Temporary geographies of the city: the experienced spaces of asylum seekers in the City of Turku, Finland

PÄIVI KYMÄLÄINEN & PAULINA NORDSTRÖM

Kymäläinen, Päivi & Paulina Nordström (2010). Temporary geographies of the city: the experienced spaces of asylum seekers in the City of Turku, Finland. *Fennia* 188: 1, pp. 76–90. Helsinki. ISSN 0015-0010.

Temporarity has a significant role in today's urban spaces and peoples' experiences of them. The city is often understood through stable material structures, while less attention is paid to such aspects of urban space that are there only for a limited time such as markets, events, manifestations and construction sites, for instance. Experiences of momentarity may be related to these kinds of elements of the city, but equally to personal feelings of not belonging to the city. In this paper we discuss, firstly, temporary geographies and their importance in today's urban studies. Debates on relational spaces and moving geographies have directed attention towards the temporary aspects of urban spaces. Temporarity itself has mostly been discussed in relation to urban planning while less attention has been paid to other aspects of everyday life. Secondly, the theoretical aspects of temporary geographies in this paper will be illustrated with empirical material collected among young asylum seekers in the City of Turku in Finland in 2008–2009. The asylum seekers were interviewed and they kept photo diaries about their urban experiences. The material demonstrates the feelings of momentarity in urban space as the asylum seekers' uses of the city were coloured by uncertainty while they were waiting for the decision about permission to stay in the country.

Keywords: temporary geographies, cities, experiences, asylum seekers

Päivi Kymäläinen & Paulina Nordström, University of Turku – Department of geography, FI-20014 Turku, Finland.
E-mails: paivi.kymalainen@utu.fi, paulina.nordstrom@utu.fi.

Introduction

Temporary events and meanings have a significant role in today's urban spaces and peoples' experiences of them. The city is often understood through stable material structures, while less attention is paid to the temporary aspects of urban space. Many experiences of the city are characterized by temporarity: cities are filled with markets, street art, manifestations, events, construction sites and other elements that are there only momentarily[1]. Experiences of momentarity may be related to such changing elements of the city, but equally to peoples' uncertainty about their status. Both material and social uncertainty are important aspects in current urban experience. Here we discuss such uncertainty with the help of temporary geography by which we mean spatial thinking that concentrates on those aspects of space that are there only for limited time (cf. Lehtovuori et al. 2003; Kohoutek & Kamleithner 2006: 34; Misselwitz et al. 2007), or are susceptible to change.

Given the multiplicity of the changing aspects of the world, it is surprising how little temporarity has been discussed in human geography or in the related fields of study. More than in geography, temporarity has been discussed in the fields of architecture and urban planning which have focused especially on temporary grass roots activities in urban renewal areas and wastelands (e.g. Lehtovuori et al. 2003; Plan B 2007) or on events in urban space (e.g. Hou 2010). These uses and activities have been regarded

URN:NBN:fi:tsv-oa2546

as capable of disrupting the established orderings of urban spaces, and they have also been considered as having more permanent effects if they encourage similar functions in the future.

In addition to urban planning and the uses of urban spaces, momentarity is more widely present in the various material, social and visual aspects of the everyday life in the city. The theoretical thinking of temporary geography can thus also rely on the debates on relational space (e.g. Harvey 1973; Massey 2005), moving geographies (e.g. Kymäläinen 2005; Cresswell 2006) or becoming places (e.g. Doel 1999; Tryselius 2007; Dovey 2010) which have re-directed the attention to the changing aspects of human environment. In this article, we rely on these different theoretical backgrounds when we discuss temporality in the everyday experiential spaces of the asylum seekers.

Discussions of asylum seekers have concentrated on administrative and legal questions: on the legislation or the differences in the amount of asylum seekers in different countries. The emphasis has been on groups of people, and thereby, the experiences of asylum seekers have been explored from a rather distant and generalizing position. Here we want to re-focus attention to the uncertainty that characterizes the urban experience of the asylum seekers as they do not know about their whereabouts in the future and therefore cannot easily develop a sense of belonging to the city. This aspect will be discussed in the empirical part of the article that is concerned with the experiences of young asylum seekers who have been studied in the City of Turku in Finland in 2008–2009. These unaccompanied minors seeking asylum were interviewed and they kept photo diaries about their urban experiences while they were waiting for progress in their asylum seeking process and information on whether they can stay in Finland.

The introduction of the paper is followed by a theoretical and conceptual discussion on temporary geography. We review some of the previous studies on temporarity, mobility and relationality in relation to urban studies and the experienced spaces of the asylum seekers. After that, we analyze the empirical material concerning the young asylum seekers in the City of Turku. The definitions of the asylum seekers, their temporary settings and the photographed spaces of their daily life will be of interest. At the end of the paper, we will discuss the findings of the lived spaces of the asylum seekers and summarize the connection of such topics on the issues of temporary geography.

Temporary geography in previous studies

Moving and relational spaces

Temporarity *per se* has not been discussed much in human geography, but many thoughts have still directed attention towards such topics. Especially, postmodern and poststructuralist thought has challenged the insights of the world as a stable reality, and has noticed the uncertainty included in people's everyday spaces and places. Such approaches have encouraged, for instance, the thoughts of relational (e.g. Massey 2005) and performative (e.g. Kaiser & Nikiforova 2008) spaces where temporarity is one of the starting points.

The relational readings of space bring new elements to the exploration of experiential places which have earlier leaned much on humanistic thought. However, humanistic geography has not regarded places as stable, but rather as dependent on subjective experiences and meanings. Still, there has been the assumption that the effort of a singular human being is to turn moving, changing and uncertain space into a permanent, secure and meaningful place (e.g. Tuan 1977). There has also been emphasis on everyday life in the humanistic studies of life-world (e.g. Buttimer 1976; Ley 1977). David Ley (1977: 504), for instance, has characterized life-world as the "group-centred world of events, relations and places infused with meanings and often ambiguity".

