

# Challenges and opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move\*

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## Abstract

This article explores different challenges and opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move with a focus on ethics, context and methods. It addresses concerns raised by research with minors and individuals who are undocumented, and looks at the implications of migratory landscapes and particular field sites. Complexities of conducting research in a context marked by transience are also examined. Moreover, two approaches, ethnographic fieldwork and creative arts-based methods, are explored for their potential in such settings. It is maintained that challenges and opportunities arising when researching the lives of young people on the move can be best addressed with an integrated approach that employs participant-centred methods and that is exploratory, flexible and sensitive.

## Introduction

This article explores different challenges and opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move with a particular focus on ethics, context and methods.<sup>1</sup> Some of these challenges and opportunities are not confined specifically to young people on the move, but relate to research with young people in general and people on the move more broadly. However, young age and mobility seen together raise additional concerns. Carrying out research with minors entails additional ethical implications. Some of these aspects are further complicated by the situations that these young people may find themselves in while being on the move, for instance, by migrating irregularly and being outside protection structures. In order to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities in researching

the lives of young people on the move, address both overarching concerns and relate it to the fieldwork I conducted among young Afghans for my PhD. My thesis is a multi-sited study based on life history and semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and creative arts-based methods. It explores the experiences of the journeys and coping strategies of Afghan young people (aged 15 to 24) on the move towards Europe, with a specific focus on those seeking onward movement from Greece and those who have sought asylum in Norway (Lønning 2018b).

Young people on the move towards and within Europe make up a heterogeneous population. While Afghans have represented a particularly large group of unaccompanied and separated minors, known for often having long and difficult journeys, there are many other groups of young people who share similar experiences of being on the move. This article focuses on this broader

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population: young people who are pursuing migratory projects across territories where they have an insecure or irregular legal status, either being undocumented or with an initial registration but no legal standing. Such a situation leaves them vulnerable to incarceration and detention, and is often accompanied by precarious living and working conditions. The population defined as young people both includes unaccompanied and separated minors and young adults. While unaccompanied and separated minors represent a discrete group in policy and often also in research, there are several reasons why a broader focus on young people may be helpful within the migratory context. Minors and young adults migrate alongside each other. Furthermore, they may be part of the same peer groups during fragmented journeys (Lønning 2018b). Whether you are defined as a minor or as an adult in encounters with formal structures has great implications, but age is often fluid and contested in the process of irregular migration. This both results from the practices of states and protection structures, and from the strategies of the young people. Such a reality means that researchers need to rethink strategic sampling frames such as children under the age of 16, minors and so forth, as they may take on another significance in this context.

In this article, I focus on aspects which I found particularly challenging and those I saw as providing great opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move, as I think they may better help illuminate the topic. The article is divided into four parts. The first part addresses some overarching concerns related to research with people defined as minors and as undocumented. The second part explores the implications of migratory contexts in creating the field, and compares two of my field sites in

Greece. The third part examines some implications of undertaking research in a context marked by transience. And the fourth part discusses the potential of ethnographic fieldwork and creative arts-based methods in such a research setting. Researching the lives of young people on the move represents a complex process that raises numerous dilemmas. This article argues that the challenges and opportunities such research presents can be best addressed with an integrated approach which is exploratory, flexible and sensitive, and that employs participant-centred methods. In other words, an approach that combines various methods that engage and, accordingly, tunes into the different ways participants mediate and express their experiences; and that, furthermore, responds to the realities and particular context(s) in which the research takes place and is reflexive.

## **Young age, mobility and undocumentedness**

In researching the lives of young people on the move, it is crucial to approach the young people as experts in their own lives. However, engaging young people in research can raise challenges both in terms of access and regarding ethics. When research involves minors, there are additional ethical concerns that need to be addressed. These are not unique to minors on the move but relate to all minors. These concerns may, nonetheless, be complicated in research with unaccompanied or separated minors on the move, if ethical review boards require that informed consent be obtained from parents or respective guardians. This is generally the case when those aged 15 and under partake in research. Additional challenges are, moreover, raised by undertaking research with people who are

undocumented. Düvell, Triandafyllidou and Vollmer (2010) raise our attention to the fact that there are no specialized ethical framework that addresses the ethical implications of irregular migration research. Furthermore, Vervliet, Rousseau, Broekaert and Derluyn (2015) note that little concern has been devoted to the specific ethical challenges of conducting research with unaccompanied and separated minors.

