Questions of living and housing are most often approached from adults’ perspectives: their views on ideal housing environments, aesthetic values and needs guide decision-making in planning processes. At the same time children’s and young people’s opinions are easily neglected. There has been relatively little research on young people and their experiences of ‘home’ and belonging. For them, home and neighbourhood are special places where they construct but also contest their social identities.

As the actual home is often a place where children and young people are subject to direct control by their parents, they attempt to negotiate and carve out space for themselves by playing and hanging-out in their residential neighbourhoods. This is one of the reasons why community and the immediate neighbourhood are often very important for them.

The methodological palette in use in Dwelling with the City is a post-structural one. This is to say that it is multi-modal, adapted as research progresses, and strives to complement the messiness and richness of life rather than seeking to simplify it to clean-cut categories. We apply observation, photo-talks and photo-walks, collecting and arranging ‘things’ and interacting with environments. These methods are participatory in nature - while also questioning the limits and conditions of young people’s participation in research.

While young people are increasingly taken along as participants in planning, the premises on which their participation is built are rarely grounded on systematic research on their experiences. We claim that lifespan-informed decisions, practices, and policies concerning housing and living can support active dwelling with for all ages. A sense of community is built through accessibility and appreciation of diversity.

This project produces new understanding of the ways in which children and young people co-exist with their living environments and negotiate the spatial limitations of their everyday lives. By ‘dwelling with’ we refer to people’s meaningful engagements with their surroundings.
Dwelling with the City is a four-year research project funded by the Academy of Finland as part of its research programme The Future of Housing and Living (2011-2015). The objective of the project is to produce in-depth understanding of the ways in which young people grow co-existing with their everyday life environments. Field work for the project is conducted in three urban areas of different scales and contexts: Helsinki (population 589 000; Helsinki Metropolitan Area, 1 million) and Oulu (140 000) in the South and North of Finland respectively, as well as in San Francisco (815 000; SF Metropolitan Area, 4.2 million) in the USA.

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