Humanistic thinking resembles some current thoughts of eventful and changing places. Ley's humanistic description of place as a world of events has similarities with poststructuralist thinking in terms of emphasizing spaces and places as events and processes (e.g. Doel 1999; Kymäläinen 2005; Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006; Olsson 2007; Tryselius 2007). In poststructuralist geography, Marcus Doel (1999: 7, 2000: 125), for instance, has pointed out that the word 'space' should not be interpreted as a noun, but rather as a verb *spacing* that brings the idea of movement and process to the spatial thinking. Furthermore, Jonathan Murdoch (2006: 21) has written about space that is not a container for entities and processes, but is rather "made by entities and processes". Gunnar Olsson (2007) instead writes about 'abysmal' which is some kind of in-between land that cannot be turned into exact maps, explanations or categories. According to Olsson (2007: 87), "the question of identity and existence is the question of

how I recognize something when I encounter it again. Boiled down to its essentials the problem splits into two: (1) what I meet again is rarely exactly what I met before; (2) even when I do meet something again, it tends to come with another name and another meaning".

Doreen Massey (2005: 141) has written about the event of place in which the previously unrelated comes together, and which is "a constellation of processes rather than a thing". For Massey, spaces and places are in a process of always becoming and never completed. According to her, space is rather a story with an open end than a container for ready-made identities (2005: 8–11). In addition, Michael Dear (1997: 232) has asked if there is a place for authenticity and identity in the forever transforming time-spaces. This is an important question since people are no longer considered as having an in-built and ready-made identity, but many identities that are intersecting, overlapping and throughout developing (Hall 1999).

The above mentioned examples are links to the poststructuralist critique of categories and binaries that seek to totalize the world and halt its movement (e.g. Dixon & Jones 2004; Cloke & Johnston 2005; Ellin 2006). In a sense, all these ideas tell about spaces that are characterized by temporarity: they cannot be given final forms as they are produced by movement and change.

Our starting point in this article is that place is not regarded as one, but rather as many. In a humanistic sense, many people long for a place where they can root themselves and have a home full of meanings, but that is possible only for some. There is an increasing amount of people who do not have one significant place as they want or are forced to move from houses, cities and countries to other ones. Thus, sticking to the sense of belonging is rather problematic especially in the case of asylum seekers who live in the city without having a clear status. In a sense, the asylum seekers are there, in the place, without the ability to be fully seen and present (see also Hannula 2001: 37–38; Kymäläinen 2003: 244–245).

Moving and relational space are examples of the thoughts that have encouraged the development of the ideas of temporary geographies. Relational space (e.g. Harvey 1973; Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006) and moving geographies (e.g. Cresswell 2006) are today rather popular thoughts in human geography. Relational space was discussed already in the 1970's by David Harvey (1973) in his *Social Space and the City*. In relational thinking space is not regarded as static or absolute, but, according to Harvey (1973: 168), it is constructed in relation to others that are simultaneously present in the space. Later on, the insights of relational spaces have been diversified (e.g. Doel 1999; Murdoch 2006; see also Lefebvre 1991). One of the most important current thinkers in this sense is Massey who writes in her book *For Space* about the change from bounded places and isolated identities towards "understanding of the spatial as relational through connections" (2005: 81). According to her, space cannot be seen as a single totalising project as it is incomplete, in production and includes fractures and ruptures (2005: 100). Furthermore, she argues that even though place or space is open and internally multiple, people have to make something of it at least temporarily (2005: 141). Place or space does not change through belonging or rootedness (as was suggested by humanistic geographers), but rather through practising and negotiating it (2005: 154).

Thoughts of movement have been included in relational thinking as well as in the various discussions about change. Ideas of moving space have been developed within poststructuralist (e.g. Gibson-Graham 1997; Doel 1999; Murdoch 2006) and non-representational (Thrift 2008) thinking. Moreover, there have been debates also on movement itself: Tim Cresswell has written about geographies on the move. He argues that geography is too often equated with fixity and stasis even though mobility is "just as spatial – as geographical – and just as central to the human experience of the world" (Cresswell 2006: 3). Nigel Thrift (2008), for his part, has written about movement-space by which he means space that is relative, but still relies on absolute space for its existence. Moreover, movement-space is context-sensitive, can be described in terms of irregularity, and refocuses attention from the monumental and fixed aspects of space to its unexpected or changing conditions. Conceptual and theoretical thoughts like these are just a small part of the thinking that can be related to the issues of temporarity. However, they give hints about the strength of the ideas of temporarity in the conceptual thought in geography – even though the names that are used to call these phenomena may vary.

Temporary spaces of the refugees

The temporary aspects of urban space are experienced in the everyday life of the inhabitants (e.g.

de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 2004). Also in urban planning the everyday has been seen as an alternative for masterplans which tend to leave the small and temporary aspects of the city unnoticed (see Temel 2006: 60). Studies concerning planning have given interesting insights into the issue of temporarity (e.g. Lehtovuori et al. 2003; Misselwitz et al. 2003, 2007; Ruoppila 2004; Haydn & Temel 2006; Plan B 2007), but it is peculiar how the theme has not reached studies concerning other aspects of urban space. Acknowledging the experiences of temporarity in daily life opens other views and gives room also for understanding the embodied experiences of temporarity. Next, we will discuss the earlier studies on temporary geography by concentrating especially on the temporary spaces of the refugees.

In his various texts, Zygmunt Bauman (e.g. 1991, 1993, 1995) has discussed the questions of belonging and not belonging in the context of others and strangers. According to Bauman (1993), we do not know strangers as 'specific humans', or do not know their personal identities. Rather, strangers derive identity from the categories to which they have been assigned (e.g. asylum seekers, refugees, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum). People do not then know these human beings, but only know *of* them in a roundabout way: through the information about the categories. They are known as types, not as people (Bauman 1993: 149; see also Bauman 1996: 47–56). Whereas natives have the opportunity to *be*, strangers have to *become* something else (Bauman 1991: 155) in order to be accepted as full human beings.

