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Landscapes of Hope
Youths' Small Agencies of Online Futures in Finland

Abstract

Our article aims to offer counter-narratives to the risks and hardships of digital youth by scrutinizing how hope is present in youth's lives in different online environments and everyday practices. We trace young people's landscapes of hope by asking what kind of hopes and ideas of the digital future young people have about online environments and how they practice and cherish hope. To achieve these objectives, we draw on both qualitative and quantitative data produced in 2021–2022 among Finnish ninth graders. Our findings emphasize that young people's online landscapes of hope are oriented toward the future, and they are in a constant state of co-becoming with different kinds of contexts, agencies, practices, and intensities.

Keywords: digital youth, hope, affect, digital landscapes, digital ethnography, Finland

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Introduction

Digitalisation has rapidly changed our everyday lives. New technologies have been loaded with plenty of positive expectations and negative fears (Boyd 2014). They are considered helpful, but many studies also reinforce a pessimistic view of digital technologies as harmful, addictive, and even toxic for young people (Drotner 1999; Lavis & Winter 2020; Henzel & Håkansson 2021; Childs & Holland 2022). In current media narratives, particularly social media usage has been considered dangerous and is often seen through the lenses of moral panic (Seland & Hyggen 2021).

Young people's digital everyday life is complicated, diverse, and in constant transformation. According to previous research on digital youth and our empirical findings, the online practices of youth and ways of participation and belonging vary significantly (Boyd 2014; Literat et al. 2018; Korjonen-Kuusipuro et al. 2022). However, young people's digital everyday is often seen as a problem: too much time is spent online, and plenty of imagined and real dangers and hardships are connected to the digital lives of teens (Drotner 1999; Boyd 2014; Livingstone & Sefton-Green 2016; Henzel & Håkansson 2021). "Landscapes of hope" refer to sociologist Andrew Webster et al.'s (2020, 1100) concept of digital landscapes which discusses the "complex and overlapping contours of off- and on-line information flows, exchanges and meanings, and how these embody cultural, political and epistemic processes". It is important to know how digital information is accessed, used and understood, but it is even more necessary to understand how young people make sense of it and how digital landscapes shape and frame their agency.

Our article offers a novel approach to digital youth. We don't just expand the knowledge base of youth studies but also propose a renewed lens through which we might understand and engage with the multifaceted worlds of young individuals today. Young people need hope as the future makers of the world, and therefore, we concentrate on how hope is present in youth's lives in different online environments and everyday practices. Even though hope is often connected with the future, we also concentrate on things already happening in the present. Ergo, the starting point of our article is anthropologist Sherry Ortner's (2016) suggestion that to understand the foundations of well-being and a good life, we need to study more than just the "harsh dimensions of social lives" (see also Willow 2023). Our two main research questions are 1) what kind of hopes and ideas of digital future do young people have on online environments? and 2) how do young people practice and cherish hope?

We draw on quantitative and qualitative research material produced in 2021–2022 on the digital everyday life of young people in Finland born in 2005

and 2006[1]. The quantitative material consists of an online survey (n=418), and the qualitative material consists of individual interviews with 28 young people and two group interviews. We also conducted digital ethnography, which in this case were online observations of the people followed by the participants on social media, the Instagram behavior of some participants, and researchers' notes of this observation. We have read, analysed, and interpreted our research material with affective lenses concentrating on different dimensions of hope. Theoretically, we lean on multidisciplinary understanding of hope and theories of affect, where affects and emotions, such as hope, are seen as critical links between micro and macro levels of social reality and as the glue binding people together and generating connections to larger social and cultural structures (Turner and Stets 2005). Affects are "hotspots", showing us socially and culturally meaningful issues that need our attention (Ahmed 2004; MacLure 2013).

We begin our article by elaborating digital environments that are meaningful for young people and dismantling the concept of hope. Then we offer an overview of our research materials, methods, and ethical considerations. In our three empirical chapters, we analyse hope as part of digital futures, small practices and collective paths. We end the article with a discussion and a conclusion.

