

**Changes in the Initial Research Objectives**

The project did not avail of sufficient time to analyse results of new strategies for youth work in the studied countries. It would be useful to continue analysis of the results in this framework.

Our experience of comparative research has shown how difficult it is to agree on the subject of a comparative method including joint treatment of empirical materials. Therefore it was very difficult to decide on the most adequate approach to the qualitative part of the comparison.

**Main Research Results**

The study shows how the maturation of young people has different national characteristics, which need to be recognised in the different European economic and policy initiatives directed towards them. In addition to national differences, the prospects for young people living in the same country vary according to whether they live in an urban or rural environment. Young people’s ethnic and/or linguistic backgrounds are also significant factors.

This comparative research shows that without information about the unique conditions and challenges that young people face in various parts of this continent, it is impossible to implement Europe-wide youth policies or youth work effectively. Regional "peripheral conditions" and young people's own starting points must be taken into consideration in European youth politics.

**Estonian young people**

During the Soviet period, central planning and the influx of industrial workers speeded up the urbanisation process more so than in other Soviet republics. However, since the re-establishment of independence in 1991, this trend has been reversed somewhat – urban populations have declined slightly, and non-Estonian minorities have shrunk.

Estonia’s Russian-speaking students have noticeably more Soviet residual elements in their social and political ideologies than their Estonian-speaking counterparts, which can be seen for example in their lower levels of participation in the labour market; (ethnically and linguistically). Since independence, however, these differences have been shrinking: non-Estonians have adjusted more to market realities, and there is a growing level of support for a more socialised form of market economy among the Estonians themselves.

The living conditions in Estonia’s countryside differ considerably from those in the cities. Average living space increased somewhat between 1992 and 1997, but a portion of the rural population has had to move into more primitive housing due to the breakdown of the collective farm system and the economic stress that this caused.
The economic conditions of young people are clearly weaker in rural homes. Nor have they improved appreciably during the course of the nineties. Unemployment rates are considerably higher than in the cities, and the level of public services available fluctuates widely from region to region.

Nearly a third of Estonians under the age of 30 are at risk of marginalisation. The viewpoint of rural young people is clearly more pessimistic than that of their urban counterparts. The task of national and regional youth politics should thus be to ensure that young people from different social and regional backgrounds will be able to find similarly satisfying opportunities for choice in education and employment.

**Young people in Vasa county (Finland)**

Former Vasa county has undergone significant structural changes. Migration from the countryside to the cities has been quite heavy, especially among the well educated. Only about a tenth of the region’s young people continue in direct contact with agriculture. In terms of population structure however, the area remains decisively rural. Bilingualism gives this region its own special character; the representatives of each language group are very similar to each other these days, though some social and cultural differences remain. For example Swedish-speaking girls are far more interested in moving across the gulf to live and work in Sweden than their Finnish-speaking counterparts.

As we found in our research the problems confronting rural youth in former Vasa county are in many ways the same as those found elsewhere in Europe. Youth unemployment continues to be high and the use of intoxicants has increased. Many feel forced to move to the cities. There is also a shortage of moderately priced housing, which limits young people’s ability to establish their own homes in their native district.

The living conditions for young people in this region are comparable to those in most other rural areas of Finland and Europe. Positive trends can be seen. Young people are highly motivated to achieve a good education. Both genders have practically the same opportunities in education and future employment. The labour market situation is improving, partially as the result of youth workshops and improvements in the apprenticeship system. There is also a strong tradition of entrepreneurship in this part of Ostro-Botnia, though young people still need more training and guidance to make it work for them.

In the 90s high-tech electronics and information technology have increasingly entered young people’s lives. Internationalisation has strengthened, especially since Finland became a member of the EU. How these and many other factors will affect the lives of rural young people in the future remains to be seen.

**Young people in Brandenburg (Germany)**

Brandenburg is Germany’s second most sparsely populated state. The percentage of young people is slightly higher here than in the country as a whole. For its size this area has experienced dramatic changes since German reunification. A major portion of Brandenburg’s industrial jobs – more than half in some fields – have vanished. Compared to Western Germany, unemployment is very high, the purchasing power of the average resident is much lower and housing is poorer. On the other hand, the population is more highly educated than in the west.