These challenges that Bauman mentions are embodied and experienced in the social spaces of cities as the strangers are encountered in the lifeworld. The daily life in the city is constructed when the intersecting trajectories and knowledges meet in the same geometrical spaces when individuals and groups make paths and trajectories through the city (de Certeau 1984; Crang 2001: 187). In the everyday life, it becomes clear how human beings can be socially distant even though they are physically close (Bauman 1993: 152–153). In addition to social space, the status of the human beings is also set in the planning of physical spaces. Bauman (1993: 158) criticizes the organization of urban space as there is a tendency to segregate people and to deny disorder by planning functional spaces, straight lines and pure geometry. In other words, the effort is to plan a rational city that excludes the vagrants, strangers and wanderers (Bauman 1996: 32–33). The segregating elements of planning are already noticed when you think about the location of the reception centre of the asylum seekers. In the City of Turku, the reception centre is located about 10 kilometres from the city centre, which means that people must make the effort to get to the liveliest social spaces of the city where encounters with the natives are most likely to happen. The city centre includes what Augé (1995: 106) calls non-places: anonymous routes, stations, stores and hotels which, paradoxically, can sometimes make foreigners feel at home.

Taina Rajanti (1999: 9) has discussed the city as a form of living or a home, or as a way for human beings to be communal in the world. She also contributes to the discussion about the status of the refugees by pondering the words of inhabitation, coming from somewhere, feeling home and citizenship in her research (1999: 182). Rajanti sees inhabitation as the fundamental way of being in the world. If a person has left a place, it is usually possible to return there (1999: 31, 49). But all the refugees do not have the freedom to return to their origins and, thus, being a refugee can be compared with rootlessness; to be withdrawn from the soil. The inhabitation – the fundamental way of being in the world – of the refugees is thus fragile (Rajanti 1999: 188).

It also takes time to naturalize somewhere or to feel at home (Rajanti 1999: 45–46), and because of this the situation of the refugees is complicated. It becomes more complicated when thinking about the rights of the refugees in comparison with citizens. Although the Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are born free and equal, this right is in context with the citizenship that is granted to the natural persons who are born in a nation-state. As Franke (2009) states, the refugee or refugeeness mostly cannot be located as it is handled as an abstract and distant matter. Moreover, the refugees are represented in the ways that allow the citizens' peace of mind in their own locations in the world (Franke 2009: 364–365).

The encounters with strangers and even their presence can affect the social structure of the city. When the city life is thought of, it is possible that temporary visitors may transform permanent ways of urban life or interrupt the accustomed ways of using social space (cf. Lehtovuori et al. 2003: 31). The personal spatial experiences of the refugees are mostly temporary as they stay in the city only for a limited time. However, as they are known rather as an anonymous group than as people, the

inhabitants do not sense the feeling of temporarity. What from the perspective of the refugees or asylum seekers feels like temporary experience, seems from the perspective of the inhabitants as a more permanent increase in the amount of foreigners in the cityscape. It is doubtful whether such anonymous experience can advance the alternative understandings of the city, or the formation of what Hille Koskela (2009: 356) calls the clay city: a tolerant city which surprises in the everyday life.

In the case of asylum seekers, the experiences are coloured by the assumptions regarding who is allowed or hoped to be seen in urban space (cf. Mitchell 2003; Staeheli & Mitchell 2008). The uncertainty about the future whereabouts is embodied (about embodiment: see Duncan 1996; Nast & Pile 1998) in the daily practices and experiences in the city. Samu Pehkonen and Eeva Puumala (2008) have studied temporarity through the corporeal choreographies of asylum seekers (see also Puumala & Pehkonen 2010). They found out that the institutional identity given to the asylum seekers differs significantly from the ways that they see themselves and their bodies. They are marked by the legislation of the country they are staying in. In their stories, the asylum seekers do not explain themselves in relation to the city or region they live in, but rather in relation to the concepts that have been used to define them during the process. In that process, the experiences of the asylum seekers are discounted (Pehkonen & Puumala 2008: 162–163).

Next, we will turn to the urban experiences of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Through the material is asked how the asylum seekers' uses of the city are coloured by the uncertainty about their staying in Turku. Like in Pehkonen's and Puumala's study, also in this case the experiences are coloured by the status given to the asylum seekers in definitions and restrictions. However, we also try to look beyond them in order to find out some elements of urban experience to which these temporary visitors of the city can relate despite their difficult situation. The experiences of the journey (Hopkins & Hill 2008), the new physical surroundings (Risbeth & Finney 2006) and the lived places (Spicer 2008), as well as conceptions of home and belonging (Sirriyeh 2008) of the refugees and the asylum seekers have been studied in Great Britain during the past decade (see also Healey 2008). To these important findings we add the discussion of temporarity.

Stories of the unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the City of Turku

Definitions of asylum seekers

An asylum seeker is a person who arrives in a country and applies for international protection. The status of an asylum seeker is marked by uncertainty. When an asylum seeker opens the door of a reception centre s/he can be compared with a tourist. Both the tourist and the asylum seeker are visitors in a city. They stay momentarily, leave some footprints in the place, and often depart from the city when the application process is finalized. Nevertheless, an asylum seeker is not a tourist. A tourist has freedom to choose a destination and to decide for how long s/he is going to stay in a place (cf. Bauman 1993: 240–244). The same does not apply to an asylum seeker. Some asylum seekers might have an idea of the destination of their journey, but most of them do not have the possibilities to contribute to the decision about where they are taken.

Peter E. Hopkins and Malcom Hill (2008: 266) studied young asylum seekers in Scotland and found that the unaccompanied minors seeking asylum seldom have a clue of the route or of the country where they are taken. Also, the length of their stay varies. In Finland, the final decision about the asylum seeking process depends on whether the person can prove that s/he is in need of protection and s/he is irreproachable. The story told to the authorities has to be shown to be true. In the hearing of an asylum seeker, authorities are interested in why and how the person has reached Finland. The personal experiences of the asylum seekers are less important (Pehkonen & Puumala 2008: 160) which indicates the practice that Bauman (1993) and Franke (2009) describe in that the strangers like refugees are known only as types and through classifications without recognizing their status in the everyday life of the city.

The Geneva Declaration from 1951 defines international conditions for granting refugee status. According to the declaration, refugee status can be given to a person who is in

> *fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his*

> *former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it* (UNHCR 2007).