Understanding hope in young people's digital environments

According to research, youth's online practices and ways of participation and belonging vary significantly, and digital well-being is seen as a goal that needs to be addressed (Livingstone & Haddon 2009; Boyd 2014; Helsper 2021). There is copious literature on the benefits and harms of digitalization and social media on young people. The positive aspects include equity (Nikunen & Valtonen 2022), new opportunities for education and work (Barron et al. 2014) and improved mental health and well-being (Lavis & Winter 2020). Among the negative aspects of social media and other online hangouts, the power of algorithms and threats to mental well-being are themes stressed by many researchers (Maalsen 2023). Also, young people themselves talk significantly about the addictive nature and usefulness of online activities, as well as time spent online. This is not a new phenomenon. Danah Boyd (2014) wrote about

1 The Dequal: Capturing Digital Social Inequality Young digi-natives' asymmetrical agencies within socio-technical imperatives and imaginaries project is funded by the Research Council of Finland (330574). We want to thank all those young people who participated in our study. We also warmly thank our colleagues at Youth Research and Development Centre Juvenia (XAMK), who shared their knowledge, ideas and experiences of hope among young people with us. The authors have planned the collection of data, collected, and analysed the data and written this article together.

teens' complicated online lives almost a decade ago, and her interpretations are still valid in many respects.

Understanding the concept of hope requires a multidisciplinary approach. Psychologically hope – "the personal rainbow of the mind" – can be defined as "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and to motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways" (Snyder 2002, 249). Understood this way, the key aspects of hope are two kinds of ways to think. First, there is the process of thinking about one's goals and the motivation to move towards them (agency thinking), and second, pathway thinking in which the most important aspect is to plan ways to achieve one's goals (Snyder 2002).

Philosopher Stan van Hooft (2014) argues that hopes are oriented toward the future and can only refer to what is possible in the future. For van Hooft, there seems to be a connection between hopes and wishes, but hope differs from other wishes in that its object needs to be the future of the person who hopes for it. Even though hope has a role in individuals' recovery processes and effects on emotional health (Cohen 2016), hope is not entirely connected to the person's efforts. It is possible that what is hoped for never occurs. (van Hooft 2014).

Anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) conceptualizes hope in a more cultural frame as a method of knowing and connects hope analytically with desires arguing that these two are not necessarily distinguishable. In Miyazaki's research, hope is not an endpoint of a process. If you approach hope as an endpoint, "the newness or freshness of the prospective moment that defines that moment as 'hopeful' is immediately lost" (Miyazaki 2004, 8).

Hope and future expectations have a unique role in young people's lives and youth studies; youth are the makers of the future. (Sun & Shek 2012; Aapola-Kari & Wrede-Jäntti 2017.) In Finland, health researcher Kaija Tikkanen (2012, 7; 86) understands young people's sense of hope as the basic element of their everyday life. Hope relates to an awareness of continuity and trust in achieving one's goals. Hope is personal, and the intensity varies, but in general, hope encourages and moves young people forward. It can also be strengthened through concrete activities connected to one's creativity, culture, or relationship with another person and the environment.

Furthermore, Hannila et al. (2015) relate young peoples' hope with awareness of others' support and help they can get if needed. This way, hope becomes a collective and shared achievement or goal. Even minor actions can add and strengthen hope, and by focusing on small but significant actions, we may understand what hope means in everyday life context (see also Kotzé 2016). Hope is often connected with positivism because they both are future-oriented and future-minded. However, Bruininks and Malle (2005) have shown that people think about hope and positivity differently. Different interpretations

occur when considering features like importance, likelihood, and perceived personal control. These differences are likely to predict different behaviors. Hope is often connected with expectations, but Dowling & Rickwood (2016, 63) state that "hope is based on perceived personal agency, while expectations are based on the perceived probable outcome". Unlike naïve optimism, hope builds on the possibility that things might be okay (Reick 2023).