When researching sensitive topics involving vulnerable populations 'our professional responsibilities lie in...informing society about the phenomenon in a manner that does not contribute to discrimination against these groups but, instead, improves understanding' (Düvell et al. 2010: 229). This may be even more important when our research includes people engaging in irregular activities, as may be the case for young people on the move as they pursue their migration projects irregularly for lack of regular migration channels despite efforts to flee persecution, war, violence or conflict. In addition, undocumented persons may be particularly difficult to recruit for research both in terms of access and regarding willingness to engage. Issues related to informed consent and asymmetrical power relations are also complicated in a setting where individuals are in a particularly vulnerable situation, do not master the language or cannot follow the public debate (Düvell et al. 2010; Hopkins 2008). These challenges do not mean that such research should be abandoned. They do, however, mean that ethical review processes may be longer and more thorough, as they rightly should be, and that ethics should be part of an iterative and continual process which extends beyond procedural ethics to situational and relational ethics.

Another ethical concern when researching the lives of young people on the move re-

lates to researching events and experiences that have been particularly stressful or traumatic. Young people on the move may be in the midst of such experiences as they face homelessness, destitution, violence, abuse, separation and, possibly, the death of fellow travellers. This requires extra sensitivity and that the researcher does not simply 'rush in' or 'rush out' (Vervliet et al. 2015: 477). However, talking about difficult experiences may not necessarily be perceived as detrimental. It can also represent a form of relief. While it is important to remember that researchers are not therapists, talking through difficult experiences and having someone who listens can be experienced as positive (BenEzer and Zetter 2015; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007). I also found it important to listen to the experiences that some young people wanted to share but did not want me to include in research. As one interlocutor said to me: 'I feel a bit lighter in my heart from telling, a bit calmer... It is good for me to tell this to a person.' These experiences did not relate to aspects which were exceptional from those of others, but might represent a young person who did not feel safe engaging in research or who felt stigmatised by a particular experience but nonetheless wanted to tell their story.

*- When research involves minors, there are additional ethical concerns that need to be addressed.*

Fieldwork among young people on the move may require attention to humanitarian relief. It may be pertinent when engaging populations in a vulnerable situation in research to be able to refer them to structures of support and assistance (Düvell et al. 2010). Knowledge about such structures is therefore important. Researchers may also

be appealed to for help and may encounter situations which call for intervention. It may as such be important to have thought through how they might want to respond in such circumstances. Researchers need also be ready to respond to unexpected situations arising during fieldwork. They may also want to help, something which may have influenced their motivation to focus on the topic in the first place. While some may seek to do this through advocacy activities, engage in the public debate, write policy briefs and disseminate their research, others may be engaged in militant research. Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway (2007: 316) maintain that 'it could be argued that if researchers are in a position to assist refugees to advocate on their own behalf...that it is morally incumbent on them to do so'. Whatever position the researcher adopts, it is important to remain reflexive. Field diaries may represent a helpful tool for critical engagement with positionality, reflexivity and emotions in research (Punch 2012).

## **Migratory landscapes and field sites**

Particular migratory landscapes give rise to particular field sites. Gaining an understanding of the given migratory landscape is of importance when researching the lives of young people on the move. What is clear is that their lives are affected by migration policies and by the formal and informal practices of states. These policies and practices also have implications for research and the challenges and opportunities researchers encounter. It is evident that migration policies and the formal and informal practices of states have an effect, but understanding these effects often represents a multi-layered process dealing with regional, national and local realities.

A regional reality in Europe is epitomised by an increase in border fences since 2015 and the introduction of temporary border controls (UNHCR 2017). There has been a securitisation of migration, the intertwining of migration with security concerns where migration is perceived as a threat. Furthermore, there has been an increased militarisation of borders. These measures are often evoked at the intersection between security and humanitarianism – as means to protect border regimes and as attempts to prevent perilous journeys (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). However, the result is that routes taken are often diverged, leading to longer and more dangerous journeys (Bloch and Chimienti 2011). It may also result in people becoming stuck or stranded. Along places of exit, there are often an accumulation of people: Calais in France, Patra in Greece and Šid in Serbia as some examples. While a national reality can relate to policies on and prevalence of detention, a local reality may be described as measures targeting specific regions or cities. It can also relate to the presence or absence of humanitarian organisations supporting people on the move.