The legislation of the European Union and Finland grants international protection according to the Geneva Declaration (European Union 2000a; Suomen säädöskokoelma 2004). Although Finland is trying to put into practice regulations enacted by the European Union, and to reach its goals that are set in legislation, there are still some differences between Finland and the EU in determining the content of international protection and in permitting residency for some other reasons than refugee status.

The legislations in both the European Union and Finland notice the vulnerable position of minors seeking asylum. There are some minimum requirements that the member states should follow when minors are concerned. These requirements deal with receiving minors and handling their applications. One request is that for each individual young applicant should be appointed a legal representative who is of assistance in the asylum seeking process. The Dublin Regulation of the European Union affects the cross-national moves in Europe. The idea of this particular regulation is that only one European Union country should be responsible for handling an application for international protection (European Union 1997, 2003). In practice this means that the responsible country is that which first receives the application for international protection, or where the applicant first comes across with the authorities and gets her/his fingerprints entered in the system (see European Union 2000b). The main reason why some minors seeking asylum in Finland in 2008 received a negative answer was that they had already been registered in some other European Union country (Maahanmuuttovirasto 2009).

In Finland, if the terms for international protection are not fulfilled, a person can be given permission to stay in the country for humanitarian reasons or if there is some other need for protection. Temporary permission to stay can also be given if it is impossible to remove the applicant from the country at the moment when the decision is made. The asylum seeking process in Finland begins when a person applies for international protection at the border of the country or soon after the border crossing. After leaving an application for asylum, the applicants are accommodated in reception centres that are situated around the country. The asylum seeking process itself consists of interviews with the authorities with the aim of finding out if there is persecution, or other trespasses and threats against the applicant in the country of origin. Finnish immigration service is mainly responsible for this detection. In the case of unaccompanied minors, there is always a personal representative present to assist the underaged person (Suomen säädöskokoelma 2004).

Temporary settings of the young asylum seekers

The research material consists of interviews and photo diaries that the young asylum seekers kept during their stay in Turku (see also Nordström 2009). Photo diaries have previously been used in human geographical research (Markwell 2000; Latham 2003, 2004; Risbeth & Finey 2006). Clare Risbeth and Nissa Finey (2006) have used photo diaries in their research of the experiences of urban greenspaces of the refugees and asylum seekers. In his studies, Alan Latham (2003, 2007) has taken the problem of temporality into consideration by asking how the momentarity of the researched could be represented so that the study would simultaneously tell something useful of the world. The answer might lay in the non-representational theory and performative thoughts. Thrift (2000: 215, 2008), for instance, has discussed the ways in which events are shaped at the very special moment when they are becoming true. He focuses on daily life which he regards as performative and as developing new practices (Thrift 1997: 126–133). Of such performative life can only be told partial truths, which should be acknowledged in a research process. Pictures, for instance, are not then seen as representations of the world, but rather as the interpreted stories of the momentary events of daily life.

The material was collected at Pansio reception centre in the City of Turku. The participators were chosen with the help of a social worker in the reception centre. The social worker proposed that the study could concentrate on a group that took part in a pilot study program (Nutukka) in the City of Turku. In addition, the social worker asked a few other asylum seekers to participate as she knew that they would be interested in taking pictures and would conduct the assignment. In the beginning, the group was first met in order to in-

troduce the study. Later on, another meeting was arranged so that the asylum seekers had the chance to ask questions with the help of interpreters.

Altogether six asylum seekers kept photo diaries and were interviewed. One interviewee was left outside the study because only one photograph came out from his film. In addition, he was interviewed after he had already moved away from the reception centre. Moreover, in the interview there was not interpreter even though he would have needed one. This interviewee was also in a slightly distinct situation from the others because he knew the destination of his journey since one of his relatives had arranged his arrival. The person also arrived in Finland together with his mother and they travelled a part of the journey together. The person stayed a few days in Helsinki in an enclosed reception centre that puts people up whom the police or the border guard has taken into custody. An unclear route or identity, for example, may be a reason for this kind of action.

The youngsters kept photo diaries, they were interviewed and also several informal discussions were conducted. An interpreter was of assistance in four of the interviews, but the informal discussions were carried out in Finnish. The interviews were stored on a digital tape recorder and informal discussions were written in a field diary after the meetings with the young asylum seekers. In the interviews and discussions, the young asylum seekers were asked about their personal backgrounds, experiences in Turku and the photographs they had taken. In addition to the interviews, one of the youngsters wrote down his thoughts over some photographs in Arabic. These texts were later translated into Finnish.

At the moment of the study, all the young asylum seekers lived at a reception centre, or had just moved from there. The reception centre is situated approximately 10 kilometres from the city centre of Turku, and consists of three separate buildings which all have their own rules and means. One of the buildings is meant to host unaccompanied minors mainly between ages 15 and 17. This building had earlier been used to accommodate people working in the shipbuilding in the Pansio industrial area. Now it was the place where all the youngsters stayed at different periods of time during their asylum seeking process. Within a short walking distance from this building lies a centre for adults and families who are seeking asylum. In the spring of 2008 a building for people on the threshold of adulthood was also opened. One of the young applicants stayed there for a couple of months in the summer of 2008. In the course of the study, the status and the position of the asylum seekers changed: some left the reception centre, some were given a permit of residence, and in one person's case the residency was denied and he was sent to another European Union country.

All the young asylum seekers had distinct and unique stories. These stories were told at a fluid space between the past and the future (cf. Doel 1999, 2000). The stories of urban experiences were affected by the different backgrounds, personalities and dreams of the young asylum seekers. What had already been seen, heard and felt played a role when a person interpreted her/his daily surroundings in the City of Turku. The young asylum seekers came from five different countries: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq and Russia. They all had different family relations, religious views and reasons why they had left their country of origin. The family backgrounds varied: some did not have any family left, the family members of some lived in a neighbouring country, one person had lost his father, and a girl's parents were still in the home country, and she heard from them only occasionally. Even though these backgrounds were not delicately analysed while studying the asylum seekers, they were acknowledged.

