Citizen Science and Co-Research Methodology with Young People

Päivi Honkatukia, paivi.honkatukia@tuni.fi
Tiina Rättilä, tiina.rattila@tuni.fi

Method Festival 2019 27.-29.8.2019, Tampere University
ALL-YOUTH

All Youth Want To Rule Their World Research Project 2018–2023

ALL-YOUTH – All youth want to rule their world is a multidisciplinary research project which explores the capacities of young people (aged between 16 and 25) and the obstacles that hamper their engagement with society. We also explore the visions of youth regarding sustainable future, growth and well-being.

The main goal of the project is to create possibilities and to enable young people to participate in making their own communities and the society. Our key ideas for sustainable growth are responsive governance and rule of law, digital innovation and sustainable development interventions such as bioeconomy.
What is citizen science?

“Science is our most reliable system of gaining new knowledge and **citizen science** is the public involvement in inquiry and discovery of new scientific knowledge. A citizen science project can involve one person or millions of people collaborating towards a common goal. Typically, public involvement is in data collection, analysis, [and]or reporting.

Here are four common features of citizen science practice: (a) anyone can participate, (b) participants use the same protocol so data can be combined and be high quality, (c) data can help real scientists come to real conclusions, and (d) a wide community of scientists and volunteers work together and share data to which the public, as well as scientists, have access. ([theoryandpractice.citizenscienceassociation.org/articles/10.5334/cstp.51/](theoryandpractice.citizenscienceassociation.org/articles/10.5334/cstp.51/) > Citizen Science: Theory and Practice)

The fields that citizen science advances are diverse: ecology, astronomy, medicine, computer science, statistics, psychology, genetics, engineering and many more. The massive collaborations that can occur through citizen science allow investigations at continental and global scales and across decades—leading to discovery that a single scientist could never achieve on their own.

"Amateur science," "crowdsourced science," “volunteer monitoring,” and "public participation in scientific research” are also common aliases for citizen science.”
Why towards co-research methodology?

- Besides being humanely and ethically important to learn about the lives and experiences of the people who are in the margins of society, such interest challenges the paradigms of the 'normal science' which has traditionally viewed research participants as 'objects' to be studied from a distance through standardised research methods, in order to produce value free or objective knowledge. (Barber 2009; Kallio et al. 2015; Smith 1987)

- In ALL-YOUTH (WP2), following ideas from the recent critical youth studies methodology (Allaste & Tiidenberg 2015; Pyry 2012; Rytioja & Kallio 2018), we have wanted to turn this approach on its head and start from the everyday life and experiences of the participants themselves when building the research constellation, designing our research questions and choosing research methods. Through the whole process, we work together with our co-researchers.

"Participants as co-researchers refers to a participatory method of research that situates participants as joint contributors and investigators to the findings of a research project. This qualitative research approach validates and privileges the experiences of participants, making them experts and therefore co-researchers and collaborators in the process of gathering and interpreting data."

(http://phd.richardmillwood.net/en/bibliography/boylorn-2008)
Standpoint epistemology

- **Strong objectivity** (Harding 1986) as responsible knowledge production: Science that openly acknowledges its interests is less biased compared to the knowledge production which does not reflect its interests. Strong objectivity means strong reflexivity, "knowing about your knowing" (Ronkainen 2000, 172)

- **Positioning**: "We can know something about the reality, but this knowledge is always local and part of the local system of knowledge, way of knowing and interests. If we want to become better knowers, know what we know and what are the limits of our knowing, we need to have courage to commit, position ourselves and settle" (Ronkainen 2000, 182; our translation from Finnish)
The idea of “institutional ethnography”:

“The ethnographic process of inquiry is one exploring further into those social, political, and economic processes that organize and determine the actual bases of experience of those whose side we have taken. Taking sides, beginning from some position with some concern, does not destroy the ‘scientific’ character of the enterprise. Detachment is not a condition for science. Indeed, in sociology there is no possibility of detachment. We must begin with some position in the world. The method recommended here is one that frankly begins from somewhere. The specification of that somewhere and the explication of the relations to which it is articulated, including the ideological discourse, are the aim of inquiry” (Smith 1987, 177; see also Hart & McKinnon 2010).
Principles of co-research in ALL-YOUTH – social research methodology on its head

A. Acknowledging that we know nothing about the lives of the young people we are about to study to begin with

B. Getting to know who our young research partners are: “Let’s go and hang out!”
   • Building trust is crucial

C. Starting from the everyday life of the youth > mapping their experiences and questions important to them

D. Planning and executing the research process together > the youth are actively involved in deciding on what to study and how

E. Collecting and analysing data together

F. Writing together (blogs, reports, articles) to the extent that is possible (e.g. 
   http://www.allyouthstn.fi/tyote_on-tehtava-
   maahanmuutajanuorten-ajatuksia-suomalaisten-
   työelämästä)

The goal is to try to understand and conceptualise the wider social contexts and power relations impacting the lives of the youth, together with the research partners.

See also: 
https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/Young+Edinburgh
+Action/1_etof4nna
Examples of ALL-YOUTH co-research processes

1. VALOMO project, Refugee Youth Support, Finland (Pakolaisnuorten tuki ry.) 2018-2019

• “Exploring the possibilities of art methods in promoting young refugees’ wellbeing and social inclusion”

Photo: Kaisla Jousimo
2. Kölvi research team, Refugee Youth Support, Finland (Pakolaisnuorten tuki ry.) 2018-2019

• "Young refugees’ experiences and dreams related to the labour market and working life in Finland"

Photo: Tiina Rättilä
3. Root’s - Occupational and educational support service workshop for young people (= starttipaja), the city of Ikaalinen (2018-2019)

- "Re-designing youth services in the city of Ikaalinen from the perspective of young people"

Photo: Jarmo Rinne
“Interviewing Muslim women as a Muslim woman was an interesting experience for me. Almost all the interviewees were open to my questions and responded willingly. According to my experience they felt that they were telling their life story to me as a person who has faced the same challenges and who understands their religious and cultural traditions. I identified emotions and experienced that there were many similarities between the women's life worlds and mine, especially with regards to hijab practices and the meanings of Islam after terrorist attacks. The atmosphere was confidential and unjudgemental. Therefore the women were able to express their fears and their feelings of insecurity as Muslim women using veil in Finland - without thinking that they are categorised as suppressed, backward, and radicalised. In a nutshell, my experience [of the interviews] was valorising and it strengthened my view that my personal experiences are also wider questions.”

Fath E Mubeen, ALL-YOUTH co-researcher, University of Eastern Finland

(See: Tokola etc. 2019)
Observations and critical self-reflections

• Engaging in co-research methodology requires time, patience and ethical sensitivity > in our case collaboration with institutional partners has helped

• Everybody will (probably) not participate actively, and that is okay!

• Young people generally value that they are approached without a pre-set top-down agenda

• Co-research has everything to do with interaction! > we as researchers play a part in it, too, contributing to the process and the results

• ”Have we really started from the interests of those researched, and worked on equal status?” > prepare yourself for critical self-reflection as an essential part of the research process

• Sometimes you mess up – but never mind! > it is an inevitable aspect of doing field (or any…) research
References

Thank You!