Despite the implications of regional, national and local realities, these are, of course, affected by group and individual factors. The presence or absence of an established community can facilitate onward migration through the availability of support structures. It may also encourage settlement for the very same reasons. This may have an impact on the role played by humanitarian organisations and may affect a researcher's ability to find gatekeepers from within the community. Furthermore, a person's particular situation, depending, among other, on resources, ties and age within the given context has great effects. Such aspects make for rather different mi-

gratory and, by correlation, field realities. Researchers may face both political and administrative barriers as well as bureaucratic and physical ones, in gaining access (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007). At the same time, it is important to remember that the various landscapes change, they respond to different priorities, different opportunities and different realities, which can change gradually but also suddenly.

**Challenges and opportunities across sites**  
Patra and Eidomeni in Greece illustrate the challenges and opportunities raised by specific field sites and the important role played by context. They also point to how different national realities at the local level may be. Patra is a port city in the northern Peloponnese and is Greece's third largest city. It represents the main field site for my PhD study. In contrast, Eidomeni is a small village in Northern Greece where a transit camp was set up in September 2015 as part of the Balkan corridor. It was not a planned field site for my research but arose as important during fieldwork in Patra.

Both Patra and Eidomeni represent exit points for people on the move trying to leave Greece. At the time of my fieldwork in Patra (20 weeks between 2012 and 2015), Afghans who had the administrative deportation order were not allowed to be present in Achaia, the regional unit which includes Patra. The prohibition was stated on the administrative deportation order which is given upon irregular entry or stay in Greece and requires the carrier to regularise their status or leave Greece within a specified period. In contrast, they were allowed to be present in Eidomeni during my fieldwork there (less than a month between October and November 2015). The prohibition/permission implied the presence or absence of likely apprehension and detention. Further-

more, only males live in the informal settlements in Patra.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, there were Afghans of all ages and both males and females in Eidomeni. In both places, Afghans are visible. However, issues of visibility can become an obstacle for researchers. I made two research trips to Turkey (Istanbul and Izmir), where I did not find that Afghans were visible in the cityscape and thus instead engaged with organisations, went to specific neighbourhoods and observed the general landscape. Patra offers several locations for potential fieldwork such as the premises of organisations, the port and the informal settlements; both formal and informal spaces that may be accessed through gatekeepers and by hanging-out. Eidomeni, as a transit camp, only had one location, a formal space, where access depended on gatekeepers. Length of encounters also influences research design. In Patra, I could meet people across days, weeks, months and some, even across field visits during different years. I also had some reencounters with people I had met in other locations. In Eidomeni, encounters were brief as people were generally crossing the border within a matter of hours. While issues of privacy in terms of meeting places was difficult during long encounters in Patra, in Eidomeni it was basically non-existent given the large amount of people present in the camp.

Given the abovementioned conditions, Patra and Eidomeni offered very different field realities as two exit points within Greece. At the same time, they were connected. During my last fieldwork in Patra in the summer of 2015, almost everyone had left to cross the Western Balkans. This change happened very late in my fieldwork but had it happened in the midst of it, I would have had to move to a new site where mobility could be observed, like Patra, or along with the young

people across these, or I would have had to rethink my research design. Accordingly, such research requires a flexibility which allows it to tune into the everchanging nature of the field and to take account of regional, national and local realities.

## Research in a context of transience

Young people on the move towards Europe are likely to find themselves in contexts marked by transience and humanitarian need. In a context marked by humanitarian need, appearing to cultural ideals and victimcy or thin stories, what Kohli (2006: 711; emphasis in the original) terms 'the *extraordinary* stories of a particular sort of suffering', may represent a survival strategy among research populations (Utas 2004). However, such accounts do not reveal the complexity of lived experience, although they may say a great deal about the politics of protection and assistance. Humanitarian organisations can serve as gatekeepers to difficult-to-access populations. They may also offer important means of getting access, such as transportation (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007). This may result in researchers being primarily perceived as part of the assistance apparatus which, based on association, may affect engagement and perceptions of them. Research shows that young people on the move are often mistrustful of formal structures (Donini, Monstuti and Scalettari 2016; Lønning 2018b; Vollebæk 2015). There may also be a hierarchy between the young people or others in their environment, and the engagement of some may result in reprisals from others (Utas 2004). At the same time, the fluidity of populations may result in researchers losing access from one day to another.

