

Collection of the success stories

– reflections of the research and methods of TELL

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Building belonging at TELL-project

TELL me about it – stories building belonging and democratic integration- project aimed to enhance social participation of young people (aged 16–29) in the Baltic sea region. It aimed to prevent exclusion and help immigrant integration focusing on young people. The increase in the number of NEET young in both Finland and Sweden called for novel practices due to increasing inequality. The TELL project organized workshops on successful integration stories where young people are heard by using narrative methods. The workshops utilized cultural and artistic methods and Human rights and democracy –game. The project was carried out in Kotka in Finland and in Uppsala, Sweden. It was expected that as a result the participating young people gain greater feelings of belonging and cross-cultural understanding. They learn self-expression skills, which in turn will help in participating in society, education and working life.

TELL-project emphasized the positive stories of belonging and engaging the society as well as mutual understanding and building transcultural trust. The research part of the project focused on the analysis of these stories of belonging in the two participating countries, in Finland and Sweden. The project was based on applying cultural knowledge and story-making processes.

TELL-project is targeted on the challenge of strengthen social inclusion of Central Baltic region. It tackles the challenges related to participation in and access to labourmarket and the challenges related to minorities and immigrants. The project promotes young immigrants' integration and aims at preventing youth exclusion. The project is targeted on young immigrants in Central Baltic region (aged 16-29) in Kotka and Uppsala.

The project organizes workshops using cultural and artistic story-making process in Finland and in Sweden.

The main outputs are the stories of success factors in integration processes of young immigrants. The stories will be collected with culture and art based methods in Sweden and Finland. The methods will be evaluated and shared.

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

The social capital resulted from the project also improves young immigrants participation in the employment and abilities to education.

Strengthening the bonding ties to society improve young immigrants' possibilities and social capital as well as the communities' resilience.

The used cultural and art-based methods of TELL are:

1. Cultural and artistic story-making is developed with external expert, Ekami in Kotka. The storytelling process of the TELL project was conducted through corporeal drama and physical activities. Art process was constructed with bodily gestures and symbolic meanings, as a performative activity.
2. "Human rights and democracy" game, developed by Uppsala Folkuniversitetet. The game is played with concrete game board, but the most important feature of the game is working together and learning. The game was used as a tool for the study group and the group's cooperation and activities were the starting points for learning and playing.

This reflective research paper concentrates on the follow-up and reflections of the project and its activities. It explores the experiences from the workshops and the factors of participation and belonging.

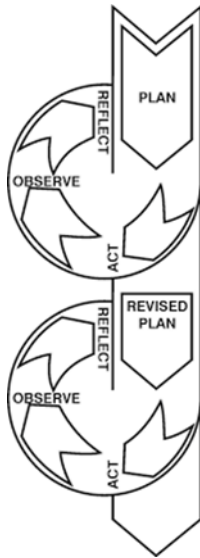
Research material and research process

The research material consists of the interviews and the reflections of the workshops, notes from the process and meetings. Both workshop organizers were interviewed twice during the year 2020. Quotations used in this paper refer to the interviews accordingly: E means Ekami's group supervisors interviews, E1, the first interview at spring 2020, and E2 the last at December 2020, F means interviews with Folkuniversitetet's supervisors. The interviews were analyzed with WeftQda qualitative analysis programme.

The background methodology of the research process followed the idea of participatory action research. Action research is a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and changes in practice are then implemented.

Participatory action research (PAR) is a research methodology with a focus on emancipatory ideologies and engages directly with communities as co-researchers to create knowledge and social action beneficial to those living in the communities (McTaggart, 1991). PAR seeks change at larger sociocultural or structural levels as well as at the individual level, while explicitly challenging traditional power dynamics between researchers and participants. PAR is used as a research method to address issues of social injustice and marginalization. (Cullen & Walsh 2019.)

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration



In the project plan the overall idea of the research was to analyze the stories of belonging and collect the material from the participants, young immigrants. Right at the beginning we realized in the project group, that it was challenging: the ethical questions and building the trust at the groups faced difficulties (Tuuva-Hongisto 2021). In the project meeting at spring 2020, we decided to change plans and the direction of the research towards reflection with the workshop supervisors. The research shifted towards reflection and action research based process. This refers to investigations of strategies that can explain or improve a situation. It is linked with evaluation research in its aim to uncover problems or strengths that can be used to better develop the project process. It will typically result in “action steps” that are context bound rather than in developing or testing theory that can be generalized. (Danley & Ellison 1999.)