Each individual young applicant had her/his own paths in the city even though there were also similarities between the youngsters. The places are relational (cf. Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006; Thrift 2008) and momentary in the stories of the young asylum seekers. The relational spaces were constructed in a process where the young asylum seekers lived and interpreted the city in their personal ways. They attended the everyday activities of a young resident: woke up in the morning to go to school, and used public transport and other services. Still, they held a special position as city dwellers as many of their activities were mainly targeted to asylum seekers. Moreover, their future was open as they did not know what was going to be the result of their asylum seeking process. There are few alternatives: an asylum seeker can be sent back to the country of origin, s/he can be sent to a European Union country where s/he has already been registered as an asylum seeker, or s/he can get a permission to stay in the country (Suomen säädöskokoelma 2004). Even if the answer is favourable to the applicant, the future dwelling place can remain unknown for several months. In the meantime, the person continues her/his daily

activities in the reception centre although it is meant to host applicants, not people with a living allowance. At the end of 2008, the reception centre for young asylum seekers in Turku was overloaded as many were waiting for to be settled.

Temporary spaces through the camera lens

A photograph can be compared with a vehicle that has a capacity to carry to past times and places (Collier 2001: 36). However, it is never possible to completely reach that which has once taken place. At the moment when the photography is taken, everything is already changing: the sky is turning from blue to grey and the people are taking different positions. The moment of taking a photograph and interpreting it might also take a person to past places. In the pictures of the young asylum seekers' photo diaries there are everyday surroundings in the temporary setting, small personal pieces of memory and things that have made an impression.

Altogether 90 pictures were taken. After the first period of taking photographs, three of the youngsters agreed to continue photographing and they took another film of pictures. Moreover, one of the youngsters took photographs with his friend's digital camera. The guidelines for taking photographs were rather free as we did not want to control the photographing too much. The photographing was a process during which the participators were instructed to take photographs of their everyday surroundings and places that evoke positive or negative feelings. The period of taking photographs was planned to last for three weeks, but in the end, the photographing lasted for four months, from May 2008 to September 2008.

In the first pictures that we received, the juveniles had mainly photographed a sunny day in the City of Naantali where they had visited with the school group. One special day in Naantali is not meaningless, as a visit there was clearly a particular event that had made an impression on the youngsters. However, one picture that had been taken from the city centre of Turku was of a restaurant boat at the River Aura. This photograph created the idea of a research as a process and inspired to encourage the juveniles to continue keeping photo diaries. The processual approach here meant acknowledging that everything cannot be planned in advance, but a researcher has to stay alert for new ideas and paths that might occur during the research.

The data was analysed by using narrative analysis. We constructed narratives from the stories that were interpreted from the photo diaries, interviews and discussions. The idea was that the researcher encountered the young asylum seekers in their temporary situations. The story of these encounters was told in the research in an imaginative way. The researcher also wanted to encourage further interaction and arranged together with the young asylum seekers an exhibition of the photographs in a shopping centre. The idea of the exhibition was to leave the research material open for different interpretations in which space could be negotiated (cf. Massey 2005: 154).

The young asylum seekers had diverse feelings when taking photographs: one felt embarrassed, the second was keen on taking photographs, and the third was not sure what he could store to a film roll:

> *It is a street. It is in the morning. I want to go to school at seven in the morning. There are few cars in the morning. I wait, that the car passes, because I feel ashamed* (a boy, 17 years).

Some similarities can be found in the photo diaries even though all youngsters had a personal way to interpret the city. Most of the young asylum seekers photographed the reception centre which offered a shelter for the youngsters in their temporary situation. Social workers were there to look after for the unaccompanied minors. Despite that, most of the minors that lived at the reception centre were responsible for many daily activities from cooking to laundry. They had different views of the building. It was photographed either from the outside or inside. One of the youngsters took a photograph through a window and described the route along which she sometimes walks (Fig. 1). Another photographed a trail in a broad-leaved forest near the reception centre and described her feelings. The girl who took this picture had first been afraid when walking along the trail:

> *...and when I was at the reception centre for adults, when the school was there, I used to walk here (the trail). In the beginning I was afraid of this place… because it is in the woods, I used to think, that might there be some dangerous animals that would eat me… Usually in Somalia you should not walk in this kind of places, because there are dangerous animals, snakes… And at that time I did not know if it is safe to go there, that is the reason why I took this photograph* (a girl, 16 years).

Fig. 1. A view from the window of the reception centre.

When the girl was a newcomer, she had not known what might be there in the woods, and interpreted the surroundings according to her previous experiences. The third person photographed the reception centre to show that he did not like the building because it was too crowded and noisy there.

The reception centre awoke distinct feelings which also, in some cases, changed during the research. One reason why some of the youngsters liked the reception centre was that there were people who spoke the same language. This was the case with a Somali girl and Afghan boy, whereas a Russian boy had no one to whom to speak his own language. However, the main reason why some juveniles were unhappy with the reception centre was the crowdedness:

> *Because there are a lot of people here. And when everyone's friends come, it is so much…Everybody is speaking and you cannot live peacefully here* (a boy, 15 years).

The amount of the residents increased during the study period, but started to decrease again towards the end of the study at the end of the year 2008.

Also, the school was widely photographed as the young asylum seekers were all very keen about attending the education offered to them (see also Sirriyeh 2008). Pictures were also taken of routes, special places and surroundings. One youngster described in the interview two encounters at a bus stop:

> Encounter one: *One time there was a man. He had not drunken a lot. He spoke with me. First he had thought that I did not speak Finnish. He spoke English with me. Then I spoke with him. He asks: Do you speak Finnish? I answer: A bit. And then we speak in Finnish.*
>
> Encounter two: *… I wait at the bus stop, a women comes. She speaks with me. She first asks: Do you speak Finnish or English? Before, I did not speak*

Fig. 2. In between two countries: An Afghanistan flag, the two Beijing Olympic Games representatives of the home country and sports achievements in Finland.

Fig. 3. First time in a gym.