Knowledge about the transience of the field may make researchers afraid to lose out. While it is impossible to capture "everything" in the field, this is not always so clear during fieldwork. A fear of losing out given fluidity of populations influenced my longest stay in Patra. I was constantly looking for opportunities to do fieldwork and did not want to leave the city during the three months I was there. I also noticed very well the consequences of arrivals and departures upon dynamics and my research relationships with the young people. This resulted in a continuous negotiation (Lønning 2018a). However, when choosing to conduct fieldwork in a site marked by transience, you need to accept such aspects. The research site can then be conceived as the people as long as they are present, or as long as you are able to negotiate continued contact, but also the particular migratory landscape and patterns of mobility and group formation which emerge at the intersection of migration projects and migration policies.

Research among street children may provide insights into how to deal with some of the challenges and opportunities in researching the lives of young people on the move. Bemak (1996) points to several relevant aspects. These include the difficulty of scheduling times and places to meet, research encounters that are terminated abruptly, and the consequences of weather conditions and incarceration. Such aspects were very visible in my fieldwork, and means that the researcher needs to tune into the environment. I only attempted to schedule time and place to meet with the young people for interviews when using an interpreter. In the end, this worked more in terms of me and the interpreter being present and available rather than on the basis of scheduled appointments. At the same time, patterns concerning times and places of visibility

emerged based on migration projects as dictated by ferry departures in Patra. I also experienced how encounters could be terminated rather abruptly: someone might be leaving town or was restless, a security official might approach, a quarrel might happen, a possibility to shower, use the internet, go to the doctor or get some food might render the research encounter insignificant. It also revealed itself in the impact of weather conditions and incarceration: both rain and police sweeps resulted in the presence of less people. In such settings, Bemak (1996) argues for an approach as a 'street researcher.' This includes the importance of becoming acquainted with the environment where the young people live, of walking the streets and learning about the environment, so accepting the young people as your teachers. This necessarily includes relying on them for protection as you enter their physical and social worlds, acquiring the language of the street but not losing oneself as researcher, and tremendous flexibility. It may also include being tested, as this can represent an important aspect of survival strategies, and multiple roles. Beyond research, this primarily relates to provide information about access to services (Bemak 1996).

While research among street children and young people in precarious living conditions may give valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities raised when conducting research with young people on the move, Vollebæk (2015: 107) reminds us that:

Most research on street children and homeless youth concerns young people who live on the street in their own country, where they master the language, have certain cultural competence and usually, a fundamental understanding of how society is structured.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the case for young people on the move towards Europe, though it can be acquired with time (and remigration). The implications of familiarity and language has very real consequences for how environments can be negotiated both by participants and the researcher. I only met a few young Afghans who spoke English. Such a reality means that the researcher needs to master their language or learn this, and thus restrict themselves to a particular linguistic group. This may be perceived as a preference for certain groups within a multi-lingual setting, and can also lead to a feeling of guilt and inadequacy on behalf of the researcher in encounters with linguistic others. Alternatively, they need to rely on interpreters, which lends itself better to some methods and which is both time-consuming and expensive. The issue of finding an interpreter, or even having a language in common with an interpreter within a multi-lingual setting where the researcher does not master the local language, may represent a significant obstacle that also needs to be addressed (Lønning 2018a).

## **Two approaches in researching the lives of young people on the move**

Ethnographic fieldwork and creative arts-based methods offer great potential for researching the lives of young people on the move. In what follows, these two approaches are discussed.

### **Ethnographic fieldwork in a context of transience**

Ethnographic fieldwork has its roots in anthropology and consists of in-depth research involving participant observation, combined with other methods and techniques. Time is an important aspect and immersion in the

field and the lives of the subjects (Creswell 2007). Processes of globalisation, global flows and mobility have seen the need for field methodology which responds to such a reality. There are many ethnographic studies of people on the move, often constructed across sites. Such research represents multi-sited ethnography as articulated by Marcus (1995), and may be constructed on the following of people, things, metaphors, stories, life stories and conflict. While multi-sited ethnographies may involve moving with participants, such studies are called mobile ethnographies within the mobilities turn. This relates to studies 'that move along with, or besides, the object of research' (Cresswell 2012: 647).

