

TELL –Tell me about it –stories building belonging and democratic integration

FINAL REPORT

1. Project overview

Tell me about it (TELL) -stories building belonging and democratic integration -project was targeted on the challenge of strengthen social inclusion of Central Baltic region. It aimed to improve the social participation of young immigrants. The project promoted young immigrants' integration and aimed at preventing youth exclusion. The participating young immigrants in Central Baltic region (aged 16-29) were reached in Kotka, Finland and Uppsala, Sweden.

To achieve these aims, the project implementation involved an exchange of cultural and artistic methods. Workshops were organized exchanging a Human rights and democracy game and story-making methods in Finland and in Sweden. The workshops were run by Ekami (a vocational college in Kotka) and Folkuniversitetet (Uppsala). The methods involved group activities in workshops and online during the Covid-period. The story-making methods involved drama, videos and drawing.

These processes aimed to improve young immigrants' self-expression and skills of re-engaging the society as well as mutual understanding and building transcultural trust. It was hoped that the social capital resulting from the project also improves young immigrants' participation in education and labour market in the long-run. This helps in building resilience and creating ties to the local communities.

The recruitment of the target group

The target group, the young immigrants were recruited to the workshops by integrating the methods into integration processes in Kotka and Uppsala. The partner in Sweden, Folkuniversitetet is an expert of language and integration training. Folkuniversitetet has been carrying out different training programs for integration of immigrants since 1970s (language courses, social orientation courses and different national and transnational projects⁹. Since Folkuniversitetet had the responsibility for the organisation of school education for unaccompanied minors, it had access to both target groups and public stakeholders responsible for them.

In Kotka, with external expert Ekami (The Joint Authority of Education of Kotka-Hamina Region Group) the development work of TELL-project was integrated to the young immigrant's language

and integration training. The target group was recruited through the language training and using the Ekami's expertise. Ekami became the external expert to the project through a procurement process.

The workshops

The main activities were the workshops organized for the target groups. The original target number was 70 participants in the workshops: 35 in Sweden and 35 in Finland. The original target number of workshops was 20 in each country. The eventual target number of participants was beyond the anticipated and the attendance to workshops was high, even during the Covid-period, when some of the Ekami workshops were completed on-line.

2. Main results by the four periods

Period 1: April-September 2019

Finland

Ekami started running the workshops with 6-14 participants in each, some of them participating more than once. Five workshops were run after which a number of research permits were obtained from participants. Building trust became important early on in the project.

The workshops were organized so that there was a warm-up in the beginning, a thematic part in the middle and a routine finish. A familiar beginning and an end to each workshop helped in sustaining a feeling of security. The idea was to increase feelings of belonging as returning participants helped out newcomers.

The warm-up in the beginning of a workshop involved some physical exercise. The thematic part enabled young immigrants to participate in activities with others and tell about themselves. In the end of a session there was an exercise aiming to build confidence and respect for oneself and others. A common theme was repetition that would help language learning as well as increasing agency and feelings of belonging. The research part of the project also started; there were initial discussions on the use of the Abilitator-questionnaire during Period 1.

Exchange of methods in Uppsala

The project work began with preparations for the meeting in Uppsala. Within this, the methodology of the "Human Rights in Practice" game was reflected upon to maximize its potential effectiveness within the framework of the "TELL"-project. Further during the meeting, the game was demonstrated in the context of the project background. The Finnish partners were acquainted with the game method and benefits of its application. Folkuniversitetet's staff also learned more about the storytelling method in the process.

Period 2: October 2019 – March 2020

Exchange of the methods – Finland and Sweden

Ekami implemented a variety of engaging and participatory story telling methods in Kotka with young immigrants. The Human Rights and Democracy game was translated and the cards printed in Finnish. During the Covid period, Ekami used the translated cards (Word file) and played the game electronically with the young immigrants.

Over 50 immigrants participated altogether in workshops. Ekami held 21 meetings with young immigrants, of which 7 were on-line due to covid-situation. 5 under 30 participants were under 30 years of age. Folkuniversitetet used Human rights and democracy-game in Uppsala with young immigrants (8 participants). All the participants were under 30 years of age.

Research and communications activities - Finland and Sweden

In Finland the approach changes from interviewing young immigrants to interviewing project staff . In Uppsala, research materials and videos were recorded for research purposes. The Abilitator approach was discussed and tested in both Uppsala and Kotka, but was found to be too challenging for these target groups. It was agreed the approach changed from interviewing young immigrants to interviewing project staff (during the 3rd period).

Several articles/communications were generated during the 2nd period and published on the internet. At this stage the Covid-situation started to affect issues such as public gatherings, face-to-face meetings and communications to the general public.

Period 3: April 2020 – September 2020

Exchange of the methods - Finland and Sweden

Ekami has continued with the Human rights-game methods in Kotka with young immigrants. They continued with using the translated cards online. Folkuniversitetet proceeded with implementation of 4 workshops with the 2nd group of trainees. The trainers made notes on the participant feedback for the research purposes of the project. At this stage the Covid-situation seriously affected the work in Sweden. The storytelling method workshops could not be started with a recruited group of participants due to coronavirus pandemy, with Folkuniversitetet being closed for distance education in spring and even worsening situation in Sweden in Uppsala in the autumn. Unlike the game, the S

storytelling method requires close physical contact among the trainees.