> *good Finnish. I speak English better. And she speaks English with me. She asks: Where do you come from? I answer: From Russia. She says: With your family? I say: I do not have one… I say: I am from a children's home. She says: I work there (in some children's home). Then she says: I like you a lot, because you have lived in a children's home. Then she asks: Do you believe in God?... I say: No, I don't* (a boy, 15 years).

Some of the places were photographed because they had become familiar through the school. Many of these places are known by the city dwellers of Turku and tourists, but some might be unfamiliar also to long-time residents. The details were personal memories mainly from the home country (Fig. 2) or beautiful and interesting pieces in the new surroundings (Fig. 3). Some of these might seem meaningless: what can a single wall with special items, an Islamic calendar or a death cap tell of momentarity experiences? Still, such photographs tell about a journey between the old and the new as memories are carried to a place where the person encounters the unfamiliar (see also Risbeth's and Finney's (2006) findings in their study of the refugee perspectives of the urban greenspaces in the City of Sheffield in Britain).

One of the youngsters had a very peculiar way to interpret what he saw in the city. We wanted to single out the story of this youngster because seeing through the camera lens was the way for him to interpret what he encountered. In addition, a successful dialogue was reached with him. In his home country, the boy had photographed and videoed weddings and bombings. The stories of his pictures tell something extremely fragile about the temporary spaces of an asylum seeker and how it is very problematic to treat asylum seekers as a homogenous group. The young person had a hard and difficult asylum seeking process because he had already been registered as an applicant in another European Union country. In the interview and discussions, the young man explained that he came to Finland because at the beginning of his journey to Europe he had been told that Finland respects human rights and he would probably get protection here. The way to the expected haven was not straightforward, but also included stopovers of varying durations. On the journey to Finland there were two meetings with the authorities: first in Italy and later in Sweden. In Italy, the boy was given advice to lie about his age if he wanted

to continue his journey. The boy was sent to the street when he said he was an adult. In Sweden, he repeated this practice and was instead taken into a reception centre.

In the interview and discussions, the young boy often thought about human rights, differences between the two societies and difficulties he had faced in Iraq. Once when the boy saw a man and a girl helping an old lady in the city centre, he photographed that happening and afterwards he wrote:

> *In Iraq they told me that in Europe one person does not help another. As I was walking in the street I saw a girl and an old man helping a lady who had fallen. They took the lady to a pavement and I took a photograph to say: in Europe people help one other and respect human rights* (a boy, 17 years).

Later on the same day the boy heard some street musicians' playing at the market place and this sound took the boy to the street of his home town where the sounds come from exploding bombs:

> *I heard music when walking in the street. As I came closer I saw two youngsters playing music. It is really wonderful to hear music in the street and enjoy the beauty of the world. In my home country, when you walk in the street, you hear bombing, but here you hear music* (a boy, 17 years) (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Two street musicians in a market place in the city centre.

The boy also photographed the Aura River as well as vessels, birds, seagulls and a bench nearby. When he had arrived in Turku, the river had reminded him of his home town with the difference that the home town had been destroyed. At the beginning of the summer, the boy photographed a vessel along the river and wrote:

> *Why do people drink alcohol in the streets, parks and everywhere? Might it be that they consider it to be the best of all? I wonder why these people do not figure out something better. I took this picture of that which is brown in colour and looks like bee* (a boy, 17 years).

Before the picture was taken, a drunken man had offended the boy with some dirty words. The boy explained during the interview that he does not want to hurt anyone with the words he wrote to the photo diary because not everyone is a problem drinker. The boy also ponders the differences between Iraq and Finland especially when it goes to relations between young men and women. In the summer, the boy had seen a young couple sitting on the bench on the shores of Aura River on a sunny afternoon. That time he had wanted to photograph the couple. However, at the moment when the picture was taken, the bench was empty and the sky was cloudy (Fig. 5).

Conclusions

The legislation of the European Union and Finland defines the position of an asylum seeker in a rather formal way. The findings of this study unmask some feelings that the young asylum seekers encounter in the temporary situations. Temporarity was seen in the life of the young asylum seekers in more than one way: firstly, they had to wait for the decision about their future and about the permission to stay in the country. Secondly, they were newcomers in the City of Turku and had to perform daily activities in unfamiliar surroundings. Although there are some similarities in the lives of the asylum seekers, there are also alternatives for