When thinking about young people's hope in digital environments, we need to consider who can act and who has agency. To understand agency, we lean on posthumanist and new materialist thinking where scholars argue that agency does not belong inherently to humans. Karen Barad (2007), a quantum physicist, philosopher of science, and feminist theorist, understands agency as "distributed" (Jackson and Mazzei 2012, 113), produced in an enactment. Thus, agency is not the property of a person or a thing but a matter of intra-acting; in which the social and material are entangled. In our research, this means that, for example, digital devices, algorithms, or places are also active agents in youth's digital landscapes of hope and interconnected with the social and material world.

From a collective and cultural viewpoint, hope is also about the sense of (digital) belonging. According to sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis (2011) belonging is about an emotional attachment, about feeling at home. She further refers to anthropologist Ghassan Hage who argues that "home is an ongoing project entailing a sense of hope for the future" (Hage 1997, 103 as cited in Yuval-Davis 2011, 10). Hage (2004) further stresses that the idea of a nation-state is to produce and distribute hope, and we are currently witnessing the distributional network of hope shrinking. Thus, a sense of safety and security are important features of hope. From our viewpoint, participation is often seen as participation in society (citizenship) or political participation. However, belonging refers to a broader, more nuanced understanding, including young people's individual experience of being part of a larger community or group. Belonging is fluid and relational; therefore, the process where hope is co-produced and woven together with everyday practices, agencies, intensities, and contexts is important.

Materials, methods, and ethical considerations

Our research focuses on ninth graders (born mainly in 2005/2006) in three different regions in Finland. The ninth graders were chosen as a target group because they are at the start of their transition years concerning education, growing up, and approaching emerging adulthood in economically and socio-culturally different environments. In Finland, ninth grade is the last year

of comprehensive school for all students. After that, the education paths of young people separate.

The production of the research material started with a survey on the use, inclusion, and place of residence of young people. The survey was planned to be conducted in collaboration with schools, but due to COVID-19, the collaboration was cancelled, and access to the field became challenging and difficult. Some schools, however, promised to share the link to our online questionnaire in Wilma, an online communication system between schools and homes in Finland. We received 418 responses to our survey with the contact information of some volunteer interviewees (see Table 1 for place of residence and Table 2 for gender of the participants). We also marketed the survey through social media, spawning a few respondents and one interviewee. In the questionnaire we asked for volunteers to participate our interviews.

Table 1. Number of participants according to the place of residence. (*12 people out of a total of 418 questionnaire respondents did not tell their place of residence.)

Place of residence	Questionnaire participants	Interviewees
Regiopolis	149	9
Stagnating industrial town	198	19
Sleepy village	59	--
TOTAL	**406***	**28**

Our purpose was to meet young people face-to-face, chat with them, interview them and observe their use of digital media and devices, but because of COVID-19 pandemic our only option was to transfer the ethnographic study online. During autumn 2021–winter 2022, we interviewed 28 young people and conducted two group interviews (4 participants). The interviews were conducted with Teams or WhatsApp and recorded. Our interviews concentrated on three themes: agency, online practices, and place. We discussed, for example the kinds of online activities and daily rhythms they have. We explored how belonging to groups and friendships are created online, and what kind of pressures acting and being online has created. We asked our participants to choose and show us some of their online posts and who they follow online. Furthermore, we asked them about their hopes for the future: what they would change if they had the power to modify their online worlds.

We use hope as a concept and a method. In the analysis of our research material, we have read and re-read the material through an affective lens

Table 2. Participants according to gender.