Studies with people on the move raise the need for designs simultaneously able to respond to participants' and the researcher's circumstances. It may accordingly be constructed in various ways. Monsutti's (2005) multilocal ethnography took him travelling and living with Afghans across Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, but also related to engaging with Afghans in other countries. The field is then not constructed according to a bounded territory but on the basis of following people. Emphasis is therefore also placed on the relationship between places. Another example is Tsoni's (2013) multi-sited and mobile ethnography, where mobility across the Athenian urban-scape is observed and experienced both by participants and by the researcher. Journeys were also followed onwards and backwards through narratives and mobile and creative methods. Mobile methods track movement but also tune into it, and shifting subjectivities. It also relates to being in research settings 'where instant decisions and the active negotiation of space can be analysed' (Cresswell 2012: 647). It can include walking and talking and experiencing

how environments are used, filming, tracing movement and travelling together. A further example is Schapendonk's (2012) longitudinal trajectory ethnography of sub-Saharan Africans across Morocco, Turkey, Senegal and the European Union. The study encompasses several trips to the field and in-depth interviewing. In addition, some migration trajectories were followed through telephone, the internet and revisits. My study included research with young Afghans in Norway and Greece, in addition to short research trips to Turkey and Italy, and I followed parts of the route across these countries (Lønning 2018b). While I did reencounter people, the study was not constructed on the basis of a matched sample across sites.

As these studies suggest, research with people on the move can be approached in various ways as multi-sited ethnographies. The parameters of research projects, funding, access and safety concerns may constrain our ability or willingness to engage with particular environments. Participants may, furthermore, not always welcome the presence of researchers or this presence may draw attention to them, increasingly so when gender and background are distinguishably different from the research population (Lønning 2018a). Depending on the context, such presence may increase security or insecurity. The internet and social media may offer means for overcoming some of these issues as well as offering valuable tools for engaging and staying in touch with participants across space and time. The internet and social media may also represent the focus of research, though they raise new ethical concerns and complicate matters of privacy and anonymity.

*Issues of access, immersion, gender and background*

Ethnographic fieldwork has immense potential in overcoming many of the challenges in researching the lives of young people on the move. Access, trust, rapport and the ability to discern patterns and the complexity of lived experience, capturing the everyday, arguably requires time, flexibility and multiple methods, something which ethnographic fieldwork allows for. In my fieldwork, it was very noticeable that even though I was granted access to places where the young people spent time early on, it took much longer to build up a degree of familiarity. During my longest stays in the field in Patra, stretching over two and three months, I noticed a clear change in terms of engagement after four to five weeks of being daily among the young people. Time in the field thus revealed itself as crucial in my fieldwork for gaining access.

Another important aspect of ethnographic fieldwork is immersion in the field and the subjects' lives. Immersion allows for greater insights. However, there may be particular parts of the field which are difficult for the researcher to be immersed in. As one young Afghan in Patra said to me: 'You've gathered a lot of information about this situation but you haven't lived it, there's a big difference'. For some researchers, even in very difficult environments, living such aspects or taking risks alongside interlocutors represents part of fieldwork. Such invariably leads to greater access to aspects which may otherwise remain hidden as they may not be easily gotten at through other methods. It may also transform research relationships (Monsutti 2005). For other researchers, encounters may be restricted to formal spaces.

Gender may play an important role in terms of access and immersion. A female

researcher among an all-male group is likely to encounter different challenges than a man; while the opposite is true when the population of interest consists only of females and the researcher is male. Different researchers also have different boundaries, and boundaries are likely to change during fieldwork. The implications of gender were very noticeable to me during my fieldwork, and the differences this resulted in between Patra as a field site, with its all-male settlements, and other sites in Greece that included Afghan females.

*- Mobile methods track movement but also tune into it, and shifting subjectivities.*

Challenges may not only result from the researcher's concerns but from cultural norms as expressed by participants, and researchers may choose different ways to negotiate cultural norms. Furthermore, aspects related to gender may intertwine with age. I was between 24 and 27 years old when I was in the field while my interlocutors were aged 15 to 24. I was often asked if I was younger and whether I missed my family, and they seemed to want to spare me any strain. As such, I got a feeling that they perceived me as vulnerable. At times, this seemed to create a distance between us but it simultaneously opened up room to speak about vulnerabilities. It also might have affected their performance of masculinity in our encounters. For example, physical pain was seldom revealed despite injuries.