These living conditions are reflected in the values of Brandenburg’s young people: for 95% of these 14-18 years old, the most important thing in life is a good job; and only 23% are interested in active participation in politics. The emphasis of official action for overcoming youth unemployment is on encouraging young people to have a positive attitude towards finding work. Various forms of mobility assistance
are offered to motivate young people to look for work in other parts of the country. Encouraging entrepreneurship plays a lesser role, since the vast majority of young people do not have sufficient investment capital available. The projects led by the unemployed themselves play an important role, "tailored" as they are to the needs of specific groups. These projects include, e.g., worker substitutes, job rotation, international trainee exchange programmes, and subsidised enterprises run by and catering to young people. Youth workshops have also been established.

**Young people in Calabria (Italy)**

Calabria, situated on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula, is one of the most under-developed areas of Italy. The region has traditionally been predominantly agricultural, but agriculture currently employs only about one sixth of the population. Emigration from Calabria has been a continuous trend throughout the entire post-war period. With the help of considerable state investment and support the standard of living has risen to near the national average. The public sector is the most significant employer; the private sector has remained small. Hope has been placed in tourism, but so far its significance as a source of employment has been lower than in other parts of Italy.

Regardless of the growth in consumer spending in the region and improved connections with the outside world, Calabria’s old social structures have remained more or less unchanged. The most important social institution is the family, which maintains the order and social integration of the community. Prior to marriage, a young person’s, especially a young woman’s, economic and personal independence is considerably more limited than in northern Italy. Young people are very rarely openly opposed to their parents.

One inevitable and distinctive feature of the life of virtually every young Calabrian is "clientelism". In earlier days a person’s success depended on relationships with the region’s land-owning nobility. These days, as the public sector is the region’s primary employer and guarantor of well-being, it is important to be on good terms with local officials and political officers. The depth and security of these relationships determines, for example, whether a young person will achieve a position in the public service or a small business development grant to start his or her own company. Practically the only alternative to this "clientelism" is to move away from the region.

The level of education in Calabria has risen considerably in recent decades. Since 1951 illiteracy has been cut in half, from nearly 40% to around 20%, and the number of those who have completed at least primary education has grown to over ten times what it was a generation ago. Education is, for many young people, the road to greater independence. The parents value their children’s education, in that it makes it possible for the whole family to rise to a higher social class.

**Conclusions from the Main Research Results**

Across Europe from North to South we find similarities but also differences in the living conditions of rural young people. In the welfare states of northern Europe, in Finland and Sweden, young people share a sense of mobility. The well-educated especially tend to leave their home districts in search of better work opportunities. Unemployment runs high both in Finland in the Vasa area and in Sweden in the Norrbotten and Västerbotten areas. In both countries, young women are more anxious to leave their rural villages than young men. If we want to preserve young people’s faith in their prospects for a productive life in the sparsely populated areas of the North, we must find ways to rebuild the employment structure of these districts. Developing tourism, for example, could be one possibility. Technological advances also make it possible to promote working from home.
The young people of Estonia and Brandenburg share a sense of change brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union. They share these experiences with young people from all former communist countries. Estonian youth are adjusting better than the East Germans to the rapid changes in employment structure that accompany the transition to a market economy. However, the position of Estonia’s Russian-speaking young people weakened when the country became independent. Improvement of their living conditions and resolution of the national language question will still require special measures. Immediately after independence, well-educated young people took over the leading positions in politics and commerce in Estonia because they were seen as ideologically untarnished. The risk remains though that those now in power will not be retiring and making room for "new blood" for another 30-40 years, creating potential problems in finding places for the next generation of Estonian young people.

In southern Italy, the young person still turns to the family for help in finding work. There, rural young people must adapt to the system of "clientelism" which has proven difficult to dismantle. This covers employment, social security, etc.. Conflicts between poor southern Italy and rich northern Italy thus seem rather inevitable.

**Main contribution to the objectives of the YFE Programme**

The research findings have been applied in the youth policy and practical youth work of the participating rural areas. The results of the study are also relevant for local, national and European Union youth policy e.g., inequalities between rural and urban young people and exclusion processes of different kinds of rural young people based on gender and ethnicity. Such information is also important for more general evaluation of the YFE Programme. The study gives sustenance to policy initiatives designed to combat the social exclusion of young people in rural areas. These include more effective education and training supported by advice and counselling about local opportunities and improved youth services and facilities. Opportunities have been identified for developing youth enterprise and rural entrepreneurial skills tailored to local needs.

The aim has been to help young people to become more active in participating in the formulation of youth policy and decision making at the local, community, national and European level.