	Female (N)	Male (N)	Non-binary/do not want to say (N)	All together (N)
Questionnaire respondents	222	175	10/11	418
Interviewees	14	13	1	28

and explored glimpses, agencies, practices, and contexts of hope. Following Miyazaki's (2004) framework understanding hope as a way of knowing, we interpret hope as something that is "not yet" but becoming. In the analysis, we searched for hopeful content in our interviews and other research material like field diaries and video recordings of the interviews. This holistic process of affective analysis demands a nuanced and empathetic attitude through careful reading. Affects can become visible in research material as emotions expressed in words like "it makes me happy to…" or this makes me feel sad" or just by stressing certain words in speech. Affective content can also be something like "I had this feeling…" or "It gives me vibes/shivers/ …" or expressed in facial expressions or bodily movements in video recordings of the interviews or laughter in interviews. (Zackariasson 2020.) Furthermore, the affective initiatives connected to hope can be a researcher's intuition that there is "something more" in this. Therefore, acquiring affective and embodied knowledge requires new kinds of means and tools and it demands sensitivity from a researcher (Koskinen-Koivisto & Lehtovaara 2020).

Our study has followed the principles of good scientific practice and general ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK), and the special ethical principles of youth research (see for example Rutanen & Vehkalahti 2019). Ethical permission for the project was granted by the Ethical Committee of the South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences (decision 28.1.2021).

The privacy statement and consent for the research were sent to interviewees beforehand by e-mail. The consent and privacy statements were also reviewed orally at the beginning of the interviews, and the young people were asked again if they wanted to participate in the study. We told our participants that even though we use direct quotations, individuals cannot be identified because we will use pseudonyms and placenames, and other possible identifiers will be removed. Our participants had a chance to ask questions about the research project during the interviews.

Everyday digital utopias

We start from the end: we concluded our interviews by asking our participants to imagine or dream of a better digital future or what they would change if they could. These dreams can be seen as a kind of everyday digital utopia experienced through the formation of new practices (Kiilakoski & Piispa 2023). Even though these everyday digital utopias are imagined, these are very closely tied to practices that challenge present injustices and enable thinking about the digital everyday in a different way. These illustrate how new social patterns can be formed in everyday lives. The task of thinking about the digital future was a difficult one for young people, and it was often followed by laughter, sighs, or silences. After a short moment of thinking, many of our participants answered that they wish or hope that people would be nicer to each other and that no one would get bullied anymore. This imagined future stemmed from the context of social media, which was considered somewhat "fake" and needed to be more realistic:

> Well [laughs], well like […] rather similar to what it is now […] but maybe more realistic, because for example, like TikTok shows, social media is like fake, like you could see what models look like in real life. These photos are so photoshopped. That could be more realistic. (Aino, H10s.)[2]

> Well, I don't know. I wish it would be less addictive or that it would have fewer disadvantages. And that people would not spend their time on social media or online or trust Google. (Sofia, H3s.)

> […] Well, something that would not guide people's lives too much. Of course, it brings possibilities, but then also the risks increase at the same time. (Matias, H4s.)

The wish for less addictive social media or online activities shows us how hopes for the future are closely entangled with the present, where change is needed. In the same way, issues of privacy and security were brought up in future hopes for the internet. This was mentioned by our study's more technically oriented participants, whose hobbies (e.g., gaming or coding) were more closely connected to online environments.

> Absolutely more private. Now it is normal for some companies to sell all your data to advertisers. I hope that there would be a solution at some point and that collecting

2 All our quotes have been translated from Finnish to English by the authors. All names are pseudonyms. Young people have identified themselves as female, male or non-binary, and we have chosen pseudonyms according to this identification.

> and selling this data would not be free or so cheap. Or was there something else that prevents companies from collecting this data. (Tuuli, H4a)

In some interviews, hopes were superseded by the ideas of a technological imperative (Talsi & Tuuva-Hongisto 2009) and technological imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim 2009; Jasanoff 2015). For example, in a pair interview with Aleksi and Oskari (H8s and H9s), we heard how the internet was perfect from Aleksi's point of view. He talked about some irritating people, but changing the internet or digitalization in this respect was not important for him. "It's not important for me that I would take part in making laws or such. Oskari (H9s) agreed with him but stressed that "in principle, you cannot do anything. Whatever you say, you can't influence it. You just need to get used to it. Get used to it what it is." This points out two things: the first vision echoes the technological imperative: the online world seems to be perfect, and second, the notion that they are unable to take action. For these two young people, digitalization and digital technologies seem to be something you cannot change or influence. Hope seems to be missing here or is not needed to change the current situation.