From her PhD study on undocumented sub-Saharan Africans in Istanbul, Suter (2012) points to how proposals of marriage and sexual advances were part of fieldwork. Furthermore, Ross (2015) speaks about

gendered risks, sexual violence and rumours during fieldwork. Such aspects may lead to defensive strategies which increase distance rather than decrease it. Suter (2012) also points to how engaging with a white European woman can be seen as an explicit strategy. I did not have such experiences regarding Afghans, but issues related to background did play out in other ways. Several of the young people said that they had thought that I was a refugee too based on my Afro-European background, often responding, when I said I am from Norway, 'when were you granted asylum?' Some also thought I had an Iranian background based on my Persian accent and resemblance with Iran's Afro-Iranian population. Ascription may be important in terms of how a researcher is perceived. Some young people also associated my appearance with an Arab origin, and said that both people of Arab and African origins were treated better than Afghans by security officials in Patra. Such aspects may impinge on how they perceive a researcher with this resemblance. Being reflexive about such aspects is also part of responding to the challenges and opportunities during fieldwork.

### **Visual and creative methods in a context of transience**

Visual research methods have become increasingly popular in the social sciences. They do not emerge from a particular theoretical context and are generally used alongside other methods (Rose 2012). Participatory research is part of a transformative research framework which seeks to engage marginalised voices, reduce power imbalances and cause change. A participatory approach employing elicitation may be particularly suitable for research in a context marked by transience. The advantages of elicitation can be summed up as follows:

the visual 'evokes a different kind of knowledge' and richness, it encourages people to talk 'about different things, in different ways' (Rose 2012: 305); participant-generated visual materials are helpful in exploring everyday aspects taken-for-granted, as such they stimulate reflection; by generating visual materials and explaining them to the researcher, participants have a central role. It represents a form of empowerment and a new way of collaboration. Elicitation is not restricted to photographs but may include films, videos, maps, diagrams, paintings, models, drawings, memory books, collages, etc. It may involve visual materials not made as part of the research. Additional benefits specific to photographs in a participatory framework are: (1) the detailed information captured in photos and their potential to engage people; and (2) participants obtain something from the process through the images taken (Rose 2012).

Creative research methods include visual methods but go beyond this by encompassing, among other, creative writing, poetry, drama, music, song, roleplay and storytelling. '[C]reative research methods can offer tools to engage research participants in an active process of producing externalized representations or symbolic worlds that can function as visual or text-based data' (Veale 2005: 255). This has been defined as arts-based methods, positioned as a sub-set of creative research methods (Kara 2017).<sup>4</sup>

The Mosaic approach represents a good example of drawing both upon creative methods as well as more traditional ones to emphasise participant-centred methods that tune into different modes of expression (Clark 2011). It was developed as part of doing research with young children and relates to changing processes and continual listening (Clark and Moss 2011). A multi-method and

participatory approach may be particularly helpful when language or trust are an issue. Studies with refugee background young people have also pointed to the benefits offered by photography in addressing such concerns (Robertson, Gifford, McMichael and Correa-Velez 2016). Such an approach can, furthermore, provide a sense of release from stressful circumstances by being fun, as well as tap into new ways of communicating experience (Clark and Moss 2011).

The visual and creative methods discussed so far relate to solicited data. However, unsolicited creative materials may also provide an important source of data. In their study on people intercepted and held at a police station near the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, Derluyn, Watters, Mels and Broekaert (2014) experienced how the setting of the waiting rooms constrained research encounters. In order to access the experiences of people on the move, they took the various messages written on the walls, tables and chairs as their primary source of data. They have called this approach spontaneous, uninvited visual ethnography. This shows how research contexts may constrain both the use and relevance of more traditional methods, such as interviews, and simultaneously offer new ways of seeing what may represent the most immediate expression of participants' feelings and experiences (Derluyn et al. 2014).

The creative materials used in my thesis (Lønning 2018b) draw on all the above approaches and can be classified into three categories: (1) participatory (solicited photo diaries, written accounts and diaries); (2) spontaneous (drawings, maps and written accounts arising during interaction); and (3) uninvited (unsolicited drawings and written accounts as represented by text captured by photo diaries, photographs I took and in drawings).

