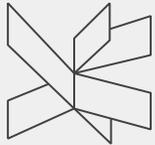


Gør tanke til handling
VIA University College



“Part-time gangsters”

– a social analysis on urban youth’s attitude toward school in a medium-sized provincial town in Denmark.

Peter H. Frostholm – phf@via.dk

Research Centre, VIA Culture & Pedagogy
Research Program - *Everyday Life of Children and Young People.*

Setting The Scene

A medium-sized
provincial town in Denmark

Ethnographic fieldwork
- Late summer 2014

In 2013, the municipality
bestowed a skater
facility right on the city's
central squares.



Our Original Research Questions:

- How do young people occupy, use and negotiate the inner-city facility?
- What youth cultural dynamics, interpretations and negotiations of youth culture come into play at the facility?

Overall analytical take:

- Socialisation processes: "To acquire knowledge, develop skills, debate and establish meaningful interactions."
- Socialisation and positioning through conflictual behaviour.
- In the city: "Education in its own right."

Unstructured socialisation?

Following the overall theme of this conference:

- At the site the young people spend time without intervention from teachers, social educators or parents...
- Unstructured socialisation?
- *"Really, I would love to receive an educational addition on my salary account for all the times I've watched out and cared for some of the town's disadvantaged children!"* (Skater, 26 years)
- The young people do partake in constructing different social groupings due to them practicing opposing codes of conduct.
 - However, they also care for one another...
- In that sense, unstructured socialization might not always be that unstructured. Patterns and structures of conflict and those of comfort and care intertwine and form on a daily basis.

'Thugz'

strict codes and uniform values

- Roughly 20 male members, all of them of an ethnic minority heritage. 13-17 years old...
- This self-named pseudo-gang, is an example of a group with simple but somewhat strict codes of conduct and uniform values.
- Learning, understanding, and acting within the lines of these strict codes of conduct is crucial in order to make it as a *Thug* (for a further elaboration on this, see Gravesen & Frostholm 2015a).
- They play out roles of pronounced masculine behaviour and practice a general **conflictual behavioural attitude** towards other groups, the social services, and the police...

'Thugz'

strict codes and uniform values

- It seems natural for the young boys in Thugz to internalize a so-called *black, expressive form of masculinity* (Hviid 2007), and play on related cultural discourses and performativity.

Surprising findings

Follow-up interviews depicted a surprising and contradictory side of the Thugz-members' attitude toward another authority present in their everyday lives;
the school

(Gravesen & Frostholt 2015).



Surprising findings

- The young boys in Thugz claim **to believe in the idea of education** and basically find that in order to lead a decent life, you need to do your best and be successful in school.
- *“You’re much more of a gangster, if you cause trouble during leisure time and get your act together in school... At least, that’s what I’ve learned!”* (Bezim, 13 years old)

What could explain this? How do they manage to balance the two ways of life?

On being a criminal:

- Bezim: "You can be a criminal, but it has to stop when you're 15. Everything must stop... Everything... You have to be a good lad... And that's for life!"
- Roman: "I'm 16... And I told them so... just from the beginning... Enjoy it while you can"
- Bezim: "Yeah... I'm 13... And I'm enjoying it... It's like being... you know... free"

What could explain this? No future/No gangster-career in a provincial town?

On education:

- Roman: "You just have to get one. It's the most important thing... Nothing comes from just sitting around doing nothing..."
- Bezim: "When you're younger, you think it's cool skipping school. But when I reached 7th grade... I started to regret not paying attention..."

What could explain this? A generational gap?

On second-generation immigrants:

- Bezim: “The previous generation (second-generation immigrants, red) don’t have a future. But us... We try to find a way to be criminals outside of school. You have to always take school seriously... You just have to.”
- Roman: “Most of them (the second-generation immigrants) have just become junkies and stuff like that...”
- Bezim: “Nobody from the third generation or from Karlehaven or Lindetoften (Official ghetto neighborhoods) are junkies or even smoking weed!”

What could explain this? What drives the motivation toward education?

On motivation:

- Bezim: "With an education you are a cool kid... with money!"
- Roman: "And think of the ladies that follow!"
- Bezim: "It's not like half of the people at Karlehaven... They retired... and they are like 30 or something!"
- Roman: "So yeah... We learned from them... from their mistakes. "Okay, you did that... we'll do this instead"..."
- Bezim: "Take my parents... They think they should treat me, the way they were treated as kids... But it's not like that... Immigrants think it is... You know, it's not like that, at all!"

Questions to elaborate on in later works...

- Has attitude toward school changed through generations? And what pushes it?
 - Inspirations from Tabin: The state is omnipresent!
 - The state controls its subjects – giving out orders!
 - Enrolling in education is a governmental imperative
 - Frostholm, P. H. & Gravesen, D.T (2016). The inner city skater facility - playground or control mechanism? - On urban youth, civic learning and pedagogical dilemmas. In: *Learning the city - Cultural approaches to civic learning in urban spaces* Springer (**In press**)
 - We elaborate on Foucault... and Rose:
 - Rose states, and essentially he finds that pedagogical technologies are constructed to form responsible citizens and to “bind the inhabitants of a territory into a single polity, a space of regulated freedom” (Rose 1992: 158).
 - Elias (civilization process) According to Elias, in order to act civilized, the individual must impose a steady and strict self-control, subordinate short-term impulses to the commands of an ingrained long-term view, and generally rely on a complex, but secure agency. (Elias 1994; 2000).

Thank you!

- Thank you for your time...

Contact:

- Peter H. Frostholm – phf@via.dk

Interested?

In English:

- Frostholm, P.H. & Gravesen, D.T. (2016). Are you from the police, or what? - selected critical remarks on the ethical implications of ethnographic fieldwork among disadvantaged urban youth. In: *The city as a learning experience*. (In press) (peer reviewed)
- Frostholm, P. H. & Gravesen, D.T (2016). The inner city skater facility - playground or control mechanism? - On urban youth, civic learning and pedagogical dilemmas. In: *Learning the city - Cultural approaches to civic learning in urban spaces*. Springer (In press) (peer reviewed)
- Gravesen, D.T. & Frostholm, P. (2015). *Conflicting cultures - a street-ethnographic take on urban youth, unstructured socialization and territoriality*. In: *Diskurs - Kindheits- und Jugendforschung*, Jg. 10, Nr. 3 (2015), s.293-307. (peer reviewed)

In Danish:

- Gravesen, D.T & Frostholm, P. (2015). *Ustruktureret socialisering blandt børn og unge - interdisciplinært betragtet*. I: *BARN. Nr.3-4* (2015), s. 93-109. (peer reviewed)