Small practices and agencies of hope

Hope is central to individual well-being (Cohen 2016), and in creating hope, all actions count. Therefore, we want to highlight the small and mundane practices that can create hope. Among our interlocutors, we found some people who stressed the role of very small positive practices, like sending hearts on social media or other forms of positive feedback to others. These could be people they knew, friends or acquaintances, or people they did not know personally. For these participants, who mostly identified themselves as females, spreading a positive attitude was important, as is the good mood spread by those they followed. For some of our participants, being in a good mood was not a necessity, but they knew how a positive mood could save the day, as Inka explains:

> Researcher: Is being in a good mood important to you?
> Inka, H13a: Well, generally, being in a good mood is nice, but it isn't necessary. I mean, you can use media, be online or anywhere else even if you don't have a good mood, or even if you get in a bad mood. I think a good mood is a plus. But if you watch or follow certain people, you know that they will inspire a good mood in you. And this can brighten your whole day if you are having a bad day, for example.

The importance of positivity and the desire to make other people feel good might be connected to hopefulness as a way of being. According to van Hooft

(2014, 49), "hopefulness is not constituted as a set of hopes directed upon specific outcomes but is a way in which she apprehends the whole world and everything that happens in it". In the following excerpt, Aino ponders the meaning of positivity in her life, describing it as a choice and highlighting the desire to spread a positive attitude to others.

> I have a more positive attitude than some of my friends. Sometimes I need to encourage my friends so that they would have a more positive mood. I am tired of negativity and don't want negative energy in my life. I want to be as positive as possible and spread this feeling to others too. (Aino, H10s.)

Aino also explained that she always tries to comment on others' posts in friendly and encouraging ways. This kind of activity is often labeled as slactivism or clicktivism, which both refer to lazy and not-so-serious methods of citizen participation (Pandey et al. 2020). Still, it could be seen as a silent or everyday resistance to an existing culture where positive actions are not taken seriously, and various power relations prevail (for more on silent resistance, see Lehtola & Autti 2019). However, if you examine these practices through the lenses of hope, all emojis and reactions matter, especially to people like Aino, who are tired of the negativity in online environments. The following excerpt from Katriina clarifies how even the tiniest of practices are important while also describing the vulnerability of online agencies. Young people carefully consider what they post online as if they get negative feedback, they may not want to do it again.

> I usually post selfies of my face on Instagram, but then one day, I thought that maybe it would be the right time, and I posted a picture of my whole body through a mirror. A photo where I had nice clothes and such […] and, well, I got really positive feedback. I have felt insecure about myself, and it was really meaningful that some people came to tell me that it was nice that I was finally encouraged to post that photo and that my action encouraged others too. It really made me feel good. (Katriina, H7s)

The story is a good example of small agency as defined by Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (2009; 2013, 46). Small agencies include repetitiveness and reciprocal movement, where the actor's network and individuals change when they create their identities and actions. In all these movements, freedom is essential, but the beginning is always connected to what has been started before and the kind of existing actions. Furthermore, this is connected to one's future and how it is possible to do something for that future (see also Tikkanen 2012). Their practices are full of hope also because of the reverberations they create.

Positive actions tend to spread and have an effect. Sarah Ahmed (2004) has written about the movement of affects through bodies. Adi Kuntsman (2012, 2) has defined this kind of movement as a reverberation "that makes us attentive to the simultaneous presence of speed and stillness in online sites; to distortions and resonance, intensification and dissolution in the process of moving through various digital terrains". Reverberation invites us to think not only about the movement of affects in and out of cyberspace through bodies but also about the multiplicity of effects such movement might entail. Affects are also sticky, as Sarah Ahmed (2010) has pointed out. This stickiness can be noted, for example in an interview, after which the researcher wrote in her fieldwork diary that "the participant's face is very close to the camera, and she has an intensive gaze. This interview makes me feel happy" (Fieldnotes 7.5.2021). Young participant's hope to be nice to other people online is embodied, and it certainly impresses the interviewer in the online interview.

