To be young! Youth and the Future

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Abstract

*The Future Is Now: Exploring New Perspectives on ESS/MAX IV through the Everdaylives of Skåne's Youth*

Topic of interest: Young People, Work and Participation in Society

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The Region of Skåne, situated in the South of Sweden, is currently establishing two large and unique research centers devoted to the study of the material sciences. The European Spallation Source (ESS) and MAX IV LAB are currently in a pre-construction phase (the aim is to be fully operational by 2015 and 2025 respectively) and Skåne is dedicated to turning the South of Sweden into a world-leading region for the material and life sciences. The EU-funded TITA-project – consisting of a number of side-projects aiming to develop regional policies for the future of Skåne within an ESS/MAX IV context – works to implement the vision Science for Society/Society for Science. During this process, the need for promoting inclusion of *future users* has been highlighted. Sweden has historically placed a strong emphasis on educational attainment within the material and life sciences, but is currently experiencing a drop in youth interest towards the very subjects within the material sciences in which the region seeks to excel. As a part of the TITA-project, the authors have launched an ethnographic investigation in order to generate insights into our youth’s attitudes towards their future in general and material/life sciences in particular. Together with several high schools and university students from different municipalities within the region a set of visual and interactive methods has been applied, aiming to deliver practical ideas for including youth’s perspectives when building a future-oriented science region and designing regional policies. The purpose of our study is to expand knowledge important for building a science region and to revitalize and remap the foundations for the future users of ESS/MAX IV. According to our assessment, little or no research has been conducted on youth involvement when seeking to develop a science and innovation region. The majority of research dealing with an *upstream engagement*-approach to science has dealt with the public as a general locus, as opposed to a particular group (in our case, youth). Our results suggest that (1) youth tend to see science as an imaginative process rather than an ordinary professional activity guided by formal rules and structures, (2) in order for science to become an attractive alternative for future users science needs to be exposed in other environments than typical classroom settings and (3) as science is perceived as something very broad it is crucial for regions who wish increase their future intellectual capital to anchor science to concrete yet interesting and imaginative activities.

Key words: future users; youth; regional development; ethnography; visual methods

Presentation format: 15-20 minutes, PowerPoint-presentation.