Research and communication activities - Finland and Sweden

The interviews with the staff were completed during the 3rd and the 4th period by Finland. Several articles/communications were generated and published on the internet. The publications and other outputs are linked to TELL website URL: <https://www.xamk.fi/tutkimus-ja-kehitys/tell-me-about-it-stories-building-belonging-and-democratic-integration-tell/>

4th period: October 2020 – March 2021

Finland

Ekami finished the last two Democracy-themed workshops in October 2020 (Suomitupa). The workshops had addressed personal finances. The young immigrants had found this theme very useful. The video (Room for interaction) was translated into Swedish and English (as arranged by Xamk) and is linked to the Tell-webpage. Xamk has completed the research activities in December 2020-January 2021. They involved interviews with the project staff at Ekami and Folkuniversitetet as well as publications. These are captured in a separate research report.

The TELL final seminar was organized as part of Xamk's annual Symbiosis-seminar that combines interests from youth and social work. The seminar consisted of project presentations. It was held on the 7th October 2020 and reached over 80 listeners on Teams.

3. Reflection on the progress methods exchanged:
 - The value of artistic methods is in their versatility. As the target group involved fairly newly arrived young immigrants, there were issues of wanting to work/educate oneself but not being ready as to yet. There may have not been much experience of formal education or schooling had been disrupted in the country of origin. Teaching methods used in the Finnish education system – also requiring certain study skills - may not reach these immigrants. Artistic methods may work as an alternative en route to learning. At first, it may not seem exactly relevant for or applicable to the working world. However, the methods will open up vistas to what kind of skills the working world will require these days.
 - Video filming proved useful and encouraging during the project. Videos are very easy to make with your own mobile devices. Video filming pushes one to learn presentation skills as well as overcoming one's own fears of, for example, speaking a foreign language. The camera is more neutral than a person to talk to. We are talking about citizenship skills.

- There has been some tangible evidence of successful participation. Some of the storytelling exercises have enabled the young immigrants shine and blossom, even take on helping others.
- Covid as a crisis situation did incur problems during the project but it has also, perhaps unexpectedly, brought forth some advances regarding education. One of the push factors has been the feeling of being in it together, and therefore trying to find common solutions and also having to push oneself further. This includes the improvement of digital skills – not only those of the young but also of the teachers. Talking about the Covid crisis may have opened doors also for talking about other difficult issues.
- Storytelling is to do with identity building. It rests on the assumption that our identities are borne out of stories that we hear and tell, that we wish to bring forth when interacting with others. Identities are created in certain social environments and each of us develop our own. Storytelling exercises help in sharing the identities with others.
- Drawing and other artistic methods may reveal depths in a person. They may channel out difficult, personal issues that may be hard to address by other means. There was this immigrant who was at first shy to draw. However the story telling exercise helped them to come out of their shell and talk, and trust others in the situation. Later on it turned out that this person was actually a talented watercolour painter for which they were hesitating to use a marker pen, having not as much experience of the latter.
- The Democracy-game has promoted not only intracultural but also intercultural exchange. It is relevant to immigrants with varying levels of educational attainment. For those who have lived in the country for a while some of the topics are already familiar but there may still be topics from which they wish to learn more.
- Not all immigrants wanted to discuss difficult and/or personal topics. For example, rape and women's rights over their bodies may be a taboo issue for some.
- Sustainability: the topics introduced in the game will have a wider impact as the participants will share and discuss them with other people later.
- Integration into Finnish society can be defined in so many ways. Often in public debates it is only defined in relation to employment. However, migrants may go to work but the only social network they have is to do with work and they may only speak English. Then there are migrants who are very well networked through their voluntary work or take part in various activities. The latter is not less valuable than being employed. It is important to have some connections at least and to find one's place in meaningful ways. However, it is supposed to be two-way integration so that it is not only up to the immigrant. One needs not to do

everything in the same way as the natives, or celebrate Christmas in the same way in the same place every year. It means that people would understand different cultures.

- Integration means that you are in a place where you can see your grandchildren growing up. Even if you did not have roots in this country you can still see the possibility and potential that I can raise children and get re-grounded here. One does not live out of a suitcase but has a place with a heart and home.
 - Despite the large numbers of immigrants into Sweden in 2015, Sweden has a good system for integration. Uppsala is near Stockholm and is a very multicultural city. Therefore it is good for the newly arrived. It is good to know that a lot of the immigrants have children so they are looking to stay for longer if not for good, get education and employment for themselves and their children.
4. Evaluation. The participants gave some feedback; however this was not systematically recorded. The Swedish feedback especially showed that the Democracy-game was found as informational and useful.

5. Dissemination and conclusions

Disseminating information about the project and its results has involved a good deal of communications. The planned aims were reached and beyond regarding publications, posts in the social media and videos (incl. seminar presentations and the ones by Ekami and Folkuniversitetet, where participants themselves spoke). All the outputs are/will be made available on Tell-website (XAMK, Juvenia).

There were three main considerations regarding the extent of the published materials, namely the need for new information; the scope of the project and research ethics. Awareness-raising has been done about the project and young immigrant's integration processes in Kymenlaakso and Uppsala regions, and via project partners' professional networks. As the project was quite limited in scale, it was not possible to generate vast amounts of data, also considering the ethics of doing research with vulnerable populations. However, it is expected that for example the improved Democracy-game and research articles published will cover potentially quite wide audiences in the Nordic countries and beyond.

It may be concluded that even despite the Covid-disruptions, the project achieved the set aims in the number of participants and mostly also regarding the planned activities. Although the Covid prevented a full comparison between the method used in Finland and Sweden, the work continues in both countries. The project progress has been documented in a number of publications and media

items. It is also noted that when the immigrants are only newly arrived, it may not be the best time to conduct interviews with them. Perhaps such personal accounts could be obtained later on once a bit more time has passed.

6. Attachment: the project plan