The other side of the coin is always present in the narratives of these kinds of small agencies and minor practices of hope. By this, we mean the possibility that young people do very little or nothing because they think their actions will not end in the desired result. This kind of affectual vacillation, constant movement, is typical for the online behavior of youth. In the following example, Viivi explains how cautious she is online:

> Well, if I think of my own online practices, I think very carefully about what I post online, if it, for example, is an image that I can get criticized or if I know that someone wants to follow me and that someone is maybe a mean person, I do not accept this person as my follower. (Viivi, H21a)

Positive intentions and hope for likes or new followers are superseded by more powerful feelings of fear and suspicion. Our example highlights that reverberation happens in very small actions and the assemblage of human and non-human actors.

Following popular content creators is one of the most common online practices among youth. Our empirical material shows how a positive and friendly attitude invited people to follow various content creators, who create the feeling of a good mood. In positive and friendly atmosphere hope was connected to a better and more friendly future of online environments.

> [PinkkuPinsku] is perhaps the one I like most. Maybe just because, how would I say it […] I somehow just get such good vibes because she is just her genuine self. And those videos are meant for the same age group, PinkkuPinsku is not much older than me. (Olivia, H5s)

Notably, our interviewee mentions embodied experiences - good vibes – as something that illuminates important issues. Even though these kinds of embodied notions were relatively rare in our research material, they demonstrate how affects "touch us", how bodies are entangled in affective processes, and how affects are not always so easy to express in words (see also Ahmed 2004; Blackman and Venn 2010; Kuntsman 2012).

Collective hopeful paths

Research has shown that social media and online communication are legitimate means of developing social connections and can foster a sense of belonging among youth (Boyd 2014; Smith et al. 2021). Being together and connecting with friends, family, and peers were very important for our participants. The most important online environments, according to our online questionnaire (n=418), were Snapchat (86.6%), TikTok (79.4%), Instagram (79.1%), YouTube (75.4%), and WhatsApp (73%). In these online environments, young people keep in touch, chat with their friends and peers, watch interesting content, and sometimes create content and post themselves. Our participants were very strict about their privacy, and many of our interviewers told us that they like to see what other people post, but they rarely post themselves. Décieux et al. (2019) have stressed how social interactions in online environments play a huge role and have changed the patterns of social interactions among peers. The apps young people chose confirm the importance of connecting as one of the most important youth online practices.

Young people's everyday life is becoming increasingly homebound, and some researchers have observed that their social landscape is shrinking (boyd 2014, 21.) For many, the home was a safe and secure place, and being on your own was valued: "I am a person who likes to be at home. I need tranquility. I like to be with my friends, but it is important for me to be on my own." (Viivi, H21a) However, online environments have made it possible for young people to be physically at home and still be together and socialize online. This kind of activity is very typical for our participants. Sometimes online environments offer more hope than real life. Jimi described this in the following way:

> Well, quite often you get such feelings that, for example if you are stressed by school or your friends irritate you or you feel bad, you can tell in that other place that, hey, now I feel bad, does anyone have time to talk with me? But if you do it in real life, you get the feeling that you cannot go to your friend and just say that you feel bad; it is more difficult in real life than on the internet. (Jimi, H12a)

This is connected to the everyday well-being of young people, making new friends and connecting with new people. It is important that young people find people they can trust. Lotta (H24a) actively produces content online but do not want her Finnish schoolmates or even siblings to know about it. As described earlier by Viivi, Lotta feels uncomfortable with possibly receiving negative feedback and has therefore made a very tough decision. Luckily, she has found many positive people online:

> I don't want my schoolmates or other people in Finland to find me. I don't want to have any people who would recognize me or come somewhere else to tell me that, "hey, you suck as a person". Because Finns are so narrow-minded about these things, it is not a big deal here yet. As a content creator, I have found a kind of circle of my own where there are lots of nice people who are in similar life situations and think about similar issues. So, they are understanding, have experience, and have been extremely nice and supportive. (Lotta, H24a)

The excerpt above demonstrates how hope is entangled with more negative possible futures and is connected to Cohen's (2016) notion of the extent to which hope enables adolescents to experience positive affective responses (happiness) to counter detrimental personal functioning (feeling of pessimism).