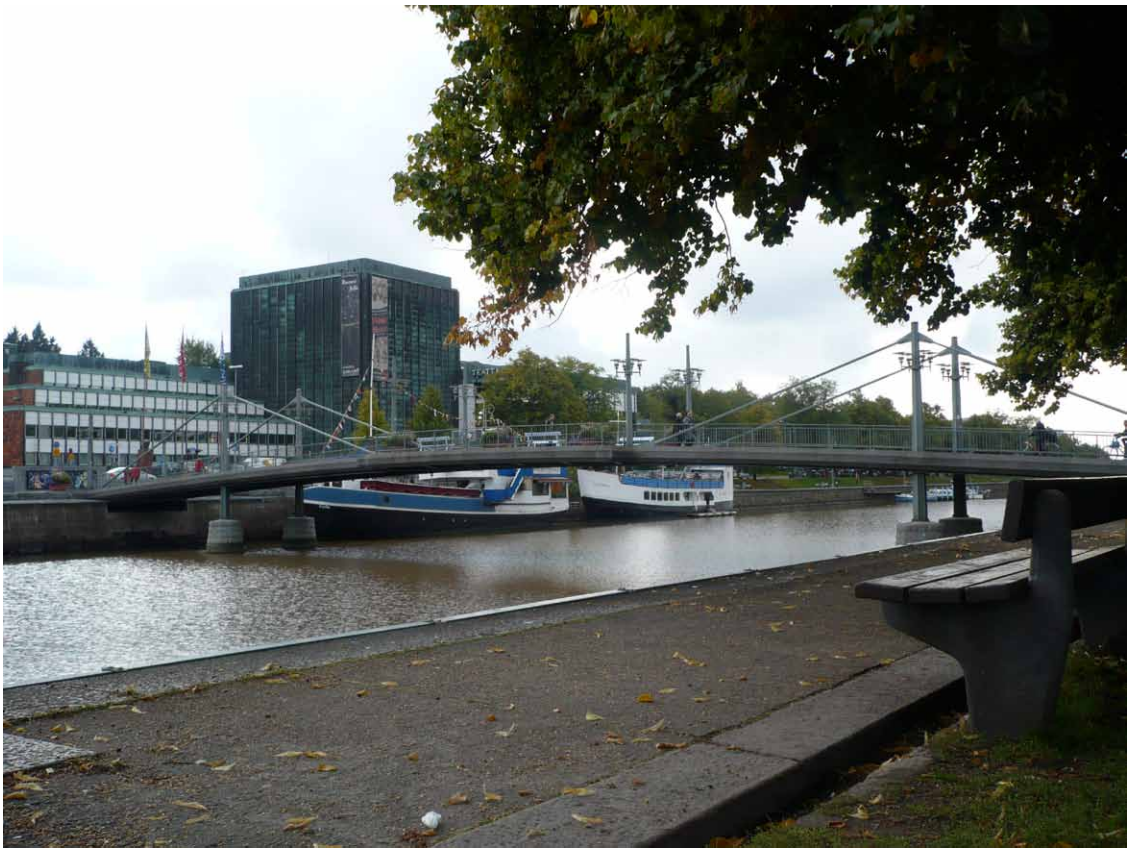

Fig. 5. An empty bench along the river Aura.

the generalized and typified knowing of them (cf. Bauman 1993). With the abstract information of the asylum seekers, they can be distanced from the daily life and social spaces of the city. When explored from a far, their situation seems rather permanent: there is a certain amount of the refugees or asylum seekers staying in the city. At a personal level, the situation of the asylum seekers is temporary: their experiences of the city are coloured with momentarity as they have no certainty of their future in the city, in Finland or in Europe.

Even though the City of Turku was strange to the asylum seekers, many of them discovered urban elements that were familiar in one way or another (cf. Augé 1995). For one of the youngsters, the Aura River was a symbol for a river in his home town, and in another case the experiences in the home country helped to interpret the surroundings of the new city. Such familiar elements may help in attaching oneself to a new place, but reminders of the past can also make oneself feel afraid or uncomfortable. The past experiences that people carry with them affect how they interpret the unknown places. Although the experiences are personal, they are not much acknowledged in the meetings with the authorities during the asylum seeking process.

At the beginning of the paper, we stated that temporary geography refers to such geography that is interested in those elements of space that are there only for a limited time. Along with this paper it has become apparent that this is a rather limited view and there are several characterizations that could be combined to the idea of temporary geography. Temporary geography encourages exploring the moving and changing aspects of

places, but yet, it does not claim that places would be moving and changing all the time, and that there would not be the points of references for people. Rather, it acknowledges that many experiences and meanings of urban spaces are temporary.

As the example of the experiences of asylum seekers shows, temporary geography is at the heart of several topical questions in human geography. The topicality of temporarity has previously been noticed especially in the studies of urban planning. In other fields of urban studies and human geography, temporary elements are often overshadowed by generalizing statistics, legislation, definitions and approaches. Experiences such as the ones of the asylum seekers are undoubtedly outside official definitions and legislation. Thanks to the various discussions about moving and relational spaces, there are already many conceptual and theoretical tools for bringing the questions of momentarity more prominently to the research on the everyday life of the city.

NOTES

[1] The word "momentarity" or "momentary" is used here as a synonym for "temporarity" or "temporary ". According to dictionaries (e.g. The New International Webster's… 1999) there is not significant difference between the words as momentary refers to "lasting but a moment" and temporary to "lasting or intended to be used for a short time only".

REFERENCES

Augé M 1995. *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. Verso, London.

Bauman Z 1991. *Modernity and ambivalence*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Bauman Z 1993. *Postmodern ethics*. Blackwell Publichers, Oxford.

Bauman Z 1995. *Life in fragments: essays in postmodern morality*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Bauman Z 1996. *Postmodernin lumo.* Vastapaino, Tampere.

Buttimer A 1976. Grasping the dynamism of lifeworld. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66: 2, 277–292.

Cloke P & Johnston R 2005. *Spaces of geographical thought: deconstructing human geography's binaries.* SAGE Publications, London.

Collier M 2001. Approaches to analysis in visual anthropology. In van Leeuwen T & Jewitt C (eds). *Handbook of visual analysis*, 35–60. Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi.

Crang M 2001. Rhythms of the city. Temporalised space and motion. In May J & Thrift N (eds). *Timespace: geographies of temporality*, 187–207. Routledge, London & New York.

Cresswell T 2006. *On the move: mobility in the modern western world*. Routledge, New York.

de Certeau M 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Dear M 1997. Identity, authenticity and memory in place-time. In Pile S & Keith M (eds). *Geographies of resistance*, 219–235. Routledge, London.

Dixon DP & Jones JP 2004. Poststructuralism. In Duncan JS, Johnson NC & Schein RH (eds). *A companion to cultural geography*, 79–107. Blackwell Publishing, New York.

Doel M 1999. *Poststructuralist geographies: the diabolical art of spatial science*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.

Doel M 2000. Un-glunking geography. Spatial science after Dr Seuss and Gilles. In Crang M & Thrift N (eds). *Thinking space,* 117–135. Routledge, New York.

Dovey K 2010. *Becoming places: urbanism/ architecture/ identity/ power*. Routledge, Oxon.

Duncan N 1996. *BodySpace*. Routledge, London.

Ellin N 2006. *Integral urbanism*. Routledge, New York.

European Union 1997. Convention determining the State responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the Member States of the European Communities – Dublin Convention. *<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:41997A0819(01):EN:NOT>* 2.10.2009.

European Union 2000a. Euroopan unionin perusoikeuskirja. *<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/fi/lvb/l33501.htm>* 2.10.2009.

European union 2000b. Council Regulation No 2725/2000. *<http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/l33081_en.htm>* 2.10.2009.

European Union 2003. Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003. *<http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/l33153_en.htm>* 2.10.2009.

Franke FN 2009. Refugee registration as foreclosure of the freedom to move: the virtualisation of refugees' rights within maps of international protection. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, 352–369.