Reflections of the art-based methods

Cultural and artistic methods are based on activity, participation, dialogue and interaction. Breaking the normal and everyday routines in safe environment offer spaces for support and trust which can help for approaching new ideas and learning (Känkänen 2013, 83.) Art- and culture-based work is characterized by sociality and a certain kind of fun and freedom. (Heikkinen 2002, 125–126.) In-between spaces of opportunity are free from power and promotes creativity, where new meanings and learning can take place. Through drama, one learns about oneself and learns to throw oneself into different life situations.

Lee Ann Bell and Rosemarie Roberts (2010) have outlined a storytelling project model in which an aesthetic storytelling experience can be told through performing arts, theater, poetry, or other free expression. They also place particular emphasis on the importance of bodily, performative experience in narration. The possibilities of movements, postures, and gestures to communicate feelings, thoughts, concerns, and questions. The storytelling process of the TELL project used corporeal drama and physical-linguistic and performative activities. (see also Krappala & Pääjoki 2004; Fraser 2018.)

What both art and culture-based methods used in the TELL project have in common, is a certain playfulness and inspiration. While the “Human rights and democracy” - game is played as a concrete game with the help of a printed game board, the most important feature of the game is working together and learning. The game is used as a tool for the study group (studiegroup) and the group's cooperation and activities are the starting points for learning and playing.

The methods applied in the TELL project are thus part of the ways widely used in various projects and activities to utilize the spectrum and beneficial effect of arts and culture-based activities. As Känkänen has stated (2013, 74), hundreds of development projects have been implemented in Finland over the

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past twenty years, which reinforce the positive effects of art and cultural activities. The results obtained through community art reflect perspectives on growing community and inclusion.

From the experiences of the participants, we have seen that this is considered as important. Strengthening language skills, knowing one's own environment and searching and expressing together is an important part of feeling heard and seen and feeling the skills to help oneself belong to society. These are also the main goals of the development project funded by Interreg Central Baltic: strengthening the social inclusion of immigrant youth in the Baltic Sea region.

Stories of Participation -how the methods increased participation?

Meaningful participation is dependent on people being willing and able to participate and express their own voices. In the project, participation was understood as something that was missing and something that was connected to exclusion that we need to prevent: the project “tackles the challenges related to participation in and access to labour market and the challenges related to minorities and immigrants. The project promotes young immigrants’ integration and aims at preventing youth exclusion.”

A couple of themes were emphasized as factors of participation in the cultural and art based methods. Within the methods, **sharing and reciprocity** were outlined, doing together, sharing experiences and knowledge was at the core of the workshops. The dynamics of the group and building the **community**, seeing the community, being part of community was also an important factor of participation. In reinforcing the participation in wider manner, as part of inclusion of society, the **future horizon**, the possibility structures and the potential to see future possibilities became important. Is the future horizon in **employment** and labour market? Is employment the target of participation and means to integrate and inclusion? At least it is a target for almost all of these kind of projects hoping to prevent marginalization and exclusion. It was also the central target for the young immigrants participating the project.

1. Sharing and reciprocity

“They definitely enjoyed the conversations and interaction with each other and discussions of these topics because they wouldn’t have discussed them otherwise, some of them like human right parts especially, like each other, so that’s why it definitely broadened their, understanding of each other, so definitely it deepens their personal relations” (F2_2020)

“Sharing your knowledge in a language that everyone knows well enough in that group is just as awesome as it can be, and it can be a really empowering experience, I know I can share this knowledge with others, and everyone benefits from this (E2_2020)

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

The most central factor of participation was sharing and reciprocity. The supervisors of the workshops emphasized the cooperation, doing-together, the discussions and the joint work. This is not necessarily the case for the regular integration and language training classes, but for the art and cultural based workshops it was important.