Tuuli (H4a) is a very active person online and has been part of many online communities where they have gained new friends. Coding is Tuuli's hobby, and their father works in the field of digital technologies. Tuuli believes their future is in coding. Tuuli met one of her best friends online about 3–4 years ago who lives in Denmark. They both were members of the same online fan group. Tuuli describes that it was a coincidence that they met; they started sending memes to each other. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not been able to meet, but now they have started to phone each other and are planning to meet face-to-face. In Tuuli's words: "we have grown really close during this time".

Like Tuuli, Kristian has become friends with many people from online environments. Typically, friends met online can live far away:

> Yes, I have got lots of friends. And I think it is positive that I have found friends who have similar interests to me, and I have found my own kind of group that gives me a sense of security. I have lots of friends all over the world, even from Canada. (Kristian, H11s)

Tuuli and Kristian describe friendships formed online, but the sense of community in online environments is not always connected to reciprocal communication. Parasocial relationships are new kinds of emotional ties described as "nonreciprocal socioemotional connections with media figures such as celebrities or influencers" (Hoffner and Bond 2022, 1). Online environments and online platforms provide opportunities for parasocial relationships, and the connection of these to multiple dimensions of well-being among media users has been stated (Hoffner & Bond 2022). Parasocial relationships are related to the sense of belonging, security, and hope. In the following extract, Lotta describes why and when she likes to watch other people playing online games:

> And gaming has been a connecting factor in all of these because I like to watch gaming every now and then. You can find something that you really like to watch and spend time with during moments that you otherwise would do nothing than just lie in your bed and think of the meaning of your own life. You can just watch others doing something and living just the kind of life you once would have liked to have. (Lotta, H24a)

If we think of hope in youth online practices and environments, the wish that it is nice to watch people living the same kind of life you would like to have is worth noticing. It is clearly something you would like to have in the future, but at the same time, it is framed within "doing nothing" in a rather boring and hopeless moment (see also Ehn & Löfgren 2010). There is a slight moralizing tone present in their story: you should be doing something more useful than this. Thus, we argue that these kinds of moments are precisely where young people's hopes are expressed, but because these can easily be overlooked, a focus shift is needed.

Lotta also tells us about subathon which is short for "subscription marathon". A subathon is a popular mode of livestream which continues if the streamer receives a subscription from viewers. The stream ends when no one subscribes to it. (Turner 2022). At the time of the interview, Lotta watches Tubbo's subathon on YouTube (or Twitch) and checks it during the interview. Subathon can be interpreted as an example of hope because it shows the nature of digital everyday relationships while being a safe environment where young people can hang out. It is as if your friend were in the same room as you, even if you are alone in your own room. You know that there are plenty of others watching the same subathon who are purchasing additional time for it to continue. What differs from real life is that however critical these people might be, they cannot harm or hurt you in

any way you are safe. This way, watching a subathon can create a sense of belonging to an online community of parasocial relations (see also Boyd 2014; Eek-Karlsson 2021).

Discussion

"Hello guys, I love you", a smiling, soft voice begins a YouTube video. This video is favorited by one of our research participants, who says that the reason why she follows this content creator on social media is that it brings joy and good feelings: "it just makes me feel good. I like to watch them [videos]" (Maria, H1s). After watching these YouTube videos, we understand how nice it feels to hear that someone loves you. Our interpretation is that if you are a teenager whose parents probably do not start the day in a similar way, this must be intriguing, comforting and reassuring.

