

“Young people and urban landscapes in transition: an experiment with research, governance, and everyday life”¹

In our last talk, Frederik Aagaard Hagemann talked about the action research project he is engaged in as part of his PhD. The project involves the participation of young people as co-researchers who will participate in defining what kind of visions, problem definitions and values are needed to make Malmö city sustainable. The research is located in the city of Malmö in two different neighbourhoods where transitions to greener environments are taking place.

Fundamentally, an action research process strives to co-produce changes in reality and document — together with actors—how does it happen. Hence the aim of the project is to involve young people in reflecting about the different sort of current crisis and tendencies in relation to nature and the environment, positioning them in a place of transition and transformation, considering that young people today are the ones that are going to live with the consequences of these crisis in the near future.

How to experiment together with young people in planning for a more sustainable landscape?



Critics of current planning perspectives identify two main problems: i) that projects are usually implemented in a top down fashion and ii) that projects fail to connect their approaches to broader societal issues. As we consider young people’s participation in landscape planning it seems that these two problems are interrelated and related to governance structures that are not specifically designed to foster young peoples’ participation in traditional planning. By focusing on the young peoples’ “Lifeworld”, i.e.: how do young people experience problems in their everyday life, the project strives to address these two problems. Placing lifeworld as a starting point, the project aims for young people to deeply explore together, how their lifeworld can develop into expectations and ideas or even dreams, about the possible ideal future and the means to get there.

¹ Compiled by Geovana Mercado and Frederik Aagaard Hagemann, SLU - LAPF- Landscape Governance and Management Group and Landscape Planning Group.

All pictures are for illustrative purposes, first picture taken by Geovana Mercado, second picture from: <https://www.n55.dk/>

A free space for self and co-reflection

The experiment embraces the notion of free space: providing a space for young people to take a step back from the everyday practices in their lives, and to try to think freely about how they would like to live.

Practitioners and policy makers will be part of this space too, and it is expected that they can encounter young people in a different, more relaxed and creative way, and somehow get closer to the real life users of the services they develop and provide. This in turn might impact their own daily work and make it more meaningful.



Young people as co-researchers in governance solutions

Currently the experimental phase has started where 30 young people have agreed to participate! In the next months they will engage in analysing the urban landscape they inhabit, they will map, identify and rate what kind of facilities, services, infrastructures and places exist for young people in their neighbourhoods, and take that as way to start to combine social and emotional issues they face in their everyday lives. Then they will enter a critique phase when talking about what concrete problems they experience in their real lives and then talk about a utopian vision about how the best version of the future could look like. After this, it is expected that they come up with different scenarios and/or project formulations based on the visions they embrace.

“One of the features about the experiment that is most important for the young participants is that anyone can be part of the experiment, it is very important for them to feel free to bring a friend, for example.”

We foresee very interesting results from this project! We look forward to what kind of suggested governance structures emerge from the young people’s participation in action research!