Young people's everyday communities as spaces of solidarity, belonging and inclusion – Possibilities for social work

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SoliPro (SA 2022-2026)
Solidarity in Practice – Young people's everyday communities as sources of recognition and spaces of preventive social work

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This research project studies solidarity as young people's (age 15–18) experiences and practices in their everyday environments.

The project examines what constitutes solidarity for young people and how their solidarities are negotiated in relation to **communities**, **spaces, belonging**, **togetherness** and **otherness**, and social and societal positions of power and inequality.

Drawing on the concept of **spatial solidarity** (Oosterlynck et al. 2016), the project investigates:

What are the sources of young people's contemporary solidarities?

How places condition solidarities in their everyday communities?

What are the politics of employing and promoting solidarity?

These questions are investigated in three locations representing the central communal environments of young people: **school**, **street** and **social media**. An analysis of **European youth solidarity programmes** will complement these investigations. Through multiple datasets and qualitative multi-method approach, the project aims to understand young people's micro-solidarities, and how these solidarities can be used in professional work with young people to enhance individual and communal wellbeing.

Stepping Outside the Shadow of Social Norms: **Solidarity in Schools**

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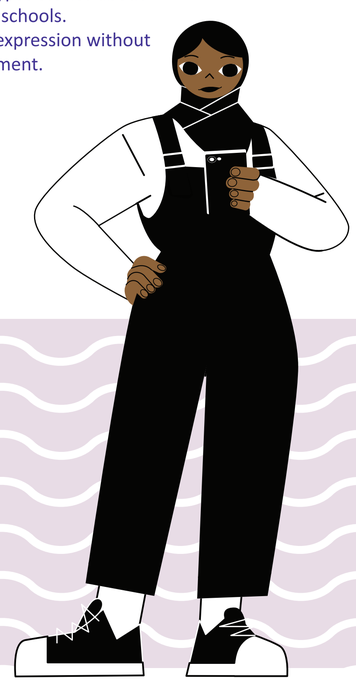
Background:

→ Social norms shape assumptions and influence how solidarity is expressed.
→ These norms often operate unconsciously and relate to power relations in schools.
→ Research must bypass pressures to "say the right thing" to capture authentic perspectives.

AIM: EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES FOR SOLIDARITY BEYOND NORMATIVE CONSTRAINTS IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS.

Methodology: Story Completion Method

→ Pupils and staff wrote fictional post-apocalypse stories about solidarity in schools.
→ Enabled expression without fear of judgment.



Key Findings:

Open negotiations between staff and pupils about sharing power foster collaboration.

Nearly half of the adult participants regarded youth as their equals, while acknowledging that young people possess distinctive skills that adults lack.

The other half perceived youth as fundamentally different, and therefore not equal.

The vast majority of young participants expressed a willingness to share power with adults, even when they held full authority to exclude them.

When pupils are seen as problem solvers in alliance with adults, it creates a fertile ground for solidarity.

Implications:

→ Innovative methods can uncover hidden dynamics of solidarity and power.
→ Creating meaningful connections requires spaces that support interaction outside norm-driven expectations.
→ The ability to connect to others is co-learned within power relations.

Solidarity on the Street
Negotiated solidarity amidst drug-related crime and violence in urban Brazil

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Background:

Although Brazil as a whole is a diverse society, with its youth living in a variety of situations, its disadvantaged urban communities have become sites of organised crime, drug trafficking and police violence, and this influences the lives of many young people.

AIM: EXPLORE WHAT CONSTITUTES SOLIDARITY IN RELATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN THIS CONTEXT OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE.

Methodology:

→ The study is based on interview data created with boys aged 15 to 17 in a governmental institution in Salvador, Brazil.
→ Most boys in the institution had current or former connections to drug trafficking and had received death threats from drug gangs.

Key findings:

Young people's ambivalent everyday solidarities and their life trajectories reveal complex and constant negotiations of (lack of) togetherness and support and (dis)trust.

Young people expressed solidarity beyond immediate relations, mainly, towards other young people living in difficult situations.

Implications:

Practice and policy built on solidarity, such as support in social welfare, education, employment and decent housing for young people and families living in urban disadvantaged communities, rather than state interventions that reinforce the cycle of violence.

Hierarchies of solidarity as experienced by young people hanging in street environments

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Background:

The Finnish media has raised concerns about the increase in youth crime and the street gang phenomenon in Finland. These phenomena have often been linked to young people with an immigrant background. The discussion is mainly stigmatizing, and the young people themselves are rarely heard in the discussion. One of the main goals of this research is to involve these young people, who are in various vulnerable positions, in the public debate on youth crime and street gangs, and to increase understanding of the various structural factors behind the emergence and development of the phenomenon.