Hope is a multidisciplinary and multilayered concept and is empirically challenging to grasp. In our research material, hope was attached to future wishes for the internet and social media, small practices and agencies, and online friendships and other connections to peers. Hope was connected to wishes, positive thinking, and practices that seemed to increase positive feelings. In all these contexts, hope was vacillating; feelings of negativity, despair, and even hopelessness were always present in some way or another. Much of the negative discussion related to parents as they were the ones who controlled youth online practices most often and said that young people should do something more useful than just hanging out online.

Hope can be seen through the lenses of digital affect cultures, which Döveling, Harju and Sommer (2018, 1) have defined as "relational, contextual, globally emergent spaces in the digital environment where affective flows construct atmospheres of emotional and cultural belonging by way of emotional resonance and alignment". Similarly, we can interpret hope as a cultural practice as something people do instead of have. When we scrutinize how hope passes through the digital landscapes of youth, we see how it constructs "pockets of culture-specific communities of affective practices" (Döveling, Harju & Sommer 2018, 1).

Young people's small agencies and practices may be interpreted as a kind of everyday activism (Pink 2012) against the negative aspects of online platforms and social media. Some youth practices are tactical and aim to make others feel better. However, others do not interpret their actions this way even though they like to have positive vibes and wish that the online world would be different in the future: more friendly and non-toxic.

When thinking about hope, we need to ponder issues that are not discussed at all or are silenced or invisible. One such issue in our research was

things learned in online environments. Professor Emerita of Media Studies Kirsten Drotner (2008) has written that young people rarely define leisure activities as learning. However, they still learn a lot in online environments, for example, about digital literacy, societal roles, tolerance, and mutual respect. We discovered that it was difficult for young people to talk about the positive sides of digitalization and the use of digital platforms if it was not for "useful purposes". Further, in the interviews, young people often mentioned spending too much time using digital devices when they could do something more useful. When asked, they often could not tell what this "more useful" might be or mentioned things such as cleaning your room or going out. Although there are plenty of negative issues entangled with digital youth, we argue that young people should be encouraged to understand the deeper meaning of youth online cultures and elaborate new kinds of learner identities and ways to learn (see also Drotner 2008). Also in "doing nothing" there might be plenty of learning happening.

Conclusions

In this article, we examined young people and hope in digital environments. We asked what hope is and how young people practice and cherish hope in their online environments.

There is a connection between positivity and hope, even though these are separate issues, positivity is connected to hope in online practices of youth. At the same time, hope is woven together with more negative features like hopelessness, despair and fear. Hope is oriented toward the future, and digital technologies can work as an open-ended future-making tool for young people. Similarly, to the messy digital everyday of youth, hope is multidimensional, dynamic, contextual; individual and collective.

Alongside the negative views of digitalization, young people also see their digital participation from a somewhat negative viewpoint. Hope often becomes visible as a minor, even hidden counterforce. Many of our interviewees consume content they find positive or makes them feel good and energizes them. Some young people we have met act as goodwill ambassadors, doing small things like sending positive messages or hearts to the people they relate to. These are examples of small agency, which can lead to more considerable results. The aim of the goodwill ambassadors is to make online environments a better place for themselves and their peers.

Landscapes of hope are contextual sites where things are going to happen. Youth online landscapes of hope are oriented toward the future, and they are in a constant state of co-becoming with different kinds of contexts, agencies, practices, and intensities. As an affect, hope is important because

it identifies the hotspots that need to be supported to reach a good future. However, hope can remain invisible because it is often connected with small agencies or tiny practices connected to often invisible moments of "doing nothing". This makes grasping hope challenging but still worthwhile as a research subject.

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SOURCES

All the research material; online questionnaire, interviews, fieldwork diaries and notes and video recordings, are in the possession of the authors.

Research material:

- Online questionnaire (N= 418)
- Twenty-eight interviews of youth aged 14-16. All names are pseudonyms.
  - Spring 2021: H1s-H12s
  - Autumn 2021: H4a-H24a
  - Group interviews 1 & 2
- Fieldwork diaries and interview notes written by the authors.
- Video recordings of the interviews.

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