2. Community and group dynamics

You can't make yourself a king, but the people around you, the community and group make you a part of the group, or excludes you, it is a question of solidarity an common process how to integrate an individual into a community, how to have access in a group. (E2_2020)

When we don't have clear targets in our class and we are aiming at something experimental, like in this case, so it supports the ability to learn when you can challenge the ideas of this world and it gives new kind of reflections your own being, and that can also support to understand your own environment and community. (E2_2020)

To become a part of a community is a joint and common process, also the community and the group should be open and allow an access. Important factor of participation in the workshops was the feeling of the group, the group dynamics and building the community.

3. Possibility structures and horizon of the future

One factor in experiencing integration is that you see a goal on the horizon, it can be your own business in future, you can see that your children go to school, you are visioning spending time with grandchildren and things like that. (E2_2020)

And just kind of that where you see your grandchildren, and kind of the fact that even if you don't have roots in this country yet, that you see its possibility and its potential, you can grow roots in here, so I think it is also a sign of integration because it tells you you no longer need to live a suitcase life and you are in someone a place where you feel like you have a home and where your heart is involved. (E2_2020)

In the interviews the supervisors of the groups, saw that the potential future and the horizon of the future is important part of the integration. It is important to be able to see the future, have hope and see your family rooting the place and country, and building home.

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

4. Employment and labour market

Integration is so complex to define, quite often especially in public debate integration is determined by attachment to working life but not that, or I think it oo just that you don't work, you don't work a lot of people who don't integrate in Finland, they don't like any network in Finland , as the network of the workplace to which they are attached or sit if the workplace has English as a working language, then that attachment can be very loose, so on the other hand we have many people who are unemployed but have a lot of cooperation networks who volunteer or actively do something. and being a participant in those networks, yes, it is not, in my opinion, any less valuable integration than it is not at work or so, integration may be, you are unable to connect your own, or you can place yourself as a participant in Finnish society and find those attachment points." (E2_2020)

Life is so big for them, there is a moment they change, the moment they come from Syria, they have another imagination how is going to Europe and how is going to school and how fast I am going to be millionaire. (F2_2020)

The interviews emphasized that when we are thinking about integration, employment is not the only factor. It is possible they integrate and have good social networks be part of society through other attachment points also. But for the most of the young immigrants, work and employment is the target, and it is also the reason for migration. To find a job, it is the main and exact wish and idea of the participation and integration.

Stories of Belonging -how the methods increased belonging

The cultural and artistic methods were increasing belonging. The feeling of belonging increased especially in the drama based practices, which involved playfulness and inspiration. **Playfulness and inspiration** are important factors in building participants own activity and dialogical interaction. Being able to through oneself to playful activities, crossing the everyday routines in safe environment requires self-confidence. To be able to be seen and heard, you have to have courage to speak for yourself and be able to **self-expression** and having our **own voice**. Having the courage to take part of the playful activities, participants needed certain **trust** and dynamics in the group. The art-based activities increased trust, self-confidence and trust to others and society.

1. Playfulness and inspiration

I think we could see from some of the participants that they felt more inspired because when you learn something new, then you feel like a step closer of the success

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

of your life, so I think we saw this kind of sparkle in their eyes of some of these participants, (F2_2020)

Learning does not necessarily have to be extremely serious, it can also be light and playful and it still can give new insights. (E2_2020)

Well at least I would see that kind of bodily-engaged, practices when you are involved with the whole body in producing experience and knowledge, throwing yourself and seeing others throwing themselves to activities, produces different information than reading words from a book, experiencing together produces a different learning environment when sitting at desks and talking to a roommate (E2_2020)

In Sweden they get some paper, they read these rules, about this area, but then we play together, it is so much fun, when they do something in practice. If you have the questions about the work company here, or insurance company here, some of them I take with me, and we are going to visit these places and they understand lot of things, it is much more fun and it is more easier too. (F1_2020)

Exception from normal class-room-working, the workshops required playfulness. The playfulness gave new insights for learning as well as increased self-confidence. The self-expression and -reflection skills improved, also participant awareness of different kind of learning identities, for some participants the practice-based learning was successful. Learning was felt as fun and easy.