AIM: EXPLORE HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SOLIDARITY AND WHAT PRACTICES SOLIDARITY OR THE LACK THEREOF IS EXPRESSED IN THE DESCRIPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

Methodology:

The study is based on interview data created with 30 young people aged 13 to 18 in a street environments of the capital area in Finland.

Key Findings:

The experiences and practices of solidarity of young people hanging in street environments appear hierarchical and are shaped as experiential relationships that reflect the interaction between the individual, the community, and society.

Implications:

→ Develop professional practices that support positive grouping among young people and prevent grouping that is harmful to young people's well-being
→ Strengthens the experience of belonging to society for young people from different backgrounds

Affective, Fast and Ephemeral: **Solidarity on Social Media**

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Background:

TikTok is a key space for young people's self-directed self-expression, information seeking and everyday meaning-making. As a playful and youth-oriented platform, TikTok offers a particularly fertile site for examining how young people express perceptions of difference, otherness, peer relations and belonging. Content addressing identity-related conflicts is often emotionally charged, providing insight into young people's emotional realities, vulnerabilities and strengths that may remain invisible in more traditional research encounters.

AIM: EXAMINE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY BY ANALYZING HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARTICULATE OTHERNESS WITHIN TIKTOK CONTENT.

Methodology:

→ Ethnographic observation.
→ The data consist of a field diary documenting observed videos, related metadata and comments, as well as the researcher's reflections.

Key Findings:

Age, gender, sexual orientation and education are central themes through which young people construct solidarity and negotiate norms and difference.

Otherness is affectively negotiated through irony, humor, shame, resistance and dehumanising comparisons.

While comment sections often function as spaces where othering is contested, racist, homophobic and misogynistic comments are widespread and routinised across content.

Implications:

→ Even fragile and ephemeral forms of digital solidarity—sometimes limited to likes or single comments—can offer meaningful experiences of belonging, especially for marginalised young people.
→ Analysing social media content helps identify both fractures and strengths of solidarity, enabling resources to be directed toward existing solidarities and toward challenges that risk excluding young people from experiences of belonging.

"Sitting into the fire together" **– Negotiating solidarity in EU youth projects in Finland**

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Background:

Solidarity is a founding EU principle. The EU Youth Strategy positions young people as key actors in strengthening democratic values through civic engagement. Yet little research examines what solidarity means to young people in the EU.

AIM: USING FINLAND AS A CASE STUDY, THIS RESEARCH ANALYZES HOW YOUNG EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS GRANT APPLICANTS AND RECIPIENTS DEFINE, PRACTICE, AND JUSTIFY SOLIDARITY PROJECTS.

Methodology:

Drawing on postcolonial and feminist perspectives, this study combines documentary analysis with ethnographic fieldwork in southern Finland (June 2025).

Key Findings:

Young people's ideas of solidarity were shaped by their own and familial experiences of social exclusion and inequality.

Many young people emphasized shared responsibility and collective goals—language aligning with EU conceptualizations of solidarity. However, grant application questions were also tailored to elicit institutional language, rendering it unclear whether young people's alignment was strategic, genuine, or shaped by sustained exposure to EU agencies.

Some solidarity projects echoed colonial tropes: framing "underprivileged" groups as needing guidance, positioning young people as moral authorities, perpetuating inequality.

Many young people showed critical self and other awareness, questioning personal biases and societal power dynamics.

Implications:

→ EU funding agencies should allow diverse understandings of solidarity, letting young people define and practice solidarity on their own terms rather than fitting in predetermined frameworks.
→ Organizations and mentors working with young people must receive training and tools to recognize and address

In Conclusion

The findings of these sub-projects illustrate that solidarity for young people

→ is **not a static decision but continuously negotiated** among youths and with other generations.
→ may source from **closeness, exclusion or struggle.**
→ is **performative and ambivalent**.

The multi-context approach makes visible how

→ the practices of and reasons for solidarity are **substantially conditioned** by the specific social and spatial contexts which the youths inhabit.
→ **intergenerational and in-generational power relations** shape young people's experiences of solidarity.

To advance solidarity in contemporary youth communities, there is a need to

UNDERSTAND THE CONSTITUTION AND MEANING OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S MICRO-SOLIDARITIES IN THEIR EVERYDAY COMMUNAL SPACES.

STRENGTHEN THE INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH MULTIPROFESSIONAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY INTERVENTIONS IN THEIR MEANINGFUL COMMUNITIES-IN-PRACTICE.

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For more, see: ***projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus/julkaisut***

Other references:

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