

**“I’m having so much fun here!”  
Expatriate children negotiating rules  
and practices in a Finnish  
international school**

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**Career  
expatriates**

**Temporary  
migrants**

**Transnational  
corporate elites**

**Highly skilled  
experts**



- Highly skilled professionals move abroad for career reasons
  - Voluntary mobility
  - Relatively well-off
  - Often temporary stays
  - North-north or south-north

# Expatriate childhood: Children's experiences of temporary migration (2019-2024, Academy of Finland)



## 8-15-year-old expatriate children in Finland

- position in Finland and on the global arena
- everyday lives in Finland
- belonging & identities & distinctions

# Research Methods

## Ethnography

participant observation

children's interviews

photo projects with children





# Schools

## Most international schools in Finland

- are free municipal schools
- follow the Finnish curriculums

## Rules and practices of school systems

- Start school at a different age
- Different curriculums
- Schools operate with the assumption of continuity



M: When you came to this school, was it easy to start studying?

S: Yeah. Because the things that we do here, I've already learned.

.....

M: How does that feel?

S: Like I'm revising things more and more times.

M: Is it boring?

S: Nah.

M: Ok. So if you went to India now, what would happen?

S: I would be sad... I would be behind all my friends in India. So I would need to continue fifth grade then. And I don't want to go to India.  
(Sonu, 9 years)

The school is much better in Finland. One can just relax and enjoy.  
(Ajey, 9 years)



Finnish schools expect relatively much independent agency from children

- clothing & equipment
- homework
- schedules
- mobilities



## Moments of resistance within school

*Why do I need to learn these words? It's boring. I'm not going to need them. I'm going to move to a more interesting place. (Amir, 9)*

- Awareness of temporary sojourn

*I go home by bus. When I arrived in Finland, I never thought it would be possible for me to take the bus alone. (Sonu, 9)*

Finland is a relatively safe country  
For many children, coming to  
Finland has meant more agency  
in terms of independent local mobility

Relatively short school days and  
daily changing schedules





# Breaking the rules or not fitting within the rules and expectations?

- Challenges in navigating school systems
  - Cannot break the rules but can try to bend them
  - Power of the state and institutions
- Children's agency in schools and beyond
  - Negotiating spaces of agency