2. Self-expression and own voice

Crossing the threshold was important and it was also visible in these functional and practices based tasks, the positive and inspiring atmosphere catches the group. In the end, it may be so that a person who has really repelled those exercises, changes his mind and notices that he learned lots of things today, which is a really great experience for the instructors as well, although we were just playing, we learned at the same time. And overcoming the fear of losing a face, so it is an important and opening experience, it opens your mind to learning and receiving and sharing. (E2_2020)

And the importance of telling on the video about yourself, it is kind of emphasized in the current times, if you think that nowadays job interviews can be video interviews, you get experience of telling yourself to video, you dare to talk and dare to listen to what you yourself sound on the tape, it is also one important civic skill nowadays. (E2_2020)

To be able to express yourself and have own voice – as well as have means to tell about yourself – are all-important civic skills. The drama—based workshops encouraged participants to tell about themselves

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

and tell about their own stories and introductions. They also practiced making the presentations at video, especially during the Covid lock-downs.

3. Trust

Many students' self-confidence grew a lot, and their learner's identities shaped towards a more positive direction. They felt they were free to make mistakes and got support; high spirits prevailed. (E2_2020)

I feel when we had the topic about the rape, våltagen, woman right to say yes or no about her body. There were three guys, they have very difficult to talk, they were dismissing this issue, and we don't speak about that. I think they were a little ashamed, they don't want, we had a mixed group, they had very difficult to take real discussion with girls, they don't want, they don't want to talk about these issue, it was like, like taboo, maybe (...)I choose these topics, because I know very well, that these topics are very different, very difficult to take, but we have this problem in Uppsala. (F2_2020)

-But also it is important that he has worked with them before, and that's why they had trust him, strong trust, from the start, so it maybe.... - I know these guys very well from the beginning they have come to Sweden, I take care of them with social chef and they believe in me, they like me, they know, (...) they listen and then, I think, they are thinking this is very good thing, he help us, going to some project, European project, I am developing, they are happy when they are coming to us, they send always messages to me, when we will have next meeting, we are going and it is ok now (F1_2020)

Then all of a sudden, he starts to tell about himself and share with his own group real personal things and to show in a way that he does trust this situation and this environment, he had to cross over the a threshold, but this was like one example of a breakthrough in enabling participation in it (E2_2020).

Building trust was one of the main aims of the project and it also was one of the main themes of the process of the project. Negotiations of trust between the project and the participants, building trust between the groups, building trust to society and the environment. Building trust was manifold, painful and difficult. What was clear from the beginning, the participants had very thin trust to authorities, and it weakened the trust building between the project and the participants (see also Miller 2004). One of the first steps was to fade the idea of institutional trust. We found out, that building trust started from the self-confidence, building trust to "self", before we can start to build trust to others. There were also breakthroughs, situations when the participants felt they belonged and when they started to trust their environment and people around them.

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Discussion

Art and culture-based methods refer to various empowering art methods, community art, functional methods and the applied use of art. Often, these methods have their roots in community art as well as sociocultural inspiration, which emphasizes informality, experientialism, and dialogue in individual development and social interaction. (Känkänen 2013, 90; see also Freire 2007.) Art-based methods are intended to influence or bring changes in participants' thinking and actions.

The utilization of art-based methods in the TELL project is also based on such an idea. The methods are implemented to improve self-expression, social interaction, inclusion and the community spirit of immigrant youth.

Richard Sennett (2004) talks about a respectful encounter when he considers the implementation of dialogue in different areas of society. The TELL project is implemented using culture- and art-based methods, as artistic self-expression can open up a state of respectful encounter that balances knowledge to strengthen self-esteem and find new meanings. With the help of art, one can get behind thoughts and words, a space where one can produce what is on its income. (Känkänen 2013, 69; Sennett 2004; Fangen 2010)

When it comes to the TELL project, it was strengthening participation and belonging. Creative methods seemed to give young immigrants very clear and concrete ways to develop self-expression and skills - thus needed for integration into society and the potential accumulation of employment skills. The Swedish human rights game, in which players seek solutions to problems that arise in everyday life as well as ethical issues, helps to find ways in which Western society can function fully. Thus, both methods implement “prevention of exclusion and inclusion in society” by strengthening the skills and practices of the participants. Knowing language skills, your own environment, and finding and strengthening expression together are an important part of feeling to be heard and seen, having our own voice. The project established a safe space for belonging and participation to grow.

It is important in that process to have the experience of success and the experience of ability that yes I can do this (E2_2020)

TELL me about it –Stories building belonging and democratic integration

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