Gibson-Graham JK 1997. Postmodern becomings: from the space of form to the space of potentiality. In Benko G & Strohmayer U (eds). *Space and social theory. Interpreting modernity and postmodernity*, 306–321. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Hall S 1999. *Identiteetti*. Vastapaino, Tampere.

Hannula M 2001. Paikallista politiikkaa, paikallista nykytaidetta. *Synteesi* 2, 33–39.

Harvey D 1973. *Social justice and the city*. Edwarld Arnold, London.

Haydn F & Temel R (eds) 2006. *Temporäre Räume. Konzepte zur Stadtnutzung*. Birkhäuser, Basel.

Healey R 2008. Asylum-seekers and refugees: a structuration theory analysis of their experiences in the UK. *Population, Space and Place* 12, 257–271.

Hopkins PE & Hill M 2008. Pre-flight experiences and migration stories: the accounts of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. *Children's geographies* 6: 3, 257–268.

Hou J (ed) 2010. *Insurgent public space: guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*. Routledge, London.

Kaiser R & Nikiforova E 2008. The performativity of scale: the social construction of scale effects in Narva, Estonia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, 537–562.

Kohoutek R & Kamleithner C 2006. Temporäre Nutzungen, Deregulierung und Urbanität. In Haydn F & Temel R (ed) *Temporäre Räume. Konzepte zur Stadtnutzung*, 25–39. Birkhäuser, Basel.

Koskela H 2009. *Pelkokierre. Pelon politiikka, turvamarkkinat ja kamppailu kaupunkitilasta*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki.

Kymäläinen P 2003. Topologies of becoming. Deferred presences in writing. *Space and Culture* 6: 3, 235–248.

Kymäläinen P 2005. Geographies in writing. Re-imagining place. *Nordia Geographical Publications* 34: 3.

Latham A 2003. Research, performance, and doing human geography: some reflections on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method. *Environment and Planning A* 35, 1993–2007.

Latham A 2004. Researching and writing everyday accounts of the city: an introduction to the diary-photo diary-interview method. In Knowles C & Sweetman P (eds). *Picturing the social landscape: visual methods and the sociological imagination*, 117–131. Routledge, London.

Lefebvre H 1991. *Production of space.* Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

Lefebvre H 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: space, time and everyday life*. Continuum, London.

Lehtovuori P, Hentilä H-L & Bengs C (2003). Temporary uses: the forgotten resource of urban planning. *Pulications in the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies* C 58, Espoo.

Ley D 1977. Social geography and the taken-for-granted world. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 2: 4, 498–512.

Maahanmuuttovirasto 2009. Turvapaikkapäätökset: yksin tulleet alaikäiset lapset 1.1.–31.1.2008 henkilömäärä. *<http://www.migri.fi/netcomm/content.asp?article=3127>* 5.10.2009.

Markwell KW 2000. Photo-documentation and analyses as research strategies in human geography. *Australian Geographical Studies* 38: 1, 91–98.

Massey D 2005. *For space*. Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi.

Misselwitz P, Oswalt P & Overmeyer K 2003. *Urban Catalyst. <http://www.studio-uc-overmeyer.de/downloads.php>* 3.10.2009.

Misselwitz P, Oswalt P, Overmeyer K & Brodowski N 2007. Open-Source Urbanismus: vom Inselurbanismus zur Urbanität der Zwischenräume. In *Plan B: Kulturwirtschaft in Berlin*, 99–108. Regioverlag, Berlin.

Mitchell D 2003. *The right to the city: social justice and the fight for public space*. The Guilford Press, New York.

Murdoch J 2006. *Post-structuralist geography*. SAGE Publications, London.

Nast HJ & Pile S (eds) 1998. *Places through the body.* Routledge, London.

Nordström P 2009. *Turvapaikanhakijanuorten väliaikaiset tilat: kohtaamisia pykäläsokkelikosta Pansioon*. Pro gradu -thesis, University of Turku, Department of Geography.

Olsson G 2007. *Abysmal. A critique of cartographic reason*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Pehkonen S & Puumala E 2008. Kehojen koreografia – kamppailu ruumiista vailla turvapaikkaa. *Terra* 120: 3, 159–168.

Plan B: Kulturwirtschaft in Berlin 2007. Regioverlag, Berlin.

Puumala E & Pehkonen S 2010. Corporeal choreographies between politics and the political: failed asylum seekers moving from body politics to bodyspaces. *International Political Sociology* 4, 50–65.

Rajanti T 1999. *Kaupunki on ihmisen koti.* Tutkijaliitto, Helsinki.

Risbeth C & Finney N 2006. Novelty and nostalgia in urban greenspace: refugee perspectives. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 97: 3, 281–295.

Ruoppila S 2004. Eastern European cities in the making – temporary land use as a tool for cultural projects. *Journal for Northeast Issues* 3, 24–26.

Sirriyeh A 2008. Young asylum seekers' conceptions of 'home' at a time of transition to adulthood. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care* 4: 1, 12–27.

Spicer N 2008. Places of exclusion and inclusion: asylum-seeker and refugee experiences of neighbourhoods in the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34: 3, 491–510.

Staeheli LA & Mitchell D 2008. *The people's property? Power, politics, and the public*. Routledge, New York.

Suomen säädöskokoelma 2004. Ulkomaalaislaki. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20040301> 2.10.2009.

Temel R 2006. Das Temporäre in der Stadt. In Haydn F & Temel R (eds). *Temporäre Räume. Konzepte zur Stadtnutzung*, 59–67. Birkhäuser, Basel.

The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language 1999. Trident Press International, Naples.

Thrift N 1997. The still point. Resistance, expressive embodiment and dance. In Pile S & Keith M (eds). *Geographies of resistance*, 124–151. Routledge, London.

Thrift N 2000. Afterwords. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18, 213–255.

Thrift N 2008. *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect.* Routledge, London.

Tryselius K 2007. Rum i tillblivelse. *Karlstad University Studies* 2007: 28.

Tuan Y-F 1977. *Space and place. The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

UNHCR 2007. Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. <*http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html*> 2.10.2009.