#### *Methodical limits and opportunities arising in the field*

Which data is collected has implications for how it can be employed and in terms of presenting the results. Different research contexts may call on different methods, and intended approaches and methods may not always be feasible given the context at hand. Fieldwork itself reveals the methodical limits and opportunities arising in the field. Visual and creative methods can be particularly suitable in research on sensitive topics and with research populations in a marginal situation (Liamputtong 2007). However, while visual and creative methods may involve shorter-term projects, they are often time-consuming (Rose 2012). Furthermore, despite a researcher's intention for participants to engage in particular ways or with particular methods, this may not materialise.

*- The different creative arts-based methods were also a way to include the non-literate and those who wanted to take part, but did not want to be interviewed.*

I had a goal during fieldwork to do photo-elicitation based on the photo diaries, but this did not play out favourably in the field. I had hoped that photo diary participants might also want to be interviewed. However, only one photo diary participant consented to this and three others provided written accounts. Although some went through the photographs with me, this related mostly to the use of places, their location and living conditions. Despite this, some young people showed me their own photographs which often became a point of discussion and thus worked more in terms of elicitation, but in an informal manner.

The creative material offered an entry to the young peoples' experiences. It also served as visual descriptions, as a way to bring the viewer closer to the environments described and to evoke other sensory responses, as well as to make marginal places visible (Rose 2012). In addition, texts gave access to an expression of vulnerability which often remained unarticulated in interviews in Patra, but which was very visible when interviewing in Norway. The different creative arts-based methods were also a way to include the non-literate and those who wanted to take part, but did not want to be interviewed. At the same time, they supported much of what emerged in interviews and observation. Creative methods may thus both complement and support other methods of data collection.

The creative material also allowed for creative outputs such as exhibitions and an animated short-film (Lønning 2013). I had not gone into the field with a plan to make a film but was able to get in touch with photo diary participants and ask for their consent and input. This led to reencounters with some of the young people in the countries they had sought asylum. The film won an award at the 2013 Plural+ Youth Video Festival and shows the potential of creative outputs, even among amateur film-makers like myself, for researchers seeking to also engage in other arenas.

## Concluding remarks

This article has raised some challenges and opportunities concerning ethics, context and methods in researching the lives of young people on the move towards and within Europe. Several of the issues raised may represent dilemmas. It may relate to the motivation behind such research and the

researcher's engagement, explicitly or implicitly, with the political. After all, research involving young people in an undocumented situation and minors outside appropriate protection structures, or which reveals the inadequacy of these as well as violations, engage with political issues and questions. It may represent dilemmas as researchers become involved in humanitarian relief or activism. The context within which such research is undertaken may acutely reveal how the researcher's and participants' priorities diverge, which leads to a range of challenges. It may relate to how engaging with researchers may represent a strategy, or how a researcher's agenda is rendered insignificant confronted with the reality of participants' lives. Dilemmas or aspects which the researcher needs to be mindful of may also converge, for instance, safety concerns both include participants and the researcher.

Researching the lives of young people on the move, who are vulnerable to incarceration and detention and who often have precarious living and working conditions, represents a complex process. This complexity can be best addressed with an integrated approach which is exploratory, flexible and sensitive. Such an approach needs to observe how regional, national and local realities play out. It also needs to allow for time in the field, find a way to negotiate the intricacies of language and be reflexive. Participant-centred methods that engage and, accordingly, tune into the different ways participants mediate and express their experiences, are of great importance for achieving such an approach.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The article builds upon the trial lecture for the public defence of my PhD on 12 January 2018 at NTNU, with the title *Researching the lives of young people on the move towards Europe: Methodological challenges and opportunities*.

<sup>2</sup> In 2014, an accommodation centre opened in Patra for unaccompanied minors, families and vulnerable adults.

<sup>3</sup> Untranslated: 'Mesteparten av forskningen på gatebarn og hjemløs ungdom er rettet mot unge som lever på gata i sitt eget land, der de behersker språket, har en viss kulturell kompetanse og som regel har en grunnleggende forståelse av hvordan samfunnet er bygget opp.'

<sup>4</sup> The other sub-sets are research using technology, mixed-methods research, transformative research frameworks and indigenous methodologies.

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